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**Report of the Director of Environment and Neighbourhoods**

**Executive Board 13 May 2009**

**Response to the City and Regional Partnerships Inquiry into the Inquiry into the role of the voluntary, community and faith sectors (VCFS) in council led community engagement**

**Electoral Wards Affected:**

Ward Members consulted  
(referred to in report)

**Specific Implications For:**

Equality and Diversity

Community Cohesion

Narrowing the Gap

Eligible for Call In

Not Eligible for Call In

(Details contained in the report)

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**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

1. This report provides the Executive Board with details of the recommendations from the recent City and Regional Partnerships Scrutiny Board into the role of the voluntary, community and faith sectors (VCFS) in council led community engagement and details how the Director proposes to respond to these recommendations. The report asks the Board to approve the proposed response.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

2. Executive Board are recommended to:

Approve the proposed responses to the Scrutiny Board's recommendations.

## **1.0 Purpose Of This Report**

- 1.1 This report provides the Executive Board with details of the recommendations from the recent City and Regional Partnerships Scrutiny Board inquiry into the role of the voluntary, community and faith sectors (VCFS) in council led community engagement and details how the Director proposes to respond to these recommendations. The report asks the Board to approve the proposed response.

## **2.0 Background Information**

- 2.1 From September 2008 to February 2009, the City and Regional Partnerships Scrutiny Board conducted an inquiry into the role of the VCFS in council led community engagement activity.
- 2.1 The inquiry had a broad remit and looked at barriers to the involvement of VCFS organisations in community engagement activity including resources available to the sector and how these might be addressed. The final scrutiny report, containing full details is attached at appendix 1.
- 2.2 The report makes 8 recommendations for action. The Director of Environment and Neighbourhoods has accepted these recommendations and actions are underway or planned to address with involvement from the sector through the VCFS Partnership Group established under the Narrowing the Gap Board of the Leeds Initiative.

## **3.0 Main Issues**

- 3.1 The Scrutiny Board's 8 recommendations are listed below along with a response from the Director of Environment and Neighbourhoods.

### **3.2 Recommendation 1:**

*That the Director of Environment and Neighbourhoods co-ordinates work across the Council to undertake a Compact for Leeds awareness and compliance self assessment. This will enable the Board to assess the extent to which Council services engage with and recognise the value of VCFS in developing and improving their plans and policies in order to deliver a customer based service.*

The Director of Environment and Neighbourhoods has identified an officer in the Regeneration Service to undertake an awareness raising exercise and compliance audit of Council Services. The outcomes of the audit and recommendations for action will be reported to Scrutiny Board. The timetable for this work is linked to recommendations 4 a and 4b.

### **3.3 Recommendation 2:**

*That through the VCFS Partnership Group the Director of Resources and the Director of Environment and Neighbourhoods:-*

- (a) reviews the period of funding attached to grant awards to VCFS organisations with a view to phasing in 3 – 5 year awards from April 2010 for appropriate schemes.*
- (b) identifies and provides appropriate support to enable VCFS organisations to develop planned exit strategies to better manage expiry of funding awards*

- (c) *strengthens leadership and collaborative arrangements within the Council and in the VCFS to minimise the potential for the duplication of commissioned activity in order to maximise the effectiveness and efficiency of the services being provided by April 2010*
- a) The Resources Sub-group of the Partnership will work with representatives of Council Services to review grant funding periods to VCFS organisations. This work will focus initially on mainstream grant funded activity that is wholly within the Council's control and will note which external grant funding bodies do and do not provide funding beyond 1 financial year. The findings of the review and recommendations for change will be reported to Scrutiny Board by end of June 2009.
- b) A guidance and advice booklet will be published on developing forward strategies and the closure of schemes will be produced by end of May 2009. This will identify named contact officers within services that can offer further information and advice where funding is due to come to an end.
- c) The VCFS Partnership Group received a report at its last meeting on the VCFS proposals for Third Sector Together. This is a proposal to strengthen leadership and the coherence of the sector and support greater collaboration and co-operation across and within the sector. Commissioning opportunities and improved access to these feature strongly in this proposal. Officers have broadly welcomed this proposal and the Regeneration Service is supporting work on commissioning through funding the Supporting Commissioning Links project led by Leeds Voice and re'new. The project aims to develop more coherent relationships and information flows between the Council and the VCFS about commissioning opportunities and guidance and training to access these. This requires Council services to work collaboratively with the aim of minimising the opportunity for duplication and improving efficiency and supporting the sector to improve the effectiveness of commissioned activity. The Resources Sub-group, which includes representation from Council Services, will oversee the delivery of the Supporting Commissioning Links project and will agree a timetable for reporting on the project outputs at its meeting on 2 April 2009.

#### 3.4 Recommendation 3:

*That through the VCFS Partnership Group the Director of Environment and Neighbourhoods identifies*

- (a) *what further improvements could be made to simplify the current procedures and processes (including funding) and how the Council in conjunction with the VCF sector could better provide quality support including training and advice to local voluntary organisations.*
- (b) *the impacts of current commissioning strategies on smaller organisations and identifies what safeguards could be developed to prevent losing the valuable services of these smaller organisations that provide a valuable service to the local community.*
- (c) *the opportunities to develop federated or collaborative working across VCFS infrastructure organisations to extend support to a wider range of organisations within the sector and benefit both their organisation and their service user and maximise the impact of public and other resources.*
- (d) *the opportunities to develop targeted information and support to community organisations to support their development and enable them to address local issues.*

- a) The Resources Sub-group of the VCFS Partnership Group will offer guidance and advice to services and partners on ensuring that processes and procedures are proportionate to the level of funding and risk in line with the Council's VCFS Grant Funding Framework. The Resources Sub-group oversees the delivery of the Supporting Commissioning Links project. This is a partnership with the voluntary sector, led by the Regeneration Service working with Leeds Voice and re'new to facilitate and support the sector to access commissioning opportunities. It will include the provision of guidance, advice and training to VFSC organisations. A timetable for the completion of this work will be agreed at the Resources Sub-group meeting on 2 April 2009
- b) Information on commissioning strategies of key services and the current and previous providers will collated by the Resources Sub-group of the VCFS Partnership to assess the impact on smaller organisations and their ability to access resources through these commissioning strategies. This will identify the current weaknesses in the approach. A timetable for the completion of this work will be agreed at the Resources Sub-group meeting on 2 April 2009.
- c) Collaborative activity to support a wide range of VCFS organisations takes place through the Leeds Infrastructure Consortium, a group made up of the key VCFS infrastructure organisations in the City. Through the Partnership, Leeds Infrastructure Consortium will be asked to consider its current work programme and potential future opportunities to extend support to a wider range of organisations. A timetable for completing this work will need to be agreed with Leeds Infrastructure Consortium.
- d) The VCFS Partnership Group will establish a Community Engagement Sub-group in April. It is proposed that the group will include in its work programme action to collate information on the current levels of information and support offered to community organisations, identify gaps in provision and recommend actions to address these within available resources. A timetable for completing this work will need to be agreed with partners once the group is established.

### 3.5 Recommendation 4:

*That through the VCFS Partnership Group the Director of Environment and Neighbourhoods:-*

- (a) *encourages all signatory partner organisations to undertake a self assessment to monitor awareness and compliance with the "Compact" Codes of Conduct and that this be monitored by the Council from January 2010.*
  - (b) *reviews the effectiveness of the "Compact" Codes of Practice in 2009/2010 in the light of changes in the environment and infrastructure, and that the outcome be reported to this Scrutiny Board.*
- a) The Compact for Leeds will be a key element of the work programme of the VCFS Partnership and its sub-groups. This will enable partner organisations to better understand the benefits of the Compact and contribute to its review and development. Partner organisations will be provided with advice, guidance and support to undertake a compliance self assessment and identify areas for further action. A timetable for undertaking this work will need to be agreed with partners at the next meeting of the VCFS Partnership on 16 April 2009.

- b) The VCFS Partnership, its sub-groups and a designated officer in the Regeneration Service will support the work of the Compact Implementation Group led by Leeds Voice to review the Compact Codes of Practice to ensure that they remain fit for purpose. Discussion will take place with the Director of Leeds Voice to agree a detailed work programme and timetable for completing this.

3.6 Recommendation 5:

*That the Director of Environment and Neighbourhoods identifies opportunities and initiatives that will further improve and enhance links with local VCFS organisations to support the delivery of the Area Committee's work in localities and that they be reported to this Scrutiny Board.*

An officer within the Regeneration Service will be identified to work with the Area Managers to identify existing links and the potential to enhance these to support the delivery of the Area Committee's Area Delivery Plans. These include the VCFS brokering community engagement and influencing service delivery at the local level; undertaking commissioned community engagement activity; and contributing to Area Delivery Plan priorities and outcomes. This work will be completed by the end of June 2009.

3.7 Recommendation 6:

*That the Director of Environment and Neighbourhoods supports the VCFS Partnership Group to map the available resource and expertise within the sector to improve the targeting and engagement of "hard to reach" groups.*

The VCFS Partnership Group will establish a Community Engagement Sub-group in April. It is proposed that the group will include in its work programme action to map the available resource and expertise within the sector to improve the targeting and engagement of "hard to reach" groups. The sector offers a means for improving the targeting of engagement and extending its reach and the outcomes of this work will be reported to the Corporate Consultation Manager and disseminated to the relevant services. A timetable for completing this work will need to be agreed with partners once the group is established.

3.8 Recommendation 7

- (a) *That the Head of Scrutiny and Member Development arranges a seminar in 2009/2010 for members on the aims, benefits and use of Talking Point.*
- (b) *That the Assistant Chief Executive (Planning, Policy and Improvement) considers how best to promote this service amongst officers and the wider community.*
- a) A number of presentations have been made to elected members since the Corporate Consultation Manager submitted evidence to Scrutiny Board. The Corporate Consultation Manager is working with Member Development officers to arrange briefings to all political groups by early summer 2009.
- b) Further work is now taking place with partner organisations through the LAA Strategy Group and further developments of Talking Point will be communicated to elected members. The Corporate Consultation Manager and communications colleagues are delivering communications to all internal and external Talking Point

stakeholders, including via the new A to Z of Services delivered with Council Tax booklets. Discussion is continuing with partners (PCT, ALMOs) about future sharing of Talking Point.

### 3.9 Recommendation 8

*That the Director of Environment and Neighbourhoods develops a time-tabled action plan to implement any changes identified in 2009/10 and submit these to Scrutiny Board for consideration*

A number of the recommendations require the active involvement of a wide range of Council Services, partner organisations and the VCFS. The work programme flowing from the recommendations will be subject to discussion and agreement with partners through the next cycle of meetings. A work programme will then be drawn up detailing actions to be taken by a designated lead against a timetable and submitted to Scrutiny Board.

## **4.0 Implications For Council Policy And Governance**

4.1 There are no immediate implications for Council Policy and Governance arising from these recommendations.

## **5.0 Legal And Resource Implications**

5.1 There are no immediate resource implications arising from the planned action to respond to the recommendations.

## **6.0 Conclusions**

6.1 The City and Regional Partnerships Scrutiny Board's Inquiry into issues around the VCFS involvement in Council led community engagement activity has highlighted the need for a consistent and coherent approach to VCFS issues from services across the Council and from partner organisations. The recommendations made by the Scrutiny Board will help to strengthen practice in this regard and enable the Scrutiny Board to monitor progress in this area. The actions proposed in response to these recommendations will be taken forward with involvement from VCFS organisations to ensure that both the needs of the Council and the sector are being met.

## **7.0 Recommendations**

7.1 Executive Board are recommended to:

Approve the proposed responses to the Scrutiny Board's recommendation.

## **8.0 Background Papers**

There are no specific background papers relating to this report.