



Communities and Localism Select Committee Inquiry into the effectiveness of covid-19 grants

Chairman – Cllr Paul Irwin

Response from Cabinet – Cllr Gareth Williams, Cabinet Member for Communities and Public Health

Recommendation	Cabinet's Response	Cabinet Agreed Actions/Timelines	Lead Member/Officer
<p>1. Recognising the work of our Local Heroes to continue to raise awareness for further volunteering and fundraising</p> <p>At the last Buckinghamshire Council meeting before the election, a one-minute clap should be held at the beginning of the meeting to say thank you to all those who helped during the pandemic. We can also recognise the work of our Local Heroes by continuing to raise awareness by promoting and publicising the excellent work of the voluntary sector to help encourage volunteering and fundraising</p>	<p>The Council continues to work with the VCS Recovery Board. It is this board and through the work of the VCS Framework that strategic collaboration including promoting the sector and volunteering will be considered. The council's latest copy of the magazine, press releases and social media highlight the work of the sector.</p> <p>The community response seen in the pandemic shows how wonderful our communities are at coming together. The Cabinet were pleased to launch the Proud of Bucks awards. Sponsored by The Clare Foundation the awards highlighted the amazing work in our local communities and celebrated the difference they made in the pandemic. Nominations came from individuals and organisations across a range of categories, from teachers and supermarket staff to health visitors, business and community groups.</p>	<p>Chairman's decision, Cabinet supportive of a One minute clap at the Council meeting in April 2021</p>	<p>Gareth Williams/ Claire Hawkes</p>

Recommendation	Cabinet's Response	Cabinet Agreed Actions/Timelines	Lead Member/Officer
<p>2. To continue the effective collaboration of the strategic partnership to protect the voluntary sector by;</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ensuring key decision makers are represented on the Strategic Funding Group to address the needs of Buckinghamshire and local communities. As part of this and other work carried out by the Council, it is important to continue looking at efficiencies to obtain value for money with all grant funding and to be able to position, flex and change direction as required so we can be quick to act 2. Considering how the Council's review of its estate and community assets could identify possible properties that could support the voluntary sector. 	<p>The Cabinet is pleased to see the effective collaboration that the new council has developed with the sector over the past year recognised in the scrutiny findings.</p> <p>The collaboration seen in the pandemic demonstrated that it is possible to work together quickly and respond as appropriate to the situation. The Strategic Funding Group is a VCS led group therefore it would be inappropriate for the council to determine who is involved. The Cabinet Member for Communities and Public Health attends these meetings. We will be continuing to work with this group and can see the key funders are already connected. In addition, the council is undergoing a review of all the grant funding provided to the voluntary and community sector this year.</p> <p>A number of council properties are currently used to support the voluntary and community sector and we will be reviewing our approach to rental subsidy agreements as part of the grants review. It is important to recognise that there are a number of competing priorities that need to be considered as we review the Council's assets, for example seeking best value for council tax payers, our commitment to the development of affordable housing and the regeneration of our town centres etc. The Council will need to consider the best use for each of its assets in this context.</p>	<p>The review of voluntary sector grant funding will be undertaken during the course of 2021, with completion in November 2021</p>	<p>Gareth Williams/ Claire Hawkes</p>
<p>3. To review the funding process to enable all community groups to have equal</p>	<p>The council is not able to commit to fund dedicated funding navigator officers. However, it is recognised that there are</p>	<p>A refreshed governance and</p>	<p>Gareth Williams/ Claire Hawkes</p>

Recommendation	Cabinet's Response	Cabinet Agreed Actions/Timelines	Lead Member/Officer
<p>opportunities to access funding by: -</p> <p>A. Providing funding navigators to help community groups access funding in Buckinghamshire. The Strategic Funding Group in partnership with the funding navigators, at a more local level, can review how all grants are currently distributed to ensure that funding is fast tracked when required and outcome focussed with an accessible system for applications</p> <p>B. Providing as much certainty of longer term funding as the Council is able so that voluntary and community organisations can plan ahead</p> <p>C. Review the application process for Community Boards as follows:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifying the benefits of Community Boards having a Small Grant Fund to empower smaller community groups where a small grant can bring huge benefits • Undertaking a review of the criteria of the Community Board application process to see whether it should be more closely aligned with the Public Health Assessment and to ensure a consistent approach to 	<p>groups, such as the Strategic Funding Group, VCS Recovery Board, and other resources such as the community board coordinators and the infrastructure contract which support VCS organisations in exploring potential funding routes.</p> <p>It will be important that Council reflects on its grant distribution through the planned grants review. When it is appropriate, this insight will be brought into strategic conversations with partners.</p> <p>Community boards are in their infancy. We continue to reflect on the experience of the first year, including the small grant fund pilots, and we will be looking at the relationship between the community boards funding and the VCS grants as part of the VCS grants review.</p> <p>We are still providing an emergency response, so it is critical that stretched resources are deployed on priority areas. However, we are intending to refresh our guidance about the funding and governance of community boards over the next few months in preparation for the start of their second year.</p>	<p>funding protocol for Community Boards will be developed by May 2021.</p>	

Recommendation	Cabinet's Response	Cabinet Agreed Actions/Timelines	Lead Member/Officer
applications to more than one Board			
<p>4. Building the Volunteer response by:-</p> <p>A. Having a Campaign to reach out to our Lockdown Heroes to encourage them to continue the legacy of volunteer work which could help strategic partnerships to build a volunteer army for Buckinghamshire to provide a response to any emergency</p> <p>B. Reviewing whether more can be done to encourage staff to take up volunteer roles by developing an Employer Supported Volunteering Procedure</p>	<p>Since we launched the volunteering request form on our website, we have been hugely grateful for the positive response from Buckinghamshire residents. Buckinghamshire has always had a strong volunteering ethos. The community spirit seen in the pandemic has been outstanding. Volunteering is a key part of the VCS Strategic Framework. A collaborative approach is essential as such this work will be part of a well-planned VCS Strategic Framework action plan.</p> <p>The council takes its corporate social responsibility very seriously and is developing a volunteering policy for its staff.</p>	<p>An Employer Supported Volunteering Policy will be developed by June 2021</p>	<p>Katrina Wood/John McMillan</p>
<p>5. Supporting smaller voluntary and community groups – recognising the benefit of smaller agile grass root organisations to complement the larger more established voluntary organisations</p> <p>A Continue to recognise the independence and value of pop-up community groups to engage residents who may be worried about the stigma of approaching more formalised</p>	<p>The VCS Sector is made up of a range of diverse organisations which includes more established organisations as well as the popup community groups seen in the pandemic. A strategic overview is required to ensure the sector does not unknowingly create duplication or repercussions for others (for example food shortages in foodbanks) or a confusing offer for residents.</p> <p>The council is not in sole control of this action but will work with the VCS Recovery Board and insight gathered from Community Boards to understand the changing makeup of the sector. The council will also advocate the need for groups to</p>	<p>The VCS Strategic Framework will be considered by Cabinet in March 2021 and will set out the Council's approach to working in partnership to build capacity in the sector.</p>	<p>Gareth Williams/ Claire Hawkes</p>

Recommendation	Cabinet's Response	Cabinet Agreed Actions/Timelines	Lead Member/Officer
<p>groups and ensure that pop up groups are supported to deliver their services safely, including formalising their group where appropriate</p> <p>B To identify structural enablers e.g. Street Associations, Community Connectors, Community Board Co-ordinators who could link local organisations together to build capacity and identify funding opportunities.</p>	<p>consider safeguarding and signpost to appropriate organisations who can provide specialist support.</p> <p>The VCS Strategic Framework will include action plans to work with Community Boards, Community Engagement Teams and the infrastructure contract on understanding local networks and ensuring support is in place to build capacity.</p>		
<p>6. The Council should continue to work with strategic partners on a Buckinghamshire Food Partnership, to:-</p> <p>A. Ensure a clearer system of referral so that food is fairly distributed to the most vulnerable and that more formalised food banks are given priority over funding</p> <p>B. Build on the current mapping of community food activity (food directory) by providing mutual support, collaboration, to share resources and to target and bring in funding.</p>	<p>We have undertaken detailed mapping of Foodbanks as an early part of our Covid response, ensuring every part of Buckinghamshire is covered and that the Foodbanks have the support they need. We have had group meetings with the foodbanks, the service and the Cabinet Member to ensure we are closely coordinated.</p> <p>Understanding the food distribution and a planned approach is critical. The council is working with the new Food partnership and will, through its work in the Helping Hand team, support a robust understanding of distribution and work closely with the independent foodbanks to understand their diverse needs.</p> <p>As above, the VCS Recovery Board and the Strategic Funding Group supports this process.</p>	<p>The Council will work with the independent foodbanks to understand their diverse needs and undertake a review of its support for foodbanks in that context – September 2021</p>	<p>Gareth Williams/ Claire Hawkes</p>

Recommendation	Cabinet's Response	Cabinet Agreed Actions/Timelines	Lead Member/Officer
<p>The Council needs to focus resource towards reducing loneliness and social isolation by:-</p> <p>A. Continuing to set up foundation services that provide the first steps in finding individuals who are experiencing loneliness, supported by structural enablers</p> <p>B. Continuing to direct interventions focussed on helping people maintain existing relationships and develop new ones e.g. promoting support activities such as lunch clubs, befriending schemes (which can be found in the directory of services which has been produced)</p> <p>C. Providing gateway services like transport, technology, spatial planning and housing which make it easier for communities to come together.</p>	<p>We are still providing an emergency response so it is critical stretched resources are deployed on priority areas.</p> <p>These recommendations are around a community development strengths-based approach and the community boards model plays an important role in helping communities supporting themselves. The boards will be able to know where there may be concerns and look at local solutions or explore removing any barriers that hinder communities supporting one another.</p> <p>This a longer-term place shaping community development approach. As the community board model matures, opportunities from across the council and its partners are understood this approach will be possible.</p>	<p>We will develop a toolkit for community boards to support them in developing local solutions to tackle social isolation in their communities, building on the COVID experience – September 2021</p>	<p>Gareth Williams/ Claire Hawkes</p>