

**VOLUNTARY AND COMMUNITY
SECTOR COMMISSIONING
FRAMEWORK TASK GROUP**

**REVIEW OF PROPOSALS FOR
DEVELOPING THE COUNCIL'S NEW
VOLUNTARY AND COMMUNITY
SECTOR COMMISSIONING
FRAMEWORK**

SEPTEMBER 2012

CONTENTS

Task Group Participants	Page 5
Proposed Recommendations	Page 6
Background Information	Pages 7 - 8
Summary of Meetings	Pages 9 - 10
Conclusions and Recommendations	Pages 11 - 14
Bibliography and Appendices	Page 15
Appendix 1 Terms of Reference	Pages 17 - 20
Appendix 2 Minutes of meeting on 24 May 2012	Pages 21 - 27
Appendix 3 Minutes of meeting on 19 June 2012	Pages 29 - 32
Appendix 4 Minutes of meeting on 13 August 2012	Pages 33 - 39
Appendix 5 Minutes of meeting on 5 September 2012	Pages 41 - 47

TASK GROUP PARTICIPANTS

Watford Borough Council

Committee Membership

Councillor Jeanette Aron	.	Chair of the Task Group and Councillor for Nascot Ward
Councillor Ian Brandon	.	Councillor for Callowland Ward
Councillor Sue Greenslade	.	Councillor for Meriden Ward
Councillor Stephen Johnson	.	Councillor for Leggatts Ward
Councillor Anne Joynes	.	Councillor for Leggatts Ward
Councillor Rabi Martins	.	Councillor for Central Ward

Portfolio Holder

Councillor Keith Crout	.	Portfolio Holder for Leisure and Community Services Councillor for Stanborough Ward
------------------------	---	--

Non-Committee Members

Councillor Jackie Connal	.	Councillor for Holywell Ward
Councillor Asif Khan	.	Councillor for Leggatts Ward

Officer Support

Lesley Palumbo	.	.	Head of Community Services
Gary Oliver	.	.	Culture and Community Section Head
Prema Mani	.	.	Commissioning Manager
Carol Chen	.	.	Head of Legal and Property Services
Linda Newell	.	.	Property Manager
Sandra Hancock	.	.	Committee and Scrutiny Officer
Rosy Wassell	.	.	Committee and Scrutiny Support Officer

External Support and Information

Watford Community Voluntary Services

Bob Jones	.	.	.	Chief Executive Officer of the Watford Community Voluntary Services
-----------	---	---	---	--

PROPOSED RECOMMENDATIONS TO PRESENT TO OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Proposed Recommendations:

1. The Small Grants Fund should be continued.
2. The total Small Grant Fund should be £50,000.
3. The limit for individual small grants should be £2,000.
4. Application criteria should include projects and 'invest to save' initiatives
5. The process for Small Grant applications should encourage match funding.
6. The priorities in the draft Commissioning Framework document as detailed below are supported:
 - Infrastructure support to the voluntary and community sector
 - Enabling people with physical mobility problems to access services in the town centre
 - Advice services
 - Arts and Culture
 - Community Centres
 - Sport

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

December 2011

Recommendation for this topic as a subject for scrutiny was the outcome of the Cabinet report of 5 December 2011 and the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting of 22 December 2011.

March 2012

At the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 7 March 2012 the Committee and Scrutiny Officer advised that she had spoken to the Community Services Section Head regarding the additional resolution at Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting on 22 December 2011. This resolution is copied below:

that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee be requested to examine the long-term impact on the four organisations which would be subject to the largest cuts and to be involved in the development of the new Commissioning Framework.

Members at this meeting agreed that a Task Group be set up in May 2012 to review the draft Commissioning Framework prior to public consultation in June 2012.

The meeting agreed that:

- A Task Group be established to review the Draft Commissioning Framework
- All non-Executive Members be asked whether they wished to participate in the review
- The appointment of the Task Group membership be delegated to the Head of Legal and Property Services in consultation with the Chair and Vice Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Committee
- The outstanding actions and questions list be updated as agreed

Scope of the Task Group

The Task Group would review proposals for developing the Council's New Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) Commissioning Framework.

The current framework and three-year grant funding programme would close on 31 March 2013. It was considered appropriate that the Council revisit its support for the VCS and ensure that there existed a clear understanding of its priorities and commissioning objectives. This was particularly important in the context of the impact of the economic climate, the recession and public sector funding cuts.

It was anticipated that the task group would:

- Examine the evidence
- Engage key stakeholders in testing the information provided
- Form a view on the priorities

At the close of the review, were it to be felt appropriate, the recommendations would be incorporated into the process of developing the new commissioning framework. .

Six Councillors had expressed an interest in working on this review; it was agreed that these Councillors would form the membership of the Task Group.

The Task Group would comprise:

Councillor Jeanette Aron – Councillor for Nascot Ward
Councillor Ian Brandon – Councillor for Callowland Ward
Councillor Sue Greenslade – Councillor for Meriden Ward
Councillor Stephen Johnson – Councillor for Leggatts Ward
Councillor Anne Joynes – Councillor for Leggatts Ward
Councillor Rabi Martins – Councillor for Central Ward

SUMMARY OF MEETINGS

First Meeting - 24 May 2012

The Task Group received the terms of reference for the review which had been drafted by officers from Community Services. The Head of Community Services explained the scrutiny suggestions and details of how Members could be involved in the development of the new Commissioning Framework; she also advised on background information for the grant funding process.

Members considered a discussion paper on the Commissioning Framework which set out areas for the group to examine. The discussion paper had included a definition of the term 'commissioning' as a 'process for ensuring quality services meeting the identified priority needs of the community'. It was intended that this service should be provided by the best placed organisation at an affordable cost to the Council. Items discussed by Members included funding and resources, services commissioned by other bodies and funding priorities.

Following discussion, it was agreed that the

- a meeting to discuss technical issues should be programmed to a meeting in July 2012.
- A representative from the CVS should be invited to a future meeting in order to answer any questions the Members may have.

For further information please see Appendix 2 of this report

Second Meeting - 19 June 2012

Members had been supplied with a variety of background documents.

The meeting discussed Joint Funding for cross boundary organisations and the sharing of resources.

The Head of Community Services advised on the proposed priorities and gave a brief comment on each of the recommendations. She also referred to the Service Level Agreement template and advised that a new version would be introduced.

The Task Group was provided with the latest edition of the draft Commissioning Framework and asked to forward their comment to officers. Consultation on the document would take place between 25 June and 10 September and officers would collate responses to present to the Task Group at the September meeting.

For further information please see Appendix 3 of this report

Third Meeting - 13 August 2012

The Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the Watford Council for Voluntary Services (CVS) had been invited to the meeting to respond to the Group's questions. These questions and answers are appended to this report within the minutes of this meeting.(Appendix 4).

The CEO also advised on the proposed Watford Community Trust which, it was anticipated, would be launched in March 2013. He explained that it was hoped that under this scheme charities would become more financially independent.

The Property Manager tabled a list of Council properties used by charities and community and voluntary organisations. The Task Group discussed leasing arrangement and rents charged for properties. It was agreed that officers would adjust the final version of the Commissioning Framework to clarify the property related issues discussed by the Group.

The Task Group also discussed issues related to Non Domestic Rate Relief and funding priorities and the delay proposed in reviewing this policy in the light of future government changes..

For further information please see Appendix 4 of this report

Final Meeting - 5 September 2012

Members discussed the feedback from the consultation.

Points noted included:

Commissioning Framework Document: This should be easier to read

Funding: Flexibility was required

An infra-structure support network for voluntary organisations was important

Commissioning Approach: The new approach would be monitored through Service Level Agreements.

Priorities: Members deliberated on a range of priorities as itemised within the survey responses

Members discussed how small grants should be deployed.

Recommendations were reviewed and determined prior to presentation to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee

For further information please see Appendix 5 of this report

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

CONCLUSIONS

During the course of the scrutiny task groups work, Members had :

- examined in detail the background to the proposed introduction of a new Commissioning Framework in the context of financially constrained circumstances;
- obtained a greater insight into the working of the wider voluntary and community sector and the environment in which those organisations operate;
- received information on the methods used to monitor the outcomes and performance of organisations receiving council funding and the intention to re-focus and stream-line the approach in the future;
- examined in detail the Council property related issues relating to the occupation by voluntary and community organisations;
- received a report on the reasons for delaying the review of the policy for non-domestic rate relief in light of future government changes;
- explored with officers the content of the draft Commissioning Framework and provided input into the final version that was issued for consultation;
- received a report on the feedback obtained through the consultation process and in the light of that feedback re-examined the priorities proposed and the issues relating to the small grants fund.

Overall the Task Group was content with the thrust of the Commissioning Framework. The final recommendations are shown below.

Recommendation 1 ~ The Small Grants Fund should be continued

The survey had shown that respondents felt there was a need for small grants.

The Head of Community Services counselled that were the Small Grants fund to be retained there must be clarity on anticipated achievements and outcomes and this must be clearly demonstrated within the application criteria. It would also be easier to encourage groups to apply if the criteria were clear.

It was suggested that small grants be maintained for two years and then monitored to evaluate whether it would be wise to continue with this scheme.

Recommendation 2 ~ The total Small Grant Fund should be £50,000

Grants had, in the past, been provided through two funds, the Mayor's Fund and the Annual Fund, which both had £50,000 available. During the previous year the two funds had been combined into one Small Grants Fund; this fund had then been reduced to £50,000 in total.

Members agreed that this budget should be maintained.

Recommendation 3 ~ The limit for individual small grants should be £2,000

The Head of Community Services advised that there was currently a limit of £2,000 for individual grants. Checks were made to ensure that the grants had been used appropriately. The decision to award a grant was delegated to Portfolio Holders.

Members agreed that the limit should be set at £2,000 and that monitoring should continue

Recommendation 4 ~ Application criteria to include projects and 'invest to save' initiatives

The Task Group noted that small grants would be useful for organisations as funding for short term projects or to make the group more sustainable in the longer term. Several Members commented that a small grant for necessary expenses could, in some circumstances, make the difference to a group's continuance or closure and that criteria for grants should include opportunities for organisations to obtain funding where a small injection of money would enable them to make bigger savings and support their longer term sustainability e.g. Help to move to cheaper premises or purchase more cost-effective to run equipment. This could be described as an 'invest to save' approach.

Members also recommended that small grants be used to finance specific projects rather than ongoing revenue requirements.

Recommendation 5 ~ The process for applications should encourage match funding

It was noted that the three-year grant funding programme had caused service users to regard the ending of this scheme as a withdrawal of funding. This reinforced the view that funding created a dependency culture.

Members discussed the case for match funding in order to eliminate a sense of dependence. Responses within the survey had indicated that many organisations which received Council grants were then enabled to increase match funding from other sources.

Members agreed that the small grants application process should encourage match funding but that commissioned services needed to be able to recover the costs of the service required to be provided.

Recommendation 6 ~ The priorities in the draft Commissioning Framework document as detailed below are supported:

(i) Infrastructure support to the voluntary and community sector

It was agreed that it was important to provide a support network for voluntary organisations and support to enable organisations to be business like in their approach and sustainable.

It was agreed that the principle of 'time-banking' be promoted.

(ii) Enabling people with physical mobility problems to access services in the town centre

A number of Members considered that access to services should be extended beyond the town centre and that the needs of those with disabilities other than physical mobility should be included.

The Head of Community Services advised that it was important to specify the town centre as this was the location for the delivery of many services. She added that were the service to be extended beyond the town centre considerable cost would be incurred. The Head of Community Services noted that 'Shop Mobility' currently provided this facility in the town centre where need had been demonstrated; no evidence of need had been proved in areas beyond the town centre.

Members discussed the suggestion that the wording of the priority should include the needs of those with disabilities other than physical mobility. After consideration it was agreed that the original term be retained.

(iii) Advice Services

Members agreed that this was an important priority through which social deprivation could be identified. It was agreed that commissioned services should be made accessible to all and would take account of culture and language needs, disability access and tackling debt and economic impacts

(iv) Arts and Culture

Members wished to be informed on how the Palace Theatre had benefited the community.

The Head of Community Services advised that the theatre had included a diverse range of events for the whole community and were actively engaging with different groups in the community in order to widen their audience.

Members considered that it was important to reach residents from all backgrounds and that 'outreach into the community' should be included in any Service Level Agreements for commissioned Arts and Culture services.

(v) *Community Centres*

The mapping of council-owned community centres had identified that the centres were mainly in areas of social deprivation on large housing estates. Services and facilities to support local community needs could be based in the centres.

The Head of Community Services advised that the community centres had been asked to work with local communities to identify the needs of local residents and by providing services and other facilities to meet those needs. She explained that whilst the Council did not run the centres, the Service Level Agreements could require the centres to act as vehicles to support individuals in their areas.

It was agreed that community centres should engage with arts and culture organisations and that this was included in their Service Level Agreements to encourage the local community's involvement with art and cultural activities.

(vi) *Sport*

Members agreed that they supported the objectives contained in the Commissioning Framework.

BIBLIOGRAPHY AND APPENDICES

Bibliography

The following documents are available on request from Democratic Services:
Please phone 01923 278375 or email legalanddemocratic@watford.gov.uk

Cabinet Report of 5 December 2011:
 ‘Review of three year grant funding programme to achieve savings’
 Appendix A to Cabinet report: Table of Savings of Options identified
 Appendix B to Cabinet: Analysis and Recommendations
Feedback to Cabinet from organisations
Extract from Cabinet minutes of 5 December 2011
Support for the Voluntary Sector:
 a report of the Call-In and Performance Scrutiny Committee
Support for the Voluntary Sector Task Group:
 Discussion with Bob Jones, Chief Executive Officer of Watford CVS
Grant Funding Programme Application Form
Grant Funding programme Guidance Notes
Draft Service Level Agreement
Service Specification
Voluntary Sector Funding Budget Table 2012 – 2013
New Voluntary Sector Commissioning Framework - 2013 – 2016 –
 Project Initiation document
Voluntary and Community Sector Commissioning Framework 2012:
 Draft discussion paper
Draft Voluntary and Community Sector Framework 2013 – 2016
Briefing note for the CEO of Watford CVS
List of Current Services commissioned by Watford Borough Council

Appendices to the report:

Appendix 1 – Terms of reference
Appendix 2 – Minutes of meeting on 24 May 2012
Appendix 3 – Minutes of meeting on 19 June 2012
Appendix 4 – Minutes of meeting on 13 August 2012
Appendix 5 – Minutes of meeting on 5 September 2012

Task Group Scope/Terms of Reference

A Member/Officer suggesting a topic for scrutiny must complete this table as fully as possible. Completed tables will be presented to Overview & Scrutiny for consideration.

<p>Proposer: Councillor/Officer</p>	<p>Head Of Community Services/Section Head</p>
<p>Topic recommended for scrutiny:</p> <p><i>Please include as much detail as is available about the specific issues and areas which should be included/excluded from the review. Should the focus be on past performance, future policy or both?</i></p>	<p>To review the proposals for developing the Councils New Voluntary and Community Sector [VCS] Commissioning Framework.</p> <p>The current Commissioning Framework and 3 Year grant funding programme are drawing to a close on the 31st March 2013.</p> <p>In the context of the impact of the economic climate, recession and the significant impact of public sector funding cuts it is appropriate for the council to revisit its support for the VCS and ensure it has in place a clear understanding of its priorities and commissioning objectives.</p> <p>The Scrutiny Committee will receive a discussion paper, and evidence that summarises the needs across Watford and will be asked to consider the following questions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What do we mean by commissioning? ▪ What resources are currently deployed to fund VCS services? ▪ What services are commissioned by other bodies? ▪ What services should Watford Borough Council be funding the VCS to provide as a priority from 1st April 2013 and beyond? ▪ What evidence is there that demonstrates the need for services to be commissioned? ▪ What can the council afford to fund?

<p>Why have you recommended this topic for scrutiny?</p>	<p>This recommendation flowed from the Cabinet report of the 5th December 2011 and Scrutiny meeting of the 22nd December 2011 which recommended that the Scrutiny committee would be involved in the development of the new Commissioning Framework</p>
<p>What are the specific outcomes you wish to see from the review?</p>	<p>.Members of the Scrutiny Committee to have</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - examined the evidence - engaged key stakeholders in testing the information provided - formed a view on the priorities <p>all of this will be incorporated into the process of developing the new commissioning framework</p>
<p>Does the proposed item meet the following criteria?</p>	
<p>It must affect a group or community of people</p>	<p>Yes a wide section of the Voluntary sector in Watford and their service users</p>
<p>It must relate to a service, event or issue in which the council has a significant stake</p>	<p>A significant amount of the Councils budget is deployed to enable the voluntary sector to provide services to the community.</p>
<p>It must not have been a topic of scrutiny within the last 12 months</p> <p><i>There will be exceptions to this arising from notified changing circumstances. Scrutiny will also maintain an interest in the progress of recommendations and issues arising from past reports.</i></p>	<p>This has not been scrutinised in the last 12 months.</p>

<p>It must not be an issue, such as planning or licensing, which is dealt with by another council committee</p>	<p>It is not a planning or licensing matter.</p>
<p>Does the topic meet the council's priorities?</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Improve the health of the town and enhance its heritage 2. Enhance the town's 'clean & green' environment 3. Enhance the town's sustainability 4. Enhance the town's economic prosperity and potential 5. Supporting individuals and the community 6. Securing an efficient, effective, value for money council 7. Influence and partnership delivery <p>Priority 5, 6 and 7 are the most relevant at this stage.</p>
<p>Are you aware of any limitations of time or other constraints which need to be taken into account?</p> <p><i>Factors to consider are forthcoming milestones, demands on the relevant service area and member availability</i></p>	<p>This review needs to be carried out prior to the draft Voluntary Sector Commissioning Framework being circulated to the Voluntary Sector for consultation in July 2012.</p>
<p>Does the topic involve a Council partner or other outside body?</p>	<p>The topic is of relevance to organisations currently in receipt of grant and of interest to the wider VCS partners.</p>
<p>Please complete the 'sign off' section at the end of this document</p>	

The following section to be completed by Democratic Services	
Consultation with relevant Heads of Service <i>(this section to be completed by Democratic Services)</i>	<i>It is important to ensure that the relevant service can support a review by providing the necessary documents and attending meetings as necessary. The Head of Service's comments should be obtained before the request to hold a review is put to the Overview & Scrutiny Committee.</i>
Has the relevant Head of Service been consulted?	Yes
Is this a topic which the service departments are able to support. When was the last time this service was the subject of a scrutiny review?	Yes this is part of the Community Service Plan priorities for this year <i>Last year Community Services as a whole were involved in 4 Scrutiny Reviews</i>

Councillor/Officer Gary Oliver	date 8 May 2012	Head of Service Lesley Palumbo	date 8 May 2012
--	------------------------	---------------------------------------	------------------------

**VOLUNTARY AND COMMUNITY SECTOR COMMISSIONING FRAMEWORK
TASK GROUP****24 May 2012**

- Present: Councillor Aron (Chair)
Councillors Brandon, Greenslade, Johnson, Joynes and Martins
- Also present: Councillor Crout, Portfolio Holder for Leisure and Community Services
Councillor Connal
- Officer: Head of Community Services
Culture and Community Section Head
Commissioning Manager
Committee and Scrutiny Officer

1. ELECTION OF CHAIR

RESOLVED –

that Councillor Jeanette Aron be elected Chair of the Task Group.

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE/COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

There were no apologies for absence.

3. DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS

The Committee and Scrutiny Officer advised that all Members had been asked to consider their disclosures before being appointed to the Task Group. Any Councillor who had a personal and prejudicial interest in a local organisation was unable to take part in the Task Group.

4. TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Task Group received the terms of reference for the review which had been put forward by officers from Community Services.

The Head of Community Services explained the scrutiny suggestions and how officers would like Members to be involved in the development of the new Commissioning Framework. She also outlined the timetable and advised that the final draft would be presented to Cabinet at its meeting in October.

Councillor Johnson referred to the Support for the Voluntary Sector Task Group which had met during 2010 and 2011. There appeared to be a discrepancy with the financial figures quoted for that review, £1.1 million, and those now quoted by the Head of Community Services, £1.6 million.

The Head of Community Services explained that the latest figures included all different types of support for the voluntary and community sector. The previous figures had not included the money set aside for community centres. The new framework would look at all support for the sector, including business rates relief.

It was AGREED that the final report from the Support for the Voluntary Sector Task Group would be circulated to the Task Group.

Councillor Martins asked that Council priority 7 was added to the list of those most relevant to this review. This was AGREED.

Councillor Martins voiced his concern about the size of the review. He felt it could not be rushed. He suggested the review was divided into sections. The first part to meet the initial deadline and the remainder of the work would be completed prior to the final presentation to Cabinet in October.

The Head of Community Services confirmed that the consultation with the Voluntary and Community Sector would take place between July and September. She agreed with Councillor Martins' proposal.

ACTION: Committee and Scrutiny Officer

5. **VOLUNTARY AND COMMUNITY SECTOR COMMISSIONING FRAMEWORK – DISCUSSION**

The Task Group received a discussion paper which set out information relevant to the review.

Introduction and Background

The Head of Community Services set out the background to the grant funding process. She confirmed that a Service Level Agreement was drawn up with organisations who received funding. She advised that the report presented to Cabinet at its meeting in December 2011 would help Members to understand the process and how they were graded.

It was AGREED that the Task Group would be provided with a copy of the Cabinet report, an example of a Service Level Agreement and an application form.

Following a Member's question, the Head of Community Services advised that the Council for Voluntary Services (CVS) kept data regarding the number of voluntary and community organisations in the area. The most recent figure quoted was 400. There were 11 organisations in receipt of the three-year grant funding and 84 in receipt of business rates relief. She added that there was no requirement for voluntary or community sector groups to register. The Head of Community Services informed the Task Group that the CVS provided assistance to organisations, which included support and training.

The Head of Community Services advised that some organisations provided a service to other areas as well as Watford.

Councillor Johnson noted that the previous Task Group had recommended more cross-boundary groups should be established.

The Head of Community Services stated that the discussion paper set out six areas for the Task Group to examine –

1. What do we mean by commissioning?
2. What resources are currently deployed to support Voluntary and Community Sector services?
3. What services are commissioned by other bodies?
4. What services should Watford Borough Council be funding the Voluntary and Community Sector to provide as a priority from 1 April 2013 and beyond?
5. What evidence is there that demonstrates the need for services to be commissioned?
6. What can the council afford to fund?

1. What do we mean by Commissioning?

The Head of Community Services stated that the word ‘commissioning’ could mean different things to different people. A proposed definition was included in the discussion paper.

The Chair, Councillor Aron, referred to the Mayor’s Fund and how small groups could apply for a small amount of funding, for example a brownie group applying to get some funding towards the cost of new shed for storage. Since the amalgamation of the two funds and under the criteria for applying for funding, she asked whether a small group could still apply for funds from the Council.

The Head of Community Services explained that the Cabinet report set out the changes to the Mayor’s Fund. It had been merged with the small grants fund and then the budget had been halved. This pot of funding would also be looked at in the new Commissioning Framework. During the current financial year applications would be made through the small grants process. Decisions were made by the Portfolio Holder for Leisure and Community Services, Councillor Crout. She added that Councillors and the Mayor could refer people to make an application from that budget.

Councillor Brandon said that the County Council and the Housing Trust had funding that could be awarded to local community groups. He commented that many organisations applied to the different bodies and pooled their funding.

The Head of Community Services advised that the CVS had a Funding Officer who was able to make organisations aware of the different grants available. She suggested that a representative from the CVS could come to a future meeting and provide information on funding streams.

Councillor Brandon suggested that the Task Group might wish to question whether the CVS was aware of the effect of the cuts on different organisations.

The Head of Community Services advised that the CVS was obtaining feedback on the impact of funding changes on voluntary sector organisations and would be able to provide a view on what was happening within the sector.

2. What resources are currently deployed to support the Voluntary and Community Sector?

The Head of Community Services explained that this document set out the different budgets which supported the voluntary and community sector. She stated that there was £732,475 available to support organisations. She asked Members to consider whether they thought this level of support was sustainable.

With regard to community centres the Head of Community Services explained that the support for the centres had been committed for the next few years. She added that there had been a saving following the new arrangements being introduced.

Following a question about Sports Development, the Head of Community Services advised that this was not a statutory requirement for the Council. It did, however, fit in with the partnership work with Three Rivers on health.

Following a number of questions about property issues the Head of Community Services suggested that if Members were interested in individual organisations and how they were charged for buildings, then the Members would need information from Property Services.

The Culture and Community Section Head added that some organisations had historically long leases with specific rent details written into their leases.

The Head of Community Services informed the Task Group that the Sports Development budget was controlled by officers. It helped to purchase support from partnership organisations and governing bodies, for example to enable individual clubs to pay lower rates for training.

A Member asked whether the financial issues with SLM had been resolved. There were voluntary and community sector groups who used the leisure centre facilities.

The Culture and Community Section Head advised that this was outside the scope of the Task Group but would be checked with the Head of Strategic Finance.

The Head of Community Services outlined some of the work carried out with funding from the Arts Development budget; including the pop-up art galleries and Imagine Watford, which the Palace Theatre took the lead role in organising. She confirmed that the Palace Theatre received funding from the Arts Council, which was more than the amount granted by the Council.

Councillor Brandon suggested that organisations who received funding should be asked to set out an action plan on how they could become sustainable in the future.

Councillor Martins felt that previously smaller organisations had been scrutinised but larger ones had not.

The Head of Community Services explained that the next section in the table referred to Discretionary Rate Relief. The guidelines would be reviewed and Members would be provided with details of which organisations received this relief. The Revenues Manager would be invited to a future meeting.

The next section referred to Property Rental. Councillor Johnson asked for details of when the Property Review would be complete. The Committee and Scrutiny Officer advised that she would contact the Head of Legal and Property Services.

3. What services are commissioned by other bodies?

This section set out those areas which were not the responsibility of the Council.

Councillor Brandon commented that although the areas set out in the report were not the responsibility of the District Council, if funding was cut by another body, for example the County Council, this could have a direct impact on services users in Watford.

Councillor Johnson responded that the Council's budget was finite and it was not possible to pick up those who had lost their funding from other bodies.

The Head of Community Services stated that the Council did not have the data, knowledge or expertise to challenge the commissioning decisions of other commissioning bodies but that the way those decisions could be challenged was to ensure that equality impact analyses had been properly carried out by those bodies.

4. What services should Watford Borough Council be funding the Voluntary and Community Sector to provide as a priority from 1 April 2013 and beyond?

The Head of Community Services commented that the important aspect here was to consider what services needed to be delivered and not to focus on individual organisations.

5. What evidence is there that demonstrates the need for these services to be commissioned?

The Head of Community Services referred Members to section 5 in the discussion paper which set out the evidence base demonstrating the need for specific services.

The Head of Community Services acknowledged that Members were interested in the true cost of funding the Palace Theatre, what the Council received in return and the future sustainability of the theatre.

The Head of Community Services advised that if Members had any issues or information requests about the Colosseum contract they needed to contact the Culture and Community Section Head. She reminded Members that the Colosseum contract was not covered by the framework as it was not awarded to a voluntary or community sector organisation.

The Head of Community Services responded to a question about the Purple Flag assessment. The assessment had considered the night time economy of the town and that there was more to offer than pubs and bars, for example the Palace Theatre and the Colosseum.

Councillor Johnson suggested that the advice services sector might be an area that needed more funding in light of the current economic climate.

The Head of Community Services confirmed that Watford Citizens Advice Bureau collated data on the demographics and BME figures related to users of the service. The organisation had been asked to carry out additional work in relation to the community in West Watford following the Council no longer funding the Watford Muslim Community Project.

Following a question from Councillor Brandon, the Head of Community Services advised that access for disabled people related to access to premises and how they moved around once they were in the Town Centre rather than public transport.

6. What can the council afford to fund?

The Head of Community Services asked Members to consider the Council's priorities in the future.

Following a question from the Chair about the three-year programme, the Head of Community Services stated that consideration would need to be given to the length of time funding was granted and whether a sliding scale should be introduced. She confirmed that organisations were currently reviewed throughout the funding period.

Key questions for debate at scrutiny

The Head of Community Services suggested that there were four key questions for Members to consider.

Councillor Martins said that the order of priority he would suggest would be –

1. Infrastructure and support to the voluntary and community sector
2. Advice services
3. Disability – integration into the community
4. Arts and culture / Sports and leisure including Community Centres

He suggested that the Task Group needed to invite a representative from the CVS as they would be able to provide a broad view of the voluntary sector.

Councillor Johnson said that the Portfolio Holder would be welcome to attend the Task Group's meetings as an observer.

It was agreed that the requested documents needed to be circulated to the Task Group to enable Members to decide on the way forward.

The Head of Community Services said that she had recognised that Members wanted one meeting to discuss technical issues including property matters and business rates. This could be programmed in to a meeting in July. Once Members had received the requested documents further questions might arise which could be covered at the next meeting. In addition Members would be able to decide on the questions they wished to ask the representative from the CVS so that a briefing note could be prepared and an invitation to attend a meeting in July could be sent.

Councillor Johnson said that it was important that the representative was not asked the same questions as at the previous review.

Dates of next meetings

Tuesday 19 June at 6.30 pm

Wednesday 11 July at 6.30 pm

ACTION: Committee and Scrutiny Support Officer and Commissioning Manager

Chair
Voluntary and Community Sector Commissioning Framework
Task Group

The meeting started at 6.30 p.m.
and finished at 8.10 p.m.

VOLUNTARY AND COMMUNITY SECTOR COMMISSIONING FRAMEWORK TASK GROUP

19 June 2012

Present: Councillor Aron (Chair)
Councillors Brandon, Greenslade, Johnson, Joynes and Martins

Officer: Head of Community Services
Culture and Community Section Head
Commissioning Manager
Committee and Scrutiny Officer

6. **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE/COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Crout, the Portfolio Holder for Leisure and Community Services.

7. **MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING**

The minutes of the meeting held on 24 May 2012 were submitted and signed.

8. **REVIEW OF BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS**

Following the previous meeting the Task Group was provided with the following background documents which had been requested –

- Cabinet report (Review of three year grant funding programme to achieve savings) and relevant extract of the minutes from the meeting held on 5 December 2011
- Support for the Voluntary Sector Task Group's final report
- Details of the matters to be addressed by the Council for Voluntary Service (CVS) at the Support for the Voluntary Sector Task Group
- Grant Funding application form 2010-2013 and guidance notes
- Service Level Agreement template
- Service Specification template
- Voluntary Sector Funding Budget Table 2012/13

Cabinet – 5 December 2011

The Head of Community Services explained the Cabinet report and confirmed that the Mayor's Fund had been amalgamated with the Annual Fund and now called The Small Grants Fund. If residents or groups approached the Mayor for a grant they were referred to Community Services and then advised to make an application to the Small Grants Fund. It was confirmed that this information was available on the Council's website and the CVS's website.

Support for the Voluntary Sector Task Group's Recommendations

The Head of Community Services updated the Task Group on the progress

since the recommendations had been presented to Cabinet.

3.1 – Joint funding with Three Rivers District Council for cross boundary organisations

The Head of Community Services explained that officers had discussed this matter with officers at Three Rivers. It had been decided that if there were any groups affected they would be discussed by the two authorities. Following a question about other local authorities, the Head of Community Services explained that generally the groups tended to be Watford and Three Rivers focussed where they covered residents across the boundaries. She advised that the Council did not fund the parts which were not related to Watford. Organisations were advised to contact other authorities for funding. For example if the client base comprised 80% Watford residents, the Council would not fund 100% of the bid.

3.2 – Grant funded organisations encouraged to share resources

The Head of Community Services informed the Task Group that organisations were actively encouraged to share resources. There were examples of collaborative work.

Councillor Brandon said that he would want to ensure that any specialist skills were not lost.

Following a number of questions and comments about the Commissioning Framework, the Head of Community Services stated that clear priorities were proposed and set out and that the resources were limited. Consultation would provide feedback on the proposals and summarised for Cabinet. There were five key emerging priorities. Officers would consider which organisations would be best placed to deliver the required service having followed the Commissioning process outlined in the framework. Applicants would need to show value for money and that they were cost effective.

The Head of Community Services advised that the County Council had a wider remit than Watford and it took a similar approach to commissioning. It was becoming more common practice.

The Head of Community Services said that organisations could apply to as many funding streams as they could access.

The Head of Community Services provided a brief comment on each of the other recommendations.

Service Level Agreement

The Head of Community Services informed the Task Group that the example provided in the pack referred to the current three-year funding programme. A more refined version would be introduced for the new process and it would be more effective for monitoring purposes.

Following a question about the previous Task Group's recommendation of a

rolling grant programme, the Head of Community Services responded that successful groups would be awarded funding for the length of time it was felt appropriate to deliver the required service.

Councillor Greenslade referred to the Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) and her concerns about accessibility for disabled people. She suggested that a monthly session could be held at the Town Hall.

The Head of Community Services advised that if the organisation was awarded funding it could be specified that it provided a service which was accessible and culturally sensitive

9. **COMMISSIONING FRAMEWORK CONSULTATION**

The Task Group was provided with the latest version of the draft Commissioning Framework. Members were asked to forward their comments to officers by Thursday 21 June. The key points for Members' consideration were sections 8.0 and 9.0. The draft document would be circulated to stakeholder organisations and Council partners; it would be placed on the Council's website and the CVS' website. The consultation would take place between 25 June and 10 September. Drop-in session would be arranged. Organisations would be asked to forward the letter and details about the draft Framework to other interested parties.

Following a question from Councillor Brandon about stakeholders the Head of Community Services agreed to circulate the list once it had been compiled.

ACTION: Community Services

The Head of Community Services informed the Task Group that officers would gather the responses and would be presented to the Task Group at its September meeting. This would provide sufficient time to feed comments into the report for Cabinet.

Councillor Brandon suggested that the framework should include reference to those organisations which were currently funded by the Council.

The Head of Community Services replied that it had been felt it might be confusing if this information was contained in the body of the report. Officers would ensure that the accompanying letter was clear and firmly state that the document was in draft format.

The Head of Community Services advised that officers had deliberately not set funding rates in the document, as availability of funding was dependent on the annual budget settlement. The funding available would be continually reviewed.

There were questions about the Palace Theatre. The Head of Community Services explained that as part of the Council's funding the theatre would be specifically required to demonstrate that they undertook work with the community and young people..

Councillor Brandon noted section 8.0 and commented that it appeared that officers had already made a decision.

The Head of Community Services proposed that it was made clear throughout the document that it was a draft and part of the consultation. She asked Members to email the Culture and Community Section Head their suggestions. She added that officers would decide on the final version to be published for consultation.

Councillor Johnson asked whether it was necessary to include the phrase 'and associated Big Society initiative.' on page 11 of the document.

The Head of Community Services confirmed that this phrase would be removed.

ACTION: Community Services

10. **PREPARATION FOR FUTURE MEETINGS**

Councillor Martins requested that the Chief Executive of the CVS be asked to bring a representative of an organisation with him.

The Head of Community Services circulated a list of proposed questions for the Chief Executive from the CVS. She advised that she would add the points Members had made about cross boundary issues and to bring a representative from a non-funded organisation with him.

The Task Groups agreed the following dates and subjects for the meetings –

- Monday 16 July at 6.00 pm – Meeting with Chief Executive from the CVS
- Monday 13 August at 6.00 pm – Representatives from Property Services and Finance
- Wednesday 5 September at 6.00 pm – Consultation feedback

Chair
Voluntary and Community Sector Commissioning Framework
Task Group

The meeting started at 6.30 p.m.
and finished at 7.45 p.m.

VOLUNTARY AND COMMUNITY SECTOR COMMISSIONING FRAMEWORK TASK GROUP

13 August 2012

- Present: Councillor Aron (Chair)
Councillors Brandon, Greenslade, Johnson and Joynes
Councillor Martins (for minute numbers 11 – 14)
- Also Present: Councillor Crout (Portfolio Holder for Leisure and Community Services)
Councillor Connal
Bob Jones, Chief Executive Officer of the Watford Community Voluntary Service (for minute numbers 11 – 13)
- Officers: Head of Community Services
Head of Legal and Property Services
Culture and Community Section Head
Property Manager
Committee and Scrutiny Support Officer (RW)

11. **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

No apologies were received

12. **MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING**

The minutes of the meeting held on 19 June 2012 were submitted and signed.

13. **BRIEFING BY CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER (CEO) OF WATFORD COUNCIL FOR VOLUNTARY SERVICES**

The Head of Community Services asked the Chief Executive Officer of the Watford Council for Voluntary Services (WCVS) to respond to the Task Group's questions.

1. What is the size and scope of Watford's Voluntary Community Sector (VCS)?
 - a) How many organisations does it comprise?

Bob Jones explained that it was difficult to define the 'Voluntary Sector' as it comprised many parts of civil society. There were, however, 500 'general charities' providing services although not all were based in Watford. Of these charities, approximately 200 held WCVS membership and about 150 were Watford-based registered charities. The total turnover of these organisations was approximately £25,000,000 with assets of approximately £30,000,000.

b) What different types of organisations are there?

Organisations included employee-based businesses and co-operatives but not housing trusts or religious organisations.

c) How does the VCS sector compare with other similar towns?

This was a difficult answer to quantify. Some authorities considered that there was more need in rural than urban communities whilst other authorities felt that the opposite was true. Bob Jones was of the opinion that Watford was consistently better served by its voluntary sector than other towns in similar situations.

2. How is the sector being impacted on by the current economic and political situation both locally and nationally?

Nationally, cuts in funding had not yet significantly affected organisations. The forecast, however, indicated that the year 2011 – 2012 marked the beginning of progressively greater cuts to voluntary sector funding in each of the succeeding four years. Some groups in Watford were already struggling to meet costs as they were working within very fine margins.

3. Are organisations changing their ways and starting to be more collaborative and willing to share resources, jointly purchase items and services and provide services collectively?

Bob Jones confirmed that the majority of charities were always keen to work in partnership and there were local examples of collaboration with other organisations.

4. Are there any examples of this happening locally?

Examples in Watford included: Guideposts/Watford Asian Community Care working together on a research project, the Relate merger and the YMCA offering support with property maintenance. The WCVS had supported many initiatives although more work could be achieved in this area.

5. What alternative funding streams are out there both nationally and locally?

There had been alternative methods of funding. These included:

- i) trust funds although these had been increasingly stretched by continuing requests
- ii) the National Lottery
- iii) Herts Community Foundation had also been of significant assistance although this was not seen as a long-term option.

Consideration had also been given to income generation to include charging for services and local community fundraising.

6. What successes have local CVS groups had in accessing funding streams both with and without the support of the CVS Funding Officer?

Other local groups, e.g. Mencap, had accessed funding without CVS assistance. It was noted that some organisations had considerable difficulty raising money whilst others, notably animal based, were very well supported by outside help.

7. Do you have information on the success of funding bids that have been supported by the CVS Funding Officer e.g. number of organisations assisted, amount raised, from whom etc.?

During the five years ending in 2011 – 2012, the WCVS Funding Advisor had helped to raise an average yearly income of over £230,000. Bob Jones advised that although it was noted that some of this money would have been raised without support from the Advisor, those applications supported by the WCVS were twice as likely to receive funding. Amongst groups surveyed in Watford, 63% secured support with assistance from WCVS and 93% of groups were satisfied with WCVS help.

8. What are the key support functions needed to support the sector to thrive and be sustainable?

Necessary support functions included access to a range of networks to share and exchange information and skills; it was hoped that online access would be made available. The CVS worked with charities offering specialist advice and guidance in areas such as governance, legal issues, insurance queries and fundraising support.

9. What are the three main areas of support that community led organisations have been provided with by the CVS over the last two years?

Areas of support were referred to in the previous question. In addition, information, representation and links to local decision-making had been offered.

10. Does the CVS provide support to organisations who request it but who are not members and if yes how many have received support over the last two years?

Support was not offered to organisations who were not members. Bob Jones stressed, however, that joining the CVS was very easy and free.

11. At an earlier task group issues were raised about the opportunities for working with Three Rivers on cross boundary funding but this has not proved possible. Are there any views as to why this has not been achievable?

The WCVS had worked with their Three Rivers colleagues in the past but it was noted that the CVS for Three Rivers would be closing within the following three months. Bob Jones said that little funding had been forthcoming from

Three Rivers Council but that the CVS had received support from the National Lottery.

Watford CVS would not work on cross-boundary funding but would continue to support Watford charities.

In reply to a question from Councillor Martins, with regard to the proposed Watford Community Trust, Bob Jones said that it was hoped that under the trust scheme, charities would become more financially independent. It was anticipated that the launch of the new trust would be during March 2013. There were plans to work with companies to encourage fundraising through direct debit and payroll methods in order that charities should not be as dependent on financial support from Watford Borough Council. The new trust also planned to introduce onto its Board representatives from the business community.

Councillor Joynes asked how flexible the trust was likely to be.

Bob Jones replied that to join the CVS was free and that with 200 member organisations, Watford CVS had the highest membership in the county. A total of 300 charities were based outside Watford but were active within the town. A current project encompassed a scheme whereby charities throughout Hertfordshire could access support whilst another scheme hoped to define the needs of the organisations e.g. IT or management information systems.

Councillor Johnson referred to a previous initiative by the CVS whereby they had shared services with other agencies and asked how this had progressed. He also noted that Three Rivers charities appeared to be managing without support and asked why this was not possible in Watford.

Bob Jones responded that some progress had been made in the area of partnership working. He added that IT services were provided at the Holywell Community Centre and more schemes were being investigated in the arena of sharing office systems. Funding had been established for a 'market place' for obtaining a variety of services.

Bob Jones said that although charities could survive without the CVS it should be acknowledged that the voluntary sector was frequently at the heart of a successful community. He added that there was less activity of this nature in Three Rivers than in Watford.

Councillor Martins raised the issue of match funding and asked whether this would be an option to pursue.

Bob Jones advised that match funding could be a possibility for some groups in relation to smaller grant provision but added that clear goals would need to be established. In relation to commissioning services however the expectation was that funders would provide sufficient funding to enable the service commissioned to be delivered without giving a competitive disadvantage to the voluntary sector by expecting them to provide match funding.

14. **LEASING ARRANGEMENTS FOR NOT-FOR-PROFIT ORGANISATIONS**

The Property Manager tabled a list of Council properties used by charities, community and voluntary organisations. The list provided details of the leasing arrangements for these organisations.

The Property Manager then explained methods of letting for voluntary service organisations.

Councillor Brandon noted that peppercorn rents were granted to some organisations who were able to charge for their services whilst other groups paid higher rents. He asked for an explanation of this approach.

The Head of Legal and Property explained the method of charging in the case of the Palace Theatre. She advised that originally the full market rent had been charged. The theatre had then invested heavily in refurbishment work to the building resulting in an extensive renovation. In recognition of this, the Council had agreed to charge only a peppercorn rent.

The Head of Legal and Property advised that there had been other properties which the tenants had refurbished and that these had also been granted low rents. She added that some organisations' rent was paid by grants.

Councillor Johnson asked what income could be generated were the organisations not charged low rents.

The Head of Legal and Property replied that in most cases, market rents were charged. She noted as an example, however, that the Citizens' Advice Bureau had a covenant within the lease which allowed use solely for community groups and as an advice centre. This would consequently restrict value to other users on the open market. She further explained that other buildings in a poor state of repair had a limited appeal on the open market. Groups in these buildings were charged a low rent or granted a limited rent-free period of occupancy.

In reply to a question from Councillor Johnson, the Head of Community Services advised that the sum of £1.6 million proposed for Council support could need readjustment in the final version of the Commissioning Framework document.

Councillor Brandon suggested that both sides of the equation in terms of income and spending needed to be considered.

The Head of Community Services advised that information on property implications was included in the accounting data but not in the framework.

The Head of Legal and Property noted that information on the cost of the Palace Theatre renovations were available. She added that with regard to community centres, the charges were counterbalanced by the services provided on behalf of the Council.

The Head of Community Services advised that in general it was difficult to quantify savings although calculations could be made for Community Centres.

ACTION: Officers to adjust the final version of the Commissioning Framework to clarify the property-related issues discussed.

The Property Manager advised that considerable sums had been expended by the tenant at Watford House Lane. Consequently the Council no longer had maintenance costs for this building.

Councillor Johnson noted that the Watford CVS had moved from the property it had formerly occupied.

The Head of Legal and Property agreed that this was generating a saving as a consequence and advised that investment had been made in the Holywell area where a building had been made available for this use by the CVS.

The Head of Community Services added that savings had also been made in running costs.

15. **N.N.D.R. BUSINESS RATE RELIEF**

The Head of Community Services advised the meeting on issues concerning National Non-Domestic Rates relief. She explained that business rates were currently the subject of a change in government policy in the form of Business Rate Retention and added that this would impact on the income that Watford Borough Council would receive through the rating system. She gave details of the three types of rate relief for charities and not-for-profit organisations.

1. Mandatory Relief: Relief of 80% of non-domestic rate was awarded. The Council was then reimbursed from the National Non-Domestic Rates 'pool'. 55 awards were made in 2012 – 2013.
2. Discretionary Rate Relief: 'Top-up' relief was available of 80% although this could be increased to 100%. In effect only 75% relief would be awarded. Eight awards were granted in 2012 – 2013.
3. Mandatory Relief with additional Discretionary Relief: Relief of an additional 20% could be granted to charitable organisations already in receipt of Mandatory Relief. 61 awards were made in 2012 – 2013.

As a result of the change in government policy the review of rate relief would not now align with the Commissioning Framework and would be undertaken by Finance at a later date. The final document would be adjusted to reflect this.

16. **TASK GROUP DISCUSSION ON OUTCOME**

Members of the Committee discussed priorities for funding a variety of organisations and social needs.

The Head of Community Services advised that it would be necessary to consider what was possible with the funding available. She noted that domestic violence was an area of concern. Officers would investigate the evidence base for this concern and examine the commissioning responsibilities of Hertfordshire County Council and the Community Safety Partnership. The findings would be presented at the next meeting. She added that recommendations must illustrate separation of the funding streams; priorities would need to be identified.

ACTION: The Head of Community Services to incorporate this into the report on consultation feedback to the next meeting on 5 September 2012.

Chair
Voluntary and Community Sector Commissioning
Framework Task Group

The meeting started at 6.00 p.m.
and finished at 7.50 p.m.

VOLUNTARY AND COMMUNITY SECTOR COMMISSIONING FRAMEWORK TASK GROUP

5 September 2012

Present: Councillor Aron (Chair)
Councillors Brandon, Greenslade, Johnson (for items 19 and 20),
Joynes and Martins

Also Present: Councillor Connal
Councillor Khan (minute number 19)

Officers: Head of Community Services
Culture and Community Section Head
Commissioning Manager
Committee and Scrutiny Officer (minute numbers 19 and 20)
Committee and Scrutiny Support Officer (RW)

17. **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

No apologies were received

18. **MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING**

The minutes of the meeting held on 13 August 2012 were submitted and signed.

19. **FEEDBACK ON THE CONSULTATION SO FAR**

The Head of Community Services tabled a paper detailing feedback from the consultation. She advised that 51 responses had been received through Survey Monkey and several more through one-to-one consultation, letters and emails. She noted that the consultation was not due to end until 10 September.

Although only 42 percent of respondents considered that the current priorities should continue to be supported, there was significant 'lobbying' for particular groups and interests to be added to the list of priorities rather than for existing priorities to be ceased.

It was noticeable that respondents were keen to see the continuance of small grant provision although opinion on which groups should benefit was divided.

Commissioning Framework Document

The survey had indicated that the document should be easier to read and to comprehend. The Head of Community Services said that a summary 'easy read' document would be produced. In reply to a question from Councillor Brandon, she advised that research had been undertaken into ways of making the documents more accessible for a variety of users. She noted,

however, that it was important to balance accessibility with the large quantity of information to be disseminated.

Funding

One respondent had disagreed that the current system created a dependency culture but these were the findings of the previous Scrutiny Task Group. It was also noted that the three-year grant funding programme caused service users to see the ending of the funding programme as a withdrawal of funding which therefore reinforced the conclusion that this created dependency.

Councillor Martins agreed that a dependency culture was created and that consequently it would be wise to consider the case for match funding in order to help eliminate this dependency. Replies within the survey had noted that many organisations which received Council grants were then enabled to increase the match funding from other sources.

Responses had indicated that some organisations would not survive without core funding from the Council; the Head of Community Services agreed that this was a correct assessment but pointed out that sufficient funding was not available for all applications.

Flexibility was required in the award of grants to take account of new priorities as they might arise in the future; the Head of Community Services explained how a move to direct commissioning of services paid by a grant, would improve the flexibility as opposed to continuing a grant bidding process.

Councillor Joynes advised that it was imperative to provide a support network for voluntary organisations.

The Head of Community Services agreed that the infrastructure was important to the whole voluntary sector in order that support could be given to a number of groups and that was why infrastructure support was one of the key priorities.

Commissioning Approach

The Head of Community Services noted that the effectiveness of the new commissioning approach would be monitored through Service Level Agreements (SLAs). She added that a clearer explanation of evidence of priorities could be included within the commissioning framework document. Replies to the survey had indicated that sharing of premises or staff could be effected in order to maximise available resources. The Head of Community Services advised that in some cases this could be inappropriate although evidence of collaboration would be encouraged as part of the commissioning process.

Priorities

Members discussed the priorities as itemised within the survey responses:

Disability:

Councillor Johnson noted that Watford Borough Council (WBC) had relatively modest financial resources available whilst Herts. County Council (HCC) had a considerably greater amount. He noted that it was possible that WBC was providing services for which HCC should be responsible.

The Head of Community Services agreed that this was a valid point and that district councils should be commissioning services where they are the primary commissioner. But where the Council was commissioning services the providers would be required to address the needs of those with additional requirements such as disability and language issues.

Arts/Culture:

Members considered that it was important to reach residents from all backgrounds.

Advice Services and Infrastructure:

Members noted that the volunteer bureau in the Three Rivers District Council would be closing. The meeting discussed the 'time-banking' system used by the Watford Council for Voluntary Services and noted that volunteer centres were expensive to run.

Sport:

The Head of Community Services noted that disabled and 'hard to reach' groups had been targeted as a priority for enabling access to sporting facilities.

Health and Social Deprivation:

Members recognised that these issues were primarily the responsibility of the health and social care agencies to commission. There was, however, WBC involvement in this area, particularly through partnership working and through issues such as housing. Some Members said that social deprivation should be accorded greater priority than Arts and Culture.

The Head of Community Services pointed out that the Council had a statutory duty to provide assistance with housing problems. Also it was important to be clear on the definition of social deprivation and whether there was any evidence that the district council had responsibility to provide services that tackled this. The mapping of council-owned community centres had identified that the areas of greatest social deprivation were being covered by those facilities being provided, from which services to support the local community need could be based.

Community Centres:

The Head of Community Services advised that the community centres had been asked to work with the local communities to identify the needs of local residents. She explained that whilst the Council did not run the centres, the SLAs could require that the centres should act as vehicles to support individuals in their areas.

In reply to a question from Councillor Johnson, the Head of Community Services advised that the centres were mainly in areas of social deprivation on large housing estates. She added that the centres had been geographically mapped and were all appropriately placed although one 'gap' in the market had been identified.

The Committee and Scrutiny Officer suggested that Members should see the mapping before the next Cabinet meeting.

Domestic Abuse Services:

Respondents on the survey had considered that Domestic Abuse should be included within the priorities.

The Head of Community Services pointed out that responsibility in this area was the remit, locally, of the Community Safety Partnership and, at County level, through the Police and Herts CC. She added, however, that early intervention could take pressure from these agencies. Currently, intervention and assistance was dealt with through HCC and Children's Services. A meeting would be held with the Community Safety Manager to identify more detail on the current situation with commissioning services to support victims of domestic abuse. Current investigation with HCC commissioners had indicated that services for men suffering domestic abuse was a current gap. A specific report addressing the consultation feedback would be incorporated into the report to Cabinet.

Small Grants

The meeting discussed how small grants should be deployed.

It was noted that grants had historically been provided through two funds: the Mayor's Fund and the Annual Fund both of which had £50,000 available. In response to a question it was confirmed that the Mayor's fund had always been fully spent but the annual fund had been occasionally underspent. During the previous year the two funds had been combined into one Small Grants Fund which all Members could encourage groups to apply for. The budget for the combined fund had been reduced to £50,000. The Head of Community Services said that if small grants were retained there must be clarity on what the Council hoped to achieve through it; she asked Members whether they felt that the criteria needed to be clearer.

Members noted that small grants were useful as additional funding in the short term; to continue a group's existence where it would otherwise have to close or to make the group more sustainable in the longer term. Some Members felt that small grants should not be used for running costs but for specific projects.

The Committee and Scrutiny Officer suggested that the small grants be maintained for two years and then monitored to evaluate whether they should be continued.

The Head of Community Services advised that the survey had shown that respondents felt that there was a need for small grants. She explained that criteria for application must show what could be achieved. She added that it would be easier to appeal to groups if the criteria were clear and suggested that grants could be project-based or as a 'save to invest' approach to keep a group running.

Priorities

In reply to questions from Members, the Head of Community Services advised that there was a limit of £2,000 for individual small grants and that the application process was easy.

Checks to ensure that the grants had been used appropriately included: submission of receipts, reports on spending, an 'outcome' form and occasionally visits from the Mayor or a Portfolio Holder. It was also explained that the decision to award a grant was delegated to Portfolio Holders.

Members agreed that monitoring should continue.

20.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS FROM THE REVIEW**Small Grants Fund**

Members agreed that

- a Small Grants Fund should be continued
- a limit of £2,000 for individual small grants and £50,000 in the total grants fund was appropriate
- the criteria should include supporting small groups to undertake projects
- the criteria should include supporting groups to continue by an "invest to save" approach.
- the application process should encourage identification of match funding

Priorities

The six priorities consulted on in the Commissioning Framework document were:

Infrastructure support to the voluntary and community sector, enabling people with physical mobility problems to access services in the town centre, advice service, arts and culture, community centres and sport.

Infrastructure Support to the Voluntary and Community Sector

It was agreed this was important and required to support a range of organisations to be sustainable and that the principle of 'time-banking' be promoted.

Enabling people with Physical Mobility Problems

Some Members considered that disabilities other than physical mobility problems should be included and that accessibility should include all buildings in the town not only the centre.

The Head of Community Services pointed out that it was important to specify the town centre as many services were delivered in this area. She added that 'Shop Mobility' undertook this service; if there was insufficient funding no other organisation would be able to step into the breach. She advised that evidence had been considered which had proved that there was a decided need for this service.

Councillor Brandon asked whether another agency could take on this responsibility and added that he considered that HCC should partly fund the service.

The Head of Community Services advised that this service priority related to enabling access to a broad range of town centre services including those provided by the Council and its partners. It could therefore be argued that this was the responsibility in commissioning terms of the district council rather than the county.

Councillor Johnson expressed his concerns regarding accessibility to community centres. He asked how people who were unable to access these centres were assisted.

The Head of Community Services explained that all centres should be DDA compliant and consequently accessible for local residents; she added that where residents were house-bound their mobility was the responsibility of HCC as were transport issues generally.

The Chair asked the meeting to consider whether the phrase 'physical mobility' should be changed to 'disabilities' and 'town centre' to another option.

Members decided that the term 'physical mobility' was the optimum term as this offered a clear criterion for service commissioning.

The Head of Community Services advised that were the service to be extended beyond the town centre there would be considerable cost implications and that there was no evidence of need. It was agreed that the wording of the priority would be retained.

Advice Services

It was agreed this was an important priority through which social deprivation would be identified and helped. There was a need to ensure commissioned services were accessible to all and would take account of culture and language needs, disability access and tackling the debt and economic impacts that the current situation was creating.

Art and Culture

Members agreed that information should be obtained and circulated to them from the Palace Theatre on how they had benefited the community.

The Head of Community Services advised that dance, Black History events and a diverse film programme had been included in the Palace programme; Members noted that Watford Museum had also provided a considerable number of events for the community.

The Committee and Scrutiny Officer suggested that 'outreach into the community' should be incorporated into the SLA.

Councillor Martins suggested that he would rather see less funding given to Arts and Culture and more given to other priorities.

Community Centres

Councillor Greenslade advised that these centres should be the 'hub' of the local community. She agreed that joint working with art and culture organisations should be included in the SLAs for community centres.

Sport

Members agreed that sporting facilities should be available for all residents and that groups who were currently non-participants should be targeted.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. that priority areas for grant funding should be:
 - Infrastructure support to the voluntary and community sector
 - Enabling people with physical mobility problems to access services in the town centre
 - Advice Services
 - Arts and Culture
 - Community Centres
 - Sport
2. that the total small grant fund should be £50,000
3. that the limit for individual small grants should be £2,000
4. that the criteria should include projects and invest to save
5. that the process for applications should encourage match funding.

Chair
Voluntary and Community Sector Commissioning
Framework Task Group

The meeting started at 6.00 p.m.
and finished at 8.20 p.m.