

Voluntary and Community Sector Infrastructure Support

Final Consultation Feedback

October 2017



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a) Introduction

Since June 2017, the Council has been undertaking stakeholder consultation to review the Voluntary Community Sector (VCS) infrastructure support that it invests in, and what this infrastructure support should look like in the future.

The original [consultation and its findings](#) can be accessed via the link.

This document presents the feedback received as part of the final stage of consultation on the [draft commissioning model](#), and presents the Council's final commissioning model for VCS infrastructure.

b) Feedback received

The Council consulted on the following contract structure for its VCS infrastructure services:

VCS Infrastructure Support Contract	
<p style="text-align: center;">Lot 1: Organisational Infrastructure</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organisational Support, Development and Capacity Building £170,000 p.a. 	<p style="text-align: center;">Lot 2: Volunteering Infrastructure</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General Volunteering Support, Development and Capacity Building £40,000 p.a. • Dementia Volunteering Support, Development and Capacity Building c. £75,000 p.a. (IBCF funded)

Details of the proposed activities within these two Lots is provided in the [draft commissioning model consultation document](#).

Three comprehensive responses were received in response to the draft commissioning model, all from local VCS organisations. The following sections provide an overview of the feedback received and the Council's response:

i. Commissioning structure

Feedback
Some concerns were raised that a single overarching contract arrangement could entail a lot of additional work, inherent risks and additional costs if this means that one contractor needs to act as the lead.
Response
While it is proposed to have a single procurement exercise, the Council does not propose to have a lead-contractor/ sub-contractor arrangement. The intention is

to let two separate contracts, one for each of the lots described. These contracts will be directly between the Council and the winning provider of each lot. The purpose of having a single procurement exercise therefore is to ensure that both contractors are clear about the role they have to play as part of commissioned VCS infrastructure in the city, and where those roles intersect.

Feedback

A query was raised regarding the reference to ‘a possible joint commissioning exercise with Gateshead’ (on page 3 of the original document) and whether this may include volunteering provision.

Response

The Council is working with Gateshead Council to explore a joint procurement exercise to commission VCS infrastructure services for the two areas. This procurement exercise will not include a Gateshead Lot for volunteering as volunteering support is currently provided directly by Gateshead Council itself.

ii. Lot 1: Organisational Support

Core Offer

Feedback

A suggestion was made to frame the core organisational support offer differently. It was suggested that it would be better to work with the successful provider to agree what will be directly delivered, what will be signposted to from elsewhere, and what will be charged for (and at what rates).

Response

We will work with the successful provider to agree the final core offer. However, we anticipate this core offer will as a minimum cover:

- Advice on organisational set up and close down
- Policy development
- Information on funding opportunities
- Organisational finance and accounting
- Public sector commissioning, procurement and bid writing
- ICT and digital development
- HR and legal matters

We will work with the provider to understand which of these services can be provided directly, which will be signposted to from elsewhere, and which will be charged for.

Information and Advice

Feedback

Some questions were raised about the remit of the provider's role in the provision of information and advice in the city i.e.:

- Will the provider be expected to coordinate the online information and advice that is currently provided by different organisations across the city
- Is the information and advice referred to for: VCS organisations, individuals, or both

Response

The reference to 'information and advice' in the consultation document was intended to refer to two pieces of work:

1. The provision of online information and advice for VCS organisations to support them with their organisational infrastructure
2. Participation in a review of online information and advice provided for adults in the city. It is intended that the Council will lead on this review.

Networking and Representation

Feedback

It was noted in the feedback that networking is more than coordination of meetings and instead involves the creation of a safe environment where organisations can share information, make connections and find answers to common challenges. Representation can be achieved only if there is a trusted relationship and a good knowledge of what is happening on the frontline within all sorts of organisations.

Response

The Council recognises that networking and representation can only succeed where there is mutual trust and a good knowledge of the local VCS. This will be appropriately reflected within the specification.

Feedback

It was noted that the requirements within Lot 1 did not cover the role of the infrastructure organisation in providing representation at high level committees and forums, and their requirement to be involved in strategic discussions with local, regional and national leaders.

Response

While this was only noted at a high level within the consultation document, we recognise that this type of representation and challenge role is an important part of the VCS infrastructure service. This role will be required as part of the future contract, and further detail on the exact requirements will be provided as part of the contract specification.

iii. **Lot 2: Volunteering**

Funding

Feedback

Responses queried the allocation of funds for the general volunteering support element of Lot 2, noting that £40,000 was too low of an amount to provide this service sustainably. Respondents also queried the size of the allocation between the general volunteering support provision, and the iBCF funded dementia volunteering support provision.

Response

In light of the responses received, the Council has revisited the allocations for Lot 2. While the Council's budget remains under significant pressure, we have been able to secure additional funding for the general volunteering support service via the Newcastle Fund ring-fence. We therefore propose that the amount of funding available for this part of the service will be £55,000 p.a. The amount available for the time limited dementia volunteering support project will remain at £75,000 p.a. for 12 months.

iBCF Funded Project

Feedback

A number of comments were received asking for further information on the iBCF dementia volunteering project, specifically:

- Some concerns regarding whether this would be duplicating existing volunteering provision
- A query about how this work will secure sufficient buy in from NHS partners
- Whether this work should be commissioned as part of a separate Lot

Response

As set out in the consultation document, the iBCF dementia volunteering project is intended to focus on:

- Designing and delivering a project to establish a Newcastle focused partnership to drive, develop and lead volunteering opportunities in support of social care, particularly related to people with dementia and their carers
- Engaging with national and regional leaders in the field of volunteering to grow a capacity building programme for local volunteers in support of social care.
- Encouraging, engaging and supporting skill development among volunteers working with people with dementia and their carers.

This will be a strategic piece of work to establish a Newcastle focused partnership that will drive, develop and lead volunteering opportunities in social care, engaging with national and regional leaders in the field of volunteering to grow a capacity building programme for local volunteers in social care.

We do not envisage that this project will duplicate or conflict with existing operational volunteering support capacity within the city.

As an iBCF funded project, this work already has support from NHS partners and will involve continued joint working across the Council and its health partners.

After careful consideration regarding whether this project should be placed into a separate Lot, it is our intention to keep this project within the Volunteering Infrastructure Lot in order to ensure alignment between general volunteering support, and the strategic volunteering project.

c) Final Model

Based on this feedback, the Council is now setting out its final commissioning model for the future of its commissioned VCS Infrastructure Support services.

Through discussion with Gateshead Council, an opportunity has been identified to undertake a single procurement exercise across Newcastle and Gateshead for VCS infrastructure support, aligning requirements where possible.

The revised structure therefore represents 3 separate contracts:

- Lot 1 Organisational Infrastructure contract with Gateshead (details will be confirmed by Gateshead as part of procurement process)
- Lot 2 Organisational Infrastructure contract with Newcastle
- Lot 3 Volunteering Infrastructure

This structure is illustrated in the diagram below:

VCS Infrastructure Support		
Lot 1: Organisational Infrastructure (Gateshead)	Lot 2: Organisational Infrastructure (Newcastle)	Lot 3: Volunteering Infrastructure
<p><u>Contract 1: Gateshead</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Amount: to be published by Gateshead Council • Length: to be published by Gateshead Council 	<p><u>Contract 2: Newcastle</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Amount: £170,000 p.a. • Length: 3 years with 2 x 12 month options to extend 	<p><u>Contract 3: Newcastle</u></p> <p>Core Volunteering Support Service</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Amount: £55,000 p.a. • Length: 3 years with 2 x 12 month options to extend <p>Social Care Volunteering Support</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Amount: £75,000 p.a. (IBCF funded) • Length: 1 year with 1 x 12 month option to extend

A provider may bid for one, two, or all three of the Lots available. Each of the Lots will be a distinct contractual arrangement directly between the winning provider and the commissioning Council.

The sections below provide high-level detail of the activities proposed to be delivered within the Newcastle specific contract opportunities:

Lot 2: Organisational Infrastructure (Newcastle)

The organisational infrastructure service will focus on, but not be limited to, the following broad areas of activity:

- Representation and networking for the local sector. Working widely across the sector to coordinate stakeholders for joint working opportunities to create partnerships, and drawing on this broad engagement to build a representative voice of the sector.
- Representing the voice of the sector at key forums with public and private sector partners, supporting a two way communication flow between these partners and the sector. Contributing to ensuring that these forums remain fit for purpose.
- Professional organisational support which includes:
 - Advice on organisational set up and close down
 - Policy development
 - Information on funding opportunities
 - Organisational finance and accounting
 - Public sector commissioning, procurement and bid writing
 - ICT and digital development
 - HR and legal matters

It is not expected that the provider will directly deliver all of these services themselves. We will work with the provider to understand which of these services can be provided directly, which will be signposted to from elsewhere, and which will be charged for.

The provider will be expected to focus on tailoring its free core offer to small VCS organisations in Newcastle, however, we will work with the provider to design how this free core offer will be applied.

- Translating national and local policy/ legislative changes into the local context in a format that is relevant to local VCS organisations.
- Providing an effective and up-to-date online web presence for dissemination of self-service information, key points of contact for support, and publication of sector specific advice and analysis. Working with the Council, volunteer support service and other related Newcastle specific online information and advice partners to ensure clear and coordinated provision of web-based VCS advice.
- Provision (via a combination of direct delivery and brokerage) of a training programme developed by and for the sector, to include mutual areas of interest including: support for trustees to transform services, asset based working, evidencing impact, and evaluation and monitoring.
- Working with the volunteering support service to make strategic links across the sector, promoting best practice and proactively contributing to an evidence base

of sector specific analysis in the city, drawing on a range of research and information sources.

- Proactively responding to emergent issues facing the sector, in collaboration with public sector partners.

Lot 3: Volunteering Infrastructure (Newcastle)

The core volunteering support, development and capacity building service will focus on:

- Strategic volunteering development, seeking out opportunities to join up volunteering programmes in the city and region and develop new opportunities for volunteering.
- Development and promotion of good practice in relation to volunteering, and activities to increase awareness of the issues impacting on volunteering, working with the organisational infrastructure support provider.
- Engaging with host organisations and through them with volunteers to build a representative voice of volunteering, working with the organisational infrastructure support provider.
- Representing the voice of the volunteering at key forums with public and private sector partners, supporting a two way communication flow between these partners and the volunteering stakeholders. Contributing to ensuring that these forums remain fit for purpose.
- Brokerage and signposting to individuals who want to volunteer.
- Maintenance of a central web-based register of volunteering opportunities which is publicly accessible.
- One to one mentoring and coordination between the provider and prospective volunteers/ organisations seeking volunteers.
- Training for host organisations in recruiting and retaining volunteers.
- Support in set up and management of volunteers.

In addition to this core service, the time-limited project regarding social care volunteering support will focus on:

- Designing and delivering a project to establish a Newcastle focused partnership to drive, develop and lead volunteering opportunities in support of social care, particularly related to people with dementia and their carers
- Engaging with national and regional leaders in the field of volunteering to grow a capacity building programme for local volunteers in support of social care.
- Encouraging, engaging and supporting skill development among volunteers working with people with dementia and their carers.

We will work with the appointed provider, VCS representatives and public sector partners to further develop the project specification leading up to contract implementation.

Organisations seeking to bid for Lot 3 will be expected to bid to provide both the core volunteering support service and the social care volunteering support project.

d) Timescales and Next Steps

The consultation is now closed.

We expect that a tender opportunity will be published during November 2017, with a pre-tender session to be held in advance of this (date to be confirmed).

To register an interest in the pre-tender session please email laura.choake@newcastle.gov.uk

e) Contacts

To comment or for additional information, please email Laura Choake, Commissioning Programme Manager at laura.choake@newcastle.gov.uk