

District-wide Strategic Grants – Proposal for two-year funding agreements with Access for All, CASS and SPARK 2018-2020

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Purpose of the Report

1. This report seeks the approval of District Executive on the future funding of three strategic voluntary sector partners Citizens Advice South Somerset (CASS); SPARK and Access for All, for the period 2018-2020.

Forward Plan

2. This report appeared on the District Executive Forward Plan with an anticipated Committee date of February 2018.

Public Interest

3. SSDC supports a range of community groups and voluntary sector organisations via its one-off community grants programme, administered via the Area Committees and through regular funding of strategic district-wide organisations that report to District Executive. This financial investment in the sector not only provides direct support to groups working in the local community but also assists the council in the delivery of the council plan.

Recommendations

4. That District Executive
 - 1) Agrees to a two year funding agreement, with appropriate break clauses, for the period April 2018 to March 2020, with payment of the year two grant subject to a satisfactory performance report, for the following amounts:
 - a. Citizens Advice South Somerset at £121,730 per annum
 - b. SPARK at £74,260 per annum
 - c. Access for All at £9,000 per annum
 - 2) Receives a progress report in 2019
 - 3) Receives a further report in 2020 with a view to moving to three year funding agreements from 2020 onwards.

Please note that in addition to the core funding, CASS are in separate discussion with our Housing and Welfare team regarding the delivery of specialist debt work to meet our responsibilities under the Homelessness Reduction Act, the value of which will be approximately £20k per annum.

Background

5. South Somerset District Council has maintained a long-term funding relationship with the above three organisations over many years.
6. The three organisations are considered strategic voluntary sector partners for the District Council delivering services across the whole district that support some of the most vulnerable residents and contribute to a resilient and thriving voluntary and community sector.
7. Whilst previously supported with three year contracts, CASS has been in receipt of annual funding since 2012, and Spark since 2015 whilst subject to reviews following concerns about their performance.
8. Members have received very favourable presentations from both CASS and SPARK following the reviews carried out in 2015/16, which has demonstrated that both organisations have made substantial improvements in terms of their performance and financial health.
9. Access for All has been funded annually through the Equalities budget.
10. Funding for all three organisations has been subject to District Executive approval with performance also reported annually to District Executive.

Access for All

11. Access for All works to improve access for all members of the community. Their aim is to increase the social inclusion of disabled people with limited mobility and other impairments, so as to enjoy equality of opportunity.
12. In pursuit of their charitable objectives, Access for All seeks to meet the needs of the community by:
 - Improving access to public buildings, public services, education, shops, leisure facilities and the countryside.
 - Working for accessible public transport, dropped kerbs, improved road crossings, appropriate parking spaces and ShopMobility services.
 - Checking planning applications to ensure buildings are designed for inclusive living.
 - Providing Disability Awareness and Equalities training.
 - Acting as a consultee on issues of disability and access to District and Town Councils, NHS, Police, retail sector, businesses and other publicly funded charities.
 - Providing support, advice, guidance and a signposting service to individuals, groups and partner organisations in relation to welfare reform, disability and issues of access.

CASS

13. CASS is an independent charity and part of the Citizens Advice network across England and Wales. They work in partnership with other agencies and groups.
14. CASS provides free, confidential, advice to help people resolve their problems and also campaign to raise awareness about the big issues that affect people's lives.
15. They provide advice on a wide range of issues including benefits, debt, employment, consumer, housing and family relationships. Their goal is to help everyone find a way forward no matter what problem they face.

16. CASS is the major provider of free, confidential, independent and impartial advice in the South Somerset area. Advice services are quality assured under the national Citizens Advice Membership Scheme
- In addition, the organisation aims to improve policies and practices that affect people's lives
 - CASS has been serving the community of South Somerset since 1961

SPARK

17. Set up in 1981, SPARK is part of a national network of Councils for Voluntary Service (now commonly called Voluntary & Community Action) that traditionally have existed at a District level. These are civil society, development organisations whose main purpose is to support the work of other organisations in the VCS. This type of organisation is also known as VCS Infrastructure. It is a registered charity and company limited by guarantee.
18. Its role includes:
- Representing the views of members to statutory bodies and others
 - Helping new initiatives to develop and new organisations to form
 - Providing advice and information on all aspects of running and managing the organisations they work with, including recruiting volunteers and accessing sustainable funding or generating income
 - A leadership role within the sector, encouraging organisations to work together in collaboration and partnership

Rationale

19. The rationale for seeking a two-year funding agreement in respect of the three organisations is as follows.
- a. There has been a significant improvement in the performance of CASS and SPARK, due in large part to the leadership provided by new managers. The outcome of the reviews was reported to DX in 2016 and members have also received detailed presentations on the current activities and future plans of the organisations.
 - b. A recognition that wherever possible, a minimum of three-year funding agreements - but see point d) below - are provided for strategic voluntary sector partners acknowledging that this improves confidence, stability and sustainability. Furthermore, funding for short periods makes recruitment and retention of staff difficult. With multi-year year funding agreements organisations are able to forward plan in a more robust way and other funders are more likely to give match funding.
 - c. The provision of secure core funding creates the context where organisations can add value to their activities by bidding with confidence for project funding.
 - d. A two year agreement in the first instance will act as a stepping stone towards three year agreements and will run conterminously with a review of the funding of Information and Advice services currently being undertaken by Somerset County Council.
 - e. A two year agreement will provide stability and security through the period of the next local elections in 2019.

Procurement Implications

Investment/Strategic Grant

20. The services provided by Access for All, CASS and SPARK are not the subject of commissioning activity but are rather treated as an Investment or strategic grant. To this end they are not subject to procurement regulations.
21. Investment/Strategic Grants are given to support the core costs or activities of organisations deemed to 'add value' to the council's aims and objectives and where there may be no natural market. These will usually be for three or possibly more years in order to provide business continuity and greater financial security, but could be for a shorter time period. In some cases these may be grants paid in pursuit of services that are additional to an existing commissioned service.
22. In the case of a proposed investment in a service where there is more than one potential provider in the market place, a competitive application process would need to be followed allowing anyone interested to apply. However, larger investment/strategic grants may, or may not, form part of service commissioning plans but as a grant they would be exempt from contract regulations and sit outside formal tendering exercises.
23. This form of grant would be to finance all or part of Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) organisations and where the council believes it can operate at arm's length without imposing the same detailed controls over day-to-day expenditure as it would over procured services.
24. However, these forms of grant would still be required to deliver against some agreed outcomes, satisfy performance criteria and demonstrate impact.
25. This approach is backed up by central government guidance i.e.

"Third sector organisations may receive grants from a variety of sources, including Government departments and other public bodies, to enable them to carry out their work. The grants may be general grants, to assist with the expenses of developing and running an organisation (often grants-in-aid) or specific grants to enable it to carry out a particular project.

A grant maker *is not contracting for a service that forms part of its own business*. It is offering financial support in an area of work, designed and proposed by the third sector organisation, which it wishes to sponsor. The work to be carried out by the third sector organisation would be deemed to add value to a public body's overall aims or objectives. The grant funder will still want, however, to monitor the achievement of the proposed outcomes.

A grant is a financial transfer and may not bring any strict contractual law obligations in itself. However, the terms of the grant are likely to require the third sector organisation to use the money only for a particular project or service (i.e. are restricted), and might require the recipient to pay back the grant, or part of it, in some circumstances, particularly if the project or service is fulfilled at a lower cost. This, however, needs to be made clear at the outset. But the third sector organisation might have no other specific legal obligations to the public body that made the grant to it, and retains considerable freedom in the way in which it carries out the work."

("Improving financial relationships with the third sector: Guidance to funders and purchasers" HM Treasury 2006)

Constitutional implications

26. Grants to Outside Bodies are covered by Financial Regulations (15.3). Relevant considerations for compliance with financial regulations include:

- District Executive or relevant Area Committee shall approve all grants greater than £1,000
- It must not form a commitment of future years' annual budget unless it matches the criteria set within the Council's Community Grants Policy
- Reports to district Executive seeking approval for grants shall provide assurance that the following are met:
 - The receiving body has been properly identified, has suitable lead parties, a defined work area/purpose, and suitable trust documents/constitution
 - Any conflicts of interest have been declared and properly managed;
 - Any risks are adequately and appropriately managed
 - Possible to confirm proper use of the funds
 - The assistance contributes to the delivery of the councils services or achievement of Council's corporate objectives
 - The extent and purpose of the assistance have been properly identified
- Arrangements to recover the value of grant are in place in the event of default by the recipient
- Any specific conditions have been identified
- Monitoring in place to ensure grant used for approved purpose
- The recipient will provide evidence of proper accounting and access to supporting information / documents / evidence
- A legally binding agreement is in place.
 - a. The Community Grants Policy refers to approval of three year agreements, however it is considered acceptable and appropriate for the Executive to approve two year agreements without the need to amend the policy – the principles remain the same regardless of shorter duration of the agreement.

Financial Risks

Access for All

27. Access for All is a small charity with a very modest turnover.
28. Projected income for the 2017/18 financial year is circa £11,000 and expenditure circa £13,000. With expenditure outstripping income, if this were to continue the organisation's reserves will be used up within two to three years.
29. Opportunities for earning income are limited although a small amount of income is raised through training for Taxi Drivers, and charges have now been introduced for services they provide to community hall committees subsequent to the initial Access Audits they undertake for free as part of our Service Level Agreement (SLA).
30. So far, attempts that have been made to secure funding through charitable trusts etc. have proved unsuccessful due in part to the scarcity of funding that is available to support the core running costs of organisations.
31. Whilst there are no aspirations to grow the organisation, ways to consolidate and improve their current financial position will be the subject of support that will be provided by SPARK.

32. It is requested, therefore, that members support the recommendation to award Access for All a two year contract but that a specific report relating to their finances is bought to members in January 2019 in order that an informed decision can be made whether or not to continue with the second year.

CASS

33. **CASS** works to a balanced budget and currently holds reserves (in line with Charity Commission guidance) in excess of £180,000.
34. CASS have successfully diversified and increased their income streams having secured an additional £130,000 towards core costs and a further £220,000 external project funding for the 2018/19 financial year from sources as diverse as National Citizens Advice, Wessex Water, Energy Companies, Yarlinton Housing, Macmillan, Martin Lewis and Avon and Bristol Law Centre.
35. CASS is, therefore, in a secure financial position and presents a low financial risk in terms of offering a two year contact.

SPARK

36. **SPARK** has been looking very carefully at the diversification of their income streams with a particular focus on income generation rather than grants. As part of this they are beginning to grow their paid-for services such as training, DBS and accountancy, whilst also looking for other funding sources elsewhere.
37. Key income secured this year includes:
- Mendip District Council grant - £25k p.a (ongoing)
 - Somerset County Council grant - £25k p.a (Jan 2018 - March 2019)
 - Frome Town Council 'Volunteer Frome' - £16k p.a. (ends March 2020)
 - NHS Symphony - £60k (ends March 2018)
 - Somerset Community Foundation - £4k grant for training
 - SCC Mental Health Hub Project - £5280 (Nov 2017 – March 2018)
 - Carers Service - £15k p.a. (for 3 years from October 2017)
 - SCC/SCF VCSE Strategic Forum Project - £6k p.a.
38. Despite significant growth in both activity and the staff team SPARK are projecting a small surplus at the end of the financial year that will be used to develop their services and increase capacity going forward.
39. SPARK is, therefore, also in a secure financial position and presents a low financial risk in terms of offering a two year contact.

Performance headlines for the 9 months April to December 2017

Access for All

- **20** detailed access reports, with recommendations, produced for a range of community buildings and spaces.

- Provided ongoing assistance and advice on disabled access compliance to five organisations/groups. (Support can include the provision of drawings illustrating potential access improvements, specialist advice e.g. on the installation of accessible toilets, and sourcing technical literature e.g. hearing loops).
- Reviewed approximately **5** planning applications per week for public building compliance with BS8300. Where required, feedback is provided directly through the planning portal on the SSDC website.
- Conducted **20** Disability Awareness training sessions for taxi drivers.
- Ongoing work with SSDC Tourism on the Guide for visitors with disabilities.
- Worked with Brympton Parish Council to achieve improved access to their public meetings. Met with Abbey Manor Community Centre committee with possible access improvements. Full survey of exterior pathways to community parking areas.
- Review of SSDC recommended health walks, with the outcome that the walks will be produced in a guide provided by SSDC for the general public.
- Survey of the Westlands Entertainment Centre with constructive marketing advice and subsequent amendments to promotional website.
- Ongoing work with the Octagon regarding their hearing loop system.
- Ongoing training with CASS to offer people with disabilities help with benefit form filling. Working with one disabled client per week.

CASS

- **4,081** clients helped covering **12,151** issues, requiring a total of **20,015** actions generating **4,414** cases. Of the above;
 - **2,159** clients presented with benefit/Universal Credit related issues
 - Of these **731** issues **were** concerned with Personal Independence Payment (PIP).
 - **637** clients presented with debt issues
 - Of these **384** issues were council tax debt.
 - **447** clients presented with Housing issues.
 - **440** clients presented with employment related issues.
- 'In person' is the primary channel for delivering services (**1,722 clients**)
- **663** clients have already used the Outreach Services in the first 9 months of 2017.
 - Of these **235** have used the Chard outreach and **119** Wincanton.
- Use of webchat has risen from **1** client in 2016 to **41** in 2017.
- **50%** of clients had a long-term health condition or were disabled.
- Volunteer numbers peaked at **51** (September)

- **8,429** hours of volunteer time (a **35%** increase on the same period last year)
- **£63,217** of volunteer time (based on the minimum wage of £7.50 p.h.)
- **£1.9 million** of income realised for clients
- **£281,000** of debts written off
- **£92,000** of payments rescheduled
- Funding was secured to offer **12** twelve-month Advice Volunteer internships where interns will undertake a NVQ Level 3 in Providing Initial Legal Advice (Skills for Justice) and the National Citizens Advice Adviser training programme.

SPARK

Learning opportunities

- **4** Voluntary sector Forum meetings with **82** participants
- **13** training courses involving **150** participants (topics included Safeguarding, Social Media, First Aid, Funding, DBS)

“Clear, precise instruction with valuable participation to make the information stick. Any anxiety of possibly doing the wrong thing is now gone.”

Information

- **45 e-bulletins circulated including:**
 - **8** General newsletters
 - **7** Funding newsletter
 - **20** Training newsletters

Group Advice and Support

- **41** groups received one-to one advice, of which
 - **10** received funding support
 - **7** received advice on governance/setting up
 - **10** received advice on volunteering
 - Supported Yeovil ADHD with a funding bid
- Provided support around marketing and strategy to Promiseworks, a mentoring charity (resulting in being commissioned to run a marketing and strategy workshop for staff and trustees).
- Met with an artist in Wincanton about setting up a social enterprise art hub.
- Provided start up support to The Geranium Trust, a local gay bereavement organisation.

- Significant support was provided to Henhayes Community Centre throughout this period, including assistance to develop a new Men's Shed project, help with a successful funding bid, business planning advice and training sessions for trustees.
- Bespoke work with ABCD Crewkerne in conjunction with the SSDC Area Development (West) team.

"Our Village held a public meeting to consider updating our community plan, and I gave a presentation based on the training I had received to highlight the importance of an active and connected community for health and wellbeing and how this can be incorporated in a community plan....."

Volunteering

- New volunteering database launched
- **178** new volunteers registered
- **28** volunteers placed (based on feedback received)
- **26** new organisations registered
- **86** new opportunities registered

"I started volunteering for YOG as my daughter came here many years ago. I have always been a stay at home mum and I wanted to get out and do something for myself. I saw that YOG was looking for volunteers and thought it would be perfect for me. I started volunteering here just over 2 years ago and from the minute I came in I felt part of the team. Because it is a special needs pre-school, every little thing you or the children achieve feels massive and gives a real boost. As a result of my volunteering I am now going on to do a level 3 qualification in childcare. I felt it was what I wanted to do. I am also going to be involved with mentoring other volunteers to support them as sometimes it can be daunting when you first start. I wouldn't want to be anywhere else. It has given me just as much as I have given them!"

Loneliness

- Loneliness has been identified as one of the key themes by the South Petherton Community Partnership (funded by Symphony) facilitated by SPARK. A Loneliness sub-group now meets regularly to make practical plans in the community including a recent village Christmas dinner for over 40 people.
- Working with the CCG and Symphony to develop a South Somerset Wellbeing Directory that will contain information about community groups and support available.
- Piloting a 'Talking Café' in Yeovil, a monthly 'meet-up' for those individuals who are socially isolated.

Financial Implications

Current and proposed payments to these organisations are summarised in the following table:

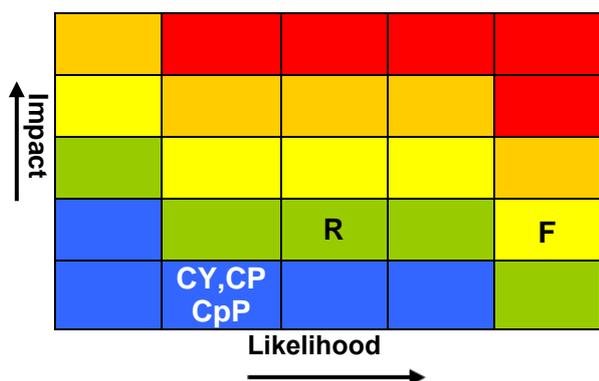
	Current	Proposed Two Year Agreement	
	2017/18 £	2018/19 £	2019/20 £
Access for All	9,000	9,000	9,000
CASS	121,730	121,730	121,730
SPARK	74,260	74,260	74,260
Totals	204,990	204,990	204,990

The total budget for voluntary and community sector grants in 2017/18 is £206,190. This amount is the same within the draft 2018/19 budget, subject to approval by Full Council on 22 February 2018. Therefore the above grants are affordable within this overall total, and would represent around 1.2% of the Council's Net Budget next year.

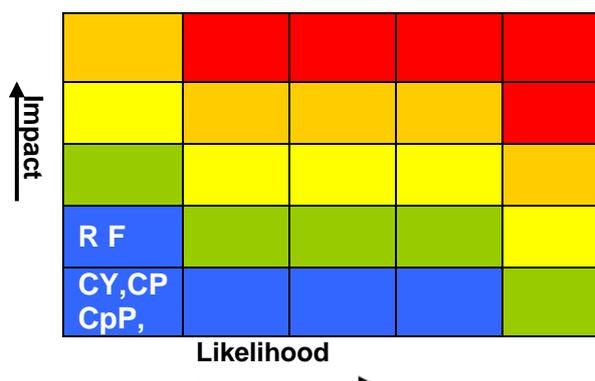
The approval of the two year agreement will effectively commit the Council to costs against future year budgets. Through the inclusion of the usual contractual break clauses the council would minimise risks through being able to terminate the arrangement (with an appropriate notice period) in circumstances where the terms of the contract are not being met or where either the council or provider's financial situation experiences a detrimental change. The payment of the grants each year will be in instalments and will be set out within the grant agreements.

Risk Matrix

Risk Profile before officer recommendations



Risk Profile after officer recommendations



Key

Categories	Colours (for further detail please refer to Risk management strategy)
R = Reputation	Red = High impact and high probability
CpP = Corporate Plan Priorities	Orange = Major impact and major probability
CP = Community Priorities	Yellow = Moderate impact and moderate probability
CY = Capacity	Green = Minor impact and minor probability
F = Financial	Blue = Insignificant impact and insignificant probability

Council Plan Implications

The funding of the district-wide organisations detailed in this report helps the Council deliver on the following values and priorities in the 2016/21 Council Plan:

Values:

Supporting people and communities, enabling them to help themselves

Working with partners to improve services, efficiencies, resilience and influence

Priorities:

- High Quality Cost Effective Services
 - Work with partners to achieve economies, resilience and influence
- Economy
 - Capitalise on our high quality culture, leisure and tourism opportunities to bring people to South Somerset
- Health and Communities
 - Target support to areas of need
 - Help people to live well by enabling quality cultural, leisure, play, sport & healthy lifestyle facilities & activities
 - Help keep our communities safe

The work of Access for All also contributes to the Council's Equality Objectives and Action Plan.

Carbon Emissions and Climate Change Implications

None

Equality and Diversity Implications

Working with the voluntary sector is one of the Council's means of providing services to hard to reach groups and engaging with communities and individuals who otherwise find it hard to access public services. CASS and Access for All deliver services to some of the most vulnerable people in the district whilst SPARK contributes to a thriving and resilient voluntary and community sector. Supporting the VCS increases community engagement and participation.

If members support the recommendation then there will be no negative impacts in respect of the Protected Characteristics covered by the Equality Act.

If members are minded to recommend either a reduction in the value, or to not support any of the recommended levels of funding, an Equality Analysis will need to be carried out and reported to DX before recommendations are implemented.

Privacy Impact Assessment

None

Background Papers

District-wide Voluntary Grants 2017-18; District-wide Voluntary Grants 2016-17; District-wide Voluntary Grants 2015-16.
