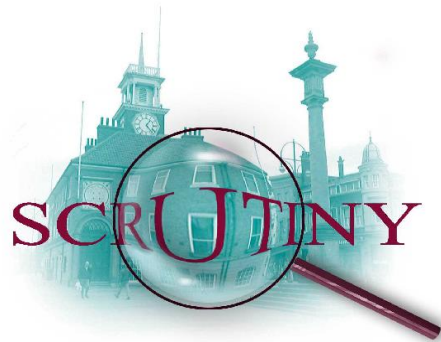


**Corporate and Social Inclusion  
Select Committee  
– Task and Finish Group**

**Review of the Voluntary and  
Community Sector**



**June 2008**

## 1.0 Executive Summary

- 1.0 The Voluntary and Community Sector can be defined as organisations set up by individuals and groups whose primary objectives are social rather than economic. These organisations are independent, provide a form of service and may campaign on issues which are of concern to them. These groups are often funded by grants and donations, and are normally formally constituted. Voluntary organisations are sometimes larger and some operate across a wide area, with a staff of paid professionals to support their work. Community organisations are rooted within more specific locations and are largely made up of grass roots volunteers. The VCS is part of what is termed the 'Third Sector', as compared to the public and private sector.
- 1.1 Local authorities have long had close relations with the VCS and are the biggest single source of funding for the sector. But within national policy there is now an ever increasing emphasis towards engaging with the sector in order to jointly deliver services and further contribute towards local decision making, alongside recognition of the role the sector fulfil in contributing towards civil society and sustainable communities.
- 1.2 The Committee found that there are a wide range of VCS organisations operating in Stockton Borough. An indication of the size of the sector can be gained from the database of Stockton Residents and Community Groups Association (SRCGA). This register has approximately 430 affiliates, and it is recognised that there are other groups within the Borough who are not affiliated to SRCGA. The sector ranges from small activity groups based in local community centres to larger organisations such as the International Family Centre and Five Lamps which provide a variety of services. Stockton Council provides core funding to eleven organisations within the voluntary sector.
- 1.3 The Group have found that there is an important contribution made by the Borough's Voluntary and Community Sector in delivering high quality services and opportunities for local people. It is clear that much hard work goes on to provide these services and this should be recognised and valued. The Group have taken the opportunity to provide an overview of many of the issues affecting the local VCS and have made recommendations in order to secure further improvements and greater understanding where necessary.
- 1.4 The Group acknowledge and recognised the work done by the Community Development Team over the last 12 months. In the past there has had to be a concentration on 'fire-fighting' problems as they arose. This has changed and the Team have concentrated on providing a support infrastructure with the link officers providing support to their portfolio of community centres.
- 1.5 VCS groups are becoming increasingly involved within local public service provision and the need for the VCS to have due regard to good governance is as important as ever. The Group recognise that the risks and responsibilities of many VCS organisations are often as great as those involved in running a small business, and members and volunteers need training and support to fulfil their duties. At the same time, the Council, as the body responsible for

co-ordinating the funding of several million pounds of public money into the sector, needs to be re-assured that the recipient organisations are robust.

- 1.6 The Group have considered the voluntary sector organisations which do not receive core funding in order to assess their support needs. The Group recognise the value and role of the entire sector including the need to continue to provide challenge using its position on the various Renaissance Boards. The Group are satisfied that all the core funded organisations contribute in some way to the aims of the Community Strategy. The group expects that its comments will be taken on board during future work, and in particular the forthcoming review of the Voluntary Sector Support Fund.
- 1.7 It is recognised that various challenges exist for the sector to cope with and the Group believe that the Council should continue to assist when appropriate, including the need to value volunteering and assistance with procurement, in conjunction with relevant partners. Within the Council, the Group have identified some outstanding issues which it believes require resolving, including the organisation of community centres, in order to secure best value for all.
- 1.8 Catalyst is the new organisation to replace Stockton Voluntary Development Agency (SVDA) and the need for a new body to provide a strategic voice for the sector has been acknowledged. However, the Group have identified a number of uncertainties in relation to the new body, Catalyst, and believe that by gaining clarity on these issues it will be for the benefit of all within the sector, including Catalyst.
- 1.9 The Group recommend:

### **Volunteering**

- 1. That the Council undertake a feasibility study into encouraging employees to volunteer with accredited voluntary organisations, and the study's scope to include reference to allowing paid and unpaid time off, acknowledging and rewarding volunteers, pre-retirement information and use of volunteer champions;**
- 2. That those organisations that receive core funding from SBC should provide a clear annual statement concerning the training and support they provide for their own volunteers, and that this should be written into funding agreements;**
- 3. That an appropriate, willing core funded organisation be identified to have responsibility for provision of a 'volunteering bureau';**

### **Community Centres**

- 4. That the Corporate Directors of DNS and CESC should take forward a response to the Audit Report on Youth and Community Centres, including reference to the status of Ragworth Neighbourhood Centre and that a report should be prepared for**

**CMT and reported back through the scrutiny monitoring process within six months;**

- 5. The provision of a freephone to access Council services (as exists in Ragworth Neighbourhood Centre) should be examined as to whether it could be replicated elsewhere;**

#### **Governance**

- 6. That the Council should continue to review and resolve governance issues including:**
  - to ensure that Members receive appropriate support to fulfil their roles on VCS bodies, including a review of guidance currently issued, and to consider how information regarding the activities of VCS organisations appointed to by this Council may be best brought to the attention of Members;**
  - reviewing which organisations should be required to complete the Governance Self Assessment documentation, and making sure that it is understandable for those which are, especially those organisations which no longer have Member representation;**
- 7. That the Council should continue to ensure the governance compliance of 3<sup>rd</sup> sector partners when procuring services from them, and the maintenance of an up to date, central register of compliant organisations should be developed;**
- 8. That, building on what information the Council already holds, a mapping exercise should be carried out in order to ascertain the full extent of the Borough's voluntary and community sector, where the Council has a funding or contractual relationship;**

#### **Core Funded Organisations**

- 9. That all core funded organisations must have information readily available to the public giving details of trustees, the annual report and the accounts;**
- 10. That there should be a memorandum of understanding between Council, SCRGA and Catalyst regarding the sharing of data of VCS groups;**

11. That the following statement be included within the terms and conditions of future core funding and grant agreements: ‘This grant/ funding is issued for the stated specific purpose. A condition of accepting the grant is that your organisation agrees to the Council having access to your records in order to demonstrate that funding is used appropriately’;
12. That core funded organisations should consider the merits of attaining charity status, in view of the potential reduction of costs to the Council in relation to rate relief and themselves in reduction of energy costs;
13. That the council examine the issues in relation to funding and relationships (outlined on page 29-30) as part of future work in relation to the core funded organisations;

#### Procurement

14. That the Council should continue to examine opportunities to provide procurement help and advice to the sector;
15. That, where appropriate, funding from the Council to the VCS should be in the form of 3-year contracts in order to provide stability for organisations;

#### Catalyst

16. That the new Executive Director of Catalyst be requested to attend Corporate, Adult Services and Social Inclusion Select Committee within six months to provide information and clarity on the role and workings of Catalyst, including their role in allocating funding and procurement criteria, and progress in relation to building relations with all the Borough’s VCS and refreshing the Memorandum and Articles of Association.
17. That following evidence received during the review regarding the concerns of a number of organisations surrounding the former SVDA and the lack of confidence which ensued, the Group recommend that an investigation takes place.