

Strategy & Partnerships Scrutiny Committee – 4 October 2012

Voluntary, Community and Faith Sector Infrastructure Support

Introduction

The aim of this paper is to update scrutiny on the recent changes to the way in which Oxfordshire County Council supports the Voluntary and Community sector.

The vibrancy and commitment of Oxfordshire's voluntary and community sector is undeniable. We already have an active and engaged Big Society in the county with over 4.500 individual organisations, and a very high number of residents who regularly give up their free time to volunteer.

Voluntary and community groups play an important role in supporting local communities and residents and are essential to delivering the council's vision for a Thriving Oxfordshire.

The Council's relationship with the sector has been strong for many years. Whilst the current environment of reduced public sector funding and changing policy has presented challenges; it has also provided opportunities to refresh how we work together.

Whilst the Council is a significant funder of the Voluntary and Community Sector our relationship is more than about that of a financial contribution. Our support to the sector has moved from 'you will' to 'we do'.

Partnership Working:

Our partnership working is maintained through strong day to day relationships. The Oxfordshire Stronger Communities Alliance which is chaired by Bishop Colin Fletcher and Cllr Louise Chapman provides a broad forum for taking a strategic overview of the issues affecting the public, voluntary, community & faith sector and works together in shaping the policies and strategies of both.

The Council's Infrastructure Contract:

The Council's infrastructure contract supports the provision of high quality infrastructure services and capacity building to frontline organisations; for example organisational development, fundraising advice, access to volunteering opportunities and influencing work giving a voice from the voluntary sector in decision making.

This contract was re-tendered in May 2012 and the successful organisation was Oxfordshire Community and Voluntary Action (OCVA). All infrastructure funding was combined into a single contract and will commence from the 1st October 2012.

The County Council continues to support the sector to ensure that core VCS needs are met across Oxfordshire regardless of location, but we have taken a less prescriptive approach than before. The detail of the contract has very much been

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developed in partnership with OCVA and the following points summarise the direction it will take:

- Providing strong voluntary sector leadership which can engage in strategic discussions and is forward looking and pioneering in its ideas
- Developing long-term strategies to operate in a new funding and policy arena to deliver effective and efficient support to frontline organisations
- Being dynamic, active and able to harness the energy and ideas of local residents so that they can do things for themselves
- Working collaboratively across urban and rural communities and providing generic and specialist support to provide the best outcomes for Oxfordshire's communities.
- Being a link between communities and the statutory sector

The core aims of the contract are:

1. Volunteering is promoted and developed. The main aspects include:
 - working with volunteer-involving organisations to help them get better at doing their own recruitment and retention and devising more volunteer roles to support increased delivery of their services
 - building on the existing core promotional route (Do-It website) to attract more people into volunteering by piloting new and innovative ways of incentivising people and developing a locality focus
2. To build trust between the sectors so that:
 - a. community groups understand the pressures on the county council and its services and come forward with positive responses that help to provide solutions
 - b. county council officers and members understand the pressures on voluntary and community organisations so that they can establish realistic expectations and productive working relationships
3. to build links and networks within the voluntary, community and faith sector and between the VCFS, officers and elected members so that shared solutions can be developed
4. to provide statutory partners with channels for consultation and access to local consultation results in order to inform their planning
5. to raise the profile of the local charitable sector so that local people are stimulated to give more time etc.
6. to ensure that the voice of Oxfordshire is heard at a national policy level either through direct dialogue or through our national partners
7. To develop 'big society' solutions with more of a focus on enabling communities to identify and meet their communities needs about the things that are important to them by:

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- ensuring that existing services delivered by the voluntary sector are robust and sustainable
- assisting existing services to grow so that they can deliver more
- supporting new services to set up and become sustainable

This offers an exciting opportunity for us to work together to ensure that we have a vibrant voluntary sector which is capable of sustaining long term service delivery and support to our communities. We already have good relationships with the sector but this new infrastructure contract is seen as a further development of joint working, to enable our relationship with the sector to go from strength to strength.

Scrutiny may want to consider:

- How you would like to be kept updated or are there are issues you would like further information on?
- Consider inviting Alison Baxter from OCVA to the January meeting to discuss the wide range of work that they are leading on.

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