

STRATEGIC GRANTS REVIEW GROUP

18 July 2014

PRESENT – Councillors Crichlow, Macnab, Newall (in the Chair), and Scott.

APOLOGIES – Councillors Donoghue, Haszeldine, Nutt, EA Richmond, S Richmond and J Taylor.

OFFICERS – Catherine Whitehead, Assistant Chief Executive, Mary Hall, Senior Engagement Officer and Karen Graves, Democratic Officer.

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE – Stephanie Sexton, Consultant.

Declarations of Interest – Councillors Newall and Macnab each declared an interest due to their involvement with Citizens' Advice Bureau.

Purpose of the Meeting – The Group met to give consideration to the report (previously circulated) produced by the external consultant to review infrastructure support in Darlington and to contemplate future infrastructure support provision and ensure its agreed outcomes are delivered.

The Senior Engagement Officer set out the current position and advised Group that an external consultant had undertaken the review through face to face discussions and workshops with people from the sector at local, regional and national level and representatives of the local authority. Group were also advised that there was currently a national review of infrastructure taking place led by the National Association for Voluntary and Community Action (NAVCA).

The Consultant advised the committee that she was not a Darlington resident and was not familiar with the area. It was emphasised that we are living in a changing world and it is even more important that voluntary and community organisations work together to achieve best possible outcomes. An effective infrastructure was very important to set a tone and culture for people to work together. All organisations should welcome constructive criticism and address the issues raised. The sector has changed and now includes community interest companies. An understanding of what was meant by the not-for-profit organisations is needed within Darlington's vision of the sector

The committee was advised that infrastructure support should be there to serve the needs of the sector as a whole, whether large or small voluntary organisations, community organisations and social enterprises. The voluntary sector has people who specialise in their own fields but need to work across the sector more widely and infrastructure support should help to facilitate and encourage this.

Some organisations determined what they were going to do based on the needs of the community. Mapping was often done, however, the information gathered was not always shared across the sector. A need at one level could be better matched to a resource elsewhere.

The infrastructure organisation had to be transparent with its processes and engage with the sector so that they understood what was being done and by which organisation. Conversely the sector and other key stakeholders had to engage with infrastructure to shape priorities and manner of delivery, ensuring that it fits with organisational needs.

Members were advised that organisations were being asked to recruit volunteers to undertake services that the Local Authority could no longer provide. This was possibly over-aspirational as some volunteers were happy to do some activities on a 'one off' basis. Clear Terms of Reference and outcomes were required for the infrastructure in order to measure the value of their actions. There needed to be a feedback loop between infrastructure and organisations in the sector to identify what had been achieved by the support offered to organisations.

It was stated that £400k was granted to Evolution to establish the Mirus System, a dedicated web-based system. This would provide a directory of voluntary and community organisations within Darlington outlining what they do and how they could provide help. Mirus should be a resource for the Third sector initially funded as part of Transforming Infrastructure Programme. Evolution is currently working to ensure it is populated in order for it to work effectively. There were uncertainties around the success of Mirus raised as part of the review and it was emphasised that any model of generic database needed to be fit for purpose and use of it and outcomes should be measured.

There are many enthusiastic small community groups in Darlington who need advice and support in order to progress. The infrastructure organisation will need to devote time to assist these groups.

Members gave consideration to the Recommendations and they were pleased to hear the recommendation of an Action Plan with Darlington Partnership for an initial period of six months and a second Action Plan including the CCG thereafter. This would determine the priorities for the infrastructure as to how views of the sector are identified, how actions are picked up and how decisions that are finally concluded are effectively communicated to the sector in a clear and timely manner.

Discussion is needed in relation to the different roles of Healthwatch and Evolution and to facilitate a protocol for effective working.

Members were keen for a directory of volunteers to be produced. The role of infrastructure and the importance of a two way flow from the Partnership to both large and small organisations was raised.

In relation to Appendix 4 – Fieldwork Key Findings and Implications the Group wanted the organisations to work together due to limited resources, as it is essential to avoid duplication, and also the Council's role needed to be clarified. There had to be clear leadership which helped smaller groups to understand the bigger picture and tap into resources and other forms of assistance.

IT WAS AGREED – (a) That the thanks of this Review Group be extended to Stephanie Sexton for her informative and detailed report.

(b) That the comments of this Review Group form part of the report determining how infrastructure support should be provided in the future to ensure it is effective and performance managed to evidence effectiveness and value for money.

C) That a further report be prepared by the Assistant Chief Executive to be presented to the members.