MAYOR AND CABINET		
Report Title	Response to the recommendations of the Safer Stronger Communities Select Committee report on Capacity in the Voluntary Sector	
Key Decision	No	Item No.
Ward	All	
Contributors	Executive Director for Community Services	
Class	Part 1	Date: 21 June 2017

1. Purpose

1.1 This report sets out the response to the comments and views arising from the Safer Stronger Communities Select Committee discussions held on the Council's Main Grants Programme at its

2. Recommendations

It is recommended that the Mayor:

2.1 Approves the responses from the Executive Director for Community Services to the recommendations from the Safer Stronger Communities Select Committee.

2.2 Agrees that this report should be forwarded to the Safer Stronger Communities Select Committee.

3. Background

3.1 At their meeting of 14 April 2016, the Safer Stronger Communities Select Committee, resolved to carry out a review into developing the capacity of the community and voluntary sector.

3.2 At its meeting on 15 September 2016, the Committee agreed the scoping paper for a short review of the support offered for organisations in the community and voluntary sector. The scoping paper set out the background and key lines of enquiry for the review. The key areas proposed to be considered were:
To establish:
- The Council's principle means for providing support to the sector
- The budget available to carry out this work
- The process for assessing the support needs of community and voluntary sector organisations

To consider:
- What forms of support should be a priority for the sector?
- What form should support arrangements for the community and voluntary sector take?

3.3 The timeline for the review was as follows:

19 October 2016 – To agree the scope of the review.

19 October 2016 - Evidence-taking session to cover the analysis of the Council's role in and budget for supporting the voluntary sector and to consider evidence from voluntary organisations.

28 November 2016 – Draft Report to Committee coinciding with the report on the main grants programme for 2017/18

January 2017 – final report released

4.   Response to the recommendations in the report

4.1   The Committee's report made 10 recommendations which are set out below along with officers response: resolved to advise Mayor and Cabinet of the following:

4.2   Recommendation 1

4.2.1   That the Council continues to work with voluntary organisations in Lewisham to help them adapt to changes in funding and reductions in grants from the Council. Support should be timely and tailored to the needs of organisations.

4.3   Response

4.3.1   Each Main Grant funded organisation has been allocated a lead officer from within the Culture and Community Development team who is responsible for both monitoring performance and providing ongoing support. This includes attending at least one trustee meeting and one in depth discussion with representatives of the organisation per year providing the means for officers to gain a detailed knowledge of the needs of the organisation. There are also themed leads within the team e.g. the arts, sport, information and advice who will have wider strategic knowledge across a number of organisations and will also undertake horizon scanning in order to keep up to date with issues and opportunities. A variety of types of support are offered, including 1:1 advice, information on resources that become available such as funding or training and opportunities to network with other organisations to facilitate greater partnership. We also now monitor the number of funding bids made by each organisation as part of our formal processes.

Voluntary Action Lewisham is also funded to provide support to the borough's voluntary sector. Following the review of services being provided by organisations receiving Main Grant funding as part of the budget cuts in 2016, officers have been working with VAL to redesign and modernise these services to make them more responsive to current needs. The organisation is currently going through a restructuring process to implement these changes.

4.4   Recommendation 2

4.4.1   When the Council reviews the grant-making process, the Council should ensure it considers assessments of skills and opportunities available in an area and not just look at need. This could be considered as an assets model rather than a uniquely deficits model.

4.5   Response

4.5.1   Assessments of skills and opportunities is very much a part of the current grant making process and the assessment of individual applications. The Main Grants Guidance document puts forward a number of key principles that highlight this approach including:

- A recognition of the importance of maintaining an independent sector that can act as a critical friend to challenge public sector policy and delivery.
- A recognition of the key role that the sector plays in building civic participation, providing a voice for seldom heard residents and providing community intelligence.
- A recognition of the great diversity of the sector and the need to engage with small and emerging groups as well as large established organisations.
- A recognition of the sector's potential to take risks and innovate which does not sit easily within commissioning frameworks.
- A recognition that third sector organisations have been key delivery partners within Lewisham, including for a wide range of targeted short term initiatives. Grant aid provides a level of security for organisations ensuring that there is a strong sector able to address local need, attract additional resources and be ready to work in partnership with us.
- A recognition of the sector's ability to utilise resources that are not available to the statutory sector through external funding and volunteers. Every £1 of grant aid invested yields approximately £4 from other sources

  The Guidance document goes on to state:
- In establishing the priority themes for the grants programme we have considered the contribution the third sector can make to meeting the priority.
- In assessing applications to the grants programme we will be looking at an organisation's readiness to work with us as active partners and what they can bring to such a partnership

4.6   Recommendation 3

4.6.1   LB Lewisham's commissioning models should reflect "The Social Value Act (2013)". Real consideration should be given to the benefits to the community of tenders by local voluntary and SME organisations during the valuation process as a means of countering contract-based culture.

4.7   Response

4.7.1   Officers welcome the proposal to consider the benefits of of tenders by local voluntary and SME organisations and will work with the Corporate Procurement Board to explore opportunities in this area. Voluntary Action Lewisham will also be encouraged to identify and help address the capacity building needs of the sector in order to ensure that organisations have the necessary skills to participate in this kind of activity.

4.8   Recommendation 4

4.8.1   The Council should consider the possibility of supporting the development of a "brokerage" system between voluntary sector organisations and employers to support increased numbers of and more effective volunteering opportunities.

4.9   Response

4.9.1   Over the past year the Council has worked closely with voluntary and community sector to establish Lewisham Local to explore new approaches to volunteering. This initiative has begun to establish bespoke giving opportunities and advertise these to local businesses, groups and individuals. Giving opportunities have attracted some staff volunteering and business donations of items. A notable example was a local HR consultancy volunteering two consultants' time for a morning to work on CV skills and employment support at a local job club. Lewisham Local is continuing to operate in this area in order to broker links between the borough's largest employers and volunteering opportunities with organisations.

4.10   Recommendation 5

4.10.1   That the potential for setting up a liaison support network specifically for Chief Executives in the Community and Voluntary Sector in Lewisham be investigated.

4.11   Response

4.11.1 A support network for Chief Executives is likely to be welcomed by the local voluntary and community sector and yield benefits such as opportunities for skill and resource sharing. The proposal will be taken forward by VAL as part of its redesign of services.

4.12   Recommendation 6

4.12.1   That the Council understands the importance of volunteering and the need for organisations to get support to develop their networks. Larger charities have access to substantial sets of data which enables them to target activities to local demographics. The Council should investigate the possibility of facilitating intelligence and data support to smaller organisations in the sector, for example through purchasing data systems such as MOSAIC and sharing data. In its consideration the Council should consider cost and maintaining and upholding the highest standards of data protection.

4.13   Response

4.13.1 Ad hoc support is provided on request to organisations around access to data, where resources allow. Data gathered by the Policy, Service Design and Analysis team has also been made available on a wider level in the past. However the value of providing this support in a more systematic way is noted and will be explored with Council colleagues and Voluntary Action Lewisham.

4.14   Recommendation 7

4.14.1 The Committee welcomes the involvement of civic society and empowering people to be involved in their communities. The advocacy role voluntary groups deliver was welcomed but work carried out to meet social need was vital.

4.15   Response

4.15.1 The response of the Committee in welcoming the involvement of civic society and empowering people to be involved in their communities is noted and will be used to inform future recommendations around these issues.

4.16   Recommendation 8

4.16.1 The Main Grants Programme should be sustained including providing the opportunity to fund core costs in some circumstances. The value of funding core costs should be recognised both when the Council funds organisations and when it is bidding for external funding itself.

4.17   Response

4.17.1 The support of the committee for provision of core funding in some circumstances is noted and will inform recommendations made to Mayor and Cabinet as part of the proposals for the next round of Main Grants due to begin in April 2019.

4.18   Recommendation 9

4.18.1 The role of local assemblies should include community development and capacity building.

4.19   Response

4.19.1 Local assemblies are encouraged to take on a community development and capacity building function and there are many examples of where this has successfully been achieved. The success of this work is often dependant on the availability and willingness of local voluntary and community sector organisations to work alongside the assembly which has limited capacity. It is also important to note that priorities for individual assemblies are set locally. Sharing the learning around these issues through networking events has been important and officers will ensure that these events continue to take place.

4.20   Recommendation 10

4.20.1 Following the review, there was a concern to ensure infrastructure support organisations provide a greater voice for the voluntary sector.

4.21   Response

4.21.1 The concern of the committee is noted and officers will ensure that this is fed into the development of the new offer being developed as part of the redesign process that VAL is currently going through.

5.   Financial Implications

5.1   Any financial implications in respect of the above will be part of the existing budget resourcing.

6.   Legal Implications

6.1   There are no specific legal implications associated with this report.

7.   Crime and Disorder Implications

7.1   There are no crime and disorder implications associated with this report.

8.   Equalities Implications

8.1   There are no adverse equalities implications associated with this report.

9.   Environmental Implications

9.1   There are no environmental implications associated with this report.

Background papers

Safer Stronger Communities Select Committee' Report into Capacity in the Voluntary Sector
Insert link

Report of comments of the Safer Stronger Communities Select Committee on the Main Grants Programme 2017-19
http://councilmeetings.lewisham.gov.uk/documents/s46647/03MandCResponseMainGrantsProgrammeSSCSC281116.pdf

Report to the Mayor and Cabinet Committee on the approach to Main Grants Programme savings
http://councilmeetings.lewisham.gov.uk/documents/s44598/Main%20Grants%20Programme%202017-18.pdf

For further information on this report please contact James Lee, Head of Cultural and Community Development on 020 8314 9569.