

31. We were informed by officers that short life funding of voluntary agencies, for example from the National Lottery, was not linked to social service priorities. There could therefore be some tension if the organisation expected that the council would automatically take over the funding. Voluntary organisations that are funded by more than one agency therefore feel very vulnerable. They are concerned that if any one of their funding agents withdraw support that the service they provide could be compromised.
32. We heard from voluntary organisations that insufficient attention is given to their infrastructure and administrative needs and that this can create difficulties. Funding was an issue for everyone and most of the organisations that we saw said they could do more if funding was available.
33. Most social service support provides funding for services which might be considered mainstream activities that the Council would traditionally have provided themselves. But there seemed little clarity about how support is determined. We would like to see a clear and transparent process for awarding grants which is linked to support to the Council's priorities.
34. Our attention was drawn to an example of good practice from South Gloucestershire Council. The Council has agreed to an integrated application process for funding. The Council's priority objectives and funding criteria were set out in an information pack, which included an application form. All applications for funding were returned to the same Council department. Applications were screened and forwarded to the most appropriate department charged with considering Voluntary Sector funding for that particular task or activity.
35. Chiltern District Council has a similar arrangement but in their case funding is determined by the appropriate Executive member in consultation with officers and the Executive.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- The Council should work to achieve co-operation and consistency across the funding agencies.
- The funding process should ensure fair access and be well publicised.

- The funding criteria should be clear.
- More support should be provided for the infrastructure of the Voluntary Sector.

Monitoring

36. We got a mixed message from voluntary organisations about monitoring. Some thought it to be about right for the amount of money involved others thought it excessive. In one case the organisation had four projects each requiring two reviews a year by different support managers. Another considered that it was onerous and could be less frequent. One organisation said that they found monitoring onerous but said they were pleased that the County were now prepared to accept the monitoring arrangement set out by their national support body. Multi funding brings with it the potential problem of multi monitoring and some organisations clearly experience this difficulty.

37. Officers of the County said that monitoring needed to be proportionate and take account of how efficient the organisation is. The frequency of monitoring is usually part of any agreed service level agreement. For those without service level agreements the frequency and extent is less clear. We also discussed the issue with the District Councils . They also undertake monitoring but in the case of small grants are often satisfied with annual reports, balance sheets and a members attendance at the organisations meetings. All thought that there is a case for rationalising monitoring arrangements and agreed that one authority should be prepared to accept another acting on its behalf.

38. The SSI has recommended that there should be a joint approach to monitoring and evaluation and consultation with other agencies about different approaches. They suggest that quantitative information should be balanced by the views of users and carers about the extent to which their needs have been met.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Monitoring should be proportionate to the level of support provided.
- The Council should cooperate with other funding

agencies to reduce unnecessary monitoring and ensure that no duplication is taking place.

- The principle aim of monitoring should be to test the outcome and quality of service provided, we are not convinced that current monitoring has this clear purpose.
- The monitoring process and method used should be subject to an agreement between the parties.

Members Involvement

39. In Buckinghamshire a number of members represent the Council on the management committees of voluntary bodies. Many play an important and active role but they normally work in isolation from the Council with no reporting arrangements or chance to inform colleagues about the organisations work. There is no forum in which members can discuss the voluntary sector and no place for County Council members, other than cabinet members, on the Bucks Partnership Forum and Locality Forum. It may be reasonable to assume therefore that the Council as a collective body is somewhat remote from the work of the Voluntary Sector. There is no guidance given to members who serve on these outside organisations.

40. Prior to modernisation members served on the Independent and Voluntary Sector Panel this provided a link with voluntary organisations who from time to time made presentations to the Panel about their work. The Panel also considered grants to smaller voluntary bodies and these were ratified by the Social Services Committee. The terms of reference of this panel were limited but voluntary organisations were pleased to have the opportunity of meeting members and presenting their case.

41. Voluntary organisations said that they would be pleased to have greater contact with members. County Councillors should play a leading role in the development of policies aimed at strengthening relationships with the Voluntary Sector. In the modernised structure it may be more difficult but seen in the context of the local leadership role ways need to be found to link members with those organisations that carryout such important work in the community.

RECOMMENDATION

- A designated Cabinet member should be responsible for partnerships with the Voluntary Sector.
- The Cabinet member should oversee service level agreements promote the development of partnerships and ensure that the County Council is fulfilling its responsibilities set out in the Compact.
- The Cabinet member should be assisted by a panel of members to help maintain contact with voluntary sector partners.
- Members should be advised about voluntary groups operating in their area and assisted to make contacts in line with their community leadership role.

Are Compacts the way forward

42. In November 1998 the Government established a "Compact on Relations between Government and the Voluntary and Community Sector in England". It set out the principles for effective working relations. They also published, Volunteering Code of Practice which set out good practice to enable and support more people getting involved in the varied forms of voluntary activity. This was one of a series of codes supplementing the Compact. At the same time the Government encouraged local authorities to examine their relationships with the voluntary sector and similarly to establish Compacts.

43. The Council Plan makes reference to the need to work in partnership with other agencies but this remains an objective that is pursued in a piece meal fashion and has not been converted into a clear unambiguous statement across the whole authority. About two years ago some detailed work was undertaken by the "Way Forward" group to develop a local Compact across the County Council, District Councils and the Voluntary Sector. This Compact was never agreed and the momentum seems to have been lost.

44. The Voluntary Sector would welcome the establishment of a Compact and recently have been working through an organisation called the Bucks Infrastructure Group to promote the idea. The Bucks Infrastructure Group are

widely representative of voluntary bodies in the County and have been mandated to lead on the establishment of a Compact for Buckinghamshire, a steering group has been formed and they plan to invite representatives of statutory bodies to join them.

45. The Committee invited representatives of the Bucks Infrastructure Group to their November meeting to explain further their views about the establishing a Compact.

46. They said that it was important to have an overall vision and to build on successful services, rather than duplicating. They felt that services needed to be better coordinated in order to make the best use of resources and a Compact was the way in which this could be addressed. They contended that the funding structure is complicated with some services being provided by different portfolios or through District Councils. The Compact would be used to decide who the critical partners were in a relationship and could include funding implications.

47. Our study shows that Compacts have been successfully introduced and we were provided with a copy of Hampshire County document. *Include some detail about the Hampshire Compact to show relevance to Bucks*

48. The Government are providing £300m next year via the Active Communications Unit for those authorities who provide evidence to show that successful Compacts have developed into strategic partnerships.

49. The Voluntary Sector is clearly keen to see the development of a Compact in Buckinghamshire and believe that it will make a significant contribution towards improvement in relationships between voluntary and statutory bodies. The County Council together with other statutory agencies should actively support this development, however since the Compact will embrace many organisations whose relationship with the voluntary sector are different from those of County Council, it will not therefore address all the issues that need attention.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- The County Council should take a proactive part in the development of a Compact for Bucks.

- The Compact should set out the procedures and working arrangement between the Council and the Voluntary Sector it will enable the parties to declare their support for a set of common objectives and principles.

District Councils

50. We visited three of the four District Councils in Buckinghamshire and discussed with them their relations with the Voluntary Sector and with Buckinghamshire County Council in the area of social care. There were differences of approach between the District Councils, largely due to the size and geography of the areas that they cover. All had officers with responsibility for partnerships and Executive/Cabinet members with responsibility for this area of the Councils work.

51. In the main their grants are determined by the Executive/Cabinet in consultation with officers. All matched grants to the strategic aims of the Council. In the case of Chiltern and Wycombe they have clear procedures by which applicants can apply for grants. All three had service level agreements with the larger organisations that they support. We discussed monitoring. They pointed out that they had responsibility to ensure that public funds were being used properly in line with their aims and in a way that benefited the area that they represented.

52. We asked whether they have any contact or joint arrangements with the County Council in the area of social care funding. Most were through work on the Partnership for Bucks but in the area of social care there was little or no contact. All thought that a greater level of contact would be helpful, they responded by suggesting a number of matters that could be considered. They thought it might be helpful to know which organisations are funded by both bodies, it was suggested that a joint application form might be agreed, monitoring by one authority could make the procedure less onerous and generally working together and jointly reviewing areas of activity could be helpful.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Steps should be taken to develop closer working

arrangements with District Councils.

Training

Conclusions

Other issues to address

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- What about the future – do we work together to build capacity – who takes the initiative – are there untapped resources – are there identified areas of potential development.
- Is there a case for a best value review of social care partnerships.
- Consultative bodies how effective are they.

This is a list of additional items that I would like to comment on in the report.

Recommendations will emerge from our discussion but so far I have identified the following that might be included

3. There is a case for the District Councils and the County Council to work closer in the area of social care partnerships, mutual benefit will be gained from understandings about funding, monitoring and other areas of support.
- 4.
5. The Council should develop ways of including the Voluntary Sector in its training programmes and when setting grants take account of development and training needs.
- 6.

RECOMMENDATION
There is a need for more transparency about funding arrangements