

TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET

02 April 2024

Report of the Interim Chief Executive

Part 1- Public

Executive Key Decisions

1 VOLUNTARY SECTOR GRANTS – FUTURE FUNDING OPTIONS

To consider options and levels of support for key Voluntary and Community Sector Groups

1.1 Background

1.1.1 The Council has provided grant funding via service level agreements (SLA's) to several voluntary and community sector organisations providing support in Tonbridge and Malling. These arrangements have been in place for many years, with SLA's updated and renewed periodically over time. It should be noted that the funding received by these groups over the years has not increased with inflation and has in fact reduced slightly.

1.1.2 We have now reached a point where the existing SLA's for each organisation are up for renewal and decisions need to be taken with regards to future funding levels and any amendments to the terms.

1.1.3 As a reminder, the organisations and the funding agreed last year (for 2023/24) are listed below:

For the three organisations with fixed 4-year grants, the funding as they enter year four of their agreements, remains as follows:

Maidstone and West Kent Mediation Schemes - £4,320

Imago - £3,600

Involve - £3,600

For Age UK Sevenoaks and Tonbridge, the funding as they enter year two of their two-year agreement remains as follows:

Age UK Sevenoaks and Tonbridge - £6,400

For CANWK, it is suggested that another 1-year agreement be offered at the existing level of £95,000.

- 1.1.4 Progress updates from each organisation are provided in Annex 1 and 2. All organisations have provided support to residents in the borough.
- 1.1.5 CANWK have supported 2,484 T&M residents with a total of 9,460 advice issues (Jan 2023 – Dec 2023). Through a combination of virtual meetings, telephone sessions and face to face (for any vulnerable resident unable to access virtual services) they have managed to reach and support all areas of the borough.
- 1.1.6 The Mediation Schemes have taken referrals for neighbour disputes, family, parent/teen disputes and anger management. In addition, they have visited primary and secondary schools, undertaken peer training and attended the weekly CSU meetings.
- 1.1.7 Imago continue to support residents by providing a Volunteer Recruitment Service with local groups and charities and working alongside the Job Centre. They have also undertaken training for organisations, including understanding eligibility for DBS. They continue to offer the Dial 2 Drive service to assist older or vulnerable people without access to a car or public transport.
- 1.1.8 Involve continue to support and promote volunteering across the borough and currently have 42 volunteers participating in supporting activities such as exercise groups, falls prevention, volunteer driving, volunteer gardening, buddying, administration, assisting creative classes and coffee/chat groups. They have increased the number of voluntary sector partners in T&M who are funded by Involve under the KCC Universal Wellbeing contract- all partners provide volunteering opportunities and they estimate this would amount to over 1000 volunteers in the borough.
- 1.1.9 Age UK Maidstone, Sevenoaks and Tonbridge continue to provide support, with their main office based at Bradford Street, Tonbridge. Drop ins are available for older people to access when they need support or a warm space. The services provided enable older people to live independently in their own homes for as long as possible. The information and advice service has responded to over 2000 signposting queries as well as providing specific advice to 1999 clients. They also run coffee mornings, dementia cafés and peer support groups. A foot-care clinic runs weekly at Town Lock, this will be expanding to offer care at home for those that can't get to Tonbridge.
- 1.1.10 It is recognised that each organisation has provided invaluable support, but as their SLA's have ended, it is also important that options are considered to ensure value for money with all our grants.

1.2 Future Funding Options

- 1.2.1 Cabinet is invited to consider the following 4 options and make recommendations for future funding arrangements:

Option 1

Make **no change** to the existing terms and continue to fund all the above organisations at the 2023/24 level for the next financial year.

Option 2

To help meet the Council's savings targets, **discontinue** grants to the above organisations. A transition phase will need to be implemented to support this approach, it will require further consideration and discussion with the organisations, if this is felt to be an appropriate option.

Option 3

The UKSPF Community Development Grant launched on 1 March 2024 (with grants up to £5,000). **Discontinue funding via SLAs** for the Mediation Schemes, Imago, Involve and Age UK and encourage them to **apply for funding** from this pot. It is likely that they will submit eligible bids against the criteria for this scheme. However, we cannot guarantee the level of grant that would be awarded, particularly if we are oversubscribed, as they will be bidding against other groups providing services in the borough. We also cannot guarantee any further funding via the UKSPF, so it is likely this would only be applicable for the 2024/25 financial year.

Option 4

Offer lower amounts (to Mediation Schemes, Involve, Imago and Age UK), **set for 4 years**, to provide additional stability. Each organisation has been contacted to establish what service impacts there would be with a lower amount, set for a longer term. The imminent launch of the UKSPF grant scheme has also been raised with them and they have been encouraged to apply to this to fill any gaps in funding that a possible reduction in grant would cause.

The lower amounts suggested over 4-year SLA's are as follows, including the assumed savings set against 2023/24 levels:

Imago - £2,000 per year for 4 years (saving of £1,600 or £6,400 over 4 years)

Involve - £2,000 per year for 4 years (saving of £1,600 or £6,400 over 4 years)

Mediation Schemes - £3,000 per year for 4 years (saving of £1,320 or £5280 over 4 years)

Age UK Sevenoaks and Tonbridge - £5,500 per year for 4 years (saving of £900 or £3,600 over 4 years)

- 1.2.2 It is worth noting that the Mediation Schemes are also funded by the Community Safety Partnership, with grants received via the Police Crime Commissioner. The suggested reduction to Age UK Sevenoaks and Tonbridge is less than suggested reductions for the others. This is because they have lost funding in recent years from KCC and at the same time, they now cover a wider area (following the closure of Age Concern Malling).
- 1.2.3 In relation to Option 4 above, organisations have been consulted on this option and comments received to date are summarised below:

Imago – Appreciated the security of longer-term funding and the opportunity to bid for an additional grant via the UKSPF Community Development Grant Scheme. A grant of £2,000 per year would fund 3 hours per week of the Volunteer Development Coordinators role to deliver the services and they would look to top this up with a bid to the grant scheme to support the shortfall.

Mediation Schemes – Appreciate that TMBC must look at funding cuts and £3000 p/y for 4 years would mean that they can still provide a service. Any reduction would impact on work as both services currently use their own resources to provide mediation.

Involve Kent – with the reduced amount they can continue to deliver without significant impact. They would not offer volunteer brokerage but would still be able to signpost to other organisations. There would be no change to promoting and supporting volunteers in the Borough.

1.3 Future funding for CANWK

- 1.3.1 CANWK receive a larger grant of £95,000. This has remained static for several years. As the cost-of-living crisis continues, there has been ever more need for their services. Despite this, it is prudent for the Council to consider all value for money options. Contact has been made with CANWK to ask them to consider a reduced grant (of between £5,000 - £10,000) and to highlight any impacts that this would have on the level of service. A reduced grant would be offered on a 4-year SLA to provide security over the coming years.
- 1.3.2 CANWK have responded to say they fully understand the very difficult financial situation Councils are facing and can see the attraction of a 4-year SLA, which would provide financial stability. However, they have suggested:
- “an overall net cut of £5-10K, taking account of and including any proposed increased rental cost of the Castle, and with a 4 year SLA to provide stability”.*
- 1.3.3 Currently CANWK rent office space from the Council at Tonbridge Castle. At this stage, there have been no formal discussions about the future of this arrangement, or any proposed rental rates. This makes it difficult to factor into the current debate regarding the SLA. It is suggested that a reduction at the lower

end of the suggested rate of £5,000 per year is considered, with the security of a 4-year SLA. In addition, CANWK will also be invited to take advantage of the current UKSPF, Community Development Grant Scheme to submit an additional funding bid to top up any shortfall in the current year.

1.4 Legal Implications

1.4.1 To be addressed via SLA's for each organisation.

1.5 Financial and Value for Money Considerations

1.5.1 As detailed in the options above.

1.6 Risk Assessment

1.6.1 A review of progress would be undertaken annually for organisations on longer term SLA's. Quarterly reporting will be requested for CANWK.

1.7 Equality Impact Assessment

1.7.1 The decisions recommended through this paper have a remote or low relevance to the substance of the Equality Act. There is no perceived impact on end users.

1.8 Policy Considerations

1.8.1 Community

1.8.2 Crime & Disorder Reduction

1.8.3 Health and Safety

1.8.4 Healthy Lifestyles

1.9 Recommendations

1.9.1 Cabinet **CONSIDER** the **4 OPTIONS** above and make a recommendation with regards to future support for these organisations.

1.9.2 Cabinet **CONSIDER** a £5,000 reduction for CANWK with the security of a 4-Year SLA.

Background papers:

contact: Gill Fox

Nil

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