

VCS Infrastructure Investment - 2012-2015

Consultation Document

Introduction

Worcestershire benefits from a wealth of voluntary and community sector organisations although it is recognised they are at varying stages of development. Government expectations of the voluntary and community sector are pronounced in relation to Localism and Personalisation. The Council's new Corporate Plan identifies the potential for existing and new organisations to play a significant role within Worcestershire in the future.

Worcestershire County Council has a history of capacity building within the sector, reflected by the three year strategic grant for infrastructure support which concluded on 30 March 2011. We are consulting on a new model of providing infrastructure support to replace those grant arrangements.

Why we are consulting

The BOLD (Better Outcomes, Lean Delivery) Programme was established to achieve better outcomes against the Council's corporate objectives for 2011-2014, in the context of reducing resource.

The BOLD Review of the Council's relationship with the voluntary and community sector was commissioned to identify how and where the Council spends money with the voluntary and community sector and how this can be spent to achieve best value for money.

For the purpose of this review the voluntary and community sector have been defined as small (annual income of up to £100,000) to medium scale organisations (annual income of £100,000 to £1 million). This includes Mutuals and social enterprise that are locally based and offer community-based, affordable and niche support to individuals or small groups.

The review has identified the need for the Council to continue to build capacity within the sector if the aspirations in the Corporate Plan are to be realised. However it has identified the limitations of the previous arrangements and the need to do something different with a more focussed approach to providing infrastructure support. This was reflected through research with focus groups from the voluntary and community sector.

What we are proposing

We are proposing an increased investment over the three year period 2012 - 2015. It has been proposed that £750,000 over a three year period is earmarked to support this proposal although this formal decision will be taken as part of the

council's budget setting process later in this financial year. The purpose of this investment will be to build a managed market of support with a view to developing voluntary and community sector organisations required to support the ambition set out in the Council's corporate plan.

In reflecting the mutual desire to do something different in place of the previous arrangement, it is proposed that an alternative model based on a three year profiled investment programme of £750,000 is put in place. It is our intention to put in place a model which will operate so as to respond to customer need, provide targeted support and give front line organisations a greater and informed choice in their selection of infrastructure provision.

It is our intention to put in place a model based on a framework contract from which the support of a range of infrastructure support services can be 'called off' by recipient organisations.

The contract framework would be an agreement with a list of pre-approved providers, which sets out terms and conditions to allow call offs during the life of the agreement. A range of providers drawn from the voluntary, private, and public sectors will be given the opportunity to join the framework contract.

It is envisaged that recipient organisations will access support by way of application to a central gateway at the Council, and will need to fulfil eligibility criteria. We are consulting on the nature of those criteria and the extent of the support that it would be reasonable to provide given the cost and any capping levels.

We will be seeking to ensure value for money infrastructure support of a high quality which meets customer needs and therefore would intend to put in place suitable arrangements including a transparent review by the recipient of the support that has been delivered.

The administration associated with this model will be as streamlined as possible. It is proposed that the model will operate around a voucher system in which the council will issue a voucher of agreed value to a recipient who in turn will select a provider from the framework contract who following satisfactory provision of the service will redeem the voucher with the Council.

Who we are consulting

We are consulting voluntary and community organisations within our definition and commissioners via a series of presentations and open meetings. We will be seeking comments on the following:

- Your views on the proposed model including:
 - What any eligibility criteria for recipient organisations could be
 - Extent of support and the level at which it should be capped
 - Practical application of the model e.g. what any application process could be

- How can this model encourage market shaping and development of best practice?

- How can this model be used to maximise organisational development and sustainability?
- How can we maximise access to support?
- What potential barriers are there and how might they be overcome?

Consultation Process

Consultation will commence on 31 October 2011 and close on 21 December 2011. This is shorter than the desired 12 week period due to the intention to have a new arrangement for infrastructure in place by April 2012.

We will be holding open meetings around the county between mid November and mid December; dates are being confirmed and will be advertised on the VCS web page www.worcestershire.gov.uk/voluntary by 2 November 2011.

Consultation feedback will be provided on 9 January 2012.