

Cabinet – 23 March 2005

Realising our Vision – working with the community and voluntary sector

Portfolio: Councillor Zahid Ali – Community Engagement and Organisational Development

Service Area: Corporate Services

Wards: All

Forward Plan: No

Summary of report

This report outlines the key issues raised and discussed at a conference held at Bescot Stadium on January 22nd 2005, and sets out proposals for how the Council can work with our statutory partners and with the community and voluntary sector in the Borough to address these issues, and to build capacity for the future.

Recommendations:

- (1) That Cabinet receive this report, and to note the conference report that is available in group rooms.
- (2) That Cabinet agree to work with statutory partners and with the community and voluntary sector locally to develop an action plan which builds overall capacity in the community and voluntary sector and which reviews and strengthens the relationship between the Council itself and the sector.

Resource and legal considerations

The Council provides support to the community and voluntary sector, through direct 'grant' payments, through contractual arrangements, and through support in kind, including premises, amounting to around £8.6 million/year. The community leadership role of the Council, the need to work closely with partners for the community well being, through the Borough Strategic Partnership and in other ways, is set out in statute.

Citizen impact

Voluntary and community organisations, and individuals offering their time and expertise as volunteers, have a very significant impact on the quality of life of local citizens and of the borough at large.

Community safety

The community and voluntary sector includes many organisations whose interests relate directly or indirectly to community safety.

Environmental impact:

The community and voluntary sector includes many organisations whose interests relate directly or indirectly to the environment.

Performance and risk management issues

One aspect where the community and voluntary sector recognises that it needs to build additional capacity relates to issues of performance, and performance monitoring. Likewise, measures adopted by the Council, by other statutory partners and by local partnerships, need to ensure that performance monitoring is effective, and proportionate.

Equality implications

As noted at the event, and in this report, the community and voluntary sector in the Borough is very diverse, in many ways. Within the sector are a range of organisations whose interests are specific to disability issues, generally and to specific disabilities, and specific to the interests of particular minority ethnic communities.

Consultation

The conference held in January 2005 was an example of how the Council, the Borough Strategic Partnership and other statutory organisations are working with the community and voluntary sector in the Borough.

Vision 2008

The implementation of a multi-agency action plan to address the needs of the community and voluntary sector, and also the further development of the Council's own relationships with the sector, strategic and operational, will assist the Council towards its vision for 2008, and will address issues relating to all of the strategic priorities underpinning that Vision.

Background

Cabinet will know that the previous CPA inspection, of February 2004 identified the Council's strategic and operational relationships with the community and voluntary sector as an area where the Council should devote additional time and energy, building on a range of existing working relationships including the Local Compact. Discussions with Walsall Voluntary Action, the Community Empowerment Network, also involving the Walsall Borough Strategic Partnership in the Autumn of 2004 led to the organisation of a conference 'Realising our Vision', held at Bescot Stadium on January 22nd 2005.

The purpose of the conference was to enable representatives of local community groups and voluntary organisations to take stock, and to discuss amongst themselves and with statutory partners the existing strengths and weaknesses of the sector, and to develop a clear vision for the sector – what the sector wants to look like in three years' time, in 2008.

The conference was organised jointly by the WBSP, CEN, Walsall Voluntary Action and the Council, and attracted a cross section of organisations and agencies. There were key note addresses by Councillor Zahid, on behalf of the Council and the WBSP, from Colin Sanders, Chair of Walsall Voluntary Action, and Angela Steatham, Chair of Walsall Community Empowerment Network. These are set out in full in the Conference report which is available in the political group rooms. These presentations, and the discussions sessions that followed (and which formed the bulk of the event), identified a number of key issues, including:

- the diversity of the community and voluntary sector in the Borough, and the need to develop a clear strategic focus and vision for the whole sector
- the expertise, and the experience, and local knowledge that is held by the sector
- the importance of true partnership working, working to establish a 'partnership of equals'
- constraints upon the community and voluntary sector – financial, and in terms of time to attend meetings – and the need for statutory organisations to plan ahead more, with joint meetings held at sensible times, with sufficient notice, and in accessible venues
- the need to increase awareness of our Local Compact, developed jointly by the Council, teaching Primary Care Trust, community and voluntary organisations and the Borough Strategic Partnership
- the need to increase capacity, and to prepare the community and voluntary sector through development and training, ready for future challenges.

Next Steps:

Looking to the future, the conference identified a range of actions – some already well underway, others still to be addressed. A project team will be established very shortly, to include representatives from the Council, WBSP, CEN and WVA, to map out those actions, and to prepare a comprehensive action plan. This will include:

- ensuring that links between the community and voluntary sector and Local Neighbourhood Partnerships are made strong, underpinned by local community fora for each of the nine LNP's

- finalising our 'phase 2' Local Compact, where the present 'in principle' agreement is strengthened by the inclusion of specific policy statements on consultation, communications, funding and accountability, capacity building and development, volunteering, and on issues specific to BME and disability organisations
- commissioning a strategic review of the community and voluntary sector to identify gaps, duplication and opportunities, and to identify opportunities for external funding
- issues specific to funding, seeking to address concern within the sector that current one year funding arrangements hold back the sector, and work against the sector developing a longer term strategic vision and purpose
- developing clear policies on volunteering across the borough
- examining and working to develop the sector's role as a deliverer of key local services, and reflecting this in local procurement arrangements.

This will be the subject of further reports to Cabinet over the coming months.

Background papers:

Walsall Voluntary and Community Sector Conference, Realising our Vision – conference report – February 2005

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Signed:



Signed:



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Portfolio Holder: Councillor Zahid Ali

Date: 14 March 2005

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