



# Surrey County Council Local Committee Voluntary and Community Sector Future Strategy

**11 May 2007**

## **KEY ISSUE:**

The report summarises Surrey County Council's approach to developing a new approach to working with the voluntary and community sector in Surrey, and seeks members' views and comments on the needs and issues for the voluntary and community sector locally in Runnymede.

## **OFFICER RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- i) Members are invited to consider and discuss this briefing, and:**
- Consider to what extent the issues outlined reflect the needs and issues identified locally.
  - Agree how best these needs and issues can be clearly highlighted both at discussion stage, but also at final draft and consultation stage.
  - 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.
  - Consider in particular if any local methods for handling grant funding could be recommended as an option for other areas of the county.
  - Consider at what other forums it would be useful to seek involvement or discussion on voluntary sector issues and strategy – e.g. the LSP.

**Report by:** Ben Collins, Senior Manager, Policy and Public Affairs Service

**LEAD/CONTACT OFFICER:** Ben Collins

**TELEPHONE NUMBER:** 020 8541 7257

**E-MAIL:** [ben.collins@surreycc.gov.uk](mailto:ben.collins@surreycc.gov.uk)

**BACKGROUND PAPERS:** None

## 1 INTRODUCTION and BACKGROUND

- This year Surrey County Council will spend over £10 million in grants alone to around 450 voluntary and community sector (VCS) organisations. Spend on contracts is almost the same again.
- Of this, a little over £320,000 is spent in the Runnymede area specifically, in around 30 different grants. This figure is based on a snapshot of spend in December 2006, and does not include a number of grants to organisations which cover more than one district or borough area.
- However, there are an estimated 6000 community groups and organisations across the county, with whom the county council has little or no direct or formal relationship.
- There has been considerable strain on the Surrey 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.
- There is a tight funding climate going forward. The leader of Surrey County Council has said he expects both internal and external stakeholders to look at ways to achieve efficiencies. The Comprehensive Spending Review will place even greater pressure on public sector funding from 2008.
- There are a number of government strategy and policy documents which require the public sector to work more closely and effectively with the VCS. These documents are being reflected increasingly in various performance and external assessment frameworks.

## 2 ANALYSIS AND COMMENTARY

### A New Approach

Working with our district and borough and PCT colleagues, and in partnership with the VCS, Surrey County Council will develop a strategy to ensure that:

- The value and role of the VCS are clear to the county council.
- 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.
- There is a clear and transparent level of investment.
- The voluntary sector can play a significant role in public sector delivery.
- The VCS helps the county council to develop and learn.
- The VCS plays a clear role in the delivery of safe, strong, and cohesive communities.
- Wherever possible ways are identified to share and achieve the most effective use of resources.

The strategy will have the following elements, which are explained in more detail below:

- a) Engagement
- b) Infrastructure
- c) Volunteering

- d) Commissioning and procurement
- e) Grant funding
- f) Compact

**a) Engagement**

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:

- a) engagement of and with VCS organisations as stakeholders in their own right,
- b) 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.

**b) Infrastructure**

This splits into three themes:

- i) An independent voice and a channel for communication as outlined above
- ii) Advice and guidance

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. The workshops on key infrastructure activities, lessons from the original Change Up work, and discussions with the existing CVS network will inform this thinking. So far, the emerging priorities are: local brokerage and support, funding advice, training and workforce development, local knowledge, data management, community action plans and organisational health checks.

For example, at present SCC funds Runnymede Association for Voluntary Services (RAVS) in partnership with the Primary Care Trust (PCT) and Runnymede Borough Council. The county council supports 8 similar and local arrangements across the county, as well significant investment in Surrey Community Action, the CVS network, the Compact Working group and other activities which cross the county. Part of our review, working with district and borough and health partners will be to look at the best way we can ensure maximum efficiencies whilst achieving a local and front line relevant service.

- iii) Property and accommodation

SCC's stated aim for estates management is "Appropriate Facility, Suitable Location, Efficient cost. To do this we will manage our 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.”

### **c) Volunteering**

Volunteers are the most valuable resource for the VCS, and one upon which public services increasingly rely. If public sector partners were to do nothing else, they would need to ensure that volunteering is robustly supported across the county. We currently fund 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.

### **d) Commissioning and Procurement**

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.

### **e) Grant Funding**

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.

The strategy aims to identify what amount of money can and should be made available as grant funding each year, what its relationship to mainstream service delivery should be, and how can we develop a process whereby local communities can be most involved in deciding the best use for that money.

### **f) Compact**

Compact is a commitment between the public and voluntary sectors to work more effectively together. The strategy itself is the 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 of this work to other Stakeholders and Partners**

As far as practicably possible, the strategy will be developed in partnership with our 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.

### **Work Plan – May to December 2007**

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

### **Involvement and Engagement Activity**

Below are some of the activities undertaken so far in developing the strategy:

1. Multi partner working groups focusing on procurement, property, engagement, volunteering, workforce development and funding.
2. Presentations and discussion at local committee and other political forums.
3. Presentations and discussion at the SLGA.
4. Paper briefings to elected members.
5. Workshops with public sector partners.
6. Input to the CVS network away day.
7. Presentations and discussion at VCS community lunches and other events.
8. Web page on SCC web site currently being considered.

### **4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

The work outlined in the strategy is examining the way in which the county council spends over £10 million a year.

### **5. VALUE FOR MONEY**

As above

## **6. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS**

The voluntary and community sector plays a key role in supporting excluded and disadvantaged groups, both in terms of direct service delivery, and in having a voice in developing the services of the county council to better suit the needs of those groups.

The strategy work outlined in this paper will therefore have both a direct and indirect equalities impact.

## **7. CONCLUSION**

- Members are invited to consider and discuss this briefing.
- Consider to what extent the issues outlined reflect the needs and issues identified locally.
- Agree how best these needs and issues can be clearly highlighted both at discussion stage, but also at final draft and consultation stage.
- 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.
- Consider in particular if any local methods for handling grant funding could be recommended as an option for other areas of the county.
- Consider at what other forums it would be useful to seek involvement or discussion on voluntary sector issues and strategy – e.g. the LSP.