

**REPORT TO:** Executive Board

**DATE:** 12<sup>th</sup> December 2024

**REPORTING OFFICER:** Executive Director Environment and Regeneration

**PORTFOLIO:** Employment, Learning and Skills and Community

**SUBJECT:** Payments to Voluntary Organisations - Impact Mitigation Plan

**WARD(S)** Borough wide

## **1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

1.1 The purpose of the report is to set out proposals for how the Council might best support and assist the community and voluntary sector in the future. This follows the Council's decision to reduce the grants it provides to the community and voluntary sector.

**2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That Executive Board approves the proposals set out in sections 3.3 - 3.12 of the report.**

## **3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

3.1 For many years the Council and community and voluntary sector have worked collaboratively to deliver shared priorities and ambitions for our residents, communities and businesses in Halton.

3.2 The Council has provided support to the sector in a number of ways including:

- Access to the Council's premises and accommodation, sometimes with below commercial market rents and leases.
- Providing funding advice and support.
- Grant management and the administration of grants.
- Advice on government legislation, including policies and procedures.
- Support for events.
- Promoting and facilitating networks and partnerships across a wide range of Council departments.
- Building in community grant opportunities in regeneration funding programmes for example, UK Shared Prosperity Fund, Long Term Town Plans.
- Advice on setting up a social enterprise, or organisation including developing a constitution and producing business plans.

- Providing of knowledge and experience on respective governance boards (for example, as trustees)
- 3.3 On the one hand, the Council's decision to reduce and remove the grants it provides to the community and voluntary sector is a negative outcome, but on the other hand, this presents a positive opportunity for the Council to take stock, prioritise and reset its relationships within the sector.
- 3.4 It is proposed that any Impact Mitigation Plan should go beyond a short-term focus on the immediate impact of reduced financial resources on the sector but should incorporate a longer-term and coherent strategy which places co-design and co-development of priorities with partners at the forefront of the Council's approach to delivering services in the future.
- 3.5 In recent years Council support has been directed to smaller and grass roots organisations, and with success. However, input at a strategic level has reduced, primarily as a result of reducing capacity within the Council, and the fact that Council managers are taking on responsibility for a much broader range of services. This has resulted in less "think time" being available to allow for strategic conversations with the sector to take place. In the past this would have ensured that maximum value is obtained from long-established relationships between respective partners.
- 3.6 Therefore, it is suggested that there are a number of areas where joint working and sharing of resources, knowledge and experience could be reenergised and subsequently pooled to provide best value to residents, communities and businesses in Halton.
- 3.7 One area where an immediate and positive impact would be felt is if the Council were to clearly designate a lead officer for promoting and coordinating the Council's interface with the community and voluntary sector.
- 3.8 A lead officer would be assigned to work collaboratively with representatives from the sector to develop and agree shared key strategic priorities. In order to do this effectively, the lead officer would need to take into account the agreed actions that were contained in the recent Council Internal Audit Report on Payments to Voluntary Organisations. For example, the report states that "The current commissioning and contract management arrangements will be reviewed, and a commissioning policy and performance management framework will be developed to introduce a consistent Council-wide approach". "...Performance targets for new and existing high-cost contracts will be developed to ensure that the achievement of expected outcomes can be monitored effectively..."

3.9 If a Commissioning Framework were to be developed, There would be merit in aligning it to the principles of Community Wealth Building (CWB) concept. CWB promotes a broader approach to local economic development that aims to build prosperity for everyone and seeks to increase and retain wealth within local economies. Halton and other Liverpool City Region (LCR) Local Authorities have been working with the Combined Authority through CLES to set out some pillars of CWB as follows:

1. Socially productive use of land and property.
2. Making financial power work for local places.
3. Progressive procurement.
4. Fair employment and just labour markets.
5. Plural ownership.

3.10 Further information on the work being progressed in the LCR is contained in the presentation outlined in Appendix 1. It is proposed that, ultimately these pillars could provide headings for workstreams which are translated into actions, milestones and key performance indicators

3.11 It is acknowledged that it will take some time to develop the Commissioning Framework as outlined above.

3.12 There are, however, some short to medium actions that would feed into the Commissioning Framework and which could be explored now, for example:

- Consideration to preparing a portfolio of community assets to be declared surplus and investigate the merits of accelerating the principles of assets of community value.
- Reinvigorating the Halton Foundation concept and aligning this with work undertaken by the Council's Business Growth Team to support businesses in the borough. It is suggested that this will help partners letter shape the ask of the private sector in respect or corporate social responsibility. This will also reinforce the principle of community wealth building described above.
- Undertaking a mapping exercise to confirm where Council departments work with the community and voluntary sector.
- Introduce regular meetings and workshops aimed at developing and agreeing shared priorities.
- Consider through the Transformation Programme identifying Council services which could be delivered by the community and voluntary sector.

#### **4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

4.1 The content of a Commissioning Framework could also be broadened to reflect recommendations made by the Local Government Association's Peer Challenge Report which advised the

Council that in developing its 'place-shaping role' "... it should develop how it works with other partners as well as build on examples of strong partnerships".

## **5.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

5.1 At this stage no specific financial implications have been identified because the focus of the report is to generate an initiative-taking discussion on how the collective human and financial resources of the Council and its voluntary and community sector partners are used effectively and efficiently to deliver valuable services to Halton residents. It is anticipated that the lead officer role would be drawn initially from existing resources. However, any financial ask may need to be reviewed as the Commissioning Framework is being developed. It is worth noting that sources of funding may be available from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund and Long-Term Plan for Towns Fund, which promote innovation in the way in which services can be provided for and by the community to deliver community initiatives.

## **6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES**

### **6.1 Improving Health, Promoting Wellbeing and Supporting Greater Independence**

The report sets out proposals for how the Council can work with partners in the community and voluntary to deliver the Council's priorities in an effective and efficient way.

### **6.2 Building a Strong, Sustainable Local Economy**

As above

### **6.3 Supporting Children, Young People and Families**

As above

### **6.4 Tackling Inequality and Helping Those Who Are Most In Need**

As above

### **6.5 Working Towards a Greener Future**

As above

### **6.6 Valuing and Appreciating Halton and Our Community**

The report reaffirms the importance of proactively engaging with the community and voluntary sector to where appropriate, lead and or support the delivery of the borough's strategic priorities.

## **7.0 Risk Analysis**

- 7.1 Any potential risks to the delivery of services to vulnerable and disadvantaged residents will be considered. However, as previously mentioned, to mitigate against any potential reductions in service quality, it is anticipated that the proposals contained in this report will promote a mechanism for allocating and prioritisation of resources based on evidence of need, demand and impact.

## **8.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES**

- 8.1 Consideration will be given to how we continue to deliver services to some of our most disadvantaged and vulnerable residents in the borough and reinforces the fact that the community and voluntary sector plays a vital role in supporting this strategic aim.

## **9.0 CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS**

- 9.1 Although not directly related to climate change per se, the proposals emphasise the need to use resources efficiently and carefully to provide services that are sustainable from both an economic and environmental perspective.

## **10.0 LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972**

- 10.1 None under the meaning of the Act.