

District-wide strategic grants – funding arrangements with Citizens Advice South Somerset and Spark Somerset 2022/2023

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Purpose of the Report

1. This report seeks the approval of District Executive on the funding of our two strategic voluntary sector partners, Citizens Advice South Somerset (CASS) and Spark Somerset (hereinafter referred to as Spark) for the year 2022 to 2023

Forward Plan

2. This report appeared on the District Executive Forward Plan with an anticipated Committee date of January 2022.

Public Interest

3. SSDC supports a range of voluntary and community sector groups, organisations and projects via its one-off community grants programme, administered by the Area Committees. It also supports, through regular funding, a small number of strategic district-wide organisations approved by 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 -
 - a) Agrees a one-year core funding agreement for the period April 2022 to March 2023, for Citizens Advice South Somerset and Spark Somerset.

Background

5. South Somerset District Council has maintained a long-term service delivery and funding relationship with the above two organisations over many years.



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The 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.

In January 2021 District Executive agreed that one year agreements be awarded for the period 2021/2022 and that future funding will be subject to the outcome of a wider piece of commissioning activity in the case of VCS Infrastructure (Spark) and the outcome of a county-wide programme of Citizen Advice service transformation work in the case of CASS.

Covid19 had a huge impact on the 'Business as Usual' of both organisations. How they responded and the crucial work they undertook with our communities throughout 2020 and 2021 has been universally recognised and commended across the public sector in Somerset. Their COVID 19 achievements were conveyed to DX members as part of the report presented in March 2021. In addition, members received presentations from the CASS and Spark CEO's.

Because of Covid19 the current operating environment remains very demanding and the future extremely challenging.

The transition to one council for Somerset has created an additional set of challenges and pressures for the two organisations which has led to a degree of uncertainty about their long term futures.

Funding of both organisations has been subject to District Executive approval with performance also reported to District Executive.

6. CASS

- i. 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.
- ii. 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.



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- iii. 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.
- iv. 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.
- v. It was agreed by District Executive Committee in March 2021 that CASS would be funded, with an additional one off payment to support Covid recovery work, for a further 12 months (April 2021 to March 2022).

7. Spark Somerset

- i. Set up in 1981, Spark Somerset is part of a national network of what were once known as Councils for Voluntary Service (now commonly called Voluntary & Community Action). These are civil society development organisations, whose main purpose is to support the work of other organisations in the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS); particularly smaller and volunteer run community groups.

Its role includes:

- 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 effective governance, recruiting volunteers and accessing sustainable funding or generating income.
 - A leadership role within the sector, encouraging organisations to work together in collaboration and partnership.
 - Representing the views of its members to statutory bodies and others.
- ii. With closure of the voluntary sector support provided by Engage in 2020, Spark Somerset became the single countywide VCS infrastructure organisation, funded by all Somerset's councils, whose principal purpose is to support the wider voluntary and community sector.
 - iii. It was agreed by District Executive Committee in March 2021 that Spark Somerset would be funded, with a small inflationary uplift, for a further 12 months (April 2021 to March 2022) and that a Voluntary Sector Infrastructure Service would be newly commissioned with effect from 1st April 2022.

8. Performance 2021/22

- i. The most up to date performance data comes from the most recent contract monitoring reports covering the period April to September 2021. In the case of Spark, as a county-



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wide organisation many of their services are offered on a county-wide basis and as we now do joint monitoring across all 5 councils, much of the data produced is county-wide. However where we have specific South Somerset data this has been included in the summary below.

a. CASS

- Client Data
 - **3,841** clients
 - **8,240** client issues generating **7,980** activities on their behalf
 - **3,864** cases
- Top 5 wards where most number of clients helped
 - Chard (Avishayes, Combe, Crimchard, Holyrood, Jocelyn) – **322** clients
 - Yeovil College – **232** clients
 - Yeovil Lyde – **210** clients
 - Yeovil Westland – **190** clients
 - Yeovil Summerlands – **182** clients
- Age Groups with over 10% of the total number of clients
 - 25-29 years
 - 30-34 years
 - 50-54 years
 - 55-59 years
- Urban/Rural Split
 - **46%** of clients urban
 - **54%** of clients rural
- Most prevalent issues
 - Benefits and Tax Credits – **1,048** clients with **1,983** issues
 - Housing – **602** clients with **1,062** issues
 - Relationships and family– **463** Clients with **760** issues
 - Universal Credit – **446** clients with **749** issues
 - Employment – **412** clients with **751** issues
 - Debt - **409** clients with **787** issues
- Top Debt Issue – Council Tax Arrears
- Top Benefit Issue – Personal Independence Payment
- Financial Outcomes for Clients
 - **£38,448** of debts written off
 - **£74,595** of income gained for clients



b. Spark

- Support and Guidance for VCS Groups
 - One to one advice and support to **95** South Somerset groups
 - Issues covered by support and guidance
 - Governance/set up/business planning
 - Funding advice & support
 - Covid-19
 - Volunteering
 - Connections/partnerships
 - Community events & activities
 - Legal issues
- Online Training Courses attended by **20** South Somerset groups – subjects covered
 - Volunteer Management
 - Trustee training
 - Child Protection
 - Mental Health Awareness
 - Trustee Training
 - GDPR
 - Emergency First Aid at Work
- **9** South Somerset groups received bespoke One-to One funding support.
- Volunteering
 - **77** new south Somerset volunteers recruited via Spark a Change platform
 - **8** new South Somerset organisations registered on Spark a Change
 - **67** new south Somerset volunteering opportunities placed on Spark a Change
 - **7** South Somerset residents given in depth volunteering support
 - **15** south Somerset organisations supported with Volunteering enquiries
- Supporting community groups to support unpaid carers.
 - Spark Somerset holds a sub-contract from the Community Council for Somerset to deliver part of the Somerset Carers Service –

supporting volunteer led support groups across Somerset. Of the 24 (pre-Covid, current and potential groups) being supported, **13** are in South Somerset - Langport, Martock, Somerton, Keinton Mandeville, Chard, Ilminster, Wincanton, Castle Cary, Bruton, Crewkerne, South Petherton and Yeovil.



- South Somerset Wellbeing Directory
 - An online directory that provides useful information about community-based social prescribing activities. The website had **4213** users and **10,905** page views. The top 3 pages were: Directory, Older People and Mental health.

- South Somerset Outcomes – testimonies
 - Yeovil Men's Shed: Spark supported following their reopening with the new committee. Supplied them with a Safeguarding Policy pro forma, involved them with dementia project, reconnected them with Westfield Community Garden and attended 'Meet the Funder'. *"Thank you for all the help you are giving us."*
 - Well Be Hub, a new CIC delivering Mental Health Training: This new community interest company wanted to make connections in the area and offer free spaces on courses to volunteers in community groups in the area. Spark linked them with the Chard based Active Learning and Skills.
 - Helped St Michael's Yeovil get a grant of £1,500 to start a simple garden planting project at Birchfield Rec. *"I received an email today offering me the complete £1500. That was the best news of this week... I am very grateful for your help in finding this funder! It would not have happened without your help."*
 - Worked with an attendee of Chard Connect who had left her full-time job pre-pandemic due to mental health issues and had gone on to undertake some peer support work with Chard Watch. She became heavily involved with the COVID 19 support group and during COVID went gone on to set up a 'meals on wheels' delivery type service based out of south Chard Church. This small business became an invaluable service for some of the more vulnerable and elderly members of the community in Chard. Spark supported in identifying funding opportunities and helped her to write a successful bid for the Open Mental Health Grants. The money has enabled this vital community service to continue and support people with moderate or severe mental health issues, isolation and other vulnerabilities.

- South Somerset groups also benefit from the services that are delivered on a county-wide basis. So for example, South Somerset groups will be amongst the beneficiaries of the **308** DBS applications that were processed and amongst the **430** delegates attending the **36** thematic Fora.



- ii. The Spark 6 month monitoring report and CASS 6-month Dashboard have been attached as Appendices to this report (Appendices 1 and 2)
- iii. In addition to the monitoring report Spark have published an Impact Study, '**Reflecting on a year like no other - 2020/21 Impact Report**'. A copy of this report can be found at Appendix 3.

9. Impact of Covid19 and Local Government Re-organisation

- i. Both CASS and Spark continue to deal with the impacts of Covid19 and conduct activities that support the recovery of our residents, volunteers and voluntary and community sector organisations. For example, in the period April to September 2021 CASS saw its client numbers increase **31%** over the same period in the previous year; a direct consequence of the effects of Covid on employment, income, debt and poverty. Spark, whilst seeing much traditional volunteering being curtailed, has successfully stood up the necessary infrastructure to provide vital support for the network of 100+ newly established Covid support groups.
- ii. Coming fast on the heels of Covid19, the announcements regarding the creation of a single council to serve Somerset have presented further challenges and generated a new set of concerns for CASS and Spark.
- iii. The principal concerns relate to the status of their funding, their ongoing sustainability and security, and ultimately to their very existence.

9.1 Spark

- i. In the run up to the final announcement on One Somerset, the District Councils had already been working collaboratively with the County Council regarding better joined up working with Spark including arrangements for joint contract monitoring and discussions on creating coterminous funding arrangements. Once the decision on One Somerset was made, this effectively created a lack of confidence as to whether this could be achieved.
- ii. In 2021 Spark commissioned a research study titled 'Reflect, Recover, Renew - Working together to create a roadmap to recovery for the Somerset VCSE'. The research has the following 3 objectives
 - 1) **Reflect** on how the pandemic impacted VCSE groups in Somerset, and the people/communities they support.
 - 2) Understand the **recovery** needs of VCSE groups in Somerset, and the people/communities they support.



- 3) Identify what the VCSE sector in Somerset needs to **renew** and thrive as it emerges from the pandemic and faces uncertainties such as a Local Government Reorganisation.
- iii. The research comprised a survey, focus groups, interviews, 2 visioning sessions and involved over 300 participants and 185 groups.
- iv. Whilst the full report is not due to be published until January 2022 the initial findings highlight 7 key issues that require action in order to aid recovery
 - Support for Mental Health and Wellbeing
 - Support for Young People
 - Care and Carers
 - Supporting physical health
 - Poverty, Benefits and Housing
 - Transport
 - Climate Change and conserving nature

And the following 5 requirements to achieve renewal

- A vision for a better Coordinated VCSE
- A vision for a properly funded VCSE
- A vision for a collaborative VCSE
- A vision for a VCSE that is community-led
- A vision for a VCSE that has the recognition it deserves

9.2 CASS

- i. Similarly, the District Councils and County Council have been working collaboratively with the five Somerset Local Citizens Advice (LCA's) on the transformation Programme which was sponsored by the joint Somerset Councils' CEO's and initiated at the end of 2018; progress on which was reported to members as part of the District Executive report in March 2021.
- ii. With the work close to its completion, the outcome is that we now have an agreed single Somerset Core Advice Offer that provides consistency in terms of the services that will be provided under the core funding given by each of the District Councils to their respective LCA. This means that each District Council SLA will be identical in terms of the description of the services provided. The LCA's themselves have signed up to a Memorandum of Agreement on how they will work together and a unified set of monitoring data are in the process of being agreed, in line with the Somerset Core Advice Offer, allowing for joint monitoring to take place.

9.3 Proposed Funding Arrangements 2022 to 2023

- i. The decision to create a single council for Somerset has had a fundamentally adverse impact on the original plans to recommission VCS infrastructure services as agreed at District Executive in March 2021 and has required a different approach to be adopted. With the creation of a single council for Somerset, independently commissioning VCS Infrastructure for South Somerset (the service currently provided by Spark) ceases to be a viable or rational proposition given that in the very near future the new council will itself be clearly be looking at commissioning single countywide services. Current arrangements are such that all the Districts, County Council and CCG are core-funding Spark. Of the Districts, two (Mendip and Sedgemoor) already have funding agreements in place up to March 2024. With the move to a single council now only 14 months away, for South Somerset to commission unilaterally something potentially different for the 12 months to 31st March 2023, would be seriously destabilising to Spark at a time when security of funding is critical.
- ii. At the time of writing this report, the approach taken by the One Somerset Programme Board has involved tasking the finance work stream with collating data on the total amount of grant provided to regularly-funded voluntary organisations across all five councils. This is for the purpose of considering a commitment to honour this funding for the first year of the new council (2023/24) in order to provide security and stability for key VCSE partners.
- iii. Once this data collection exercise is complete the One Somerset Joint Committee will consider a report on VCSE funding for the first year of the Unitary (2023/24) at its first meeting in the New Year in order to build in future financial support to the VCSE sector into the Somerset Council 2023/24 budget proposals.

Constitutional implications

Grants to Outside Bodies are covered by SSDC's Financial Regulations (15.3).

Financial Risks

CASS

The CASS draft budget for 2022/23 is

- Forecast income: £614,072
- Forecast expenditure: £719,789
- Deficit: £106,000

Please note: £106,000 of reserve funds are to be designated to provide a debt casework service. This is a strategic investment that will ensure that we maintain specialist debt



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services and provide the time needed to secure alternative funding to replace the MaPS contract. (see below)

Due to a national re-commissioning of Debt Services (Money and Pensions Service - MaPS) and of Universal Credit Help To Claim, CASS forecast a £191,000 drop in income for provision of specialist help during 2022/23. The tender specifications differ significantly from the current contract (moved from a focus on local delivery and face to face to national or sub regional delivery with little or no face-to-face provision). The service specifications (volume targets and payment in arrears on result) represent a substantial cash risk to the organisation that could undermine the stability of all our work. For these reasons, the Trustees have opted not to participate in either contract.

SPARK

Spark Trustees are in the process of finalising their 2022/23 Budget. However, it is likely that as a minimum, if Somerset West and Taunton and SSDC do not fund in 2022/23, there will be as a minimum a deficit of circa £100,500 (Mendip and Sedgemoor agreed funding to 2024 last year).

Management of the deficit is most likely to be by the withdrawal of services from Somerset West and Taunton and South Somerset and redundancies.

If this position is clearer by the time of the meeting Spark's CEO will be able to update members verbally.

Financial Implications

The recommendation to Members is to approve a one-year agreements with CASS and Spark, with the second year costs (2023/24) being met by the new Somerset Council. The

costs, including a 2% inflationary uplift, can be met from the proposed 2022/23 VCSE grants budget.

CASS

- CASS's core funding of **£121,730** for 2022/23 will be subject to a 2% inflationary increase

Spark

- SPARK's core funding of **£77,020 per annum** for 2022/23 will be subject to a 2% inflationary

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

Organisation	2021/22			2022/23		
	Core Grant	One Off Uplift/Inflation	Total	Core Grant	Inflation	Total
CASS	£121,730	£11,335	£133,065	£121,730	£2434.60 (2%)	£124,164.60
SPARK	£75,520	£1,500	£77,020	£77,020	£1540.40 (2%)	£78,560.40
Total	£197,250	£12,835	£210,085	£198,750	£3,975	£202,725

In addition to the above there is a further **£7,000** in the Corporate Grants budget, which is allocated to support SSDC's contribution to the countywide Disability Consultation and Engagement Service.

Summary

2022/23

- The 2022/23 budget for strategic district-wide voluntary and community sector grants is **£238,960**
- The proposed levels of funding for 2022/23 for CASS and Spark, including 2% inflationary uplifts totals, **£202,725**.
- In addition there is a **£7,000** allocation in the 2023/23 budget as a final contribution to the Somerset Disability Engagement and Consultation service
- All of the above commitments can, therefore, be met from within the grants budget i.e. the total of the above commitments in 2022/23 is **£209,725**. This will leave a balance of **£29,235**

Risk Matrix

If the officer recommendation is not supported i.e. to not award funding for 2022/23, there will be significant risks to CASS and Spark and implications for SSDC. The critical risks are:

- Complete closure of CASS in 2022 with the transfer of any remaining assets to another LCA and with all staff made redundant.
- The termination of all of Spark's dedicated South Somerset resources e.g. no discrete South Somerset Voluntary Sector Adviser, no one-to-one group support, no access to dedicated volunteering support. This would leave South Somerset groups with access to only generic countywide services such as the 'Spark a Change' volunteering portal and general forums/training.
- Because our core grant also contributes to other key Spark posts and services there could be additional redundancies or posts subject to a reduction in hours.

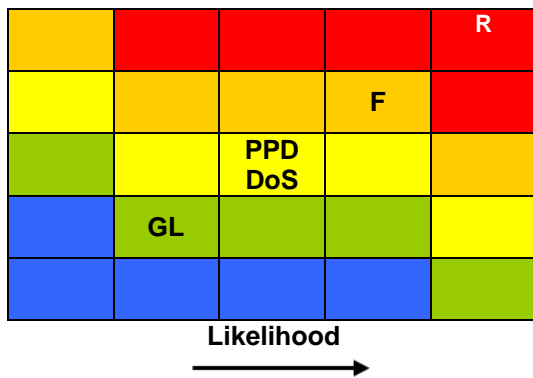


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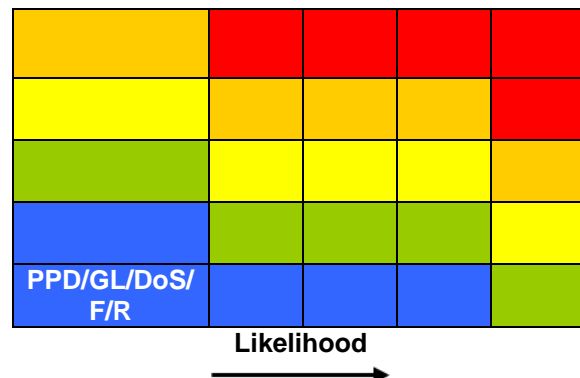
- Implications for the councils
 - Significant reputational damage to the council
 - An increased and unsustainable demand on the council (and potentially other public services) to fill the vacuum and meet the advice needs of the community.
 - Potential breach of our requirement to have 'Due Regard' under the Public Sector Equality Duty in the absence of means to mitigate the negative impacts (see Equality Impact Assessment for detail)

The Risk Template is attached at Appendix 4

Risk Profile before officer recommendations



Risk Profile after officer recommendations



Key

Delivery of Services – DoS	Catastrophic impact and likelihood certain Significant impact and likelihood probable Moderate impact and likelihood possible Limited impact and likelihood unlikely Minimal impact and likelihood remote
Health and Safety - HS	
Governance and Legal – GL	
Financial - F	
Project/Programme Delivery - PPD	
Reputation - R	
Staffing and Capacity - SC	

Council Plan Implications

The work of both CASS and Spark helps the Council deliver on the following values and priorities in the 2020/24 Council Plan:

The work of both CASS and Spark contributes to the following elements of the council Corporate Plan

Aim: Delivering for our communities

Values: Working collaboratively - Working with partners to enhance outcomes for our communities

Theme: 'Healthy and Self Reliant Communities' and the following priorities

- Work with partners to keep, and help our residents feel safe in their homes and communities
- Work with partners to reduce the impact of social isolation and create a feeling of community
- Work with partners to support people in improving their own physical and mental health and wellbeing
- Enable quality cultural, leisure and sport activities
- Proactively support residents facing hardship
- Help tackle the causes of economic exclusion, poverty and low social mobility
- Support older people to live and age well by increasing independence, reducing loneliness, and improving financial security

Carbon Emissions and Climate Change Implications

None

Equality and Diversity Implications

An Equality Impact Assessment has been carried out in respect of the consequences of not supporting the recommendation to fund. This shows that that a decision not to fund CASS and Spark in 2022/23 will have negative impacts on all the Protected Characteristics

A copy of the EIA is attached at Appendix 5

Privacy Impact Assessment

None

Background Papers

District-wide strategic grants – funding arrangements with CASS and SPARK 2021-2022
District-wide strategic grants – funding arrangements with CASS and SPARK 2020-2021;
Funding for Citizens Advice South Somerset (CASS) February 2019; District-wide strategic grants – Proposal for new two -year funding agreements with Access for All, CASS and SPARK 2018-2020; District-wide Voluntary Grants 2017-18; District-wide Voluntary Grants 2016-17; District-wide Voluntary Grants 2015-16;
