

Grants Determination Sub-Committee 13 th March 2018	 TOWER HAMLETS
Report of: Zena Cooke, Corporate Director Resources	Classification: Unrestricted
VCS Strategy Delivery update (Crowdfunding, Procurement (Social Value) and Volunteering)	

Originating Officer(s)	Steve Hill – Head of Benefits Services Mohammed Ahad – Community Programmes Officer
Wards affected	All wards
Key Decision?	Yes
Community Plan Theme	One Tower Hamlets

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 This report seeks to give the Grants Determination Sub-committee an update on the delivery of certain actions agreed within the Voluntary and Community Sector Strategy (VCS) 2016-19 Action Plan. In particular it details three pilot programmes related to diversifying the resource base of VCS organisations through:

- Crowdfunding, including match funding for new projects
- Promoting social value in procurement using community benefit clauses in relevant council contracts in order to lever additional support for VCS organisations in the borough
- Increasing links and developing projects with the Volunteer Centre Tower Hamlets to support volunteering in the borough.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 The Grants Determination Sub-Committee is recommended to:

- i. Note the progress in implementing actions within the VCS Strategy, with particular reference to diversifying the resource base of the VCS through crowdfunding, social value in procurement and promoting volunteering.

3. REASONS FOR THE DECISIONS

3.1 No decisions are required, this is a noting report.

4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

4.1 The Committee could choose not to receive an update report but this would mean information and actions regarding the VCS Strategy 2016-19 not being considered by the Committee and is therefore not recommended.

5. DETAILS OF REPORT

VCS Strategy 2016-19

- 5.1 The Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) Strategy sets out how the council will work with the VCS between 2016 - 2019 to deliver vital local services. It is aimed at driving significant change in the way the council works. Established ways of working will be redefined, so communities get the help they need in a way that demonstrates the best use of limited resources. The vision of the strategy is to develop a strong, independent and thriving voluntary and community sector that works well in partnership with the council. This means a sector which has the resources and confidence to provide high quality services and support all parts of the community in Tower Hamlets.

The Strategy includes an action plan containing 52 actions which are separated into 5 themes:

- Agreeing roles and responsibilities and improving co-ordination
- Promoting co-production and sustainability
- Maximising the value from resources
- Creating a sea change in volunteering
- Bringing together businesses and the VCS

- 5.2 In order to ensure the action plan was genuinely deliverable rather than merely aspirational, the actions were all agreed with agencies named within the Action Plan – including the Tower Hamlets Council for Voluntary Services, East London Business Alliance, Volunteer Centre Tower Hamlets, Education Business Partnership and East End Community Foundation. In addition, a VCS Strategy Delivery Group was established to oversee the delivery of the actions. The group is chaired by the Corporate Director, Resources, and the members are representatives of the organisations mentioned above.

As there are a high number of actions and the Delivery Group meets quarterly, it was agreed that 4 task and finish sub-groups would be established to meet in between the quarterly meetings and drive forward some of the actions. These include:

- Crowdfunding
- Procurement (Social Value)
- Business
- Volunteering

Volunteering

- 5.3 The VCS Strategy action plan includes a number of actions aimed at creating a step change in volunteering. The strategy states that the levels of formal and informal volunteering should be developed to enhance a sense of pride in the local community. This would be directed not only at those living, working and studying in the borough, but also those born and raised in the borough but living elsewhere. There is a particular need to develop highly skilled volunteering, and to use the power of those who have been successful in their careers.

- 5.4 As part of this work the Volunteer Centre Tower Hamlets were commissioned to undertake a 12 month pilot (1st April 2017 – 31st March 2018) related to volunteer brokerage and with the aim of providing a volunteering service in the borough which included online brokerage support. This included:
- 5.5 **Ensuring a Supply of Volunteering Roles and Volunteers** – by ensuring 15 new organisations are registered and health checked in 2017-2018 and at least 80 new roles are advertised during the year, as well as existing roles. As of the 31st December 2017, 19 organisations had been health checked with 78 new roles being created and promoted.
- 5.6 **Online Brokerage Service** – VCTH has recently invested in developing a bespoke online searchable database called Volunteer Connect. Local people can access this via VCTH's website, view current volunteering opportunities (150+ vacancies at any given time), create a personal profile, express an interest in particular roles, and join the Volunteer Bank to receive alerts about similar roles. The pilot was to ensure that 50 local people per month would register onto volunteer connect, with 600 in total throughout the 12 month pilot. As of the 31st December 2017, 428 local people had registered.
- 5.7 **Advisor Appointment Service** - This is particularly important for people with lower levels of confidence, literacy, or English, all of whom prefer human interaction to online support. It is anticipated that clients using the face-to-face/telephone appointment service will be a combination of unemployed people, older people, people from BAME communities (including ESOL learners and new migrants), students, people with physical health/mental health issues, and people with learning disabilities. The pilot was to ensure that at least 14 people per month would access the face-to-face/telephone appointment service with an advisor – 168 people during the 12 month pilot. As of the 31st December 2017 107 local people had accessed this service.

Volunteer Centre Tower Hamlets Case Study

Volunteer Case Study

Volunteer X is female, 50 years old, heterosexual, describes herself as Black or Black British of African origin, is Muslim, and had been unemployed for more than a year when she contacted us.

Volunteer X originally came for an appointment with a Volunteer Centre Advisor on 19 July 2017. She expressed an interest in volunteering with older people or in health and social care. Our advisor discussed 4 suitable roles with her, then sent her details of these roles by email. In August 2017 she went on holiday, so she did not apply for any of the roles.

In late September 2017, when she returned from her holiday, we contacted her again using WhatsApp to find out how she was getting on. She told us which days of the week she was now available to volunteer, and we sent her some further volunteering roles to consider.

In October 2017 she selected the Maternity Mates role at Women's Health and Family Services. We asked her to contact the Volunteer Manager there, and in November she was invited to the Maternity Mates open day. After the open day she filled in an application form and was called for an interview in late November. In early December she was offered the role and started a substantial accredited training course that all volunteers must complete. We asked Volunteer X to tell us a little more about herself and her experience.

Tell us a bit about yourself.

I am 50, originally from Tanzania. I have 2 fantastic boys; the oldest is 21 and the youngest is 9 years old. I came to this country in 1996 as an asylum seeker.

Why did you decide to volunteer?

I decide to do volunteer because I like meeting new people from different backgrounds. It is also a good way to build contacts to get a job and a great way to gain more experience.

How did the Volunteer Centre help you?

The Volunteer Centre has really helped me. In a couple of weeks they sent me a few volunteering options and then they sent me contact details of different volunteer roles. I chose a role I liked, contacted them, was called in for an interview and got through the interview. I am grateful to the Volunteer Centre.

Who do you help through volunteering?

I will be volunteering with pregnant vulnerable women after completing training as a Maternity Mate. I can't wait to start volunteering with pregnant vulnerable women.

Organisation Registration Case Study

Ocean Women's Association (OWA) was referred to Volunteer Centre Tower Hamlets (VCTH) by Tower Hamlets Council in May 2017. OWA is a small community group, providing services to Bengali women who don't access other services. Although they have been in existence for many years, they are currently struggling with limited capacity, as they are run by a volunteer, with some support from other members of their Board of Trustees. LBTH suggested that we might support Ocean Women's Association by building their volunteering capacity.

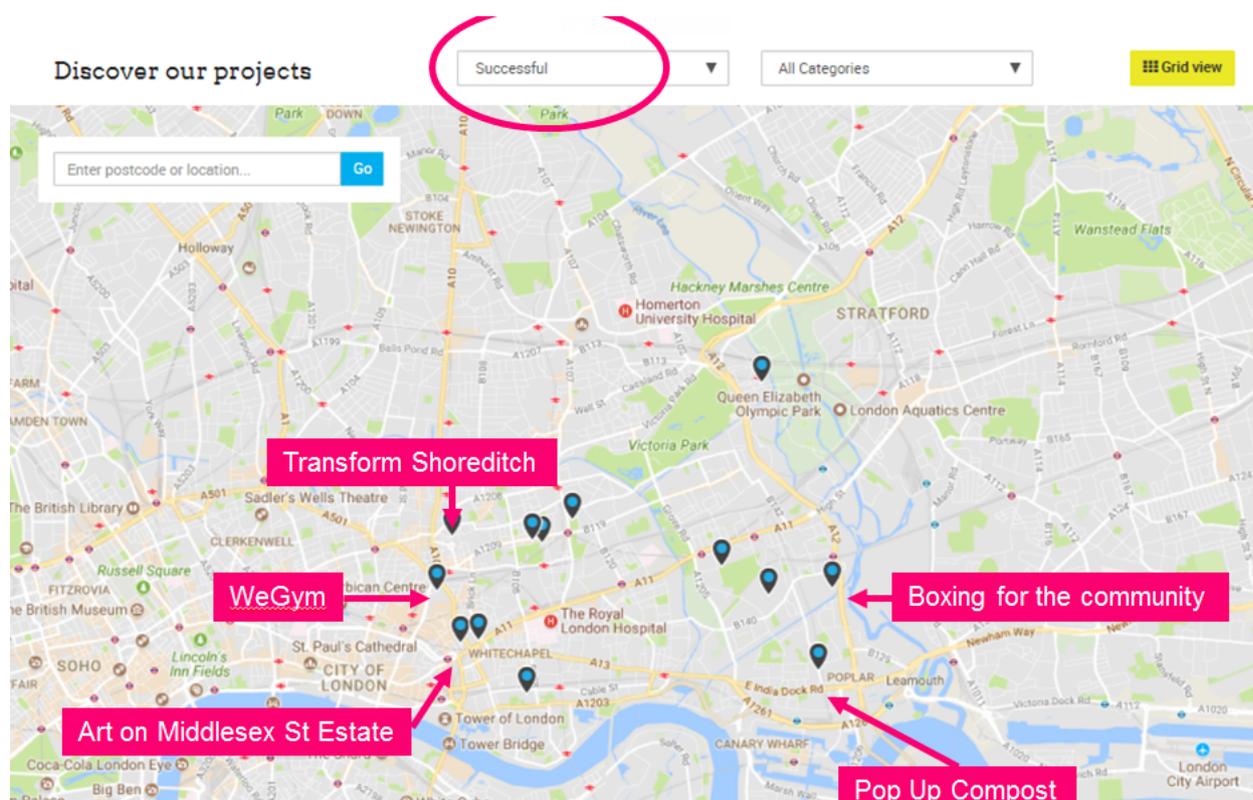
As part of the process of registering with VCTH, organisations must provide a copy of their Health & Safety Policy and proof of insurance cover. After we receive these documents, we meet with the organisation to conduct a basic Volunteer Management Health Check. This is to reassure us that when we signpost potential volunteers to an organisation they have a basic level of protection and good practice in place.

OWA has recently received a small amount of funding to run weekly coffee mornings at Stepney City Farm for older Bengali women. They have some service users who help out as volunteers, but they want to recruit other volunteers with more clearly defined roles. As part of the Health Check process, VCTH also advised them on procedures for managing volunteers. VCTH provided sample templates, including an application form template and a sample Volunteer Agreement. We also advised on a process for volunteers claiming expenses and on carrying out DBS checks for volunteers.

We helped the organisation to think about which volunteer roles would be most helpful, including a Coffee Morning Assistant and a Fundraising Assistant to help with writing simple funding applications (we advised that the latter could be hard to recruit). We also signposted some other organisations that OWA might like to contact, including WorkPath (for employability support for OWA's own service users) and Queen Mary University (for recruiting a short-term student volunteer to design a promotional leaflet).

Crowdfunding

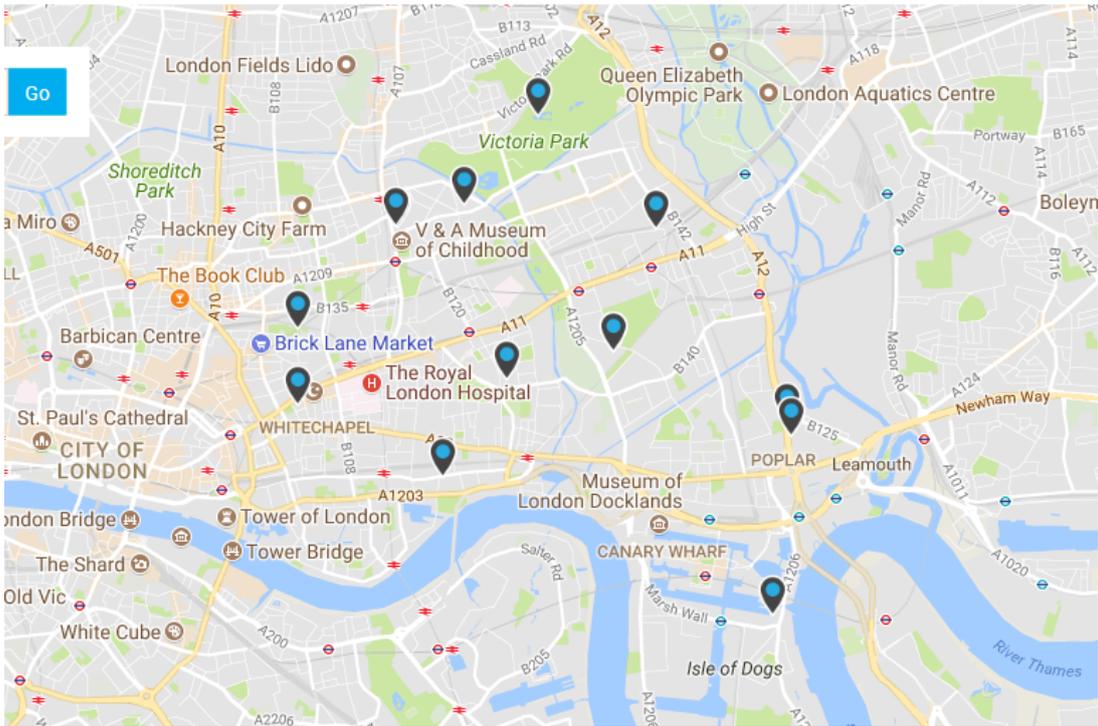
- 5.8 An action within the VCS Strategy is to identify potential external funding sources to expand and diversify the resource base of local VCS organisations. Crowdfunding was identified as one method of doing this, which has been operating successfully elsewhere for some time now.. In response, the Council launched a pilot programme for 12 months through a contract with Spacehive who are working with the GLA and a number of other councils..
- 5.9 As part of the crowdfunding initiative it was proposed that match-funding would be available through some Council grants. To start with, the Innovation Fund has been identified as a source for match-funding eligible projects. This is a one-off fund with a budget of £120k. As a result organisations that are crowdfunding through the Our Tower Hamlets page of the Spacehive portal have an opportunity to pitch for up to £10,000 (or a maximum of 50% of an organisations crowdfunding target) in match funding for their projects.
- 5.10 The crowdfunding initiative was launched in July 2017 with the Innovation Funding being made available in August 2017. In the first 3 months there were 10 live ideas. There were 5 successful projects with a total value of £178,200. The Council commitment through the innovation fund to three of these projects, who were successful, has been £13,425. The table below, details the geographical location of these projects:



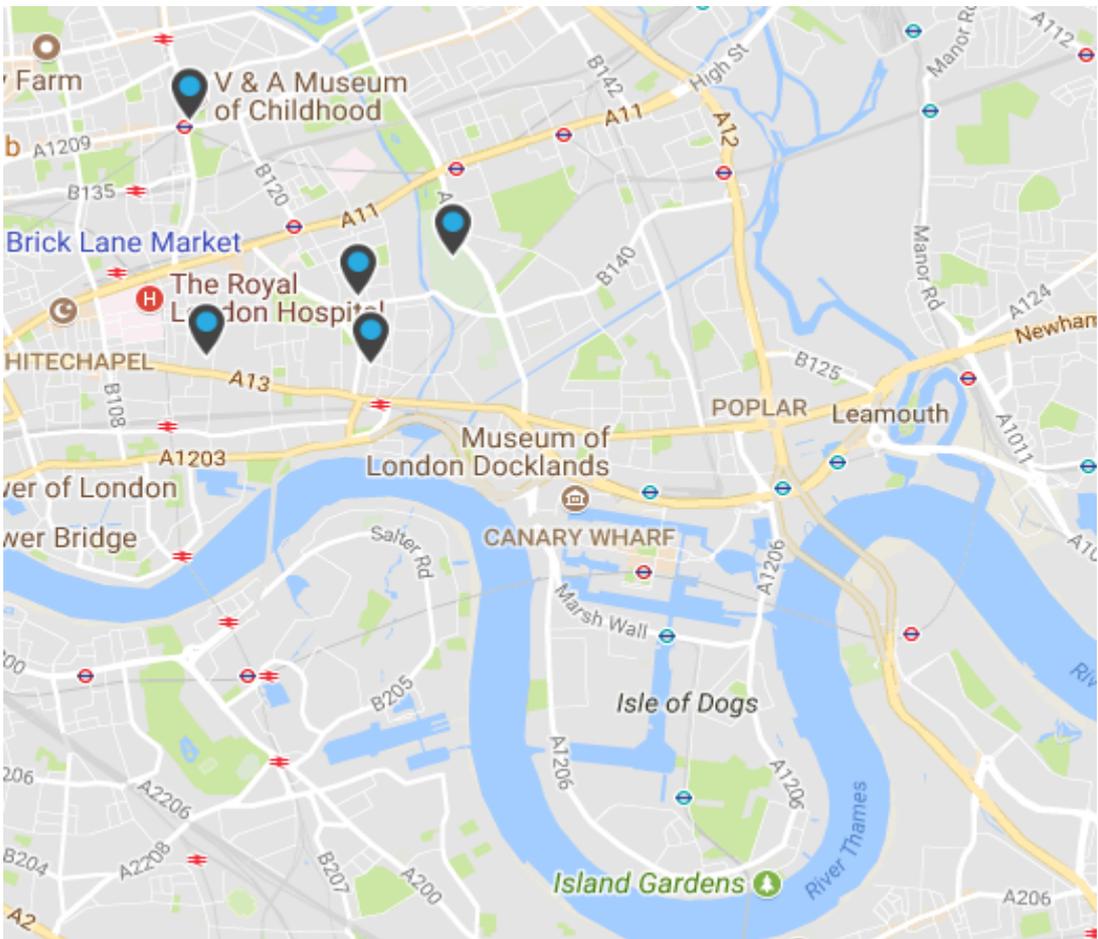
Currently there are 12 organisations that are in the idea stage of their campaign, with a further 5 who are actively fundraising. These are detailed below:

Idea

All Categories

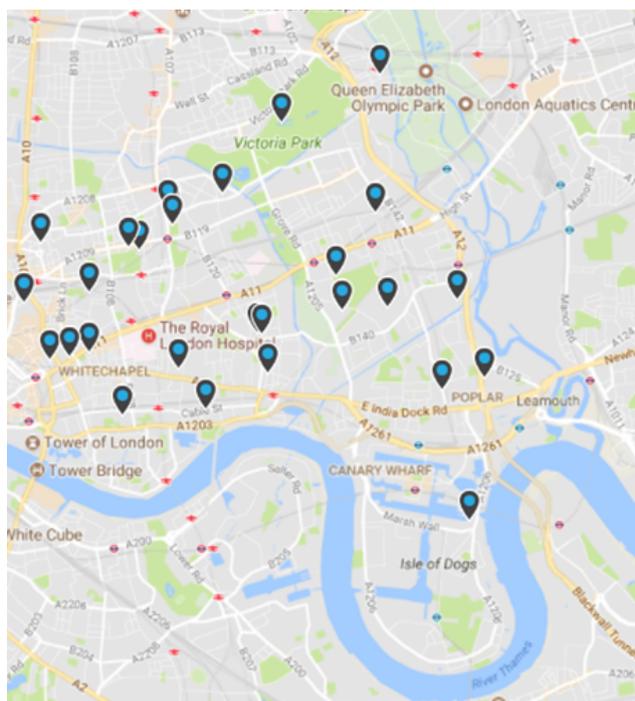


At the idea stage of their campaigns and projects



Projects currently crowdfunding

5.11 It is clear that crowdfunding can be an additional source of income for VCS organisations. Local VCS organisations, through crowdfunding, also have an opportunity to not only seek funding from the Council but through other funders who are active on the portal such as the GLA, Veolia, Better Gyms and the Esmee Fairbairn Foundation. In analysing the geographical data there does appear to be traction in certain parts of the borough although it has been identified that further work needs to be undertaken in order to encourage organisations from other parts of the borough to explore crowdfunding – this forms part of the next stage of developing the Council’s crowdfunding initiative.



Geographic Focus

Where are we starting to see traction?

Bethnal Green, Shoreditch, Whitechapel, Aldgate, Stepney Poplar

Where do we still need to work on?

Millwall, Cubitt Town Mile End, Blackwall, Bow, Bromley by Bow, Fish Island Victoria Park,

Areas of the borough where there has been traction and areas where we will be focusing on developing the crowdfunding initiative.

Crowdfunding Case Study – Boxing for the Community in London

This was a project by the Factory East Community Project who were keen to crowdfund for new gym equipment. The organisation uses the gym and its boxing facilities as an innovative approach to engage with and support young people who are at risk of engaging in gang culture. In addition the gym supports local residents in gaining confidence, living a healthy lifestyle and promoting community cohesion.

In particular their campaign included crowdfunding for items such as a training station, boxing kits for children and adult boxers and delivering Level 1 England Boxing Coaching courses to 4 of its trainers.

Through their campaign they managed to secure £2,040 in-kind support through Better Gyms and £2,283 through the Council’s Innovation Fund.

Procurement (Social Value)

- 5.12 According to the Council's 2016-19 Procurement Strategy the Council spends over £340m a year with about 3,500 suppliers. An action within the VCS Strategy was to use community benefit clauses in all relevant council contracts in order to lever additional support for VCS organisations in the borough and the local community and economy. In order to meet this commitment the Council has recently entered into an agreement with a local organisation Firesouls to pilot support to local VCS organisations through its Social Value Exchange which aims to get new resources into communities.
- 5.13 The pilot is based on a £3.5m works contract. Potential bidders for this contract will be invited to an e-auction where they will be asked to demonstrate what social value they will provide as part of the contract. This would be from a schedule of benefits which has been produced by the Council and signed-off by the VCS Strategy Procurement (Social Value) Sub-Group. As well as office space, material items such as desktop computers and laptops the benefits also include capacity building support from junior, management and executive members of the bidder.

6 COMMENTS OF THE CHIEF FINANCE OFFICER

- 6.1 This report sets out The Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) strategy between 2016 – 2019. The strategic objectives aim to achieve better value with limited resources, whilst targeting more positive outcomes for members of the local community.
- 6.2 These changes set out how the council will work in partnership with the VCS and promote community based volunteering. The current programme cycle of 2016-2019 had £300k set aside for programme deliver over that period. However it is not anticipated that those resources will be called upon as a result of actions within this report, which will be contained within the service general fund provision.

7. LEGAL COMMENTS

- 7.1 This reports provides an update on The Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) Strategy 2016 – 2019 approved by Cabinet on 5 April 2016 Agenda Item 5.8 and the Crowdfunding Initiative approved by the Grants Determination Sub Committee on 17th May 2017 Agenda Item 6.5 (Decisions).
- 7.2 The report raises no further legal issues beyond those detailed in the original reports as the report is an update on progress.

8. ONE TOWER HAMLETS CONSIDERATIONS

- 8.1 The contribution of organisations to delivering One Tower Hamlets is explicitly recognised in the approach taken to refresh the current Voluntary and Sector Strategy and the strategy itself. The strategy intends to strengthen and redefine the council's relationship with the VCS and support communities in a way that is flexible, responsive and meets local needs whilst demonstrating value for money. This includes providing support to the sector in a range of practical ways, as well as through grants and commissioning.

9. BEST VALUE (BV) IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 The refresh of the VCS Strategy supports the Best Value duty through its approach to develop a more strategic relationship with the VCS to help address the outcomes sought by the council. The strategy sets out opportunities to harness local knowledge and partnership work to better deliver services informed by consideration of economy, efficiency and effectiveness including co-production and sustainability and will provide the framework for voluntary organisations and community groups to work with the council to meet the needs of local residents.
- 9.2 The strategy's proposal to move to a collaborative commissioning model with the sector will enable the council to redesign services through joining up resources with partners to focus on improving outcomes for local people in the most efficient and effective way. It will also help to eliminate duplication of resources and effort and develop stronger and more varied partnerships to result in improved and more coherent services.

10. SUSTAINABLE ACTION FOR A GREENER ENVIRONMENT

- 10.1 There are no immediate sustainable or environmental issues arising from this report.

11. RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1 There are no direct risk management implications arising from this report.

12. CRIME AND DISORDER REDUCTION IMPLICATIONS

- 12.1 There are no direct implications of crime and disorder as a result of this report.

13. SAFEGUARDING IMPLICATIONS

- 13.1 There are no direct implications on safeguarding arising from this report.

Linked Reports, Appendices and Background Documents

Linked Report

- **Voluntary and Community Sector Strategy** – Cabinet, 5th April 2016

Appendices

- None

Background Documents – Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements)(Access to Information)(England) Regulations 2012

- None

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