

Appendix D

Emerging recommendations of the Support for the Third Sector (Developing a Strategy) Scrutiny Topic Group

Topic Group Members:

Councillors, David Cullen (Chair), Monika Cherney-Craw, Matthew Hurst, Lin Martin-Haugh, Carol Latif, John Mead, Simon Speller and Marilyn Yarnold-Forrester.

The Topic Group met on three occasions, 2 February, 30 March and 6 April. Two of these occasions were all day sessions where the group interviewed the following people:

Richard Protheroe, Head of Housing, Partnerships and Communications
Nicola Kilvington, Communications and Partnerships Manager
Pam Shaw, St Nicholas Community Centre Manager
Rose Griffin, The Oval Community Centre Manager
Ann Jansz, Stevenage CVS
Pauline Hickey, Neighbourhood Team Manager
Mandy Williams, Community Development Officer
Marian Hurle, Director Stevenage CAB
Councillor Sherma Batson, Portfolio Holder for Community, Health and Older People
George Ruddock, Third Thursday
Eileen Hutchinson, Third Thursday
Jonathan Prince, Social Impact Group

The notes of the meeting had previously been circulated but will be formally forwarded to the Portfolio Holder for Community, Health and Older People and the Strategic Director for their consideration whilst they are formulating the Strategy to support the Voluntary Sector in Stevenage.

The original intention was that the Topic Group would continue to meet in 2011-12 to carry on this Policy Development work supporting the Portfolio Holder and Strategic Director, but due to the reorganisation of the Scrutiny structure in 2011-12 this work will now be formally handed over to the Executive Portfolio Holder and the Strategic Director to incorporate into the work that Officers are currently undertaking.

The Portfolio Holder for Community, Health and Older People together with the Strategic Director and Community Health and Older People Development and Scrutiny Committee will need to consider whether the Committee can offer any further assistance in the time available before the strategy is formally consulted on with partners prior to the Executive agree a Strategy in the Autumn.

Emergent Recommendations

The Strategy should:

- Build on the excellent Voluntary Sector Summit and widen the evidence base with further interviews with parts of the sector that were under represented at the Summit
- Endeavour to make the Strategy a working document which has an action plan that can be delivered – If the strategy's action plan could identify an early "quick win" that tangibly demonstrates the Council's wish to support the sector this would really help engender further goodwill between the sector and the Council. The Council does not need another strategy that "sits on a shelf"

- Consider delaying the consultation with the sector until September as the summer is historically a difficult time to get response from people
- Help the Council become an enabler to the Sector – “Co-operative Council”. A theme that emerged throughout the Voluntary Sector Summit was the Council’s role as an enabler “the Council needs to recognise that community groups do more service delivery than the Council does” (quote from Voluntary Sector Summit)
 - The Co-operative Council – this will be a culture change for the Council from ‘we know best’ to a ‘how can we help you’
 - The Council in its enabling role when it develops a strategy need to (i) be realistic about what it can achieve and (ii) really listen and engage with the community groups and make sure it supports their needs
 - build on the Voluntary Sector Summit, harness the good will generated on the day

The Strategy should within the associated action plan look at ways to:

- Carry out a Mapping exercise for the Voluntary Sector – Help people in the sector navigate their way around, especially who to speak to at the Council about a particular service or expertise. The Mapping exercise could begin to evaluate the social impact of groups in the sector
- Facilitate peer health checks of the Sector’s staff, volunteers and trustees
Use the health checks to direct resources and help to those areas that need it most and where it would be strategically advantageous especially regarding trustees, business planning and financial governance/funding strategies
- Help the Voluntary Sector develop business plans and funding strategies.
Voluntary Sector Groups can’t chase funding if it requires them to change their modus operandi, as funding is often for projects and capital investment not core running costs
- Within the Action Plan develop ways of supporting sustainability in the sector and income generation
- Develop capacity building initiatives to increase organisations volunteer base
- Help the Council to maintain a face to face contact with the Voluntary Sector
- Make links with businesses – tap into professional expertise
- Use the experience of the Community Development Officers to shape the Strategy and the CDO’s work plans should be guided by the strategy
- Provide training opportunities to the Voluntary Sector (previously offered but not followed through)
- Facilitate more network opportunities
- Encourage parts of the Sector to work together collaboratively where there are obvious financial savings to be made
- Be prepared to do things differently
- Continue to be strategic in who the Council helps, there are 357 different Voluntary Sector groups in the town, covering 37 generic areas (29 Children and Young People, 28 Older People, 26 Education and Skills, 21 Family and Support). Consider how many groups are sustainable? Consider whether some groups merge or share back office services?
- Consider whether in the future a volunteer hub or central services could be created in the town in a building like Swingate House to provide a training and central support base for the Sector in the town
- The Strategy should be considered by relevant officers of the Council when other cross cutting decisions are implemented, such as any decision on the Council’s Asset Management
- The Strategy should recognise the diversity of the groups that operate in the town and see that different groups require different support if they are to flourish. For

example a “one-size fits all” approach to the Community Centres in the town is not appropriate

- With regards to the Community Centres the Council needs to recognise that there are important reputational issues at stake regarding past reviews and management contract negotiations, leases etc that the Strategy will need to address
- Promote SBC employee volunteering opportunities - Carry out an audit of employee skills which could be matched up with Voluntary Sector needs
- If the Strategy supports the use of Social Enterprises it should consider a small pilot first