For Members to consider and agree the preferred options for future support to the Voluntary and Community Sector Support in Corby

1. Relevant Background Details

Corby Borough Council (CBC) and Northamptonshire County Council (NCC) currently have a partnership agreement to support Local Infrastructure Organisations (LIO) services for the voluntary and community sector (VCS) in Corby. Since April 2010, CBC, NCC and Kettering Borough Council jointly commissioned a three-year contract to deliver voluntary and community support in Corby and Kettering. In 2013 CBC and NCC continued this arrangement separately for Corby with grant funding of £30,000 from NCC and £19,500 from CBC per year. The contract has been delivered by Groundwork Northants in partnership with Corby Voluntary and Community Services (Corby VCS).

Corby VCS are the Corby and District local infrastructure organisation act as the voluntary and community sector lead body for the Corby Borough area supporting and helping to sustain local voluntary and community based organisations. They assist local vulnerable and excluded people and assist with developing policies and procedures for new community facilities and the work being delivered to support new and emerging communities.

This includes:

- The provision of information, advice and assistance for frontline voluntary and community sector organisations.
- Support and develop the start up of new voluntary and community sector organisations in Corby and District and policy support and research to the voluntary and community sector.
- Provision of advocacy and representation of the local voluntary and community sectors on appropriate bodies and public sector organisations.
- Working with partners to develop activities, this will aid and speed the integration of migrant workers, refugees and asylum seekers into the local community.
- Provide a facility for the Voluntary Sector & wider community to access training and education opportunities, skills development and promotion and development of volunteering in the Corby area.
- Working with partners to inspire pride in our community and develop an interest in the Corby area’s local heritage.
- Development of partnership building and a brokerage service, for local organisations, which through working together will provide added value to the local community. Facilitation of the local voluntary sector forum.
- Provide car pool services in Corby and a shopmobility and wheelchair hire service.
However NCC has now decided rather than fund seven LIO’s across the county they will now only commission one single provider to deliver local infrastructure support countywide. The implementation of NCC’s new voluntary and community support has required the Council’s Grants Sub Committee to also agree an extension to the existing joint contract until 30th June 2014.

NCC has awarded a three year ‘Countywide VCS Support and Development Contract – Local Provision Contract’ with a possible two year extension option to Northampton Volunteering Centre (NVC) from 1st July 2014. The contract of £300k per annum allows NCC to make a financial reduction of approximately 10% countywide for local infrastructure support. Corby CVS did not tender for the work.

2. Report
The Council now needs to consider the potential impact on the Boroughs voluntary and community services following the awarding of the contract to NVC by NCC.

NVC are in the process of developing a plan on how the local services will be delivered, they have stated they have invested a lot of time in assessing how they can provide both a consistent countywide quality delivery offer and meet local delivery needs for each district.

NVC wish to work in partnership with each district/borough to ensure services are adapted to meet specific local needs. Whilst the base service will remain the same there will be a local area VCS support plan developed to adapt services to meet the specific needs of individual areas. This plan will be developed in conjunction with local user groups and stakeholders.

They have set out their proposed delivery; in brief some of the key priorities include:

- Establishing strategic partners ensuring effective engagement.
- Support to the existing VCS forums and delivery of specific development days three times per year in each district/borough, training, networking and assessment of area needs.
- Provision of online systems to local groups, funding advice and support.
- A dedicated development worker will have time dedicated to each district to complete surgeries held in local venues.
- Two half days per district per week dedicated to face to face appointments/surgeries in each district
- Group training sessions will be carried out bi monthly in each district around key areas such as bid writing, volunteer management, collaboration and consortium, tendering for contracts, business planning, sustainability and other relevant subjects
- Information through online pages dedicated to specific key subjects and use of social media such as Facebook and Twitter.
- Training programmes specific to each locality area delivered in each district.
- Development and support of volunteering opportunities
- Promotion of the sector and the impact of the work it does across the county.

Further details of what is intended to be provided by NVC across the County are provided in Appendix One.

The funding being received by Groundwork Northants and Corby VCS will cease at the end of June 2014, and it is expected that under the new contract there will be a reduction in the staff working time in Corby within the voluntary and community sector. It is not known at this time if any work will be subcontracted by NVC to Groundwork, the CVCS or any other organisation.

The new NCC arrangement with NVC now leaves uncertainty surrounding the long-term sustainability of CVCS who are based in the Old TA Centre on Elizabeth Street. Corby Borough Council holds the head lease for this property from the Homes and Community
Agency (HCA) that sublet’s building space to voluntary and community organisations. The Corby VCS receives part of the tenancy payments and undertakes the building management role. The Council’s lease for this building is due to expire on 22nd March 2015. The future beyond this date is unknown and will require further discussion with the HCA.

Presently Corby Borough Council contributes through its grants programme £19,500 per annum to Groundwork and Corby VCS to deliver local infrastructure support services alongside NCC, of which £4,875 has been released to cover the current remaining contract until 30th June 2014.

The NCC Local Infrastructure Support contract will undoubtedly provide an enhanced online support but at the expense of a reduced locality staffing level. It is uncertain if the countywide contract will have the capacity to support voluntary and community organisations to be able to deliver community initiatives. It is also unclear how much capacity NVC will be able to directly apply to support supporting organisations to source and apply for project funding, working with the private sector to secure corporate volunteering and the delivery of community projects that meets the requirements of external funders.

**Options to be considered**

Members are requested to consider how they would like the Council to consider future support to the Corby Voluntary and Community Sector that would add value to the proposed outcomes being delivered under the new NCC contract, but not duplicate any work delivered under the new contract that will build the strength of organisations at neighbourhood level. This includes the grant funding of £19,500 that the Council presently funds to the CVCS.

**Option 1** – To note the NCC new contract arrangement with NVC but discontinue support for Local Infrastructure after March 2014.

Without the continuation of CBC grant funding, the LIO offer by CVS is going to less and this is expected to have a detrimental impact on the considerable work undertaken to support community work in Corby.

**Option 2** – Investment in the NVC approach.

To use the Council funding to support some of the outcomes being delivered through the NVC contract, for an enhanced service in Corby. This may include the continued support to the local forum and additional officer time in the borough. The added benefit will be agreed in advance and clearly show through quarterly monitoring by CBC Officers.

**Option 3** – To buy specific services.

The proposal is to buy specific services to deliver against a particular local issue such as homelessness, the Community Covenant, teenage pregnancy etc. This would target the funding to be used against a Corby Borough Council community priority. Relevant local organisations will be asked to apply if they can deliver against the priority set. These will be presented to the Grants Sub Committee for a decision on the successful applicant.

**Option 4** – use the £19,500 grant funding to support the strengthening of local voluntary and community organisations to deliver community based projects.

The funding could be used to directly support local organisations to deliver community based projects that the Council have as local priorities; this would include projects such as support to deliver funding initiatives such as the Big Local funding, development of small community projects and strengthening community cohesion.

**Option 5** - Continue to commission the Corby VCS on an interim basis to deliver community services either directly with the Corby VCS or as it is at the moment in partnership with Groundwork.

This would allow the Council time to measure the outcomes for continued local infrastructure support from both the NVC and Corby CVS. However with the separation of funding support from NCC, it is expected only a limited service may be provided by Corby CVS.
4. Issues to be taken into account:-

Policy Priorities
Support to the Community and Voluntary sector to improve capacity is identified within the Corporate Plan.

Financial
The Council has budget provision of £19,500 in 2014/15 that is provided as a grant to Groundwork and Corby CVS towards local infrastructure organisational support work in Corby. It is not intended that this amount will increase and future grant funding will be subject to the normal agreement budget process and agreement at full Council in February 2015.

Risk
To totally withdraw this funding to support the community and voluntary sector would have a detrimental effect on the future sustainability of community groups and the level of voluntary work presently delivered in the borough.

Legal
The support to local infrastructure organisations is a discretionary service and therefore the Council has no statutory obligation to provide grant funding.

Performance Information
CBC and NCC officers would jointly monitor all outcomes. The Grants Sub Committee reviews grant funding to core organisations on a year-by-year basis.

Best Value
The Council has worked closely with voluntary organisations to improve and extend the range of services available for the residents of Corby.

Human Rights
The Council requires any grant-funded organisation to act appropriately with any human rights issues arising.

Equalities
The Council will ensure all arrangements continue to comply with the 2010 Equalities Act

Sustainability
The grant funding available is reviewed on a year-to-year basis as part of the budget setting progress. All community and voluntary sector organisations are encouraged to source additional funding to ensure sustainability.

Community Safety
Community safety issues are taken into account when work is being delivered in wards.

5. Conclusion
The new NCC contract inevitably means significant change to the Corby voluntary and community organisations. It is very difficult though to fully assess the impact and support NVC will be able to provide locally. NCC and NCV have provided assurances that Corby's voluntary and community sector will still be supported and have a voice in building a well-supported vibrant community.

The priority for Corby Borough Council grant funding is not to duplicate what will be delivered by NVC but to enhance the delivery offered for the benefit of Corby organisations. This will add value to the hands on support required locally.
Because of the present uncertainty it is recommended that Option 5 is approved. An interim arrangement is agreed with Corby CVS until at least February 2015, with agreed outcomes for supporting for Corby’s voluntary sector. This would allow the Council the opportunity of assessing the impact of the new NCC contract with NVC. It also allows time to consider the Councils arrangements with the HCA for the lease of the TA Centre which houses a number of community organisations.

**Recommendation**
The Committee:-

i) agree Option Five, a continuation with Corby CVS and Groundwork as an interim arrangement until at least February 2015.

**Background Papers**
NCC outcomes Framework for Voluntary and Community Sector Support Services
Report to Grants Sub Committee dated 30th January 2014

**List of Appendices**
NCC outcomes Framework for Voluntary and Community Sector Support Services

**Officer to Contact**
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Countywide VCS Support and Development Contract – Local Provision

NVC is extremely pleased to have been awarded the Countywide VCS support and development contract for Northamptonshire. We have invested a lot of time in assessing how we can provide both a consistent countywide quality delivery offer and meet local delivery needs for each district. We will be providing the following support offer in each of the districts to ensure that local need is met. A key part of this work will be to work in partnership with each district to ensure services are adapted to meet specific local needs. Whilst the base service will remain the same there will be a local area VCS support plan developed to adapt services to meet the specific needs of individual areas. This plan will be developed in conjunction with local user groups and our stakeholders.

Strategic Support

NVC will ensure that it can respond effectively to changes in the circumstances or priorities of a strategic partner by involving our strategic partners throughout our planning, delivery, insight and intelligence gathering, and review of support to the VCS. We will:

- Work closely with strategic partners, including NCC, district and borough councils, the NHS, LEPs and police in the development of a vision, strategy and support programmes for the Northamptonshire VCS.
- Ensure that both NVC and the VCS have a range of effective engagement and communication mechanisms and opportunities to interact with strategic partners.
- Ensure our insight and intelligence-gathering includes all stakeholders, including strategic partners and the VCS, so that NVC has clear insight into the changing needs of strategic partners and can act on and communicate these.
- Ensure that our monitoring and evaluation engages with strategic partners and is used to inform changes to our ongoing work with the sector.

Relationships and regular contact with local strategic partners

We will set out clear routes into our services for our strategic partners, setting out our service offer for statutory partners and how to access this.

- We will establish lead contacts within NVC for each local strategic partner, develop plans for delivery linked to the VCS and volunteering strategies, and a programme of quarterly meetings to keep track of progress and plan for the future.
- We will meet with all strategic partners within the first two months of the contract to establish priorities and to set up working arrangements.
- We will provide information about our services to staff in statutory organisations so they are aware of our work and how to communicate with us and the VCS.
- We will involve appropriate contacts within local strategic partners to input into our work planning, inviting them to sit on project steering groups or to informally advise NVC.

Insight and intelligence gathering for local districts

This will be done via various mechanisms:

- A rolling programme of one to one meetings with key contacts within district councils to assess priorities for the area.
• Regular scanning of key meetings (e.g. HWBB, scrutiny, cabinet papers) to identify emerging local initiatives we should seek more information on from partners.

• Our annual State of Sector research which analyses each district, to include review of changing priorities and strategies of strategic partners through desktop review and direct conversations.

• The website will have the capacity to continually gather key information each time a local group logs on to the system or visits specific development areas.

• Support to the existing forums and delivery of specific development days 3 times per year in each district which will include training, networking and assessment of area needs.

**Group Development**

Support to groups will be provided locally in a number of ways:

**Provision of locality Development days**

• Each District will have at least three Development Days per year, and we will run countywide locality events, as agreed with partners, with an annual programme of dates set out at the beginning of the contract. We would like strategic partners to attend these, present current issues as a mechanism to collect intelligence and to develop joint plans.

• These events will also provide opportunities to support partners’ consultations, Networking and the opportunity to build new or develop existing collaborations & partnerships.

• The development days will also contain elements of training & development for VCS groups, the training program will be developed from the assessment of local needs through the local area support plan and engagement with local groups and forums.

**Online resources**

All groups in every district will be able to access online resources, which will include

• A self assessment system, each group will be able to create an individual log in that provides them with tailored services. They will be asked a series of questions that will enable the system to build up a picture of the organisation and its basic support needs. Groups will be directed via the system to online resources and training that fit their needs.

• The system will also alert NVC where there are additional needs that have not been met via the online resources. This will enable us to proactively approach groups to offer additional support where needed.

• The online system will collect information from groups on an ongoing basis which will allow NVC to assess area needs and develop resources accordingly.

• For those groups who have development needs around the online resources there will be support available to train and coach them on using the system.

• There will be a number of training and resources available on line to local groups around key development areas such as social enterprise, trading arms, volunteer management, collaboration, consortium and partnerships, being contract & tender ready, measuring impact, starting a group, policies & procedures etc.

• There will be a funding search page available for local groups to find suitable funding for their projects and services and the ability to sign up for a funding alert service.
• At specific times of each day there will be an online chat function available for groups to interact with an online adviser to raise questions issues & queries.

• Key countywide agenda items such as health and social care, prevention & demand management, important consultations, national changes etc. Will have their own dedicated web-space which will highlight links to key parts of stakeholders websites and provide information and advice for groups around these areas in an easily digestible form.

• Development of the local giving site to allow groups to access local donations & match funding thus improving the sustainability of the sector in localities.

**Local support & development**

In addition to the online services there will be telephone support and dedicated face to face outreach work available for each district.

• A dedicated development worker will be completing face to face meetings and case work with groups in each district. The development worker will have time dedicated to each district to complete surgeries held in local venues for more complex needs and to carry out casework for local groups that have additional support needs that the online resources are not meeting. There will be 2 half days per district per week dedicated to face to face appointments/surgeries in each district (Northampton counts as 2 districts because of the size of demand and number of groups within this area)

• Development days will be facilitated in each district 3 times per year with themes that fit with the local priorities.

• Group training sessions will be carried out bi monthly in each area around key need areas such as bid writing, volunteer management, collaboration & consortium, tendering for contracts, business planning, sustainability and other relevant subjects.

**Communication**

As there is not going to be the same local physical building presence as previously our communication with local areas is going to be key to the success of delivery of a quality service that is accessible to all the VCS groups who need it. As an initial part of the contract delivery we will be working with key stakeholders and VCS groups in each district to create a workable communication plan. Communication will happen in a number of ways (these may need to be adapted as the contract develops and we learn more about what works in each district)

• Regular monthly e-bulletin, these will have a consistent countywide content for part of the bulletin so key messages can be distributed. In addition each district will receive their own version with part of the bulletin dedicated to local relevant information so the local needs are not missed.

• Online pages dedicated to specific key subjects such as key consultations, health & well-being, current opportunities, online threads & discussion pages on countywide and local agendas etc
  • Social media such as Facebook & Twitter that allows quick excerpts of key information to be delivered to people quickly

• Development days where information can be given but also allows the local sector and stakeholders the opportunity to communicate local issues and best practice.

• Information specific to individual groups through the area development workers.
**Training**

There will be a programme of training specific to each locality area delivered in each district. The training plans will be developed in conjunction with the local groups and stakeholders and delivered in the following ways.

- As part of the development days there will be an element of training and coaching defined by area need.
- Group training courses around specific subjects.
- Webinars and online training toolkits
- Individual coaching through the development workers

**Volunteering**

Development of volunteering opportunities and creating a consistent quality volunteering experience across localities will be a key part of our local work. We will be looking for the contract to be a catalyst for joining up volunteering across the county to make it as accessible as possible for potential volunteers no matter where they want to volunteer.

Through both ourselves and key delivery partners in districts we will be providing the following support around volunteering:

- Drop in surgeries and appointments for potential volunteers in local venues for 2 half days per district per week.
- Advertising of all local opportunities through key district partners such as local volunteer centres, libraries, VCS access points, job centres, the national do-it website.
- Input and management of all local volunteering opportunities through V-base the current system.
- Advice & information to local groups around creating & writing volunteering opportunities.
- Receipt & management of enquiries for each district.
- Provision of volunteering stats and information for each locality on a quarterly basis.

Our website will be central to our support and will include:

- A Good Practice Guide to Involving Volunteers, a one-stop overview of volunteering and the essential building blocks to get it working.
- Involving Volunteers Quality Check, a simple tool, linked to Investing in Volunteers, for organisations involving volunteers to assess their strengths and weaknesses to prioritise the latter.
- Model policies and procedures, e.g. a volunteering policy, induction checklist and volunteering supervision form.
- Factsheets on volunteering and the law and managing performance of volunteers, which are being developed and other topics will be added as needs emerge.
We will also ensure that there are clear links on the website to other resources, such as NCVO and Volunteering England websites.

**Representation**

**VCS representatives**

Involvement of representatives is another mechanism in which NVC can respond to needs of strategic partners and locality needs, by providing strong links between multi-agency partnerships, NVC and the VCS.

- We will identify key local partnership meetings and agree protocols for representation of NVC and the VCS.

- We will ensure that representatives feed back on the changing needs and priorities of partners through regular themed development days, through our website, ebriefing and social media, through our Chief Executives Network and the VCS Strategy Group. NVC will review representatives’ feedback after each meeting to identify any issues emerging for further development.

- We will also provide training and development for both existing representatives and those wanting to take on representation roles in each local area.

- We will support and correspond? the local VCS fora to develop and grow their own representatives so that there is a wide cross section of representation. Where a locality is lacking in representation we will actively recruit potential suitable reps to ensure the widest possible community input.

- There will be the creation of a countywide Chief Executives network to ensure input and influence from the leaders of the VCS. The venue for this meeting will be rotated round the districts to ensure maximum input from all the localities.

**Promotion**

**Sector exposure**

NVC will be working to promote the sector and the impact of the work it does across the county. Whilst this tends to be a countywide approach to marketing the social & economic impact of the sector in the county, regionally and nationally, there is some district specific work that will take place.

- Case studies will be collected from individual districts to highlight best practice work and show where best practice and community impact is being delivered effectively. There are 5 case studies written per quarter and each district will feature at least bi-monthly. The case studies are used in varying ways such as councillor e-briefs, GP news letters, regional events, reports to the cabinet office, dvds for promotional events and many more.

- We highlight district case studies and exceptional volunteers for regional & national awards. An example of this work is that individual volunteers from 2 voluntary sector organisations in Kettering have recently been put through to the final stage of the Cabinet Office of Civil Society Volunteer awards.

- We will complete district promotional events such as volunteer fairs or exhibitions around key dates such as volunteer week or small charities week.