

External Grant Funding Review Working Party Report Report

Cabinet	28 November 2024
By	Charles Hungwe, Deputy Committee Services Manager
Cabinet Portfolio Member	Councillor Duckworth, Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Growth / Councillor Yates, Cabinet Member for Corporate Services
Key Decision	No
Decision classification	Unrestricted
Call in status	Yes
Ward:	Thanet Wide

Purpose of the Report

This covering report is to introduce the report by the External Grant Funding Review Working Party following a review by the sub group that started in June 2024, into how the Council could support efforts to increase external grant funding coming into the district, through local community voluntary organisations work activities. This scrutiny review led to some observations and findings by the working party. These and recommendations are detailed in the working review report which is attached as Annex 1 to this covering report. A summary of findings and recommendations detailed in the body of this covering report. This report was considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Panel on 19 November.

Recommendation(s):

1. Cabinet is asked to consider the recommendations of the Scrutiny Review at Annex 1 and respond in full to each recommendation.

1. Summary of Reasons

- 1.1 The review findings and recommendations are being presented to Cabinet for decision.

2. Background

- 2.1 At its first meeting for 2024/25 on 21 May 2024, the Panel set up a five member External Grant Funding Review Working Party to conduct a scrutiny review on how Thanet District Council could support efforts to increase external grant funding coming into the district. The review topic was picked out of a list of topics that were

identified by the Panel (on officer advice) and that list forms part of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel work programme.

2.2 The working party was given specific terms of reference as follows:

- a. The main focus of this review work was on how Thanet District Council could support efforts to increase external grant funding coming into the district.

2.3 This was to be achieved by looking at the following:

- a. A focus on smaller external grants (under £100k);
- b. Focus primarily on small & medium voluntary & community organisations and look at how we can best help them to access funding;
- c. Find out what information & skills community voluntary organisations have and identify where the funding gaps are;
- d. Ask how these organisations have worked with TDC and canvass ideas for how else the Council might help;
- e. Ask town & parish councils, infrastructure bodies & funders what their experiences of working with Thanet organisations were & what might help improve success rates;
- f. Outline what had worked, what had not and how we might tailor TDC support in future for greater impact without overburdening officers/ creating significant extra costs.

2.4 This piece of work would be incomplete without the participation of the infrastructure bodies, local community voluntary organisations and town and parish councils, as these organisations would be some of the vehicles for attracting and utilising such funding.

3. Review Activities and Summary of Findings

3.1 The working party held a meeting on 6 June 2024 to gather evidence for their report from council officers that included the Head of Regeneration & Growth, Head of Neighbourhoods, Finance Manager, Shared Prosperity Project Coordinator and Coastal Wellbeing Coordinator.

3.2 Meetings were also held with infrastructure bodies, funding bodies and local community voluntary organisations between June and July 2024. The meeting with representatives from sixteen voluntary organisations was in-person in the Council offices and was highly interactive. It generated a significant amount of information that was used for the review report attached at Annex 1 of this cover report.

3.3 A questionnaire was also sent out to voluntary organisations to enable those that were unable to attend the meeting to provide some feedback. Feedback from this survey was included in the review report.

3.4 A summary of findings and recommendations together with senior management responses to the review recommendations is detailed below. The recommendations are set out in four main categories as follows:

1. Relationships and networking

2. Information access
3. Training, capacity building and consultancy
4. Recommendations for further possibilities for longer term consideration

Relationships and networking

Build equal partnerships

- 3.5 Many respondents highlighted the need for a mindset change in our approach to the VCS: 'a radical rethink' was the term used. We have tended to think in terms of capacity building and sharing our knowledge, rather than us learning from the sector. We recommend recognising & respecting the VCS as an equal partner, appreciating each other's strengths & contributions, as the foundation for a mutually supportive partnership. We must recognise that the third sector is different, and not fall into the trap of assuming it works as we do – or thinking of it as an unpaid workforce to replace statutory obligations.

Timescale: The UKSPF and Town Deal programmes have made a good start on this process, but there is more to do, and it is not a quick fix.

Resources: Open mindedness & willingness to learn on all sides.

Identify formal TDC lead contacts for the VCS

- 3.6 Just as a lead officer now links with first-tier Councils, it is recommended establishing a main officer contact for the VCS. The UKSPF Coordinator does this now, but her post is temporary and groups are concerned at possibly losing this when the programme ends. We also recommend a Cabinet member takes on a formal link role, & ward Councillors facilitate links with VCS groups in their wards.

Timescale: By the end of 2024

Resources: Officer time (3hpw)

Establish a VCS Forum

- 3.7 VCS bodies and infrastructure groups were strongly in favour of a regular (monthly/ two-monthly) TDC-led Forum meeting that would allow groups to network and share information between themselves and with the Council. It should be chaired by a senior officer or Councillor with a mandate to coordinate and delegate tasks for action and delivery where appropriate. Meetings would have clear agendas and focused discussion, with speakers, 'surgery' sessions (e.g. with individual TDC Heads of Service) etc built in as required.

Timescale: To be discussed

Resources: Ideally officer time, linked with 2) - but if this is impossible, Working Party members are happy to volunteer their time to set up and run a Forum.

Information access

Share funding alerts

- 3.8 UKSPF officers now share some grant funding opportunities on social media. Yet many more funds are out there for the VCS to bid for: most appear only on Ramsgate Town Team's Funding Forum FB group, run by volunteers who struggle to keep it updated. We recommend that sharing funding alerts regularly becomes part of an officer role.

Timescale: By Spring 2025

Resources: Officer time (1 hpw)

Use accessible language

- 3.9 Groups pointed to jargon on the TDC website and in some communications as an obstacle, especially for small, informal and new VCS groups. Some TDC teams are already actively working on this. We recommend committing to plain English in communications for VCS groups - and indeed for residents & businesses too.

Timescale: Ongoing

Resources: Training for officers and Councillors; support from Comms team

Update website information

- 3.10 Review of information on the website relevant to the VCS, & search terms likely to be used by VCS groups, to facilitate access.

Timescale: Spring 2025

Resources: Comms team/ Regeneration & Communities officer time

Training, capacity building and consultancy

Commit to openness & transparency

- 3.11 Council committed to transparency in our Corporate Plan. To deliver this in practice, we recommend committing to sharing information openly with partners & Council taxpayers, including the VCS, with only genuinely confidential/ personal information undisclosed. Where TDC approval/ support is required – eg for VCS funding bids – we must ensure approval processes & criteria are clearly set out & publicised.

Timescale: Immediate/ ongoing

Resources: We believe this is attitudinal and should not involve extra time or funds

Maintain & build on UKSPF links

- 3.12 Secure ongoing funding to maintain the officer roles, support and relationships built through the UKSPF and related programmes – but if this does not happen, we must identify other ways to build on these links so the many benefits the programme has brought to both the VCS and the Council are not lost. This is particularly important in the case of links with infrastructure bodies, whose involvement will be crucial to providing effective support for VCS fundraising in future.

Timescale: Ongoing

Resources: Staff time (as part of TDC link person role - see recommendation 2)

Review procurement practices

- 3.13 VCS groups said that they have often felt discounted as potential consultants & partners in the historic 'top-down' relationship with TDC. The new Procurement Act 2023 has potential to increase flexibility in how we procure. The LGIU explains: "The legislation is intended to promote innovation and open up opportunities for small and local companies and charities to deliver public contracts." The Act will require a rewrite of our own Contract Standing Orders, giving us the chance to reduce barriers for local suppliers, including the VCS, within our Quotation/Tender processes.

Timescale: Already in process: must be completed by end October

Resources: No additional officer time – review required by new legislation

Simplify paperwork & form filling

- 3.14 The paperwork we ask the VCS to complete to establish a service or take on a licence often seems disproportionate to the scope of the proposed work. By simplifying our documentation while maintaining its rigour, we can ensure our requirements are covered without putting off potential VCS partners.

Timescale: Immediate & ongoing

Resources: Working Party members are happy to volunteer their time to help with this.

Reconsider charging policy

- 3.15 Reviewing our charging policies for the VCS - and it's encouraged to learn that one team is already working on this.

Timescale: To build into budget planning for 2025/6 financial year & beyond

Resources: Officer & member time to review charges – perhaps a time-limited Working Group

Help with practicalities

- 3.16 Finding simple practical ways to reduce the administrative & practical burdens on VCS groups wanting to work with us. At present each group or application seems to need to start afresh – yet simple support such as template risk assessments on our website, equipment loans, generic insurance cover & informal planning advice will all help save time for both VCS groups and for officers in responding to individual requests. Some of this is in place, but there is potential to expand it for everyone's benefit.

Timescale: By start of new financial year

Resources: Officer time (but no more than we already spend on individual queries)

Recommendations for further possibilities for longer term consideration

Establish a formal VCS Compact

- 3.17 The Collaboration Working Party recommended a Parish Charter setting out a framework for first-tier Councils working with TDC: a parallel document for the VCS could be helpful to clarify expectations and obligations on both sides.

Reconsider our website structure

- 3.18 Our website has good search functions but material is often organised oddly from external partners' point of view, mostly arising from our own internal structure. We know most of our VCS information sits under Regeneration rather than Community, for example, but how would external enquirers and partners know this?

Consider a wider range of partnership activities

- 3.19 Working more closely with the VCS would benefit both TDC and local groups. Options to explore range from shared training through mentoring and buddying (both ways round), work experience placements and job swaps to submitting external bids to fund shared VCS/ Council officer roles: all have the potential to build skills, strengthen relationships and enrich the experience of all involved.

Look at in-kind support options

- 3.20 Resourcing for voluntary organisations can come from many sources and need not involve hard cash – but the sector is hard-pressed and as partners we need to consider all the ways in which we might help, including in kind.

Premises, for example, are often a major area of outlay for VCS organisations. We have a large office building at Cecil Street with unused areas. Could we offer desk/ meeting space to VCS groups for nominal rent? Where VCS groups rent other spaces from us, are we maximising benefits for both parties, as we are seeking to do, for example, through the Margate Creative Land Trust?

Consider social value

- 3.21 The social value agenda is increasingly important in procurement, and the Procurement Act referred to above provides further incentives to incorporate social value into procurement. Embracing this approach would ensure that every decision we make as a Council not only addresses immediate financial concerns but also fosters a positive, lasting impact on the lives of our residents

By committing to considering social value, we can create a framework that ensures the resources entrusted to us are used not only efficiently but for the greatest social good. Cabinet should take this step and make social value a cornerstone of how we measure our success moving forward.

Relationships and networking

Build equal partnerships

- 3.22 Many respondents highlighted the need for a mindset change in our approach to the VCS: 'a radical rethink' was the term used. We have tended to think in terms of capacity building and sharing our knowledge, rather than us learning from the sector.

We recommend recognising & respecting the VCS as an equal partner, appreciating each other's strengths & contributions, as the foundation for a mutually supportive partnership. We must recognise that the third sector is different, and not fall into the trap of assuming it works as we do – or thinking of it as an unpaid workforce to replace statutory obligations.

Timescale: The UKSPF and Town Deal programmes have made a good start on this process, but there is more to do, and it is not a quick fix.

Resources: Open mindedness & willingness to learn on all sides.

Identify formal TDC lead contacts for the VCS

- 3.23 Just as a lead officer now links with first-tier Councils, it is recommended establishing a main officer contact for the VCS. The UKSPF Coordinator does this now, but her post is temporary and groups are concerned at possibly losing this when the programme ends. We also recommend a Cabinet member takes on a formal link role, & ward Councillors facilitate links with VCS groups in their wards.

Timescale: By the end of 2024

Resources: Officer time (3hpw)

Establish a VCS Forum

- 3.24 VCS bodies and infrastructure groups were strongly in favour of a regular (monthly/ two-monthly) TDC-led Forum meeting that would allow groups to network and share information between themselves and with the Council. It should be chaired by a senior officer or Councillor with a mandate to coordinate and delegate tasks for action and delivery where appropriate. Meetings would have clear agendas and focused discussion, with speakers, 'surgery' sessions (e.g. with individual TDC Heads of Service) etc built in as required.

Timescale: To be discussed

Resources: Ideally officer time, linked with 2) - but if this is impossible, Working Party members are happy to volunteer their time to set up and run a Forum.

Information access

Share funding alerts

- 3.25 UKSPF officers now share some grant funding opportunities on social media. Yet many more funds are out there for the VCS to bid for: most appear only on Ramsgate Town Team's Funding Forum FB group, run by volunteers who struggle to keep it updated. We recommend that sharing funding alerts regularly becomes part of an officer role.

Timescale: By Spring 2025

Resources: Officer time (1 hpw)

Use accessible language

- 3.26 Groups pointed to jargon on the TDC website and in some communications as an obstacle, especially for small, informal and new VCS groups. Some TDC teams are already actively working on this. We recommend committing to plain English in communications for VCS groups - and indeed for residents & businesses too.

Timescale: Ongoing

Resources: Training for officers and Councillors; support from Comms team

Update website information

- 3.27 Review of information on the website relevant to the VCS, & search terms likely to be used by VCS groups, to facilitate access.

Timescale: Spring 2025

Resources: Comms team/ Regeneration & Communities officer time

Training, capacity building and consultancy

Commit to openness & transparency

- 3.28 Council committed to transparency in our Corporate Plan. To deliver this in practice, we recommend committing to sharing information openly with partners & Council taxpayers, including the VCS, with only genuinely confidential/ personal information undisclosed. Where TDC approval/ support is required – eg for VCS funding bids – we must ensure approval processes & criteria are clearly set out & publicised.

Timescale: Immediate/ ongoing

Resources: We believe this is attitudinal and should not involve extra time or funds

Maintain & build on UKSPF links

- 3.29 Secure ongoing funding to maintain the officer roles, support and relationships built through the UKSPF and related programmes – but if this does not happen, we must identify other ways to build on these links so the many benefits the programme has brought to both the VCS and the Council are not lost. This is particularly important in the case of links with infrastructure bodies, whose involvement will be crucial to providing effective support for VCS fundraising in future.

Timescale: Ongoing

Resources: Staff time (as part of TDC link person role - see recommendation 2)

Review procurement practices

- 3.30 VCS groups said that they have often felt discounted as potential consultants & partners in the historic 'top-down' relationship with TDC. The new Procurement Act 2023 has potential to increase flexibility in how we procure. The LGIU explains: "The legislation is intended to promote innovation and open up opportunities for small and local companies and charities to deliver public contracts." The Act will require a rewrite of our own Contract Standing Orders, giving us the chance to reduce barriers for local suppliers, including the VCS, within our Quotation/Tender processes.

Timescale: Already in process: must be completed by end October
Resources: No additional officer time – review required by new legislation

Simplify paperwork & form filling

- 3.31 The paperwork we ask the VCS to complete to establish a service or take on a licence often seems disproportionate to the scope of the proposed work. By simplifying our documentation while maintaining its rigour, we can ensure our requirements are covered without putting off potential VCS partners.

Timescale: Immediate & ongoing
Resources: Working Party members are happy to volunteer their time to help with this.

Reconsider charging policy

- 3.32 Reviewing our charging policies for the VCS - and it's encouraged to learn that one team is already working on this.

Timescale: To build into budget planning for 2025/6 financial year & beyond
Resources: Officer & member time to review charges – perhaps a time-limited Working Group

Help with practicalities

- 3.33 Finding simple practical ways to reduce the administrative & practical burdens on VCS groups wanting to work with us. At present each group or application seems to need to start afresh – yet simple support such as template risk assessments on our website, equipment loans, generic insurance cover & informal planning advice will all help save time for both VCS groups and for officers in responding to individual requests. Some of this is in place, but there is potential to expand it for everyone's benefit.

Timescale: By start of new financial year
Resources: Officer time (but no more than we already spend on individual queries)

Recommendations for further possibilities for longer term consideration

Establish a formal VCS Compact

- 3.34 The Collaboration Working Party recommended a Parish Charter setting out a framework for first-tier Councils working with TDC: a parallel document for the VCS could be helpful to clarify expectations and obligations on both sides.

Reconsider our website structure

- 3.35 Our website has good search functions but material is often organised oddly from external partners' point of view, mostly arising from our own internal structure. We know most of our VCS information sits under Regeneration rather than Community, for example, but how would external enquirers and partners know this?

Consider a wider range of partnership activities

- 3.36 Working more closely with the VCS would benefit both TDC and local groups. Options to explore range from shared training through mentoring and buddying (both ways round), work experience placements and job swaps to submitting external bids to fund shared VCS/ Council officer roles: all have the potential to build skills, strengthen relationships and enrich the experience of all involved.

Look at in-kind support options

- 3.37 Resourcing for voluntary organisations can come from many sources and need not involve hard cash – but the sector is hard-pressed and as partners we need to consider all the ways in which we might help, including in kind.

Premises, for example, are often a major area of outlay for VCS organisations. We have a large office building at Cecil Street with unused areas. Could we offer desk/ meeting space to VCS groups for nominal rent? Where VCS groups rent other spaces from us, are we maximising benefits for both parties, as we are seeking to do, for example, through the Margate Creative Land Trust?

Consider social value

- 3.38 The social value agenda is increasingly important in procurement, and the Procurement Act referred to above provides further incentives to incorporate social value into procurement. Embracing this approach would ensure that every decision we make as a Council not only addresses immediate financial concerns but also fosters a positive, lasting impact on the lives of our residents

By committing to considering social value, we can create a framework that ensures the resources entrusted to us are used not only efficiently but for the greatest social good. Cabinet should take this step and make social value a cornerstone of how we measure our success moving forward.

4.0 Senior Management Comments to Scrutiny Review Recommendations

- 4.1 In general the findings and recommendations of the scrutiny review are welcomed. The findings recognise some of the positive examples of how the council currently works with the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) sector and identifies some helpful recommendations focused on improving the working relationships between the council and the VCSE sector and possible support for the sector to grow its capacity to access funding.
- 4.2 The original remit of the review focused on how the council can better support the VCSE sector to bring more small-scale grant funding into Thanet. Some of the recommendations in the report directly relate to the review. However, some recommendations are focused more generally on how the council supports the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) sector across Thanet.

- 4.3 The table below provides a direct response to each recommendation. Where the recommendation covers issues outside of the original scope of the review, this is indicated, and in some cases further work is needed to fully consider the implications of the recommendation. In particular, where the review has extended beyond the original scope, not all of the current work of the council has been captured in the findings of the review and in these cases further work will be required.
- 4.4 Some of the recommendations have financial implications that will need to be fully assessed prior to a decision about their implementation. Where this is the case, a comment is included.

External Grant Funding WP Recommendations	Justification for Recommendation	CMT Comments
Relationships and networking		
Build equal partnerships	<p>Many respondents highlighted the need for a mindset change in our approach to the VCS: 'a radical rethink' was the term used. We have tended to think in terms of capacity building and sharing our knowledge, rather than us learning from the sector. We recommend recognising & respecting the VCS as an equal partner, appreciating each other's strengths & contributions, as the foundation for a mutually supportive partnership. We must recognise that the third sector is different, and not fall into the trap of assuming it works as we do – or thinking of it as an unpaid workforce to replace statutory obligations.</p> <p>Timescale: The UKSPF and Town Deal programmes have made a good start on this process, but there is more to do, and it is not a quick fix.</p> <p>Resources: Open mindedness & willingness to learn on all sides.</p>	<p>This feedback from the VCSE sector is noted and accepted. It is good to see that there has been progress in this area and that this has been recognised by the review. We are committed to working in partnership with the VCSE sector and value the strengths and contributions they provide.</p>
Identify formal TDC lead contacts for the VCS	<p>Just as a lead officer now links with first-tier Councils, it is recommended establishing a main officer contact for the VCS. The UKSPF Coordinator does this now, but her post is temporary and groups are concerned at possibly losing this when the programme ends. We also recommend a Cabinet member takes on a formal link role, & ward Councillors facilitate links with VCS</p>	<p>This recommendation is supported in principle and the recognition of the positive impact of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) programme is welcomed. The financial implications of extending this work beyond the UKSPF programme will need to be fully assessed.</p>

	<p>groups in their wards.</p> <p>Timescale: By the end of 2024</p> <p>Resources: Officer time (3hpw)</p>	<p>We have secured funding for a permanent Community Development Officer post within the Regeneration and Growth team. This post could resource some of the recommendations made in this review.</p>
<p>Establish a VCS Forum</p>	<p>VCS bodies and infrastructure groups were strongly in favour of a regular (monthly/ two-monthly) TDC-led Forum meeting that would allow groups to network and share information between themselves and with the Council. It should be chaired by a senior officer or Councillor with a mandate to coordinate and delegate tasks for action and delivery where appropriate. Meetings would have clear agendas and focused discussion, with speakers, 'surgery' sessions (e.g. with individual TDC Heads of Service) etc built in as required.</p> <p>Timescale:</p> <p>Resources: Ideally officer time, linked with 2) - but if this is impossible, Working Party members are happy to volunteer their time to set up and run a Forum.</p>	<p>Feedback following the Community Champions Conference was that this would be beneficial for the sector. A further conference is planned for March, to include an awards ceremony to celebrate the success of our VCSE sector.</p> <p>It is important to continue engagement with the sector, support their capacity to host forums and have the right guests and speakers. The council can have a role in supporting this, which should be reviewed.</p> <p>Further work will be needed on the scope of a forum, the time commitment needed and how it could be best supported from across the council. It</p>
<p>Information access</p>		
<p>Share funding alerts</p>	<p>UKSPF officers now share some grant funding opportunities on social media. Yet many more funds are out there for the VCS to bid for: most appear only on Ramsgate Town Team's Funding Forum FB group, run by volunteers who struggle to keep it updated. We recommend that sharing funding alerts regularly becomes part of an officer role.</p> <p>Timescale: By Spring 2025</p> <p>Resources: Officer time (1 hpw)</p>	<p>The recognition of the work currently being done is welcomed. The financial implications of extending this work beyond the UKSPF programme will need to be fully assessed.</p> <p>To fulfil this role fully, we consider that it will take more than the suggested 1 hour per week to fully scan the available funding opportunities and to prepare and share information about these.</p> <p>The role could also include sign-posting to other organisations that are already offering services in this space.</p>
<p>Use accessible language</p>	<p>Groups pointed to jargon on the TDC website and in some communications as an obstacle, especially for small, informal and new VCS groups. Some TDC teams are already actively working on this. We recommend committing to plain English in</p>	<p>There are communications corporate guidelines in place which require information and communications produced by the council to be clear and appropriate for the intended audiences. The guidelines will be</p>

	<p>communications for VCS groups - and indeed for residents & businesses too.</p> <p>Timescale: Ongoing</p> <p>Resources: Training for officers and Councillors; support from Comms team</p>	<p>refreshed and reshared across the organisation to ensure that information, including the content of our website is as clear as possible.</p> <p>It can be challenging changing third party jargon, particularly if it relates to outputs from third party funders.</p>
<p>Update website information</p>	<p>Review of information on the website relevant to the VCS, & search terms likely to be used by VCS groups, to facilitate access.</p> <p>Timescale: Spring 2025?</p> <p>Resources: Comms team/ Regeneration & Communities officer time</p>	<p>We would always want to keep information available on the council's website under review to ensure that it is accurate, up to date and accessible.</p> <p>This proposal can be considered alongside other proposals for the council to provide clarity about its support of the VCSE sector.</p>
<p>Training, capacity building and consultancy</p>		
<p>Commit to openness & transparency</p>	<p>Council committed to transparency in our Corporate Plan. To deliver this in practice, we recommend committing to sharing information openly with partners & Council taxpayers, including the VCS, with only genuinely confidential/ personal information undisclosed. Where TDC approval/ support is required – eg for VCS funding bids – we must ensure approval processes & criteria are clearly set out & publicised.</p> <p>Timescale: Immediate/ ongoing</p> <p>Resources: We believe this is attitudinal and should not involve extra time or funds</p>	<p>This recommendation is broader than the original scope of the review. That said, the council is committed to open and transparent communication.</p> <p>The council has shared the work developed as part of the UK Shared Prosperity Programme and is making sure that it is available online for the VCSE sector to access.</p> <p>The council is going to put together a process for organisations to request letters of support.</p>
<p>Maintain & build on UKSPF links</p>	<p>Secure ongoing funding to maintain the officer roles, support and relationships built through the UKSPF and related programmes – but if this does not happen, we must identify other ways to build on these links so the many benefits the programme has brought to both the VCS and the Council are not lost. This is particularly important in the case of links with infrastructure bodies, whose involvement will be crucial to providing effective support for VCS fundraising in future.</p> <p>Timescale: Ongoing</p> <p>Resources: Staff time (as part of TDC link person role - see recommendation 2)</p>	<p>This recommendation is supported, subject to the necessary funding.</p>

<p>Review procurement practices</p>	<p>VCS groups said that they have often felt discounted as potential consultants & partners in the historic ‘top-down’ relationship with TDC. The new Procurement Act 2023 has potential to increase flexibility in how we procure. The LGIU explains: “The legislation is intended to promote innovation and open up opportunities for small and local companies and charities to deliver public contracts.” The Act will require a rewrite of our own Contract Standing Orders, giving us the chance to reduce barriers for local suppliers, including the VCS, within our Quotation/Tender processes.</p> <p>Timescale: Already in process: must be completed by end October</p> <p>Resources: No additional officer time – review required by new legislation</p>	<p>The VCSE sector is unlikely to be discounted as consultants and partners - the UKSPF programme shows how the council works in partnership with many VCSE organisations. In terms of procurement and being consultants, the council is bound by procurement regulations, which includes bidders needing to complete various documentation, supply evidence and fulfil certain criteria. Through open procurement processes all bidders are equal and are required to evidence their delivery and experience.</p>
<p>Simplify paperwork & form filling</p>	<p>The paperwork we ask the VCS to complete to establish a service or take on a licence often seems disproportionate to the scope of the proposed work. By simplifying our documentation while maintaining its rigour, we can ensure our requirements are covered without putting off potential VCS partners.</p> <p>Timescale: Immediate & ongoing</p> <p>Resources: Working Party members are happy to volunteer their time to help with this.</p>	<p>This recommendation is not clear about the specific paperwork referred to.</p> <p>The council is committed to ensuring that documentation is easy to complete and written using plain English.</p> <p>We would be happy to review specific processes if these cause difficulty, to ensure that they are as accessible and easy to complete as possible.</p> <p>Processes do need to ensure that risks, costs, legal or other implications are fully considered, and simplification may not always be possible.</p>
<p>Reconsider charging policy</p>	<p>Reviewing our charging policies for the VCS - and it’s encouraged to learn that one team is already working on this.</p> <p>Timescale: To build into budget planning for 2025/6 financial year & beyond</p> <p>Resources: Officer & member time to review charges – perhaps a time-limited Working Group?</p>	<p>Charging policies are reviewed annually as part of the Fees and Charges setting. There is scope to include variable fee structures and/or discounts, but the cost implications of any proposals would need to be assessed and any costs built into budgets.</p>
<p>Help with practicalities</p>	<p>Finding simple practical ways to reduce the administrative & practical burdens on VCS groups wanting to work with us. At present each group or application seems to need to start afresh – yet simple support such as template risk assessments on our website,</p>	<p>This recommendation is noted and the value of this work is recognised. It cuts across a number of service areas and officers will need to consider how this support could be best provided.</p>

	<p>equipment loans, generic insurance cover & informal planning advice will all help save time for both VCS groups and for officers in responding to individual requests. Some of this is in place, but there is potential to expand it for everyone's benefit.</p> <p>Timescale: By start of new financial year</p> <p>Resources: Officer time (but no more than we already spend on individual queries)</p>	<p>Any proposals to resource this work into the future will be subject to the approval of the necessary budget.</p>
<p>Recommendations for further possibilities for longer term consideration</p>		
<p>Establish a formal VCS Compact</p>	<p>The Collaboration Working Party recommended a Parish Charter setting out a framework for first-tier Councils working with TDC: might a parallel document for the VCS could be helpful to clarify expectations and obligations on both sides</p>	<p>The principle of developing a compact setting out how the council will work with the VCSE sector is supported. This recommendation is outside of the original scope of the review and further work about what this should cover, together with an assessment of any legal and financial implications is needed.</p> <p>If a VCSE sector forum is to be established it will also need clear terms of reference.</p>
<p>Reconsider our website structure</p>	<p>Our website has good search functions but material is often organised oddly from external partners' point of view, mostly arising from our own internal structure. We know most of our VCS information sits under Regeneration rather than Community, for example, but how would external enquirers and partners know this?</p>	<p>This feedback from the review is noted. We are committed to ensuring that the information on the council's website is accurate, up to date and accessible. We will therefore explore ways to improve the accessibility of information that is relevant to the VCSE sector.</p> <p>Our aim is to implement an intelligent search function, that would direct enquiries to the correct page, with no need to understand the website hierarchy. We can also assess whether a dedicated area would also be beneficial.</p>
<p>Consider a wider range of partnership activities</p>	<p>Working more closely with the VCS would benefit both TDC and local groups. Options to explore range from shared training through mentoring and buddying (both ways round), work experience placements and job swaps to submitting external bids to fund shared VCS/ Council officer roles: all have the potential to build skills, strengthen relationships and enrich the experience of all involved.</p>	<p>Closer working with the VCSE sector is supported. Each proposal for mentoring, buddying, work experience placements or job swaps would need to be individually assessed to identify the potential benefits and risks. Job swaps, in particular, are likely to be much more difficult to facilitate.</p>

<p>Look at in-kind support options</p>	<p>Resourcing for voluntary organisations can come from many sources and need not involve hard cash – but the sector is hard-pressed and as partners we need to consider all the ways in which we might help, including in kind.</p> <p>Premises, for example, are often a major area of outlay for VCS organisations. We have a large office building at Cecil Street with unused areas. Could we offer desk/ meeting space to VCS groups for nominal rent? Where VCS groups rent other spaces from us, are we maximising benefits for both parties, as we are seeking to do, for example, through the Margate Creative Land Trust.</p>	<p>There are already examples in place where the council has made hotdesk space available to partner organisations. This has proved to be very successful in promoting joint working.</p> <p>Where the council is looking to lease space to a VCSE organisation we will always need to consider the market value of that space, the opportunity cost of agreeing to an alternative use as well as the social value that might be achieved. The council will continue to be accountable for these decisions and will need to be able to demonstrate a best value approach.</p> <p>The Margate Creative Land Trust has been set up specifically to support the creative sector by buying assets, to hold in perpetuity for the sector. It is not directly relevant to this review.</p>
<p>Consider social value</p>	<p>The social value agenda is increasingly important in procurement, and the Procurement Act referred to above provides further incentives to incorporate social value into procurement. Embracing this approach would ensure that every decision we make as a Council not only addresses immediate financial concerns but also fosters a positive, lasting impact on the lives of our residents</p> <p>By committing to considering social value, we can create a framework that ensures the resources entrusted to us are used not only efficiently but for the greatest social good. Cabinet should take this step and make social value a cornerstone of how we measure our success moving forward.</p>	<p>The council does already consider social value through procurement. This is already a requirement under the current procurement regulations and reflected in the council's Contract Standing Orders. The duty will continue under the new Procurement Act 2023.</p> <p>That said, there is scope for the council to improve its coordination of social value achieved and to better publish information about social value. Any proposal to introduce new arrangements for coordination and publication of social value would require further work and may have legal or financial implications that will need to be assessed.</p>

5. Options

5.1 Having considered the Corporate Management Team comments in the table in 4.0 above, Cabinet is being asked to either agree all or some of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel recommendations as detailed in section 3.0 and 4.0 of the cover report and in the scrutiny review report attached as Annex 1.

Or

5.2 That Cabinet rejects the recommendations from the Overview and Scrutiny Panel report.

6. Corporate Implications

6.1 Finance and Resources

6.1.1 There are financial implications arising directly regarding some of the recommendations in the main report. Setting up and managing the Voluntary and Community Sector Forum has financial implications and so does the provision of training, capacity building and consultancy to these organisations. Making changes to the council's website to set up updated and more user friendly public facing pages would ordinarily incur a cost.

6.1.2 There are no allocated budgets available for any of the above identified costs, as a result, any changes would have to either be covered from within existing resources or savings would need to be identified.

6.2 Legal and Constitutional

6.2.1 The role of scrutiny is set out in section 9F of the Local Government Act 2000 as well as the Statutory Guidance on Overview and Scrutiny, published earlier this year. The report drafted is consistent with those provisions which provide that Overview and Scrutiny has the power to look at anything which affects the 'area or the area's inhabitants'

6.2.2 The Committee is advised to take note of the response of CMT to the recommendations contained within this report. These are largely positive in relation to the recommendations but also note that the legal framework prevents the implementation of others. The proposals in relation to Procurement are an example of this since Procurement rules are governed strictly by legislation and the Council's own standing orders. There are financial implications and resource implications in respect of some of the proposals and the Committee should also give these the necessary consideration before finalising any recommendations to Cabinet.

6.3 Council Policies and Priorities

6.3.1 This report relates to the following corporate priorities: -
(delete as appropriate)

- To create a thriving place
- To work efficiently for you

6.4 Risk

6.4.1 If there are any recommendations that the Cabinet is minded to adopt and it involves engagement of the local voluntary sector organisations, such recommendations should be implemented as agreed in order to maintain the good reputation of the Council.

6.5 Climate Change and Biodiversity

6.5.1 There are no climate and biodiversity implications arising directly from this report.

7. Equality, Equity and Diversity Implications

7.1 There are no equality, equity and diversity implications arising directly from this report.

8. Crime and Disorder Implications and Community impact

8.1 There are no crime and disorder implications arising directly from this report. However, adoption of some of the recommendations in the report would enhance the work of local voluntary organisations working in the district and this would have a positive impact on the lives of local communities.

9. Subject History

9.1 This report is being considered by Cabinet having been discussed by the Overview and Scrutiny Panel. The Panel made some recommendations for consideration by Cabinet.

Appendices

Annex 1: External Grant Funding Review Report

Background Papers

None

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Report Sign Off

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