

An Offer Of Support to Bradford Council – Deploying a Reduced VCSE SIP to Minimise Council Budget Impact of VCSE Failure and Mitigate Council Service Cuts

Background

In a climate of unprecedented challenges for our communities and all our sectors we all recognise that the current financial position of the Council requires challenging decisions to be made.

Bradford District is nationally renowned for its rich, diverse and vibrant VCSE sector. There are nearly 4,000 VCSE organisations, employing approximately 12,424 people and 34,721 volunteers. 95% of these VCSE organisations are small or micro with a specific focus in wards or with specific underserved / marginalised groups. It is these groups that receive essential support from the SIP contract to survive, grow and thrive.

The current budget proposals that have been put forward for consultation would result in an 83% cut in council funded support to VCSE organisations in Bradford District. We are concerned that this will result in increased failure and reduced in the VCSE sector leading to increased statutory demand on Council front line services and budgets.

As clearly demonstrated during the pandemic, the strength in tackling an emergency came from bringing together our collective strengths, mobilising in a way which united putting the residents of our District first and by mobilising the power and assets in all our communities. There is an opportunity in the face of this challenge to take the same approach to collaborative problem solving and mobilisation.

We know you understand the value of the VCSE sector, particularly during times of service cuts when more people likely to be driven into crisis. (more people and more complex problems)

Councillor Susan Hinchcliffe talked about the value of the VCSE in the T&A earlier this month .

<https://www.thetelegraphandargus.co.uk/news/24023238.council-leader-speaks-financial-crisis-facing-bradford/>

What the Council has asked from the current SIP contract

VCSE Capacity Building support – enabling groups to start up, addressing risk and resilience of VCSE organisations, supporting organisations to run effectively including; strong governance, accessing funding, safeguarding training business planning to diversify income through trading and specific support to social enterprises. Through this work over 1,500 one-to-one tailored support sessions have been delivered to organisations over the last 18 months.

This contract also provides support to various council departments with their own outputs e.g. UKSPF with economic, Community Asset Transfers. Therefore there is a risk that future grants given to the council may not get spent and residents may not see the benefit.

Information and Insight – provision of information to the VCSE sector including;

- website and online resources (22,757 users, 205,699 engagements, 1,131 downloads, 5,754 link clicks),
- Briefing Bradford - weekly information on funding, training and employment opportunities for the sector. This is read each week by 1,230 organisations.
- The Bradford District VCSE Sector secured £14.4m in 2021
- social media information with a reach to 7,369 across Facebook, X and Instagram.

Voice and Influence – provision of networks to support the sector to facilitate their contributions into strategies, build resilience and share good practice; also acts a key point for the council to talk to the sector on various issues.

- **Provides and supports advocates across strategic boards and partnerships.** The new VCSE Leaders Network that was developed during this contract now has around 100 active participants; the diversification of the membership is growing each month with many grassroots organisations gaining benefit from this. The WhatsApp Group of the Leaders' Network shares information, enables debate and connects VCSE workers from a diverse range of VCSE organisations

Volunteering –

- support the sector to recruit and manage volunteers safely and effectively;
- business brokerage providing private sector volunteering and donation to charities and social enterprises (valued at £752,081 in the current year April 2023 to December 2023);
- supporting council volunteering initiatives including support for City of Culture's volunteering ambitions; volunteer quality award.

Citizen Voice (funded by the NHS element of the programme) – engagement with the VCSE, their service users and the public to support consultations, service changes and to gather insight about services

Building Sustainability – facilitating small grant making processes and securing inward investment opportunities. Over £1.3 million allocated to 174 VCSE projects across the district through CNet small grant programmes.

The number of events and network meetings for the contract currently stands at 189 (individual events since April 2022 equating to 10 per month; number of beneficiaries 1,800)

Added Value

Due to the investment by the Council, our VCSE delivery organisations are offered stability which enables added value.

CEO's across both SIP contracts do not take salary costs from the contract and have also collaborated to deliver the following:

- Inward Investment of £240,000 from West Yorkshire ICB for direct project delivery with grassroots organisations including the delivery of Participatory Grant Making event that resulted in over 20 organisations receiving funding in one day. The funding this year is in addition to two previous rounds from this source (total investment across all three rounds is c.£750,000)
- Use of our pioneering data driven approach through the MyCake data dashboard and our Diagnostic tool to identify organisations at risk and undertake early targeted interventions.
- Regional developments with WYCA to support Bradford VCSE groups in the longer term
- Shaping the Future of Volunteering – national research project on behalf of 26 national charities to support the increase the diversity of volunteers within their organisations.
- Women in Governance – a local ICB funded project to support more women from protected characteristics into governance roles across all sectors
- Key partner in delivery of COVID Champions work; c£300,000 from DLUHC.
- Delivery of VCSE Research Champions Programme
- Working in collaboration with Bradford Council to deliver the Council / VCSE Action plan aimed at improving sustainability of the VCSE sector

What would be lost

One of many examples where the SIP contract has supported VCSE organisations struggling to survive and delivering essential services that keeps pressure off Council services, is the support currently being provided to [REDACTED]

The Centre provides a wide range of services to families in need on the [REDACTED] estate including Food bank, Baby Bank, Nursery, Advice Services and family support. Through our data driven approach to identify organisations at risk the charity was approached and is receiving support from staff at Community Action and Participate to address budget deficits and create a recovery action plan.

This work is vital to ensure the survival of the charity. If it were to close families would see an immediate loss of a range of wrap around services that protect vulnerable children living in poverty. This would inevitably lead to increased demand on Childrens Services budgets. If deteriorating family conditions led to just 2 children being taken into care this would cost the council £624,000, significantly more than the total place budget for infrastructure support, and indeed the turnover of [REDACTED].

<https://www.yorkshirepost.co.uk/news/opinion/columnists/care-system-needs-fixing-as-bradford-councils-costs-show-the-yorkshire-post-says-4403963>

Across the Infrastructure programme our teams work with organisations that directly support people and families who would otherwise require additional support from Bradford Council. We do this through help to raise funds, work to improve their effectiveness and support to tackle risk and crisis. Amongst these are:

- Drug and alcohol services
- Adult and Children's mental health services
- Domestic Violence organisations
- Asylum seekers and refugee groups
- Youth organisations in the most disadvantaged communities
- Organisations working with offenders

A way forward

Many VCSE organisations act as a buffer between individuals and families and Council front line services. As the examples above demonstrate, it would take a very small number of them to fail – or to do less - to cost the Council considerably more than the value of the VCSE SIP contract.

For this reason, we do not want to see a significant reduction in crucial support to grassroots VCSE organisations that support and deliver services for Bradford Council.

This paper is an offer to work collaboratively with Bradford Council and other partners, such as the NHS, to help mitigate against the impact of decisions which have the potential to disproportionately affect our diverse communities and further widening health inequalities and the deepening the impacts of poverty.

We propose that we collaborate with you to consider and agree how the VCSE sector can help mitigate the cuts that the Council will have to make including -

- Repurpose a reduced VCSE SIP Contract to support the Council mitigate the impact of essential service cuts, to be agreed jointly. This could include for example targeting support for VCSE organisations that divert people away from Adult Health and Social Care services, particularly wellbeing and prevention statutory services, Children, Young People and Family Services, Welfare benefits and debt advice, domestic violence and mental health services

- Supporting the Council to deliver its emerging Prevention strategy, and particularly its statutory duty under the Care Act 2014 highlights to deliver 'prevention' activities with an inextricable link to the fundamental principle of promoting people's wellbeing.
- Utilise the MyCake data dashboard to pull together data on VCSE organisations across the District to:
 - Understand specific areas of service delivery ie health, social care and public health focused
 - Identify areas of risk to organisational sustainability (RAG rated) in order to prioritise targeted early intervention.
- Utilise Participate Project's national pioneering Diagnostic Tool to provide support for organisations deemed as 'business critical' to BMDC, particularly Adult Health and Social Care, Children and Young People, as used previously under the Transformation Programme work carried out jointly with the Stronger Communities Team.
- Statutory duty to promote wellbeing
- Continue support to struggling VCSE organisations, particularly those that are critical in mitigating pressure on Council services. Using our pioneering data driven approach through the MyCake data dashboard and our Diagnostic tool to identify organisations at risk and undertake early targeted interventions.
- Discuss and agree a workable reduced level of Department of Place investment in the SIP contract for 2024/25 and 2025/26 and the longer term.
- Provide other essential support to VCSE organisations that they identify, also informed by the insight of infrastructure support service staff.
- Work with the other West Yorkshire infrastructure organisations to create economies of scale.
- Seek alternative investment for infrastructure support in the future

Alternative proposal

We understand that, to do this, alternative savings would need to be found. A few options are offered here.

1. Repurpose UKSPF funds (including residual funding across Area Offices from recent Pillar One expenditure) to invest in the SIP contract for 2024/25. This has been done in Kirklees, traditionally an authority that has not valued its VCSE infrastructure in the same way Bradford Council has.
2. Support an approach to WYCA for underspent Pillar 1 funding to be redirected to Bradford to support this shortfall.
3. Flex of other contracts e.g. Public Health

We are currently working up further alternative potential savings / repurposing of funds to resource this proposal which we would like to discuss with you at the earliest opportunity; understanding the future asks around the remaining investment are crucial to our partners being able to provide realistic proposals for consideration. We will also respond to the Equality Impact assessments which understate the impact of the withdrawing of the VCSE SIP contract on the VCSE sector and our diverse communities.

In addition, we would propose moving any VCSE SIP infrastructure contract going forward from the Place Department to Adult and Community Services. The work of the VCSE sector is most aligned to the work of Adult Social Care & Health i.e. implications of a failing VCSE sector would

cause most pressure on Adult Social Care & Health services. Also, we understand that Iain McBeath is now the named CMT Director for the VCSE sector and therefore moving the contract would align with this recent development.

We hope this proposal is helpful and would welcome a more detailed conversation. with you to explore these proposals further and understand better the Council's needs to mitigate further pressure on Council services caused by proposed budget cuts.

VCSE SIP Contract Partners

Community Action

HALE

Participate

REN

CNet

VCS Alliance