

A Development Plan to improve Voluntary & Community Sector Service Delivery in the Wakefield District

Produced by the Wakefield Infrastructure Partnership

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Introduction:

The Policy Context – Voluntary and Community Sector Support Needs:

One of the key elements of the programme to modernise public services is the development of a more diverse base of providers of public services. This will include having more voluntary and community sector providers.

National government initiatives have recognised that in order for this to happen specific support for voluntary and community groups is needed to assist the groups in their own development. In addition, changes in procurement and contracting practice and attitudes in some public sector organisations will also be needed.

The Wakefield District has current low levels of public service delivery by voluntary and community groups in comparison to other areas. The Wakefield Infrastructure Partnership was set up to look at how the voluntary and community sector Infrastructure agencies can work together to identify and address support needs of local groups. A list of the partnership members is given at the end of this document. In order to identify support needs, four major pieces of research looking at support needs in relation to service delivery were undertaken, followed by a more general review of infrastructure needs of groups. Copies can be gained by emailing peg@smileconsultancy.com. The recommendations from all five pieces of work have been used to produce this development plan.

The Aim of this Document:

The aim of this document is to outline a multi-agency development plan to improve voluntary and community sector service delivery in the Wakefield District. The document has been subject to consultation and input from the key public sector agencies in the District, including Wakefield District Partnership theme groups. It is hoped that the plan will be approved by the Wakefield District Partnership.

It is hoped that this report will be integrated in-time into a more comprehensive Business Plan for the Voluntary and Community Sectors in the Wakefield District.

The recommendations in this report:

This report outlines a number of actions that would support the development of the voluntary and community sector's ability to deliver services. Many of the recommendations would not incur specific costs, but are about how new ways of

working would assist the development of the sectors. It is hoped that this document will soon become an action plan with different agencies taking a lead in specific areas.

Connection to Fast Forward:

In addition to addressing national policy drivers, the voluntary and community sectors are essential to meeting the strategic objectives of Fast Forward.

Statement in Fast Forward	How the voluntary and community sectors can contribute
<p>In 25 years time the Wakefield District will be a place Moving forward motivated by pride and its heritage</p>	<p>Involvement in local community action and groups gives local people a sense of pride in their achievements and ability to change their local area for the better.</p>
<p>In 25 years time the Wakefield District will be a place Where people look after themselves and each other so that they are safe and healthy, having skills and confidence to take ore control over their lives</p>	<p>There is arguably no better way to ensure that communities have the skills and confidence to take control over their lives and look after each other than by enabling communities themselves to plan, manage and deliver the local services that they need and rely upon. Such services tend to be more responsive to local demand and key management and development decisions are made by those that use the services or with the direct knowledge of how services are perceived.</p> <p>In addition to providing essential services to local people, activity within local voluntary and community groups can greatly increase the skills and confidence of those that take part as community members.</p>
<p>In 25 years time the Wakefield District will be a place With places that are attractive to live, learn, work and invest in and where our diverse towns and villages work together to promote the well being of the whole District</p>	<p>Community and voluntary organisations generally undertake work to improve their local areas. Often their activities are innovative and they can gain funding from external sources to support these activities. They are responsive to local need and community driven, giving local people a pride in their area and the ability to change things rather than seeking to leave their areas. Local groups provide learning opportunities that are both formal and informal, and also through leverage of external funding and the development of local services provide local employment, thereby contributing to a better local economy and environmental sustainability through reduction in travel. The income levered by groups also adds significantly to inward investment in the district.</p>

Community Engagement	<p>Active voluntary and community groups assist the process of community engagement through the development of fora to enable communities to have a voice, and the increased skills, confidence and strategic problem solving skills that come through collective community action. The pivotal role of established groups in giving individual community members a voice was recognised by the Government in planning its Community Engagement Funds, all of which are targeted to groups to achieve this end.</p>
Community Cohesion	<p>Active involvement in community and voluntary organisations means that people start to work together, listen and learn about each other in ways that often does not happen organically. Involvement in groups really does nurture a sense of belonging, helps to develop respect between those that work together, breaks down barriers and low levels of knowledge that can lead to fear of diversity. It builds trust within communities, and through dealing with external agencies can build trust between stakeholders. It is often through involvement in groups that people start to network and make contacts with people in different communities and geographical areas.</p>
Sustainability	<p>Voluntary and community groups are extremely sustainable. They generally rely on volunteer input, even when funding is gained for paid employees. The commitment that comes with voluntary activity is very strong and can mean that services and activities are carried out without financial support. The work of many community based groups is cross cutting itself – many concentrating on areas of work as diverse as supporting local older people, through to community clean-ups.</p> <p>In addition, voluntary and community groups are able to access a range of funds to finance their activities and work.</p>

THE RECOMMENDATIONS

Commissioning and Contracting

More and more public services are being commissioned - ie. the purchaser of the service clearly states what service they would like to buy and then opens offers to a range of potential providers to deliver the services. A key element of the public service modernisation programme is a diverse provider base. Voluntary and community organisations that provide public services bring added value in a number of respects – including user involvement and relevance, local delivery, leverage of additional external funds, use of volunteers etc. Nationally, the Government has recognised that the voluntary and community sectors need additional development support to enable them to compete fairly for public service delivery. This support is even more needed in the Wakefield District where development levels are below other areas.

In the Wakefield District we should

- Establish a commissioning unit to work with both commissioners and voluntary and community groups so that more services can be commissioned to a range of voluntary and community organisations. This unit would have a role around ensuring:
 - Capacity building of potential providers, in particular small organisations
 - Quality standards are implemented within potential providers, with 'passporting' arrangements in place and funding included for implementing quality systems.
- Support commissioners to develop appropriate commissioning procedures and contracts, with reference to other strategic priorities and their own operational and service delivery requirements.
- Developing relationships between the voluntary and community sectors, public and private sectors.
- Support commissioners to identify who can deliver services that are inclusive and address community diversity.

- Develop a WMDC addendum to the Wakefield District Compact addressing Council commissioning and procurement processes.
- Hold an event where local voluntary and community organisations can discuss with, and learn about WMDC Partnering and Procurement processes with respect to tendering for WMDC contracts.
- Recognise that often the Voluntary and Community sectors can be at the forefront of innovation. Commissioning and contracting process should not seek to stifle this innovation. Moreover, commissioning and contracting does not negate the need for core funding.
- Review sustainability of funding streams with a view to developing longer term funding arrangements.

Information about the Sectors

The voluntary and community sectors are incredibly complex, diverse and rapidly changing, with no one clear regulatory or legal framework within which they work. Having a clear and up-to-date picture of the state of the sectors within the District is essential to ensure that we can both measure their development, and also ensure development services are appropriate to needs. In addition, individual groups need to know what other organisations exist to enable joined up working.

In the Wakefield District we should

- Develop a new research facility to ensure we have up to date information on the size and state of the sector, needs of groups, areas for development, issues for specific communities, gaps in service delivery etc. It may be provided regionally or sub-regionally.
- Explore opportunities for how we can share existing research better.

Partnerships and Collaboration

The Wakefield District has made huge strides in increasing partnership work in recent years. There is still more work that can be done, however, to encourage voluntary and community organisations to undertake more partnership activity.

In the Wakefield District we should

- Establish systems to encourage and reward formal partnering and coalition in service delivery between voluntary and community groups and sectors.
- Establish 'fit-for-funding' processes that are appropriate to level of possible funding to share application and assessment processes within agencies where the same group is being funded.
- Review the membership of the Wakefield Infrastructure Partnership to see whether this development plan needs a multi-agency steer.
- Be clear at the outset of any partnership arrangements about what is being offered between partners.

Workforce Development / Learning and Training

Volunteers are the backbone of the voluntary and community sectors and we need to encourage volunteering, and then ensure that support and opportunities are available to those who do so. There are also recruitment and retention difficulties within the sector for paid posts which are often only funded for a fixed term and often at rates of pay lower than the public sector. The result is that there is often gaps in staff teams, and staff often have significant training needs.

Although training provision specifically for the voluntary and community sectors exists within the Wakefield District, additional support is needed. Of particular emphasis and importance are learning needs around organisational development of which there is very little support in the District, and specific support around implementing recognised quality standards within voluntary and community organisations.

In the Wakefield District we should

In respect of a strategic approach to learning:

- Ensure a long term learning strategy for the sectors is always in place, with annual targets for levels of provision and a diverse range of learning opportunities. This to include an increase in current provision and also ensure 'core' training requirements are covered – eg. equality, employee management, financial control, customer focus etc.
- The strategy also needs to reflect the 'values' driven nature of the sector.
- Ensure that when contracts are awarded they include provision for time and costs for the development of those involved with the organisation and service provision.
- Develop a new mentoring and experience sharing project between voluntary and community organisations and also other agencies within the District. This would include one to one mentoring, job shadowing, job rotation, secondment and job sharing.
- Ensure additional infrastructure support for BME community groups.
- Look at how we can improve existing and create new learning and development opportunities across agencies.

In respect of quality standards:

- Promote and ensure use of appropriate standards.
- Increase support available to groups to assist them to implement quality standards.
- Ensure all training provision links into quality assurance criteria.

In respect of workforce development – volunteers, employees, activists and management committee members:

- Recognise the role of volunteers and promote volunteering through the District including to young people.
- Develop more imaginative ways to seek progression routes for both paid and unpaid staff through a multi-agency approach. In the case of paid staff this would assist internal career development and retention; in the case of volunteers it could provide a structured forward route into education, further volunteering or paid work.

- Develop an employment bank for community and voluntary organisations to provide cover where there are vacancies / at times of difficulty.
- Develop a skills bank of volunteers / promote and develop new volunteering opportunities and placements linked to internal workforce development both within the public and private sectors.
- Ensure that all recruitment processes recognise voluntary work experience.

Management, Leadership and Governance

Running and developing a voluntary and community group can be a daunting task for committee members who have never undertaken this type of work before. However it is this community and local input that brings much of the added value of the sector. Using partnerships to share expertise between groups and between agencies from different sectors is one way forward.

In the Wakefield District we should

- Ensure there is specific support for management committees on issues of management and governance, including training, one to one support, mentoring opportunities etc. within the voluntary and community sectors as well as other sectors.
- Increase organisational development support available to voluntary and community groups. This will include support to groups to develop strategic business plans that address issues around contribution to Fast Forward, partnerships and complementarity, needs analysis, potential for charges/generated income, quality standards etc.
- Be pro-active in supporting new people to become active in the voluntary and community sector.
- Develop a 'Committee' bank of people from a variety of sectors and walks of life to serve on management committees, with particular emphasis on gaps – eg. Treasurers.
- Ensure recognition by funders that some organisations need to retain their specialist nature and not attempt to make all organisations generic.

- Engage smaller agencies more in partnership and strategic working. This may mean providing support and back-up to these agencies to free up staff and committee time.
- Develop a marketing, promotion and publicity support service.

Community Development

Community development work – work that assists communities, either a geographical community, or a community of interest, to come together to address themes - underpins any development of the voluntary and community sectors. Most groups start off as informal meetings or discussions. Ensuring there is support to bring people together, and to assist them to both develop their ideas and connections and then their plans is vital if the voluntary and community sector is to flourish. Community development often does not bring immediate service delivery or other specific outputs but is essential if the modernisation of public services agenda is to be achieved, and the changes communities require implemented in the long term.

In the Wakefield District we should

- Implement recognition within funding arrangements and contracts that community development needs to be resourced as part of overall support to the voluntary and community sectors.
- Ensure full and proper training for community development workers, and in community work skills for all staff that work or engage with communities across all sectors.
- Increase the number of community development workers within the District through the creation of a multi-agency Community Development Way Forward Consortium.
- Recognise that in order to implement Fast Forward, the District needs to have a range of voluntary and community groups - many of which will want to deliver public services. Funding streams must be available to such organisations, with District action plans (Such as Local Area Agreements, Fast Forward Action Plans etc) including such activity as appropriate.

Information Communications Technology

The Wakefield District needs to take advantage of the potential of ICT and to build on the success of the Learning Network.

In the Wakefield District we should

- Increase connectivity to the internet for groups.
- Provide more packages of support to groups.
- Promote the use of existing ICT facilities to local organisations.

Wakefield Infrastructure Partnership Membership:

Charities Information Bureau,
Community Work Training Company,
DIVA – Development Initiative for Voluntary Arts,
Groundwork Wakefield,
Voluntary Action Wakefield District,
VOX,
Wakefield Tenants and Residents Federation,
Wakefield Asian Community Forum,
West Yorkshire Community Accounting Service

Public agencies involved in consultation:

Wakefield Metropolitan District Council
Wakefield Community Safety partnership
Wakefield District Learning Partnership
Wakefield West Primary Care Trust

