ITEM NO.   ....8(f)............

INFRASTRUCTURE REVIEW

Responsible Cabinet Member - Councillor Andy Scott, Health and Partnerships Portfolio

Responsible Director - Catherine Whitehead, Assistant Chief Executive

SUMMARY REPORT

Purpose of the Report

1. To seek Members agreement to proposed changes to the funding of infrastructure support to the voluntary sector from September 2015.

Background

2. The Council has set out an overall objective of Building Stronger Communities within One Darlington: Perfectly Placed. As part of the overall approach to austerity a direction of travel has been outlined which sees commissioners working with the not for profit sector to design alternative delivery models for core services and to strengthen community involvement to reduce demand. This report examines the current provision of infrastructure and aims to ensure that future support is well placed to enable the sector to respond to the challenges of new ways of working within a changed financial climate.

Summary

3. A review of Strategic Grants conducted by the Health and Partnership Scrutiny Task and Finish Group has led to an examination of current infrastructure support to the voluntary sector. An independent consultant's review was commissioned and an action plan has been developed to enable the existing infrastructure support to move towards an alternative model.

4. The full report can be found at:

    http://www.darlington.gov.uk/media/407926/Darlington-Report-Appendix-2.pdf

    and it was presented to Health and Partnerships Scrutiny on 15 September 2014. The full infrastructure report was then shared with all of the people who had participated in the review.

5. Following release of this report an action plan based upon the priority areas identified in the report was developed by Darlington Borough Council and the

Executive Director of Evolution which was presented to Evolution's Board and Health and Partnerships Scrutiny Committee. The local authority has worked with Evolution over the past 6 months to support delivery of this plan.

6. This work has enabled us to review the strategic grant which the Council provides to support infrastructure. It has identified that the Council's priorities and the economic climate have changed since the last review of strategic grant. This report proposes that a new model would provide targeted support in areas identified by the review as the key priorities moving forward. A commissioned rather than grant funded approach will better enable performance against the desired outcomes to be measured. The new arrangements will involve the development of stronger networks to help strategic commissioning and to improve working across the sector, web based funding and governance support to streamline delivery and maximise funding opportunities and a commissioned service to provide dedicated support to volunteers and to promote volunteering.

7. This report sets out :-

   (a) Information and analysis based upon the Infrastructure review
   (b) Priorities as identified in the Infrastructure review
   (c) Best Practice examples from elsewhere
   (d) Proposal for future delivery

Recommendation

8. It is recommended that Members:-

   (a) Approve the proposal to remove the Strategic Grant in relation to infrastructure.
   (b) Agree to support the development of an effective representational forum which can help to achieve the broader objectives of commissioners whilst providing effective representation and engagement with the sector.
   (c) Agree to the commission of an electronic funding resource which can also provide community based governance information to support community groups and voluntary sector organisations.
   (d) Agree to the commission of a service to recruit and support volunteers and to promote volunteering across the Borough.
   (e) To establish a performance framework to monitor the number of volunteers and the contribution of volunteering to drawing in external funding and reducing demand.
   (f) Note that the proposals in this report will enable the savings identified within the Strategic Grant budget as set out in the MTFP for 2016/17 to be achieved.

Reasons for the Recommendations

9. The reasons for the recommendations are set out more fully in the report but in brief these are:

   a) To realise the savings in Strategic Grant detailed in the MTFP.
   b) To support the delivery of the objective 'Building Stronger Communities' and in particular to provide effective representation, grow volunteering and support volunteers.
   c) To maximise the amount of external funding which Darlington is able to attract.

d) To manage the performance of relevant commissioning.

Catherine Whitehead
Assistant Chief Executive

Background Papers

(i)   Darlington Borough Council Cabinet Paper dated 1 July 2013
(ii)   Health and Partnerships Scrutiny Paper 10 December 2013
(iii) Health and Partnerships Scrutiny Paper 15 September 2014
(iv)   Cabinet Paper 6 January 2015

Mary Hall : Extension 6053

S17 Crime and Disorder	There are no direct benefits for crime and disorder but many of the issues of this report are of secondary benefit in reducing crime and disorder.
Health and Well Being	Provision of infrastructure support to the VCS supports people with health and social care needs and facilitates prevention activity.
Carbon Impact	There are no carbon impacts
Diversity	Infrastructure support will also assist organisations that work with diverse communities.
Wards Affected	All wards are affected by delivery funded supported through infrastructure
Groups Affected	The whole population will potentially be impacted upon by the infrastructure support available to voluntary and community organisations.
Budget and Policy Framework	This report does not represent a change to the budget and policy framework
Key Decision	The report has been included within the Forward Plan.
Urgent Decision	This is not an urgent decision.
One Darlington: Perfectly Placed	Organisations accessing support a number of vulnerable people in Darlington and will help to reduce inequalities.
Efficiency	This report aims to identify savings within the Strategic Grants budget and also to maximise the opportunities for drawing down external funding the sector and the Borough as a whole.

MAIN REPORT

Information and Analysis of the Infrastructure review

9. All recipients of Strategic Grant were asked to attend a Health and Partnership Scrutiny Task and Finish Group in June 2013. The aim of this meeting was to discuss the existing use of the grant and the outcomes it was able to deliver. It was agreed as part of the work plan for scrutiny that further work was needed to assess effectiveness including the ring-fenced allocation to Evolution for the provision of infrastructure.

10. An end of year performance report in relationship to organisations in receipt of Strategic Grant was brought to Health and Partnership Scrutiny on 17 June 2014. Scrutiny requested quarterly updates on delivery by all recipients of strategic grant including the infrastructure body. This process evidenced that frontline delivery organisations were performing well and in many cases were over performing against outcomes and outputs required.

11. It was identified that a more detailed review of infrastructure was needed as the economic environment had changed and also there were concerns about the delivery of infrastructure support. Stephanie Sexton from Russams was appointed to deliver a review of infrastructure following a quotation process.

12. The review was conducted through a process of telephone and face to face interviews with over 40 people from the community sector, voluntary sector, public sector, national and regional infrastructure support providers and Evolution as the existing local provider.

13. A Think-Piece was written by the consultant and workshops undertaken to discuss this prior to the development of the final infrastructure review report which can be found at http://www.darlington.gov.uk/media/407926/Darlington-Report-Appendix-2.pdf

14. The report highlighted the need for infrastructure to provide a national perspective to help the sector understand changes in legislation, shifts in policy and the impact of these on the not-for-profit sector. It also highlighted the need for funding support especially for smaller organisations, governance support and support for volunteering recruitment and ongoing mentoring.

15. Volunteering was highlighted as a key area in which the role of the infrastructure body was pivotal. Feedback from the review stated that there appeared to be no single point of contact for volunteering and opportunities were being lost. Signposting of volunteers was dependent on the signposter's own knowledge of groups and organisations in Darlington and their ability to involve volunteers and support them. The report recommended an action plan to deliver improvements and to see if the current arrangements could be restructured to meet the changed requirements.

16. The action plan was developed through detailed collaboration with the Chief Executive Officer of Evolution over a number of meetings throughout the summer and early autumn. The draft action plan was designed as a transition process

making the steps towards changed infrastructure support rather than reflecting each of the specific recommendations of the report.

17. The action plan was presented to the Board of Evolution on 7 October 2014. It was agreed that the Executive Director and Operational Manager from Evolution would meet on a monthly basis to review performance and agree how this would be evidenced.   The review of the Action Plan will be presented to Health and Partnerships Scrutiny Committee on 17 June 2015. The review has supported the development of the proposals outlined below.

Priorities identified in the Infrastructure Review

18. The key priorities are identified by the grouping of a number of issues within the action plan into three key strands. These are:-

    (a) Representational and Strategic Infrastructure Support
    (b) Information, Governance and Funding
    (c) Volunteering, Recruitment, Placement and Support

Reasoning

(a) Representational and Strategic Infrastructure Support

19. The issue of representation and strategic support was raised as important in giving the sector a strong voice that could influence policy developments as well as delivery. This was seen as key both from within the sector and also with public sector bodies and in particular commissioners. To be representative requires individuals to discuss issues with the sector and feed these into the relevant discussions in strategic fora.

20. Organisations expressed the view that they needed to understand more about what each other deliver and for support in mapping the pattern of not for profit services delivered across the Borough. Much of this support and mentoring can be provided by representatives within the sector but it needs to have a forum for this interaction to take place. One of the priorities in the action plan was the facilitation of the Strategy and Development Group and although the group has been established and has begun the task of mapping the pattern of children's services it has yet to achieve the widespread support of the sector necessary to enable it to achieve the goals outlined.

21. There are also a number of network groups including the Co-production Group the Supporting People Core Strategy Group, Darlington Organisations Together, Financial Inclusion Action Group, Darlington for Culture and others which can have a role to play with a limited amount of support these groups can provide representation of specific issues into a strategic forum.

22. A strong strategic group would provide a forum for commissioners such as the local authority, health, police and fire to bring opportunities for co-production, co-design, joint funding bids, commissioning and broader service developments to the sector. It can provide a forum to enable the 'joining up' of activity within and across the sector. This joint activity could increase the funds being brought into Darlington, help manage demand on services by developing prevention services and facilitate

co-design that involves not only large commissioned organisations but service users, carers and a broad range of providers.

23. Research work carried out regionally supports the development of these new delivery models and Darlington's sector is well placed to respond to the challenges and opportunities that the financial climate presents.

(b) Information, Governance and Funding

24. The infrastructure report highlighted the need for ongoing infrastructure support but recognised the need for change. Sara Llewellin, Chair of the Independent Commission on the Future of Local Infrastructure has commented as follows:

    "Infrastructure needs to be financed but it also needs to undergo a redesign, It needs to be leaner, meaner and more technologically savvy. It needs to act as a lever bringing in new resources……

25. Provision of one to one support to small organisations can no longer be funded. Support on set up, governance, charity law and funding opportunities needs to be made readily available to small and emerging organisations. This could also include basic policies including Health and Safety, Safeguarding, HR, Training modules and a range of model policies and how to adapt them for local circumstances.

26. In order to survive these organisations will need to be able to use the electronic sources of information available nationally and locally in one form or another and they will need to be able to self-serve. A service which helps them to navigate the myriad of national resources available and which provides them with intelligent search facilities for funding opportunities can be purchased at relatively low cost and is widely used nationally as a means of providing a technical solution to infrastructure support. The report highlights below examples of how this has been well exploited in other areas.

(c) Volunteering Recruitment, Placement and Support

27. The most crucial need identified with the infrastructure review was that of support to an effective and efficient volunteer bureau. During the review process many people commented on the lack of a co-ordinated approach and the lack of ongoing support both for volunteers and organisations. Key points raised were:

    (a) Signposting and Recruitment
    (b) Mapping to identify the range of opportunities and the range of volunteers required by the sector
    (c) Checking, training, development supervision, mentoring and support to volunteers once recruited to help retention and development.

28. The sector identified the need for a bureau that very clearly stated what it was, so that people with little or no knowledge of the sector in Darlington could locate it quickly and easily. In this regard the branding of the current provider was seen as unhelpful.

29. Marketing and volunteer fairs are also important. Taking advantage of major events such as the Festival of Thrift and the Rugby World Club to recruit volunteers can help bring new volunteers in quickly. Support and training is vital to help capitalise on new recruits to enable their development and retention. It is also important to include activity to encourage a wide range of volunteers including those with professional skills. This would include direct approaches to organisations who employ people with those skills.

30. There needs to be a pro-active approach to groups who may have a particular need to add volunteering onto a CV. Students are one example of this and the timing of recruitment activities could be targeted at the times that students may be coming to or returning to Darlington. Other potential groups are those that are approaching retirement and a bureau could establish links to retirement preparation courses.

31. Voluntary Sector organisations who participated in the infrastructure review expected infrastructure organisations to provide advice and support for volunteers. Organisations said that too often volunteers went directly to them and valuable time of front-line staff was needed to assess if the volunteer was suitable and to explain the type of opportunity available.

32. Support for individual volunteers is required to explain the benefits of volunteering but also the risks and challenges including the impact on welfare benefits and this requires skills that may not be available in all frontline organisations.

33. There is also a lack of support to resolve issues where the volunteering opportunity does not work out in a particular organisation. The reasons for this can be various ranging from, lack of skills, physical or mental health issues, personality clashes, changing commitments both of the individual and organisations, lack of understanding of role, failure to value volunteer, failure to understand and implement policy and culture. A volunteer bureau operating effectively is not unlike an HR department which helps to ensure that broad policies are implemented for effective recruitment and retention. It can advise organisations about legal developments including clarity about the distinction between volunteering and employment and the extent of the duties and responsibilities of organisations to their volunteers.

34. It is also important that there is a central repository for statistics and data relating to volunteers as this will enable the economic value of volunteers to be recognised and funding for support to be renewed and to enable commissioning. Not only is this important for organisations but also so that individuals themselves feel valued. When bidding for money volunteer hours can also be used for some funders as a benefit in kind to provide match fund.

Best Practice from Elsewhere

35. As part of the development of options for future delivery the infrastructure support offered elsewhere in the country has been explored. Some of this was undertaken through face to face discussion and others by desktop research. A visit was made to York CVS, and research was undertaken looking at Hull, Sandwell and Bradford.

36. Research was also undertaken to look at the Tees Valley infrastructure organisations using the reports submitted to the Charity Commission as a basis for

this. This latter exercise was particularly to inform the development of arrangements for volunteering and the value of any contract.   There is a pattern of withdrawing from a whole service approach to infrastructure support and a focus on funding for specific services such as a volunteer bureau or on a commercial income generating model which relies on contract management with the not for profit sector.

(a) Representational and Strategic Infrastructure Support

37. York CVS highlighted that relationships were seen as key both within the sector and with commissioners. The CVS provided HR and Independent examination of accounts to VCS organisations and the majority of services are charged for. There is some basic information that is seen as core and provided with funding from LA. They give basic information and provide factsheets for HR and then charge if organisations need something over and above that. The VCS facilitate forums and networks and organise a time bank type of volunteering programme

38. Involve Yorkshire and Humber which include Leeds and Hull highlight that working in collaboration is key to a strong voluntary and community sector and that trust between organisations is key to a successful sector. It gives a stronger voice but also provides opportunities to share training and maximise the use of existing capacity.

(b) Information, Governance and Funding

39. York have a funder finder package but were pro-active in following up work e.g. bid writing. Perhaps the best example of use of a funding package is that of Bradford who have a voluntary partnership called 'Bfunded' and they use IDOX funding package 'Open4 Community' but have developed additional information around the system. The funding package is open to any community group and provides national, regional and local funding information.

40. The rest of the package includes Governance support with a range of topics to help both new and existing groups. For example, it includes how to write a partnership agreement that sets out a checklist of information that will need to be included and uses an example to show what is required. This covers the role of partners, timetable for delivery, payments, reporting and accounting, copyright, dispute resolution and termination or breach.

41. Also included is support for tendering, basic HR, developing a business plan, risk management, preparing a fundraising plan and other associated policies and templates that the not for profit sector would find useful. This covers a vast range of information and is largely a self-service approach although contacts are given for additional support. Hull also use the same package as do Sandwell.

42. Both Hull and Bradford undertake an annual survey of users of Open 4 Funding and this helps to ascertain the funding brought in through this system. In 2014 Hull reported that £230,000 had been brought into Hull as a result of using the system and in the 2015 £130,000 had been secured despite the tighter economic position.

(c) Volunteering

43. All of the organisations reviewed have a strong emphasis on volunteering linked to the increasing demand for care and support and the reducing resources. All of the organisations had also had to restructure and faced reduced budgets which had served to focus the business plan on activities that could be charged for, areas of greatest benefit in terms of social benefit and financial benefit.

44. York have a volunteer centre that is accredited. They have 4 volunteer brokers and use the Do-It national system as a matching tool. The CVS hold drop-ins and will also hold individual sessions and they use placements of social work trainees to support this activity. They provide templates for Job descriptions etc. and provide placement support for people especially those with support needs including people with learning impairments and mental health issues. This includes offering mentoring to the individual and the organisations.

45. The majority of volunteering at York is through a self-serve process. The CVS has a volunteer co-ordinator who concentrates on diversity in volunteering and there is a volunteer co-ordinator based in the LA. They also have a basic charter for volunteering that sets out what a volunteer can expect. This includes a self-assessment process and the local authority use this internally.

46. Hull also have a Volunteer Centre that sees thousands of people per year and includes the use of the Do-it national matching programme and also their own local database. They also hold drop-in sessions twice a week and can hold confidential matching at these sessions and they also provide volunteer management training.

47. Costs for delivery of Volunteer centres varies considerably across Tees Valley and elsewhere and it is also hard to clarify how core costs are split across a number of areas of activity. Evolutions costs are £85,357 compared to £29,995 in Redcar for example for seeing a similar number of volunteers. However, there are examples of volunteer businesses which could be funded for a smaller amount than the current infrastructure grant.

Options for Future Delivery

48. Set out below are the options for delivery against the three identified priority areas. Given that the IT based funding package is a very different product from the volunteer support, it is proposed to split the various priorities of infrastructure support into three distinct areas.

(a) Representational and Strategic Infrastructure Support

49. The representational and strategic element of infrastructure support will need to be driven by the sector and commissioners working together in partnership. This will need to be developed and while it is proposed that officer time is contributed to support this approach it is not envisaged that this will require specific funding beyond a minimal level on a one off basis to facilitate development. There are existing arrangements which could be developed or combined to provide a single overarching forum and there are organisations who are well placed to support the process.

50. An overarching representational group could be chaired on a rotational basis with the secretariat initially being provided by the local authority but with the view to

having a self-sustaining model in the future. Accommodation for meetings could also be provided initially but this again could be done on a rotational basis as this would also add to the increased knowledge and understanding of the sector.

(b) Information, Governance and Funding

51. As set out above the proposed model here is a funding website and associated information and governance support. Having looked at the various activities required it is proposed to purchase an improved funding package and that other information could be provided through a mixture of signposting and bespoke guidance and information available on links to the Council site.

52. The funding package proposed is the IDOX Funding4Community and a proposal is currently being examined. The Council currently has access to the Grantfinder programme through the external funding team but this is not open access and the benefit of the Funding4Community model is that it is very simple to use and can be accessed by tablet or PC and by Voluntary and Community Groups or individuals. This would also provide a useful tool for elected Members in their work with community groups.

53. As the Council has existing contracts for Grantfinder and also contracts for other IDOX products used within workforce development there is potential to negotiate a reduced rate with estimates of a one off set up of £2,500 with an ongoing commitment of £5,000 per year. Assuming the package would achieve increased funding of only £10,000 (a very modest estimate given the performance in other areas) it would justify this level of investment. The work is carried out by the provider and the system has a very short lead in time of approximately 3 months for implementation.

54. In terms of the other supporting information this could be developed in house and be in place by September/October as some of the information will already form part of the Member Toolkit currently under development. A wealth of information is already provided nationally and the site could include appropriate links to other sites to keep information up to date with minimal local input.

(c) Volunteering Recruitment, Placement and Support

55. A draft specification is currently being developed to enable a commission of a volunteer bureau to be started in time to enable the bureau service to be in place by the time the current infrastructure support comes to an end at the end of September.

56. This will require funding and it is proposed that existing infrastructure funding should be reduced but this should still enable sufficient resource to provide the service envisaged particularly where this is an add on to an existing HR or volunteer bureau business.

57. The scope of the service will be as follows:-

    (a) Provision of a recruitment service which:-

(i) Includes an online, telephony and face to face presence for at least a specified period (this can be an add on to an existing service or through a partnership arrangement).

(ii) Includes a skills assessment of volunteers

(iii) Includes a matching service which enables volunteers to be appropriately matched with specific opportunities within specific organisations using case studies to support this.

(b) A training service to support the personal development of volunteers and to ensure that training opportunities across the sector are co-ordinated.

(c) Development of a volunteer's charter to enable a clear contract between the volunteer and the organisation providing the volunteering opportunity to be agreed at the outset, including areas like the use of personal data, the volunteer's rights and a process for raising concerns.

(d) A marketing and advertising service which promotes volunteering and holds recruitment events and has a clear plan in relation to opportunities to recruit volunteers via events, student fairs and retirement sessions.

(e) A data collection and retention function which collects specified data to inform wider strategy and to performance manage the contract.

(f) Advice line to organisations with skilled advice available in relation to legal and HR requirements and the duties and responsibilities of organisations to their volunteers.

(g) A mentoring service to resolve disputes between volunteers and their organisations.

(h) A representational service to promote the interests of volunteers and to seek concessions and other support to facilitate volunteering with e.g. employers and public services.

Conclusion

58. The infrastructure review has been completed and has involved discussion with a number of organisations and individuals. The importance of ongoing support to work with the voluntary sector is recognised and understood particularly if the wider objectives of Building Stronger Communities are to be achieved. However as with all services this needs to be delivered within the context of austerity and with a demonstrable business case. Effective infrastructure will help us to achieve our objectives in driving down demand for services such as social care, health and children's services. It can also help to fill the gaps left by services withdrawing from areas like financial inclusion, arts, culture, heritage and green spaces.

59. To achieve these objectives it has to be at minimal cost, to maximise the use of technology, to engage the sector in co-design and partnership approaches to service delivery and to maximise the use of external funding and to increase the number of volunteer hours which can effectively help to support our communities.