

Clare Hall, Chair
VOSCUR
CREATE Centre
Smeaton Road
Bristol
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Reply to: Ashy McKay
Telephone: 0117 9223293

Date: 6 February 2006

Dear Clare Hall,

Re: Regeneration Division Voluntary Sector Investment 2006-2010

Thank you for your letter regarding the Investment Strategy and also for you and your organisation's active involvement in the consultation process to date. I will cover your points in order.

1. The consultation process has as you know included 8 open meetings organised through Voscur and BDA, on a district basis or targeted at equalities communities, a widespread circulation of the draft to all currently funded and other VCS organisations, a questionnaire, web-based communication, liaison with the City's equality fora plus 5 meetings aimed at other funders. As the Sustainable Development and Neighbourhoods Executive stated at the Select Committee on Sustaining Voluntary Organisations on 1 December this is a through process and one which has been developed by experienced staff who have geared it to meeting the specific needs of this consultation process. The process has been based on previous successful consultations carried out for earlier reviews of the strategy but enhanced with extra meetings and wider dialogue. The Bristol Compact's guidance on consultation is designed to "give ideas for actions, methods and examples" in order to ensure good fit and not as a mandatory set of rules. I am sure you will be pleased to hear that early indications from attendance at meetings and written feedback suggest a successful exercise.
2. The proposals on advice services are very much based on the recent review carried out by Michael Bell Associates. I would disagree with your suggestion that the review was weak on identifying need as it included a thorough and objective assessment. One of the recommendations of this review was the establishment of an Advice Services Joint Planning Board. This has now been set up and it will act as the primary forum for the development and commissioning of services in this area, leading to a long-term strategy for advice in Bristol. The Council's own advice

services were included in the review and will be actively involved in the Joint Planning Board. ACFA was commended for its coordination, innovation and cost effectiveness in the review. It holds 3 seats on the Joint Planning Board and is envisaged to continue its role. The issue of quality of services is crucial and will be spelt out in any tendering process.

3. The concept of community hubs has been thoroughly discussed in the consultation meetings. In outline these have a geographic basis but will need to take regard of socially excluded communities. No capital budget is available so the strategy does not anticipate building new centres. The figure of 12 hubs is an approximate one and part of the aim of consultation is to assist in identifying priority areas. The menu of specific services provided by any individual hub will of course vary dependant on local needs and conditions but it is expected that the centre will provide community facilities, rooms for hire, community development support and networking. With regard to a preference for individual or clusters of organisations, this again will come down to local conditions, within existing budgetary constraints.
4. Your comments regarding the funding of infrastructure services will be noted among the responses to the strategy. It is intended that a system of awarding support for infrastructure needs to local organisations will be developed over the next 2 years and the transition from the current funding to infrastructure organisations will be over the same period. As has been stated in the consultation meetings the aim of this proposal is to empower local organisations and to ensure they are able to choose the most appropriate support possible. In response to your point 12, no phased withdrawal of funding is anticipated as a 2-year lead in period is built in to the process (6 month rollover plus a further 18 month period).
5. The suggestion of paid membership for infrastructure services is line with Change Up and the Council's aim of encouraging the independence of the VCS through income generation. I note your comments regarding the representation of VCS organisations and welcome your and your members' views on the issues of paid membership. I am aware that Voscur has previously carried out a members questionnaire on this issue and but have not seen the formal report on this.
6. The proposal for the support and development of volunteering is aiming to build on good practice in the VCS in the City. It is not suggested that this will routed through local groups and is excluded from the "open market" proposal for infrastructure organisations. The issues of quality, sustainability, training, development and benefits are appropriate to be addressed as part of the commissioning process.
7. I note your comments on local economic development initiatives. This of course is seen as a shared venture in partnership with the VCS. The Council's definition of CDFI is broader than simply credit unions and

LETS. Bristol CC is interested in exploring innovative schemes in this area including links to advice services and business support.

8. It is intended that a scheme identifying areas of need within equalities communities be developed. We are working to develop this and will look to the current consultation to enhance this work. Given scheme this it is then desirable for both the Council and VCS providers that 3-year service level agreements are developed to cover this work.
9. Commissioning processes will follow BCC procurement guidance and wherever possible will be done in liaison with local communities and/or the VCS. The Council will of course reserve the right to vary agreements and review its priorities (currently on a 3-yearly basis).
10. Following current practice, annual grants will be open to new organisations who are working towards baseline standards. Services may move to commissioning where there is a clear link with the funding priorities.
11. The community chest is seen as a one-off pot of money which complements other funding streams. If a group develops it is possible that this may link to annual funding or commissioning as appropriate. Your comments regarding retrospective funding are noted and I can say that this is likely to change in the final document.
12. The Council will reserve the right to scrutinise those organisations it funds. Wherever possible we will aim to reduce the bureaucratic burden on the VCS. However this scrutiny is particularly important with key services and we would hope could be an effective tool for the VCS organisations involved to help ensure their sustainability. Of course the utilisation of quality marks, performance management and assurance frameworks will increase the confidence in providers and lessen the burden of scrutiny. The traffic light system will work to clearly communicate when an organisation is doing well or has issues to resolve. It is intended to be understandable by the group, officers, Councillors or other interested parties. It is expected that where these issues are relatively minor, an amber light will show this and timescales set for their resolution. A red light will signal more serious or ongoing concerns and is likely to lead to a move to the protocol for the withdrawal of funding.
13. I welcome your endorsement of the lead funder model. We are aware that this is a shared priority. The evaluation of the SW Pilot is due to be completed at the end of March. Its further implementation is the subject of discussions within the authority and will build on the pilot's experience. Full cost recovery is not an issue where the Council funds the core of a VCS organisation. In other cases full cost recovery will be the expected norm.

14. Whilst it is anticipated that this budget will have a positive effect on all of the Council's corporate priorities, it is focused most strongly on the aim of balanced and sustainable communities. The budget will be targeted at the priorities as discussed above; resultantly groups who meet other priorities will not be funded. We have carried out some work on asset transfers however this budget is a revenue stream and not applicable for capital spending.

I note your comments regarding the use funding of infrastructure organisations and ask that you note that the impact assessment will form part of the formal reporting procedure. I must reiterate the Executive's words in confirming that this is a genuine consultation process and would welcome proposals of other models in this area. I have already committed to meeting with Voscur and others to further discuss these issues. I look forward to your further feedback and again would like to thank you for your work on this.

Yours sincerely

Ashy McKay
Head of Regeneration

cc: Cllr Barbara Janke
Cllr. Gary Hopkins
Nick Gurney