



REPORT TO:	Cabinet, Boston Borough Council
DATE:	Wednesday 24 th September 2024
SUBJECT:	Working in partnership with the Voluntary and Community Sector
PURPOSE:	<p>To provide an overview of Voluntary and Community Sector work/activity that is being supported and further developed by the South and East Lincolnshire Councils Partnership.</p> <p>To seek approval to deliver more sustainable and enhanced local services through the Voluntary and Community Sector that are operating within South and East Lincolnshire.</p>
KEY DECISION:	No
PORTFOLIO HOLDER:	Councillor Emma Cresswell, Portfolio Holder Communities
REPORT OF:	John Leach, Deputy Chief Executive - Communities
REPORT AUTHOR:	Emily Spicer, Assistant Director – Wellbeing and Community Leadership
WARD(S) AFFECTED:	All
EXEMPT REPORT?	No

SUMMARY

As sovereign councils and as the 'South and East Lincolnshire Councils Partnership' we recognise the important work of the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS). This includes supporting the communities in South and East Lincolnshire to lead longer, safer, and healthier lives.

What makes South and East Lincolnshire great, is its people and its communities. Notably, our communities play a significant part in respect to playing an active volunteering role in their localities. This may be for community or personal advantage, with volunteering showing positive physical and mental health benefits to participatory individuals.

This report provides an overview of activity that has taken place in the last year with the Voluntary and Community Sector. This includes a summary of the South and East Lincolnshire Councils Partnership 'Trusted Volunteer Scheme' funded through UK Shared Prosperity Funding, forming part of the Partnership's strategic approach to working with the VCS within the Sub-Region.

In addition, the report seeks member approval to consolidate our position with the Voluntary and Community Sector through appropriate commissioning to third sector organisations to deliver community wellbeing related services.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That the important role that the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) plays in supporting local communities/residents in enjoying healthy fulfilling lives within South and East Lincolnshire is noted.
2. That current progress made between the SELCP and VCS is noted. This includes the SELCP Trusted Volunteers Scheme.
3. That Members agree to the proposed South and East Lincolnshire Councils Partnership 'Volunteer Charter'.
4. That Members approve a transition from grant giving to VCS organisations and move to a commissioned services model (where appropriate) that meet the aims and objectives of the South and East Lincolnshire Councils Partnership.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

VCS organisations offer huge amounts to local areas, through the services they provide, the wealth they generate, and the people they connect, engage, and empower. At a time of rising pressure on services and tough financial constraints, it is more important than ever that councils can harness their local strengths and build successful partnerships with their local VCS.

OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

Do nothing – this option will not support additional benefits that working with our VCS provides.

1.0 BACKGROUND

- 1.1 Strong relationships between councils and the local Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) are the bedrock of successful places (LGA 2023). VCS organisations offer huge amounts to local areas, through the services they provide, the wealth they generate, and the people they connect, engage, and empower. At a time of rising pressure on services and tough financial constraints, it is more important than ever that councils can harness their local strengths and build successful partnerships with their local VCS to meet the needs of local people and communities. South and East Lincolnshire has a large and varied VCS, much of it thriving without any assistance from the councils. The region is justifiably proud of its VCS, which plays a major part in our communities' civic lives.
- 1.2 In addition, the communities themselves have a lot to offer in respect to playing an active volunteering role in their localities. This may be for community or personal advantage, with volunteering showing positive physical and mental health benefits to participatory individuals.

2. VOLUNTARY AND COMMUNITY SECTOR COMMISSIONED AND GRANT SUPPORTED SERVICES

2.1 Commissioning opportunities to the local VCS often produces quality and focused services that deliver tailored and flexible support to residents based on deep-rooted connections and local knowledge. The following section highlights a number of examples where the SELCP has worked alongside VCS organisations, either through grant-giving or commissioning throughout 2023/24: -

a) Lincolnshire Community Foundation

2.2 Lincolnshire Community Foundation is a VCS organisation (founded in 2002), providing grant distribution, grant creation, opportunities for social investment, advice, and practical support for communities. Through the direct experience of administering the previous three phases of the 'Household Support Fund' (HSF) and the recognition that additional capacity and pace was required on a short-term basis, Lincolnshire Community Foundation were commissioned in September 2023 to deliver circa 40% (£230,000) of the total SELCP allocation of Household Support Fund phase 4, to administer an application-based scheme for households in need.

This included: -

- Based on successful pilot in previous round of HSF, applications were assessed on need and reached different households, including those that were not usually eligible for other government support (for example, homeowners and those in employment)
- Grant management costs of 15% were taken from allocation equating to £34,500. For this LCF have managed and promoted the scheme, met reporting requirements, and managed all enquiries.
- LCF provide additional 'added value' for their fee; as members of Lincolnshire Financial Inclusion Partnership, they have offered additional signposting, onward referrals and advice to households on other emergency grant schemes.
- Applications could be made via web-form and telephone; all applications were anonymised and assessed by independent approver before awarded.
- Grants of up to £300 were awarded as vouchers for food, utility support or other household essentials.
- Whilst monitoring is ongoing, performance and client feedback has remained consistently high throughout the programme.
- Between August – December 2023 LCF supported 635 low-income households with energy grants via HSF.

Following the strong performance of the Household Support Fund grant administration, Lincolnshire Community Foundation were further commissioned to distribute funding following Storm Babet in October 2023. Recognising an immediate need for response, Lincolnshire Community Foundation distributed £29,085 to assist 140 households severely affected across the East Lindsey area.

It is important to note, that whilst commissioning these services through LCF delivered tailored support to residents at pace, the council remained an active commissioner to maintain awareness of fluctuations in demand and capacity that may have affected performance.

b) Advice and support services

2.3 Across South and East Lincolnshire, three independent Lincolnshire based Citizen Advice charities deliver free, independent, and impartial advice service; to give people knowledge and confidence to find a way forward whatever the problem. Locally, these services have received core funding contribution from all three SELCP Councils and Lincolnshire County Council Public Health. In addition, bespoke projects that meet local need and reduce demand on Council services are commissioned by the Councils (for example Financial First Aid in East Lindsey and Housing Support in South Holland).

Citizens Advice are a reputable charity with proven track record in the advice and consumer sector; all branches hold the Advice Quality Standard, meeting the requirements of the Advice Service Alliance Standard for advice and are accredited by the Money and Pension Service and authorised and regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority.

As local charities they have the flexibility of resources and skills to deliver a comprehensive service to the diverse and changing communities of South and East Lincolnshire. Through established partnership with the Councils, they support residents and services to address national agendas and legislative or policy changes that may impact on residents.

The core offer of Lincolnshire Citizens Advice charities is advice on benefits, work, money, housing, family law, immigration, and consumer as well as local delivery of national contracts for DWP (Help to Claim), Trading Standards (National Consumer helpline) and Money Advice and Pensions Service (Debt Advice).

The SELCP receives quarterly reports and case studies from each Citizens Advice organisation, which offers value insight into needs and provide evidence to inform strategy. Based on Q3 reports (April 2023 – December 2023) collectively Citizens Advice has supported **9,161 residents** in South and East Lincolnshire totalling **39,583 issues**.

In addition, the charities estimate that they have helped residents address over **£2 million** in unmanageable debt and secured **circa £4 million** in additional household income.

The top issues South and East Lincolnshire residents contact Citizens Advice regarding were: (September – December 2023):

Top issues Q3	CA Lindsey	CA Mid Lincs	CA South Lincs
1	Benefits & Tax Credit	Benefits & Tax Credit	Benefits & Tax Credits
2	Universal Credit	Debt & Financial Capability	Universal Credit
3	Debt	Universal Credit	Charitable Support & Food Banks
4	Housing	Housing	Debt
5	Financial Capability	Utilities	Housing

Work is underway to align reporting, expectations, and requirements of the Citizens Advice funding for financial year 2024/25 to ensure the provision both reduces demands on council services and efficient use of public funding.

c) Lincolnshire Community Voluntary Services (LCVS)

- 2.4 LCVS has provided support to individuals and organisations through several health and wellbeing focused projects over the past 25 years. Offering guidance, training, and DBS checks one of the core missions for LCVS is promoting volunteering as a force for positive change. As the sole accredited Volunteer Centre in South and East Lincolnshire, the organisation provides a brokerage service to connect potential volunteers with organisations seeking volunteers.
- 2.5 Through an annual core grant of £93k (£31k per council), LCVS provide a:
- Volunteer Programme that is bespoke for South and East Lincolnshire and the needs of its communities. Including training, health and safety advice, allocation and identification of roles, qualifications if appropriate. Outcomes are focused on building community cohesion, civic pride and improving personal mental health.
 - Linked to the above, support for a 'Food Network', that focuses on food supply to food banks, supporting community gardens and allotments, healthy cooking advice and training, food waste reduction/elimination.
 - Investment in young people and to increase the opportunities for young people to volunteer within their communities.
- 2.6 Monitoring of LCVS grant supported services is undertaken by monthly meetings. Performance metrics in the coming year's agreement will include: the number of volunteers supported or mentored, number of volunteers identified, number of volunteers placed, and funding opportunities accessed via groups, all data received to be broken down into sovereign council area.

d) Further commissioning opportunities

- 2.7 It is noted that there may be some reservations not to commission services from third sector organisations where it is felt to be the role of local government. In seeking to continue to promote VCS commissioned services this will of course be done with Members full engagement so that all considerations in this regard can be accommodated as appropriate. It is proposed to transition in coming years from grant giving to VCS organisations, to procured commissioned contracts as appropriate, that all third sector organisations can tender for.

3.0 SELCP TRUSTED VOLUNTEERS SCHEME

- 3.1 Becoming a volunteer can be very rewarding for those participating alongside their communities. People can gain valuable skills and experience that could help you in your work and home life. Equally, volunteers make a huge difference to organisations and local communities, providing the opportunity to reach and help more people whilst strengthening the organisation's ties to its community.
- 3.2 For the SELCP, there are many opportunities for volunteers to become involved in the important work that is provided to our communities. Through UK Shared Prosperity Funding (£53k), the SELCP has been successful in funding a Volunteer Co-ordinator that will support volunteers within the organisation.
- 3.3 Whilst not an exhaustive list, volunteering opportunities will include: -
- Litter picking, planting, cleaning, tidying, providing support within parks including the formation of community kitchen gardens.
 - CCTV monitoring
 - Heritage Support within the Guildhall, Ayscoughfee Hall Museum and Gardens, cemeteries
 - Culture and theatre within South Holland Centre, the Embassy Theatre in Skegness

- Event champions – providing support, carrying out satisfaction surveys, taking photographs, staffing information points, handing out programmes and flyers, keeping the event clear of litter.

3.4 It is estimated that there could be 300+ volunteering opportunities across the SELCP each year, providing additional capacity whilst building on the connection to our communities.

3.5 There are many ways of recruiting volunteers. It is intended to use a variety of methods including social media promotion, word of mouth, dedicated pages on the SELCP websites, umbrella organisations, adverts in local places, recruitment open days.

3.6 Whilst volunteers are not part of any workplace legislation, through good practice the Volunteer Co-ordinator will informally meet with individuals/groups. Alongside the service that the volunteers are supporting, the necessary safeguarding, health and safety and equality and diversity support will be provided.

3.7 Managing and supporting volunteers will be important post induction. Training and knowledge-sharing as appropriate will be offered and managers will be encouraged to get to know their volunteers and continue to motivate and provide an appealing environment to continue their efforts.

3.8 It is proposed that the Volunteer-Coordinator will drive the recruitment of volunteers, hold (with the appropriate data protection safeguards in place) a register (through a dedicated database) of volunteer details and volunteering interests for Council related activities and act as a conduit to other volunteering opportunities with LCVS, who will also refer back to the Council where opportunities come to their attention that are of relevance to SELCP Trusted Volunteer Scheme.

3.9 People who are recruited to the SELCP Trusted Volunteer Scheme will be aligned to relevant service areas (e.g the Council's CCTV Unit, Environmental Services etc) for relevant training.

3.10 Monitoring of the scheme will take place through quarterly meetings between the Community Leadership Manager and Service Leads within each Directorate.

4.0 Volunteer Charter

4.1 The Volunteer Charter (appendix A) sets out the nine key principles which help to underpin good relations within a volunteering environment. The charter supports the foundations for a good volunteer experience and gives individuals that volunteer for the SELCP the opportunity to express their support for the spirit of volunteering while upholding the principles of good volunteer practice.

5.0 Supporting the Voluntary and Community Sector

5.1 Through a variety of ways the Community Leadership Team continue to support local VCS groups. Key examples of this include: -

- South and East Lincolnshire Crowd
- South and East Lincolnshire Community Lottery
- Warm Spaces/Community Hub Support
- Empowering Community Groups for example, 'The Bread-and-Butter Thing' – Old Leake, Sutton on Sea Playing field.
- Use of external funding to support projects, for example Household Support Funding made available for SELCP Food Banks & Community Larders (circa £175,00 in 2023/24)

5.2 Working with partners Spacehive, the partnership currently provides a Crowdfunding platform for VCS to raise funds for local community-based initiatives. The crowdfunding platform allows local groups to develop a community project via an online public platform, then seek additional financial support through online pledges. Each pitch is then also eligible for up to £8000 from the South and East

Lincolnshire Crowd. The scheme can support local projects and VCS to make communities stronger, more connected and empowered by supporting projects that matter to the community.

- 5.3 The South and East Lincolnshire Community Lottery supports local good causes, community groups and clubs to raise fund through the sale of lottery tickets.
- 60% goes to local good causes.
 - 20% for the prize money and
 - 20% to the External Management Lottery (ELM) Company for running costs; including relevant insurance to cover the prize fund and VAT.
- 5.4 There are currently 88 caused registered with the South and East Lincolnshire Community lottery. For 2023, the annual funding for good causes is £34,756.80.
- 5.5 During 2022, 50 warm hubs throughout the SELCP were able to benefit from over £30,000 warm spaces funding, received via National Grid Funding and districted via the Community Leadership Team. Support for warm hubs has continued via a Lincolnshire wide approach for 2023. Face to face support continues via Community Leadership Officer, with regular visits and signposting for groups.
- 5.6 Working with 'The Bread-and-Butter Thing' (TBBT) in January 2022, the Community Leadership Team were able to identify local need and work with a local community group to establish a hub in Old Leake, Boston. TBBT works in partnership with supermarkets, factories, and farms to redistribute surplus food that often ends up going to waste. The hubs then offer weekly groceries at a fraction of high street prices, for approximately £8.50 residents can get roughly £35 worth of food each week. Each TBBT hub relies on volunteers to pack and distribute food weekly to residents. In year one of Old Leake hub, 585 residents have shopped at TBBT. Distributing 3382 sets of shopping bags and offering 561 volunteering opportunities.
- 5.7 The Community Leadership team along with Programme Delivery Team have begun to support on Sutton on Sea Playing field with the development of the new community sports asset, the Community Leadership Team are supporting the local community to ensure ownership and long-term delivery of the new asset.

6. CONCLUSION

- 6.1 The Voluntary and Community Sector in South and East Lincolnshire offers considerable opportunity to improve the overall quality of life within the sub-region. It is proposed therefore that Members support a strategic approach to VCS engagement that:
- a) **Commissions more services from the VCS** where that adds value through enhanced reach and support to local communities at greater value than can be offered by the three South and East Lincolnshire Councils.
 - b) **Delivers for SELCP a Trusted Volunteer Scheme** and follows an agreed **Volunteer Charter** to support the foundations of a good volunteer experience. as described within this report.
 - c) **Supports Capacity Building** for VCS Organisations to flourish in South and East Lincolnshire.
 - d) **Promotes volunteering and partnership work with VCS organisations.**

EXPECTED BENEFITS TO THE PARTNERSHIP

VCS organisations offer huge amounts to local areas, through the services they provide, the wealth they generate, and the people they connect, engage, and empower. At a time of rising pressure on services and tough financial constraints, it is more important than ever that councils can harness their local strengths and build successful partnerships with their local VCS.

IMPLICATIONS

SOUTH AND EAST LINCOLNSHIRE COUNCILS PARTNERSHIP

Collaboratively working with the VCS across South and East Lincolnshire ensures resources are aligned for efficiencies across the partnership, that local knowledge identifies local opportunities within the Voluntary and Community Sector and that promotion of volunteering projects are maximised.

CORPORATE PRIORITIES

The following Sub-Regional Priorities are supported through working with the VCS:

- 1) Growth and Prosperity
- 2) Healthy Lives
- 3) Safe and Resilient Communities
- 4) Environment

The corporate priority of Efficiency and Effectiveness is also supported along with local priorities across the three councils that make up South and East Lincolnshire Councils Partnership.

STAFFING

Working with the VCS, identifying commissioning opportunities and connections is currently undertaken across the partnership within current staffing resources.

The mobilisation of a 'Trusted Volunteers Scheme' has been successfully funded by UKSPF which includes additional capacity through a Volunteer Co-Ordinator.

WORKFORCE CAPACITY IMPLICATIONS

Efficient and effective work alongside the VCS can strengthen community and workforce capacity and resilience.

CONSTITUTIONAL AND LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

All collaboration and commissioning with the VCS is undertaken following the appropriate constitution and legal processes.

DATA PROTECTION

There are no data protection issues related to this report.

FINANCIAL

The resource contribution and productivity that the Voluntary and Community Sector provides across South and East Lincolnshire is substantial; alongside benefits for both personal and professional skills development and utilisation, making new connections, increased confidence and wellbeing.

As detailed within the main body of this report, the council has provided £31k annually to LCVS in the form of a grant. In addition, £53k has been awarded to SELCP from UKSPF to undertake a Trusted Volunteers Scheme.

RISK MANAGEMENT

All risks associated with collaborating and commissioning services with the VCS will be appropriately managed.

STAKEHOLDER / CONSULTATION / TIMESCALES

The activities within this report have been developed alongside the Portfolio Holders, Lead Officers and key Partners.

REPUTATION

Working with the VCS can enhance the opportunities for communities and provide positive experiences, enhancing reputation.

CONTRACTS

All collaboration and commissioning opportunities would follow the necessary procurement approval processes.

CRIME AND DISORDER

Building resilience, inclusive and active communities through enhanced working with the VCS can provide the community the opportunities to prevent, reduce and detect crime.

EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY/ HUMAN RIGHTS/ SAFEGUARDING

An equality impact assessment will be undertaken as part of the work with the VCS and specifically through the Trusted Volunteers Scheme.

HEALTH AND WELL BEING

Volunteering activities provide opportunities for individuals to be involved in several activities within their community. Supporting both physical and positive mental health.

CLIMATE CHANGE AND ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

Volunteering activities provide opportunities to support local environments and improve pride of places.

ACRONYMS

VCS – Voluntary and Community Sector

UKSPF – UK Shared Prosperity Fund

SELCP – South & East Lincolnshire Councils Partnership

APPENDICES

Appendix A – SELCP Volunteer Charter

REPORT APPROVAL

Report author:	Emily Spicer, Assistant Director Well-Being and Community Leadership
Signed off by:	John Leach, Deputy Chief Executive (Communities)
Approved for publication:	Councillor Cresswell