

# **Social Justice & Regeneration Committee**

**SJR(2)-01-07(p.6)**

**Date: 18 January 2007**

**Venue: Senedd**

**Title: Draft Strategic Action Plan - Voluntary Sector Scheme**

## **Purpose**

To invite the Committee to comment on the draft Strategic Action Plan for the Voluntary Sector Scheme. The draft Plan is out for public consultation until 4 April 2007.

Members will recall that I have kept them informed of the progress of this work in my reports to committee in July, September and November.

## **Summary / Recommendations**

I have launched a public consultation on a new Strategic Action Plan for the Voluntary Sector Scheme. In summary, the draft Strategic Action Plan:

Reaffirms the Assembly Government's commitment to the principles and values in the Voluntary Sector Scheme

Presents a clear picture of what the next Assembly Government might wish to achieve through its support for the sector, and proposes a new 'vision statement' to underpin this relationship

### **Calls on the Assembly Government to:**

champion the sector's interests at the highest level and across the whole of government

create new administrative arrangements to provide more integrated support to the third sector

identify a set of 'civil empowerment indicators' so that progress towards the Plan's citizen involvement and empowerment goals can be assessed

Identifies a range of actions for the Assembly Government and the sector to take, organised under seven headings:

Volunteering to make a difference; Building sustainable communities; Helping citizens to be heard; Delivering citizen-centred public services; The Voluntary Sector Scheme and Compacts; Generic and

specialist support services; Capacity building for raised performance and growth

Takes account of the extant recommendations of the Independent Commission that reviewed the Voluntary Sector Scheme in 2004.

The Committee is invited to comment on the draft Plan. Members may also wish to comment individually, and have until 4 April to do this.

## **Background**

The Voluntary Sector Scheme sets out the broad principles and shared values governing the relationship between the Assembly and the voluntary sector. Section 2.4 of the Scheme requires the Assembly Government, in consultation with the sector, ‘to develop and maintain a separate Action Plan by which performance against the Scheme can be monitored effectively’.

In March 2004, the Independent Commission that reviewed the Voluntary Sector Scheme recommended that the Assembly Government:

‘should, in full consultation with the sector through the Voluntary Sector Partnership Council, develop and publish a new Strategic Action Plan, setting out the next steps in implementing the Scheme in the light of the Commission’s recommendations. It should assign responsibilities, set deadlines, and identify milestones and indicators for monitoring and evaluation’. (Recommendation no.3).

In October 2004, the Assembly Government accepted this and all of the Commission’s other recommendations. In January 2005, I appointed a Joint Working Group, comprising officials and sector representatives, to oversee the implementation of the Plan, and of various other recommendations.

The Joint Working Group considered the recommendation in detail, at meetings in May, June, August and October 2005. Arising from its discussions, the Group prepared two papers; one set out how the preparation of the plan should be taken forward, the other detailed a range of possible shared objectives for the sector and the Assembly Government. In addition, it recommended that an independent consultant be appointed to undertake this work.

In May 2006, I approved the appointment of Dr Neil Caldwell to write the draft Plan and consultation paper. I also agreed that in view of the proximity to the forthcoming Assembly elections, the work would, in effect, be geared towards the new Administration. This approach has been endorsed by the Voluntary Sector Partnership Council, and by my Cabinet colleagues.

## **Consideration**

The draft Strategic Action Plan was written and revised during September, October and November. It was subsequently approved by Cabinet members, and the consultation period began on 2 January. The draft Plan and accompanying consultation paper are attached at Annex 1.

In preparing the draft Plan, Dr Caldwell has undertaken extensive 'pre-consultation', to ensure that the document takes account of other current policy initiatives, including Delivering the Connections, the Beecham Review, Health Challenge Wales, Designed for Life, the Social Enterprise Strategy, Learning to Live Differently and the Government of Wales Act. This pre-consultation has included:

- extensive background reading on the operation of the Voluntary Sector Scheme, previous review and consultation responses, the complex policy and procedural framework within which the Scheme is required to function, relevant thinking and developments elsewhere in the UK, and papers prepared by the Joint Working Group
- a large number of interviews with officials from various departments exploring the implications of the Scheme on their work and responsibilities
- selected interviews with voluntary and community sector practitioners
- meetings with the Voluntary Sector Partnership Council's 'Joint Working Group' (this has acted as a sounding board for discussion of potential ideas for the Plan).
- a meeting with Whitehall officials to discuss the current Cabinet Office/HM Treasury Review of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Sector.

In addition, two workshops structured around clusters of Ministerial portfolios were held in September, to test out the initial ideas for the Plan, and to ensure that specific portfolio interests were taken into account. The workshops were attended by senior officials, and by people representing a cross-section of interests from the voluntary sector, and were well received.

## **Financial Implications**

The cost of implementing many of the actions can be accommodated from within existing resources. However others (for example the introduction of a Third Sector Services Capacity Building Fund) would if agreed require a significant new commitment from the incoming Administration. No provision for these items has been made within the 2007/8 budget, so implementation would depend on resources being secured under the Budget Planning Round for 2008/9 and for subsequent years.

Treasury officials have advised that the current HM Treasury/Cabinet Office 'Review of the Third Sector' may yield consequential funding for the Assembly Government, as part of the UK Government's drive to promote third sector capacity. If this transpires, this could assist the next Assembly Government to fund any major spending commitments, if it decides to make them.

## **Cross Cutting Themes**

The Strategic Action Plan was developed in consultation with officials from all Assembly Government Departments, and with a range of partners from the voluntary sector. The Plan takes into

account the Assembly Government's cross-cutting themes of equality, sustainability and social inclusion/justice.

Many of these proposed actions are cross-cutting and will impact upon all Departments, for example the calls for:

- Ministers / Departments to include tasks in support of the Strategic Action Plan within Departmental Operational Plans
- Departments to clarify how they will enhance the contribution of volunteers to the delivery of their objectives
- the introduction of a Code of Practice on Consultation
- the introduction of a Third Sector Services Capacity Building Fund
- the Code of Practice for Funding the Voluntary Sector to be revised to include 'Full Cost Recovery', and best practice on procurement.

### **Action for Subject Committee**

The committee is asked to comment on the draft Strategic Action Plan.

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