

A Third Sector Strategy for Wakefield District

Consultation paper

This consultation process, endorsed by Wakefield's Compact Group, opens in December 08 and will feed into workshops at the January 27th Third Sector consultative event at Wakefield Town Hall. Based on your written and verbal feedback and the Wakefield NI 7 survey results, we will put an action plan for a thriving Third Sector to the Safer & Stronger Theme Group and the Wakefield Together Board for approval in March 09.

Introduction

Wakefield Together has set NI 7 'Environment for a thriving Third sector' as a priority indicator in its Local Area Agreement 2008-11. The indicative target is a 4.9% improvement in national survey results¹. We now need a partnership delivery plan to help us focus our activity. VAWD is leading the development of the delivery plan on behalf of the Wakefield Together partnership.

In choosing this target the partnership recognises the contribution of the sector to the sustainable community strategy in many ways: as a channel for identifying community needs and aspirations, as an expert in engaging with communities, a support and stimulus for self help and advocacy, as a delivery agent for public services, and as a developer of voluntary sector capacity. Community cohesion, the environment, volunteering, and community development are critical to Wakefield's future, particularly in times of economic downturn. The Third sector operates in the spaces between public sector systems.

The third sector is extremely diverse, made up of a large number of groups operating in different ways across the District. The wider sector includes community groups, interest groups, volunteers, and both small and large organisations with and without paid staff. These groups and organisations have different aspirations, and need different things to help them thrive. The strategy aims to choose priorities for action in order to best focus our activity and resources for maximum benefit. The plan will be devised with this principle in mind.

The Third sector has been sustained in the past by a mix of short-term mainstream and initiative-based funding (e.g. Neighbourhood Renewal, Connexions, Children's Fund, Preventing Violent Extremism) and we have recently seen some weakening of local groups in Wakefield as a result of funding streams ending or changing focus. We have not focused enough on demonstrating the benefits of investments in Third sector organisations. There is now a need to work more proactively with statutory partners to create an environment for a sustainable sector linked to identified priorities and outcomes.

The development of a Wakefield partnership commissioning framework has already been agreed in principle, which will benefit from strong co-ordination across partner organisations.

¹ Ipsos MORI are conducting surveys of Third sector organisations across all local authority areas for the Office of the Third Sector in autumn 2008 and 2010 to measure performance against the national indicator.

This strategy will seek to identify what other areas could benefit from better partnership co-ordination and how.

NI 7, along with several other indicators chosen by Wakefield (NI 1, NI 3, NI 4, NI 5) are part of the local empowerment agenda, on which much of the new government policy for local service provision and the Comprehensive Area Assessment depends. NIs 1-5 deal with issues of community cohesion, engagement, participation, satisfaction and influence. Processes are in place to help deliver these (LAA delivery plans, local strategic needs assessments, Wakefield Speaks, Student Speaks, VoX networks and conventions) which the partnership is bringing together into an engagement strategy. As the agenda develops on community engagement and empowerment (neighbourhood agreements, new forms of commissioning, personalisation, participatory budgeting etc.) there will need to be clear links across to this Third sector 'environment' strategy.

This 'environment' strategy for the Third sector aims to create the conditions for sustainable growth by:

- Help the partnership to understand and own the indicator
- Identify elements of Third sector 'environment' and help prioritise areas for development in Wakefield
- Ensure we have the information, data, and an evidence base of what works
- Show what we have achieved and are achieving, and where there are barriers to success, and address them
- Set priority actions for partner organisations
- Deliver or exceed the agreed target

Finally, there are national drivers which help set the context for Third Sector partnership development, which may be of interest in determining the local strategy. Please see Appendix 1 for details.

‘Environment for a thriving Third Sector’ in Wakefield: developing proposals for action:

This consultation paper follows the themes in the Compact codes. These codes cover:

- Communities of interest (including BME)
- Consultation, representation and engagement
- Funding, Commissioning and Procurement
- Volunteering

Each section following will discuss the current position and propose areas for development.

This consultation paper focuses on aspects of the ‘environment’ used by the Office of the Third Sector in the national survey of Third sector organisations (local support, organisational relationships, etc). These are defined below on page 8.

Questions are raised throughout the paper to prompt responses and discussion. You are asked to respond to these where you have an interest, to raise further questions, and to make proposals that will take the strategy forward.

The **consultative timetable** is as follows:

1st December 2008	Consultation launched
27th January 2009	Consultation event – Wakefield Town Hall
20th February 2009	Consultation completed
5th March 2009	Draft strategy and action plan to Safer & Stronger Communities Theme Group
26th March 2009	Third Sector Strategy to Wakefield Together Board

What is the Third Sector?

The voluntary and community sector includes a range of organisations, such as community groups, voluntary organisations, faith and equalities groups, charities, social enterprises co-operatives, mutuals and housing associations who:

- Are independent of national, regional and local government
- Pursue primarily social, economic or environmental objectives
- Reinvest surplus profit in the pursuit of their objectives

Key activities include:

- Advocacy, information and advice
- Delivery of services, often but not always on behalf of public bodies
- Campaigning and lobbying
- Representing specific interest groups
- Building capacity and community development
- Infrastructure services to local VCOs

The VCS contributes to the local economy and wellbeing in a variety of ways: it

- Generates jobs – between 3-4% of the regional workforce
- Prepares people for paid work – through hundreds of thousands of volunteering opportunities, learning and raising self esteem
- Gives advice to reduce social and financial exclusion
- Levers in substantial additional funding (a multiplier 8:1 is typically used) over and above statutory sources: total turnover is of the order of 4% of regional GDP, including both direct and indirect contributions
- Creates and maintains green spaces and local pride
- Encourages mental and social wellbeing through activity and friendships
- Promotes democratic life and civic engagement
- Develops the region's skill base through training and mentoring
- Identifies and meets new needs
- Innovates and creates new responses to local conditions
- Acts as a voice for those with no champion and builds their capacity to speak for themselves all within a general mission or goal of social inclusion.

The wider sector also includes communities of place, both urban and rural, communities of interest or identity, cultural, ethnic and faith groups. Community groups have perspectives that differ from those of the voluntary sector because of their proximity to the communities in which they are rooted. Community groups often work with small numbers of individuals and emerging groups at neighbourhood level thereby contributing to the development of social capital and capacity. Community development and capacity building work is often the key catalyst in sponsoring the developmental process both for individuals and groups, and in generating new VCS organisations.

The Third sector in Wakefield

In Wakefield the Third sector comprises a large number of community groups with no paid staff, a number of small voluntary organisations, and some national organisations. There are also infrastructure organisations such as VAWD, VOX, Fit4Funding and Young Lives, and communities of interest where VCS organisations and/or community members come together to represent sections of the community.

The Regional Forum for the VCS in Yorkshire and Humber estimates that there are on average between 5 and 10 VCS organisations per 1,000 population in the Region. With a population of over 322,000, Wakefield should have between 1,610 and 3220 organisations. A survey in 2003² showed there were about 1,270 voluntary and community groups and organisations operating in Wakefield District: the large majority of these are very small and have no paid staff. This supports the view of 'underdevelopment' by comparison with other districts.

There is evidence that the Third sector in Wakefield is underdeveloped in particular areas of service, where there is little or no engagement with local VCS organisations, for example in offender management, or in addressing worklessness. This strategy provides opportunities to examine all areas of the sustainable community strategy and to ask how and where the VCS should be better engaged.

Wakefield is part of a Northern Rock Foundation Third Sector Trends study, which will be reporting some results in early 2009. The National Survey of Third sector organisations will also be reporting results in early 2009. VAWD is also launching a new VCS database and internet site. These will provide some useful information on the Wakefield picture in comparison to national and regional data to feed into this strategy.

VAWD is hosting a new internet portal for the VCS in Wakefield from spring 2009 to provide a source of information on and for the VCS. As the use of the portal grows, it will generate evidence on VCS organisations using it, their characteristics, areas of interest and needs, and provide a 'virtual' marketplace for statutory partners. This information will be publicly available for the purpose of knowing what is out there, how to engage with the VCS and to monitor activity and growth areas.

² 'Establishing the baselines' VAWD and the Charities Information Bureau 2003

Communities of Interest

There is a range of groups in Wakefield representing different communities of interest (COIs), some well organised and networked and others new or only just starting to develop a real independent engagement role. Some COIs are VCS umbrella organisations, i.e. Young Lives (children and young people's VCS), VISOP (older people's VCS) and the BME Forum (BME VCS organisations and communities). These VCS umbrella organisations have some links to statutory partners, for example, Young Lives (newly formed from the Children's Consortium and the WVYON) has a seat on the Children's Trust Management Group, and is supported by WMDC Family Services to provide infrastructure support and training to the children's VCS. The BME Forum, though still at a formative stage, has a seat at the Wakefield Together partnership Board.

Statutory partners also invest resources in the development of communities of interest from the wider community for the purposes of consultation, engagement and capacity building. These are supported and facilitated by the Council and the PCT, i.e. the six Disabled People's Partnerships and the six Older People's Forums, and the Learning Difficulties Partnership. They are all continually developing their roles in terms of the need for wider engagement in priority issues.

Commissioning managers in Family Services and the PCT engage through dialogue with the sector in various ways, in reviewing contracts and in consulting on appropriate services provision. Commissioning practices are developing as part of creating the partnership's new commissioning framework.

The Local Involvement Network (LINK) is also newly operating in the District, representing the views of health and social care service users.

There are areas in Wakefield where a COI is needed, but for different reasons these have not been developed or sustained, for example in the area of mental health, where the Council once facilitated a forum of VCS organisations. None exist formally in the area of LGBT or refugee and asylum seekers. In the absence of a COI, understanding between the sectors may not develop, leading to potential problems in commissioning relationships and unintended consequences for the VCS from the implementation of statutory initiatives.

While efforts have been made to support COIs, several groups still feel marginalised. The partnership has a role to play in improving engagement with BME groups, LGBT groups and others.

It is worth reviewing how well existing COIs are working from the perspective of partnership working and engagement. For example, there are national guidelines on engagement published by NICE, and VCS Engage (National Children's Bureau) have published standards for Children's Trusts in their work with VCS organisations. These can provide useful guidance in engagement processes.

Q: Do we have the right range of COIs in Wakefield? If not, where are the gaps?

Q: What are the support needs of (different) COIs?

Q: How should the support needs and resourcing of COIs be met?

Q: How well does the partnership engage with COIs as part of deciding needs, priorities and direction? Do we meet national standards? Where could things improve?

Third Sector Environment

The NI 7 indicator measures how VCS organisations rate the influence of local partner organisations on their success. The national survey looks at the local environment and how it helps and supports VCS organisations in the following areas:

- Overall income
- Recruiting and retaining management staff
- Recruiting and retaining other staff
- Finding volunteers
- Finding trustees and committee members
- Advice & support
- Accommodation and operating space
- Maintaining sufficient financial reserves
- Applying for funds
- Accessing training for staff and volunteers
- Help in influencing local decisions
- Working together to deliver services
- Engagement and consultation about things affecting the VCS

These things help to constitute the Third sector 'environment'. They are delivered either through statutory partners' support for infrastructure, or by the statutory organisations themselves. The national survey will give us a local baseline and help establish areas for improvement.

We are conducting our own survey of VCS organisations and community groups in the District on these issues. The consultation event in January 2009 will also explore what constitutes a positive local environment for the Third sector.

The survey also looks at satisfaction with the range of grants and contracts available, access to loan finance, concessions and reliefs, the application/bidding process, help from statutory funders, continuity of funding (3 years), full cost recovery, the timeliness of payments, and the administration of contracts and funding agreements. It asks whether statutory partners value and understand VCS organisations, respect their independence, inform and consult them appropriately, involve them and act on their opinions.

The Partnership Information and Intelligence Group (PIIG) will receive a report in early 2009 on the outcomes of these surveys.

Q: Does the above list cover aspects of the VCS 'Environment' as it should? If not, what is missing?

Q What does the NI 7 survey outcome and the local survey outcome tell us about the health of the local Third sector 'environment'?

Community Development and Infrastructure Support

To create a positive Third sector 'environment', the members of Wakefield Together partnership invest significant resources in developing and empowering communities and voluntary sector organisations. VAWD and VOX are also supported to deliver specific programmes of work on community empowerment and infrastructure for service delivery.

The PCT has a number of initiatives to support the sector, including the Public Health Unit, which has teams of community development staff working directly to build the capacity of communities using a CD model. Commissioning managers are building relationships with VCS providers. The Healthier Communities Fund for the VCS is delivered in partnership with VAWD and VOX.

Family Services Contracts Team has a dedicated post of Voluntary and Community Sector Contract Development Officer. An annual programme of events facilitates networking within Third Sector organizations operating in the District and between the Third Sector and commissioners in the Council and partner agencies. Events have included workshops on collaboration and contracting (processes and documentation), and a Futurebuilders Advice Surgery. Contracts Team also provides information on a range of funding initiatives and is developing a database of funding streams. Capacity-building is further supported through provision of free training places funded by a national grant and an annual Third Sector conference in November enables organizations to inform the annual Family Services Training Plan.

Other supports include WMDC's Partnerships Team who support the Compact and partnership work, and Procurement team staff. 'Meet the Buyer' events have welcomed the involvement of the VCS, and a VCS database has been developed.

WDH has numerous staff and projects engaged in community development and community support as part of their mainstream work. The Probation Service has a dedicated manager linked to VCS development.

Capacity building requires a co-ordinated programme of change. Growth in capacity of the voluntary sector is a key element underpinning the delivery of Wakefield's Community Strategy. WMDC, the PCT and the LAA support VAWD's core role in order to provide strategic leadership, which includes strategic work on Third sector development, the Compact and commissioning, group development, training, ICT, initiatives in skills and worklessness and healthier communities, and volunteering.

VOX is the Community Empowerment Network in Wakefield. It is supported by the LAA and the PCT to promote and support engagement, involvement and empowerment through neighbourhood networks across the District, supporting representation on local committees

and boards, holding VOX Conventions around current issues and producing newsletters, bulletins and briefings.

Q What knowledge and understanding of community and voluntary sector needs are we sharing from community development and capacity building activity across the District?

Q What are the key areas of community development and capacity building activity across the partnership and should they be better co-ordinated? How?

Q What does the VCS in Wakefield need in terms of types and levels of infrastructure support? What are the priorities and how should these be delivered?

Development of the Compact

Wakefield Together has adopted a new Compact and the Group is producing local Codes to cover all areas of the Third sector environment i.e. commissioning, volunteering, community groups and consultation and engagement. These Codes will be part of the Compact's annual report to the Wakefield Together Board as part of this Third Sector strategy.

It will be important to co-ordinate the development of these Codes with the work ongoing across the partnership, particularly in the areas of engagement and commissioning.

Q How can Compact principles be better understood and integrated into other aspects of partnership working?

Consultation, representation and engagement

Local VCS representation

Third sector involvement in the LSP at strategic level has been strong in Wakefield. The first LAA included targets on Third sector growth and community empowerment, and funding was made available for infrastructure delivery plans. The refresh of the LAA has involved consultation with the voluntary and community sector through partnership activities and a dedicated VOX convention, and a strong set of indicators has been chosen.

However, Third sector involvement in delivery plans in the first LAA round was not evident. Major initiatives have recently been taken by the PCT in the VCS in delivering healthier communities targets. VAWD has targeted infrastructure support in healthier communities and Working Together on the employment agenda. It will be important to ensure VCS engagement across the LAA refresh process currently underway.

Engagement with the partnership agenda could work from three different perspectives:

- Thematic for those with an interest in one of the key themes, e.g. healthier communities, environment, work with offenders, employment, skills, children and young people
- Community of interest (COI) for those in a particular group (BME, older people, women, disabled people)
- Geographic for those with a focus on particular neighbourhoods

Many Third sector groups would want to engage from more than one perspective.

We need to strengthen VCS engagement in statutory planning and service delivery. Thematic engagement could be enabled through the review and strengthening of COIs (see COIs page 7) and their links to partnership working at Board and Theme Group levels.

The new 'Duty to involve' of the Council and other statutory bodies requires stronger relationships to be built between public and Third sector organisations. Wakefield Together's partnership engagement framework is being refreshed currently to bring together engagement activities and co-ordinate them. Voluntary organisations and COIs need to be part of this process.

The new Executive Group has agreed to meet periodically with the sector. In order to facilitate this relationship, a new representational structure is needed. This could be facilitated through a Wakefield-wide VCS Forum/Assembly, where all third sector interests could be represented.

It is evident from the Treasury Local Area Pathfinder Initiative that having local strategic champions is one of the success factors of better public sector partnership with the VCS. In pathfinder Councils, there would typically be a senior member and board level Director from a service Directorate where the sector is a key player such as adult or children's social care who would champion the Third sector's interests.

Wakefield has a new 'second generation' Compact which reports to the Wakefield Together Board and could provide the foundation for improved partnership consultative processes. In

the recent review of the Wakefield Compact we agreed that senior level champions were needed in each partner agency to promote Compact working.

Q: How could the Third sector link better with decision-making on priorities at operational levels and partnership delivery plans?

Q: How should the VCS be represented/ better represented across thematic areas? How should this be achieved?

Q There is a case for a Third sector Forum or Assembly in Wakefield to represent the interests of the third sector in regular meetings with the Wakefield Together Executive?

Q If so, how should this be taken forward?

Q Do we need local strategic champions for the VCS from members and service directors to drive the strategy forward?

Funding, Resourcing, Procurement and Commissioning

The relationship between the sectors is underpinned by a mix of local funding and other in-kind arrangements:

- Purchasing, or procurement, involves the statutory body in drawing up a shopping list of those services it wishes to buy, and the VCS is encouraged and sometimes supported in tendering for these. In this relationship, the VCS is treated as 'just another provider'.
- Investment: alternatively, the statutory body may decide to invest in the VCS as a future potential contractor, because of their specific value to the purpose of the contract. This may happen through grants, loans, competitive funds or other forms of capacity-building initiatives.
- Small to medium grants are where the statutory body decides to give a grant to a voluntary organisation to help support projects and/or core running costs.
- Where a VCS organisation is fully involved in assessing need, shaping the service, providing a service, and evaluating the outcome, this is a commissioning relationship, and requires close partnership working to develop over time.

There are new funding sources to add to this mix, that of personal budgets to deliver 'personalisation' of local services, and potential participatory budgeting in communities. VCS providers (individual or organisations) may be funded in future in this way.

There are also 'in kind' resources to the sector, which are essential elements of third sector 'environment', such as buildings, spaces to operate in, shared resources, training, and concessions. There is both mandatory and discretionary rate relief for VCS organisations including clubs and centres.

There are examples of innovative practice in Wakefield (e.g. Children's Fund, the Healthier Communities Fund) that can provide valuable learning about funding for capacity building and growing the local market.

We do not have reliable information at present on the VCS market share of public funds in Wakefield. This would include funding from local statutory organisations' own funding streams and those where they act as accountable body, plus the sub-Regional and national funding drawn through from government agencies and area-based grants. We do know, however, that the VCS is less active in Wakefield in a number of delivery areas than the voluntary sector in neighbouring districts, and that overall levels of resource attracted in to the District could be higher if we had better cross-sector partnership working.

There will be a need for new forms of funding to face the credit crisis, for example, to stimulate the work of credit unions. This strategy should provide a basis for better planning for new funding bids.

We also have recent cases where VCS groups have experienced real difficulty in sustaining their levels of activity or getting their needs met because of aspects of the contracting and procurements process.

Finally. Some very small groups are unable to access resources at all because they have no formal constitution. There is a higher than average proportion of groups in Wakefield in this position.

The relative weakness of the sector in Wakefield suggests that a phase of development is needed which includes capacity building as priority activity. This can be achieved in a range of ways, including core grants, innovative funding streams linked to priorities, and building consortia relationships.

Q Does the partnership in principle support a funding mix of grants and commissioned work?

Q Are there key areas of service provision that should be targeted for VCS development? If so where?

Q What else is needed to grow the market share of the VCS?

Q Should we develop a funding pot for start up for groups too small to be funded any other way?

Funding for infrastructure support

Third sector infrastructure support includes:

- Strategy and policy development, including commissioning
- Networking and engagement
- Organisational development and direct support for groups (capacity building, training, partnership development)
- Specialist advice and guidance (accounting, HR, volunteering)
- Funding advice
- Information and communication
- Direct support (administration, services)
- Resources (office space, meeting rooms)

Historically the Council has funded infrastructure support in the District, and the LAA budget has also contributed. Short term national funding has been available from the Lottery and Capacitybuilders. Infrastructure organisations have for many years received only annual funding, which makes planning difficult.

There is a case for the provision of back office support on a shared basis where groups are not large enough to warrant separate resources of their own, in order to maximise the efficiency of direct support.

Q What arrangements should be made to resource the infrastructure needs of the sector?

Q Should a level of dedicated infrastructure funding for Wakefield District be identified? What would this fund cover? Would it include community assets?

National and local VCS

There is clear evidence that the sector is becoming increasingly polarized – 85% of VCS organisations in England have an annual turnover of less than £100k and generate less than 7% of the sector's total income. Over 70% of the total income of the sector is generated by 2.4% of VCS organisations. The 18 major charities in the UK together generate over 40% of the VCS' total income. NCVO research shows this polarization is increasing.

The Charities Commission website shows Wakefield to have the lowest number of registered charities of the Districts in West Yorkshire. We estimate just over 400 registered charities have their base in Wakefield, and several operate in Wakefield from a base elsewhere, some of these being national charities. Commissioning managers report difficulties in locating suitable Wakefield charities for service provision.

Local VCS providers can ensure that more people have the chance to take up leadership roles in their neighbourhoods and can enable those who experience disadvantage and discrimination to take charge of their own solutions. If procurement policy results in greater predominance of national charities, services may be of reputable quality, but added value e.g. in community cohesion and other valuable aspects of the community strategy may be lost.

We have an example already in Wakefield of a national charity acting as an 'anchor' organisation for a small local consortium, which has now become independent. WMDC has been the funding partner in this relationship through the Children's Fund. This could provide a model for VCS 'hub' development with national charities in other public service areas.

Q Should the partnership adopt a local policy on the roles of the local and national VCS in developing local services?

Q Should the local commissioning framework promote the role of local VCS organisations?

Q What roles should national charities be encouraged to take, and how?

Grant funding and investment

Sustainability for the whole Third sector relies on retaining a mix of funding. Small grant funding in particular helps the community sector achieve its preventive community goals, and creates the environment where civic life, volunteering and empowerment is fostered. It builds social capital, encourages diversity and responsiveness, and enables leverage of other resources from elsewhere. The independence of the sector in this funding relationship is important. Local voluntary organisations grow from the community sector, and therefore it provides a resource for the sector as a whole.

There are areas including bidding for external funds requiring match funding where investment in partnership with Third sector organisations would attract funding in to the District. There is evidence that the best partnership bids arise from long term relationships between the sectors where needs are already identified and roles established. Opportunities for external funds often arise at short notice and need quick responses. The partnership should devote some resource to developing partnership proposals for solutions where there is as yet no identified resourcing.

Q Should the partnership prioritise and develop areas of joint working with the VCS where external investment could be sought? In which areas?

The Community Foundation for Wakefield District

In 2007, The Community Foundation for Wakefield District was formed. Up until last year, Wakefield was one of the only areas in the region and indeed the UK that did not have a Community Foundation. There are now over 60 Community Foundations in the UK.

The Community Foundation is an independent grant-making charity supporting local voluntary groups and charities throughout the Wakefield Metropolitan District.

The prime purpose of the Community Foundation is to build endowment to meet future local needs in Wakefield District – e.g. helping to improve the quality of life for those suffering disadvantage through poverty, age or disability.

It also acts as a broker to meet the wishes of the donor with the needs of the beneficiary and create longer term mutually beneficial partnerships. This can encompass philanthropy, corporate social responsibility and donations from individuals, companies and organisations.

It can also act as a broker to increase the potential donations to the life of the District through creating better incentives than exist at present for corporate giving.

For example, assets currently in public ownership such as the Hepworth could go into partnership with the Community Foundation for outreach work, following the example of the Sage in Tyne and Wear, where the CF hold £11m in endowment – funds entirely from the private sector. The benefits to donors are that an independent third party holds the money. The Foundation can attract investment in partnership with public sector organisations the public sector alone would not have the same impact. There are examples of direct public sector investment e.g. North Yorkshire Community Foundation will receive all money from successful LAA stretch targets (a possible 1.8m) to put into endowment to build the long term community fund.

Q What investment plan could the partnership devise for the Wakefield Community Foundation to support the community and voluntary sector? What partnership assets could be identified for this purpose?

Contracts

There are concerns across Third sector organisations in Wakefield that funding agreements are often short, of variable quality, and let without adequate consultation periods. Monitoring arrangements are felt to be disproportionate, not linked to outcomes, and the results of monitoring often do not inform new decisions. The performance framework is not clear enough, nor linked to outcomes.

Q What is the local impact of contracting methods on local third sector organisations?

What issues do they want to raise?

Community Assets – buildings

Premises are one of the main concerns of VCS organisations wishing to grow sufficiently to deliver new services. Wakefield has a large number of buildings across the District, including Healthy Living Centres and Community Centres. Nevertheless there is a real shortage of suitable accommodation for VCS organisations in the Wakefield District. The Quirk review and the Communitybuilders initiative are policy drivers in this area. Transfer of assets from statutory to voluntary organisations is supported by a national programme of grants. There are also organisations such as Charitybank and Key Fund Yorkshire who can make loans to VCS organisations for business proposals.

Q The identification of accommodation needs and suitable premises for VCS organisations should be part of a long term strategy, together with a funding plan. How should this be achieved?

Other In kind supports

Partnership working is facilitated to some degree at present through 'in kind' supports in the form of training, accommodation etc. This support is not monitored nor co-ordinated, and partners have a range of policies. This could be systematized and made more open, and perhaps extended to include secondments and other skills sharing. The impact on the VCS of selling assets including buildings, or rental policies, should be reviewed.

Wakefield Together Strategic Commissioning Framework

It is clear from the evidence of national policy drivers that commissioning policy and practice has a significant effect on the local 'environment' for a thriving VCS. In July 2008 the Wakefield Together partnership agreed to develop a framework that would enable sharing of principles and best practice in commissioning across agencies. The framework is being developed in tandem with this strategy.

Growing a diverse and vibrant local market against priorities for services is a key aspect of commissioning. The identification of gaps and the stimulation of new ways of providing services in partnership is part of good commissioning practice. There are areas of service provision in Wakefield where the Third sector is not yet involved.

Good procurement is part of commissioning. However, a focus on value for money and efficiency and the rigid application of rules has sometimes led to procurement practices that favour contracts over grants, economies of scale and competitive tendering processes despite policies that emphasise the importance of supporting local voluntary sector organisations. There have been many attempts in Wakefield to open up the procurement process and to develop the sector to respond to it, but many VCS groups in Wakefield remain highly critical of the current procurement process.

Certain key principles stand out as critical in VCS commissioning:

- Communication and relationship-building
- Adhering to national good practice standards
- Accountable, user-friendly application process
- Building local capacity
- Full cost recovery
- Three year funding agreements as the norm
- Recognition of the added value of the local VCS
- Commitment to local funding within the District
- Proportionate monitoring arrangements

Compatible approaches to application, monitoring and evaluation across the partnership could be developed, particularly where an organisation is in receipt of funds from several partners.

Many services that could be provided by other sectors are currently delivered in-house in Wakefield. It is a statutory requirement for many services to consider alternative providers when reviewing the need for services.

We need opportunities for organisations to come together across the partnership and learn from each other and develop joint approaches on key areas such as engagement of the VCS in needs assessment and service shaping, commissioning for capacity building, developing prospectuses, outcomes based monitoring, full cost recovery accounting, and using compact principles in commissioning.

Q The development of a framework for commissioning practice and development is an essential part of a third sector strategy. Have we identified the key elements of that framework?

Q Should all public services be periodically reviewed against a commissioning framework?

Volunteering in Wakefield

Volunteering is at the heart of VCS development and accounts for a large labour force across the District, without whom civic life would not function. The majority of partner organisations make extensive use of volunteers, and many have excellent volunteering programmes which work well. There are many different entry points to volunteering. Opportunities, however, need to be developed further, and in new areas, if we are to achieve our goals. Though sources of information vary, it is estimated that 70% of the District are not active in civic society which would be considerably below the national average.

Volunteers must be valued for what they are: they are not staff and do not wish to be 'professionalised', neither is volunteering ever a compulsory activity. This is at the centre of the national Compact code on volunteering. The partnership should agree certain key principles in raising the level and quality of the volunteering experience across the District.

VAWD currently hosts the accredited volunteer centre for Wakefield, with plans to expand links to worklessness and skills development. Other agencies offer volunteering opportunities at many different levels and for different purposes. Volunteering is being actively promoted to schools. Volunteers from deprived areas are also being sought and supported. Working across

with education, employers and learning providers we can establish ways in which the recognition of skills developed through volunteering can aid progression routes into education, training and employment.

The Government White Paper has proposed that people on benefits can volunteer without detriment to their income.

The Compact Group is developing a local Code on volunteering to take account of the local situation in Wakefield.

Q How can the partnership better support volunteering across Wakefield District organisations?

Q Volunteering skills could be better shared and co-ordinated. How could this be done?

Q How can we improve the supply of volunteering opportunities and signposting?

Q What links can be made between volunteering and the skills and employment agenda in Wakefield?

Q Should we increase collaboration across volunteering, including a pooled fund to support expenses etc. ?

Who is responsible for the Third Sector Strategy?

This is ultimately the partnership's strategy. Wakefield Together partner organisations need to work together to implement the strategy through working to an Action Plan, their own organisation plans, and the core engagement programme of the partnership engagement group.

The Wakefield Together Board should have strategic oversight, on the basis of performance reports.

The Compact group will meet regularly and is responsible for the development and implementation of the strategy and will report periodically on achievements and any issues arising.

Julie Wilkes
CX VAWD
For the Wakefield Compact Group