

Specification for the Provision of Support Services – Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) – *Communication, Networking and Sector Representation*

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The VCS provide a range of vital services, work with those at risk of exclusion and enable individuals to contribute to public life and the development of their communities. It also attracts funding not available to public agencies. This can provide significant opportunities for co-design, community engagement, capacity building and policy development and planning.
- 1.2 The relationship between the voluntary and public sector has developed at considerable speed over the last 18 months as a result of the coronavirus pandemic. The voluntary and community sector is embedded in the community and have showcased their passion, strength and creativity. There has been extraordinary and unprecedented support from the sector, working in partnership with statutory bodies, to support vulnerable residents and recruit volunteers, foster grassroots community networks and adapt to deliver innovative and responsive online services.
- 1.3 The VCS in Dorset, like the business community, is a micro-sector, consisting of large numbers of very small organisations with limited internal support services to meet the demands of compliance with a range of legal, technical and contractual issues. As a consequence, local organisations rely on the existence and activity of the main Support Service organisations for advice on a range of operational and strategic issues.
- 1.4 The main aim of the VCS support services is to enable community groups and voluntary organisations to develop, build greater reliance, self-sustaining capacity and capabilities to deliver activities and services that benefit the users of their services and communities.
- 1.5 The Council wants to build on the achievements of VCS Support Services that have to date strengthened, represented and supported the sector.
- 1.6 The Provider shall be required to work in partnership with the Council and with commissioners to build and strengthen the capacity of Dorset's Voluntary and Community Sector, who play an important role in helping the Council deliver [the Council Plan](#). The Provider will facilitate a good working relationship

between the Commissioners and the voluntary and community organisations, building capacity in line with the Commissioners' priorities.

1.7 The Provider shall have, and maintain, a good understanding of the Dorset landscape and communities (further information on Dorset and its local communities is available on [Dorset Insight](#)), [the Council Plan](#), and be able to navigate, build and facilitate relationships across different partners at local level and through key strategic partnerships across the Dorset Council area.

1.8 The Commissioners recognise the importance of supporting, in particular, micro sized voluntary and community organisations operating in the Dorset Council area (defined as having a turnover of less than £5,000/annum) that in turn provide support to keep people resilient and able to live independently and prevent reliance on statutory services. The key role of the Provider is to ensure the voice of the sector are heard by all appropriate strategic bodies and partnerships across the VCS sector, help voluntary organisations who need support, whether they be small or larger VCS, to be sustainable and effective and develop solutions that combine the creation and delivery of voluntary and community led action.

1.9 The Provider is required to provide VCS Support Services - what is sometimes referred to as 'infrastructure support'.

Infrastructure organisations are the backbone of the Voluntary and Community Sector – Resources providing crucial guidance to hundreds of community organisations such as local charities, community groups, village hall committees, social enterprises and parish councils. A good infrastructure body will “offer the right mixture of support, challenge, leadership, resource, skills and knowledge. It will also help to foster relationships between the local voluntary sector, public bodies and local business. They also promote social action and make sure local communities have a voice”. Sir Stuart Etherington, chief executive of NCVO (31 Oct 2012)

1.10 The partnership will develop over time but will include significant opportunities for discussion to shape and reshape the practical workstreams that need to be delivered as priorities evolve. The Provider shall ensure that the voice of the sector is brought into these discussions and influences the *Enabling Communities Strategy*.

1.11 This Service Specification describes **Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) Communication, Networking and Sector Representation**, the shared principles, values and behaviours that are required to support the VCS. These are shaped from conversations, formal consultation, market engagement and workshops with service leads, stakeholders, VCS groups, and the development of Council priorities.

- 1.12 Providers shall be expected to work in a mutually beneficial way with other commissioned VCS support partners in order to provide a consistent level of service for the Voluntary and Community Sector across the Council's local authority area and provide an integrated service in partnership with each other and the Provider of the Information, Advice and Guidance Services contract.

2. Shared Principles across the VCS Support Services Providers

The overarching principle is to deliver Voluntary and Community Support Services Sector support so that:

- i. Dorset's Voluntary and Community Sector is enabled to grow and develop – supporting residents to enjoy a good quality of life and enabling more people to benefit from a vibrant and greater choice of social, cultural and sporting opportunities.
- ii. Volunteering is regarded as a valuable opportunity for individuals to contribute to their community and is accessible to all, regardless of their skills or time capacity.
- iii. Provider(s) represent the whole VCS and act as their strategic voice and shall be the strategic partner for the Council to help inform its current and future services. The Provider(s) shall ensure the VCS is well informed and understand the priorities of Dorset Council as laid out in the [Council Plan](#), the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) strategy, the Enabling Communities Strategy (currently in development) and other key workstreams.

3. Key principles for VCS Communications, Networking and Sector Representation

There are several key principles that underpin the delivery of the vision and the outcomes described in the specification:

- i. **Leadership:** the Provider will provide strategic leadership for the sector and promote its successful evolution. Together with the Council, the provider will provide collective leadership across the whole VCS sector.
- ii. **Representation and networking for the sector:** the provider will work widely across the sector to coordinate stakeholders for joint working opportunities to create partnerships and draw on this broad engagement to build a representative voice of the sector. The provider will ensure the voice of the sector are heard by all appropriate strategic bodies and partnerships through identified representatives at key forums, supporting two-way communication flow between these representatives and partners and the sector.

- iii. **Facilitating sector consultation:** The provider will ensure the diverse voluntary and community groups across the Dorset Council area are involved in consultation and able to influence on planning and developing policy, service design and change.
- iv. **Partnership working and collaboration:** the provider will be committed to building and strengthening relationships both within the sector and between sectors. The provider will be well placed to champion, identify and convene partnerships and opportunities for collaboration and co-design to support identified outcomes and by utilising collective resources.
- v. **Information sharing:** The sharing of information relating to National and Local trends (e.g. Charity Commission, NCVO), needs and assets is a fundamental part of this specification. Two way sharing of information supports all partners to deliver better outcomes and make best use of our collective resource. The provider will draw on their knowledge and connections across the VCS. They will be well placed as a repository of data and information about community across the Dorset Council area, a point of access to VCS networks, and to offer views on how the 'market' as a whole is functioning.

4. Outcomes and Values

Delivering better outcomes is a shared achievement as many are interconnected, overlapping and are the result of people, organisations, processes and cultures interacting together. Communications and open dialogue, relationships and partnerships are the repeated themes highlighted through conversations and consultation, and to work in collaboration with Dorset Council.

5. Who is this service for?

The Provider(s) shall capacity build and work with voluntary sector organisations, community and faith groups and others delivering services in Dorset Council's local authority area.

6. Performance Measures and Monitoring Requirements

The Provider, in delivering the service, shall use learning as the driver for performance improvement and capture of outcomes. The Council recognises that working effectively and collaboratively requires the ability to adapt and change in response to the dynamic nature of communities. What works is a continuous process of listening, learning and adapting.

Quarterly monitoring meetings to be held between the Council and the Provider. The Provider shall capture social value, added value and cost savings to statutory services. Review of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) to measure how well the Provider is achieving agreed goals and objectives.

The Provider shall produce and share an annual service report. This annual report shall summarise activity, analyse data and trends (including emerging trends), and detail the learning and adaptations that have occurred. The use of case studies will benefit the report.

7. Interdependencies with other services

Due to the diverse range of organisations, people and places covered by this service, it is essential that the Provider(s) encourage all to proactively engage and collaborate in order that the principles and behaviours of the service are met. Building positive relationships with the sector is key as well as engaging with a range of partners. The Provider(s) to facilitate specialist VCS representation where needed.

8. Service requirements

The provision of the Council's local authority area wide organisational support service for **VCS Communication, Networking and Sector Representation** is required to focus on, but not be limited to, the following broad areas of activity.

The Provider shall:

Offer sector leadership and provide the VCS sector in the Dorset Council area with a voice by –

- Representation and networking for and with the local VCS sector
- Working very widely across the sector to coordinate stakeholders for joint working opportunities and to create partnerships, drawing on this broad engagement to build a representative voice of the sector
- Consulting on national, regional and local policy developments and contribute to discussions and decision-making at local level

Promote strategic involvement by –

- Working with the providers of the Volunteer Support Service, the Information, Advice and Guidance service and other VCS Support Services to make strategic links across the sector, promoting best practice and proactively contributing to an evidence base of sector specific analysis in Dorset Council area, drawing on a range of research and information sources
- Ensuring that the sector is involved and represented in local policymaking and planning

Ensure the VCS is able to influence by:

- Developing structured routes for consultation and dialogue within the VCS that enable and facilitate individual and diverse voices of the VCS to be heard and feedback.

- The VCS is represented and influences planning and policy making at strategic levels as a result of support service activities
- VCS groups are supported to develop and innovate to meet changing needs and to identify patterns of need to feed into strategic needs assessments in the Dorset Council area
- Stimulate the sector to produce creative and innovative solutions to local issues and identified need

Facilitate communication and cooperation by –

- Representing the voice of the sector at key forums with public and private sector partners, supporting a two-way communication flow between these partners and the sector. Contributing to ensuring that these forums remain fit for purpose.
- Working collaboratively with other commissioned VCS Support Service providers to achieve joint outcomes
- Working collaboratively with the provider awarded for the Information, Advice and Guidance contract.
- Encouraging and supporting groups and organisations to work together and share resources to create a more efficient way of working and build stronger local sector
- Providing thematic forums for networking to share good practice and expertise as well as forming partnerships, ensuring a geographical coverage across the county
- Develop methods of dialogue to disseminate relevant communications
- Translating national and local policy/ legislative changes into the local context in a format that is relevant to local VCS organisations and disseminating across the local VCS sector

Identify and fill the gaps by –

- Monitoring the services provided by the voluntary social and community sector in the Council's local authority area, so they are able to identify the gaps in services
- Working with new groups to address unmet needs as well as ensuring that existing groups are equipped to shape their services to the changing needs of the community
- Proactively responding to emergent issues facing the sector, in collaboration with public sector partners

Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

KPIs will be agreed with the Provider based on the following measures:

Area of Work	Objective	Population Measures
VCS Communication, Networking and Sector Representation	<p>The Voluntary and Community Sector in the Dorset Council area have a strong and influential voice.</p> <p>VCS organisations will be supported to contribute to the strategic priorities of the Council</p>	The VCS sector in the Dorset Council area is well-informed about the current and future operating environment
		The VCS are enabled to shape and influence the Dorset Council Communities Strategy – and other Dorset Council workstreams
		Dorset's VCS is enabled to become more effective, efficient and sustainable - and to recover, grow and develop following the Coronavirus pandemic through networking, peer to peer support, collaboration and partnerships.
		Disseminating information on a national, regional and local level to the local VCS Organisations
		Reporting emerging trends, gaps in services and identifying opportunities that develop the VCS landscape in Dorset