



Committee Report

PURPOSE: Final Decision Report

KEY OR NON-KEY DECISION: Key decision over £500k

COMMITTEE: Public Health and Communities Committee

DATE: 14 March 2025

TITLE: Voluntary and Community Sector Infrastructure Support Grant

Ward(s): Citywide

Officer presenting the report: Penny Germon **Job title:** Head of Communities

Committee Chair: Councillor Stephen Williams

Executive Director lead: Hugh Evans: Executive Director for Adult and Communities

Proposal origin: BCC Staff

Purpose of Report:

To seek approval to invite community and voluntary sector organisations to apply for the Voluntary and Community Sector Infrastructure Support Grant maintaining the current funding of £316,608 per annum, a total of £1,266,432 over four years from 1st April 2026 to 31st March 2030 with an option to extend for a further 12 months.

Evidence Base

1. The Voluntary and Community Sector Infrastructure Support Grant funds advice, support, and training to groups on issues like governance, finance, volunteering and representing the collective interests of the sector. The existing four-year funding agreement (called Enabling the VCSE sector) ends 31st March 2026.
2. The grant is part of the City Council's commitment to support a thriving, more equitable voluntary and community ecosystem and a one city, many communities, approach.
3. The diversity, creativity, and impact of Bristol's voluntary, community, and social enterprise (VCSE) sector is one of the city's greatest assets. It supports the council to meet its statutory obligations and strategic objectives. Effective and sustainable VCSE organisations lead to engaged, stronger, and more resilient communities, with greater wellbeing, where people are less reliant on public services.
4. For the city council to achieve its ambitions and meet the significant challenges that lie ahead it needs a resilient and sustainable VCSE sector. Well-run VCSE organisations reach communities, lever in funding, and add social and economic capital in ways that BCC cannot.

5. The grant funds infrastructure support to VCSE groups so they have access to specialist training, skills, advice and support, they can work together and there is an organised way for the city to collaborate with a very diverse network of organisations. The grant will contribute to:
 - supporting organisations to operate within relevant legal and policy frameworks
 - building capacity and resilience
 - strategic leadership and development
 - bring diversity and creativity to city conversations and decision-making
 - greater equity within and for the VCSE sector

For further details about what the grant will fund and the proposed approach see Appendix A.

6. Following engagement with the sector there is no significant change in the proposed approach, which builds on and takes learning from the current and earlier programmes. Applicants will be invited from VCSE organisations with the track record and depth of experience in Bristol to build on the journey so far and crucially maximise the assets (expertise, skills, knowledge, land and buildings) within the VCSE sector itself, and those of city partners. Through strategic and operational collaboration, the sector is best placed to determine the arrangements and activities to meet the overall outcomes and has the flexibility in approach to respond to a changing context for the duration of the grant. Applicants will need to demonstrate how they are involving a wide range of organisations in shaping the offer.
7. There are many significant and complex challenges facing the VCSE sector including rising costs, the impact of increasing poverty and inequity on citizens and communities, and climate change. The Infrastructure Support Grant is important investment at a time of significant challenge and change.
8. The VCSE sector is hugely diverse, which is a great asset, but there is inequality of opportunity and influence. BCC will expect applicants to have clear proposals for taking positive action to address systemic disadvantage, growing the diversity of the sector and its leadership.
9. The recommendation includes the option to extend the funding agreement for a further 12 months up to five years. This decision would take account of performance, wider context, for example, crisis response and competing priorities.

Officer Recommendations:

That the Committee for Public Health and Communities:

Contractual:

1. Authorises the Executive Director of Adults and Communities in consultation with Chair of the Public Health and Communities Committee to:
 - a. invite applications for the VCSE Sector Infrastructure Support Grant of £316,608 p.a. a total of £1,266,432 over four years from 1st April 2026 to 31st March 2030
 - b. award the grants in-line with the maximum budget envelopes outlined in this report.
 - c. extend the funding agreement by a further 12 months making the total programme five years to 31st March 2031 at an additional cost of £316,608.

Corporate Strategy alignment:

1. The corporate strategy recognises the vital role of the community and voluntary sector in achieving

its strategic priorities.

City Benefits:

1. The community and voluntary sector is vital to the health and wellbeing of communities.
2. Well-run VCSE organisations reach communities, lever in funding and add social and economic capital in ways that BCC cannot.
3. The VCSE sector is a key partner in the life of the city and improving outcomes for citizens and communities

Consultation Details:

1. As no significant changes were proposed there was not a consultation process but there was a process of engagement with VCSE organisations, seeking their feedback through conversations and an online survey Findings of the engagement and survey are included in Appendix A. Most people supported the proposed priorities and approach. This has informed the overall approach which is set out in Appendix A.
2. The key findings and the response to these findings are set out in the background section of Appendix A.
3. A full survey and engagement report is included in Appendix F.

Background Documents:

[Designing a new social reality VCSE summary report](#)

Revenue Cost	£1,266,432 or maximum of £1,583,040 over 5 years.	Source of Revenue Funding	General Fund
Capital Cost	£	Source of Capital Funding	
One off cost <input type="checkbox"/>	Ongoing cost <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Saving Proposal <input type="checkbox"/>	If yes - existing or new saving? Choose an item. OR Income generation proposal <input type="checkbox"/>

Professional comments section:

1. Finance Advice:

This report seeks permission to invite applications for the VCSE Sector Infrastructure Support Grant of £316,608 per annum, with a total of £1,266,432 payable over four years from 1st April 2026 to 31st March 2030. There is a potential to extend this for a further year. This results in a potential budget envelope of £1,583,040 over the 5 years period. This expenditure is fully funded from the general fund and can be met from within existing resources.

Finance Business Partner: Denise Hunt 16 January 2025

2. Legal Advice:

Procurement

provided the agreement is a grant agreement and not a contract for services, it will not need to be procured in compliance with the Public Contracts Regulations 2015. Client officers will need to seek legal

assistance to ensure the agreement is a grant agreement.

Equalities

The Council must comply with the requirements of the Public Sector Equality duty when making any decisions. The duty requires the decision maker to consider the need to promote equality for persons with “protected characteristics” and to have due regard to the need to i) eliminate discrimination, harassment, and victimisation; ii) advance equality of opportunity; and iii) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not share it. In order to do this the decision maker must have sufficient information about the effects of the proposed decision on the aims of the Duty. The Equalities Impact Assessment is designed to assist with compliance with this duty. Its purpose is to assess whether there are any barriers in place that may prevent people with a protected characteristic using a service or benefiting from a policy.

Legal Team Leader: Husinara Jones, Team Manager/Solicitor 13 January 2025

3. Implications on IT: I.T. are supportive of the proposals and are available to aid in progressing relevant work and can be engaged through the existing work request process.

IT Team Leader: Alex Simpson – Lead Enterprise Architect – 14th January 2025

4. HR Advice: This report is seeking approval to invite VCSE organisations to apply for the VCSE Sector Infrastructure Support Grant. There are no significant HR implications arising from this report.

HR Partner: Debbie Hunt, HR Business Partner 16/01/25

APPENDICES

Appendix A – Further essential background / detail on the proposal	YES
Appendix B – Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA)	YES
Appendix C – Environmental Impact Assessment	YES
Appendix D – Decision Risk Assessment	YES
Appendix E – Exempt Information	NO
Appendix F – Details of consultation carried out - internal and external	YES
Appendix G – Options appraisal matrix	NO
Appendix H – Business case / financial analysis	NO