AGENDA MANAGEMENT SHEET

Name of Committee	**Adult and Community Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee**
Date of Committee	**16 February 2006**
Report Title	**Voluntary and Community Sector Strategy**
Summary	This report provides a further update on progress in developing a Voluntary and Community Sector strategy. Attached is the draft strategy and the results of consultation on this, in line with the Warwickshire Compact
For further information please contact:	John Lyons Community Development Coordinator Tel: 01926 746824 johnlyons@warwickshire.gov.uk
Would the recommended decision be contrary to the Budget and Policy Framework?	No.
Background papers	Internal report - Working with the Voluntary and Community Sector – July 2004

CONSULTATION ALREADY UNDERTAKEN:-   Details to be specified

Other Committees	☐	
Local Member(s)	☐	
Other Elected Members	☒	McAuley, Booth and Forwood
Cabinet Member	☒	Cllr Hayfield
Chief Executive	☐	
Legal	☒	David Carter, Jane Pollard
Finance	☐	
Other Chief Officers	☒	Michael Hake

District Councils	☒	
Health Authority	☒	....
Police	☐	....
Other Bodies/Individuals	☒	The report has been circulated widely to public sector partners and the voluntary and community sector in accordance with the Warwickshire Compact

FINAL DECISION   YES

SUGGESTED NEXT STEPS: Details to be specified

Further consideration by this Committee	☒	
To Council	☐	
To Cabinet	☒	Following report to this Committee
To an O & S Committee	☐	....
To an Area Committee	☐	....
Further Consultation	☐	....

Adult and Community Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee – 16 February 2006.

<u>Voluntary and Community Sector Strategy</u>

Report of the Strategic Director, Performance and Development

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Recommendation

That the Committee notes the draft Voluntary and Community Sector Strategy and the comments received through consultation, and requests that a final version be produced for approval by Cabinet.

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1. Background

1.   A review of the Council's relationship with the voluntary and community sector (VCS) was undertaken in 2004. A report setting out the scope of the sector, the basis of our relationship with it and a set of detailed recommendations for improvement was considered by the former Employment and Inclusion OSC in July 2004. This report was referred on to Area Committees for their comments and Cabinet approved the overall approach in October 2004.

2.   Cabinet asked that a Strategy be produced to implement the review, including further work on the detailed actions needed to change existing arrangements and to promote and market our relationship more effectively. Cabinet also asked that the Strategy should be developed in parallel with the Social Services Department's audit of adult community and voluntary sector service provision, as it was clear that the development of good practice in contracting with the VCS needs to be driven through Social Services, which is the largest contracting department with the sector.

3.   In order to do this, I established a short term Implementation Group, chaired by myself, and comprising representatives from the VCS and officers from Council Departments. The terms of reference of the group were to produce the Strategy, to include the following components:

   ❑   A framework to ensure that all work with the VCS is developed within a corporate approach

- ❑ This framework to guide the Councils' one-to one relationship with the VCS, but n the context of our Partnership working through the Warwickshire Compact and Local Strategic Partnerships
- ❑ An action plan to implement the detailed recommendations contained within the 2004 report and to consider the relevant forums, meetings, events and other communication channels needed to support the relationship
- ❑ A clear and robust performance management framework to support the relationship

4. The process of bringing together VCS representatives and council officers, through the Implementation Group (and its sub groups) proved to be extremely effective and enabled us to engage with the sector in a way that has not been possible before. The Group completed its work in June 2005 and produced a revised set of recommendations, which had the full support of the VCS representatives.

5. I reported progress to the OSC in July 2005 and to Cabinet in August. Cabinet agreed the Implementation Group's recommendations as the basis for wider consultation within the VCS and with our other partners, and the production of a strategy. Under the Warwickshire Compact, a consultation period of 12 weeks is the norm. A draft strategy was produced which was launched at annual meeting of organisations within the Warwickshire Compact and was circulated to these organisations and more widely within the voluntary and community sector between November and the end of January, which included a series of forums organised by the local Council for Voluntary Service in each area.

6. A copy of the consultation version of the Strategy is attached for consideration by members as Appendix 1, and a summary of the main comments received through the consultation process is attached as Appendix 2. Following this meeting I propose to reconvene the Implementation Group to finalise the Strategy, taking into account the comments received and to refine the action plan with a realistic timetable. The Strategy will then be submitted to cabinet for approval.

DAVID CARTER
Strategic Director
Performance and Development
February 2006

Warwickshire County Council

Consultation Version

Voluntary and Community Sector Strategy 2006 - 2011

1. Introduction

A review of the way in which the County Council and the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) work together was undertaken during 2004 and 2005. This Strategy has been developed from the recommendations made in the review and will determine how we will work together more effectively over the next five years.

The VCS is important to the County Council. It is a major partner of the Council in promoting active communities and in service provision. We spend nearly £40 million annually with voluntary and independent organisations, inclusive of specific grants received from Government. Social care contracts with independent providers are by far the biggest area of spending, but all service departments have significant dealings with the sector.

The County Council will shortly, together with the VCS and other partners, be developing a Local Area Agreement (LAA) with central government for implementation from April 2007. The County Council will be seeking to engage with the VCS regarding the sector's role in the agreement at the earliest opportunity.   he LAA will build on and apply the arrangements set out in this Strategy and the Warwickshire Compact.

The County Council is also engaged in a process of modernising its organisational structure and cultural practices in order to be able to improve its performance. Amongst other things, this will need to give added focus to partnership working, customer service and community engagement. The VCS will have a key role to play in the process and this Strategy, which has been

developed in conjunction with the sector, will need to be adapted in line with the changes that result from modernisation

2. The Warwickshire Compact

The County Council supports the Warwickshire Compact as a framework for guiding relationships between public agencies and VCS organisations in Warwickshire. This Strategy is in line with Compact principles and is in effect how the County Council intends to implement the provisions of the Compact. To reinforce this link a copy of the Summary version of the Compact is included as part of the Strategy at Appendix 2

3. The Scope of the Sector

The VCS comprises around half a million voluntary groups in the UK with an annual income of over £20 billion. It includes organisations that provide services to people who need help, advice or care, as well as those that people join to take part in sport and leisure, or political, religious and social affiliation. VCS organisations range from small local community groups to large national and international voluntary organisations, with all sizes in between.

Public donations and Government funding are the main sources of income. Government provides around 37%, with local authorities contributing a third of this. The sector is dominated in funding terms by the big national charities, which account for 61% of total income.

There is no simple definition of what distinguishes a community group from a voluntary organisation, but community groups tend to be less formal and member led, whereas voluntary organisations tend to employ staff and be more formally constituted.

There are around 4,000 VCS organisations in Warwickshire, including sporting and social organisations, cubs and brownies, village hall committees, youth groups, social care providers and support groups, early years providers etc. Of these there are about 2,500 organisations affiliated to Councils for Voluntary service, 1,250 registered charities and 500 faith based groups. There are also around 200 town and parish councils, and whilst these are not normally defined as VCS organisations, they are often the focus for local community activity.

4. The Basis of the Strategy

The Strategy focuses on those VCS organisations that operate on a "not for profit" basis in support of the social, economic, environmental and well-being of the Community and or wish to work in partnership with the Council in support of our Corporate Business Plan, the Strategic Plan for Warwickshire and local Community Strategies. In particular the VCS works with the Council in helping us

- ❑ Exercise corporate governance
- ❑ Provide council services
- ❑ Achieve our overarching corporate objectives

The Council's six corporate objectives are to:

- Promote Lifelong Learning and personal development
- Promote the Health and Social Care of our citizens
- Improve the Environment
- Reduce Crime and improve the Safety of the Community
- Develop and maintain a vibrant local economy, which promotes Employment and Prosperity for all.
- Ensure sound governance of the County Council to provide accessible, responsive and well-managed services

Across all six objectives, the County Council is committed to upholding the following four principles

- Improvement for all but with fastest improvement for the most deprived
- Equality of Opportunity for all
- To be a customer focused organisation
- To take account of the needs of future generations in our planning

The VCS is an important partner in helping us to achieve these objectives and supporting aims and is an important contributor to all of them.

5. Principles underpinning the Strategy

The Strategy is focused on the circumstances in which the responsibilities of the Council to provide services and promote the well-being of the community, come together with the independent aims of VCS organisations. This is based on a number of principles:

The Council accepts

- That in it's dealing with the VCS it needs to operate in a more consistent and corporate way than in the past and act as one Council, rather than a collection of departments.
- That it cannot and should not attempt to meet all the needs of communities through the provision of public services.
- The need to support the development of active communities with the capacity to do things for themselves, with appropriate support
- The need to support the infrastructure of the VCS to help provide this support
- The independence of the VCS and that it is driven by its own aims and objectives.
- That it needs to work in partnership with other public agencies and VCS organisations, both thorough LSPs and other formal partnerships and at more informal levels.

This Strategy describes more specifically how the Council will fulfil its obligations under Compact. The VCS asserts that it:

- Has the capacity and experience to deliver services more effectively, flexibility and innovatively in some circumstances
- Has a tradition of helping the most disadvantaged or hardest to reach in society,

- ❑ Does not exist to fill gaps in public services.
- ❑ Must retain its independence and be free to criticise the Council where appropriate, without fear of losing its funding
- ❑ Has its own resources that it can bring to the table and add value to public services, but should not be expected to use its resources to subsidise public spending
- ❑ Is the organised community - its eyes, ears and voice. It has a legitimate role in representing the community in Community Planning and Local Strategic Partnerships.

6. How We Will Work with the VCS

The following are the main areas of activity between the Council and the VCS. In relation to these we will adopt more detailed principles

- ❑ Contracting for Service delivery
- ❑ Supporting the VCS Infrastructure
- ❑ Developing effective communications and consultation
- ❑ Working together to ensure good governance

6.1   Contracting for Service delivery

- ❑ We will adopt a procurement protocol to determine how to involve the VCS in contracting

- ❑ We acknowledge that the choice of provider might be influenced by a range of factors such as, the supply market, locality, specialist skills, size of the contract, and relationship with existing providers etc. and that we have to comply with EU regulations.

- ❑ We accept that the VCS cannot be treated as a special case in the market, but we acknowledge the contribution/added value it provides and try to utilise this in the context of our competition rules.

- ❑ We acknowledge that the Council needs to manage the market to achieve both short-term and long-term objectives. In doing so we are mindful that there is a risk in tendering that, if applied bluntly, it might drive out partnership.

- ❑ We need to have a view about whether the excessive use of large outside providers, with the capacity to tender competitively (and undercut or bear loss-leaders on the local price) puts at risk the capacity and activity of local communities.

- ❑ We will develop processes spanning all departments that ensure we use the VCS in a consistent and positive way and to monitor the level of business placed with the sector.

- ❑ We will consider ways of supporting the VCS to enable it to compete, both within the sector itself and with the private sector. "Meet the buyer events" and training are two of the ways we can help.

- We will develop standardised corporate documentation for tendering and for contracts and service level agreements (proportionate to value) and processes for paying for services

- We accept that the VCS should have the right to charge full cost recovery of overheads when contracting for services and seek to achieve an appropriate formula for assessing these.

- We accept the need for medium term, as opposed to short-term (one year) contracts, with three to five year agreements as the norm, with appropriate review processes

- We accept that risks needs to be shared appropriately and effective review arrangements need to be in place to ensure that services can be fine-tuned and service failures avoided

- We acknowledge the difficulties faced by the VCS in maintaining capacity when much of their funding relates to fixed terms. The Council is unlikely to be able to pick up the costs at the end of such funding. Potential problems should be considered at the outset, so that agreed exit strategies can be developed at the start and reduce the incidence of recrimination at the end

- Any support other than direct funding (e.g. accommodation and back-office services) should normally be justified as part of a grant or contract and charged at normal rates, although there may be some scope for providing facilities without charge when these are freely available

6.2 Supporting the Infrastructure

- We think it is necessary to establish a joint officer/VCS forum to guide work on developing procurement and contracting practice and to be the focal point for links with the various community forums (children, adult, BME etc) and linking with LSPs and Warwickshire Strategic Partnership.

- We recognise the special role that some VCS organisations have as strategic partners and community representatives, which suggests a more permanent funding arrangement than might be possible through tendering. However there is general consensus that the concept of permanent core funding and the shape of the infrastructure needs to be reviewed over time in line with ChangeUp principles, We will work jointly with the VCS in doing this.

- We feel that responsibility for providing core funding should rest with the most appropriate Council department.

6.3 Developing effective Communications and Consultation

- We recognise the need to work closely with VCS infrastructure organisations as representatives of the VCS in helping us to develop our working relationships, but we also need to communicate more widely with

the sector in developing a better understanding of what we can do and how it can help us. There are a number of ways in which we can do this.

❑ We will develop a standing joint-group with key VCS organisations to monitor this strategy and we will make specific links with a number of community forums, covering areas such as disability, BME issues, the needs of younger and older people etc

❑ We will develop the Council's website by bringing together community information more effectively and making links with key VCS websites

❑ We will develop the County Council's community information database held by LHTS with a view to making it a comprehensive database, with the capacity to become the sole database for Warwickshire communities

❑ We will develop our consultation processes with the VCS to ensure a more consistent approach

❑ We will review our publications to ensure more effective communication and consultation and provide opportunities for the VCS to use them to promote its services

6.4 Working together to ensure good governance

❑ We will develop an Employee Volunteering Policy for the Council as part of our approach to ensuring a good work/life balance for our staff and promoting active communities

❑ As part of this we will consider the scope for extending placements and secondments etc to the VCS, as a two-way process.

❑ We will Improve consistency and coherence in the way in which we operate and support partnership working to this end, thereby working to improve the VCS and build vibrant and cohesive communities. This will include making best use of resources by partners.

❑ We will review the basis on which Members should be appointed to outside bodies, clarify the expectations of all involved, and the process for reporting to Council.

❑ We will consult with the VCS as a matter of routine during service reviews, the development of all area based strategies, and the local impact of county strategies.

7. Action Plan

A number of the above principles and recommendations for action have already been agreed and can be implemented quickly and easily. Other actions will require further discussion or consultation and may require specific agreements or protocols to be produced. The actions needed are set out in the Action Plan attached as Appendix 1 to this Strategy.

8. Managing the Strategy

The Social Inclusion Network (reporting to the Chief Officers' Management Team) will coordinate the Council's activity and overall performance management on VCS work. The Network will be the focal point for sharing good practice and providing corporate coordination on the issues identified in the Strategy

At elected member level, the **Economic Development** and the **Adult and Community Services Overview and Scrutiny Committees** are responsible for scrutinising and monitoring policy in relation community development and social inclusion work, which is the basis of much of our contact with the VCS. However, other Overview and Scrutiny committees have responsibilities for service delivery and the Coordinating Group may need to play a role. .

The Social Inclusion Network will review progress on the action plan twice a year, tying in where possible with the work of the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committees and there will be an annual progress report to Cabinet in …………….

Regular liaison will maintained with the **Cabinet members** responsible for **Economic Development** and **Adult and Community Services**

Regular liaison arrangements will be held between Council officers and VCS representatives and wider forums will be used to ensure that the views of all groups can be aired

David Carter
October 2005

Voluntary and Community Sector Strategy 2006 - 2011 – Action Plan

	Action	Outputs	Lead Responsibility	Date by
1	To establish a joint standing- group of Council officers and VCS representatives to manage the Council's VCS Strategy	To monitor progress on implementing all aspects of the Strategy and to generally act as a forum for considering matters relating to the council and the VCS	John Lyons to convene	Dec 05
2	To develop links between the JSG above the various community forums (BME, POP, YPF etc) and LSPs	To propose how the overall corporate relationship might be linked into the various other circumstances in which the Council, the VCS and other public sector partners inter-relate	Joint Standing Group to consider as early task	Apr 06
3	To develop the Council's Procurement Strategy to include a protocol for commissioning services with the VCS	To have a consistent approach corporately and throughout all council Departments	Paul White to lead with John Lyons and VCS rep	Apr 06
4	The procurement flow-chart should be process mapped as the basic framework for deciding how to involve the VCS in contracting.	To have a consistent approach corporately and throughout all council Departments	Paul White to lead with John Lyons and VCS rep	Apr 06
5	To develop a key performance indicator to track our performance on business placed with the VCS	To be able to measure increase/decrease in level of business	Paul White	Apr 06
6	To establish customer liaison arrangements with VCS	For the SJG (see 1 above0 to above to adopt as one of its roles a customer liaison function, e.g. to set up meet the buyer, training and procurement support (including a new support post	Joint Standing Group to consider as early task	Apr 06
7	To develop standard (and simplified) corporate documents and protocols for tendering and contracting with the VCS	To produce contracts with agreed standard terms, to include duration, payment terms, risk sharing, review and exit arrangements	Legal, with support from Corporate Procurement Group and VCS	Dec 06
8	To develop a consistent practice in relation to the calculation and charging of overheads	To produce a protocol to clarify for the circumstances in which full cost recovery of overheads should be made and how they are calculated	Paul White with County Treasurer and VCS	Dec 06
9	To review practice and produce a new protocol on core funding, in line with ChangeUp	To establish a basis for fair allocation and levels of funding related to specified outcomes, with a view to moving to full cost recovery, to involve all funders to ensure the overall level of support meet community needs	John Lyons plus CWIC and District Councils	Apr 07
10	To review the shape of the VCS infrastructure to take account of strategic coordination in line with ChangeUp	To review the role of organisations forming the infrastructure and the potential for rationalisation and or devolvement	CWIC with John Lyons and District Councils	Apr 07
11	To review the Council's arrangements for applying annual targets on grants to VCS core funded organisations	To clarify the Council's intentions with regard to whether efficiency targets are to be applied to VCS grants and if so whether Departments should be treated	David Carter and Dave Clarke	Dec 05

		consistently to encourage the appropriate location of such grants		
12	To enhance the role of Area Committees as the focal point for allocating small grants	To consider the practicality of all small grants, corporate and departmental, being rationalised, for allocation by Area Committees, on the advice of the proposed community workers group (see action 28)	Paul Williams	Apr 06
13	To ensure coherence between the Area Committee Review of grant allocation and the work following on from the Strategic Review of Services for Young People regarding the grant making and other roles of the Area Community Education Councils	Enhanced coherence of area grant making activities	John Lyons Paul Williams Elizabeth Featherstone VCS rep	April 06
14	To consider ways in which the Area Committees, through existing ACEC members and others, might develop 'Community Panels' to give advice on grant allocation and other aspects of their work	Enhanced community involvement in decision making regarding area based grants More informed decision making	John Lyons Paul Williams Elizabeth Featherstone VCS rep	April 06
15	To revise the Communities page on the WCC website to make it more effective as source on information on WCC activity in relation to the VCS and activity within the VCS as a whole	To bring together all community related information on the website, to consider scope for adding additional information and make links to key VCS websites	Phil Parker plus Desmond Heaps and Area Support	Apr 06
16	To improve the promotion of WCC website Communities page	To create a leaflet and press-release detailing the services that can be accessed from the webpage once the improvements have been undertaken.	Phil Parker plus Desmond Heaps and Area Support	Apr 06
17	To develop the Community Information database (CID) held by LHTS with a view to it becoming the definitive database of VCS organisations in Warwickshire	To produce a leaflet to increase the use of the CID to inform groups of the process and benefits of registration and to encourage existing registered groups to add information to their entry.	Desmond Heaps plus Area Support and VCS rep	Jul 06
	Ditto	To encourage groups to take up services on offer such as free webpage design and community profiling	Desmond Heaps plus Area Support and VCS rep	Jul 06
	Ditto	To explore the relationship between CID and other local and general databases and specialist databases such as "Up2date" for young people in Coventry and Warwicks.	Desmond Heaps plus Area Support and VCS rep and district councils	Jul 06
18	To consider the possibility of using CID to provide a 'who to consult' list for public sector consultation with the VCS	To ask groups to register on CID the circumstances in which they would like to be consulted – either in all cases or in respect of more specialist aspects of public service activity.	Desmond Heaps and Louise Richards	Jul 06
	Ditto	To develop CID to link it to the Corporate Consultation Database to enable it to handle such requests	Desmond Heaps and Louise	Jul 06

			Richards	
19	To improve the corporate consultation process generally by creating a Compact compliant leaflet on 'How to consult with the VCS' to complement the leaflets for other target audiences.	To produce a leaflet as suggested and to develop a standard 'who to consult' list of VCS groups on general and specific services developments.	John Lyons and Louise Richards	Jul 06
20	To ensure the WCC consultation strategy provides for the VCS to be consulted as a matter of routine on all corporate service reviews, the development of all area based strategies and polices, and the local impact of county strategies.	To review the Corporate Consultation Strategy and Area consultation to ensure its processes include routine consultation with the VCS as required	John Lyons, Peter Hunter and Louise Richards	Jul 06
	Ditto	To ensure that Area Committee arrangements and corporate projects (e.g. Children Act and Adult Services review) include VCS consultation and do not create separate processes	John Lyons with Paul Williams and Ros Boune	Jul 06
21	To survey all current newsletters, leaflets and publications with a view to rationalisation and developing better communication between the Council and the VCS	To rationalise WCC publications that go to the VCS.	Eric Britton and VCS rep	Apr 06
	Ditto	To have a permanent slot for VCS issues in the Warwickshire View	Eric Britton and VCS rep	Apr 06
	Ditto	To consider the use of use e-mail newsletters, e-mail alerts and the Warwickshire Web	Phil Parker and Desmond Heaps	Apr 06
	Ditto	To investigate the continued need for 5 separate CVS newsletters	CVS's	Apr 06
22	To develop a procedure to guide the letting or selling of Council accommodation to VCS organisations.	To clarify the circumstances in which the council might make property available to VCS groups, the terms under which it should be let and the relationship to grants and service contracts, based on Best Value	David Halsall (Completed subject to consultation)	Sep 05
23	To develop a protocol for establishing more effective links between the VCS and Area committees	To improve the current ad-hoc relationships by agreeing amore formal involvement of the VCS in developing the Area Business Plan, Local Area Agreements, community plans and by presentations to the committees from time to time on their work	Paul Williams	Apr 06
	Ditto	To request Area committees to consider using VCS facilities for their meetings to make them more visible in the community and promote community involvement	Paul Williams	Dec 05
24	To make better use of community facilities	For both WCC and VCS to publicise the availability of meeting rooms and other facilities(to be let under normal arrangements)	Paul Williams	Dec 05
25	To assist capacity building in the VCS by the development of protocol for the involvement of VCS	To include consideration of advertising courses on offer, making a number of places	Nicola McKay Plus VCS rep	Apr 06

	representatives in Council training programmes and in reciprocal arrangements with the VCS	available to the VCS, involving it in the planning and design of course and joint development/mentoring activities		
26	To investigate the possibility of adding VCS organisations onto main WCC contracts for utilities and other services	To support the capacity of the community by enabling VCS organizations to take advantage of discounts and council support services etc., where possible	John Lyons and Paul White with VCS	Apr 06
27	To develop an Employee Volunteering Policy for the County Council as part of the Work-Life Balance strategy, to provide opportunities to support the capacity of the VCS and to widen the experience of staff.	To consider arrangements for time off for staff willing to provide volunteer support to the VCS. Departments to consider how they will promote volunteering, including whether they will appoint departmental champions	Bob Perks, Nicola McKay and John Lyons plus chief officers and Volunteer Centres	Apr 06
	Ditto	To consider how to extend placements, secondments, joint projects and mentoring etc between the sectors	Bob Perks, Nicola McKay and John Lyons	Apr 06
	Ditto	To consider continuous service entitlements for people transferring between the County Council and the VCS	Bob Perks and John Lyons	Apr 06
28	To improve community development standards and the way resources are allocated between the County Council and the VCS to support community work	To formalise the establishment of local "community workers" groups in all five areas, with agree terms of reference to include responsibility for considering local funding applications	Paul Williams and VCS rep	Apr 06
	Ditto	To develop common community development standards	CWIC	
	Ditto	To develop a protocol to encourage joint discussion on the development of new posts and external funding bids to avoid duplication, encourage efficiency and avoid problems due to external grants expiring	John Lyons, Paul Williams and CWIC	Apr 06
	Ditto	The VCS to consider proposals to extend take up of approved quality marks and for this to result in protocol for the quality assurance of organisatioins eligible for Council funding	CWIC	Jul 06
29	To review the basis on which Members (and staff) should be appointed to outside bodies, including VCS organisations	To clarify the circumstances in which the Council should nominate an elected member or officer to serve on an outside body.	Jan Purcell and Legal and VCS	Apr 06
	Ditto	To clarify the expectations of the Council in respect of the elected member or officer's role in relation to the Council's interests and charity law	Jan Purcell and Legal and VCS	Apr 06

Voluntary and Community Sector Strategy 2006-2011
<u>Consultation Responses</u>

The draft strategy was launched at the Warwickshire Compact annual meeting on 7 November 2005. This was well attended by both public sector and voluntary and community sector (VCS) organisations. In order to comply with Compact guidelines, consultation responses were invited until the end of January 2006. The draft strategy was sent to all Compact signatories and, via the Councils for Voluntary Service, it was made available to all community groups. It was also posted on the County Council's website.

Respondents were invited to reply direct, or via their local CVS, who organised a series of workshops around the County, open to all their affiliated groups. These workshops were attended by myself and Tim Willis (Social Services) to recognise the link between the Strategy and the Social Services review of contracting.

Only three individual responses were received, but summaries of the comments made at the workshops were collated and comments were also received from Warwick District Council. Respondents were asked to comment on six questions. For the purposes of this report, I have attempted to summarise and synthesise the comments received to the questions in the following sections. These are mainly individual comments, but some were made by more than one respondent. I have tried to make it clear where there were a number of comments of a similar kind or where there was particular strength of feeling. It is likely that further comments will be received and these will be reported orally to Committee.

1. The basis of the Strategy and the principles suggested for underpinning the relationship between the Council and the VCS (Sections 4 and 5)

Respondents were generally supportive of the draft strategy. They thought its production was timely and covered a range of areas that were in need of addressing

It was felt that the Council's modernisation process should address the need to clarify the type of services it requires at a corporate level, given the different requirements of directorates, and their new configuration. Also, it was felt that Local Area Agreements would provide new opportunities to work with the VCS and involve LSPs more effectively.

There was a general acknowledgement that we need to get other public sector bodies on board if this strategy is to be effective, particularly district councils and health trusts. The difficulty in doing this at a time when many

public services were going through a process of organisational change was recognised. There is very strong support from Warwick DC to be fully involved in taking forward the strategy and its action plan and using it as a framework for all Councils to meet their obligations under the Warwickshire Compact

2. Contracting for service delivery (Section 6.1)

There was general support that a fundamental review of contracting/funding is necessary, as this would provide more clarity and more opportunities for the whole sector and allow new providers to come forward . The sector accepts that it cannot be treated as special case but the rules need to be clear. We should make clear statements on issues such as - our market strategy; the issue of full cost recovery of overheads; inflation proofing; provision for set-up costs and appropriate phasing of payments; and a commitment for regular review and monitoring of contracts.

The main point here was a widespread concern that our tendering and contracting processes should recognise the value that locally delivered services add to community capacity and cohesion. There is a concern that the need to achieve best value and the expertise and economies of scale enjoyed by large national providers will drive out local ones and destroy this capacity. This relates particularly to the social care market and whilst most of this (e.g. home care and residential care) has mostly not been provided by local groups, there are areas of the market where we need to consider these concerns carefully.

Various suggestions were made about how we could help local providers compete successfully including – the provision of training on how to tender effectively; allowing scope for natural evolution of a service so there is time to adjust; ensuring that full costs are identified and budgeted for; that documentation is kept as simple as possible; review tendering limits so they are not too high; that continuity of care and the need for choice from a mixed market are part of the selection criteria.

The move towards 3-5 year contracts/service level agreements was widely supported as offering more stability for VCS organisations and better continuity of provision. There was strong support for the move to more standard documentation and that this should be kept as simple as possible. There were concerns about possible increases in bureaucracy, but it was thought there was scope to reduce it in some areas, e.g. unnecessary invoicing requirements and standardised payment periods

It was felt that there should be better but not more contract monitoring. There should be consistency in monitoring standards, which needs to be agreed with the VCS and be appropriate. Where contracts/projects are multi-funded it is suggested that monitoring should be undertaken only once, on behalf of all the funders. Suggestions were also made about involving the user perspective more in monitoring, so it is not just between the commissioner and the service provider.

A comment was made that the draft strategy focuses too much on contracting and not enough on partnership working. Collaboration and partnership takes time to develop and if the environment is too competitive this might not be possible. Another comment was that we should ensure that our focus is not just on those (minority of) VCS organisations that contract with the Council – we need to develop our relationship with the sector as a whole.

There was support for the provision of small one-off grants such as the Community Development Fund to continue and that these should remain accessible and simple. It was thought that more could be done to standardise forms and make connections with funding available from others such as District Councils [which is already].

3. Proposals for supporting the infrastructure of the VCS (Section 6.2)

Respondents were mainly smaller community organisations affiliated to Council's for Voluntary Service, who are the key infrastructure organisations. It was acknowledged that the VCS is very diverse and wide-ranging and that the needs of national VCS organisations, or nationally supported organisations are very different from those of stand-alone local organisations and that even locally groups involved in delivering services have greater support needs that grass roots community groups

There was general agreement with the proposal in the draft strategy for the County Council and the Coventry and Warwickshire Infrastructure Consortium to work together to review the concept of core funding and the shape of the infrastructure in accordance with the ChangeUp principles adopted by Government.

The community organisations were keen to ensure that this process would not result in a loss of local focus, or that the work of organisations like CVS and volunteer centres would refocus on the needs of a few larger organisations at the cost of grass-roots groups

One suggestion was that as many VCS organisations struggle with a lack of infrastructure, there could be economies of scale in establishing a single back office infrastructure provider to support the sector as a whole

There were lots of comments about core funding, which as suggested above is to be reviewed. Some of the smaller organisations see this as something that should be extended more widely to give them greater security and sustainability. Others acknowledged that it did not serve anyone well and that such funding needed to relate more clearly to an agreed level of service.

4. How we might improve communications and consultation with the sector (Section 6.3)

There was good support for the concept of streamlining communication by reducing the duplication of newsletters and making stronger links between what the Council and the VCS publish.

The development of the Community Information database held by the County Council and the County Council website was strongly supported, although there were concerns about one big database being too remote and inflexible. It was suggested that whatever we do all the public agencies need to buy into it or things will continue to develop separately

Similar alternatives were suggested such as an e-mail register of interested groups linked to a specific VCS website and there was support for the County Council's customer call centre being trained up to guide callers to VCS infrastructure organisations and services

The continuing role of CVS as a communication conduit was supported as was the development of community forums of various kinds, but it was felt we need better ways of communicating with small organisations to bring them in the loop. Nearly all organisations attending the meetings were able to confirm that they now have their own access, or access through members of their group, to the internet and e-mail. This now becomes a realistic option for fast and effective communication with the sector. However there were some concerns about us becoming over-reliant on web-based communication – mainly older people's representatives

It was felt that good consultation with the VCS was vital and at present we do not always involve those who need to be involved, either direct of through intermediaries such as the CVS. It was felt that we should do more to give feedback on consultation, with more detail and explanation on whether ideas were accepted or not and why. Other points included the need to resource consultation meetings and the need to develop strong relationships though individuals – high staff turnover in some areas was a real problem for the sector.

5. How we can work more effectively with the sector to ensure good governance (Section 6.4)

The need to review the role of councillors nominated to serve on VCS management bodies was supported. Suggestions included - whether they might become observers rather than members; whether the council needed to be involved in the governance of the voluntary organisations it supports; whether CVS could take on this role and; it would be helpful if councillors have experience of working in the voluntary sector

We need to look beyond our relationships with groups and look more at how we can promote volunteering. We should start this in the schools and nurture it as a lifetime activity. "Younger" volunteers are needed and it would be a positive step for the Council to develop its employee volunteering approach –

can we promote the opportunity for skilled Council staff to support the governance of voluntary organisations in a private capacity

6. General comments not covered by the above

The action plan is too good but is too ambitious and needs to be adjusted

There was support for setting up a standing joint forum with the VCS. The involvement of VCS representatives in partnerships requires the rethinking of organisational arrangements due to time constraints with less traditional committee type arrangements; if there is to be true partnership the VCS needs to be more involved in internal management - e.g. SIN and O&S committees

We should do more to encourage the development of user-led services and the involvement of the VCS in the design of service specifications from the start

As well as respecting the independence of the sector we should recognise its different character – its resources, organisation, pace and cohesion are different.

We should explore the scope for providing facilities without charge if there is no cost involved

We should explore the opportunities for co-location between the public and VCS, developing the concept of one-stop-shops/neighbourhood centres

John Lyons
2 February 2006