

*PART A

Report to: Cabinet
Date of meeting: 7th September 2015
Report of: Head of Corporate Strategy & Client Services
Title: Voluntary and Community Sector Commissioning Framework
2016-2019

1.0 **SUMMARY**

- 1.1 The council recognises that the voluntary and community sector has an important and legitimate role in providing services within the borough which provide many positive benefits for those who live, work and visit Watford.

The Commissioning Framework is the council's mechanism that sets out the priorities for a range of leisure and community services to be delivered by commissioned voluntary and third sector organisations between 2016-2019 on behalf of the council.

The aim of the Framework is to ensure a robust approach to commissioning the voluntary and community sector to deliver services in areas considered to be district council responsibility and based on evidence of current or emerging need(s) within Watford.

The current Commissioning Framework is due to expire on 31st March 2016

- 1.2 The Commissioning Framework is set in the context of current budget pressures and cuts to the public sector. The development of the Framework provides an opportunity to assess whether the priorities are still the right priorities for Watford in terms of whether they are appropriate for a district council to fund. At present there is no requirement for additional savings to be made from the voluntary and community sector budget; although commissioned organisations will be required to provide evidence on how they are working to achieve future longer term financial sustainability.
- 1.3 The development of the next three year Commissioning Framework has now concluded and the purpose of this report is to confirm 1) the commissioning priorities from 2016 and 2) key areas of focus within the stated priorities.

This report:

- Presents the final draft of the Voluntary and Community Sector Commissioning Framework 2016-2019 (**Appendix A**) document for approval
- Summarises the work and consultation undertaken by elected members, partners, service users and officers to identify the commissioning priorities and areas of focus for the next three years
- Outlines next steps and milestones e.g. development of Service Level Agreements (SLA) and service specifications

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 Cabinet are recommended to:

2.2 Approve the Voluntary and Community Sector Commissioning Framework 2016-2019 priorities and areas of focus as identified in Section 3.6 of this report

2.3 Delegate responsibility to the Head of Corporate Strategy & Client Services in consultation with the Portfolio Holder to implement the next steps and key milestones as described in Section 3.7 to ensure services are in place from 1st April 2016, subject to council approval of the Budget 2016/17

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Report approved by: Lesley Palumbo, Head of Corporate Strategy & Client Services .

3.0 DETAILED PROPOSAL

3.1 Introduction

Watford has a large and active voluntary sector with organisations providing a diverse range of services often to those who are most vulnerable. The Voluntary and Community Sector Commissioning Framework 2016-2019 is the mechanism for allocating funding to a number of voluntary and third sector organisations to deliver a range of leisure and community service priorities on behalf of the council.

The council has a long standing and positive working relationship with the local voluntary and third sector organisations and it deploys a significant proportion of its budget to support a number of them in a variety of ways. The council intends to continue supporting the sector recognising that they are sometimes best placed to deliver key services to local residents.

3.1.2 The new Commissioning Framework is designed to support the delivery of the council's Vision and Corporate Plan, in particular 'promoting an active, cohesive and well informed community', although it is also expected that it would contribute to 'making Watford a better place to live' and 'to provide the strategic lead for Watford's sustainable economic growth'. New service specifications will make much clearer the commissioned objectives against the corporate plan and the Town's objectives. Each service's performance and outcomes secured against the current framework have been reviewed in this context.

3.2 **Community Centres Task Group Recommendations**

3.2.1 A cross party task group was established to support the development of the community centres element of the new Commissioning Framework and held a series of meetings in May 2015. A report on the work of the task group is listed in the background papers.

The task group proposed the following recommendations in relation to individual community centres:

3.2.2 **Centrepoint Community Centre:** That the council continue to manage the centre on an interim basis within the allocated budget envelope whilst further discussions take place with regard to the future of the facility, allowing for the following:

- Any impact from the WBC Property Review to be considered.
- The outcomes from the Watford Community Housing Trust's Community Options Study to be considered.
- Partnership opportunities around future management of the building to be explored.

3.2.3 **Holywell Community Centre:** That the council continue to fund the centre for three years to provide stability, allowing for any opportunities arising from the Sports Facility Strategy to be considered and enable Watford and Three Rivers Trust to maximise income potential through the hall hire for the following proposed activities:

- Charitable fundraising events
- Business events and conferences
- Private hires including wedding receptions
- Health and wellbeing activities that target evidenced health issues in local area

3.2.4 **Leavesden Green Community Centre:** That the council continues to fund the centre for two years up to April 2107. Watford Community Housing Trust (WCHT) subsequently continuing their long lease (99 years) on the condition they use the building for community activities with such a commitment embedded into the lease as a Community Use Agreement.

That WCHT market activities at the centre to both WCHT residents and the wider community.

3.2.5 **Meriden Community Centre:** That the council continues to fund the facility for three years whilst redevelopment of the site is completed and that the Watford Football Sports and Education Trust (WFC Trust) be required to submit a comprehensive business plan with evidence of moving towards becoming self-sustaining from April 2019.

3.2.6 **Orbital Community Centre:** That the council continues to fund the facility for three years to provide stability, enabling the YMCA to consider redevelopment and funding opportunities that will help them to become self sustaining.

That the centre explore community development opportunities with the influx of new residents as a result of the new WCHT housing development and proactively engage

with the new community residing at the new development on the site of the former Lincoln Court.

- 3.2.7 **West Watford Community Association (WWCA):** That the council continues to fund the centre for three years whilst WWCA explore opportunities for income generation and future alternative premises/partnerships.

3.3 **General Recommendations**

The Task Group considered that the centres should be commissioned to support the needs of their individual communities, fostering a sense of community spirit and cohesion. They proposed that community centres provide a range of centre activities that address evidenced need in their ward in one or more the following areas:

- Public health focusing on mental health and wellbeing
- Support and skills building towards gaining employment
- Youth focused activities
- Activities for older people
- Support with budget and debt issues
- Activities for people with disabilities

That all six community centres increase their marketing and publicity activity. Focus to be placed on the council's current communication resources e.g. About Watford and social media opportunities.

These objectives will be built into the service specifications.

3.4 **Development of Commissioning Framework priorities**

- 3.4.1 The new Commissioning Framework priorities were agreed through a process involving:

- Understanding Herts County Council obligations as lead funder and commissioning body for education, social care support, public health and community health related services, domestic violence, housing related support etc.
- Consultation with voluntary sector organisations about emerging needs (e.g. Welfare Reform Act impacts resulting in greater demand for advice services in the borough)
- Recommendations from a cross party member task group
- Emerging national and local priorities which would be a district council responsibility
- Outcome of the Equality Impact Analysis

3.5 **Voluntary and Community Sector Consultation**

During July / August 2015, a consultation was undertaken with Watford's Voluntary and Community Sector. A survey was sent to the third sector organisations asking for their views on the voluntary and community sector environment in the town.

61 responses were received to the survey. In terms of the voluntary and community

sector overall the following were the top 3 support services seen as important for the sector:

1. Start up advice
2. Governance advice
3. Advice on charity issues

In terms of the organisations themselves, the following were the top 3 services seen by service users as important:

1. Funding search / sourcing
2. Funding applications / bids help
3. Opening up links to other organisations in the voluntary and community sector / advising on changes and new initiatives relating to the voluntary and community sector (joint)

3.6 Conclusions

As a result of adopting the third Voluntary and Community Sector Commissioning Framework the services detailed below will continue to be provided to residents for a period up to April 2019 but will be subject to the availability of funding during that period as set out in the council's Medium Term Financial Strategy and annual budget setting process.

The quality of services commissioned by the council will be monitored and should the services be considered below the quality expected or the need for the service reduce then the Service Level Agreement (SLA) with the organisations commissioned will enable the council to de-commission or reduce funding as appropriate.

The funding for the Commissioning Framework will be met through existing resources and will be a standstill budget for the period 2016-2019. The current budget envelope for 2016/17 is £980,270 and opportunities for efficiencies will be identified..

The services to be commissioned are:

- Infrastructure support to the voluntary and community sector – delivered by Watford and Three Rivers Trust (W3RT)
- Mobility scooter and wheel chair services – delivered by Watford Shopmobility
- Advice services – delivered by Watford Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB)
- Arts and culture services – delivered by Watford Palace Theatre
- Small Grants Fund – administered by the WBC Client Services Team

The authority also provides a management grant to support the following council owned community centres across the borough:

- Holywell community centre – managed by W3RT
- Orbital community centre – managed by YMCA
- Leavesden Green community centre – managed by Watford Community Housing Trust
- Meriden community centre – managed by Watford Football Club Sports and Education Trust (WFC Trust)

- West Watford Community Association
- Centrepont community centre – currently managed in-house by WBC. (see section 3.2 of this report - recommendations identified from cross party task group)

3.7 Next steps

- 3.7.1 • 7th September 2015 - Cabinet approves the Voluntary and Community Sector Commissioning Framework 2016-2019 (Attached as Appendix A)
- 3.7.2 • October – March 2016 implementation phase including:
 - Preparation of individual SLAs
 - Preparation of service specifications and lease documents as appropriate
 - Finalise budgets and funding allocation
 - Finalise lease arrangements as appropriate

4.0 IMPLICATIONS

4.1 Financial

- 4.1.1 The Shared Director of Finance comments that the baseline funding for this programme will be contained within the current budget for this area of activity.

The budget will be subject to the council's annual budget setting process and any requirements to make savings or provide growth will be dealt with as part of this process..

4.2 Legal Issues (Monitoring Officer)

- 4.2.1 The Head of Democracy and Governance comments that the council has a wide variety of legal powers that are available for it to provide both financial and physical assistance to the voluntary sector to enable them to undertake their functions. The priorities identified within the Commissioning Framework are all covered by these powers.

The council must have due regard to the Equality Impact Analysis and the effect of the framework on those with protected characteristics and any mitigation before adopting the framework as a new policy.

4.3 Equalities

- 4.3.1 Watford Borough Council is committed to equality and diversity as an employer, service provider and as a strategic partner.

An Equality Impact Analysis (EIA) has been undertaken for the new Commissioning Framework and the full report will be published on the internet. The assessment has considered if there are identified emerging needs that are currently not met through the proposed priorities and focus areas and if these needs are already being addressed or not.

If emerging needs are identified during the period of the Commissioning Framework, consideration will have to be given as to whether these are a district council commissioning responsibility. If it is considered a District Council responsibility, further assessment will need to be undertaken with regard to:

- Alignment with the council's corporate objectives
- Whether council funding is required in order to commission the services

If the above criteria are met, the process will require a separate report identifying the commissioning requirements to be taken forward for approval with appropriate funding identified either from savings within the programme or a requirement for a growth bid.

No immediate issues have been identified from the EIA. Looking to the future the impact of changes within the Welfare Reform Act may present a future need by local residents that may not have been identified at this time but will be monitored over the period of the Commissioning Framework.

4.4 Potential Risks

Potential Risk	Likelihood	Impact	Overall score
Priorities and focus areas not agreed by Cabinet	1	4	4
Failure to deliver project next steps and milestones within agreed timeframe	2	4	8
Future funding for the Commissioning Framework not available beyond 2017	2	4	8
Equality Impact Analysis identifies emerging need that is a WBC responsibility which is not covered by the priorities or focus areas	1	4	4
<p>The Voluntary and Community Commissioning Framework delivers a range of high profile services to local residents, failure to deliver the priorities and focus area would present a reputation risk to the organisation.</p> <p>In order to minimise this potential risk a detailed risk assessment and monitoring programme will be produced and form an integral part of the implementation of the new Commissioning Framework, service specifications and individual SLAs.</p>			

4.5 Staffing

4.5.1 There are no changes to staffing arrangements identified through the adoption of this Commissioning Framework. Any changes that may occur during the period of the framework as a result of the identification of emerging needs or service issues relating to individual SLA's will be addressed on an individual service basis at the time.

4.6 Accommodation

4.6.1 There are no changes identified in this report relating to accommodation

4.7 **Community Safety**

- 4.7.1 The positive activities resulting from the services provided by many of the commissioned services particularly in relation to youth activities will contribute to a safer environment.

4.8 **Sustainability**

- 4.8.1 The proposals in this report accord with the council's approach on sustainable procurement to consider the social and economic impacts of the procurement or commission. Small firms, voluntary and community organisations and social enterprises are innovative and add value with an important role in the local economy and contribution to social cohesion.

Appendices

- A - Voluntary and Community Sector Commissioning Framework 2016-2019

Background Papers

- Project Initiation Document – Voluntary Sector Commissioning Framework 2016-2019, 8th January 2015 (not for publication as the document contains financial information relating to Watford Borough Council and other groups – Part 1, Schedule 12A, paragraph 3)
- Voluntary Sector Commissioning Framework (Community Centres) Task Group Final Report, including 12th and 26th May 2015 Task Group minutes
- Equalities Impact Analysis (EIA), August 2015

“The following background papers were used in the preparation of this report. If you wish to inspect or take copies of the background papers, please contact the officer named on the front page of the report.”