

Report of: Executive Member for Homes and Communities

Meeting of	Date	Agenda item	Wards
Voluntary and Community Sector Committee	7 December 2023		All

SUBJECT: Voluntary and Community Sector Partnership Grants Programme 2024-2028
1. Synopsis

- 1.1** The council's current four-year VCS Partnership Grants programme 2021-24 is due to end on 31st March 2024.
- 1.2** The current grant budget totals £2,696,000 per annum and currently funds 50 VCS organisations.
- 1.3** Since the launch of the council's VCS Partnership Grants Programme 2021-24, the council has developed a new Corporate Plan - Islington Together 2030, agreed a series of missions and Corporate Values.
- 1.4** The council's VCS Partnership Grants Programme is a key component of the council's efforts to support the development of resilient communities and the council has committed to protect levels of council grant-giving to the local voluntary and community sector in the Labour Manifesto.
- 1.5** This report provides an overview of the VCS Grants Programme 2024-2028 outlining the programme structure, the application and assessment processes, and makes recommendations on the allocation of grant funding.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1** To approve the recommendations for funding to the 51 organisations for the VCS Partnership Grants Programme across the 6 strands of the programme and detailed in appendix 1.
- 2.2** To agree the proposal to provide funding of £2,711,500 per full financial year and over the programme for four years totalling £10, 846,000.

3. Background to the VCS Partnership Grant

- 3.1** The Council, across all departments currently spends £44 million with the borough's VCS partners. £2,696,000 of the Council's £44 million spend is allocated through the Council's VCS Partnership Grants Programme 2021-2024, a programme that provides core funding to strategic VCS partners. This programme was designed around the Council's Corporate Plan Islington Together 2030 the Council's Voluntary and Community Sector Strategy 2016-2020. The funding provides the foundation for a strong, vibrant, and independent VCS in the borough.
- 3.2** The current grant budget totals £2,696,000 per annum made up of £2,431,000 from the general fund (HASS and Public Health), £146,000 from the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) and £119,000 from Islington ICB.
- 3.3** The exact structure of the council's VCS Grants Programme was co-designed and co-delivered, with involvement of a range of Executive Members, directorates, and external partners. In July 2023 the Voluntary and Community Sector Committee agreed recommendations to provide funding to organisations across 6 strands. The table below details of the various strands and the indicative levels of funding which were made available up to a total fund of £2,696,000:

2024-2028 Strand	Indicative Total Funding	Indicative Funding Awards
Independent Advice and Navigation	Up to £1.45 million	Up to £500K
Community Hubs	Up to £600K	Up to £60K
VCS Capacity Building	Up to £80K	Up to £60K
Volunteering	Up to £35K	Up to £35K
Delivery Partners	Up to £400K	Up to £25K
Equalities and Cohesion Networks	Up to £150K	Up to £30K

4. Application and Assessment Process

- 4.1** In July 2023, the VCS Committee approved the recommendations for the launch of the VCS Partnerships Grants programme 2024-28 to take place in August 2023. A two stage process with two rounds were implemented, and some capacity building support for VCS organisations through the Big Alliance were agreed.
- 4.2** On 29 August 2023, the VCS Partnerships Grant programme 2024-28 was launched and information about the programme was widely published widely through council and voluntary sector communication channels. Nine 'Meet the Funder' events took place during the months of June – September 2023, with a total of 103 VCS colleagues attending the sessions.

4.3 Stage 1 Expression of Interest Stage - 94 applications were received, which resulted with 81 organisations being selected for the Stage 2 Full Application stage. 13 organisations were unsuccessful due to not meeting the minimum eligibility criteria outline set for the programme, which is detailed below:

- Grounds for mandatory exclusion
- Minimum Criteria
- Suitability Criteria in three areas:
 - The organisation's financial viability and their track record of securing income
 - What the organisation will use the core grant for and the difference it will make to the organisation
 - The organisation's objectives / articles of association and how these relate to the Council's Corporate Priorities

4.4 Stage 2 Full Application Stage - A total of 88 applications were received by 80 organisations requesting for a total of £4,521,774.34.

Each application for 5 of the strands were then assessed based on the following award criteria with weighting:

- Needs, Issues and Beneficiaries - 20%
- Outcomes, Services, Activities and Risks - 20%
- The Difference We Want You to Make - 30%
- Organisational Development - 20%
- Evaluating and Communicating Impact - 10%

The Advice and Navigation strand was assessed based on the following award criteria with weighting:

- Needs, Issues and Beneficiaries – 10%
- Outcomes, Services, Activities and Risks – 20%
- The Difference We Want You to Make – 30%
- Your Ability to Deliver an Integrated Advice Model for Islington – 20%
- Organisational Development – 10%
- Evaluating and Communicating Impact – 10%

A vigorous and comprehensive scoring procedure took place with each application being assessed by a minimum of two individual council officers, in line with the established criteria.

Panel meetings were held with assessors to address divergence in scoring, to undertake an additional qualitative assessment of each application, and to agree a final shortlist for each strand.

4.5 At each stage of the process officers assessed recommendations in line with the aspiration to establish a balanced and diverse portfolio working with different sections of the community with protected characteristics and across the borough. This assessment included consideration of:

- Equalities and protected characteristics
- Geographical spread across the borough
- Thematic spread

5. Applications summary

A total of 88 applications were received at Stage 2 of the VCS Partnership Grants 2024-28, with a request for £4,521,774.34.

5.1 The applications received break down into the following areas:

Strand	Total received	Not Recommended for Funding	Recommended for Funding
Capacity Building	2	0	2
Community Hubs	17	4	13
Delivery	54	18	26
Equalities and Cohesion Networks	6	1	5
Independent Advice & Navigation	8	2	6
Volunteering	1	0	1
Total	88	25	53

5.2 The recommendation is to fund 53 applications to 51 organisations amounting to £2,711,500 as illustrated in Appendix 1. There is an overspend of £15,500 which is recommended to be obtained from the underspent from the 2021-24 VCS Partnerships Grant.

5.3 Organisations recommended for funding present a good spread across the borough and are targeted in reaching equalities groups in Islington. There is a diverse range of delivery models and areas of focus, including organisations which work across the protected characteristics. The table below illustrates the allocation of funds per strand:

Strand	Number of applications funded	Funds allocated
Independent Advice and Navigation	6	£1,415,000
Community Hubs	13	£615,000
VCS Capacity Building	2	£80,000
Volunteering	1	£35,000
Delivery Partners	26	£436,500
Equalities and Cohesion Networks	5	£130,000

5.4 We currently fund 50 organisations under six strands, 3 of the organisations in the current Delivery Strand did not meet the set criteria and therefore their funding will not continue. The remaining 47 organisations will receive funding and enable the council to continue their existing partnerships.

5.5 The recommendation is to fund 6 new organisations which are not currently funded under the 2021-24 programme, these fall into the Delivery strand.

5.6 Once the recommendations have been formally agreed, all organisations will be notified in writing to confirm the decision and the level of funding agreed (where applicable). Organisations will then be required to develop an annual delivery plan before a grant agreement is issued.

5.7 There will be a support package made available to organisations not being recommended for funding which will include:

- Detailed feedback about applications, available upon request
- Access to training opportunities/sessions – Including writing funding applications
- Details of alternative funding available

6. Monitoring arrangement

6.1 To ensure that the commitments made within any established grant agreements and applications are developed and actioned, regular monitoring and partnership meetings will be held throughout the duration of the grant programme.

7. Implications

7.1 Financial Implications

The Council seeks to provide funding to VCS organisations to a total of £2,696,000 per year over the financial years: 2024/25, 2025/26, 2026/27, and 2027/28. Of the £2,696,000 funding per year available for VCS organisations to bid for as part of the 2024-2028 VCS grants programme, the report recommends £2,711,500 per annum (pro rata FY24/25) be awarded.

Maintaining the Council's existing financial commitment of £2,696,000 per annum to the VCS Partnership Grants Programme requires continued funding of £119,000 from the CCG. An agreement has been reached between the Council and the CCG to commit to this funding arrangement for the duration of the 2024-2028 programme. The £15,500 overspend will be met by the VCS reserve balance, drawing down a total balance of £62,000 over the four year period that this report covers. The current position of the VCS reserve is £380,563 prior to 2024-28 drawdowns. It is intended that grant commitments will be protected for a 2 period with a mid-programme review to commit another 2 years, as per the last grants programme. The Council's Medium-Term Financial Strategy currently incorporates a continuation of the scheme as proposed. This is subject to ongoing Council wide savings discussions. The table below displays the additional money requested in the recommendations, where the funding is coming from, remaining funding, and the number of allocations in the FY24-28 period. Please note that the proposed allocations range in funding size from £35,000 to £1,450,000.

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7.2 Legal Implications

The general power of competence pursuant to Section 1 of the Localism Act 2011 provides the council with very broad powers 'to do anything that individuals generally may do'. This covers the power to give grants to voluntary and community sector organisations as proposed in this report and includes anything which it considers is likely to achieve the promotion or improvement of the economic, social or environmental well-being of the whole or part of its area or all or any of the persons resident or present in that area. The provision of resources through the Local Initiatives Fund is likely to promote the social and economic well-being of Islington's residents.

The council is under a fiduciary duty to ensure that its resources are used appropriately. Where the money is allocated to outside bodies, the requirements of the procurement rules may apply. In any event it will be important to maintain current practice of ensuring that the money will be used for the purposes for which it is allocated and that

individual members are made aware of the responsibility they bear in making recommendations in relation to specific groups.

7.3 Environmental Implications

The grant programme in itself has minimal environmental impacts, being limited to those associated with the office use of the staff involved. However, the grants will be used to fund activities that are likely to have a range of environmental impacts, most of which will have resulting carbon emissions. These include energy and water use in buildings, the purchase of goods with supply chain impacts and the generation of waste.

7.4 Equalities Impact Assessment

An equalities impact assessment has been completed (appendix 3) to understand the impact of the grants programme on residents in the borough, particularly those with protected characteristics. The new grants programme aims to support the overarching Council priorities of addressing inequality, promoting community cohesion and supporting the most vulnerable residents.

Key highlights from the resident impact assessment are detailed below:

- 31 of the 53 organisations recommended for funding are classified as having a 'targeted' approach and 22 with a 'universal' approach. In comparison to core grant-funding awards in 2021-2024, there has been a 5% increase in the level of funding going to organisations with a 'targeted' approach to working with residents with protected characteristics.

8. Conclusions and reasons for recommendations

- 8.1** The VCS Partnerships Grants 2024-28 process has undertaken a vigorous, fair and transparent process which has resulted in the £2,711,500,000 available in the funds from 2024-28 (£2,696,000) and underspend from 2021-24 (£15,500) to be allocated to 51 organisations. These organisations are aligned to meet our strategic priorities as set in our Islington Together Vision 2030 Plan, and has resulted in us to continue our commitment to enable services and local neighbourhoods to work together, focus on early intervention and prevention, build stronger partnerships and collaboration, and continue the creation of an integrated and connected system to support our residents in Islington

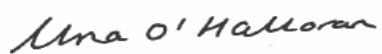
Appendices

Appendix 1: **List of organisations recommended for funding by strand**

Appendix 2: **Equalities Impact Assessment**

Background papers: None

Final report clearance:

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Una O'Halloran". The signature is written in a cursive style and is centered within a light gray rectangular box.

Signed by: Una O'Halloran, Executive Member for Homes and Communities **Date:** 29.11.23

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APPENDIX 1: LISTS OF ORGANISATIONS RECOMMENDED FOR FUNDING BY STRAND

Independent Advice and Navigation	
Help on Your Doorstep	£150,000
Islington BAMER Advice Alliance	£100,000
Arachne Greek Cypriot Women's Group	£35,000
RCJ Advice and Citizens Advice Islington	£450,000
Islington Law Centre	£450,000
Islington People's Rights	£230,000
TOTAL	£1,415,000
Community Hubs	
Caxton House Community Centre	£40,000
Hanley Crouch Community Association	£60,000
Highbury Roundhouse	£40,000
Highbury Vale Blackstock Trust	£50,000
Hilldrop Area Community Association	£50,000
Holloway Neighbourhood Group	£40,000
Hornsey Lane Estate Community Association	£50,000
Mildmay Community Partnership	£45,000
Muslim Welfare House	£40,000
St Luke's Parochial Trust	£60,000
The Peel	£40,000
Whittington Park Community Association	£60,000
Light Project Pro International	£40,000
TOTAL	£615,000
Capacity Building	
Octopus Community Network	£40,000

Voluntary Action Islington	£40,000
TOTAL	£80,000
Volunteering	
Voluntary Action Islington	£35,000
TOTAL	£35,000
Delivery	
ALAG on behalf of the Autism Hub Islington	£20,000
All Change	£20,000
Chabad Ludavitch of Islington	£10,000
Community Language Support Services	£24,000
Company 3	£15,000
Claremont Project	£20,000
Eritrean Community in UK	£20,000
Finsbury Park Mosque	£10,000
Global Generations	£10,000
Healthy Generations	£10,000
Hillside Clubhouse	£15,000
Holloway Neighbourhood Group	£15,000
Imece Women's Centre	£15,000
Islington Bangladesh Association	£25,000
Islington Centre for Refugees and Migrants	£25,000
Islington Pensioners Forum	£10,000
Islington Somali Community	£25,000
Kurdish and Middle Eastern Women Organisation	£20,000
One True Voice	£10,000
Maa Shanti	£15,000
Middle Eastern Women and Society Organisation	£15,000
The Lilliesleaf Trust UK	£10,000
The Margins Project	£25,000
The Maya Centre	£15,000
The Parent House	£17,500

The Stuart Low Trust	£20,000
TOTAL	£436,500
Equalities and Cohesion Network	
Disability Action in Islington DAI	£30,000
London Irish Centre	£30,000
Islington Faith Forum	£30,000
Forum+	£20,000
Islington Refugee & Migrant Forum (IRMF)	£20,000
TOTAL	£130,000
GRAND TOTAL	£2,711,500

APPENDIX 2: EQUALITIES IMPACT ASSESEMENT