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Buckinghamshire Infra-structure (BIG) The Next Steps

Context:

The Buckinghamshire Infra-Structure Group consists of the following organisations;

Buckinghamshire Community Action
Buckinghamshire Council For Voluntary Youth Services
Community Matters Bucks
Chiltern CVS
South Bucks Volunteer Bureau
Priory Centre
Vale Volunteers

We have representation from Regional Action & Involvement-South East (RAISE) and can access support from National Association for Council for Voluntary Services (NACVS) as required.

In Buckinghamshire at present there is one fact that we are all agreed upon – ***‘everything is changing’***. We have the Modernisation of Local Government, Primary Care Trust development, re-structuring of Social Services, development of new mental health & Learning Disability Trusts, new plan for the NHS, new strategic partnerships, community planning ...to name just a few!

Alongside all of the above has been the need to consult and we all know how much consultation has gone on in the past year with the promise of much more to come.

With all of the above there are agendas that require local delivery mechanisms if partnership working and community involvement are the vision for the future .

The Buckinghamshire Infra-Structure Group came together earlier this year to start to look at how we can best deliver our services. The services that we provide are diverse in order to meet the need of each locality. However there are 12 clearly defined areas of work as follows;

Information

- To provide reliable, accurate information to wider voluntary sector organisations and communities
- Timely information
- Appropriate information to target audience
- Co-ordination of information
- To act as a signpost to appropriate services

2. Communication/ conduit

- Two way between statutory and voluntary sector
- Two way between regional and voluntary sector
- Two way between National and voluntary sector

3. Strategic Development

- Development of Local Compact/working agreement
- Strategic Partnerships
- The 'Constant' for the delivery of strategy at local level

4. Training
 - To deliver/provide access to training for voluntary sector and voluntary using bodies in line with demand/need
 - To offer training programme that can continuously assist the development of small organisations
 - To ensure and maintain strong links with education within the voluntary sector
5. Village Halls Advice
6. Funding Advice
7. Project Management
 - County wide
 - Locality wide
8. Policy Development
 - Ensuring and enabling voluntary sector involvement and 'VOICE'
 - Offering technical support for community development
 - Holding events to promote key topics
 - Identifying needs and responding with the appropriate initiative within communities
9. Delivery of Volunteering agenda
 - Establishing volunteering opportunities
 - Recruiting volunteers
 - Supporting volunteers and organisations that utilise them
10. Continuous development of wider volunteering opportunities to include;
 - People with Special Needs
 - The unemployed
 - The elderly
 - Young People
11. Quality/Monitoring and Evaluation
 - Honest broker

At the present time BIG is made up of organisations that deliver a combination of all of the above. As a group we embrace the regional, countywide and local agendas. We have endless examples of 'Good Practice' and 'Added Value' both financially and through service provision.

In line with the political agenda and changing shape of parts of our County we are looking at bringing together 2 of the organisations. We are exploring the improvements in service delivery that this will achieve. We realise that the voluntary sector infra-structure needs to ensure that it is best placed to support both statutory and voluntary sector development

Summary

The next step is to look at how a more streamlined, unified service that offers the same opportunities to all communities and voluntary sector organisations, can be delivered. These may be urban or rural and therefore need to be tailored to meet the needs of each locality. With the uncertainty around funding we are very concerned that organisations will continue to disappear as lottery funding comes to an end etc. This has a three-fold effect as expertise in staff is lost, damage to partnerships is incurred and therefore damaging the delivery of the services outlined above. This also imposes a constant strain on relationships on partners in the community as raised expectations cannot be fulfilled. This damage is in varying degrees but a huge amount of time is spent rebuilding partnerships and regaining trust.

As a county BIG want to create an infra-structure for the voluntary sector that is not only sustainable but able to capacity build the sector and offer the support that is needed. A strong partnership is needed with the statutory and private sector, and commitment from all if this is to be achieved.

This commitment is to an inclusive, common vision, through transparent partnership working in time, effort and other resources.