

Voluntary Sector Review

Introduction

On 25th March 2014, Fife Council Executive Committee agreed the scope for a review of voluntary sector support to be taken forward.

It was agreed that a baseline position outlining the range of services currently being provided by the voluntary and community sector, under a number of themes, would be developed. These would be developed through engagement and consultation with both the sector and Council services to provide a strategic statement of the outcomes the Council wants to achieve in 3 years' time with proposals for how to get there and any savings or reinvestment that will be achieved.

Given the range of investment currently provided to the voluntary and community sector through both recurring and non-recurring grants the contribution is concentrated within the following Council outcomes – taken from the Council Plan - which was used as the basis for developing the themed baseline information.

- Growing a Vibrant Economy
- Increasing Opportunity and Reducing Poverty and Inequality
- Improving Quality of Life in Local Communities (Health and Social Care)
- Improving Quality of Life in Local Communities (Housing and Communities)
- Promoting a Sustainable Society

Consultation Event – 20th June 2014

A voluntary sector consultation and engagement event was held on Friday 20th June to set the scene for the review and to seek input from the sector on the themes and the current funding position. It was recognised that the voluntary sector are doing an excellent job in providing services for the Council and that there are many advantages to the sector taking forward much of the work as they are not viewed as part of the “establishment”. It was also recognised that the third sector already bring extensive leverage through their ability to attract external funding.

The third sector also commented that reference should be made to the client groups they are working with recognising they are often chaotic and the most difficult to reach; SLAs may need to reflect this better. It is agreed that early intervention was a requirement but it was difficult to measure the impact of preventative services in the short or medium term. Third sector agencies involved in most themes are already heavily engaged in early intervention and prevention work and are ideally placed to work with groups/families and in communities. Additionally the voluntary sector wants to ensure that a dependency culture is not created on council services.

The key points raised during the event can be summarised as follows:

Collaboration

- There is scope for greater collaboration between voluntary organisations themselves and between voluntary organisations and statutory agencies for increased effectiveness, efficiency and reduction in duplication. This could include co-location; resources; secondments/sharing staff. In particular there was an appetite for more information sharing and bringing together sector representatives regularly to discuss topics important to developing services and the sector.
- The voluntary sector recognised they needed to be more joined up if collaboration is going to work
- All organisations need to become better connected and improve communication - between partnerships and various council services, NHS and voluntary sector e.g. don't hide behind data protection as an excuse not to share.

Funding

- A commitment to 3 year funding agreements is needed as this improves service delivery; however, there also has to be recognition that services need to evolve and occasionally need to stop as they are no longer the priority. Change needs to be planned and achieved in conjunction with the sector.
- There is often a narrow focus only on council funding when non-council funding is/can also support a project and the leverage of the Council funding should be recognised.
- There was recognition that some services can be paid for and where appropriate this should happen, but charging should not make services prohibitive.

Focus/Targeting

- There is a wide geographic spread of clients and whilst targeting is the right thing to do and is often focused in SIMD areas. It can be too easy to miss people in need if too focused solely on SIMD
- A more holistic approach is sometimes needed - to work with whole families to address all issues – sector and services working more closely together which requires a cultural change.
- SLAs should focus more on outcomes, which would give the sector more scope to be entrepreneurial and innovative

Consortium/Commissioning of Services

- Voluntary sector agencies are warm to consortium approaches where voluntary organisations are asked to come together to receive programme funding to deliver on agreed outcomes.
- For consortium to work voluntary organisations realise they will have to become more organised and discuss amongst themselves how to commission services/share bids and they need support to do so.

Policy Development

- The sector is keen to be more involved in shaping policy priorities and direction - what is/would be the mechanism for the voluntary sector representations in policy development?

Conclusion

The review will continue by considering ways in which the Council can work with the voluntary sector to deliver more innovative service delivery. Many of the groups fed back they would want the council to take the lead on collaboration activities as they do not have spare capacity to lead such activity.

The review will build on the key points above with a more detailed engagement being planned, with facilitated group sessions organised by FVA for each theme and across each of the Council's Area Committee areas.