

BEST VALUE REVIEW OF VOLUNTARY SECTOR FUNDING

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The scope of this review centred on

- HCC **processes** for **discretionary** funding (and in kind giving) to the voluntary sector in Hertfordshire.
- Maximising the level of resources accessible to the sector

Detailed proposals are contained in the Implementation Plan schedule. This includes a set of Recommendations (referred to in section 9 (page 10) of the covering report)

In arriving at these recommendations the Review has involved extensive consultation with the voluntary sector. In recognition of the cross cutting nature of this Review the officer team overseeing it has included representatives of all services throughout.

The proposals do not promote a centralist model, but they do attempt to ensure that information management is comprehensive and transparent and that workflow processes are consistent and modern. This approach is to help the sector as much as to update the council's processes. The retention and use of expertise and experience within services, and existing networks with the sector, remain critical to successful implementation.

By looking at processes the Review has **not** studied the allocation of funding to, or the performance of, individual voluntary organisations. The process work has examined, and made proposals on:-

- Publicising available funding
- Identifying and advising on non HCC funding sources
- Maximising share of external funding
- HCC strategy and criteria
- Form filling /bidding
- Timetables and decision making
- awarding grants
- monitoring and evaluation

The Implementation Plan has been divided into four sections. The following notes pick out some of the key messages:-

Capacity Building

The voluntary sector has a vital role in helping our communities. The Council will contribute to the infrastructure of the sector through training, advice and other support.

Significant progress has already been made in developing the Hertfordshire External Resources Network. The key HCC role rests within the Economic and Community Development Unit.

This section promotes working with other funders. A number of District Councils have been involved with the Review at various stages. The intention for future development is to work with them and other partners to make the processes more streamline and consistent. Talks are in progress with Primary Care Teams to explore the potential for closer work on funding.

Strategy and Criteria

Where the county council is funding a voluntary activity we need to be clear how that activity links to county council and service priorities. Proposals here will achieve that aim. Such clarity is something the sector itself has called for.

Most grant giving is already based on well developed criteria suited to needs. This area requires more consistency without losing the service element. We aim to ensure that good practise is evident in those organisations funded by the council.

Funding

Security will be provided to the sector by increasing numbers of longer term funding agreements, where appropriate to the council's needs.

The proposals will give clarity to funding streams available to the sector, and will provide a complete county council database of where the funding goes and accountability for it. In kind support will be identified in this process.

A single HCC funding prospectus, and annual timetable, will help the sector to focus on their bidding arrangements.

The council will have a role in maximising external funding coming into the county and in directing organisations to other funding sources.

By directing resources and by providing opportunities for increased independence the council will be able to increase its support for 'hard to reach' groups. There is broad acceptance that current funding excludes bidding by some groups, and that this has given rise to a 'charmed circle'.

Further work will be undertaken to determine the potential for a small grants fund, outside of the mainstream process.

Process

A key theme emerging throughout the Review relates to the council's information management and the desire for transparency and completeness. Database development will address this theme.

Work will continue on the development of a single application form and the potential for modern technology in processing bids.

Summary

The Plan is wide ranging and the elements within it are interdependent.

Successful implementation will require the continued commitment of services within HCC, support from other partners/funders, and a continuous dialogue with the voluntary sector in the county.