

Impact of Revenue Funding for Community Bodies

Report of the Community Manager

Recommended:

That Overview and Scrutiny Committee notes the content of the report and supports the continued monitoring and development of services funded through the Council's Revenue Funding Programme.

SUMMARY:

- A report on the impact of Test Valley Borough Council's revenue funding programme, which provides over £350,000 of funding per year to charitable organisations.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Test Valley Borough Council has long recognised the value of a vibrant and robust community and voluntary sector. The Revenue Funding Programme is one example of how the Council invests resources into supporting and developing the sector to increase the quality of life for residents in Test Valley, whilst also reducing demand on public services.
- 1.2 The programme encompasses a broad range of funding offers, both in terms of funding value and in the nature of projects funded, with a mix of core funding of organisations which the Council would consider to be strategic partners, through to funding for specific elements of well-defined projects.
- 1.3 This report briefs Members on the impact of that funding for the organisations and their service users in the 2022-23 financial year.

2. Background and local context

- 2.1 In February 2022, Cabinet approved a report which recommended funding amounts for 2022-25 as well as several changes to the revenue funding programme. This included:
 - the ring-fencing of funding for the services of voluntary sector support, Shopmobility provision and free impartial advice and support on debt, benefits, employment, housing and relationships.

- Developing a revised funding model for funding currently awarded under the fund, but outside of the above ring-fenced areas, from 2024/25 onwards (see Annex 1).
- That the Community Manager bring an annual report to Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the impact of the funding programme overall.

2.2 Annex 1 shows the funding allocated for the 2022-25 period. This also illustrates those organisations who have received three years of funding, and those non-ring fenced areas, which received two years of funding.

3. Updates on impact of funding

3.1 Citizen's Advice Test Valley

3.2 In 2022/23, Citizen's Advice Test Valley (CATV) received £269,216 to provide free and impartial support and advice on debt, benefits, employment, housing and relationships to residents of Test Valley.

3.3 The funding is used in three areas:

- The main part of the funding supports salaries of the paid staff (6.1 FTE) who also support more than 60 volunteers.
- Premise rental costs
- Operating costs and overheads

3.4 As 2022/23 was a challenging year for many households in Test Valley, so it follows that there was significant demand and challenge for CATV in supporting them. Although the country was no longer facing significant Covid-related restrictions for the first time in two years, the legacy and impact of those restrictions were still creating real challenges for many households in Test Valley, and a new model of working for CATV staff and volunteers continued to evolve throughout the year.

3.5 The main challenge for CATV's clients was the rapidly increasing cost of living. Over the course of the year this created significant additional demand on their advice services. Not only did the number of people requiring support increase, but the complexity of cases also increased markedly, meaning greater demands on staff and volunteer time 'per case'.

3.6 As well as continuing to provide advice and support face to face at their offices and over the phone, CATV has increased its outreach and partnership working. CATV has secured additional funding (including from TVBC) to provide a caseworker at Andover and Romsey foodbanks. This provides an opportunity to build rapport and trust with foodbank users who may not otherwise access CATV support.

- 3.7 CATV was an active contributor to the special Cost of Living Partnerships which were vital in developing the Test Valley approach to the rising cost of living. They were one of a handful of key partners who established a weekly conference call to track the local impact of the cost-of living and they also worked with the Council and Unity to administer a scheme to redistribute donations made from pensioner winter fuel payments to other pensioners in the borough.
- 3.8 They report significantly improved links with other organisations, helped by those partnership meetings and built on through subsequent interaction.
- 3.9 The Community Manager is in regular contact with the Chief Officer of CATV, but also holds monitoring meetings twice a year, where they review specific measures. These largely consist of measures which are standard measures for Citizen's Advice charities across the country.
- 3.10 Measures include monthly self-assessment and quarterly external assessment of advice given, customer satisfaction, cost of service and organisational financial management among others.
- 3.11 CATV consistently score well against those well-established national measures and are transparent and have proven to be pro-active on any occasions where the measures require further attention. It is an extremely well-run organisation which maintains strong leadership, governance and financial sustainability even in challenging times.
- 3.12 Some particularly helpful measures to draw attention to include:
- Consistently high performance on quality of advice measured by both internal and external assessment.
 - 4,464 individual clients supported in 2022/23, most needing multiple areas of support.
 - Annual value of volunteer contribution of £551,106.
 - £317,859 in income gains for clients (includes income gains, debts written off and payments rescheduled).
- 3.13 2022/23 did see some challenges around service users' access as CATV moved back to offering face to face advice, following a change to almost exclusively telephone advice during the pandemic, the service and accessibility has responded accordingly, and customer satisfaction has improved, although there are continuing pressures on resources and therefore accessibility.
- 3.14 The intensity of some of the work since Covid and a change in volunteering arrangements, such as an increase in volunteers providing advice from home have been factors in a slight increase in volunteers 'retiring', but there has been a drive to recruit new volunteers and in July of 2023, TVBC funded CATV £16,000 to recruit and train 16 volunteers in addition to their usual annual intake (an increase of around 50%).

3.15 Another challenge which will continue throughout 2023/24 is the continuing increase in the complexity of enquiries which require more in depth, lengthy advice and a general increase in demand, driven by the increased cost of living.

3.16 These factors are combining to maintain pressure on sufficiently resourcing CATV's opening hours.

3.17 Accordingly, CATV's key priorities for 2023/24 are to increase accessibility by developing a range of contact channels, including face-to-face, telephone, e-mail and chat; and to continue to adapt their advice and support to the changing needs of clients to empower them to progress independently or to advocate for them as appropriate.

3.18 Unity Core Support

3.19 In 2022/23 Unity received £37,947 to provide core support for the community and voluntary sector. They do this by supporting charity and voluntary organisations with organisational governance, provision of funding advice and guidance, promotion of volunteering opportunities and through facilitation of training and sharing of learning and good practice. Unity also acts as a representative body for the charity and voluntary sector.

3.20 During the year, Unity worked with a total of 312 groups of varying sizes. For many this would have been 'light touch' engagement, such as sharing information on funding and training opportunities but also includes more specific support.

3.21 More intensive support included conducting 16 'organisational health checks' which include regular follow up support; supporting 79 organisations to improve volunteer recruitment, retention and management practices; and supporting 16 organisations to review and/or adopt appropriate governance structure.

3.22 Their volunteer hub directly placed 159 volunteers, delivering 3,878 volunteer hours in the borough. A total of 32 volunteer placements were made for people who are unemployed which sustained for at least four weeks. Unity was also able to identify and support seven new trustees in to positions with organisations in Test Valley.

3.23 89 individual learners accessed training and support, primarily on funding and key skills for voluntary organisations (e.g. managing volunteers).

3.24 Unity has recently developed the digital support it offers to the sector and provided eight organisations with 1-2-1 support to develop their digital offer, with developing a social media presence being in particular demand.

3.25 Unity has also sought to increase awareness of volunteering opportunities and how Unity can help both organisations and prospective volunteers. They organised a volunteer fair in Romsey in June 2022, and attended events such as jobs fairs, Armed Forces Day events and events at Thruxton race circuit.

- 3.26 They have been active partners in the Test Valley Partnership and the special Cost of Living Partnerships and worked with CATV and the Council on the winter fuel payment scheme, which redistributed £2,500 to support pensioners in Test Valley.
- 3.27 As the increased cost of living will continue to impact households in Test Valley, so shall it impact community and voluntary organisations across the borough, many of whom will see demand on their services rise whilst, for many, their costs will increase.
- 3.28 Even the smallest groups may find room hire and other costs creating new challenges. Unity will need to play an essential role in supporting those groups to continue and to prosper.
- 3.29 In 2023/24, Unity will continue to respond to demand in the local sector, which particularly highlights long-term sustainability of both funding and governance as a priority; increasing collaboration in the sector; developing their volunteer hub offer to respond to the changing volunteer market; and continuing to actively represent the sector in both local and national strategic discourse.
- 3.30 Unity Shopmobility
- 3.31 In 2022/23 Unity received £32,000 to deliver a Shopmobility service. This service provides a broad range of equipment for hire to Test Valley residents and visitors.
- 3.32 This includes the hiring options of half-day, full day, or a 'loan hire' for those who wish to take equipment on holiday or who have need for the item during a longer period of convalescence.
- 3.33 Rental of this equipment enables people who would otherwise struggle to access a range of local facilities and amenities, thereby supporting people to remain independent whilst also supporting the local economy.
- 3.34 2022/23 was the first full funding year without any Covid-related restrictions. A disproportionate number of Shopmobility customers are either clinically vulnerable or clinically extremely vulnerable to covid, and therefore were understandably particularly cautious about the risk of exposure to infection.
- 3.35 As such, whilst there were no social measures in place, there is anecdotal evidence that this caution has impacted the rate at which Shopmobility's service users have returned to the town centre, and therefore returned to accessing the Shopmobility service. There is similar anecdotal evidence that the increased cost-of-living is impacting on the frequency with which people are accessing the service, which may have had an impact on the continuing reduction in numbers.
- 3.36 Prior to the pandemic, day hires averaged 200-300 per month, in 22/23, this was closer to 60-70 per month.

- 3.37 However, over the same period there has been significant growth in the number of extended loans of two days or more (up to, and in some cases beyond, three months). In 2019/20 there were 76 such loans, compared to 199 in 2022/23.
- 3.38 Unity has also been diversifying its fleet of mobility scooters, reducing the overall number but delivering a more flexible offer which better reflects demand. They have also adopted a new online booking system which means that all customers have access to all available stock, and can choose exactly the type, size and capacity of equipment they wish to hire.
- 3.39 During the year they have increased promotion of the service through increased social media activity, increased attendance at local events, regular newsletters for members and by linking in with local partners, such as social prescribers and the Andover Health Hub.
- 3.40 In 2023/24 Unity want to continue to grow their long-term hire offer, whilst ensuring they are still promoting their one-day hire service and continue to increase their profile generally.
- 3.41 Youth in Romsey
- 3.42 In 2022/23 Youth in Romsey (YiR) received £9,500 towards their core costs including electricity, phone, internet, cleaning and administration.
- 3.43 YiR provide free, confidential support for young people between the ages of 6 and 25 years. Services include counselling, one to one support, three different youth clubs, employment and career advice and support, and a drop-in sexual health service.
- 3.44 In 2022/23 YiR supported 994 young people, 78% of whom live within the Test Valley borough. Their services include services include, play therapy, counselling, one to one support on any issue, careers guidance, sexual health service, two youth support groups, *Allsorts* youth group for young people with disabilities and an allotment project for those out of mainstream education.
- 3.45 Their services are offered at their centre and in local primary and secondary schools and they also work in close partnership with Hampshire Youth Access, CAMHS, Romsey young carers.
- 3.46 YiR have successfully secured project funding from several funders including the Clinical Commissioning Group (now the Integrated Care Board), Children in Need, Solent Sexual Health, local schools and Romsey Rotary.
- 3.47 During the year they were able to recruit four additional sessional staff to meet increased demand of supporting the mental health of young people. They were also able to take on an apprentice and have 17 regular volunteers. However, they have struggled to recruit new volunteers for their youth support groups. Whilst they cannot be sure of the reasons for this, there is a sense that people who may have been able to volunteer in the past are increasingly looking for paid work.

3.48 The main challenge for 2023/24 is the demand on their counselling service. This was oversubscribed in 2022/23 which means there is a 'waiting list' for this service at the start of the year and that is likely to remain the case throughout the year.

3.49 King Arthur's Way Community Association

3.50 King Arthur's Way Community Association (KAWCA) aims to enhance the lives of people living in the local community by working in partnership with relevant bodies to promote educational, social and recreational activities in a safe and accessible environment.

3.51 In 2022/23 King Arthur's Way Community Association was awarded £5000 Contribution towards the salary of two community centre staff.

3.52 In 2022/23 footfall at the centre increased by over 150%, from 4,023 in 2021/22, to 10,199. Whilst KAWCA themselves are keen to highlight that the scale of that increase is in part down to some residual covid restrictions and hesitancy still being a factor in early 2021/22, it does seem fair to conclude that it also reflects the important role the community centre plays in community life in the area.

3.53 Throughout the year, the community association has helped provide a range of support and activities including a weekly job club, school holiday activities, *Comfort Café* and thrift shop, *Coffee Chat Stay and Play* (both also acting as 'warm hubs' for the community), a regular foodbank, bereavement support and a range of dance and sports activities. They have also hosted free events for families.

3.54 They have also played an essential role in the Healthier Communities project, working with the community and alongside partners including TVBC and the Integrated Care Board to explore how to support people to be healthier and more active.

3.55 They have successfully recruited additional volunteers this year who have been essential in running the warm hubs and the school holiday activities.

3.56 Delivering and developing the kind of support described above will continue to be at the core of KAWCA's offer in 2023/24.

3.57 Age Concern

3.58 Age Concern Hampshire is an independent charity working across Hampshire to promote independent living in the over-50s. In 2022/23 they received £5,830 towards their rent and utilities.

3.59 In particular, this funding was to support the provision of its footcare clinic from rented premises in Andover, which also acts as a link to its wider services and support available, such as their information hub.

- 3.60 In 2022/23 114 clinics were held, delivering 1539 appointments for 1009 clients. There were also 550 referrals to their information hub service.
- 3.61 The Foot Care service is still yet to reach client numbers of 'pre-Covid' levels of around 50 clients a week, but attendances for the year 2022/23 show an increase on the previous year and are currently seeing around 30 clients per week.
- 3.62 The Information Hub and Community Information Service continue to support clients with signposting, form filling, support securing financial aid and support to access online resources. This service is made up of a team of volunteers lead by paid coordinators.
- 3.63 However, the organisation has recently lost funding from Hampshire County Council for the Community Information Service, which has meant new funding streams have had to be sourced. They have been successful in crowdfunding through Aviva Community Fund to secure match funding for the Hampshire wide project of approximately £19,500, however, they will need to maintain this 'year on year', for the scheme to continue.
- 3.64 Due to rising energy costs, Age Concern took the decision to end their lease at Town Mill House at the end of March 2023 and the Andover Foot clinics now operate from The Andover Baptist Church.
- 3.65 As the grant from TVBC was for rent and utilities at Town Mill House, they can use the award in 2023/24 towards the costs for the Baptist church, however this will leave a surplus, and we are working with Age Concern to understand whether they can usefully put this surplus to another element of their work in Test Valley.
- 3.66 Relate
- 3.67 In 2022/23, Relate received £3,240 for counselling, information and support to individuals, couples, young people and families. They offer counselling sessions via face to face and via webcam and telephone.
- 3.68 Whilst there is not feedback specifically from Test Valley clients, their overall client feedback shows that 82% of adult relationship counselling clients describe their situation as better or much better after counselling, 72% said their mental wellbeing had improved and 77% reported having improved coping strategies.
- 3.69 The funding was used to create a bursary to reduce the cost of counselling sessions for clients with an annual household income of £40,000 or less. This funding has enabled 11 families to access support who would otherwise be unlikely to be able to afford it.

3.70 However, only £844 of the funding was utilised for this purpose in 2022/23, leaving a surplus of £2,396. There are limited opportunities for Relate to redirect this surplus to another element of their work in Test Valley, and there is no reason to expect a significant increase in demand for the bursary in 2023/24. If we should fail to appropriately redirect this surplus we will reclaim it, but we will work with Relate to increase the reach and impact of the funding this year.

3.71 Mind

3.72 Andover Mind supports people who experience, or are affected by, mental health needs. It provides a range of services including well-being support, counselling, young people's well-being, Ugly Duckling furniture upcycling project, carer support and dementia advice.

3.73 In 2022/23 they were awarded £2,500 towards the running costs of the Ugly Duckling project, a furniture recycling, repair and upcycling project which creates training, volunteering and employment opportunities whilst also reducing the amount of unwanted furniture going to waste.

3.74 The Ugly Duckling project has faced two major challenges this year, the main one being the temporary closure of their workshop at Portway whilst their landlord made improvements to the site. During that period their volunteers initially continued to work from their own spaces (i.e. 'at home') to supply the pop-up shop in the Chantry Centre with items to sell, and subsequently Mind took up a lease at Incuhive in the Chantry Centre. They moved back to their premises at Portway in June 2023.

3.75 Another key challenge was the retirement of the paid workshop coordinator, as Mind were not immediately able to replace them. Andover Mind has successfully supported their volunteer team to lead the project themselves (with support from their Volunteer Coordinator and Head of Business Development), which has greatly increased confidence and skills amongst participants.

3.76 These challenges have contributed to participant numbers being lower than anticipated, but still benefitting 45 volunteers, and total volunteer hours have actually increased. Andover Mind emphasises the benefits of attendance to those participants' confidence and wellbeing, who would otherwise be at significant risk of social isolation.

3.77 In 2023/24 one of their key priorities is to increase the number of participants. This will be easier now that they have the security of a long-term lease at Portway, and they are now looking to recruit volunteer workshop coordinators, which will enable the workshop to open more often, increasing capacity for people to participate.

3.78 They are also working with their Wellbeing and Carer Support and Dementia Advice Services to explore offering their service users dedicated sessions at the workshop.

4. Future of smaller revenue funding

- 4.1 One of the recommendations accepted by Cabinet in February 2022 was to develop a revised funding model for funding currently awarded under the scheme, but outside of the ring-fenced themes of voluntary sector support; Shopmobility provision; and free impartial advice and support on debt, benefits, employment, housing and relationships. This new scheme is scheduled to open in 2024/25.
- 4.2 A key tenet of that rationale was to create a more open and accessible process of funding allocation which better encourages innovation and collaboration.
- 4.3 In keeping with that recommendation, the awards for Youth in Romsey, King Arthur's Way Community Association, Age Concern, Relate and Mind were awarded for two years, the final year being this financial year (2023/24).
- 4.4 Officers are working to develop a pilot scheme of core support in time for applications in the 2024/25 financial year.

5. Corporate Objectives and Priorities

- 5.1 By building an effective, resilient and robust charity and voluntary sector in Test Valley, the Revenue Funding programme supports several of the corporate priorities and is particularly relevant to the areas of sustainability, inclusion and prosperity.

6. Conclusion

- 6.1 There is no doubt that global and national events have contributed to a particularly challenging year for the funded organisations and for their service users. Organisations have demonstrated a willingness and ability to adapt in these conditions and continue to provide high quality services with excellent value for money.
- 6.2 Those conditions have also demonstrated the importance of CATV and Unity as strategic partners of the Council, working with others to understand how best we can support the wider charity and voluntary sector and ultimately families in Test Valley.
- 6.3 They also highlight the important contribution of smaller scale organisations in supporting the most vulnerable in our communities, as demonstrated by the recipients of smaller levels of funding under this scheme.

Background Papers (Local Government Act 1972 Section 100D)

None

Confidentiality

It is considered that this report does not contain exempt information within the meaning of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, as amended, and can be made public.

No of Annexes:	1		
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