

<b>Committee(s):</b> Community and Health Committee	<b>Date:</b> 13 September 2021
<b>Subject:</b> Voluntary, Faith and Communities Sector Support Strategy 2021-2026	<b>Wards Affected:</b> ALL
<b>Report of:</b> Kim Anderson, Corporate Manager (Communities, Leisure and Health)	<b>Public</b>
<b>Report Author/s:</b> Lucy Gill, Community, Leisure and Wellbeing Officer Telephone: 01277 312500 E-mail: Lucy.gill@brentwood.gov.uk	<b>For Decision</b>

### Summary

There has been an active and admirable response to the COVID-19 pandemic by voluntary organisations. The response offered the opportunity to consider and review the current partnership and support arrangements the Council holds with the voluntary, faith and communities sector, as agreed at a previous committee.

The draft Voluntary, Faith and Communities Sector Support Strategy (2021-2026) has been created following a full review of the current landscape of the sector. It outlines its vital role in supporting local communities and the economy, the role the Council currently plays in supporting sector development, and identifies ways in which it will continue to support the growth of a strong and sustainable sector.

### Recommendation(s)

**Members are asked to:**

**R1: Agree the implementation of the draft Voluntary, Faith and Communities Sector Support Strategy (2021-2026), and agree for officers to create a 5-year accompanying action plan; and**

**R2: For officers to update Members at the relevant committee on the progress of the implementation of the strategy with the annual action plan.**

### Main Report

#### **Introduction and Background**

1. The Borough Council has had a long-term positive relationship with the Voluntary Faith and Communities Sector (VFCS), providing both staff and finances to support its development, through the delivery and commissioning of initiatives, organisational support, and allocation of premises and associate subsidiaries, such as affordable rentals and discretionary rate relief.

2. The Council directly commissions 3 key organisations, runs 2 discretionary funding programmes and leads the delivery of health, wellbeing and other workstreams within the community to broker partnerships to address inequalities.
3. As a commissioner, the Council has a key role in working closely with the sector to gain valuable insight to shape services and drive delivery of priorities forward.
4. The pandemic has changed the landscape of local need and with an increase in volunteering, development of new voluntary groups and networks at a hyper-local level, this is being ably met by the VFCS. The Council has an important role to play in harnessing this development to ensure continued and sustained support to our residents.
5. Essex County Council, who also supports the sector with funding, is undertaking its own review of support and services. It is important that Brentwood Borough Council aligns its direction appropriately to enable shared outcomes, reporting and monitoring.

### **Issue, Options and Analysis of Options**

6. Our vision is for the Borough of Brentwood to have a strong, active, resilient and sustainable VFCS that is recognised for its role in delivering and shaping local services and valued for the wider social, economic and environmental contribution that it makes to the Borough of Brentwood.
7. Upon review and consultation with key partners, the draft VFCS Strategy outlines 3 clear areas of support:
  - a) **Commissioning and funding** – aligning our financial contributions with strategic priorities, offering flexible, longer-term funding to enable sustainable planning and delivery, with clear outcomes frameworks, as well as maximising social value commitments of contractors and other financial community contributions.
  - b) **Building capacity** - providing leadership and promoting collaboration, taking an asset-based community development approach to maximise strengths at a hyper local level. Working to raise the profile of the sector, brokering new partnerships with other sectors and supporting organisations to share resources and embed resilient business plans. Encouraging co-production of services and working with people at the heart of communities.

**c) Supporting infrastructure** - Prioritising the upskilling of organisations to enable effective bidding of funding and support to adaptations to innovative and digital ways of working. Maximising Council assets and exploring community asset transfer opportunities, whilst building on the hub approach. Upskilling and acknowledging volunteers and promoting volunteer opportunities, supporting organisations to recruit and retain volunteers.

8. Although the Council is reviewing its funding allocation and direction, it is not looking to reduce any funding to the three commissioned services of Brentwood CVS, Brentwood Community Transport and Citizen's Advice South East (CASE). In some areas, the funding may be increased to meet priorities and objectives of the strategy and officers will seek to utilise external funding streams where possible. This will enable the VFCS to become more sustainable, producing longer term outcomes and support for residents.

### **Reasons for recommendation**

9. The VFCS Strategy has been drafted following extensive review and consultation with the sector. It confidently outlines where the Council's support is currently needed to strengthen and develop the sector to be more responsive and flexible, providing effective support where it is most needed, and making the best use of resources to deliver high quality, value for money services.
10. Delivery of actions to meet the three key support areas will be outlined in a robust action plan that will be regularly monitored and reviewed.

### **Consultation**

11. From May to July 2021 the Council undertook a review of the local VFCS and its role in supporting it. This was undertaken through a variety of methods, including lengthy discussions with commissioned services and external VFCS developmental organisations, plus surveys with sector networks.
12. Discussions and surveys were designed to ascertain what the strengths of the local landscape are, where additional support is needed and what priorities there are for the community moving forwards through pandemic recovery stages.

### **References to Corporate Plan**

13. The draft VFCS Strategy supports a number of priorities under the 'Developing Communities' strand, supporting the most vulnerable people in our community and ensuring residents can access the right services they need in the right way.

14. The draft strategy also meets priorities for 'Growing our Economy', supporting pathways to employment, developing volunteering, skills development and generating external funding.

## Implications

### Financial Implications

**Name/Title: Jacqueline Van Mellaerts, Corporate Director (Finance & Resources)**

**Tel/Email: 01277 312500/jacqueline.vanmellaerts@brentwood.gov.uk**

15. Current agreements for this financial year have been met by existing budgets and is reviewed annually as part of the budget setting process.

Brentwood Council for Voluntary Services	£10,000 (General Fund)
Citizens Advice South Essex	£ 59,000 (£56,000 General Fund, £3,000 Housing Revenue Account)
Brentwood Community Transport	£26,000 (General Fund)
Brentwood Community Fund	£16,300 (General Fund)
Mental Health Small Grants Scheme	£10,000 (General Fund)

16. Any further contributions necessary to deliver the outcomes of the draft strategy, that cannot be funded externally, will need to be considered as part of the Council's budget setting process.

### Legal Implications

**Name & Title: Amanda Julian, Corporate Director (Law & Governance) and Monitoring Officer**

**Tel & Email: 01277 312705/amanda.julian@brentwood.gov.uk**

17. The Council must when providing grant monies ensure that there is a fair process in place and that the monies available are distributed to ensure the best value for the Borough.
18. The Council should in making decisions ensure that it follows good governance, transparency and ensure that any application process for grant funding does follows the policies and procedures in place. Having these in place will mitigate challenges to decisions being made by the Council.

### Economic Implications

**Name/Title: Phil Drane, Corporate Director (Planning & Economy)**

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19. Voluntary organisations and partnership working provides a vital component to the local economy both directly and indirectly. A review of partnership arrangements and voluntary sector contributions should strengthen the efficiency of our local offer, benefitting the local economy.

### **Equality and Diversity Implications**

**Name/Title: Kim Anderson, Corporate Manager (Communities, Leisure & Health)**

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20. The Council ensures that the allocation of funding and support to the voluntary, faith and community sector supports all in the community including those with protected characteristics.

### **Health & Wellbeing Implications**

**Name/Title: Jo Cory, Corporate Health & Wellbeing Officer**

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21. Providing support and access to services for residents through these community organisations and funding programmes is vital to promote good health and wellbeing across the community, helping to reach the most vulnerable residents who may be more at-risk following the impact of the pandemic

### **Other Implications**

None

### **Background Papers**

None

### **Appendices to this report**

- Appendix A: Draft Voluntary, Faith and Communities Sector Support Strategy 2021-2026