

96. Voluntary Action LeicesterShire - Performance Report 2009/10.

The Commission considered a performance report of Voluntary Action LeicesterShire (VAL) during the first year of the new infrastructure contract. A copy of the report, marked 'C', is filed with these minutes.

The Chairman welcomed Kevan Liles, Chief Executive of VAL to the meeting.

In response to questions from members, Mr. Liles advised the Commission as follows:-

- The relationship between VAL and the community hubs had been a difficult one, as there had been a perception that VAL had 'taken' their funding. It was VAL's responsibility to keep a watching brief on the hubs and some work had been carried out to assist them in defining their role in the sector, though their role remained largely unclear at this stage. It was stressed that VAL was required to create effective relationships and support all 3,500 voluntary and community sector (VCS) groups and that the hubs represented small part of the voluntary sector;
- If the community hubs did not deliver a return for their funding (£70,000 per hub), there remained the concern that this funding would be lost, not only to the hubs, but to the voluntary sector as a whole;
- There was a concern that there was a limited pool of VCS representatives that could be drawn on to represent the sector. It would take time before a diverse group of representatives with the necessary range of skills, knowledge and experience could be recruited to respond to the range of pressures faced by the sector;
- The survey of public agencies' satisfaction with the VCS issued by VAL had received a poor response rate. For this reason, the survey would be re-issued in the hope that more data could be collected to formulate a more solid basis on which to form views on the sector;
- Voluntary Action Hinckley and Bosworth had put forward the possibility of joining forces with VAL in an effort to deliver efficiency savings. It remained, however, a hope that the hubs in each of the districts would be enabled to work more effectively and deliver sustainable services to the public;

The Chief Executive reported that the single contract for the voluntary sector support that had been awarded from April 2009 was a response to the unsatisfactory service that had previously been provided to the VCS as a whole (including the separate 3,500 separate groups) by the Voluntary Actions (now known as community hubs). VAL's role as the successful contractor was to achieve challenging targets including better training and support for those 3,500 organisations and higher numbers of volunteers being recruited. The community hubs were separately contracted to provide general support within their district areas and to provide specific services, although a number of these services were currently under review.

A view was expressed that in order for the Commission to scrutinise fully the voluntary sector in a balanced fashion, it might wish to hear evidence from a range of VCS agencies including the larger providers such as Age Concern, the community hubs and other voluntary and community groups. It was acknowledged that this might fall more appropriately within the remit of a scrutiny review panel.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the first year performance report of Voluntary Action LeicesterShire be noted;
- (b) That the points now raised be the subject of a discussion between the Scrutiny Commissioners in order that a view can be formed on how best to progress the matter and that the outcome of those discussions, together with a summary of the points raised, be presented to the Commission at its next meeting on 1 September.