

## **Funding VCS Infrastructure in Leicester Shire**

### **Report of Workshop held on 9<sup>th</sup> November 2005**

#### **Background**

1. The purposes of the workshop were to:
  - disseminate the findings of the study on VCS Infrastructure in Leicester Shire produced by Sheffield Hallam university;
  - give initial consideration of the study findings, including the preferred direction of future development, and how that might be achieved; and
  - to consider next steps.
  
2. The workshop was chaired by Kevan Liles, chair of the Leicester Shire VCS Consortium. A presentation on the study was provided by Dr Rob Macmillan who led the research team at Sheffield Hallam University. Two sets of four workshops considered possible ways forward. Each workshop was facilitated by a member of the SHU research team and each comprised a mix of representatives from a range of VCS infrastructure and funding organisations. The workshops considered, in turn, the following:
  - Whether a consensus exists on a preferred direction for the future development of VCS Infrastructure in Leicester Shire, in particular whether the preferred direction is the status quo, operational change or structural change;
  - To consider the preferred option in more detail, including considering how it might be achieved and what the next steps should be.

#### **Note of Key Messages/ Agreed Actions**

3. The detailed flipcharts of the individual workshop discussions have been written up and are available on request. This note is not intended to be a full minute or record of everything said at the event or in individual workshops, but rather to be a concise summary of key issues raised and actions agreed.

##### **Key messages (not necessarily unanimously held)**

- A general consensus that the status quo is not a realistic option.
- General support for various types of operational change, including from those who were in support of, and those opposing, any structural change. It was acknowledged that much operational change is already in hand.
- A range of views were expressed in relation to structural change. Some were opposed, some supported some of the milder aspects of structural change, and some were strongly in favour of radical reconfiguration. It was noted that some structural change is underway, partly funded by through ChangeUp.
- The loss of 'local focus' was identified by some as a risk if there is substantial restructuring, with others arguing that local focus can be effectively served (through local offices etc) by larger organisations.

- There appeared to be general recognition that a failure to embrace change would result in change being imposed by others, whether it be the Government, funders, or national/ regional organisations carrying out service delivery activities currently or potentially provided by local VCS organisations.
- Budget pressures make it unlikely that in overall terms there will be increased funding for VCS infrastructure in the future. Funding levels will depend to a large extent on the ability of the sector to demonstrate value for money to existing and potential new funding organisations.
- Further clarity about 'functions' is required before final decisions on 'form' can be made.
- There is a need to engage the wider voluntary and community sector, in particular front line voluntary organisations. The needs of such organisations are a key consideration.
- Greater understanding of the drivers and priorities of funders is required. A distinction needs to be made between the roles of the VCS in relation to service delivery and in relation to the stronger communities agenda.
- Tensions remain regarding the provision of specialist infrastructure, in particularly BME infrastructure, but also infrastructure serving rural communities.

### **Next Steps**

4. The working group (comprising VCS and funder representatives) which commissioned the study and organised the workshop will meet in late November/ early December. The working group (which will have extended membership to include additional nominees from the VCS Consortium and Funders Panel) will develop a proposal for further work over the next few months. As part of this the working group will:
  - Take account of the detailed comments made at the workshop (and which were recorded on flipcharts)
  - Seek to narrow down the range of possible options for the future of VCS infrastructure, to 'focus discussions'. Also consider whether this options identification exercise requires further consultancy work;
  - Seek to engage missing stakeholders not currently active in the discussions;
  - Consider the need for further work to improve understanding of the needs of front line organisations, building on the earlier Greengage work;
  - Consider the role of future ChangeUp funding (through Capacity Builders) in helping bring about change.

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