

SCRUTINY COMMISSION – 14 JULY 2010**VOLUNTARY ACTION LEICESTERSHIRE – PERFORMANCE REPORT
2009/10****REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE****Purpose of report**

1. The purpose of this report is to advise the Scrutiny Commission of Voluntary Action LeicesterShire's (VAL) performance for 2009/10 during the first year of the new infrastructure contract, as requested at the meeting on 9th December 2009.

Policy Framework and Previous Decisions

2. The County Council and partners entered into a new contract for the provision of infrastructure services to the voluntary sector in April 2009. Following a full procurement exercise the contract was won in open competition by Voluntary Action LeicesterShire. The Scrutiny Commission at its meeting on 9th December 2009 requested that VAL's first year performance report be presented to the Commission, when available.

Background

3. In April 2007, the Cabinet considered an assessment of the configuration and operation of VCS infrastructure support, which identified that:
 - There was wide variation in the levels of investment in each area with consequential difference in the range, quality and performance of provision;
 - The organisations tended to focus strongly on the districts served and struggled to engage in planning and partnership working at the county wide level;
 - There were capacity issues both in terms of time/resources and in relation to the knowledge and skills of staff;
 - The capacity issues had been increasingly evident through the development of the Local Area Agreement, with the exception of leadership of the Stronger Communities Board the sector has been stretched to participate consistently and effectively across the whole LAA;

- The organisations were not well placed to take advantage of potential efficiencies that may arise from shared support functions (HR, ICT, Finance etc.) or to develop working methods that may only be realised by working across a larger area such as providing greater accessibility to services through optimal use of telephone, face to face and web access.
4. Cabinet, in April 2007, therefore considered three models to reconfigure VCS infrastructure and indicated preference for a countywide VCS infrastructure organisation with continued support for a local community presence for the delivery of some VCS infrastructure functions. Feedback on the three models was also sought from other funding partners.
 5. In November 2007, the Cabinet recommended that agreement be sought with other funders to jointly commission a countywide infrastructure organisation and work with existing VCS organisations as service delivery partners and community anchor organisations/representatives of the sector.
 6. In 2008, tenders were sought for a countywide VCS infrastructure organisation, based on agreed outcomes (Appendix A) following wide stakeholder consultation.
 7. Voluntary Action LeicesterShire following tender evaluation was the successful organisation and was jointly commissioned by the County Council, NHS Leicestershire & Rutland, District Councils, Police and Connexions to provide Countywide Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) infrastructure support services beginning from 1st April 2009.

Contract Performance Management

8. Performance management and monitoring arrangements have been established with the funders to ensure that key performance objectives and outcomes are being achieved by the new service.
9. A sub-regional funders group meets quarterly to assess VAL's performance together with the performance of the Community Hubs and Local Resource Centres. In addition separate meetings are held by funders and VAL to discuss performance in specific areas such as commissioning and procurement.

VAL Performance Framework

10. VAL has been commissioned to deliver countywide infrastructure services for three over-arching outcomes:-

Co-ordination, Engagement and Representation:

- The voices of the diversity of frontline voluntary and community groups will be heard by all appropriate strategic bodies and partnerships through identified representatives.
- There will be a range of communication strategies for Leicestershire Together partners to engage effectively with the VCS to enable them to influence future strategies, policies and practices at county, district or sub-regionally, as required by the funding partners.

Capacity Building and Support to the VCS

- The diversity of frontline voluntary and community organisations are supported to work more effectively by developing their capacity, quality and reach to deliver public services in partnership with community hubs and local communities.
- A range of high quality and accessible support mechanisms will be available for the diverse frontline groups in Leicestershire. These will be focused on improving sustainability, raising quality, and becoming more outcome focussed.

Volunteering

- The six core functions of a volunteer centre as defined by Volunteering England are delivered to the standard required to achieve Volunteering England quality accreditation. Accessible support for volunteers and volunteering is developed that meets local needs and increases the number of people volunteering across the private, public and voluntary sectors.

11. The three overarching outcomes are measured through a number of performance indicators. These indicators are also common for VAL services delivered in Leicester City. VAL has also worked closely with local Community Hubs and District Councils to deliver a range of locally based services.
12. The first year performance report with RAG ratings for the agreed indicators and commentary is reported in Appendix B. VAL's performance across 30 indicators has gradually improved through the year particularly as it became fully operational from the third quarter following recruitment of district based staff.
13. To meet the funders requirement for increased accessibility, VAL now provides extended opening hours through its telephone Helpline up to 7.00 p.m. four days a week and is also available on Saturdays. VAL staff provide support across the county on a one to one basis in addition to attending Community Hubs and Local Resource Centres for agreed drop ins. VAL has changed its website to reflect its operations across both

county and city and offers an online resource centre on various topics to support the VCS.

14. At the year end the overall position in relation to first year delivery targets is as follows:-

Summary of Performance on indicators	
Green	21
Amber	5
Red	4
Total	30

Performance reporting by over-arching outcomes

15. The current status for each outcome is set out in the section below. For each outcome the table shows the rating for the related indicators together with some achievements. Information on each of the red rated indicators is also set out below.

Co-ordination, Engagement and Representation

Green	7
Amber	3
Red	2
Total	12

16. VAL has undertaken an annual VCS survey to explore the views of voluntary and community groups on a range of issues including support from VAL. A majority of the groups (75%) said that they are well informed by VAL about strategies, policies and partnerships. They also said that public services value the work and independence of the VCS.
17. VAL has put in place methods to elect/select future VCS representatives for local partnerships such as the Health & Well-Being Partnership Board. A handbook to support VCS representatives has been produced. VAL officers have worked with a number of County Council services on specific topics such as personalisation, developing training and support plans to build capacity and the skills of the VCS from preparing business plans to submitting tenders for public services, as well as consultations on a number of strategies including the recent Leicestershire Housing Related Support Strategy.
18. VAL now represents the VCS in sub-regional strategies such as the Multi Area Agreement (MAA) on economic development and the task groups related to Total Place work streams such as Access to Services.

Red rated indicators

19. *Percentage of VCS groups and public agencies that think the Compact has improved relations between them* - The development of a revised Compact has been delayed to ensure that it aligns to the national review of the Compact. The National Compact was launched in December 2009. The revised Leicestershire Compact is currently out for consultation with VCS groups and public agencies with a deadline of 30th July 2010. An annual action plan for the Leicestershire Compact will be developed based on the feedback from the consultation as well as developments arising from the Coalition Government potential review of the National Compact.
20. *Percentage of partners and VCS groups that feel VCS representatives have effectively represented the sector* - The annual VCS survey recorded that 32% of VCS groups felt that VCS representatives have effectively represented the sector. VAL reports that mapping of a range of partnerships and groups has taken some time. A system has been established to elect/select future representatives, with a supporting handbook and training and strengthened communication links to and from the sector. The weekly bulletin from VAL is used to advertise partnerships who require VCS representation and invites nominees to put themselves forward for election. Recruitment of VCS representatives for the Health and Well Being Partnership is currently being undertaken. VAL informs the sector which VCS representatives are representing the sector on various partnerships.

Capacity Building and Support to VCS

Green	8
Amber	2
Red	1
Total	11

21. VAL produces a training programme based on identified need such as the 'Food Hygiene Certificate'; applying for grants from the Big Lottery or Grassroots Grant; Getting Volunteers Involved; and Vetting and Barring to Bidding for Contracts. These courses are offered across the county and city and many are free courses. Evaluation of training courses showed that 64% of participants agreed that training has enabled them to run their organisations more effectively.
22. The Online Resource Centre offers documents to help people or groups such as 'Your guide to setting up a Voluntary or Community Group'; 'Your guide to employing staff'; 'Your guide to funding in the voluntary and community sector' as well as 'Your guide to commissioning and procurement'.
23. In 2009/10 VAL has supported 474 Leicestershire-based organisations and provided 1:1 face-to-face support for 227 organisations. 94% of the organisations worked with have been small community groups with an

income of less than £10,000 and 2% have been Black and Minority Ethnic organisations. These figures are in line with the profile of Leicestershire's VCS, with the BME figure being double the % of BME organisations on the VAL database.

24. The table below shows a detailed breakdown of 1:1 face-to-face support provided across the 7 districts:

District	Groups 1:1	Sessions 1:1	Hours 1:1
Blaby	30	45	57
Charnwood	65	111	132
Harborough	22	29	104
Hinckley & Bosworth	29	49	29
Melton	23	38	30
NW Leicestershire	43	80	53
Oadby & Wigston	15	18	19
Leicestershire Total	227	370	423

Red rated indicator

25. *Percentage of key local commissioners and funders of VCS groups satisfied with capacity building services provided* - this assessment is through a public sector survey which had a minimal return rate. The survey has been re-issued to improve the return rate and ensure results are statistically reliable. The results have yet to be analysed. General feedback from local commissioners and funders has not identified any particular issues in relation to capacity building services. The County Council Commissioning and Procurement group is working closely with VAL to implement an action plan to ensure appropriate training and support is offered to VCS groups to work with public agencies.

Volunteering

Green	6
Amber	0
Red	1
Total	7

26. VAL has developed drop-in arrangements at Community Hubs and Local Resource Centres in the county in addition to the support provided through the City Centre drop-in location. VAL's annual survey identified that 91% of users of VAL's volunteering service found it easy to use. 3,327 people enquired about volunteering in the county.
27. Follow up of potential volunteers directed to volunteering opportunities over the last six months shows the following conversion rate by district. It

is anticipated that these rates will improve with cleaner data on volunteering conversion.

	Number of Enquiries	% Conversion rate
Blaby	403	23%
Charnwood	979	44%
Harborough	282	39%
Hinckley & Bosworth	387	38%
Melton	121	50%
North West Leicestershire	259	23%
Oadby & Wigston	319	30%

28. VAL's volunteering service has been revamped to bring together the Central Volunteering service with the District based service and linking with the work undertaken through the Stronger Communities agenda. A number of joint marketing events have been held across the county, for example in Melton to recruit volunteers.
29. Referral arrangements for volunteer enquiries between the Community Hubs/ Local Resource Centres and VAL have now been clarified. A volunteering network has been set up to support and connect managers of volunteers. VAL is also working with libraries to help promote volunteering through and in libraries. VAL is also now working with large employers to encourage them to develop employee volunteering schemes appropriate for their organisations.

Red rated indicator

30. *Number of volunteer enquiries* – The target for volunteer enquiries was based on VAL being operational in the districts from the second quarter 2009/10. However the need to recruit for district posts resulted in VAL becoming fully operational in the districts from the third quarter. The target for volunteer enquiries has therefore just been missed, although the previous county figure from the Voluntary Actions and Volunteer Centres for volunteer enquiries has been surpassed. VAL has undertaken a number of recruitment events including in partnership with Community Hubs. In addition 1st June 2010 to 7th June 2010 was national Volunteer Week and a number of events were being held across the county to increase volunteer numbers (Appendix C).

Consultations

31. The performance monitoring process provides a variety of feedback channels on the performance of the VCS infrastructure contract. This includes regular feedback from District colleagues at quarterly monitoring meetings with Community Hubs, other funders at the quarterly sub-regional monitoring meeting and feedback from colleagues from the County Council. VAL has responded quickly to any queries arising from the feedback.

32. VAL carries out an annual satisfaction survey of its services both with the VCS and funders on the support and services provided to the voluntary sector. Survey results from the VCS have been analysed and areas of improvement have been incorporated into this year's action plan. The feedback from the funders survey was limited and the survey has been issued again to ensure a better response rate.

Resources Implications

33. Under the new infrastructure arrangements the County Council and partners have made a significant investment in support to the voluntary sector. The current public sector funding environment means that efficiencies need to be looked for in all possible areas of operation. VAL's contract for countywide VCS infrastructure services includes efficiency savings for 2010/11 and a small efficiency reduction has been made in the community hubs funding. Further efficiency savings will be required in infrastructure costs in future years.

The Future

34. The Commission may wish to discuss with VAL the impact of the public sector funding reductions and the Coalition government approach to emphasise the role of the individual, communities and local government. In particular:-

- Reduction in spend will affect voluntary agencies whose main role is to deliver contracted services. What changes are required within the sector in response to these reductions and how can/ will VAL help promote these changes?
- There is an increased emphasis on communications and some VCS groups' main role is to provide support to communities of geography and communities of interest. How can these groups be supported and what role can/ will VAL play in supporting them?

35. Current levels of funding (2010/11) for the VCS (excluding educational & residential contracts) in Leicestershire from the County Council are summarised below:

Service Contracts		
Environment & Transport including Community Transport		£1,108,949
Children & Young People's Service		£3,126,974
Local Area Agreement		£1,509,000
Adults & Communities		£11,124,891
Chief Executives		£708,574
Chief Executives Infrastructure VCS Support Services (Contributions from District Councils, PCT, Police & Connexions have been excluded)	VAL	£685,300
	Community Hubs	£333,200
	Local Resource Centres	£29,000

36. Consultation is underway or about to begin regarding service contract reductions and infrastructure and other support funding is to be reduced (by £50k in 2010/11, £100k in 2011/12 and £150k in 2012/13).

Conclusion

37. VAL's contract for the provision of a VCS infrastructure support service is based on achieving a number of outcomes. Some outcomes will take time to be achieved. The first year performance report shows that good progress has been made towards achieving the outcomes set out in the contract, allowing for a late start following re-organisation and recruitment for new posts at VAL to form a new integrated organisation.
38. VAL has identified improvement actions for the 'Amber' and 'Red' indicators and these are considered at the quarterly monitoring meetings with all the funding partners.

Background Papers

Cabinet Report on 3rd April 2007 on Voluntary and Community Sector Infrastructure
Cabinet Report on 23rd November 2007 on Review of Voluntary and Community Sector Infrastructure

Circulation Under Sensitive Issues Procedures

None.

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List of Appendices

Appendix A - Outcomes to be achieved by Countywide Infrastructure Organisation
Appendix B - VAL Performance Report for 2009/10
Appendix C – Programme of events for Volunteers Week

Relevant Impact Assessments

Equal Opportunities Implications

VAL's contract seeks to ensure that the diverse range of the voluntary and community groups in Leicestershire receive appropriate support to effectively provide services to their community and engage effectively in relevant partnerships.

Crime and Disorder Implications

VAL works with community groups across the county and supports the work being undertaken by the Stronger Communities Board to build stronger communities particularly in priority neighbourhoods.

Environmental Impact

VAL provides volunteer brokerage services that assist community groups who provide a range of environmental services.

Partnership Working and Associated Issues

VAL has to work in partnership with voluntary and community groups, statutory organisations and the private sector to achieve the outcomes in the contract. VAL is also advising and supporting a range of LSP work including Stronger Communities.

Risk Assessment

Any poor performance by VAL would affect the support offered to VCS groups in the county to engage with statutory agencies to deliver effective services to their communities. Effective performance monitoring and regular liaison is in place to mitigate the risk.