

## **Draft Regeneration Voluntary Sector Investment Strategy -**

### **Voscur Comments and questions**

#### **General**

On 26<sup>th</sup> May 2005, 80 representatives of voluntary and community sector (VCS) organisations from Bristol attended a Voluntary and Community Sector Regeneration conference organised by Voscur and sponsored by Bristol City Council, the Single Community Programme, Hartcliffe and Withywood Community Partnership and Community at Heart. The conference produced several recommendations for strengthening the VCS in Bristol. Have these been taken into account?

How has the relevant evidence given to the Select Committee on Bristol City Council's relationship with the Voluntary and Community Sector in Bristol been taken into account in the development of this strategy?

How has the ChangeUp infrastructure plan been taken into account in the development of the strategy?

What is the process and timetable for implementation of the strategy?

How do you envisage the strategy freeing up money to invest in new groups?

Where are the opportunities for new groups?

What are the plans to publicise the strategy and opportunities to new groups?

#### **1 Bristol City Council's Priorities**

1.2 states that the Regeneration Division will be running projects. The Regeneration Division has not previously 'run projects'. What does this mean?

## **2 Aims for Regeneration Voluntary Sector Investment**

### 2.1 a to g

How does the strategy meet these aims? The relationship between the aims of the strategy and the content of the strategy is not described.

2.1 b) What does 'strengthen the Council's priorities for regeneration funding' mean?

2.1 c) If priorities are based on identified need, how are new needs identified?

### 2.2

Has an impact assessment been carried out? That is, has any work been done to identify which groups currently funded through this budget may be affected by the strategy?

Will there be a phased withdrawal of funding from groups that will be affected? If not, what support will be available to groups?

## **3 Priorities for Regeneration Voluntary Sector Investment (2006 – 2010)**

### **3.1 a) Advice Services**

BCC recently invested in a comprehensive review of advice services. Have any of these recommendations been made as a result of the recent advice services review?

3.1 a) 1 Some groups provide advice and support as part of a range of services and do not have General Help LSCQM, particularly groups providing advice to new communities. How will they be affected?

3.1 a) 5 The nature of advice means that it may be difficult to monitor the monetary benefits to users of some advice services. This is often the case in relation to debt advice. Will the council propose a format by which monetary benefit will be measured?

Some advice giving does not directly result in a monetary benefit, but other outcomes such free school meals, resolved asylum issues, free bus passes awarded, disability aids provided are achieved.

### **3.1 b) Community Hubs**

Are these community hubs the same as the approximately 12 centres across the city referred to in 3.1?

What has led to the decision to support 12 community hubs? Is this decision evidence based?

What will happen in neighbourhoods where there is already more than one community hub?

Have gaps in provision of community hubs been identified? If so, where are these? How will new hubs be initiated?

3.1 b) 2. This statement is confusing. Are the hubs to serve geographic communities or socially excluded groups? Or both? Which will take priority?

3.1 b) 4. Will there be a prescribed list of resources that community hubs will be required to provide locally?

3.1 b) 6. What kind of services and facilities will hubs be required to provide?

3.1 b) 7. Which are the targeted regeneration areas?

3.1 b) 8. What will be eligible as match funding? Will assets and volunteer time be eligible, for example? Will there be a minimum requirement of match funding?

3.2 b) 10. Does this mean that the Council's intention is to incorporate service provision for equalities communities into generalist hubs?

### **3.1c) Infrastructure Support for the VCS**

Local Infrastructure organisations are not sustainable without an element of core funding from the local authority. Core funding provides stability and enables infrastructure organisations to bring additional funding into the city from a range of other sources, add value to the Council's core funding and develop a range of services relevant to local groups.

Is it the Council's intention to withdraw funding from local infrastructure organisations and open the market for local infrastructure provision to regional and national organisations?

If so, how will the transition from direct funding of local infrastructure organisations be managed?

After creating an open market for infrastructure services, how will the Council ensure that many vital services are not lost, as providers are faced with chasing funding and may choose to only provide those services which are easiest to fund?

Under this regime how will the Council ensure that local infrastructure providers do not restrict their services (given they may have no funding relationship with them) based on unfair criteria (such as offering services to those that are able to pay the highest price)?

How will the Council ensure that infrastructure services are available for new and emerging groups that do not have the ability to pay for them?

3.1 c i) Has the Council prioritised infrastructure support functions or are all of the services listed in the appendix equally valid?

3.1 c ii) What will be the mechanism for directing funding to local vcs organisations so that they can purchase infrastructure support? What criteria will groups use to select infrastructure support (without local infrastructure organisations to sign-post them to sources of support?)

How will this approach give greater opportunity for projects providing services directly in local communities to get infrastructure services which match their individual needs?

Currently Voscur and Black Development Agency (for example) exceed the City Council's targets for service delivery. Voscur and BDA are both registered Councils for Voluntary Service and as such will be eligible to apply for the proposed National Association of Council for Voluntary Services quality mark (which will be achieved as a result of achieving relevant performance standards).

How will the Local Authority measure the quality of infrastructure providers if services are purchased from organisations from outside of Bristol and with whom the Council has no funding relationship and who not work to recognised standards?

3.1 c iii) f) Accountable representation for VCS organisations can only be provided by local infrastructure organisations with a robust and active membership. In order to sustain a robust and active membership, infrastructure organisations need to offer services other than representation. This position will be undermined if local infrastructure organisations are not supported through guaranteed core funding.

### **3.1c v) Funding for Representation of the VCS**

See 3.1 iii) f) above. Groups will not pay for representation only. They will expect a range of services from infrastructure organisations.

Infrastructure organisations currently operate different membership structures. Will there be a requirement that these are brought into line, before this system is introduced?

Specialist infrastructure organisations serving communities of interest may have fewer members than generalist infrastructure organisations. Will numbers of members counted be proportionate to the population of different communities of interest?

Is the Council planning to commission services for representation on a three year basis?

### **3.3 c vi) Funding for Volunteering Support**

The National Compact Code on Volunteering states that there should be provision of six core functions of volunteering infrastructure provision in every local authority area. As a result the volunteer centre network has developed a quality accreditation framework requiring local volunteer centres to provide the full set of six core functions. Surely Bristol City Council would want to support such a framework rather than potentially withdraw funding from proven high quality providers in favour of opportunist providers with no relevant quality mark?

How will the numbers of volunteers recruited be counted? The number of volunteers recruited does not take into account the quality and sustainability of volunteer placements, the quality of training and development of volunteers, the benefits to volunteers and to organisations offering placements.

### **3.4 d) Local Economic Development Initiatives**

The Bristol City Council website states 'the social economy sector of Bristol is a thriving and innovative movement and an important part of the city's economy. It is made up of organisations which are run on a 'not for personal profit' basis. Examples include community businesses, co-operatives, local self-help or interest groups, and activities and services can range from housing and property management, cultural activities, sport, manufacturing, care services and arts - in fact almost any type of income generation'

This definition used by Bristol City Council when carrying out the audit that obtained the figure of a 4% growth in the sector encompasses the wider voluntary and community sector in Bristol. It is the whole sector that has grown by more than 4% over inflation (not only the social enterprise sector).

What is the Council's definition of a Community Development Finance Initiative?

What is the CDFI movement in Bristol?

### **3.1 4) Funding for Local Economic Development Initiatives**

Please refer to 3.1 c ii) above.

### **3.1 e) Equalities**

3.1 e i) states that the Council will provide support for equalities communities of interest, yet it does not describe how it will do this.

3.1 e iii) states that BCC will not provide support for a community where support or services are already in place. What does this mean? Will the quality, sustainability, appropriateness of the support be taken into account?

Services will be commissioned with reference to an evidence base. Who will supply the evidence base?

Who commissions and what is the process for commissioning?

Who decides what the priorities are and when they have changed? Will this be the Council or the groups themselves?

## **4 Funding Systems**

4.1 a) What is the commissioning process? How will specifications for service delivery be drawn up? Who will be involved? Will there be opportunities for the Voluntary and Community Sector to be involved in developing specifications?

It is our understanding that a funding arrangement is different from a commissioning arrangement. The term 'funding' is used to describe payment for commissioned services. This is confusing.

4.1 b) 'One off' start up grants are described in 4.1 c. It may take longer than one year for a group to achieve base-line standards. How will new groups gain access to annual funding if criteria include baseline standards being in place? New groups need support to reach base-line standards.

Is there a strategy to enable annually funded groups to move to the position of being commissioned to deliver services?

When will the criteria for the annual grants programme be published?

Most respondents to the Grimley survey requested 3 year funding arrangements. Was this given due consideration? Why was this rejected?

4.1 c i) There will be no funding for new work unless it meets the Council's priorities. How will groups that have identified a need that does not yet meet the Council's priorities be able to access funding from this budget?

4.1 c iii) Does one-off mean one per annum or that any organisations applying to the fund will only be able to apply once during its lifetime?

4.1 c iv) Grants paid to existing organisations for development will be payable in arrears on completion of the agreed activities. Groups applying for such funding may be unable to pay for development support unless they have, themselves, received grant funding in advance.

4.2.1 Contracts are different from funding agreements. Would the council expect to scrutinise the financial arrangements of groups who are contracted to the council in the same way that funded groups are scrutinised. Will the same arrangements apply to all organisations who carry out contracted work on behalf of the Council?

4.2.2 Will the monitoring and scrutiny unit be located within the Regeneration Division or work across all departments?

4.2.3 Will the Council pay for groups to achieve recognised performance improvement standards?

4.3.1 Has the lead funder pilot been successful? If so, where is the published evidence for this?

4.3.1 b) Who will agree the baseline standards? How will groups be supported to achieve these?

4.3.1 c) Which funders will share information?