

## 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.

### Wycombe Racial Equality Council

#### Meeting with Ranjit Dheer Director and Shaid Aktar Welfare Officer

1. How would your organisation define a partnership?

In reply they said, collaborative working towards a common aim. Mutual respect even though the status of organisations may be unequal common purpose in the pursuit of shared goal. They pointed out that their funding originally came from Social Services to support the welfare advice and assistance that they give, but the source has been changed and support now comes from the Council's corporate budget.

2. 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?

They said the County are sensitive in the way they deal with the REC, they listen but the link could be stronger. Said that the link with Aylesbury REC appears stronger but said that this may be geography.

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

In reply they showed that they had a clear view of the mutual objects, which they said was working towards racial and social justice. They said that race equality work underpins the partnership. While there was clear understanding at corporate level not all County Officers with whom they dealt had the same commitment and from time to time misunderstandings did arise. They gave as examples school exclusions and the Equality Fair held at Green Street School.

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

In response to this question they continued to talk about what they considered was slippage between the Council policy and the way in which it was implemented locally. They argued that there needed to be better liaison. In the past the Senior local Social Service Officers and the area Education Officer used to attend EC meetings but this helpful link no longer takes place. They said that the odd thing was that in the past their complaints were about the police but their contacts were now excellent and the Council had slipped.

5. What form does you 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 what they described as a simple service level agreement. They said that this partnership charter places clear responsibilities on the parties. They were very pleased when this was agreed it established clear responsibilities and also confirmed funding over a three year period.

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

The agreement is a written document and it has provided a helpful model in drawing up an agreement with the Wycombe District Council. All three RECs within the County similar agreements.

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

The REC has an annual work programme and a comprehensive set of core standards that are made available to all funding bodies. It is drawn up and closely monitored by the EC of the REC. The REC is also closely monitored by the Commission for Racial Equality and the Councils now accept that because of this they can have a light touch.

8. How time consuming or onerous is the monitoring process?

Monitoring as far as the County is concerned is not onerous but the CRE do require detailed progress reports and a considerable amount time and energy is put into them. The REC are currently working in partnership with the Probation Service and the Home Office on a special project and this also requires a good deal of time to satisfy the monitoring requirements. The County are generally satisfied to know that these organisations are monitoring the REC and all auditing information is available to them. With very little administrative support the REC finds monitoring a substantial task. The Counties light touch approach to it is welcome.

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

They felt that many professionals with whom they had dealings had little understanding of the cultural dynamics. They said, "suddenly since September 11 we seem to have a Muslim problem" but it needed to be understood that the real issues were poverty, and poor education

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

The REC received computer training and other courses are open but few are relevant.

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

The Officers of the REC considered that there were a number of unmet needs in the community that they served. They referred to health and social problems that they were concerned about but said they had insufficient resources to make a difference. Among other issues they mentioned drugs, young people disabled by crime and prostitution. They wanted to undertake development work with the Afro Caribbean community and generally wanted to be more proactive.

12. 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?

They were aware of the Bucks Infrastructure Group and their efforts to bring Voluntary Sector Partners together. They thought that a Compact would be helpful, although they doubted whether it would make much difference to their situation.

13. How could partnerships be made more effective?

Better links with professionals working in the field of social care. It would be helpful if area officers could again attend meetings of the Executive Committee. Some years ago they used to regularly attend and this was very helpful.

14. Could your organisation benefit from closer links with County Councillors?

Yes this would also be helpful.

15. 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 from the County is now much improved, annual funding has been replaced by a three year funding agreement.

16. How could the system be improved?

They said that they really needed additional funding to meet identified need. They said that they particularly wanted to undertake more work with the Afro Caribbean community. The District Council had offered to 50% fund a post but additional sums were needed from other funding bodies to make up the remainder.

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

Additional funds to help development work would be very welcome.

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

The REC receives its funds from the following sources: CRE, County, District Council, Affiliations and grants for special one off projects

(currently they are receiving a grant from the Home Office for a special project in partnership with the probation service). Special projects of this nature are time consuming bidding for necessary funds takes a good deal of time. More help in this area would be helpful.

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

**No.**

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

**Yes there are different requirements. The CRE monitor the work programme in a detailed way, it is very time consuming but necessary.**

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

**Only the probation project which is running for two years.**

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

**There is the prospect of doing similar work with other agencies.**