

SCRUTINY COMMISSION – 1 SEPTEMBER 2010

REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

VOLUNTARY ACTION LEICESTERSHIRE

Purpose of Report

1. The purpose of this report is to summarise the key points made at the Commission's meeting with Voluntary Action LeicesterShire (VAL) on 14 July and the views of the Scrutiny Commissioners on the way ahead.

Voluntary Action LeicesterShire

2. Some of the key points that came out of the meeting with Kevan Liles of VAL were:
 - (a) VAL had been awarded the contract by the County Council because of the poor level of service offered by the voluntary sector;
 - (b) Much of the discussion revolved around the relationship between VAL and the Community Hubs, which at present did not appear to be positive. The value of the hubs was brought into question, as they presently did not have a clearly defined role. There was a risk that their funding would be lost altogether if their performance did not improve;
 - (c) A number of services provided by the community hubs were currently under review.
 - (d) Some hubs had suggested merging with VAL in an effort to deliver efficiency savings. However, it was not considered appropriate and that the hubs should operate in their own right;
 - (e) Little questioning at the Commission had related to the new contract arrangements and rather focused on the hubs. It was therefore stressed that the voluntary sector was made up of over 3,500 groups and VAL would be required to support all of them if they were to succeed in better supporting the voluntary sector as a whole.
3. There was a view at the meeting that, should the Commission wish to scrutinise the voluntary sector arrangements further, it should take evidence from the hubs themselves and some of the many other voluntary groups.

Deliberations by the Scrutiny Commissioners

4. The Commissioners were advised that the reason for creating a single contract for infrastructure was that the VCS in Leicestershire had itself identified considerable weaknesses in the infrastructure support services that it was receiving under previous arrangements. The contract which was won by VAL is supported by a clear and measurable performance framework, the year 1 results of which were presented to the Commission by Mr Liles its Chief Executive.
5. The performance required of and provided by the Community Hubs on the other hand was less clear and less measurable. The need for clarity of roles between the infrastructure provider (VAL) and the Community Hubs and for reconsideration of the role of Community Hubs in the light of changes to services contracts and the Government's Big Society proposals was recognised.. As a result an external review has been agreed by funding partners. A suitable external consultant and approach has been identified and it is hoped the work can be completed and reported by the end of October/early November.
6. The Commissioners also noted that a key part of the Coalition Government's agenda included a greater role for the voluntary and community sector both in service delivery and in supporting communities to help themselves, the 'Big Society' agenda. This is an issue which the Commissioners considered would merit investigation by a scrutiny panel which could undertake a survey of the voluntary sector's readiness to meet such a challenge and how the County Council and other partners would need to support the voluntary sector in both these roles. The external review referred to in paragraph 5 above would also provide useful information for such a review. The Commissioners will be meeting again in September to scope such a review with the aim of starting the review in October and reporting to the Commission in December so that the findings can inform budget deliberations.

Recommendation

7. The Commission is asked to endorse the view of the Commissioners that a scrutiny review panel should be established to assess the voluntary sector's readiness to meet the challenges posed by the Coalition Government and how the County Council and other partners would need to engage with the voluntary sector to enable them to rise to this challenge.

Background Papers

None.

Circulation under Local Issues Alerts

None.

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List of Appendices

Appendix – Extract of the Minutes of the meeting of the Scrutiny Commission with
Voluntary Action LeicesterShire