



Overview and Scrutiny Committee on Partnerships

The County Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee on Partnerships is seeking to find out as much as possible about the way that the County Council's partnerships with voluntary organisations work. Clearly, if a full picture is to be built up, it is important to know the views of voluntary organisations. Therefore, it would be very helpful to have answers to the following questions.

Meeting with Bucks Association for the Blind and Partially Sighted People who were represented by Maureen Reeves the Director and Jenny Arkell the Assistant Director at Meadowcroft on Tuesday, 13 January 2002

How would your organisation define a partnership?

An understanding between equals working together for a common aim.

Does your organisation feel that the County Council treats it as a partner and values the relationship? If not, what should the Council do to improve the situation?

Unequal (this was the initial response to our question). As contractors delivering services we feel valued by BCC staff but strategically there is a lack of clarity.

What are the objectives of the partnership and is your organisation clear about them?

The objective is to provide services for the blind.

Is there a satisfactory level of consultation? Are your organisation's views listened to and acted upon?

There are lots of meetings and documents BCC asking too many questions. Consultation on day to day running of services is good. Strategic Policy Consultation is not so good. Consultation does not lead to action!

What form does your contract with the County Council take (for example is there a Service Level Agreement or any other form of written contract with the Council?)?

There is a Service Level Agreement.

If there is a written contract, how helpful is it? If there is no such document would your organisation find one useful?

It is clear and works well.

What contract monitoring or other monitoring does the County Council carry out?

There is a quarterly meeting at which we provide the statistical information. There is also discussion about Service Development with Social Services.

How time consuming or onerous is the monitoring process?

For the amount of money it is reasonable and not too onerous.

What problems has your organisation found with the partnership, have they been resolved and how?

The relationships between our Rehabilitation Officers and BCC Officers are occasionally difficult, but these do get ironed out at the meetings. There is a misunderstanding of expectation.

What help does the Council provide with training and developing your organisation's staff?

The Council helps to get a training budget. We can access Social Services staff training. We have a good relationship with "Human Resources". Our staff are in the County Pension Fund.

What more could your organisation do given greater resources and how would it benefit clients?

We need more Rehabilitation Officers. As 50% of our clientele is over 80 many qualify for benefits, but it takes at least 4 hours to fill in the forms and find the evidence. This would help not only the clients but also BCC funds as Government grants are linked to Benefit take up!

We need a Rehabilitation Officer just for children. There are 200 blind and partially sighted children .

Is your organisation aware of the Bucks Infrastructure Group (BIG) and the proposed Compact? If so, would your organisation see advantages or disadvantages in a compact?

As we are providing Statutory Services and have a Service Agreement, we do not see any advantages.

How could partnerships be made more effective?

Closer links with County Councillors and Portfolio holder and Bill Chapple. Crispin and I would continue to take intelligent interest and visit.

Could your organisation benefit from closer links with County Councillors?

Yes, see above.

It is not an objective of this particular exercise to get into the detail of funding. Nevertheless, it would be helpful to have some thoughts on the following:

How is funding obtained from the County Council?

Funding comes 6 monthly. The County council fund the clinical side ie Assessments and makes a contribution to the volunteer co-ordinator in recognition of her work in managing 400 volunteers.

How could the system be improved?

We would like to know that we can get at least an inflation profit grant.

Does the funding provide security for a reasonable period (one, two or three years or more?)

We have a 3 year rolling contract but we do feel insecure.

What additional funding does your organisation have to seek and how time consuming is this?

50% of the Director's time is spent in fundraising and seeking. We need to raise more funds in order to reassess people with deteriorating eyesight. We need more funding for Educational Mobility.

If your organisation receives additional funding, is there any conflict between the requirements of different funding bodies?

RNIB gives a small grant.

In return we cannot go out and actively fundraise ie flag days but we can seek legacies.

Do different funding bodies have different monitoring requirements and, if they do, what difficulties does this create?

Yes, eg Bucks Health Authority. We have to provide a different lot of statistics.

What short-life funding (lottery, charitable trusts etc) does your organisation receive?

Unsolicited donations, legacies.

What strategy does your organisation have for dealing with the loss of this or any other funding?

We will make another application to PIG (Promoting Independence Grant) used to be called Prevention Grant.