

Report to: External Organisations Scrutiny Committee

Date: 13th September 2007

Report of: Chief Executive

Report No:

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Report Title: **The Future Role of the Voluntary and Community Sector in Bolton**

**Confidential /
Non Confidential:**

This report does **not** contain information which warrants its consideration in the absence of the press or members of the public

Purpose:

To outline for the External Organisations Scrutiny Committee the work currently being undertaken to enhance the infrastructure of the voluntary and community sector in Bolton and in particular to develop the Future Role of the Voluntary and Community Sector in Bolton.

Recommendations:

The Scrutiny Committee is asked

- i. to note the information outlined in the report;
- ii. agree that a further report be submitted at a later date outlining future developments and progress.

Decision:

Background Doc(s):

Signed:

Leader / Executive Member

Monitoring Officer

Date:

Summary:

This report gives a brief outline of developments in the voluntary and community sector and in particular provides detail on the “Future Role of the Voluntary and Community Sector in Bolton” project.

Carol James, Head of Strategic Projects and Carol Latham, the Community Network and Partnership Strategy Officer with CVS will make a presentation at the meeting.

1. National Picture

- 1.1 In response to the developing relationship between the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) and the public sector, the **Compact**¹ was developed and signed up to nationally in 1998. The Compact is an agreement between central Government and the VCS. It sets out undertakings and relationships between all parties. This included recognition of the sector's independence and its right to campaign, comment on and challenge Government policy, irrespective of any funding relationship, and to manage its own affairs. Subsequent national Codes of Practice as part of the Compact arrangements have been produced to clarify other important aspects of the voluntary/public sector relationship eg funding, BME Communities.
- 1.2 The Bolton Compact, which is a statement of partnership between the local statutory sector and the CVS, was agreed in 2001 and is a commitment to work more closely together and to respect each other's rights and responsibilities. Since then individual Codes of Good Practice have been agreed on areas such as BME Organisations, Volunteering, Funding and Partnership Working. The introduction of the Compacts proved beneficial in clarifying crucial aspects of the relationship between the voluntary and public sectors enabling a more open relationship between the two sectors and provided a firm foundation for future initiatives. In recent years government policy has placed significant emphasis on public service reform and as part of the 2002 Comprehensive Spending Review conducted a cross-cutting review of the role of the VCS in public service delivery.
- 1.3 In recent months, the Treasury and the Office of the Third Sector (OTS) have been conducting a joint review of the role of the third sector in social and economic regeneration. This will be considered as part of the 2007 Comprehensive Spending Review. This review is highlighting the sector's role in:
- building social capital;
 - providing community services;
 - promoting participation and empowerment; and
 - contributing to local regeneration.
- 1.4 This review identified areas where the VCS may have the potential to deliver more effectively than other public or private sector providers, particularly to certain client groups or communities. Crucial qualities underpinning this potential include: strong user focus/access to the community; areas of specialist knowledge and experience; independent structures allowing for innovation; and relative freedom from institutional pressures resulting in greater responsiveness.
- 1.5 In September 2006, Bolton Community and Voluntary Service (CVS) was requested to participate in this national review; the CVS organised a consultation event to feed the sector's views into central Government's review of the third sector's role. Bolton was one of a limited number of such consultations across the country.
- 1.6 The interim report identifies that Government needs to understand better when to offer contracts, investment support and grant funding. The final report due in
- Compact on Relations between Government and the Voluntary and Community Sector in England**

autumn will address: voice and campaigning; communities; public services; social enterprise; and a healthy third sector.

2 Local Context and Developments.

- 2.1 Bolton has a strong and diverse voluntary and community sector consisting of between 1,500 and 2,000 organisations of all sizes supported by the Bolton Community and Voluntary Service (CVS). The Bolton CVS supports the voluntary, community and faith sectors through development, training, offering information and advice, supporting volunteers, networking and sharing resources.
- 2.2 In February of this year, the Bolton CVS relocated to its new premises at The Bolton Hub, Bolton Street, Bolton. This is a landmark building for voluntary and community groups in Bolton and is providing a focal point and substantial resource for the voluntary and community sector in Bolton. The Bolton Hub has a vital role to play in the future of the voluntary and community sector including community engagement and public service delivery. This was a key outcome planned for within the Community Strategy (2003 – 13), and the project was supported strongly by the council in enable this development to take place.
- 2.3 Since the inception of Bolton's Local Area Agreement (LAA) in 2006, an LAA Stronger Communities Group has been formed to develop and agree priorities within the LAA stronger block and to identify and commission activities. The group is multi-agency to reflect the broad agenda (community cohesion, housing, local perceptions, volunteering, voluntary and community sector). This has been helpful in encouraging networking and cross-agency linkages.
- 2.4 As part of the Local Area Agreement and with the use of Neighbourhood Renewal Funds in 2006/7 and 2007/8 the LAA Stronger Communities group agreed to fund a number of projects to support and develop the infrastructure of the voluntary, community and faith sectors in Bolton. These include:
 - **Bolton Volunteer Centre Tracking of Volunteers.** The Centre currently holds details of around 5,000 volunteers, however, no mechanism currently exists to assess how many of these are currently active, nor how much volunteering they are involved in, with which groups and over what period. This research project will identify existing numbers of volunteers in Bolton, assess groups' and agencies' capacity to promote, develop and maintain volunteering opportunities and develop a sustainable system to track and report the number of volunteers.
 - **Payroll Giving/Big Bolton Fund.** A project to help to develop payroll giving across agencies in Bolton to help support a number of voluntary groups and help establish the Big Bolton Fund with the aim of providing more sustainable funds into the future.
 - **Uniservity.** This project involves the purchase of a Uniservity database which will enable all the information relating to VCS organisations that is currently held in a number of different places to be transferred, with the

consent of groups, onto a public, searchable database providing easily accessible, up to date information on voluntary and community organisations in Bolton.

- **Future Role of VCS project** Specifically the LAA Stronger Communities group commissioned a project to consider the changing national context and potential role of the VCS and to ensure that the VCS and the statutory sector gear up and are ready to take on the challenges that may emerge from the Comprehensive Spending review 2007 and the Third Sector Review. In short, the “future role” project is about making sure that the two sectors working together are fit for purpose and fit for the future. **(see below for further details)**

3 “Future Role of the VCS in Bolton” Project

3.1 Partners across the VCS and the statutory sectors considered that the time was right to consider the potential future role of the VCS in Bolton, particularly in the light of the national context. This would include the sector’s role in empowering local people and communities, influencing local decision-making, joint delivery and strategic commissioning processes and shaping the delivery of future services. The Future Role Project is a two phase project with the aims and objective of the *first* phase being to:

- explore the role of the VCS in Bolton and its relationship with the public sector;
 - work toward developing a shared vision for the future; and
 - identify actions to achieve this.

In order to achieve this, Consultants were commissioned to undertake this work. The project has engaged VCS and the public sector in a series of three events.

The *second* phase of the Future Role Project is around the implementation of the findings of the first phase.

3.2 Voluntary –and community organisations (VCOs), with their local knowledge and inclusive approach to user involvement, have been identified as important partners of this mix of provision. This is not just as potential providers of services offering greater choice to service users in future, but also as advocates on behalf of marginalised groups within the community and as advisers on service design and the needs of service users.

4 Future Role Project - Initial Findings

4.1 The Future Role project has engaged the VCS and public sector partners in a series of three events. The first two were held in March 2007 with VCS and public sector participants working separately to explore the things they valued about each other, their current relationship and their wishes for the future. An analysis of all the suggested priorities coming out of the first two events produced three overarching themes which were seen as building blocks for

future work. The three themes, which now run through this project, were accepted and agreed by all participants at the follow-up event in July, 2007. These are:

- Joint working, engagement and delivery
- Funding and sustainability
- Accountability and quality assurance

4.2 The follow-up event brought the two sectors together to build on the findings and themes from the previous events in March. This third event:

- Provided an opportunity for VCS and public sector participants to get to know each other better:
- Provided feedback from the earlier events:
- Engaged participants in cross-sector working groups to develop vision statements and actions relating to each of the three key themes emerging from the earlier events. (as stated above)

4.3 A number of commonly identified training and support needs emerged from these activities. The existence of VCOs and the work that they do within and across communities is an important part of the social and cultural fabric of our society. A healthy VCS has significant benefits for society as a whole, in terms of activity and social capital within communities. Training and support needs identified include:

- Public sector commissioning skills and understanding of what is allowable within financial regulations.
- VCS understanding of public sector procurement and commissioning processes.
- VCS skills in developing proposals and responding to tender documents.
- Support for the sector to develop collaboration and consortia where appropriate.
- Developing a common understanding of full cost recovery
- VCS expertise in costing projects properly and pricing their services accordingly.
- Development of skills and understanding on both sides in relation to identifying and measuring outcomes.
- Support for VCOs to improved governance and accountability.
- Improved negotiation skills on both sides of the relationship.
- Public Sector understanding and awareness of how the VCS operates

4.4 A Summary Paper entitled The Future Role of the Voluntary and Community Sector in Bolton: Working Towards a Shared Vision has been produced and is attached for information [\(Appendix A\). This paper provides an overview of the national policy context for the Future Role project and provides examples of work being done elsewhere to address similar issues.](#)

5. Next Steps

- 5.1 The next phase of the Future Role project will be the implementation of the shared vision of an even better relationship between the public sector and the voluntary sector. Actions include:
- addressing joint training needs as set out above;
 - updating the Compact arrangements and Codes of Practice; and
 - the development of a framework for the future relationship between the public sector and the voluntary sector.
- 5.2 Further details about the future options/findings/recommendations will be made available as the project progresses.

6 Recommendations

The Scrutiny Committee is asked

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- ii. agree that a further report be submitted at a later date outlining future developments and progress.