

Senior Management Team – 27th August 2014

**Review of Service Priorities for Voluntary & Community Sector Commissioning
Community, Culture and Leisure Portfolio**

1. Purpose of Report

To agree which community services should be commissioned over the years 2015 - 2018 under the Council's programme for commissioning the voluntary and community sector (VCS).

2. Advice

Recommended action:	That the Council commissions the VCS to provide specified welfare advice services and specified community transport services for a combined value of £80,000 per year for the three years 2015 - 2018. This will be split according to the table contained in part 4.
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3. Introduction

Following a review of the Council's grants programme in 2010 – 2011, it was agreed to commission the VCS to provide specific services for the contract values shown below:

	2012 - 13	2013 - 14	2014 - 15
Welfare Advice	£75,000	£67,500	£60,000
Community Transport	£25,000	£22,500	£20,000
TOTAL	£100,000	£90,000	£80,000

It was also agreed to fix the combined value of the contracts thereafter at the 2014 – 15 level, ie. £80,000 per year.

It was always understood that neither of the contracts were of sufficient value to provide a complete welfare advice service or a complete community transport service. Rather, they enabled the Council to secure specific outcomes that met with community and corporate objectives. In order to deliver a complete service, both the current providers had to secure funding from elsewhere. The Council's funding helped lever in such funds.

As we are approaching a new three year commissioning cycle, it is important to review what is currently commissioned and what could potentially be commissioned in future years to ensure such services meet with corporate priorities and have public support. The review process is a commitment that is contained in the Council's policy statement for commissioning the VCS.

Once the services that the Council wants to commission are agreed, the process of preparing detailed service specifications and tender documents can begin.

4. Information

The first part of the review was to identify the range of services that could potentially be delivered by the VCS. This was done by asking the County Council and the other districts and boroughs in Northamptonshire which services they currently support either by revenue grants or commissioning. This exercise generated a list of seven community services that are typically funded by local authorities:

- Community transport
- Furniture re-use
- Supporting victims of crime
- Supporting vulnerable people
- Supporting youth
- VCS infrastructure support
- Welfare advice

Each service was scored in terms of how far they match up with corporate and community priorities and how far they link with the new well-being contract that the Council is leading on. The outcome of this exercise is attached in Appendix One. It reveals that welfare advice most closely met the assessment criteria with a score of 16 whilst community transport was a good second with a score of 12. Supporting vulnerable people had the third best score with 10.

The Council needs to be reassured that this desk-top exercise would be reflected in local public opinion so the *People's Panel* and a number of partner agencies were invited to vote via the internet for the community services that they most valued. The poll was administered by *Survey Monkey* and was open for three weeks between 10th July and 1st August. It generated over 200 responses and the results are attached in Appendix Two.

Community transport had the highest amount of community support with nearly 70% of respondents voting for it. Supporting vulnerable people was a good second (55%) but welfare advice scored less well (30%). Officers believe the results are fairly reliable as the response rate was good for an e-survey – the highest in fact for this Council, in over four years. There was an over-representation of older residents, but the 18 – 45 year old cohort, which is usually less represented in local surveys, stood up quite well. 25% of respondents were from this cohort compared to 32% in the local population as a whole.

As welfare advice scored highly in the desk-top exercise, it is proposed that this service continues to be funded. As community transport performed well in both the desk-top exercise and the public vote, it is proposed that this service continues to be funded. Supporting vulnerable people scored moderately well in the desk-top exercise

and was a clear second in the public vote. However, the Council already contributes officer support to *Daventry District Over Fifties Forum* (DOF), provides a *Care & Repair* service, and contributes both officer time and funding to a range of partnership activity under the community safety umbrella. Therefore, vulnerable people are already well supported by the Council.

Despite community transport's popularity in the public vote, it is proposed to keep the funding split between this and welfare advice at the same levels as is currently provided. This is justified because the desk-top exercise is seen as being more reliable and the community transport provider will also be eligible to apply to the Council's capital grant programme to upgrade its fleet when needed.

To clarify then, it is recommended that the Council commissions the VCS to provide specific welfare advice services and specific community transport services for the next three years for a combined value of £80,000. This is split out as shown below:

	2015 - 16	2016 - 17	2017 - 18
Welfare Advice	£60,000	£60,000	£60,000
Community Transport	£20,000	£20,000	£20,000
TOTAL	£80,000	£80,000	£80,000

As in previous years, it is understood that neither of these contracts are of sufficient value to provide a complete welfare advice service or a complete community transport service. Rather, they are sufficient enough to:

- (a) secure specific outcomes that meet with corporate and community objectives, and
- (b) enable the providers to secure further funding for their core business.

Indeed, Northamptonshire County Council (NCC) fund both these services, but for specific purposes and outcomes. It is important therefore, to ensure this Council's service specifications do not duplicate that of NCC's unless it is clear there is an existing shortfall in funding for a specific purpose/outcome. The process of preparing service specifications will take account of current best practice and will require consultation with current providers in order to arrive at a realistic appraisal of what outcomes can be achieved with the funding available.

It is intended that contracts will be put out to tender in the Autumn with a view to awarding contracts by the end of the calendar year. The successful service providers will be expected to provide quarterly data returns to demonstrate their effectiveness against corporate and community priorities and to receive ongoing funding.

5. Implications

5.1 Financial

To be met from existing resources. The Corporate Board report dated 3rd May 2011 recommended that the commissioning budget be fixed at £80,000 per year from 2014 – 2015.

5.2 Personnel

To be met from existing resources.

5.3 Legal/Constitutional

Section 1 of the Localism Act 2011 provides the Council with a general power of competence, enabling it to do anything people may generally do. This is subject to the restriction that it does not allow the Council to do things it is expressly prevented from doing under other powers.

5.4 Environmental

No implications

5.5 Policy

A key element of deciding which services to fund was the extent to which they meet corporate and community priorities (see Appendix One).

The Council's policy statement, Commissioning Funding for Voluntary and Community Organisations recognises the need to provide financial support to the VCS in order for them to deliver community services. It also summarises the commissioning process generally.

5.6 ICT

To be met from existing resources.

5.7 Crime and Disorder

No implications

5.8 Human Rights

No implications

5.9 Equalities

Funding these services will increase access to services generally, which is a key issue in a large rural District. Successful service providers will have to demonstrate that their organisation operates in accordance with the Equality Act 2010.

6. Conclusions

The Council is expected to review the services that it commissions through the VCS on a periodic basis. The review outlined in this report was deemed sufficiently robust for the level of decision being considered.

Maria Taylor, Community Manager

Background papers:

Corporate Board Report dated 3rd May 2011

Previous minutes:

None

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