

### **3. The Council's Engagement with the Voluntary Sector**

Working Group Members: Councillors P Allan (Chair), K Blair, B Andrews, G Gregory, M Paling, C Powell, M Weisz, H Wheeler.

#### **3.1 Conclusions and Recommendations**

Members concluded there were many benefits from working closely with the voluntary sector and that this relationship should not just involve the funding of community and voluntary organisations but should be a partnership relationship whereby both parties are able to enhance the support they provide within the community. The voluntary sector could have a greater role in supporting service provision and Members felt there was a necessity to develop a framework whereby grant aid could be utilised to enhance current service provision. Members considered it was important to establish what the authority is trying to achieve with its grant aid funding and to be confident that grant funding decisions are made in a systematic, consistent and transparent way, and a new grant aid strategy needed to be developed to reflect this.

#### **3.2 Service Level Agreements**

Members found it difficult to access basic performance information relating to the effectiveness of the Service Level Agreements and acknowledged that the nature of the way that RCAN and Gedling CVS operate as umbrella organisations makes it difficult to establish how effectively grant aid has been utilised. The Committee is aware that these organisations could well be providing effective, valuable and worthwhile support to smaller associated organisations but considered that it was not currently possible to demonstrate whether expectations were being met and whether the funding provided was meeting objectives and providing value for money.

Members were concerned about transparency, value for money, lack of defined targets and weakness of the systems currently available to monitor compliance with the SLAs. They felt that the vague aims and objectives, lack of specification, absence of defined outcomes or outputs and a monitoring process were all weaknesses that needed addressing. In addition they concluded that this lack of clarity as to how funding was being used could lead to the duplication of funding from multiple organisations for similar work and that an arrangement with tighter specified objectives is required and the monitoring of performance and quality standards needs to be developed to remove this concern.

#### **Recommendation 1**

**Service Level Agreements should be replaced by contract arrangements for specified services increasing transparency of what the funding is used for and what it achieves.**

When designing the contract it should:

- identify a set of objectives and what actions are required
- define what outcomes/outputs the contract should deliver
- establish targets that are SMART, specific, achievable, measurable, achievable, realistic and timely
- include a formalised set of monitoring arrangements to ensure the objectives and targets are met
- ensure value for money
- be phased in to avoid destabilising the finances of the recipient organisations.

### **3.3 Grant Aid**

Members concluded that as there is little finance available to support the voluntary sector what is available should be used as effectively as possible, and that any arrangement for the allocation of grant aid funding should be fair and made in a systematic, consistent and transparent way. They considered that the current arrangements did not meet this criteria and that there was a need to develop a voluntary sector grant aid strategy that not only aligns with Council priorities and sets out what the authority is hoping to achieve but should also be open and accessible by all organisations. Members felt the introduction of three year funding awards replacing the need to apply annually would provide certainty for groups receiving small awards and remove a yearly administrative burden. The three year awards could be monitored annually before funding is released. The lack of a single point of contact within the authority for voluntary sector funding was seen as a weakness. Currently grant aid funding is only a small part of a number of different job roles and Members felt that if all grant aid distribution was consolidated into one job role the process would be more transparent and accessible, duplication would be avoided the post holder would be able to support the voluntary sector more effectively.

#### **Recommendation 2**

**A new voluntary sector grant aid strategy should be developed that aligns with the Council priorities and sets out what the authority is hoping to achieve.**

It should:

- identify which services the authority would like the voluntary sector to provide and how the Council can help them to do this
- be publicised and available to all organisations
- advertise and invite applications as widely as possible through the Gedling Borough Web pages, Contacts magazine and the Funders Fair

- use an application process that is available and accessible to all organisations, providing clear written guidance on how to complete the application, include an explanation of allocation process, possibly through the provision of an online form
- ensure that grant aid funding is available to a wide range of diverse groups
- have no automatic renewal
- include all grant aid funding streams
- record all grant aid funding by the authority, including the Member's Pots, to prevent duplication
- be necessary for organisations to disclose all funding streams to prevent duplication
- incorporate a mechanism to monitor outputs and outcomes. Monitoring should be undertaken but it should be proportional to the amount of funding allocated, not time consuming or onerous and could possibly include self-assessment against agreed criteria
- explore the possibility of awarding some of smaller grants on a three year arrangement
- consider aligning all grant aid within one directorate
- inform organisations well in advance of any changes that will be made to the grant aid strategy, giving them time to seek alternative funding streams.

Members concluded that Gedling as a borough was underperforming in attracting external grant aid funding. They considered that funding streams from national trusts, funds and organisations like the Lottery should be accessed to maximise funding for voluntary groups. The authority should determine the reasons for this failure to attract funding and develop arrangements to support and assist organisations to access external funding streams that would enable additional income to be drawn into the borough. This could be done either by the authority assuming the role or by contracting one of the umbrella organisations currently funded through a service level agreement to undertake this work.

### **Recommendation 3**

**A scheme to support voluntary organisations maximise funding from national sources is established.**

Members considered that the authority should seek non - monetary ways to support voluntary groups that benefit the community. Expertise and knowledge, space to advertise, subsidised rates for use of facilities are among some of the possibilities that could be explored.

#### **Recommendation 4**

**Non-cash ways that the Council can support voluntary groups should be determined and publicised.**

Members were concerned about the role that Members on outside bodies were expected to undertake particularly when this involved inclusion on a management committee. Clarification is needed as to why are Members are on some of the outside bodies, what their role is and what their responsibility is to the group. They considered that particular issues arose when funding requested or received from the authority were discussed by the organisation.

#### **Recommendation 5**

**Define the purpose and role of Members who are appointed as representatives on outside bodies.**