

Buckinghamshire County Council

Report

Overview and Scrutiny Committee on Partnership

AGENDA ITEM: 4

Date	28th September 2001
Title	Partnerships and the Voluntary Sector – A Social Care Perspective
Author	Group Manager, Service Development and Commissioning (Adults)
Contact Officer	Kate Kennally (01494 475044)

Summary

1. This report sets out some of the issues for consideration regarding social care partnerships which will be further explored through a presentation to the Partnerships Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the 28th of September

Recommendation

2. That the committee considers the issues raised within the contents of this report and presentation to inform the development of a corporate approach to partnership working.

Background

3. Local social services and the voluntary sector have a long history of working together in Buckinghamshire. These relationships have evolved over time and not always in a planned way.
4. Over recent years, government policy has sought to transfer the delivery of a range of social care services to voluntary and independent organisations – the requirements of the Special Transitional Grant following the Community Care Act was instrumental to this. It has also required statutory agencies to consult with voluntary, community and user organisations in the planning and implementation of services.
5. In November 1998, the White Paper *Modernising Social Services* reinforced this message for local councils by making clear the importance of forging partnerships with, among others, the voluntary sector as a key to improving services for the public. The White Paper states

‘Voluntary organisations make an enormous contribution to social care, working alongside and in co-operation with social services. Social services should have good relationships with voluntary organisations, both in service provision partnerships and also in order to help understand the needs and views of users. Local councils should ensure that they know which voluntary organisations are in their area; what the voluntary sector

can contribute to meeting the needs of the local population; and where the council's support for the sector can be used to best effect.'

6. This position, together with the requirement to secure Best Value will mean that partnerships with voluntary organisations will continue to be central to how social care services are delivered within Buckinghamshire.

Definitions and Types of Partnership

7. Many different partnerships exist between the voluntary sector and Social Services, The main objectives of these partnerships tend to fall into 3 categories:
 - The development of policy
 - The development of strategy
 - The implementation of strategy (service delivery partnerships)
8. A partnership exists where each part has an opportunity to contribute to the decisions of the partnership and to influence the provision, which arises from it. This therefore can be at a policy, strategic or implementation level
9. Social Services in Bucks seem to have approached partnerships in a pragmatic way. Partnerships have been developed where it makes sense to do so. This has resulted in some services being commissioned in response to an identified need led by Social Services or services being delivered by 'specialists' e.g. Buckinghamshire Association for the Blind. Other partnerships have been entered into once a need has been demonstrated through a grassroots service development. Partnerships have been developed where they offer greater opportunities for maximising the available resources to support service developments.
10. The Social Services Inspectorate in December 2000 published a report entitled *Towards a Common Cause – A Compact for Care* which was a review of local authority and social services relationships with the voluntary sector. This report sets out useful standards and a checklist, for Social Services with voluntary sector providers to assess current ways of working. What the report does demonstrate is that in Buckinghamshire, current practice is not dissimilar to that of the authorities that were inspected. However the report does identify some significant challenges for consideration as set out below

Clarity of Purpose

11. Partnerships work best where there is an explicit statement of shared vision based upon jointly held values. The involvement of voluntary sector providers in developing policies and strategies can help ensure that this occurs – for example in the Mental Health Community Support Services review where key principles for the service have been jointly developed. However in other areas this has not occurred and work is happening to develop this shared vision statement retrospectively to ensure that partnerships between commissioners and voluntary sector providers are effective. An example of this is the work currently being undertaken to develop an advocacy strategy.
12. At a more strategic level, the Council Plan does make reference to the need to work in partnership with other agencies. However work is needed to translate this corporate statement in a local compact¹. Detailed work has been undertaken by the 'Way Forward'

¹ In November 1998, the Government established a *Compact on Relations between Government and the Voluntary and Community Sector in England*. This sets out agreed principles for effective working relationships. Local councils are being encouraged to adopt these principles and to establish their own versions of the Compact.

group to develop a local compact across the County Council, District Councils and voluntary sector infrastructure groups. However this compact was never agreed and the momentum developed seems to have been lost. The value of local compact is that it sets out protocols for partnerships working. This committee may wish to consider what action needs to be undertaken to re-establish developing a Compact.

Voluntary Sector Participation and Consultation

13. The development and funding of Locality Forums in Buckinghamshire to support the active involvement of the voluntary sector in local decision making processes is a significant local development. Within the first two years of Locality Forums being in place, they have led the consultation on the Long Term Care Strategy and Community Care Plan, are actively involved in the developing Physical Disability Strategy and have contributed to the mental health community support review. At a policy level we have developed joint standards between Health and Social care 'Involving Local People in Planning'.
14. However despite funding the locality forums, participating in consultation and planning exercises can be expensive and time consuming. For voluntary organisations to be effective, they need to consult their members and service users to ensure the best possible response.
15. A balance has to be struck between becoming engaged in consultation, particularly when the subject of consultation is not closely aligned with existing core business and not being diverted from core service delivery work. The risk of diversion is increased for small voluntary organisations that do not have any spare capacity to become involved in community consultation. The increase of specific project based funding for voluntary organisations exacerbates this, however the need for consultation and involvement continues to grow.
16. Invitations to participate in consultation therefore should make clear the relevance of the programme or partnership to the voluntary sector and how feedback will be given following the consultation. Particularly where there is no new funding available or where there are no immediate benefits, it can be difficult to perceive the value of involvement without clarity of relevance and therefore appears tokenistic.

Funding Arrangements

17. Funding for local voluntary sector organisations can come from one or more of the following sources:
 - social services – to include mainstream budgets and specific grants;
 - other council departments or Local Authorities
 - trusts and charities
 - The National Lottery
18. Increasingly organisations have been funded for specific projects rather than through core funding. This imposes increased monitoring regime, as monitoring has tended to be focused on projects and has affected the ability of small voluntary organisations to develop their infrastructure to modernise services. An example of this is Aylesbury Vale Carers Association, whose funding is project based, leaving the organisation vulnerable in terms of managerial arrangements. For 2000/2001, money was used to pay a 'quality premium' to advocacy services in Bucks to help them develop appropriate infrastructure to deliver and monitor new advocacy standards as services were funded on by individual projects without fully taking account the management costs of the organisation.

19. A mapping exercise completed two years ago examined the funding sources for voluntary organisations across Bucks. This identified small voluntary sector organisations being funded by a multiplicity of local councils each with separate monitoring and service agreements.
20. Work has been done to try and develop joint service agreements where possible. An example of this is the service agreement for Connection, Floating Support that is joint between the County Council, District Councils, Probation and Health with a single monitoring process. However this is the exception rather than the norm and voluntary organisations are rightly concerned that if one of the stakeholders withdrew or reduced their contribution without consultation with other stakeholders the level or quality of their service could be compromised. The mapping process confirmed that different funding support arrangements across Local Authorities are not currently co-ordinated and are unclear for voluntary sector providers. There are examples of good practice on this for two tier authorities such as South Gloucestershire that the Partnerships Committee might like to explore.
21. Another challenge that needs to be addressed is how Social Services responds to the short-life funding of voluntary agencies, for example from the National Lottery. There have been expectations from organisations that local councils would automatically take over the funding, without prior dialogue on fit with social services priorities. This has caused tensions between the voluntary sector and social services when funding was not automatically available. Discussion on how this can be best managed needs to occur prior to application for funding - a process for this needs to be discussed between Voluntary Sector Infrastructure organisations e.g. Bucks Community Action and the Council.

Member Involvement in Partnerships

22. Elected members of the Council are actively involved in the work of the voluntary sector. From attending service reviews to individual relationships with organisations and through the Best Value review programme, members have helped developed a sense of partnerships between organisations and the Council.
23. Prior to the modernisation of the Council's committee structure, the review and determination of funding for Voluntary Sector organisations was linked with the committee cycle of the Independent and Voluntary Sector Panel (IVSP) and the Social Services Committee
24. IVSP used to receive presentations and reports from selected groups of Voluntary Sector organisations. On average those organisations with the largest funding would make a presentation to IVSP once within the life of each three-year service agreement. Organisations funded for smaller amounts would report less frequently.
25. Annually IVSP used to be asked to approve a schedule of payments for certain voluntary organisations, which then had to be ratified by the full Social Services Committee in time for the start of the new financial year.
26. Increasingly over recent years, the annual list of proposed payments passed through the IVSP in this way became less representative of the total funding relationship with the Voluntary and Independent sector. Some arrangements, with for example Fremantle, WRVS, Red Cross and Advance Housing, whilst subject to reporting to the IVSP, were not included on the list of annual payments for the panel to approve, as they were the subject of negotiations elsewhere within the Department.

27. Other organisations were receiving funding through various specific grants e.g. Carers, Advocacy, MISG/MHG. This funding was often for particular projects, subject to a bidding or application process against set criteria, which fell outside of the scope of IVSP. It was not unusual for an organisation such as Age Concern, to receive core funding which was annually agreed through IVSP, and to receive in addition funding for carers and advocacy work which was not part of the same process.
28. There was also no explicit mechanism for the transfer onto the IVSP list, of those organisations who had previously been funded through Joint finance, but where funding had now tapered wholly or in part to the Department (e.g. Aylesbury Clubhouse). There is a need to re-examine the mechanism for determining funding for the voluntary sector. It is the view of the Service Development team that payments to the voluntary organisations that went to IVSP cease to be considered as a separate funding block. Funding for Voluntary sector organisation all of which are specified and set out under terms of either services agreement or memoranda of agreement should in future be determined according to the service priorities and budgets of each service.
29. However there is a need to consider any requirements that members may have for reporting. Voluntary sector organisations have welcomed the opportunity to present their work to the IVSP as it has helped them to feel part of the overall services delivered by the Council.

Building Mutual Understanding and Skills

30. Joint training initiatives are a very successful way of building trust and partnership working. Money within the Mental Health Grant has been earmarked for training initiatives across statutory and non-statutory sectors. This has proved beneficial in helping support service modernisation in line with the requirements of the NSF.
31. In addition where joint training has been available to voluntary sector organisations on specific initiatives such as Vulnerable Adults this has helped ensure that practice issues can be better addressed.
32. The current funding arrangements for voluntary organisations often do not adequately take into account the training and development needs of their staff. Work needs to occur with the Training Section to consider what is an appropriate level of funding for voluntary organisations to support the training and development agenda for social care services. This will have a resource implication as the training support grant that the Council receives for Social Care is based on the number of directly employed social care employees.

Conclusion

33. Getting partnership working right is everyone's business; Members, Senior Managers, Operational Staff as well as Service Development staff. Progressing work on the Compact and reviewing current practice against SSI standards would help ascertain how partnerships can be strengthened. This is necessary as partnership working is increasing. Understanding and having clear processes for delegating Council responsibilities to other organisations and acting as a community leader are critical to ensure that services that the Council funds are fit for purpose and meet the needs of the population which it serves.