

Agenda Item 7

For Information: Community Group Support

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Summary

This report provides a summary of the support offered to community organisations and the proposals for developing various strands of this service over the coming year

Over the last few years FTC has developed a programme of community group support in order to build a stronger and more resilient third sector in the town. We offer a range of support to Charities, Community Interest Companies (CICs), formal and informal community groups and Trusts. Their work underpins our work in communities and will be the basis of our work with children and young people.

This support is currently delivered through a series of mechanisms supported by FTC staff. It has been developed to help local groups meet increasing demand for their services amidst a tougher funding climate and changing charity and third sector regulation and best practice.

We have recently undertaken a survey of local groups asking for their views on the support we provide. We received 37 responses to 31 questions. This paper summarises the five key support mechanisms, a summary survey feedback and proposes ways to improve our offer over the coming months.

Community Groups Newsletter

This is a regular e-bulletin which we use to share upcoming training, events, funding news and other information relevant to third sector organisations in Frome. It is open to any interested parties in Frome and currently has 300 + subscribers, receiving a good 'open' and 'click' rate.

Respondents to the survey said that they use the newsletter to: check for training; practical help; dates for diary; keeping up to date with what is on offer and knowing that FTC is there as an interested partner and as a safety net.

95% of respondents said that they would like to continue to be or become signed up to the newsletter.

12 respondents suggested the following ideas to include in the newsletter: new projects coming up and wanting support; fundraising opportunities; case studies / good news stories; and an area to promote requests for help.

It is proposed to continue to develop and promote the newsletter as a means of community groups staying in touch with each other and FTC. The communications team will take over the delivery of this newsletter in order to ensure a regular and timely edition.

Fundraising support and advice

This is a commissioned service where organisations are referred by staff to a fundraising advisor. The current contract with Rebecca Morland ends in December 2019. The idea of the service is to support organisations to learn the basics of fundraising, become familiar with writing a case for support and knowing how to research available grants. The fundraiser also supports with editing and providing feedback on grant applications but does not write grant applications on behalf of organisations.

Over the last five years, this contract, delivered by different consultants at various stages, has had several significant successes in bringing funding into the town's voluntary sector organisations, approximately averaging £150k per year. However, demand for this service has reduced over the last three years and many of the organisations benefiting from support are returning organisations. Training sessions on writing a case for support, identifying funding streams and creating a budget have proved successful and a large number of organisations presenting for fundraising advice and support have benefited from a wider programme of tailored support to ensure that they are 'grant ready', often through the 1:1 support detailed below.

Many organisations have told us that they find it hard to find the capacity for fundraising. However, it is difficult for people outside of the organisation to write funding bids on their behalf because of the time involved in getting to know the organisation and the projects that they propose to deliver. The support has therefore been developed to enable organisations to learn the basics of writing a funding application through developing a case for support.

Respondents to our survey said:

11 respondents had received support. Of which, nine were successful in receiving funding as a result of the support.

Feedback on the service included:

"it has given us a framework and more confidence to move forward and make further funding bids"
"we have more confidence"
"the case for support helped me write funding bids"
"I got overwhelmed by the enormous demands on time and energy for funding applications and just gave up in favour of running the club"

Next steps

The fundraising contract comes to an end in December 2019. It is proposed to ensure that Multi Year Agreement recipients, alongside other groups, have every opportunity to access this support over the next six months. There is a question about this support continuing post December and the Grants Advisory Panel will consider the future of this contract whilst looking at a review of grants and MYAs in the coming months.

Responsive advice and support

Since April this year, over 20 organisations and individuals have benefited from individual meetings with the Community Development Manager (CDM) to identify specific support that has included: referrals to fundraising support and advice; networking and group information and updates; advice and support on being 'grant ready' and other general information and support. A growing area of this support has been facilitation for trustee and management groups that enables organisations to create a clear vision and a series of tasks to fulfil their purpose. These sessions are tailored around the individual needs of the organisation and are aimed at creating clear, sustainable structures and delivery objects for growth.

Organisations are also supported by the wider FTC team particularly managers and projects officers who often refer to the CDM for more specific advice and support such as fundraising, organisation inception and development and the best ways to set up an organisation. This area of work is recognised as currently uses approximately 35 – 40% of the CDM time.

14 respondents to the survey said that they had used this support and that they found the following most useful:

“breadth of knowledge”
“practical help from the Rangers”
“tailored support, through knowledge of local organisations to liaise with or seek guidance from”
“help to focus the core value of the business and how to access customers”
“just being able to phone up and check something out”
“the detail that was given - research done in advance and follow up provided after”
“the time that was given and the offers of future help”
“invaluable in supporting the growth of [community group], allowing us to find our own pace and ensuring that we have always felt that we were making good decisions for our community”
“endlessly practical and a huge support”
“discussion on insurance”
“personal approaches and tailored advice”
“publicity and social media”

64% of those that have not received this support didn't know about the offer.

When asked if we could improve this support and how, many respondents said 'no'. Others suggested we could have 'more follow up, gentle pushing', 'think about ways to help and provide support for smaller local charities to make more of a level playing field [alongside bigger charities with regard to funding]' and 'more practical and financial support helping to create and sustain apprentices, training and accreditation'.

FTC will continue to develop this area of work, paying particular attention to the needs of smaller organisations and emerging community groups in Frome.

Training

Over the last three years FTC has developed a training programme for community organisations which includes; 1st Aid, Governance for Trustees, Managing Volunteers, marketing and social media, fundraising – is it the best route for survival and writing a case for support, and GDPR.

The rolling programme has been delivered throughout the year with monthly training events. Attendance has improved since we introduced a small fee. However, it has fluctuated in recent months. FTC are also conscious that other local and regional training providers have on occasion been offering similar courses at the same time.

Feedback from the survey suggested that participants were very positive about the training offered and that we (FTC) run the programme. They would welcome more courses in the future and made a series of suggestions about topics that might be covered. Many respondents would like the information about our courses further in advance. With this in mind we are looking to consolidate the training programme, and as with the newsletter the communications team are going to take over putting the programme together ensuring that our training offer compliments the training programmes of partners organisations to avoid replication. We will have a focus on engaging smaller, local groups and meeting their needs.

Forums

Following the five panels FTC ran in 2016, we have delivered a series of forums run on quarterly, biannual and annual basis. Recent forums include The Wellbeing Forum, Sports Forum, Children and Young Peoples Mental Health forum and Arts forum.

The survey results suggest that these forums have offered valuable networking opportunities but that these could be achieved through other mechanisms, such as training and topic-based events. As a result, we will bring groups of practitioners, professionals and interested residents together in order to discuss specific topics, rather than on a regular basis through the above forums in the future.

And finally...we have a shed full of resources

We have several resources available for community groups to borrow including; large and small gazebos, tables and chairs, bean bags, a smoothie bike, litter pickers and more. The information team in the town hall manage the bookings and we continue to build the bank as we become aware of gaps. Groups, large and small, have commented on the value of these resources in delivering events and maximising storage and best use of funds.

Summary

FTC continues to develop the support offered to community organisations in the coming year, with a particular focus on engaging small and grassroots organisations, broadening the reach of our support.