

Summary report

Voluntary Sector Forum workshop on NI7

Background

The Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) is in the process of developing a strategy and action plan in order to deliver an environment for a thriving third sector in Wolverhampton . The document is in a draft form and the Voluntary Sector Forum met on 9th May to consider and comment on its strategic elements .

The strategic priorities are:

- Equal partnership
- Participation and involvement
- Proactive third sector development
- Market development

The forum commented on each of these in a number of small groups

Feedback

Under each priority feedback from the third sector partnership can be summarised as follows:

Equal partnership:

Compact: There was a shared feeling that this needs to be further strengthened, specifically by “real sign up” at the highest levels, specifically within the City Council

Co-ordinating the Third Sector:

- There was agreement with regard to greater co-ordination and a desire for a more joined up approach between voluntary and community sectors. This included, for example, a request for a central point of contact for support.
- There was a desire to trumpet good news stories from the sector and to increase our profile

Organising resources: Three key points were made

- The need for one vision
- The need to have a clear route to accessing opportunities for the sector
- Access to shared IT support

Partnership arrangements:

- There was a clear request to ensure that diversity issues are fully addressed in partnership arrangements.
- It was suggested that the sector needs to build stronger relationships with senior managers at for example the PCT

Participation and involvement

Co-ordination: The key theme here was the need for clarity about the purpose of consultation, what can be changed and the relevance to VCOs

Effective communication

- There was a common theme of communication being clear, cutting down jargon, writing in plain English and having a variety of formats
- Recognition of costs of participation including transport and communication support for disabled people
- Measurement of the impact of consultations should be based on outcomes ie what changes not numbers of people involved etc

Maximum participation

- A need to be more organised eg publicised through agreed websites, an annual schedule of events and opportunities to be involved
- An “open door” approach and avoidance of cliques

- Need to actively encourage excluded groups including those from BME communities, smaller orgs etc

Pro-active third sector development

More Commission ready organisations

- Good governance is crucial
- Organisations need to be fit for purpose – an audit or checklist could be developed
- There needs to be widespread awareness of opportunities
- There needs to be an acknowledgement of lead in times for service delivery eg for CRB checks
- Commissioners need to be made more aware of the potential contribution of 3rd sector orgs

How will consortia be developed

- Establishing groups with similar interests for consortia or a brokering approach
- “Jigsaw” approach
- A need for lead organisations to recognise their role and for there to be clear lines of responsibility
- Speed dating events
- It is important that we use consortia to move beyond delivery by the “usual suspects”

Development of a training programme

The message here is that a range of training and support is needed. This should include:

- A training programme relevant to big and small organisations with a “pick and mix” approach.
- Intensive one to one support

- Organisational support
- There should be appropriate training standards
- There is a need to develop contract management capability across the sectors

What would a transparent commissioning framework look like?

- Clear outcomes
- A clear and transparent process
- An inclusive process, playing to all our strengths
- The development of consortia, recognised by commissioners but with an understanding of the stresses and risks of consortia or sub contracting chains
- Whenever possible a schedule of future opportunities so organisations can prepare and plan and certainly early awareness of services to be procured
- Long range "direction of travel" statements would help the "market" prepare itself
- A clear acknowledgement of local added value in all funding processes

Other points

- There is a need to champion the role and importance of the Third sector through more innovative publicity eg storyline in soaps
- There were requests for help with the costs of involvement in the commissioning process

Market development

Funding arrangements

- There is a need to define local priorities and link as many funding sources as possible into those priorities through a co-ordinated

approach by commissioners and, whenever possible, engagement by external funders

- We need to be clear that the focus of benefit must be for the communities of Wolverhampton not individual organisations within the sector
- There is a need for a consistent approach to funding and funding reviews
- We need to work towards a “level playing field”

Commissioning

- We could establish a portfolio of “contract ready” organisations
- There was a clear message that commissioning should be driven by the needs of the community and that these should inform the whole process
- There is a need for clarity in what is needed to respond to issues/challenges

Information

- It was suggested that one person could be responsible for co-ordinating and advertising opportunities
- We could set up an information resource/room to allow wider access to opportunities
- There is a need for a third sector engagement strategy

Internal audit for contract readiness

- There is a perceived need for more capacity within the third sector partnership
- There is a need for us to scrutinise and monitor what we do more carefully