



Report to:	STOCKPORT HOMES MEMBER COMMITTEE		
	<i>01 July 2024</i>		
Report of:	DIRECTOR OF HOUSING PLUS		
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Type of Report	<i>Assurance</i>		
Title of Report:	SUPPORT TO CIVIL SOCIETY		
Purpose of Report:	To update Members Committee on SKylight’s external grant funding work and support of Stockport’s Third Sector and wider civil society.		
Recommendation(s):	That Members Committee note and comment upon Skylight’s grant funding work and support for the Third Sector and wider civil society.		
Confidentiality	Non-Confidential		
Resource Implications	None		
	Risk Number	Risk Description	Risk Mitigation
	4	Stakeholders do not fully understand SKylight's strategic aims and relationships are not well managed.	Reporting on the work of the Funding Service and integration with Civil society and Sector3 to demonstrate alignment with strategic aims of Skylight
Customer Voice	Every funding application is supported through bespoke approach tailored to each civil society group. The current Civil Society Support Strategy 2022 – 2025 was developed through consultation with multiple Third Sector organisations,		

	including Sector3, detailing their requirements for a funding support service.
Equality, Diversity & Inclusion implications	An Equality Impact Assessment conducted as part of the Civil Society Support Strategy 2022-2025 noted much of the work of the Funding Officer and Funding Service at SKYlight enhances equality and inclusion supporting opportunities for multiple groups.
Regulatory compliance	The report provides assurance to members that the services delivered are consistent with the objectives of SKYlight and designed to support Council priorities, which is a key requirement of the Transparency, Influence and Accountability and the Consumer Regulations standards .

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 SHG has social objectives consistent and complimentary with its role as a provider of social housing through its mission of 'One Team, Transforming Lives.' One of the many ways SHG achieves this is by working directly with, and building strong partnerships with, local Civil Society¹. As part of this, SKylight (SHG's Charitable Community Benefit Society) is committed to working with local groups to secure grant funding, with a Funding Officer in post since 2011 tasked primarily with building strong community relationships and supporting groups to secure funding.
- 1.2 The support SHG provides is outlined in the Stockport Homes Civil Society Strategy 2022 – 2025 and includes a broader strategic approach based upon strong, long-term partnerships. Through this Strategy and the work of the Funding Officer, SHG, principally via SKylight, works with the Council, funders and infrastructure organisation like Sector3 to support local Civil Society groups to:
- Continue to attract inward investment, grants and other resources.
 - Build their skills and sustainability.
 - Build partnerships which deliver in and benefit local neighbourhoods.
 - Work closely with One Stockport and Sector3 in the short, medium and long term.
 - Raise the profile of Stockport groups to compete for national grant awards.
- 1.3 The SKylight Funding Officer works closely with the diverse and vibrant Civil Society sector in Stockport. Currently there are a total of 1,672 voluntary organisations, community groups and social enterprises. These Civil Society groups are supported by approximately 57,000 volunteers, who collectively contribute a calculated 213,536 hours of their time each week.
- 1.4 11% of the Civil Society sector supports public sector reform, and value for money priorities for the public and statutory sectors by bringing external income to Stockport, with 63% of Civil Society organisations generating at least one source of non-public sector funds to support local residents and communities.
- 1.5 83% of Civil Society organisations in Stockport collaborate with other Civil Society organisations in the Borough, this avoids duplication and maximises the value of the support they offer. The SKylight Funding Officer is a key part of this landscape linking groups together to build strong networks to ensure local Civil Society organisations are linked with the Council and local businesses. In total 89% of Civil Society organisations in Stockport have established relationships or have worked directly with Stockport Council, and 61% of Civil Societies have worked with private business in some capacity.²

¹ The term Civil Society is used to describe all VCFSE (Voluntary, Community, Faith & Social Enterprise) groups and organisations, and Third Sector organisations

² Voluntary, Community, Faith and Social Enterprise Sector Strategy published 15th August 2023
https://assets.ctfassets.net/ii3xdrqc6nfw/49SrldkVGUaibJG79yeliO/17e9518a5f882bf079dd5dbf3b96f568/Voluntary__Community__Faith_and_Social_Enterprise_Sector_strategy.pdf

- 1.6 The support offered by SKyLight makes a direct contribution to One Stockport priorities, particularly the One Heart objectives of:
- A healthy and happy Stockport People live the best lives they can - happy, healthy and independently.
 - A strong and supportive Stockport Confident and empowered communities working together to make a difference.
- 1.7 SKyLight's work also directly contributes to One Stockport's 'Our Kind of Stockport – A strategy for a thriving Voluntary Community Faith and Social Enterprise Sector in Stockport'. The strategy describes a collective commitment to the Civil Society sector in Stockport over the next five years, aiming to support the growth, sustainability and resilience of local Civil Society organisations.

2. PARTNERSHIP WORKING

- 2.1 SKyLight works in partnership with the Council, Sector3 and a range of local and national partners. Local Intelligence meetings are held on a quarterly basis between SKyLight, Stockport Council, Sector3 and the National Lottery Community Fund. These meetings are designed to secure positive funding opportunities for local groups, identifying new and emerging funding streams and matching these opportunities to relevant organisations and groups.
- 2.2 In addition to sourcing new funding, the SKyLight Funding Officer maintains strong links with local Civil Society networks, groups, and partnerships. An excellent example of this is the long-term membership of the Brinnington Big Local partnership. The SKyLight Funding Officer regularly attends board meetings in an advisory capacity updating the group on new local services and potential funding streams.
- 2.3 SKyLight have a strong history of working with Sector 3, the 2022 'Funding the Future' event showcased a presentation from Sector 3 to raise awareness of the organisation and demonstrate how VCFSE organisations and groups could benefit from Sector 3 and the support they provide.
- 2.4 Since 2012, the SKyLight funding service has supported local organisations to secure a total of **£4,833,687** from a wide range of local, regional, and national funders. The table below illustrates the amount of grant awarded and the number of bids submitted.

YEAR	GRANT	QUANTITY OF BIDS SUBMITTED
2012/13	£174,520	75
2013/14	£235,596	56
2014/15	£354,079	53

2015/16	£358,519	82
2016/17	£355,468	75
2017/18	£375,058	88
2018/19	£341,338	67
2019/20	£463,809	62
2020/21	£531,219	56
2021/22	£505,583	41
2022/23	£502,361	86
2023/24	£636,137	75
TOTAL	£4,833,687	816

2.5 2023/24 represented the highest performance to date, with **£636,137** of grant funding secured for Stockport. **£584,029** was secured by a range of local groups and organisations and **£52,108** was secured by SKylight projects including Your Local Pantry and the Ageing in Place Project. Highlights include:

- **£254,913** National Lottery Reaching Communities grant awarded to the R-Time partnership of Stockport Council and SKylight led by Active Stockport CIC (Life Leisure) to deliver a three-year programme of youth work in the borough.
- **£242,235** was secured via a National Lottery Reaching Communities grant by Starting Point to deliver a three-year project to recruit and train 250 new digital champions and support Stockport Councils 'Digiknow' programme.
- **£36,000** grant from Greater Manchester Environment Fund to develop a new Community Interest Company "Seeding the Change". This fund has since improved greenspaces in Shaw Heath and developed a community allotment plot on Webb Lane Allotments.
- Heaton Norris Community Centre received **£9,900** from Sport England to deliver sporting activities for young people at Heaton Norris and a further bid was supported to access **£9,700** to deliver the service in an additional location at Lancashire Hill.

2.6 SKylight works closely with the Fusion21 Resilience Programme which provides up to £10,000 worth of consultancy time to Civil Society organisations, including advice and guidance on legal structures, business plans and project support. In addition, groups can be invited to apply for unrestricted grant funding of up to £10,000 to further develop and enhance their project. The relationship with SKylight affords the Funding Officer the discretion to nominate two organisations for the Resilience Programme. SKylight recently referred the following organisations for this opportunity:

- Ongoing Women's Local Support (OWLS) utilised the £10,000 of consultancy support to develop into a Charitable Incorporated Organisation and were then awarded a further £9,095 of grant funding.
- Make A Difference utilised the £10,000 of consultancy support to develop into a Charitable Incorporated Organisation and were then awarded a further £9,700 of grant funding.

Two further nominations have been made to Fusion21 and the results are awaited:

- Cheadle Heath Community Association to develop the “Friendly Fridays” project into a Charitable Incorporated Organisation.
- AutiSK (Adswood) to transition to a Charitable Incorporated Organisation.

3. SKYLIGHT FUNDING SUPPORT

- 3.1 SKyLight’s Funding support is delivered using the ‘L.I.F.E’ model (**Lead, Influence, Follow, Exit**) with over 300 organisations having been supported during 2023/24. From one dedicated Funding Officer, each group is provided with a bespoke package of support depending on their aims, needs and circumstances. A group can transition through all aspects of the model depending on the status of their bid and their requirements. At each stage, the L.I.F.E. model is responsive and adaptive to maximise positive outcomes. Many of those supported by SKyLight, especially in the earlier stages, have an existing relationship with SHG as a customer and / or through other community engagement and activity.
- 3.2 Typically, the **Lead** stage of the ‘L.I.F.E’ model is the most intensive level of support offered. The Funding Officer will often provide targeted local intelligence, information, advice and guidance to help Civil Society groups to progress. This can involve supporting groups to complete community consultation and project development, identify appropriate funders and illustrate statistical evidence to demonstrate the value of the project. In addition, support to write and submit funding applications is provided, with the Funding Officer where appropriate guiding a group towards developing into a fully constituted structure, frequently essential to securing funding.
- 3.3 The **Influence** stage sees support step back slightly, with the Funding Officer providing regular funding updates and information on new funding streams and reviewing drafted bids and statistical evidence. Groups are supported to consider the longevity of funding and how they will fund their projects beyond their immediate funding stream.
- 3.4 The **Follow** stage is where a group can tap into support as and when required. At this stage, the Funding Officer will now ‘follow’ the lead of the group itself, stepping back to be on hand when needed but not directly contacting the organisation. The option to reconnect with the SKyLight Funding service to receive ad-hoc support and advice is always available.
- 3.5 **Exit** is the final stage where a group is fully functional and embedded, delivering their project and operating autonomously. This is the stage where the Funding Office will exit the relationship. However, the Funding Officer remains available should the group require advice, guidance or to re-connect to bid for new funding streams.

- 3.6 Working closely with Sector3, a key part of the Skylight Funding Officer's role is to identify and nurture new and existing community groups to enable them to grow into sustainable, incorporated legal entities, this can maximise their opportunity for growth and development. This style of working addresses the challenges inherent in continuous reliability on short-term grant funding. This issue has been highlighted by the National Council for Voluntary Organisation (NCVO). Through utilising the L.I.F.E. model, future pathways are identified and explored to ensure all successful Civil Society organisations continue to thrive, develop, evolve and most of all achieve sustainability.
- 3.7 To help deliver this goal the Funding Officer, in partnership with the council and Sector 3, organises and facilitates small and large-scale funding events and conferences throughout the year. SKYlight regularly host 'Meet the Funder' coffee table events which highlight specific funders and funding streams. In 2023/24, six of these events were held showcasing funding opportunities from ASDA, TESCO, Manchester Airport, Forever Manchester and the National Lottery. These supported 94 individuals from a range of projects and Civil Society groups to speak directly to the funder about their specific project.
- 3.8 SKYlight also host the annual 'Funding the Future' conference delivered at Cornerstone. The conferences bring together local Civil Society organisations with funders. In September 2023, 63 individuals from a range of projects and Civil Society groups attended the most recent conference and met with nine local and national funders including the Greater Manchester Council for Voluntary Organisations (GMCVO) who used the event to raise awareness of new grant programmes including the UK Shared Prosperity Fund:

"We always want to be part of this event, it's so well planned and organised. It really adds value for the community groups who attend too, with the funders supporting and encouraging them. I've already received excellent feedback re: the networking opportunities and people learned so much."

"The buzz in the room was incredible. Many of the community members I spoke to really valued not only the event, but also the opportunity to network and establish mutual support with other groups and get support with applications. They all praised SKYlight, not only for the event but also the funding they have previously received. Community members also mentioned the enthusiasm of the SKYlight team."

4. SKYLIGHT COMMUNITY FUND

- 4.1 The SKYlight Community Fund supports groups and projects which improve the neighbourhoods where SHG manage properties. The Community Fund is aimed at groups that make a genuine difference to the lives of SHG customers and the wider community. An annual budget of £50,000 is provided from Gift Aid created from SHG's commercial activities which is then gifted to SKYlight through the group structure. Groups can bid for grants of up to £2,000. Decisions on the allocation of funds are determined by local residents through a Customer Panel. During 2023/24 the Customer Panel awarded the full

£50,000, with funds distributed to 33 local groups across Stockport and an average amount awarded of £1,477.

The Fund's objectives support groups and projects which meet one of six designated categories:

- Community Spirit
- Digital Inclusion
- Employment and Skills
- Health and Wellbeing
- Older People
- Younger People

During 2023/24, funding has been awarded to a wide range of projects including support to first-time mothers and their families, youth projects, Age Well yoga, support to care experienced young people, digital inclusion, Life Skills, a volunteer programme for women experiencing Domestic Abuse, mental well-being football and a Community Skills Exchange programme led by the Refugee Community Togetherness Group. Most projects have multiple benefits, with the majority of successful applications supporting health and well-being.

5. CONCLUSION

- 5.1 SKylight works in close partnership with the Council, Sector 3 and a wide range of local and national funders to support the work of Civil Society groups and organisations and maximise the resources brought into the borough to support local residents and communities. Through this approach a wide range of projects and activities have been created which support mainstream services delivered by the public sector. SKylight will continue to work with the council and other partners to explore future opportunities and would welcome any information from Members about groups or activity in your wards which could benefit from support.

6. RECOMMENDATION(S)

- 6.1 That Members Committee note and comment upon SKylight's grant funding work and support for the Third Sector and wider civil society.