

<b>Cabinet</b>	 <b>TOWER HAMLETS</b>
21 <sup>st</sup> October 2020	
<b>Report of:</b> Sharon Godman – Divisional Director, Strategy, Policy and Performance Will Tuckley – Chief Executive	<b>Classification:</b> Unrestricted
<b>Covid 19 Volunteer Hub - Grant Variation for Capacity Building and Infrastructure Grant Programme</b>	

<b>Lead Member</b>	<b>Councillor Candida Ronald, Cabinet Member for Resources and the Voluntary Sector</b>
<b>Originating Officer(s)</b>	Mark Waterman - Strategy and Policy Manager, Emily Fieran-Reed - Senior Strategy and Policy Manager
<b>Wards affected</b>	All wards
<b>Key Decision?</b>	No
<b>Forward Plan Notice Published</b>	9 October 2020
<b>Reason for Key Decision</b>	N/A
<b>Community Plan Theme</b>	It covers the following outcomes from Priority 1, Priority 2 and Priority 3: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• People access joined up services when they need them and feel healthier and more independent (Outcome 3)</li> <li>• People feel they are part of a cohesive and vibrant community (Outcome 8)</li> <li>• People say we work together across boundaries in a strong and effective partnership to achieve the best outcomes for our residents (Outcome 10)</li> </ul>

## REASONS FOR URGENCY

The report was not published five clear days in advance of the meeting as it was unclear until very recently whether there would be a need for the continuation of the Covid-19 Volunteering Hub. With the second wave of the pandemic arising in September 2020 it is now clear that there is a need for this continuation. Furthermore, monies for the £50,000 funding for the contract between the Council and VCTH for Hub activity were not identified until late September 2020. They are now available through a Government grant to the Council's Public Health Department. No alternative Council funding was available for this contract. It is essential to approve the grant variation as soon as possible in order to permit continued Council funding for VCTH delivery of the Hub work relating to the voluntary sector as the previous Council funding for this work concluded on 30<sup>th</sup> September 2020.

## **Executive Summary**

It is proposed that a grant variation is made to the funding agreement between the Council and Tower Hamlets Council for Voluntary Service (THCVS) in relation to the Infrastructure and Capacity Building Grants Programme, which is delivered by a partnership led by THCVS. This is being proposed as it would change the volunteering focus of the Programme to prioritise the delivery of a Covid 19 Volunteering Hub to voluntary and community sector (VCS) organisations. This grant is delivered by a partnership led by THCVS, with the relevant element within that delivered by Volunteer Centre Tower Hamlets (VCTH).

The above proposal would permit the Council to fund VCTH to continue to manage the Covid-19 Volunteering Hub between October 2020-September 2021 to link Tower Hamlets residents to volunteering opportunities to respond to the Covid-19 pandemic in the borough. VCTH set up the Hub in mid-March 2020 and successfully managed it between mid-March to September 2020. Grant funding for VCTH for its work in managing the Hub activity in relation to VCS organisations would amount to around 60% of the £63,000 that VCTH is scheduled to receive for its work on the Programme between October 2020-September 2021. It is important that the grant variation for the Infrastructure and Capacity Building Grants Programme is agreed as soon as possible in order to permit LBTH to fund VCTH for its work in managing the delivery of the Covid-19 Volunteering Hub work relating to VCS organisations, particularly in the context of the second wave of the Covid-19 pandemic commencing.

## **Recommendations:**

The Mayor in Cabinet is recommended to:

1. Agree the proposed grant variation to the funding agreement between the Council and Tower Hamlets Council for Voluntary Service (THCVS) in relation to the Infrastructure and Capacity Building Grants Programme. This grant is delivered by a partnership led by THCVS, with the relevant element within that delivered by Volunteer Centre Tower Hamlets (VCTH). The proposed variation will change the volunteering focus of the programme to prioritise the delivery of a Covid-19 Volunteering Hub to VCS organisations.

## **1. REASONS FOR THE DECISIONS**

- 1.1 The Council has been funding Volunteer Centre Tower Hamlets (VCTH), from mid-March to the end of September 2020, to set up and manage the Covid-19 Volunteering Hub in order to link volunteers in Tower Hamlets to volunteering opportunities to respond to the Covid-19 pandemic. The Hub has played a significant role in the response to the pandemic in the borough.
- 1.2 Council funding for VCTH to manage the Covid-19 Volunteering Hub

concluded on 30<sup>th</sup> September 2020. There is an urgent need for the work of the Covid-19 Volunteering Hub to continue to support the response in the borough, particularly from VCS organisations, to the second wave of the Covid-19 pandemic. The proposal to continue its important work is:

- the Council would fund VCTH to continue to manage the delivery of the Volunteering Hub for a further 12 months (October 2020-September 2021) in order to support the response to the second wave of the Covid-19 pandemic in the borough.
- the Council funding for the VCTH's management of the Hub would come from two sources – 1) a new contract funded by the public health covid grant – this would cover volunteering with the Council – this is not the subject of this paper but is mentioned for context; and 2) grant funding from the Infrastructure and Capacity Building Grants Programme, which is delivered by a partnership led by THCVS. VCTH is the relevant partner in this Programme in relation to the proposed variation.

1.3 The grant variation proposes a change of priorities for VCTH in the Programme, with around 60% of the funding VCTH receives as part of the grant for this Programme being diverted to fund VCTH's continued management and delivery of the Covid-19 Volunteering Hub through the Programme.

## **2. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS**

2.1 LBTH does not approve the grant variation. This is not a viable alternative, due to the need to address the challenges presented to the borough by the second wave of the Covid-19 pandemic. The volunteering support delivered by VCS organisations in the first wave of the pandemic, was supported by VCTH securing additional volunteers. This played a crucial role in the response to the first wave of the pandemic in the borough. A similar response, with similar levels of volunteers in the borough's VCS organisations, will be required to effectively meet the challenges of the second wave of the pandemic in the borough. Furthermore, volunteering will be one of the key priorities of the new Voluntary and Community Sector Strategy for 2020-2024 that the Council has been developing with the VCS, led by THCVS, Tower Hamlets Clinical Commissioning Group and Tower Hamlets Homes.

2.2 The Council manages the Covid-19 Volunteering Hub directly. This is not a viable or preferred option as:

- the Council does not have the staff with the required expertise and skills to directly manage the Hub.
- the Council does not have the credibility that VCTH has in engaging with

local VCS organisations in regards to their volunteering needs of being a VCS organisation itself or of having a specialist remit in regards to volunteering.

- there will be start-up costs for LBTH in assuming responsibility for managing the Hub as it would have to establish its own systems and procedures for the Hub
- the Council does not have established relationships with the Hub's volunteers.

2.3 The Council funds VCTH to manage the Covid-19 Volunteering Hub activity relating to VCS organisations between October 2020-September 2021 from an alternative source. This is not a viable option as we have not been able to identify any alternative sources of funding for this work.

### **3. DETAILS OF THE REPORT**

3.1 The Council funded VCTH to set up and manage the Covid-19 Volunteering Hub between mid-March and the end of September 2020. It has been a very important intervention to respond to the challenges of Covid-19 in the borough. Its achievements have included:

- 2,341 individuals signed up as volunteers via the Hub
- 2,815 matches of volunteers to volunteer roles in the Council and local VCS organisations (as at mid September 2020)
- VCS organisations supported to adapt or re-open their services safely. (The Hub works with 470+ local VCS organisations in the borough).
- Recent recruitment by the Council of over 200 COVID-19 Community Champions supported by the hub
- Volunteers matched to a number of roles in the Council, including roles providing vital assistance to socially isolated residents. Volunteer roles which the Hub has matched volunteers to include:
  - car drivers, delivering PPE to carers' homes
  - van drivers, and food packers distributing bulk food supplies to VCS organisations and foodbanks
  - Volunteers, supporting the Summer Holiday Hunger funded projects
  - shopping volunteers, delivering shopping to housebound residents
  - community kitchen volunteers
  - Bengali-speaking telephone befrienders
  - online English for Speakers of other languages (ESOL) conversational volunteers and online ESOL class volunteers

3.2 The continuation of the Covid-19 Volunteering Hub is essential for Tower Hamlets, particularly given the growing impact of Covid-19 due to the second wave of the pandemic. There is a need to ensure sustainable volunteering resources in the borough to help the Council and VCS organisations continue

to respond to the Covid-19 pandemic. Furthermore, volunteering has been identified as a key priority of the Council and will be one of the key priorities of the VCS Strategy 2020-2024 that is currently being developed, including a commitment to develop a volunteering plan for the borough. The Hub will be essential to deliver this work.

- 3.3 The previous funding of the Volunteering hub was on a quarterly basis, with the decision about the second quarter being taken at the end of the first quarter. There is a need to ensure that funding for the Covid-19 Volunteering Hub is on a more long-term basis to provide a reasonable level of security to the Hub and enable it to plan ahead for future activity in response to the rising needs of the pandemic.
- 3.4 The Council funds the Infrastructure and Capacity Building Grants Programme, which operates for three years from October 2019 – September 2022. VCTH receive funding as part of this grant. The Council funding agreement for this grant is with Tower Hamlets Council for Voluntary Service (THCVS), and VCTH are one of 2 partner agencies that deliver the service. The other partner in the Programme is Tower Hamlets Community Transport (THCT). VCTH is scheduled to receive £63,000 per year for its work on this Programme. It has been successfully delivering its scheduled activity for the Programme to date.
- 3.5 It is proposed that, for year two of the grant (October 2020-September 2021), around 60% of the funding VCTH receives as part of the above grant be diverted instead to fund VCTH's continued management and delivery of the Covid-19 Volunteering Hub. The justification for this is that supporting the VCS response to the second wave is now the biggest priority for work with the VCS around volunteering. This will enable the part of the Hub that relates to VCS organisations to continue. This funding will support the Hub to place volunteers in VCS organisations in the borough, in order to help them respond to the demands of the pandemic and assist VCS organisations to effectively support these volunteers in their roles. The funding for the above Programme was designated to provide infrastructure support to the VCS in the borough, and therefore the diversion of programme funds to work to assist VCS organisations to respond to the volunteering demands that they will face during the pandemic is consistent with the programme's initial aim.
- 3.6 VCTH will deliver a range of activities through the Covid-19 Volunteering Hub element of the Infrastructure & Capacity Building Grants Programme to support VCS organisations in the borough respond to the volunteering demands of the Covid-19 pandemic, including:
  - overall coordination and management of the Hub
  - attending Council meetings relating to volunteering
  - liaising with Council staff to develop and advertise their volunteer roles (eg COVID Champions, Food Hub volunteers, Parks Volunteers, etc),
  - supporting VCS organisations to develop robust volunteer roles
  - providing best practice advice on recruiting and supporting volunteers (including safeguarding)

- compiling and disseminating weekly alerts on current volunteer opportunities to the expanding volunteer pool
- connecting interested volunteer to organisations
- registering new VCS organisations and conducting a volunteering health check on them.

3.7 VCTH will also continue to deliver the highest priority elements it was originally funded for in October 2020-September 2021, including training for volunteer managers and the delivery of peer learning sessions. It has been successfully delivering in October 2019-September 2020 its scheduled activity for the Programme. Some of the lower priority activities will no longer be delivered in October 2020-September 2021, or will be provided on a downscaled basis. VCTH will also be offering replacement activities to offset the above changes. Changes will be as follows:

- removal of some of the advice information in VCTH monthly e-bulletins to VCS organisations. These items will be replaced by occasional blogs on VCTH website which will share good practice.
- reduction in the number of VCS organisations receiving best practice support, from 24 organisations over 40 sessions to 18 organisations over 30 sessions. VCTH will be able to provide additional support to organisations via its work with them through the Covid-19 Volunteering Hub, particularly in relation to developing and refining volunteer roles.
- removal of casework support for 3 organisations to achieve Investing in Volunteers (IiV) quality accreditation per annum. VCTH will be offering instead a limited amount of support to organisations working on IiV (either the full standard, or the new free 'IiV Essentials' health check) as part of the above best practice support work. Furthermore, the National Council for Voluntary Organisations has launched a free health check (IiV Essentials), which is likely to be more appealing to organisations in the current financial crisis.
- an updated bank of shared good practice resources from across the sector (24 organisations per annum contribute to good practice bank; 50 organisations per annum use resources from good practice bank) will not be provided. VCTH will instead share resources directly with organisations as needed. Some good practice resources - eg fact sheets - will remain available on VCTH website.
- a co-production exercise to explore potential for a Strategic Volunteer Managers' Forum will not take place. VCTH will instead facilitate the occasional targeted strategic meeting as necessary, eg in relation to the volunteering element of the VCS Strategy.

3.8 The above proposed provision of Covid-19 Volunteering Hub activities to support VCS organisations in the borough offers excellent value for money to the Council as the Hub is already established at VCTH and therefore there will

be no start-up costs. VCTH has management and staff who are experienced in working with the Hub and they can start delivering immediately.

- 3.9 If demands relating to Covid-19 volunteering decrease, then the Council would negotiate with THCVS and VCTH about revising the funding agreement for the Infrastructure and Capacity Building Grants Programme to agree on any reductions in Covid-19 volunteering work and resumption of Programme volunteer-related activity that had been suspended. These changes would be subject to Grant Determination (Cabinet) Sub-Committee approval.
- 3.10 With the support from its legal team, the Council is ensuring that the revised funding agreement for the Infrastructure and Capacity Building Grants Programme includes:
- clear output and outcome targets
  - clauses to ensure that the Council enjoys intellectual property rights, in relation to information about volunteers, within the confines of General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR).
- 3.11 As referred to in Paragraph 1.2 above, the Council also plans to fund VCTH through a contract of just under £50,000 between October 2020-September 2021 to manage the work of the Hub that relates to supporting volunteering for the Council. This funding is from a Government grant made to LBTH Public Health to support the response to Covid-19 in Tower Hamlets. This information is provided for context and is not the subject of this report.

#### **4. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS**

- 4.1 An Equality Impact Assessment has been carried out on the Covid 19 Volunteer Hub - Grant Variation for Capacity Building and Infrastructure Grant Programme proposal. This Assessment found that a full Equality Impact Analysis is not required as proposal is likely to have no or minimal impact on the protected characteristic groups listed in Equality Impact Assessment Screening Tool.
- 4.2 The Covid-19 Volunteering Hub activity of the Programme will support a vast range of local VCS organisations, that encompass the breadth of the VCS sector, ranging from micro volunteer-led groups to well-established charities. This will include support for BAME-led VCS organisations, and those VCS organisations providing services to protected characteristic groups, such as disabled people, women, LGBT communities, older people, children and young people.
- 4.3 The Council monitoring of Hub activity, as part of the Council's overall monitoring of the Infrastructure and Capacity Building Programme, will monitor its progress in effectively addressing equality issues.

## **5. OTHER STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS**

5.1 This section of the report is used to highlight further specific statutory implications that are either not covered in the main body of the report or are required to be highlighted to ensure decision makers give them proper consideration. Examples of other implications may be:

- Best Value Implications,
- Consultations,
- Environmental (including air quality),
- Risk Management,
- Crime Reduction,
- Safeguarding.
- Data Protection / Privacy Impact Assessment.

5.2 There are no further statutory sector implications relating to this report.

## **6. COMMENTS OF THE CHIEF FINANCE OFFICER**

6.1 This report seeks approval to agree to the proposed grant variation to the funding agreement between the Council and Tower Hamlets Council for Voluntary Service (THCVS) in relation to the Infrastructure and Capacity Building Grants Programme.

6.2 As part of the programme THCVS is scheduled to receive £63,000 for the year (October 2020 – September 2021). The proposed variation will divert 60%, approx. £38,000 of funding to continue the management and delivery of the Covid-19 Volunteering Hub.

## **7. COMMENTS OF LEGAL SERVICES**

7.1 Section 2B of the National Health Service Act 2006 requires every local authority to take such steps as it considers appropriate for improving the health of the people in its area. Section 2B(4) makes it clear that these steps may include the making of grants or loans on such terms as the local authority considers appropriate. Therefore, the Council has the legal power to amend the grant as is proposed in this report.

7.2 The grant agreement will be amended to reflect the changes referred to in this report. This will allow the Council to monitor the grant and ensure that it is used for the purposes for which it is intended and that the activities resulting from the grant are effective efficient and economic. This will assist the Council to demonstrate that the use of the grant meets the Council's best value duty.

- 7.3 The Council has undertaken an Equalities Assessment to ensure that the repurposing of the grant complies with the Council's legal duties under the Equality Act 2010.
- 7.4 Ordinarily the Council makes decisions relating to grants as part of the Grants Determination (Cabinet) sub-committee. However, the ability for the sub-committee to make such decisions is due to a delegation from the Mayor under the constitution. If so minded, the Mayor is entitled to make the decision referred to in the recommendations as at any point the delegator of a decision can make the particular delegated decision in accordance with Administrative Law.
- 

### **Linked Reports, Appendices and Background Documents**

#### **Linked Report**

- NONE

#### **Appendices**

- NONE

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

- NONE

#### **Officer contact details for documents:**

- N/A