

3<sup>rd</sup> December 2024

Dear Cllrs Hilton and Collins,

### **Re Foreshore Trust Large Grants Proposals**

We are writing following the publication of the Charity Committee papers for the forthcoming meeting on 9<sup>th</sup> December 2024. It is necessary for us, as the infrastructure organisation for the VCSE sector, to raise our significant concerns about the Large Grants process and the wider impact this will have on investment to local organisations and the delivery of services to the most vulnerable members of our community. Our submission to the Charity Committee is based on the following points:-

1. Since the ending of the previous large grants programme in September 2024, there has been no continuing investment in the form of large grants to charities supporting people in poverty. Even taking account of the proposed commission of £100,000 for advice services, it is in effect, an £80,000 cut in funding. This means that the Foreshore Trust will not be investing the resources available to it (and for which it has budgeted) at a time of significant and increasing needs. At a time when Hastings residents face significant pressures it is unacceptable that the Foreshore Trust has decided to limit its spending to one single commissioning area.
2. We are disappointed that the proposed comprehensive Large Grants scheme has not materialised within the planned timescale as outlined in previous reports. In our view, the Foreshore Trust has had a significant period of time since 2023 to formulate its proposals and has also had the benefit of an Independent Evaluation report on the existing Large Grants programme to draw upon.
3. You will recall that HVA in conjunction with other organisations (supported by Hastings Community Network) brought forward a proposal to extend the current arrangements so that existing levels of Foreshore Trust investment could be retained to key local organisations. We are hugely disappointed that so little progress has been made to establish a proper programme beyond the advice sector commission, and that a further 12-month period is envisaged before there is any clarity about the scope of the full programme. Instead of a properly thought through and strategic Large Grants Programme, all that has been achieved in 12 months is a 3-page report about one aspect of provision.
4. We make the point that the proposed commission, whilst covering an important area of work (Housing Debt and Fuel Poverty), makes no mention of any advice being made available on the uptake of welfare benefits or income maximisation. Whilst this may be an oversight or perhaps intended that such provision may be possible within the scope of the proposed commission, we request that this be clarified at the earliest opportunity.

5. We note that the advice sector has been singled out using the rationale of “pressing need”, but argue that the same criteria also applies to other Large Grants commissions that have been discontinued. By way of example, the Links Project (for refugees, asylum seekers and migrants) has recorded its highest ever level of attendance and by the Borough Councils own assessment, the demand in areas such as homelessness is at record levels. Therefore, there is a compelling argument for the provision.

6. It is clear to us that a further, significant period of time will elapse before a full Large Grants programme is put in place by the Foreshore Trust.

In order to ensure that key services remain in place and that the needs of local people can be met, we are urging members of the Charity Committee to:-

- a) Commit to resourcing the VCSE sector at the level as planned and envisaged within the Foreshore Trust budget.
- b) Approve the report relating to advice sector provision (whilst clarifying whether this will apply to benefits advice).
- c) Enter into immediate negotiation with the VCSE organisations that delivered services within the previous Large Grant Commission, about what transitional arrangements can be put in place to ensure that the projected levels of funding are delivered and that core services that support vulnerable members of the community can be protected at a time of greatest need.

In closing, we believe it would not be in anyone’s interest if the Foreshore Trust failed to meet its original spending plans to support local residents during this unprecedented period of need. We are committed to working alongside you to ensure that a solution can be reached which will enable investment in services whilst the long-term Large Grants programme is fully configured.

We look forward to your response by Friday.

Yours Sincerely

*Steve Manwaring*  
**Director**  
Hastings Voluntary Action

*Peter Thorpe*  
**Deputy Director**  
Hastings Voluntary Action