

Funding for South Somerset Voluntary & Community Action

Executive Portfolio Holder: Sylvia Seal, Leisure & Culture
Strategic Director: Rina Singh, Strategic Director (Place & Performance)
Assistant Director: Helen Rutter/Kim Close, Assistant Director (Communities)
Service Manager: Helen Rutter
Contact Details: helen.rutter@southsomerset.gov.uk or 01963 435012

Purpose of the Report

This report highlights the work of South Somerset Voluntary & Community Action (SSVCA) during the current year, focusing on the Voluntary Sector Support service which SSDC fund, and seeks the approval of the District Executive for the grant funding of SSVCA for 2015/16.

Public Interest

SSDC supports SSVCA to ensure that:

- a) Voluntary organisations and community groups across South Somerset are able to access free, impartial and expert advice from within the sector
- b) The voluntary sector is properly represented,
- c) There is a development body that promotes the need for and ways of delivering, services in the sector, to help some of the people most in need
- d) A range of objectives in our Council Plan are met

To this end SSDC provided funding of £74,260 during 2014/15

Recommendations

That the District Executive:

- (1) approves funding for South Somerset Voluntary & Community Action (SSVCA) of £74,260 for 2015/16;
- (2) agrees the current Service Level Agreement (SLA) is rolled forward for another year enabling a full review of our funding for SSVCA with a new agreement in place from 2016/17.

Background

Set up in 1981, SSVCA is part of a National network of Councils for Voluntary Service (now commonly called Voluntary & Community Action) that traditionally have largely existed at a District level. These are civil society, development organisations whose main purpose is to support the work of other organisations in the voluntary and community sector. It is a registered charity and company limited by guarantee.

Its role includes:

- Representing the views of members to Government 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

SSVCA has undergone a major restructuring over a 2 year period, which finally concluded in December 2014. This was necessary to secure efficiencies and improve its sustainability in a changing environment. Reduced grant and contracts from public bodies such as Somerset County Council and changes in policy and approaches from major funding organisations like The Big Lottery have all had an impact. The National Association of Voluntary & Community Action reports that many similar organisations at a District level have closed or merged in recent years. In this environment it has become essential for organisations like SSVCA to re-evaluate their work, prioritise and restructure their business.

Members of the Executive have been aware of the major and ongoing restructuring at the organisation and SSVCA has worked closely with our Financial Services team to provide evidence of the organisation's ongoing sustainability for both its core activities and its direct services set out in more detail below.

SSVCA is an umbrella organisation under which South Somerset Community Transport and South Somerset Furnicare operate. These services are no longer directly funded by SSDC.

SSDC provided grant funding of £74,260 for SSVCA during 2014/15. This funding is in the MTFP also forms part of the budget approved in February 2015*. The award of the grant itself is subject to direct approval by the Executive. Under the terms of the current SLA, which runs to 31st March 2015, we are obligated to give 12-months' notice in writing if we anticipate any significant changes in our agreement, although the agreement can be terminated by giving 6-months' written notice to SSVCA.

SSVCA Supporting the Voluntary Sector

SSVCA is one of the largest charities operating in South Somerset. It has a turnover in the region of £800,000 pa and a workforce of over 50 members of staff and over 60 volunteers.

The aim of this service is to engage with and provide services, support & advice for the voluntary sector/not for profit organisations within South Somerset. The continuing reduction in public service finance, mean that many authorities are looking to the Voluntary Sector to take over the delivery of services. SSVCA has an important role to play in supporting the VCS organisations to develop their capacity to take on this challenge if they wish to.

The current structure has separated out more fully the 3 main arms of the business: Voluntary Sector Support, Community Transport and Furnicare. Each now has a Manager responsible for all aspects of their business, reporting directly to the Board of Trustees. The CEO retains overall responsibility for all legal aspects of the business. A diagram showing the old structure and new structure is shown in Appendix 1.

The Voluntary Sector Support element (VSS) incorporates the Volunteer Centre & focuses on 5 core functions:

- (1) Information services
- (2) Advice & guidance services
- (3) Support services
- (4) Volunteering
- (5) The voice of the voluntary sector

The restructure, largely completed in January 2014, has ensured the right capacity (just under 2 FTEs) is in place to deliver these core functions and this service has moved back to Petters House to reduce head office costs and to be more accessible to groups and potential volunteers

The Community Transport arm has appointed a new General Manager and simplified its management to improve its accountability to the Board across its services. It provides affordable and accessible transport services for people living in South Somerset who do not have access to transport or who cannot access the transport available. It has a full cost recovery approach to charging and has integrated its scheduling for minibus, community cars and slinky bus services so that the customer is offered the best option for service users.

Furnicare adopted its new structure in September 2014, resulting in the closure of the Chard site and the consolidation of the operation from its central branch in Yeovil. From here it offers a districtwide reach to local residents, with a dedicated General Manager, increasing its autonomy and enabling new business practices and better decision making. The paid team also has a training scheme to encourage more people into volunteering with a significant reduction in the cost of providing the scheme.

Services and Achievements in 2014

A detailed schedule for the VSS with monitoring figures for April to September 2014 is attached in Appendix 2. It includes a summary of activity for Community Transport and Furnicare services, not directly funded by SSDC.

Information Services

- Currently 332 organisations are signed up through the 2 main SSVCA databases, this includes organisations seeking volunteers. Work is underway to sign up a further 70 organisations by the end of March 2015
- The organisations SSVCA work with are 13% from Area West, 37% from Area South, 22% Area North, 14% Area East (the remainder did not specify their base)
- Member organisations are very diverse with over 50% working with children & young people, 57% working with the over-60s, 31% working on disability and medical care issues, 25% working with unemployed, 23% working with those with a learning difficulties and 18% working with those with mental ill health
- Organisations signing up chose a bespoke selection of updates and e bulletins. Thirty nine e bulletins went out April to September 2014, these share all kinds of information and are used to highlight events. Weekly funding bulletins are compiled & circulated to help groups find grants.
- The website has been upgraded with a wide range of resources available, active twitter and facebook accounts. Two forum events have been held, one on volunteering the other on social media. Both were very popular attracting a wide range of local organisations

Advice and Guidance Services

- Over the half year 37 groups had 1:1 advice on matters including: constitutions; governance; funding bids; working with volunteers etc. Of these 10 were new groups
- The new database under development this year will enable better tracking of outcomes from this work
- A Voluntary Sector Survey was conducted in autumn 2014. There were 50 respondents. The findings from the survey are being used to refine the services offered by SSVCA and make sure they target the particular concerns and needs of local organisations

Support Services

- The main areas of commissioned work this year have been: management of flooding volunteers (see separate paragraph below) volunteer development for SSDCs CHAC and administration of the South Somerset Alliance on behalf of South Somerset CAB

- The survey mentioned above is being used to develop the offer of paid for services. This highlighted the top needs as: help with (a) volunteer recruitment/ management (b) raising funds. Other needs were: help with (c) good governance (d) marketing the groups activities/ services

Volunteering

The Volunteer service records (groups seeking volunteers and those wanting to volunteer) are managed through Vbase a national database shared by volunteer centres across the country. Content is uploaded to the national **Do It!** website where volunteers can see vacancies in their area. This website is being revamped to make it more tablet and mobile friendly. The whole service is free at the point of use to organisations and volunteers.

- Potential volunteers can discuss the options by phone or face to face with the SSVCA Coordinator to secure a placement. Opportunities are marketed through the Western Gazette, web sites & a drop in at Yeovil library one morning per week. It is hoped to extend this
- The half year saw 244 volunteers registered and 49 placed. Thirty one organisations made requests for 66 volunteering opportunities
- Work is underway with Yarlinton to encourage their residents to volunteer using social media
- They organize a volunteer coordinator peer support network with over 20 organisations involved to share best practice
- Have worked with 2 big firms in Yeovil to promote staff volunteering and a skills bank

The Voice of the Voluntary sector

- SSVCA provides a voice for the sector on a number of Partnership and forums. This is important as it makes sure that the needs of the sector and local communities are known and valued as policies and programmes are developed.
- Due to the relative strength of SSVCA they often represent the voluntary sector for the whole County. Examples include: the Heart of the SW LEP engagement forum; Somerset CCG engagement forums; Somerset County Council VCS forum. It also represents the sector locally on South Somerset Together.

Somerset Levels Programme

SSVCA with Mendip Community Support were commissioned by SCC to manage a large number of volunteers (over 60 people) who came together spontaneously to help those affected by the floods last winter. This was a major project including designing bespoke working arrangements and systems to safeguard and ensure good practices were adopted by the group. A full report is available. This was funded on a full cost recovery basis involving the CEO Sam Best working an additional 2 days per week to fulfill the brief. A small amount of funding from this went towards the VSS work. It provides a good example of the importance of having a responsive and expert capability in place that can quickly address a need and apply the necessary experience to deal with a difficult & unexpected situation.

Community Transport

- A social enterprise that operates 23 vehicles from cars to 16 seater minibuses
- All vehicles are wheelchair accessible
- Operates from bases in Yeovil, Chard and Langport
- Provides over 24,000 journeys per year for individuals and groups, including medical appointments, social trips & shopping
- Provide specialist school transport for 4-18s with physical disabilities and learning difficulties
- In addition to the fleet over 40 volunteer drivers use their own cars to provide individual journeys
- Faces a challenge to replacing an ageing fleet of vehicles

Furnicare

- A social enterprise that sells donated furniture and goods to people on low incomes meeting needs and reducing landfill
- Has a referral membership system & work with organisations supporting vulnerable people
- Have placed 3,243 items with new owners in the last 6 months, over 6,400 pa
- Is entirely self-funded and keeps sale prices as low as possible, helped by using a team of 7 volunteers, with 2 more starting soon
- Uses modern IT to manage and promote the service

Development Plans 2015/16 (note draft targets are under discussion by their Board)

The Trustees have been working on a new Business Plan for 2015/18 to focus the work around both the needs of local VCS and the requirement to have sustainable income streams going forward.

This will incorporate separate shorter Operational Plans for each of the 3 main areas of work which form separate Business Units. The Plan is due for adoption end of February 2015. During 2015/16 active consideration will be given to merger with other infrastructure organisations in Somerset to address long term sustainability. The main aspects of development relevant to the VSS are:

- Commence area working, by basing team members in community spaces to be more accessible to potential clients
- Re-refresh the existing website, to be more user friendly and to give VSS team more control in managing the website.
- Increase our social media contacts
- Increase our membership by 100%
- Hold a Funding Fayre/Networking event in the Autumn of 2015
- Research training needs of the sector and set up 4 training events
- Increase number of network forums to 6 per year and increase attendance.
- Explore possibility of engaging local businesses in Employer Supported Volunteering
- Launch 3 Volunteer Coordinator Network meetings
- Develop and launch new county wide database based on a Customer Management Referral System, recording all work undertaken with groups to create a better monitoring process.
- Explore setting up bank of volunteers with specialist skills
- Approach Yeovil College to help with promotion of VSS services
- Promote and respond to project requests

To implement the above, Advice and Guidance work is to get more emphasis subsuming the Support Service to offer a 3 stage process, able to give a bespoke response to need. Groups seeking help will undergo an initial assessment, get up to 10 hours of free help and will have the option to buy in additional support should they need to.

Financial Information and Issues

Overall SSVCA has now seen positive financial results from its new working arrangements with the 2014/15 year predicted to make a small surplus by the year end across the organisation

Reserves: For the year ending 31st March 2014 there was £187,000 of unrestricted funds. Looking ahead, to projected figures for 31st March 2015 it is anticipated that there will be a slightly increased to the reserves as each trading arm makes a small surplus.

The table below shows the anticipated funding sources for the VSS element of SSVCA for 2015/16. The cost for this service in 2013/14 was £180,000 so it has nearly halved over the course of the restructuring. Please note this is one element of a much wider range of services which the business itself offers to residents and funds through a combination of income, contracts and funding from agencies or grants approaching £800,000

<i>VSS Funding sources</i>	
South Somerset District Council	£74,260
Training fees	£1,500
CAB funding	£6,184
Clerking work	£4,332
Heritage project	£2,500
Donations	£1,500
Fee income for services to be provided	£4,500
Total	95,516

Whilst in recent years SCC and the Heath service have ceased funding the core VSS service, they do make active use of the services it provides, especially the volunteer centre and the representational and leadership role for the community sector across the district. Without the SSVCA core VSS service the two social enterprises- running their services of community transport and Furnicare respectively- would remain, but no volunteer brokering service nor the other elements of VSS set out above.

SSDC Funding

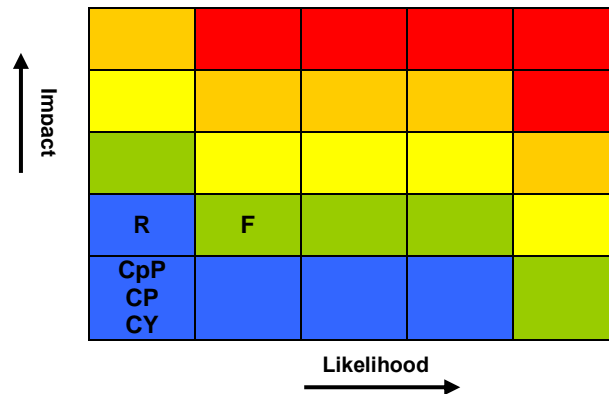
In March 2012 SSDC agreed a 3-year Service Level Agreement with SSVCA for 2012-15. Monitoring of the SLA is based on the objectives outlined at Appendix 2. The budget available for the SLA in the budget is £74,260. Due to the extensive restructuring and relocations that have just been completed, the organisation needs the new arrangements to bed down and for the structure to demonstrate what it can achieve in a stable year. In addition the organisation is looking at a potential merger with 2 other CVSs which would create a new organisation in due course. For these reasons it is recommended that the current SLA is rolled forward for another year and that we work closely with SSVCA, including a full review of our funding to be undertaken during 2015/16. It is envisaged that a new agreement would be entered into from April 2016/17

Financial Implications

If the funding recommended is agreed, all funds in the CVS grants budget will be committed for 2015/16.

Risk Matrix

This matrix only identifies the risk associated with taking the decision as set out in the report as the recommendation(s). Should there be any proposal to amend the recommendation(s) by either members or officers at the meeting then the impact on the matrix and the risks it identifies must be considered prior to the vote on the recommendation(s) taking place.



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

Corporate Priority Implications

- Develop options that increase recycling and minimise waste
- Work with partners to combat fuel poverty
- Optimise opportunities for external funding to promote healthy living
- Help communities develop transport schemes and local solutions to reduce rural isolation and inequalities to meet needs of those communities
- Evaluate the overall requirements of the Localism legislation and work with communities to develop plans for their community

Carbon Emissions and Climate Change Implications

In 2013/14 Furnicare collected 10,761 items of furniture donations, totalling 187 tonnes saved from landfill

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 who otherwise find it hard to access public services. Supporting the VCS increases community engagement and participation. All groups supported by SSDC are required to have an Equalities Policy. An Equalities Analysis has been carried out on the proposal above with minimal impact.

Background Papers

Monitoring reports and annual report & account submitted by SSVCA.