

Dear Members

Cabinet

A meeting of the Cabinet will be held on **Thursday 20 February 2025** at **6.30pm** in the **Craddock Room, Civic Centre, Riverside, Stafford** to deal with the business as set out on the agenda.

Please note that this meeting will be recorded.

Members are reminded that contact officers are shown at the top of each report and members are welcome to raise questions etc in advance of the meeting with the appropriate officer.



Head of Law and Governance

CABINET - 20 FEBRUARY 2025

Chair - Councillor A T A Godfrey

AGENDA

- 1 Minutes of 23 January 2025 as circulated and published on 24 January 2025.
- 2 Apologies
- 3 Councillors' Question Time (if any)
- 4 Proposals of the Cabinet Members (as follows):-

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- (i) Funding for Voluntary Sector Organisations 3 - 15

Membership

Chair - Councillor A T A Godfrey

- | | |
|---------------|---|
| A T A Godfrey | - Leader |
| R Kenney | - Deputy Leader (Town Centres Regeneration Portfolio) |
| R P Cooke | - Resources Portfolio |
| I D Fordham | - Environment Portfolio |
| J Hood | - Community Portfolio |
| G P K Pardesi | - Leisure Portfolio |
| A N Pearce | - Climate Action and Nature Recovery Portfolio |
| A F Reid | - Economic Development and Planning Portfolio |

Agenda Item 4(a)

Funding for Voluntary Sector Organisations

Committee:	Cabinet
Date of Meeting:	20 February 2025
Report of:	Head of Wellbeing
Portfolio:	Community Portfolio

1 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To approve the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) Grant Policy which details how and what support will be given by the Council to voluntary sector organisations.
- 1.2 Recognising that Stafford Borough Council is currently reviewing its Corporate Plan and, work is underway to develop a Community Wellbeing Strategy, this report requests that Cabinet agree the grants currently given to voluntary sector organisations are extended by a 12 month period commencing from April 2025. This will allow time for the new policy to be agreed and the strategic framework that will guide applications to be set.

2 Recommendations

- 2.1 That Cabinet approve the VCSE Grant Policy and note the element of the policy which delegates the decision on allocation of funding to the Head of Wellbeing in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Community;
- 2.2 To approve the spend of £130,250 which will enable the extension of the current grant agreements until 31 March 2026;
- 2.3 To delegate the authority to approve grants following review from a panel of officers and elected members to the Head of Wellbeing and elected Portfolio holder.

Reasons for Recommendations

- 2.4 The Council have a long history of supporting the voluntary sector and working in partnership with them to deliver the Council's objectives. It is important that this close working continues. The grant funding had been operating for some years without review. Officers have now reviewed the arrangements and have drafted a grant policy which has set out funding aims to address key priority areas, the requirements of the applicant and the allocation process.
- 2.5 Due to the Corporate Plan and Community Wellbeing Strategy, which will guide applications, being in the process of development, the policy can't be implemented immediately, therefore the recommendation is to roll over the current agreements until 31 March 2026.

3 Key Issues

- 3.1 The council recognises the value and significant contribution that the voluntary and community sector provide to our communities and the role they play in supporting the delivery of our corporate objectives. To facilitate this working, the Council has been providing financial support to seven community and voluntary sector organisations with grants totalling £130,250 per year for the past 4 years to help them provide these services. The councils ongoing investment would enable the sector to continue adding value.
- 3.2 In order to continue to support our communities and the organisations that provide vital services to them, it is fair to extend the current agreements for one year while the Corporate Plan and Community Wellbeing Strategy are finalised.

4 Relationship to Corporate Priorities

- 4.1 This supports the delivery of Corporate Business Objective 2, "To improve the quality of life of local people by providing a safe, clean attractive place to live and work and encouraging people to be engaged in developing strong communities that promote health and wellbeing".

5 Report Detail

- 5.1 The council has provided support to the voluntary sector for a number of years now through a variety of different sources which includes:
- Commissioning of local projects and services that support the delivery of the Council's corporate business objectives.
 - Direct support of seven voluntary sector organisations with grants totalling £130,250 per annum. Six organisations have grant agreements with the Council which are monitored on a quarterly basis, and one

organisation administers two grant schemes on behalf of the Council. Detailed support is as follows:-

- Citizens Advice Bureau - £60,000
- Support Staffordshire - Stafford District - £22,250
- Staffordshire Women's Aid - £15,000
- Stafford District Arts Council - £10,000
- Katharine House Hospice - £3,500
- Douglas MacMillan Hospice - £2,500
- Stafford Borough Small Grants Scheme - £10,000 (administered by the Community Foundation)
- Stafford Borough Sports Grants Scheme - £7,000 (administered by the Community Foundation)

5.2 The last 4 years has seen significant challenges for residents and the voluntary sector in Stafford Borough. The Covid pandemic impacted on everyone and for many people continues to do so and significant challenges have been brought on communities by the increased cost of living. There has been a significant increase in levels of demand for VCSE services. The increase in demand alongside limited funded has led many VCSE organisations to adapt and adjust their business delivery models, revise their use of finances and draw on reserves.

5.3 It is important that there is clarity and a shared understanding of the funds core purpose, which is to support residents of Stafford Borough. Whilst we understand the importance of supporting the VCSE sector and the role they play the grant funding should not be too heavily relied on by VCSE organisations. Repeating the application process every year will ensure the funded activities are focused, however applicants will have the opportunity to apply for up to three years funding, if that is in the best interest of the project.

5.4 A panel of officers will ensure that the applications are scored fairly. Applications will be scored on the following areas:

Criteria	Weighting
Demonstrating how priorities are met	30%
Well run	20%
Strengths based approach	20%
Value for money	20%
Collaborative	10%

- 5.5 An update on the outcome of the panel decisions and details of the funded projects will be reported to the Community Wellbeing Partnership and included in the annual performance update to the Scrutiny panel, however details on individual bid information will not be shared as this will not be in the public domain.

6 Implications

6.1 Financial

Budget provision exists for this to be extended until 31 March 2026.

6.2 Legal

The recommendations will allow the current grants to continue for a period of 12 months offering a period of stability in the services being provided under the current grants while the new policy is rolled out for the 2026/27 financial year. The policy has the potential to increase transparency and fairness in the selection of funded VCSEs and drive better performance through a weighted selection process. The policy may increase the administrative burden of carrying out the selection process and there is a low risk that organisations losing out on the grants may seek reasons for their bids being rejected or legal recourse when they fail to secure grant funding under the policy. In order to mitigate such risk, application procedures and weighting criteria need to be clearly set out and adhered to.

6.3 Human Resources

None

6.4 Risk Management

None

6.5 Equalities and Diversity

None

6.6 Health

The recommendations will help to contribute towards the delivery of priorities, as to be set within the Community Wellbeing strategy.

6.7 Climate Change

None

7 Appendices

Appendix 1: Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) Grant Policy

8 Previous Consideration

None

9 Background Papers

None

Contact Officer: Victoria Cooper

Telephone Number: 01785 619385

Ward Interest: All

Report Track: Cabinet 20 February 2025 (Only)

Key Decision: Yes

Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) Grant Policy

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1. Introduction

Stafford Borough Council (SBC or 'the Council') recognises the significant contributions made by the voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) sectors in providing projects and services that improve the social and community wellbeing of the borough.

Although not statutorily obliged to provide grant support, where funding allows, the Council is committed to financially supporting the VCSE sector organisations to deliver projects and activities which have a positive and beneficial impact on local communities and residents within the Borough.

The key aims of allocating grants are:

- To provide financial support which helps strengthen or widen the provision of facilities and services within the borough of Stafford.
- To positively support and address identified issues that are affecting local communities and residents.
- Ensure long term differences are made to those who benefit from the service or activity being delivered.

As well as helping communities develop, working closely with the VCSE sector in Stafford Borough also helps deliver and add value to the council's own services and meet the business objectives set out in its corporate plan.

2. Scope of policy

This policy is intended for Council Officers and prospective applicants to:

- Guide the allocation of funding, ensuring decisions are consistent, fair and transparent.
- Provide a coordinated and transparent funding service to the VCSE sector.
- Ensure a sustainable approach to funding, focused on achieving value for money.

3. Eligibility

Who can make an application?

The following organisations are eligible to submit an application for funding:

- Registered charities.
- Not-for-Profit (NFP) businesses.
- Community Interest Companies (CIC).
- Community-based organisations.
- Town and parish councils within Stafford Borough.

Exclusions

The following are not eligible to submit applications for funding:

- Individuals.
- Other local authorities.
- Public sector bodies, or organisations that are funded by other public sector or statutory bodies - for example, schools and GP practices.
- Groups who raise funds on behalf of an ineligible organisation or who will create or improve facilities which will predominately benefit an ineligible organisation.
- Profit-based businesses.

4. What can be funded

The following costs are deemed allowable as part of any grant application:

- Core running costs including employee costs.
- Programme or activity costs which are directly relevant to the application.
- Travel and transport costs associated with events in Stafford Borough.
- Hire or purchase of equipment for meeting project needs, including sports equipment.
- Venue hire (excluding hire of group's own premises) relating to the application and any technical assistance.
- Publicity and marketing (subject to agreement from the Council).
- Volunteer expenses.

The following cannot be funded through any allocation of grant funding:

- Projects where there is statutory funding provision available.
- Capital projects – such as building or refurbishment work.
- Projects to be delivered outside of Stafford Borough.
- Projects which are discriminatory, political, or religious in nature.
- Costs that can be claimed back from elsewhere e.g. VAT.
- Costs towards banking charges or repayment of debt.
- Retrospective costs e.g. completed activities.
- Gifts and prizes.
- Alcohol.
- Works to facilities that are/should be subject to an insurance claim.

5. Application criteria

Organisations applying for funding must fulfil all the following criteria:

- Have an existing constitution, articles or rules in place which describes the groups aims and objectives, its membership, and details of how decisions are made.
- Have been established for more than 12 months.
- Must provide services or activities for the benefit of residents and communities in Stafford Borough.
- Be in a position to provide previous accounts, and have a bank account in the name of the organisation or group who will receive any funding – the account must require at least two joint signatures, from individuals who are not related, for all transactions.
- Have in place the necessary policies and procedure to fulfil legal and financial requirements, e.g. accounts, health and safety, equal opportunities, insurance, safeguarding and demonstrate compliance with employment legislation and good practice.
- Be able to meet the Council's requirements for delivering performance monitoring and accountability for the use of public funding.
- Be able to demonstrate the necessary ability to provide good quality services, with accreditation where appropriate.
- Promote equalities within their structure and operations.

6. Assessment Criteria

All grant applications will be assessed using pre-selected assessment criteria. The details of the assessment criteria will be made available to all applicants before they apply for funding. Applications will be scored on the following areas:

Criteria	Weighting
Demonstrating how priorities are met	30%
Well run	20%
Strengths based approach	20%
Value for money	20%
Collaborative	10%

As a minimum the criteria for assessment will include:

- A clear outline of the project, including the financial outline.
- The structure and delivery plan that will support the achievement of the stated outcomes.
- The management, staffing structure and delivery plan that will support the achievement of the stated outcomes.
- The organisations' ability to successfully manage finance by submission of accounts, bank statements and cash flow forecasts as appropriate.
- The approach to health and safety, duty of care, and other appropriate best practice requirements including safeguarding of children and vulnerable adults and the organisations' ability to successfully manage these on the project.
- A planned approach to addressing equalities and diversity issues ensuring they do not discriminate against any group in that they ensure everyone has the opportunity to access their service and that this service contributes towards community cohesion.
- A realistic development/ business plan to sustain the organisation.

All assessment criteria will be based on meeting need within the community. There will be no pre-determined demographic allocation of funds. Some funding opportunities may be restricted to a particular delivery area, e.g. to a specific ward, but only where this is to address a specific identified need.

7. **Application process**

The council is committed to ensuring an open, fair, and transparent application process for all grant allocations.

For all available grants, the information provided by the Council to prospective applicants will include:

- the amount of money that is available in total;
- clear information on the purposes for which funding is offered;
- the time scale in which projects will be delivered (funding will be made available for projects lasting up to 3 years as a maximum);
- clear information on eligibility criteria;
- a full list of conditions that will apply to the grant, including linking to the corporate objectives of the Council and the Community Wellbeing Strategy;
- the deadline by which applications must be submitted; and
- the date by which applicants will be informed of the outcome of their application.

All applications will be reviewed to ensure they are eligible for scoring. Applications may be screened out at this stage if they do not meet the eligibility criteria as set within this Policy.

8. **Decision making**

Grant applications will be assessed by a panel of Officers from Wellbeing and Elected Members. A scoring matrix will be utilised to score applications – a copy of which will be made available as part of the grant application form.

All successful applications will be approved by the Head of Wellbeing and the Community Portfolio Holder.

All applicants will receive confirmation informing them of whether they have been successful or not as soon as possible after the panel has made its decision.

Successful applicants will be asked to sign and return a copy of the letter agreeing to the terms and conditions of the individual grant.

Complaints about any aspect of the community grant process will be dealt with under the Council's [Complaints Procedure](#).

There is no right of appeal as to the grant decision itself.

9. **Grant conditions**

Any funding award is made in agreement to the following conditions:

- Where required the applicant will enter into a Grant Agreement with the council.
- Funding can only be spent on the project/service as described in the application and for no other purpose.
- It is the responsibility of applicants to comply with all relevant regulations and legislation.
- If expenditure on the grant-aided aspect of the project/ service is less than stated in your application, the grant amount paid to you will be reduced.
- Any unspent funds must be returned to the council.
- Details of how the funding was spent, evidenced with copies of receipts, accounts and performance must be provided to the council in line with the Grant Agreement.
- Stafford Borough Council will be acknowledged and invited to participate in any appropriate publicity of the project.

10. **Monitoring and evaluation**

The Council needs to ensure best value from its funding and to ensure the financial support that it gives to organisations makes a real difference to the residents and communities within Stafford Borough.

Project monitoring meetings will be scheduled to allow the Council to assess whether an organisation is satisfying the terms and conditions of the grant and is able to manage their financial and legal responsibilities.

Organisations who are allocated funding will also be expected to produce self-monitoring reports on progress each quarter, using the Council's monitoring report template. All grant recipients will be required to produce an end of year evaluation report using the Council's template. These reports will be collated and reported to Community Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee on an annual basis.