

Report subject	<b>Empowering Communities: BCP Council's Voluntary and Community Sector and Volunteering Strategy 2021-2024</b>
Meeting date	29 September 2021
Status	Public Report
Executive summary	<p>This report outlines the proposal to approve and adopt the Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Council's Voluntary and Community Sector and Volunteering Strategy.</p> <p>The vision of the strategy is to ensure that Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole is a vibrant, connected community which provides meaningful opportunities for volunteering and empowers a thriving voluntary and community sector to help support community needs.</p> <p>The strategy details how we aim to achieve the vision through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- A set of key principles and framework for how the council will collaborate and work together with the voluntary and community sector to support local communities.</li> <li>- Recognising the impact of COVID-19 and identifying ways to help communities to recover, as well as learning from the crisis response that brought some residents closer together.</li> <li>- Developing a volunteering strategy that creates opportunities that are accessible and enable residents to play an active role in helping others and themselves, through formal volunteering, neighbourliness, work experience and related opportunities.</li> </ul> <p>The strategy is accompanied by a three-year delivery plan. The strategy and delivery plan have been informed and developed through public consultation and stakeholder engagement with a range of organisations, community groups and individuals.</p> <p>The report outlines the proposal to allocate funding to a dedicated Volunteer Coordinator to facilitate and support the delivery of the plans.</p>

<p><b>Recommendations</b></p>	<p><b>It is RECOMMENDED that:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>(a) Cabinet adopts the BCP Council’s Voluntary and Community sector and Volunteering Strategy and Delivery Plan.</b></li> <li><b>(b) Cabinet notes the £33k of annual additional resources requested to support a Volunteer Coordinator to facilitate delivery of the plans from 2022/23 onwards.</b></li> <li><b>(c) Cabinet notes that the £33k of annual additional resources will formally be recommended to Council as part of the 2022/23 budget and Medium-Term Financial Plan Update report in February 2022.</b></li> <li><b>(d) Cabinet recognises the significant impact that Covid has had on the state of the local voluntary and community sector and the increased demand on services that organisations are experiencing.</b></li> </ul>
<p><b>Reason for recommendations</b></p>	<p>To recognise the fundamental role that the voluntary and community sector and volunteers had, and continues to have, in supporting our communities during the pandemic and to ensure that the voluntary and community sector is supported to recover from the significant impact the pandemic has had on their operation, finances and trustees.</p> <p>To recognise that half of the VCS organisations that responded to a local survey by CAN in the summer of 2021 said they are at risk of permanent closure within 12 months. It is important that the council understands and commits to effectively supporting the sector, both financially and through working relationships as outlined in the strategy, in order to empower the sector to thrive and be sustainable.</p> <p>To recognise the continued pressure on council services and budgets, alongside the challenges of funding and resources within the voluntary and community sector and that it is essential that we all work together in partnership and collaboratively to share knowledge, expertise and resource to support a thriving sector and empower vibrant communities.</p> <p>To support the transformation of the council, ensuring communities and partnerships are embedded in the heart of the council as part of its operating model and supporting the development of strength-based approaches to working with our communities.</p> <p>To demonstrate our commitment to the development of an ambitious volunteering and social action strategy, that celebrates</p>

	<p>and builds on the volunteering and neighbourliness that already exists in our communities. Particularly learning from the recent community response to COVID-19 where communities came together to support each other.</p> <p>This strategy enables us to achieve the outcomes in the BCP Council's Big Plan <a href="#">and the Corporate Strategy</a> regarding our commitment to developing vibrant communities, with an outstanding quality of life, where everyone plays an active role. Volunteers already work with the council in a variety of ways but there are opportunities to strengthen and extend the range of ways people can get involved to help others.</p>
Portfolio Holder(s):	<p>Cllr Drew Mellor, Leader of BCP Council</p> <p>Cllr Karen Rampton, Portfolio Holder for Adults</p> <p>With Assistance from - Cllr Jane Kelly, Lead Member for Community Engagement</p>
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Wards	All Wards
Classification	For Decision

## Background

1. The BCP Council's 'Voluntary and Community Sector and Volunteering Strategy 2021-2024' outlines our ambition to support a thriving, vibrant, voluntary and community sector across Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole, along with our desire to put volunteering at the heart of our communities, ensuring there are diverse, accessible, rewarding opportunities to volunteer.
2. Ongoing pressure on budgets and resources both within the council and across the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) means that now more than ever we need to work more effectively together through joined up approaches to share expertise, knowledge and resources to support community needs. The strategy and delivery plan are based on working closely with others, particularly the VCS and local communities, to respond to need and enable vibrant connected communities.

3. In addition, the pandemic has had both positive and negative impacts on the VCS and volunteering across the area. The need for crisis services has placed strain upon the council, partner agencies and the VCS to provide support to those in need. The VCS have demonstrated that they are able to adapt and respond quickly to need in our communities and the strength of our partnership working has grown significantly.
4. Volunteering in all its forms has grown and we want to embrace the groundswell of active volunteering and ensure that the Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole area is one where there are exciting and rewarding volunteering opportunities which are open and accessible. We also want to expand and diversify our own volunteering opportunities as a council and this strategy and delivery plan details how we intend to achieve this.
5. The strategy has been developed by listening to the views and feedback received from a recent public consultation (477 responses), alongside stakeholder engagement sessions (including councillors, town and parish councils and external organisations), previous relevant surveys and existing relationships with CVS organisations, community groups and individuals.
6. The strategy aligns closely with the Community Engagement and Consultation Strategy, our work to support the development of vibrant communities in our priority areas using strength-based approaches and the transformation of the council, which aims to put communities and partnerships at the heart of everything we do as a council.
7. The development of the strategy has included engaging with other departments across the council to understand evolving work plans, significant transformational service delivery changes and relevant strategies. There is an overall shift towards greater collaboration with the VCS sector and communities to build resilience. This strategy provides the foundations and framework for how the council plans to work with the VCS and help to support it to thrive and how the council can lead the way in its own approach to volunteering.
8. Several council departments work closely with the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) through partnerships, projects and other work to support local communities. BCP Council funds specialist VCS organisations through grant agreements, such as with Citizens Advice BCP and Community Action Network (CAN), which provide professional advice and expertise that extends the council's breadth and depth of services. Dedicated council officers within departments also recruit and work with volunteers that help the council in a range of ways, such as with open spaces, arts and culture and community transport.
9. Once approved, the strategy will enable officers and partnerships across the council to engage and link work effectively. The principles align closely to the recently published national Integrated Care System (ICS) Design Framework and Dorset's ICS commitment to working in partnership with people and communities. Dorset's ICS public engagement partnerships with the local VCS has been recognised as an example of good practice.

10. In Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole there are currently 657 general registered charities and at least 2,600 voluntary and community sector groups across the area. Of the total population, 22% regularly volunteer and 11 million hours of volunteer time is given per year.
11. Respondents to the public consultation on the strategy recognised the negative impact the pandemic has had on the sector and the majority (94%) agreed that partnership approaches are important to help support community needs. They would also like to see the council provide more resources and support, as well as joined up approaches and better engagement to help empower the sector. The majority were volunteers (88%), and about a quarter had volunteered or carried out work experience with the council.
12. The consultation revealed that 59% of respondents believed that council-led opportunities are open and accessible to all, and that better awareness and promoting opportunities more widely, not just online, would help. They commented that the council should also better identify the needs of different groups. Other barriers that prevent people from volunteering were identified, mainly not enough time and family/work commitments as well as confidence to do something new. Respondents shared a range of local activities and groups that they are involved in. Whilst 66% want get more involved to help others in their community, nearly half (44%) felt they didn't have enough support to set up their own community initiatives and groups.
13. Community Action Network (CAN) are a local infrastructure charity who work across Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole providing support to the voluntary and community sector free of charge through a grant agreement with BCP Council. The council will continue to work closely with CAN to support the delivery plans for the volunteering strategy and volunteer hub to connect people with opportunities.
14. CAN recently carried out a State of the Sector survey with local VCS organisations and identified the significant impact the pandemic has had on the local sector. About half (51%) of the responding organisations said that they are at risk of permanent closure within 12 months if funding is not made available to them. Many have been able to quickly adapt to the restrictions and changed the way they delivered their services and nearly half (46%) have seen a significant increase in need. However, 56% of the 31 organisations who wish to continue their expanded services will need to access funding to enable this.

## **Strategy Summary**

15. The BCP Council's 'Voluntary and community sector and Volunteering Strategy 2021-2024' (Appendix 1) outlines a set of priorities and key actions over the next three years to achieve our vision through partnership and collaborative working of: *'To ensure that Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole is a vibrant, connected community which provides meaningful opportunities for volunteering and empowers a thriving voluntary and community sector to help support community needs.'*

16. The strategy focuses on:

- i. How we work with the voluntary and community sector to support connected vibrant communities through partnerships and collaborative working, as well as helping residents to build resilient communities.
- ii. Recognising the impact of COVID-19: Learning from the community response to the pandemic to embrace new ways of working, as well as helping those negatively impacted to find opportunities to play an active, valued role in their communities.
- iii. Focusing on the development of volunteering and social action opportunities across the wider community, including council-led opportunities as well as volunteering and social action that takes place through the voluntary and community sector, local business and more informal mechanisms.

17. The strategy builds on existing council strategies including the Corporate Strategy and the Big Plan and existing effective partnerships with the VCS to provide a corporate-wide approach to sharing knowledge and expertise more broadly across the organisation and between partners.

18. The strategy defines the following priorities for how BCP Council will collaborate with a range of organisations, groups and individuals within communities to empower the voluntary and community sector and communities to thrive through:

- a. Build effective partnerships and working relationships that support stronger connected communities. This includes co-designing a partnership agreement with the sector to replace previous Compact agreements.
- b. Extend the council's services by building capacity through specialist partners.
- c. Learn from the community response to COVID-19 and embrace new ways of working.
- d. Help people to connect with their communities.
- e. Support community-led approaches to build resilient communities.
- f. Focus on early intervention and prevention to support people to avoid crisis.

19. The strategy defines how BCP Council will work with others to develop volunteering and social action opportunities which are accessible and enable everyone to be able to play an active role in helping each other and themselves. Social action is about people coming together to help improve their lives and solve the problems that are important in their communities. It involves people giving their time and other resources for the common good, in a range of forms – from volunteering and community-owned services to community organising or simple neighbourly acts. This strategy is not only focused on developing council-led opportunities but also working with the voluntary and community sector, local businesses and other informal mechanisms to enable more people to join in.

20. The strategy outlines the following priorities for developing volunteering and social action opportunities where everyone can play an active role to help others:
- i. Recognising the value and promoting the benefits of volunteering.
  - ii. Enhancing accessibility, choice and diversity.
  - iii. Providing positive and rewarding volunteering experiences.
  - iv. Bringing communities together to enable social action.
  - v. Engaging employers and business leaders to play their part.
  - vi. Developing a more joined up approach to volunteering within the council.
21. The public consultation on the strategy revealed strong support for the council to work in partnership with and support the voluntary and community sector. In addition, it identified the need for better promotion and communication on what volunteer and work experience opportunities are available and to make it easier for people to sign up and join in. We believe that volunteering should be open and accessible, and the strategy focuses on working with a range of organisations and communities to identify and breakdown potential barriers to volunteering and improve the variety of opportunities that are available.
22. In addition, volunteers should be recognised for the valuable contribution they make to society. Working with partners, we will develop celebratory events and awards to help to acknowledge this work, raise awareness of volunteering, share best practice, as well as inspiring others.
23. The strategy recognises the council's commitment and role to support the needs of our communities. In particular, it will focus on those that could benefit from volunteering and work experience opportunities to support them to improve their quality of life, whether it be through building their skills and employability opportunities or improving their wellbeing and connecting with others in their community.
24. The council is committed to developing an employer supported volunteering scheme which enables staff to volunteer. This will be reviewed as part of the Smarter Structures pay and reward programme which forms part of the transformation of BCP Council.
25. The approach to volunteering within BCP Council is currently carried out in isolation across different departments. Through the strategy and delivery plan we will establish a working group to enable a more joined up approach between departments that work with volunteers. This will enable better sharing of information and resources between departments to improve synergy, efficiency, and consistency, where appropriate, so that it is easier for people to volunteer with the council. We will also develop the infrastructure to enable more council departments to be supported to offer volunteering opportunities and ensure that these opportunities are promoted and clearly accessible.

## **Delivering the strategy**

26. The strategy includes a three-year delivery plan which will be reviewed on an annual basis to reflect the fluidity of the situation we are currently functioning under as part of the pandemic. It will be overseen by the Vibrant Communities Partnership Board which will be established to govern the strategy and delivery plan, alongside other community strategies that link together as part of this work. This board will report to the BCP Health and Wellbeing Board.
27. In addition, a working group will be created to oversee the delivery plan and the delivery of the strategy. This will include representatives from BCP Council, other public sector organisations, local businesses, voluntary and community sector organisations and groups. It will integrate learning from those with lived experience to understand issues and effective support needed. This working group is likely to include subgroups that will focus on particular areas of the strategy.
28. The delivery plan contains a set of overall success measures that will be used, as well as individual measures of success against the actions outlined in the delivery plans. It is an ambitious statement about the value we place on the voluntary and community sector and the role of volunteering across Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole and sets out our intent to recognise, support and grow the sector through partnership working.

## **Options Appraisal**

29. Option 1: There is no statutory obligation to have this strategy and therefore Cabinet could decide not to adopt it. No further resource would be spent on this piece of work other than that which currently take place within existing departments. However, without a dedicated resource and delivery plan, there are missed opportunities, including greater efficiencies and benefits that are achievable through partnership working and community cohesion. On this basis, this option has been rejected.
30. Option 2: To separate the strategies: one to focus on working with the voluntary and community sector and the other to improve volunteering and social action opportunities locally. The advantage would be shorter public facing strategies, compact delivery plans and more defined focus on each area. However, the sector and volunteering are interlinked and dependent on each other and by separating the strategies, the work becomes less cohesive and aligned. The response and recovery to the COVID-19 pandemic is very intertwined between the two areas of the strategy as well. On this basis, this option has been rejected.
31. Option 3: To adopt the strategy and allocate the requested resource to bring together the working groups and facilitate the coordination of the delivery plans in partnership with others. This strategy provides opportunities to improve on the council's ability to support local needs by working more closely with the voluntary and community sector and communities. This is the recommended option.



## **Summary of financial implications**

32. The financial cost to adopt the strategy is the council officer resource required for facilitation and administration of the delivery plans. It is proposed that a full-time equivalent Volunteer Coordinator is recruited for the length of the strategy. The cost is £32,683 including on costs.
33. Cabinet is asked to only note the £33k of additional resources requested to support the Volunteering Strategy from 2022/23 onwards. This is on the basis that Council will formally be requested to approve these resources as part of the 2022/23 budget and Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP) Update report in February 2022.
34. The council is committed to working in a strength-based approach to support communities to develop. Over time, this will lead to fewer residents falling into crisis, reducing the strain on resources and securing sustainable outcomes. In order to achieve this, we need to work more collaboratively with the voluntary and community sector and the appointment of the Volunteer Coordinator post will enable us to progress this in line with the strategy and delivery plan.

## **Summary of legal implications**

35. The strategy will take note of issues covered under equal opportunities, non-discriminatory conduct by the local authority and the insurance implications of volunteers directly engaged with council services. The existing Volunteer Agreement developed by Bournemouth Council in 2014 and agreed by Legal Services will be reviewed as part of the strategy to ensure it remains fit for purpose.
36. The strategy will consider ways of vetting and monitoring organisations that the council works with to avoid any potential reputational damage risk if the council funds an organisation that may then be involved in inappropriate behaviour.
37. The strategy will incorporate data protection regulations in dealings with volunteers and groups. It will consider employment status risks of work experience / 'volunteers' especially if part of a course where a financial agreement is in place, seeking guidance from HR in relation to support documentation, induction and any individual agreements.
38. The working group will seek advice and guidance from the Legal and Insurance departments as required as the implementation of the strategy develops.

## **Summary of human resources implications**

39. There are costs associated with the time spent by council officers being involved in the delivery of the strategy. However, this is part of most of the officers existing roles and the benefits far outweigh these associated costs.
40. The strategy is dependent on leadership and corporate wide commitment to the priorities outlined in the strategy and it will only be successful if there is dedicated time and responsibility is given within the relevant council departments, to help deliver on plans that relate to their area of service.

41. The council has recently committed to supporting employees to volunteer. This is being reviewed as part of the Smarter Structures pay and reward work as part of the transformation of the council to allow employees a certain amount of paid time off to undertake volunteering within the community. This commitment shows the council's role in leading in such work and could provide significant support and skills sharing to the voluntary and community sector.

### **Summary of sustainability impact**

42. A Decision Impact Assessment report has been completed for this strategy (Appendix 2). There is a low carbon footprint risk as a result of the planned activity, and most of the activity supports sustainable communities. The strategy is focused on local partnership working and connecting communities across the area and at a local level. By creating strong networks at a local level, it provides the opportunity for more local provision and support to local organisations. This in turn helps to reduce the carbon footprint in our area.

43. An increase in volunteering could lead to more local journeys. To mitigate this, the strategy will encourage people to participate in volunteering and social action within their local neighbourhoods. We will encourage this localised volunteering or, where travel is necessary, the use of public transport in order to reduce carbon emissions in recognition of our declaration of the climate and ecological emergency.

44. Active communities can help address the causes/effects of climate change by volunteering to improve the natural environment and spread the message that individual actions will assist in global improvements. This should outweigh the increased transport caused by volunteer movements, some of which will be by sustainable means as local volunteering is encouraged. The strategy links to the Greenspaces Volunteering Strategy and through participation, it encourages people to value these spaces more and improve quality.

45. The council will work closely with Community Action Network, who are also working on the climate change agenda. This includes looking to support organisations and groups across the voluntary and community sector to work together to help reduce the impact of climate change. This will strengthen the commitments made by BCP Council.

46. The proposal has a positive impact on encouraging sustainable procurement and standards. Working with strategic procurement, the strategy includes reference to the social value act and the desire to ensure this is considered more in the council's procurement of services.

### **Summary of public health implications**

47. The strategy aims to create vibrant communities and encourage people to actively participate and feel part of their communities. Volunteering and social action offers many benefits, personal social, and economic, for the volunteers themselves, local groups, organisations and charities, the wider community and economy. Benefits include helping others, having a sense of purpose, reducing loneliness and being more active.

48. Through partnership working, there are also opportunities for knowledge and skills sharing between organisations and groups which help to develop more thriving communities. The strategy is focused on supporting the voluntary and community sector to thrive, which in turn provides specialist support to help reduce health inequalities locally.

### **Summary of equality implications**

49. An Equality Impact Assessment report has been produced for this strategy, (Appendix 3). There is a lack of diversity in the people that declare they volunteer locally. The public consultation revealed that many felt that volunteering and work experience opportunities were not open and accessible to everyone and that there are barriers that prevent people from volunteering. However, the strategy and delivery plan are focused on improving this by increasing the range of opportunities and the way in which these are shared more broadly across communities. The delivery plans involve working with a range of relevant partners to reach out to under-represented groups and improve the range of formal volunteering opportunities available, such as younger people, long term unemployed, care leavers, those with disabilities and a broader representation from ethnic minority groups. Ongoing engagement will identify any additional under-represented groups.
50. BCP Council will work with a range of relevant partners to better understand and engage with individuals and communities to create more opportunities and positive experiences with volunteering and work experience. Work with partners will include reviewing how accessible opportunities are for people to get involved taking into consideration economical, physical and mental requirements.
51. The strategy outlines a set of principles to how the council will work with the voluntary and community sector to support them to thrive. It is fundamental that we provide the right level of support to help the sector to be sustainable and in turn avoid a reduction in services/support available to communities where needed. DOTS Disability were commissioned to undertake a consultation with disabled people on the draft strategy to provide feedback for consideration.

### **Summary of risk assessment**

52. If the strategy is not adopted, there will be less support and opportunities created that help the voluntary and community sector to recover from the pandemic and thrive. This could result in some highly specialist organisations struggling more and reduce the types of support and services that are provided to local communities.
53. In adopting a strategy, there is a risk that if it is only a short-term commitment it could lead to a loss in trust and confidence with the council in the very communities it seeks to support and develop.
54. The COVID-19 pandemic could continue to have a significant impact through further outbreaks locally that were not expected. This could impact or delay the delivery of the strategy and delivery plans. During the pandemic, organisations

and people adapted to change and will continue to do so even if not at optimal delivery. The strategy includes annual reviews to be able to amend plans accordingly.

55. The priorities to look at improving the volunteering and social action opportunities available to people may be achieved, but those that we are trying to reach may continue to decide not to play an active part. Whilst there was a promising neighbourly response to helping others during the pandemic, individuals may decide to return to their previous ways and not wish to be involved in more sustained work.

A shortened version of the strategy will be made available for those that are interested in a summary of the key priorities and purpose of the strategy.

### **Background papers**

BCP Council's Corporate strategy <https://www.bcpCouncil.gov.uk/About-the-council/Strategies-plans-and-policies/CorporateStrategy/Corporate-Strategy.aspx>  
'Published works'

BCP Council's Big Plan <https://www.bcpCouncil.gov.uk/About-the-council/Our-Big-Plan/Our-Big-Plan-summary.aspx> 'Published works'

BCP Council's CVS and Volunteering Strategy Consultation Report  
<https://haveyoursay.bcpCouncil.gov.uk/8619/widgets/28772/documents/13311>  
'Published works'

National Integrated Care System Design Framework - [Report template - NHSI website \(england.nhs.uk\)](#)

### **Appendices**

Appendix 1. BCP Council's Voluntary and Community Sector and Volunteering Strategy 2021-2024

Appendix 2. Decision Impact Assessment report

Appendix 3. Equality Impact Assessment

Appendix 4. Draft Shortened version of BCP Council's VCS and Volunteering Strategy 2021-2024

Appendix 5. Delivery plans for BCP Council's VCS and Volunteering strategy