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25 January 2008

Helen Ball
Head of Policy, Performance and Equalities
Bristol City Council
The Council House
College Green
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Dear Helen

AREA BASED GRANT CONSULTATION

Set out below is Voscur's response to the Area Based Grant consultation. The responses listed below were gathered at a Voscur meeting on 23rd January attended by 38 people from voluntary, community and social enterprise organisations across the city and from comments sent in to the Voscur office.

3.1 Working Neighbourhoods Fund

Voscur members are disappointed that Bristol did not qualify for Working Neighbourhoods fund and asked whether the City Council is working with other authorities, who are in a similar situation, to lobby national government. There is sympathy in the sector for the Council's position, coupled with a frustration that planning for this eventuality did not take place earlier.

3.4 Mainstreaming

Voscur proposes that a cross sector partnership is established to bring different partners together to develop a strategy for 'mainstreaming' and commissioning services from voluntary, community and social enterprise groups. We understand that the Voluntary Sector Project Board has been looking at this issue as has the Compact steering group. The VCS Project Board needs to be expanded to include wider Bristol Partnership members and voluntary sector representatives.

3.8 Consultation and prioritisation process

Members expressed the following concerns:

that the timescale for consultation was too short for small groups with a limited capacity to respond. The documents were also very complex and difficult to understand. Groups are fearful that those with the capacity to ‘shout the loudest’ will be heard over the smaller groups without lobbying power;

the initial consultation/prioritisation exercise in July 07 should have been wider than just Neighbourhood Renewal Fund recipients, since the impact of the fund was far wider and city-wide;

it is not clear from the documents which groups will lose funding, for example a representative from one group told us that their work did not feature at all in the consultation document. In the past they have received £850,000 of Neighbourhood Renewal funding in five streams. Yet, they have disappeared in the consultation document. Their work has, in the past, been prioritised, and they have met and exceeded all targets.

We would like to see a list of all groups and projects that will lose funding.

3.9 Economy and Enterprise

The paper states that ‘the Council wishes to consult with key stakeholders, particularly the Economy Delivery Group over how to allocate this money across various projects’. However, the Area Based grant consultation document was not initially sent to members of the Economy Delivery Group. Council officers proposed a short list of identified projects to the group at its most recent meeting. These did not relate to the prioritisation exercise that was carried out in November. Members felt that it would have been more strategic to develop a long list of options and take an overview of how the transition funding could be best used to draw in additional investment (such as the Urban Enterprise fund).

4.3 ChangeUp Consortium

There is support for SSCF investment to continue to fund infrastructure through the ChangeUp Consortium, given groups’ support needs.

4.4 Neighbourhood Management

Groups were not clear as to how the decision to fund neighbourhood management pilots had been made, or the rationale for the sums allocated.

There was no debate at the recent Regeneration Group as to whether Neighbourhood Management Pilots should be funded, but much debate about how much they would receive.

Many groups based in the Central, Easton and Lawrence Hill areas are actually 'city-wide' groups, benefiting the whole city. Many groups based in these areas are also working with Black and Minority Ethnic people and new communities, who need additional support.

Groups were concerned that there was implied racism in some the recent media coverage and were keen to emphasise co-operation and cross-city work.

Support needs

Groups identified a range of support needs.

Three months notice of closure is difficult for groups since there is such a limited time to seek alternative funding and groups need help to look for alternative funding or income generation opportunities.

Groups need help with the legal issues relating to closure and redundancy.

Groups are concerned that the withdrawal of funding could result in in-fighting between organisations within the sector, over the limited funds that are available. Co-operation and joint working need to be fostered and developed.

There was a suggestion that Neighbourhood based projects could widen their geographical catchment area and work across the city in order to attract mainstream investment.

Central Support Framework

Voscur itself has been funded to run the Neighbourhood Renewal Residents' Forum and the Neighbourhood Renewal Learning Programme as part of the central support framework. Both of these programmes have achieved their outcomes and been well-supported. Whilst we acknowledge that with limited funding, it is difficult to sustain this activity, we feel that our knowledge, expertise and experience of city-wide working and supporting residents and groups could be utilised during the transition period, and would like to explore this option.

We hope the above views, which have been gathered from Voscur's membership, are able to inform the outcome of the consultation.

Yours sincerely

Wendy Stephenson
Chief Executive

CC Councillor Helen Holland
Councillor Peter Hammond
Nick Gurney Chief Executive, Bristol City Council
Ashy McKay Head of Regeneration, Bristol City Council