

Watford Borough Council

Voluntary Sector Commissioning
Framework (2024 - 2028)

DRAFT

Introduction

Watford Borough Council (WBC) recognises the range of skills and experience offered by the town's voluntary and community sector (VCS) organisations. This means they are often best placed to deliver vital support and activities for local people. Our Voluntary Sector Commissioning Framework sets out our approach and key principles to commissioning services from the VCS which respond to our community's needs and deliver a range of community, socio-economic and cultural benefits.

The term Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) applies to organisations that are not-for-profit, social value driven and that reinvest their financial profits into social, environmental or cultural objectives. The groups that make up this sector are as varied as the services and activities they offer. They can range from small, volunteer driven organisations to large organisations, with links to national agencies.

Watford has a rich history of widespread community activity that adds value to the quality of lives of our residents and their neighbourhoods. Supporting this activity is a vibrant and engaged VCS, delivering high quality and value for money services that benefit those who live, work and visit Watford.

Watford's diverse and vibrant VCS played an integral role in supporting the borough's response to, and recovery from, the Covid-19 pandemic. The pandemic brought forward a new cohort of voluntary and community groups that demonstrated a shared commitment to delivering positive outcomes, particularly to vulnerable people in the town. It also highlighted the opportunities of new ways of delivering services and the different approaches taken by all partners who increased or changed their service offering during the Covid-19 response.

It is recognised that many VCS organisations do not receive funding directly from this framework but collaborate closely with the organisations commissioned within and with the Council. The priorities set out in this framework take this into consideration, seeking to deliver benefits not just to service users of the commissioned organisations but more broadly to deliver support, improve collaboration and to foster inclusive working across the VCS.

To ensure the commissioning model and priorities are fit for purpose and responsive to future need, we have reviewed and refreshed our Commissioning Framework 2019-2023. This iteration of the framework, therefore, is an extension of the fourth commissioning framework approved by WBC. Informed by comprehensive research and engagement and aligned to the aims of our Council Plan 2022-26 and Community Engagement and Participation Strategy 2023-26, it sets out a shared set of priorities, principles, responsibilities and expectations for all stakeholders.

What is commissioning?

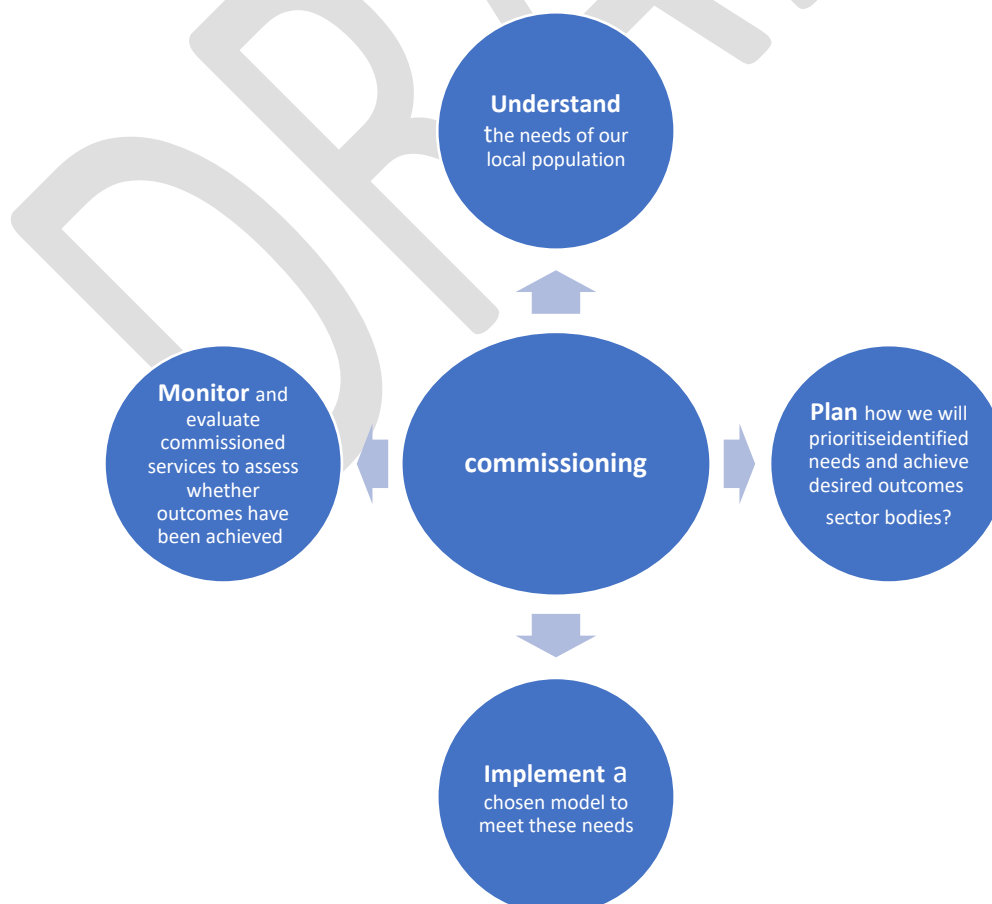
There are many definitions of commissioning, but, for the purpose of this framework, we are using:

Commissioning is the process for ensuring that quality services meeting the identified priority needs of the community are provided by the best placed organisation to do so at an affordable cost to the council

The VCS is a key partner in transforming local services and forging new relationships between the council and local residents. Voluntary organisations are well positioned to respond to the challenges ahead – notably to develop services for prevention and early intervention and to build capacity within local communities to promote resilience and make improved outcomes sustainable.

When we commission the sector to deliver services on behalf of the council, the following four point commissioning framework will be applied:

1. **Understand** the needs of our local population
2. **Plan** how we will prioritise identified needs and achieve desired outcomes
3. **Implement** a chosen model to meet these needs
4. **Monitor** and evaluate commissioned services to assess whether outcomes have been achieved



Priorities and evidence of community need

To guarantee our commissioning model and priorities are fit for purpose and responsive to future need, the council and its partners explored a wealth of rich insights into our community, services and the aspirations of our Elected Mayor. Continually building on this knowledge is crucial to effective commissioning and a key part of the “community needs analysis” stage of the commission cycle.

This framework has been informed by evidence-based research and engagement including but not limited to the following:

- **Local needs**- based on demographic and socioeconomic and qualitative insights about our communities.
- **Local priorities**- based on the political direction set out by our Elected Mayor, and in line with feedback from our residents and partners.
- **Existing provision**- review of the existing service level agreements and key performance indicators of the commissioned organisations over the previous four years.
- **Opportunities for development**- based on national and emerging trends, best practice inside and outside of the council and current service delivery and offers.

The research and engagement undertaken has found that the existing priorities and commissioned organisations identified in the previous framework, 2019-2023, continue to align with the current and future needs of the community and our Council Plan commitments.

The commissioning priorities and organisations for this framework will remain as:

- **Infrastructure support to the voluntary and community sector**

We will continue to support and strengthen the voluntary and community sector in Watford, developing and supporting the local voluntary sector infrastructure. This service will be delivered by Watford and Three Rivers Trust (W3RT) who have extensive networks across the voluntary, statutory and business sectors within the town and beyond.

- **Advice and support services**

We will continue to support a universal advice service, which can provide detailed and expert advice and support for Watford’s diverse community and, particularly, our vulnerable residents. This service will be delivered by Watford Citizens Advice, who have a proven track record in the advice and support sector and who we will work closely with to address and respond to any emerging national issues, legislative or policy changes that may impact local people.

- **Support services for families**

We will continue to provide targeted support for families, to help parents cope with the many difficulties life can bring ensuring that they have the skills, confidence and strength they need to nurture their young children. This service will be commissioned by Home Start Watford and Three Rivers, whose trained volunteers will continue to provide early intervention by supporting families in a variety of emotional and practical ways.

- **Mobility services**

We will continue to support services that allow independence and enhanced living for anyone with limited mobility, whether it be temporary or permanent. This service will continue to be commissioned to Shopmobility Watford who have the experience and infrastructure to deliver a range of mobility services to ensure that our town centre and all its associated services, and retail outlets remain accessible to people with limited mobility.

- **Arts and culture**

We will continue to support access to arts and culture ensuring that is accessible for all of its residents. Watford Palace Theatre and the Pump House Theatres will be commissioned to deliver arts and culture services through a range of theatre productions and performances, projects and outreach programmes that bring people together and support the health and wellbeing of people of all ages and backgrounds.

- **Community centre provision**

We will continue to support the management of four council owned community centres across the town to provide a programme of activities designed to meet the needs of the community they serve. The following centres will continue to be commissioned by:

- Holywell Community Centre- Watford and Three Rivers Trust (W3RT)
- Orbital Community Centre- One YMCA
- Meriden Community Centre - Watford FC Community Sports & Education Trust
- West Watford Community Centre- West Watford Community Association

Principles and expected outcomes

Directly commissioned providers will work to the following set of principles, which align with the themes and commitments identified in the Council Plan 2022-26.



The principles, have been informed by reviewing the existing framework and analysing the current and future needs of the community, to guarantee the activities and services provided reflect the needs of our residents, as identified in our commissioning model.

The council will work with directly commissioned providers to ensure the outcomes they deliver meet these principles.

The defined deliverables demonstrate the expected outcomes for funding and offer a structure for measuring impact alongside bespoke Service Level agreements and Key Performance Indicators:

Principle 1: Community Cohesion

Deliverables

- ✓ Provide our residents with accessible advice and support services, training and education, art, culture, leisure and wellbeing opportunities to build healthier, more resilient and connected communities.
- ✓ Provide spaces and programmes that promote neighbourliness and activities for all ages and interests.
- ✓ Seek opportunities to work in partnership with community and voluntary organisations to harness corporate social responsibility.

Principle 2: Enable opportunities

Deliverables

- ✓ Address inequalities, focusing on those in greatest need
- ✓ Support community-based models of prevention, self-help and early intervention activities which help build resilience, improve quality of life by reducing the negative impacts of poverty, disability and ill-health.
- ✓ Support strategic partners to identify and connect with groups within our community who are not yet known to us.
- ✓ Value the work of grassroots organisations, recognising and enabling their contribution to our shared outcomes
- ✓ Make best use of technology to deliver more effective and efficient solutions

Principle 3: Community capacity and Impact

Deliverables

- ✓ Provide access to information, advice and tools to build capacity, where volunteering is promoted and developed, and communities are supported and empowered to find their own solutions.
- ✓ Support greater partnership working and co-production, working collaboratively with the voluntary and community sector to address long term challenges.
- ✓ Encourage our commissioned organisations to support each other, promoting best practice, sharing of skills and a space for strategic conversations
- ✓ Commission projects via existing funding streams that seek to broaden engagement and improve participation from hard-to-reach groups
- ✓ Diversify income sources to best meet community need
- ✓ Assess delivery and outcomes in terms of social value and the most efficient use of public money

Principle 4: Environmental Sustainability

Deliverables

- ✓ Make sure commissioned organisations contribute to the council's Environmental Strategy, working to targets and deliverables outlined in the people power theme, and our overarching borough targets.
- ✓ Use voice and influence to provide community leadership on sustainability initiatives and addressing our borough wide targets.
- ✓ Influence meaningful change on addressing our key sustainability targets.
- ✓ Support disadvantaged people / communities to benefit from sustainability initiatives. Provide advice, information and signposting, where appropriate, on addressing the climate change and ecological emergency issues and impacts; including reduction, mitigation and adaptation.

Related strategies

The framework does not sit in isolation and should be read and enacted in conjunction with Council's wider strategies, including but not exclusively

- The Council Plan 2022-2026
- The Community Participation and Engagement Strategy 2023-2026
- Environmental Strategy 2023-2030
- Economic Growth Strategy 2021-2025
- Community Asset Strategy (in development)

These strategies and frameworks provide a toolkit for change that will shape Watford in the years ahead and support the delivery of projects and aspirations through shared visions and goals.

Wider opportunities

Watford is fortunate to have over 500 voluntary community sector organisations. We recognise all of the town's VCS organisations share our commitment to delivering positive outcomes to vulnerable people and making Watford a vibrant place to live and work.

It is recognised that many VCS organisations do not receive funding directly from this framework however, the Council does support the VCS in a variety of ways, including the Council's volunteering scheme which permits all employees 15 paid hours during any 12

month period to volunteer and support the VCS by “giving something back” to the community.

The council will continue to encourage and nurture voluntary activities by commissioning the CVS under this framework, delivering wider funding streams, sharing resources and skills, supporting with funding applications and signposting, rental of council assets, and building partnerships.

Table 1 below sets out a broad range of council led funding available to all voluntary sector organisations annually.

Table 1

Funding opportunity	Timeframe
The Mayor’s Small Grants Fund	Annual
Neighbourhood Grant	Annual
Watford Community Lottery	Annual
The Community Fund	Annual

Future funding of the Voluntary Sector Commissioning Framework

The principles within the framework require our commissioned organisations to review the way they currently provide and deliver services. During the lifetime of the framework they will need to identify innovative changes, focusing on efficiency, value for money, clear and measurable outcomes and a commitment to collaborative and partnership working, which will help secure the long term sustainability of services and activities that are important to local people and support a welcoming and thriving community.

In view of the scale of the financial challenges and budget pressures future funding to the voluntary sector will be kept under review.