

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT BY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF ADULT SOCIAL CARE & HEALTH

TO:	POLICY COMMITTEE		
DATE:	13 DECEMBER 2021		
TITLE:	THE VOLUNTARY & COMMUNITY SECTOR (VCS) COMMISSIONING PROGRAMME		
LEAD COUNCILLOR:	CLLR BROCK	PORTFOLIO:	LEADERSHIP
SERVICE:	ADULT SOCIAL CARE	WARDS:	BOROUGHWIDE
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1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report focuses on the commissioning of the services which have previously been commissioned under the Narrowing the Gap II framework - an established programme within Reading for the commissioning of services from the VCS to tackle poverty, discrimination and disadvantage; promote wellbeing, and support thriving communities. The programme brings together funding from Adult Social Care, Housing, Corporate budgets and Public Health along with additional funding from the Clinical Commissioning Group to achieve shared outcomes. The current programme covers contracts with 27 Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) organisations and ends in May 2022. For the purposes of this report, this will be referred to as the Voluntary & Community Sector Commissioning programme (VCS Commissioning).
- 1.2 To inform the direction of travel this report summarises information from the Council's current policies and strategic direction; up-to-date information on inequalities within Reading, feedback from the VCS and expert advice arising from the VCS review which is running in parallel. It recommends a fresh approach to the commissioning and procurement of services from the VCS which will allocate funding to target inequalities in the most disadvantaged groups and neighbourhoods using an outcomes-based approach, alongside delivery of core services for Adult Social Care & Public Health.
- 1.3 The overall focus of the programme will continue to be on improving health & wellbeing and reducing deprivation and disadvantage. The key outcomes of the programme that Providers will be asked to submit proposals against are:
- To support people to get out and stay out of poverty
 - To build resilience, independence and well-being, connecting people to support and focusing on individual and community strengths.
 - To invest in VCS infrastructure support.
- Priority aims have been identified under each outcome and are listed in Appendix A.
- 1.4 The programme will utilise a new approach to procurement for these services, recognising the knowledge, experience and creativity of the VCS and empowering the sector to define solutions to meet outcomes set out by the Council. This will mean moving away from detailed specifications to an outcome focused approach. Providers will be asked to submit proposals which address the following in the context of the Council outcomes:
- What is the change you believe needs to happen and why?
 - How will you work to make this change happen?
 - How do you know your activities will create change?

- What will you look at and measure to see if change is happening?
- How will this work contribute to our outcomes?

- 1.5 This approach seeks to empower the sector to share their knowledge and skill in delivery of evidence-based outcomes as defined by the Council. The aim of the process is not only to allocate funding which will contribute to addressing inequality but also to signal a changing relationship with the VCS, recognising the importance of the sector in a thriving and self-reliant community. With this in mind it is proposed that this overall programme be renamed the 'Closing the Gap' Framework thus signalling a shift from the current approach but not losing the branding behind previous iterations.
- 1.6 The budget envelope will be sustained at £1.13m per annum. Approximately £270k of funding will be allocated against outcome 1; £701k against outcome 2 and £158k against outcome 3. These amounts are derived from a review of the current spending in Narrowing the Gap II but are *indicative only* to allow for flexibility. A detailed specification will be provided for the carers' services only as this is a core requirement of DACHS. An indicative amount of £150k from outcome 2 has been ringfenced to support the delivery of carers' services.
- 1.7 Bids will be evaluated by a multi-disciplinary team and funding will be awarded for proposals which are deemed to have the most positive impact on outcomes, reflecting the overall requirement to deliver a balanced and fair portfolio of provision to meet outcomes. The Council reserves the right to negotiate with bidders as part of the process, to achieve this balance, dependent on the spread of bids received and their ability to achieve the complete spectrum of defined outcomes.
- 1.8 Successful bidders will be offered contracts of 3 years; acknowledging the positive impact of stability and certainty of funding for providers. The Council will work in partnership with the winning bidders throughout the 3 year contract period to achieve the outcomes.
- 1.9 The following timetable is proposed:
- 17th December 2021- The bidding process is opened.
 - 9th February 2022 - Deadline for submissions. Please note, the time frame has been extended following advice from members.
 - 14th - 28th February 22 - Evaluation and permission to award.
 - 5th - 15th March 22 - Standstill period
 - 21st March 22 - Issue contract award notice
 - 21st March - 31st May 22 - Contract mobilisation period
 - The start date for new contracts - 1st June 2022.

2. RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

- 2.1. That the Council launch a new outcomes focused commissioning programme for the procurement of services from the VCS to meet the three key outcomes defined by the Council.
- 2.2. That the budget envelope will be sustained at £1.13m per annum with this funding to be used to meet each of the outcomes with an indicative split based on an analysis of the current spending and with an element ringfenced for Carers' Services. Contracts will be awarded to providers who have submitted proposals deemed to have the most positive impact on outcomes. This will be achieved through an evaluation of bids. Dependent on the spread of bids received and their ability to achieve the complete spectrum of outcomes, the Council will undertake further negotiation with the sector if required.
- 2.3. That the Deputy Chief Executive in consultation with the Leader of the Council and the Executive Director of Adult Social Care & Health be granted delegated authority to enter into contracts with the successful organisations for 3 years commencing on the 1st June 2022.

3. POLICY CONTEXT

- 3.1 Information from sources such as the Indices of Multiple Deprivation and the Poverty Needs Analysis indicates that some people, groups and communities within Reading experience much higher levels of deprivation, poorer health and more limited access to opportunities. These disadvantages have been exacerbated during the COVID-19 pandemic. Addressing these differences is a major focus of Council policies.
- 3.2 The Corporate Plan 2021-22¹ seeks to support a community in which everyone has an equal chance to thrive, the needs of the marginalised are prioritised and there is a strong focus on pandemic recovery. The recently launched Berkshire West Health & Wellbeing Strategy² aims to reduce the differences in health between groups of people with a specific focus on promotion of good mental health and wellbeing for the whole population. A key element of the Adult Social Care Strategy³ is a strengths and assets-based approach which includes the 'Conversations Count' model, improvements to the information and advice offer, and redesign of the 'front door' so that people can be better supported to draw on their own strengths, friends and family and community support as preferable alternatives to formal care.
- 3.3 A critical element of delivering against the policies and strategies above is a diverse and vibrant VCS which can enable a self-reliant and independent community. The pandemic has clearly demonstrated the important role played by the VCS in the town and the enormous value of strong working relationships between Council and VCS as evidenced for example by the work of the Reading Hub. The Council has already commissioned a review (the VCS Review) to identify ways of building on this relationship which is being reported separately.

4. THE PROPOSAL

- 4.1 It is within the policy context described above that the Council seeks to recommission the Narrowing the Gap II Framework contracts and services; building on the work that has been achieved, taking into account the need to address growing levels of inequality and deprivation and the emerging impact of the pandemic. The VCS Commissioning programme represents only one aspect of the Council's work with the VCS but it is important in supporting the Council (and Clinical Commissioning Group) to deliver on strategic priorities.
- 4.2 Narrowing the Gap is presently in its 2nd iteration, growing initially from an annual grants programme which had run since 2016. £1.13m funding per annum is spent on 39 contracts with 27 organisations (see Appendix A) in target areas including basic needs, maximising income, reducing debt, support towards employment; provision of peer support and reduction of social isolation; information, advice and guidance to vulnerable groups; as well as contributing to infrastructure support for the VCS. It combines funding from across Public Health, Housing, Adult Social Care, Corporate Budgets and Berkshire West NHS CCG and when the current contracts end in May 2022, they will have run for 4 years.

Current Position

- 4.3 In order to inform the VCS Commissioning programme, several steps have been taken:
- An update of the Needs Analysis
 - A VCS Survey
 - A review of the current contract monitoring arrangements
 - Consideration of early lessons from the VCS Review work being run in parallel
 - Joint work with commissioners to determine the outcomes required from the VCS Commissioning programme.

Needs analysis

¹ Investing in Reading's Future - Reading Borough Council's Corporate Plan 2021-2022

² Berkshire West Health & Wellbeing Strategy 2021 - 2030

³ Supporting our Future - Adult Social Care Strategy 2019-2022

- 4.4 The Needs Analysis⁴ has drawn on a number of sources.
- 4.5 Some aspects of deprivation are linked to geographical place⁵. Within Reading, 5 neighbourhoods are amongst the 10% most deprived in England⁶. This represents a worsening of the position in 2015, when 2 Reading neighbourhoods were identified as being amongst the 10% most deprived. As Reading is also home to the affluent, this reflects an increasing disparity between the deprived and well-off. Some equalities groups⁷ also experience poorer outcomes. This includes: people from certain ethnic backgrounds, people with disabilities, older people, people with poor mental health (including younger people and LGBTQ+) and carers.
- 4.6 During the pandemic, lockdowns, restrictions on movement and social contact, fear of contracting COVID or being ill with COVID have all had an adverse impact across the whole population in terms of physical and mental health. Although the challenges have not been experienced equally. People who are more vulnerable are likely to face greater challenges in re-engaging with services or communities. Disruptions and anxieties linked to living through COVID have been felt more keenly by people from Black or Minority Ethnic communities, those with pre-existing physical or mental health problems, unpaid carers, parents, and those on lower incomes. The need for support for younger adults has grown, and the link between loneliness and low income has become a more significant consideration. Digital inclusion has also been recognised as contributing to a growing divide, with so many services having moved online during the pandemic, and some likely to remain so.
- 4.7 There is an ongoing need to address adult health and wellbeing, poverty and inclusion issues within Reading. The level of need has either demonstrably increased or is predicted to do so over the coming year. There is a need to focus limited resource on the most excluded or at-risk residents to have the biggest impact.

VSC survey⁸

- 4.8 As part of the wider work the Council is carrying out with the VCS, a survey was launched in July 2021. This online survey captured feedback from the third sector to help inform the Council's commissioning plans from 2022. Close to 80 organisations provided a response.
- 4.9 Almost all providers wanted to see their services grow to meet growing community demand and a recognised need to broaden the reach of services and do more to address inequalities. Organisations identified a need to engage more people from different Black and Minority Ethnic communities, to improve support to unpaid carers, and a stronger youth offer, as well as maintaining support to address loneliness and social isolation. The specific area of support which most organisations wished to develop was mental health support, again with a focus on addressing growing inequalities, seen as both a matter of access to services but also underlying risk factors. Stronger collaboration across organisations was another frequently cited ambition with time the most significant barrier.
- 4.10 The preferred period for funding agreements indicated by survey respondents was 3-4 years to offer organisations some stability, but with a recognition that there ought to be some

⁴ The Council's Poverty Needs Analysis 2020; Reading JSNA; PHE Wider Impacts of COVID-19 (WICH) tool; PHE Mental Health Surveillance Tool; Public feedback gathered through a consultation on the 2021-30 Berkshire West Health and Wellbeing Strategy.

⁵ The English Index of Deprivation measures deprivation within neighbourhoods (Lower Super Output Areas) across 7 domains (income, employment, education, health, crime, housing and living environment) to give a relative indication of deprivation across the country. In Reading, this relates to Reading 017A / 017B / 009A / 015B / 018E in Whitley, Church, Norcot and Southcote wards.

⁷ People are protected under the Equalities Act 2010 from discrimination on the grounds of age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion, sex, gender or sexual orientation and includes protection of the rights of carers.

⁸ Investing in Community Support Consultation Report - July 2021

mechanism for awarding funding for short term projects within a funding cycle of this length. Several organisations commented that the Council could also consider ways to support the local third sector by facilitating access to community buildings differently.

VCS Review and follow-up VCS Commissioning programme engagement

- 4.11 The Council has commissioned a piece of work to explore how it might build the effectiveness and impact of its relationship with the VCS moving forward. A series of interviews has been held with a broad cohort of the VCS, including larger organisations with paid employees, to community groups that are predominantly run by volunteers. The emerging themes and suggestions put forward by the VCS have informed the approach for the VCS Commissioning programme.
- 4.12 A key recommendation from the VCS review is to embed a Theory of Change Model into the VCS Commissioning programme commissioning and procurement process whereby the Council defines target outcomes and invites the VCS to use their skills and expertise to propose solutions which will contribute. For the VCS Commissioning programme this will mean a move away from asking providers how they will deliver against prescriptive service specifications to a model whereby they are asked:
- What is the change you believe needs to happen and why?
 - How will you work to make this change happen? What will you do?
 - How do you know your activities will create change?
 - What will you look at and measure to see if change is happening?
 - How will this work contribute to our outcomes?
- 4.13 This approach to the VCS Commissioning programme will support the Council in shifting its overall relationship with the VCS, recognising it has a strategic leadership role and can enable the sector to work with statutory provision to achieve a shared vision for Reading.
- 4.14 The principles of this approach were discussed with the VCS during September and October 2021, as part of a series of engagement sessions. These sessions were attended by 60 organisations and were a useful opportunity to discuss an outcome-based approach and to keep providers up to date with developments. There was broad support for the proposed approach. The sector is supportive of collaborative working noting challenges around infrastructure and time. It is important to recognise the different size of VCS organisations which impact on their time to work together and to participate in bidding processes.
- 4.15 Additional engagement sessions took place with the sector during the course of November 2021. This included an update session on the 25th November and two workshops on 29th and 30th November 21 which involved both VCS providers and staff from across the Council. The workshops offered an opportunity for VCS providers to hear ideas from subject matter experts from within the Council which will contribute to successful proposals.

Option Proposed

- 4.16 Informed by the policy context and needs analysis, the Council has defined three key outcomes which it wishes to meet through the VCS Commissioning process. These are:
- To support people to get out and stay out of poverty.
 - To build resilience, independence and wellbeing, connect people to support and focus on individual and community strengths.
 - To invest in VCS infrastructure support.
- 4.17 Under each outcome a number of priority areas have been identified. These are described in detail in Appendix A
- 4.18 To reflect the aspirational nature of the VCS Commissioning Programme, whilst retaining the brand of Narrowing the Gap, it is proposed that the 2022 - 2025 Programme be named 'Closing the Gap'.
- 4.19 The budget envelope will be sustained at £1.13m per annum, with contributions from Adult Social Care, Housing, Corporate budgets, the Berkshire West Clinical Commissioning Group

and Public Health to achieve shared outcomes. It is proposed that the level of funding available in each of the outcome areas be derived from the analysis of the current spending in Narrowing the Gap II but are *indicative only* to allow for flexibility. Approximately £270k per annum of funding will be allocated against outcome 1; £701k pa against outcome 2 and £158k pa against outcome 3. The will Council reserve the right to award contracts to fund proposals which offer the most cost-effective contribution to the overall outcomes.

- 4.20 Opportunities will be in the form of contracts for up to 3 years to provide stability as well as a platform to bid for income from other sources. Contracts will be awarded fairly to the organisations which will make the most positive difference.
- 4.21 Under the proposed VCS Commissioning programme the Council will invite VCS organisations to submit proposals which detail how they will contribute to the key outcomes. Proposals will be structured around the questions recommended through the VCS Review (as detailed in 4.12 above) which allow for flexible and creative responses.
- 4.22 Of note, the current Narrowing the Gap II framework includes services for carers. As this is a specific statutory requirement for Adult Social Care⁹ this service will be specified by the Council and an amount of £150k pa will be ringfenced for development of this service. Of note, the Council is currently exploring the option of jointly commissioning the Carers' provision with West Berkshire Council.
- 4.23 The evaluation of bids will be carried out by a multi-disciplinary team and funding will be awarded to the proposals which are deemed to have the most positive impact on outcomes. The process will reflect the need to deliver a balanced and fair portfolio of provision to deliver the outcomes and benefit Reading and its residents. The Council reserves the right to negotiate with bidders as part of the process, to achieve this balance, dependent on the spread of bids received and their ability to achieve the complete spectrum of defined outcomes.
- 4.24 The evaluation process will encourage:
- Collaboration and partnership working.
 - User engagement.
 - A community empowerment model - addressing needs, building confidence, capacity and resilience in individuals to take self-directed action.
 - Targeted impact on either place (noting areas of greatest deprivation) and/or specific equalities issues.
- 4.25 In order to ensure that there is continuity of provision between contracts funded under the Narrowing the Gap II Programme and the VCS Commissioning programme the following timetable is proposed:
- 13th December 2021 - Policy Committee
 - 17th December 2021 - Providers will be invited to submit proposals over an 8-week period. The Council will support during this time to support organisations in bidding.
 - 9th February 2022 - Closing date for proposals (an additional two weeks has been included to support the sector in developing bids and in recognition of the holiday closedown).
 - 14th to 25th February - Proposals will be evaluated against agreed criteria.
 - 14th February to 18th February 2022 - Decision making
 - 28th February 2022 - Permission to award
 - 5th - 15th March 22 - Standstill period
 - 21st March 2022 - Contract award notices will be issued
 - 21st March to 31st May 2022 - Contract mobilisation period
 - 1st June 2022 - New contracts start.

⁹ Care Act 2014

- 4.26 Once contracts are in place, the Council will continue to work in partnership and collaboration with providers through robust and supportive contract management.

Other Options Considered

4.27 To do nothing

- If the Council does nothing, the contracts with the VCS under Narrowing the Gap II will expire at the end of May 2022. Whilst potentially the available funding could be used differently by the Council and CCG, it would remain necessary to commission core services - for example, services for carers (Care Act 2014) and services to provide preventative support for people, e.g. those at risk of mental ill health (Public Health grant). As has been iterated above, an important deliverable of the VCS Commissioning Programme will be to support a thriving VCS which will empower the community and reduce demand on statutory services. Lack of investment in this preventative provision is likely to increase demand on statutory services. A decision to do nothing, would represent the loss of an alternative to commission efficiently and effectively to achieve shared outcomes which contribute to the Council's strategic objectives.

4.28 To move to a Grant Framework

- Narrowing the Gap was initially seen as an opportunity to move from grant funding to contract funding to focus reduced budgets on the essential aspects of community support that had been identified through needs analysis and community engagement. Predominantly (though not exclusively), the sector has expressed a preference for a contractual approach. Contracts provide an opportunity for closer working between the Council and providers and offer stability and certainty to the sector. Continuation of the contract approach for the VCS Commissioning programme will offer a level of consistency to the sector in that the Council is not choosing to move between grants and contracts and back to grants - this risks putting additional and unnecessary bureaucratic burdens on often small, volunteer led organisations.

4.29 To recommission the Framework with no change to the Narrowing the Gap II model

- Recommissioning the framework with no change to the approach may result in an easier process for those providers who are currently on the Narrowing the Gap II framework. It would mean the Council determining and clearly specifying requirements under a series of lots and inviting providers to bid. It would however, represent a lost opportunity to move to a more enabling and leadership role for the Council in its relationship with the VCS, recognising the strengths of both the Council (as a strategic leader) but also the sector (with grass-roots knowledge and experience) and the value of working in collaboration. To recommission with no change is unlikely to lead to a changed way of working with the VCS and will not necessarily meet the strategic priorities of the council.

5. CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC AIMS

5.1 The recommendations for VCS Commissioning programme contribute to the Corporate Plan Themes in the following ways:

- **Healthy Environment** - A key intention of the programme is to improve the overall health and wellbeing of individuals and the community by directly targeting the needs of disadvantaged groups and the social determinants of poor health.
- **Thriving Communities** - A key intention of the programme is to target and strengthen the community by harnessing the ideas and creativity of the community towards common purpose. A positive outcome will be a more self-reliant community which works cohesively for the good of its citizens to improve resilience and self-empowerment.
- **Inclusive Economy** - the programme recognises that people and groups within Reading, by virtue of a range of interrelated factors - whether this be protected characteristics such as age, disability or race; or by unemployment, housing or poverty - experience poorer outcomes. By seeking to reduce the levels of inequality and deprivation of

certain groups, the VCS Commissioning programme will contribute to a more inclusive community in which all citizens have equal opportunity to fare well.

- 5.4 The VCS Commissioning programme reflects TEAM Reading values in the following ways:
- **Together** - the programme brings together funding from key partners - both within the Council and with the CCG. It recognises shared outcomes for all and works with the VCS and citizens of Reading towards common values. The onus is on listening and working together on a shared challenge. It is not 'top down' whereby the Council 'tells'; it is about the Council listening and working with the VCS to confirm goals, inspire creativity and use knowledge within the community to determine what works well for Reading.
 - **Efficiency** - By uniting resource and energy under a common banner, the VCS Commissioning programme is a way of achieving greater efficiency - streamlining outcomes, working collectively with the sector.
 - **Ambitious** - This is an ambitious programme but represents only one element of the Council's work with the VCS. It seeks to make a difference to the whole town by working with partners to improve the well-being of the whole town, enabling all people to have equal opportunity, to achieve potential and not be left behind.
 - **Make a Difference** - the VCS Commissioning programme aims to improve outcomes for people and the community by addressing poverty, social inclusion, social isolation as well as other determinants of poor health and wellbeing. A successful programme will work with the VCS to make a positive difference to the lives of people who are disadvantaged.

6. ENVIRONMENTAL AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 There are no known implications at this stage. This will continue to be taken into consideration throughout the procurement and evaluation process and once there is clarity on the contracts that will be awarded. Its worth noting that one of the key aims for this work is to secure local services, for local people within their own neighbourhoods thus reducing unnecessary travel.

7. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND INFORMATION

- 7.1 As detailed in the report a significant amount of engagement with the VCS has already taken place. This will continue during the next phase of this project and in line with the timetable outlined in 4.25.

8. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 8.1 Services currently funded through the Narrowing the Gap II framework will remain in place until their planned contract end date therefore there are no perceived impacts. The current providers have been consulted about the impact on their organisations and services were they to be unsuccessful in securing funding in the next round of the VCS Commissioning Programme. Whilst this information cannot inform the evaluation process it will inform the Council's response once contract award has been determined. At the point new services are considered further Equality Impact Assessment work will be undertaken.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 Procurement advice has informed the development of this project to ensure the appropriate contractual guidelines are adhered to.

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 It is anticipated that the following funding contribution will be made by the Council:

Public Health Grant (which must be used towards delivery in line with the Public Health Outcomes Framework)	£493,000
Housing Revenue Account which is focused on support for the Council's tenant population	£130,000
Adult Social Care Baseline	£169,000
Berkshire West CCG (pursuant to an agreement under S.75 of the NHS Act 2006)	£140,000
CEX baseline	£163,000
Refugee Resettlement	£35,000
TOTAL	£1,130,000

11. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- Appendix A: Proposed outcomes for future commissioning

Appendix A

The table below provides further information on the key outcomes and the criteria which fall under each outcome.

The VCS Commissioning programme - Outcomes
1. To support people to get out and stay out of poverty.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• People in crisis who cannot afford to meet their basic needs receive timely practical help to resolve their problems and move into a sustainable way of living• People are provided with help and assistance to prevent them from entering a crisis situation linked to poverty• Communities are given practical tools, advice and assistance to reduce the impacts of poverty and help to help themselves• Joined up approach to maximise the benefits to communities struggling with poverty• Individuals have every opportunity to maximise their income, manage their debts, prevent homelessness and improve their life choices/ opportunities.
2. To build resilience, independence and wellbeing, connect people to support and focus on individual and community strengths.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Providing coordinated information, advice, signposting and social prescribing to enable people to get the help and support they need from each other and their communities, thus improving well-being and reducing the need for support from statutory services.• Building capacity in community services and activities which support individuals in their community and reduces the need for access Adult Social Care and Health services.• Targeted support to groups at greater risk of experiencing mental health challenges, loneliness and social isolation and health inequalities in order to support early identification and intervention.• Carers of people with Social Care Needs are supported to maintain their caring role via access to Assessment, Peer Support, Carer Break down planning and Information & Advice• Increase the accessibility of transport for those with a disability or individuals who need support to leave their homes (e.g. buddy schemes, community drivers)• Develop and support peer support initiatives, befriending and volunteer schemes that aid individuals to stay connected and supported• Ethnically diverse communities believe that Reading is a place where people from different backgrounds get on well together• The needs of ethnically diverse communities are clearly articulated and actioned• Diverse communities feel equal to the wider community• Refugees and asylum seekers are integrated and achieve self-sufficiency• Individuals that have experienced discrimination or injustice are supported to understand their rights and empowered to seek resolution themselves• Individuals are empowered to access digital channels so they are not disadvantaged and can fully participate and make the same life choices as the wider population
3. To invest in VCS infrastructure support
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Emerging community groups in deprived neighbourhoods are supported to access the help and support available to become established and grow for the benefit of the wider community• Engagement and volunteering in deprived neighbourhoods makes a difference (increases digital inclusion and reduces social isolation) to the neighbourhood or local community• The voice of young people in deprived neighbourhoods is heard and influences change• Community buildings are fully utilised to tackle social exclusion in neighbourhoods• Reading voluntary and community organisations have the resources and support they need to operate effectively as a force for positive change in Reading• Diverse VCS organisations are participating in multi-agency partnerships• Funding from multiple sources is drawn into the sector• The positive contribution made by volunteers is highly visible in the town.