



COMMITTEE TITLE: Housing, Health, and Community

DATE – 11th March 2024

REPORT TITLE:	Voluntary Sector Grants – Core Funding
REPORT OF:	Eugene Minogue – Interim Director of Community and Health
REPORT IS FOR:	Decision
WARDS:	All

REPORT SUMMARY

The Council allocates discretionary core funding to key Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) organisations that provide support to our local residents. This enables the Council to ensure that we have a strong and resilient VCS which supports the Council's priorities. The Council needs to ensure with the limited amount of funding available that the processes and principles of funding are applied fairly and transparently, and they are effective in providing targeted support to those most in need.

RECOMMENDATION

- R1. That Brentwood Council for Voluntary Services is funded for 2024-25 and that a further report come back to the relevant Committee once the outcome of the Essex County Council VCS infrastructure model has been determined.**
- R2. That Brentwood Community Transport is funded for 2024-25 and that a further report come back to the relevant committee once the outcome of the joint work with Essex County Council, Basildon Borough Council, Brentwood Borough Council, Brentwood and Basildon Alliance and Brentwood Community Transport has been concluded with the recommendation and next steps agreed.**
- R3. That Citizens Advice Brentwood is funded for 2024- 25 to enable alignment with the other core funding arrangements at Brentwood Borough Council and bring back a further report to the relevant committee to look at longer term funding models.**

SUPPORT ING INFORMATION

1.0 REASON FOR RECOMMENDATION

The VCS organisations provide key support to the residents of Brentwood, but the Council is not the sole funder for these organisations. The Council is keen to work in partnership with Essex County Council, Brentwood and Basildon Alliance and other

local authorities to ensure that we are allocating this core funding in an effective way that provides services that our residents require.

This funding is discretionary, so the Council needs to demonstrate that it is delivering value for money to its residents.

2.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

2.1 Currently Brentwood Borough Council provides core funding to Brentwood Council for Voluntary Services, Brentwood Community Transport and Citizens Advice Brentwood.

2.2 In addition to this core funding the Council also has a discretionary funding pot – Brentwood Community Fund which organisations can apply for small grants each year.

2.3 **Brentwood CVS** – The organisation moved to Merrymeade House in 2022 where they have office space on the first floor and have the ability to hire two rooms on the ground floor for 3rd party usage which provides them with an additional income stream. Brentwood CVS pay a service charge to the Council for their demise at Merrymeade House. At the 13 September 2023 Finance, Assets, Investments and Recovery (FAIR) Committee members agreed that delegated authority for the Director of Assets and Investment to negotiate an agreement with Brentwood Council for Voluntary Services to manage weddings/civil ceremonies at Merrymeade House; and ensure that the change to the Wedding /Civil Ceremonies is clearly communicated to the public via the Council's website.

The Council has worked with Essex Registrars at Essex County Council to get the premise licensed for weddings and there will be a transitioning period when the weddings migrate to Merrymeade House from the Town Hall. This again provides an income to Brentwood CVS. The wedding offer can also be enhanced with CVS working with the Tea Room operator for wedding breakfasts as well.

Brentwood CVS receives funding from Brentwood Borough Council, Essex County Council and Brentwood and Basildon Alliance.

In April 2023 Essex County Council announced that it was reviewing VCS infrastructure services across Essex (Appendix A) and would look to re-commission for a VCS Infrastructure model to be in place by 1 April 2024. This tender exercise was due to be completed in January 2024 with the awarding of the new contract to start on 1 April 2024. This process has been delayed and Brentwood Borough Council and Brentwood CVS are still awaiting the outcome from Essex County Council. To ensure that Brentwood Borough Council understand the impact of the new commissioning model and align any required reporting it is recommended at this stage that members agree to provide core funding for one year for 2024-25 as set out in the financial implications which is allocated within existing budgets while we await the outcome from Essex County Council.

2.4 **Brentwood Community Transport (BCT)** – Brentwood Community Transport moved to Unit 9 in the Baytree Centre at the end of 2021. They provide the following facilities:

- Social Care Scheme/ Accessible Vehicle Service (AVS) - The social car scheme is a service which provides local journeys for residents who can access a standard vehicle but are unable to use public transport. This is provided by a workforce of volunteer drivers who operate their own vehicles. The accessible vehicle service is designed for residents of Brentwood who are unable to access a standard vehicle due to disability. Brentwood Community Transport has a selection of minibuses with tail lifts and facilities for the transportation of wheelchair users.
- Minibus Brokerage Scheme - Brokerage consists of a pool of vehicles, providing groups with a chance to use a vehicle when needed without the expense of owning and running a vehicle of their own.
- 808 Hospital Shuttle Bus registered route Two buses operate a timetabled service circular route, Community Hospital, Brentwood High Street, Brentwood Station, Brentwood High Street, Shenfield Station and Long Ridings estate, Community Hospital. This runs every half hour with a term time and non-term time timetable.
- St Helen's School - This service is to provide transport for the children who are rurally isolated and unable to access public transport. This service ran during the pandemic for key worker children. It is now running back to full capacity with two vehicles servicing St Helens school assisting with relieving congestion on the roads during school start and end.

COVID 19 had a big impact on their volunteer driver numbers and in 2023 a Community Transport minibus was stolen from William Hunter Way car park. BCT have been informed that insurance will not cover all the replacement costs for the vehicle and will take between 18-24months to replace the specialised vehicle.

Brentwood Borough Council and Basildon Borough Council share the same CEO for Community Transport. Brentwood and Basildon Alliance, as part of the Age Well subgroup undertook a deep dive into transport in general to understand from residents the main issues and challenges.

Feedback from residents across Brentwood and Basildon identified the following areas that will require further work or focus:

- To improve transport networks across Brentwood and Basildon.
- To ensure all hospital appointments/GP appointments are attended/not missed due to lack of transport.
- Concerns at Brentwood Health and Wellbeing Board about missed appointments.
- All lived experience groups expressed concerns over lack of transport (to attend appointments/activity centre/green spaces)
- Lived experience need more communication around transport- what is available. What they are entitled to and access to timetables
- BCT meeting highlighted issues such as an oversubscribed service /waiting list/ turning people away/office staff need to signpost but lack knowledge.
- Funding agreement to be renewed with BCT in April 24.
- Meeting with the Essex Integrated Passenger Transport Unit (IPTU), Basildon Borough Council, Brentwood Borough Council on 27 November 2023.
 - Reviewing transport options and looking into patient transport service capacity/eligibility/signposting
 - New option or better oversight/reporting from BCT to be in place.

Essex IPTU arranged a liaison meeting with all the Community Transport schemes across Essex to understand their challenges and agree where ECC, the local authorities and the Alliance could help to develop a better service to support residents. ECC are looking at

funding for 1-2 years but after year one the service is reviewed which provides opportunity for joint commissioning.

On 15 April 2024 a transport summit is being planned by Brentwood and Basildon Alliance colleagues to discuss options going forward. This will be informed by

- Lived experience data from passengers.
- What models work and identify where the gaps are currently?
- Community mapping
- Timing of hospital appointments
- Model that could work across boundaries (district areas)
- How requests are currently triaged
- Training for drivers for passengers with more complex needs
- How can we meet the demand for services?
- Funding for the schemes

Essex County Council is sending out a partnership agreement with the Community Transport schemes but this could be a wider partnership agreement going forward.

2.5 Citizen’s Advice Brentwood (CAB) – Citizen’s Advice Brentwood moved into the Town Hall in 2019 as part of the redevelopment. They provide debt and advice support services. In 2022-2023 they saw over 3,000 unique clients. The highest category of support was in regard to benefits, tax and universal credits followed by requests for housing support. For 2023/24 (until January 2024) Citizen’s Advice Brentwood has supported 2,342 unique clients. Additional projects to help Brentwood residents currently include:

- Macmillan Welfare Rights – to help people suffering from cancer.
- Money & Pension Service – debt specialist service
- Income Wise65+ (new funded by Independent Age) – for anyone living in Brentwood over the age of 65 years, particular focus on benefit support.
- Warm projects, currently includes Warm Homes, Warm Start & UKPN – all helping local people deal with escalating energy costs.
- South Essex Law Clinic – providing pro bono legal advice.
- The Brentwood Community Fund project providing an outreach in
- CAB project staff continue to support pop up ad hoc events in Brentwood where possible.

CAB pay a service charge for the Town Hall accommodation. They have also provided the estimation of their added value in the table below.

Value Added	Enhanced BBC service	Benefits to client
Reduced pressure on staff and department time	Housing and Homelessness Department	Increased knowledge and realistic expectations of options for housing and homelessness issues
Faster resolution of issues through Citizens Advice Advisers speaking directly with officers, saving BC officer time	Revenue and Benefits Department	Complex situations explained to relevant BC officers assisting understanding and communication
Signposting to correct department, avoiding wasting staff time	All departments	Clients know who to approach, what to expect and documents to take
Independent advice on BC letters and decisions,	All departments	Clients understand decisions and their

avoiding duplication of effort and saving time		implications and have clear next steps to take
Information given on processes, procedures and timescales, reducing unnecessary telephone calls and visits and reducing pressure on staff	Revenue and Benefits Department	Client is aware of time scales and less impatient
Acting as intermediary with officers in cases such as non-payment of council tax, preventing need for tax recovery and saving council resources	Revenue and Benefits Department	Client has debt assessment, offered money management tools, help to create sustainable household budgets, agree payment schedules, put clients into Breathing Space & provide full debt advice.
Assisting with complaints resolution, reducing the number of complaints, and saving BC staff and department time	All departments	Clients understand issues and their rights and responsibilities relating to the complaint and get resolution at earlier stage.
Enriching BC work by assisting in promoting the safety of older people in their homes and in the community, including scams awareness.	Community Safety	Scam awareness campaign

CAB have also calculated three kinds of financial value:

Fiscal value: Financial savings to local and national Government due to fewer payments for out-of-work benefits, costly evictions, re-housing evicted tenants and less demand on the NHS.

For every £1 invested in Citizens Advice Brentwood they generate, £4.02 in fiscal value

Public value: When people have fewer problems they have higher levels of wellbeing, participation in society and productivity. Our calculation of public value also includes the value of a volunteer run service. For every £1 invested in Citizens Advice Brentwood they generate, £27.62 in public value.

Value to the people we help: We help individual clients to achieve individual financial outcomes like getting back-dated benefits, writing-off debts and refunds for consumer issues.

For every £1 invested in Citizens Advice Brentwood they generate, £15.42 in value to the people they help.

2.6 It is proposed that Brentwood Borough Council fund CAB for 2024-25 so that there can be alignment with the other core funding recipients and a longer term funding model can be developed and adopted from 2025 onwards.

3.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

3.1 This core funding is discretionary so members could decide to reduce it or stop it completely, if they wish. The length of term of the funding can also be varied but would need to be built into the Council's Medium Term Final Plan.

4.0 RELEVANT RISKS

4.1 Reducing funding could impact on the services that are delivered.

4.2 Working with partner organisations should provide greater alignment of priorities and efficiencies in regard to funding that support resident needs.

5.0 ENGAGEMENT/CONSULTATION

5.1 Meetings have been held with Essex County Council, CVS organisations and Community Transport organisations and the local authorities. Brentwood and Basildon Alliance also undertook consultation with users of community transport. A transport summit is taking place in April.

6.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Name & Title: Tim Willis, Director – Resources & Section 151 Officer

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The current budget allocation is set out in the table below and is within existing budgets. Any additional budget requirements in relation to core funding would need to be agreed by Members as part of the overall budget setting.

Organisation	Core funding 2024/25
Brentwood CVS	£10,000
Brentwood Community Transport	£26,500
Citizens Advice Brentwood	£59,000*
Total	£95,500

*£3,000 is allocated out of the HRA account to provide Housing advice.

7.0 LEGAL/GOVERNANCE IMPLICATIONS

7.1 Any work undertaken by the Council, either by itself or in partnership will be in line with statutory legal guidance.

Name & Title: Claire Mayhew, Acting Joint Director – People & Governance & Monitoring Officer

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8.0 ECONOMIC IMPLICATIONS

8.1 There are no direct economic implications beyond those noted in the report.

**Name & Title: Laurie Edmonds, Corporate Manager – Economic Development
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9.0 EQUALITY & HEALTH IMPLICATIONS

9.1 The Public Sector Equality Duty applies to the Council when it makes decisions. The duty requires us to have regard to the need to:

- a) Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other behaviour prohibited by the Act. In summary, the Act makes discrimination etc. on the grounds of a protected characteristic unlawful.
- b) Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- c) Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not, including tackling prejudice and promoting understanding.

The protected characteristics are age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, marriage and civil partnership, race, religion or belief, gender, and sexual orientation. The Act states that 'marriage and civil partnership' is not a relevant protected characteristic for (b) or (c) although it is relevant for (a).

The proposals in this report will not have a disproportionate adverse impact on anybody with a protected characteristic. These core funded organisations provide support for our most vulnerable residents.

Name & Title: Kim Anderson, Corporate Manager - Communities, Leisure and Health

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10.0 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

10.1 There are no direct environmental and climate implications beyond those noted in the report.

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APPENDIX A - DISTRICT OFFICER VCS INFRASTRUCTURE BRIEFING

SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)

Council Meeting	Date
None	