



**SURREY COUNTY COUNCIL AND
SURREY'S VOLUNTARY AND COMMUNITY
SECTOR – DEVELOPING A STRATEGY**

**SURREY COUNTY COUNCIL
LOCAL COMMITTEE (GUILDFORD)**

22 March 2007

KEY ISSUE/DECISION:

The report summarises Surrey County Council's relationship with the voluntary and community sector (VCS) and seeks Members comments on the needs and issues locally in Guildford.

OFFICER RECOMMENDATIONS

The Committee is asked to:

- (i) Consider and discuss the briefing report.
- (ii) Consider to what extent the issues outlined reflect the needs and issues identified locally
- (iii) Ensure that these needs and issues are clearly highlighted in the development of the renewed SCC Strategy in relation to the VCS.

BACKGROUND:

1. SCC currently spends over £10 million in grants alone to around 450 voluntary and community sector (VCS) organisations. Spend on contracts is many more times this figure.

2. Of this, a little over £600,000 is spent in the Guildford area in around 40 different grants. This figure is based on a snap shot of spend in December 2006.
3. However, there are an estimated 6000 community groups and organisations across the county, with whom SCC has little or no direct or formal relationship.
4. There has been considerable strain on the County Council's relationship with the VCS over the past 12 months – brought about in part by inconsistent practice between different services, and because of changes in systems and personnel.
5. There is a tight funding climate going forward. The Leader of Surrey County Council (SCC) has said he expects both internal and external stakeholders to look at ways to achieve efficiencies. The Comprehensive Spending Review 2007 will place even greater pressure on public sector funding from 2008 onwards.
6. There are a number of government strategy and policy documents which require the public sector to work more closely and effectively with the VCS.

A New Approach

7. Working with our district and borough and PCT colleagues, and in partnership with the VCS, SCC will develop a strategy to ensure that:
 - a. the value and role of the VCS are clear to the county council.
 - b. there is a clear position on the independence of the VCS, the sharing of risk, a balanced use of grants and contracts, and so on.
 - c. there is a clear and transparent level of investment.
 - d. the voluntary sector can play a significant role in public sector delivery.
 - e. the VCS helps SCC to develop and learn.
 - f. the VCS plays a clear role in the delivery of safe, strong, and cohesive communities.
 - g. wherever possible ways are identified to share and achieve the most effective use of resources.
8. The strategy will have the following elements:
 - a. Engagement
 - b. Commissioning and Procurement
 - c. Volunteering
 - d. Infrastructure
 - e. Grant Funding
 - f. Workforce Development
 - g. Compact

Engagement

9. There will be engagement channels at various levels and in different formats across SCC. Wherever possible these will be coterminous with other partners. There are two elements to engagement:

10. engagement of and with VCS organisations as stakeholders in their own right,
11. engagement with the VCS as a channel to individuals and members of local communities and excluded or disadvantaged groups. Within this second part, a clear position on how best to support the VCS as an independent voice and its role in advocacy and mediation will be developed.

Commissioning and Procurement

12. In order for the VCS to play a greater role in the delivery of our services, commissioning and procurement practices will need to be VCS “proofed” – offering ways to create a “level playing field”, for example relevant and VCS sensitive payment terms, and a clear approach to sharing risk, funding arrangements which run for three or even five years, and so on.

Volunteering

13. Volunteers are the most valuable resource for the VCS. If public sector partners were to do nothing else, they would need to ensure that volunteering is robustly supported across the county. SCC currently funds volunteer centres as a part of each CVS. However research suggests there needs to be greater access to volunteering support. The strategy will explore options to enable this.

Infrastructure

14. Splits into two main themes: Property and accommodation, and advice and guidance

Property and accommodation

15. SCC’s stated aim for estates management is “Appropriate Facility, Suitable Location, Efficient cost. To do this SCC will manage its portfolio efficiently, so that services are delivered from fit for purpose facilities in a suitable local setting, investment is made to maximise returns for the authority, revenue costs are minimised, and public and private partnerships are developed.”

Advice and guidance

16. The approach is to commission organisations to deliver advice and guidance focused on enabling and creating a vibrant VCS where we do not have a direct involvement. Workshops (see below) on key infrastructure activities, lessons from the original Change Up work, and discussions with the existing CVS network will inform this thinking.
17. For example, at present SCC funds Guildford Association for Voluntary Services (GAVS) in partnership with the PCT and Guildford Borough

Council. The county council supports 8 similar and local arrangements across the county, as well as significant investment in Surrey Community Action, the CVS network, the Compact Working group and other activities which cross the county. Part of the review, working with district and borough and health partners will be to look at the best way SCC can ensure maximum efficiencies whilst achieving a local and front line relevant service.

Grant Funding

18. There is currently an unwieldy and inconsistent approach to grants which struggles to manage the tension between local and county, or have clear links between the grant and organisational and county priorities. In Guildford for instance there is a well-developed and popular single VCS grants programme to which the statutory sector partners contribute. SCC wants to understand what people feel are the pros and cons of this arrangement in considering if there is a single model which can be adopted across the county.

Workforce Development

19. Training and workforce development is a key issue for the voluntary sector. SCC will explore ways in which it can support this, possibly through economies of scale across sectors, or through the creation of social enterprises.

Compact

20. Compact is a commitment between the public and voluntary sectors to work more effectively together. The strategy itself is the County Council's commitment to Compact. The intention is to move away from having Compact as an almost separate activity, but rather to identify key activities in the implementation and delivery of the strategy which can be monitored, and used to indicate how well SCC and other partners remain true to this commitment.

Relationship to other Stakeholders and Partners

21. As far as practicably possible, the strategy will be developed in partnership with SCC's statutory and VCS partners. The outcomes will seek to present, wherever possible, a single public sector approach, making best use of all resources from across the partners, as well as joint objectives.

22. Work Plan – February to December 2007

- a. Detailed analysis with SCC services of current spend within the VCS through February and March.
- b. Four countywide workshops based around the themes of volunteering, engagement, workforce development and funding during March 2007
- c. Detailed analysis and outline options to SCC Executive and CCMT during April.
- d. A major event with VCS partners in late spring/early summer at Dorking Halls.
- e. Draft strategy for discussion during May with stakeholders and partners.
- f. Final strategy for approval by SCC Executive and County Council Management Team in late June/early July.
- g. Final strategy for stakeholder consultation between July and September.
- h. New grant programmes and tender opportunities announced in the autumn.

23. Involvement and Engagement Activity

- a. Multi partner working groups focusing on procurement, property, engagement, volunteering, workforce development and funding.
- b. Presentations and discussion at local committees and other political forums.
- c. Presentations and discussion at the SLGA.
- d. Paper briefings to elected Members.
- e. Workshops with public sector partners.
- f. Input to the CVS network away day.
- g. Presentations and discussion at VCS community lunches and other events.
- h. Web page on SCC web site currently being considered.

24. The Role of the Local Committee

- a. Members are invited to consider and discuss this briefing report.
- b. Consider to what extent the issues outlined reflect the needs and issues identified locally.
- c. Ensure that these needs and issues are clearly highlighted both at discussion stage in the activities above, but also at final draft and consultation stage.
- d. Actively support local voluntary groups (as well as public sector officers) to be aware of the work and if appropriate arrange for further events to brief and involve them.
- e. Consider in particular whether the local method for handling grant funding (the Voluntary Grants Panel) should be commended as an option for other areas of the county. What, if anything, could be done to make it even more effective?
- f. Consider at what other forums it would be useful to seek involvement or discussion – e.g. the Local Strategic Partnership – and where appropriate, seek to have the issue raised on the agenda.
- g. consider if the committee would like further more detailed reports or involvement, for instance at the June meeting.

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BACKGROUND PAPERS: None
