

Community Governance Report

Context

Buckinghamshire Community Action are a Voluntary Sector organisation. We are a Registered Charity and a Company Limited by Guarantee. We are the Countywide umbrella organisation for Council for Voluntary Services, with a remit in New Buckinghamshire and the Rural Community Council for Buckinghamshire including Milton Keynes. We have 3 main sources of funding;

- ◆ Buckinghamshire County Council
- ◆ The Countryside Agency
- ◆ District Councils

As an organisation we work closely with all of the above and one of our main aims is to act as a bridge between the Statutory and wider Voluntary Sector. Via project work we also work very closely with Buckinghamshire Social Services and Buckinghamshire Health Authority.

In July 2000 we were approached by John Spargo and requested to oversee an independent review of the Buckinghamshire Disability Resource Centre (BDRC). Buckinghamshire Community Action agreed to this in principle subject to confirmation of the 'Terms of Reference' for the review. The Partnership Forum subsequently commissioned this review on 19/07/00 and the Terms of Reference were agreed on 31/07/00.

The designated lead from Buckinghamshire Community Action was agreed as Catherine Johnstone, Chief Executive. A Community Governance Report would be required on completion of the review to be presented to the Partnership Forum alongside that of the independent consultant. This was to ensure that the viewpoint of the voluntary organisations currently housed within the BDRC were represented and that there was a transparent process for the review.

1. The Process

1.1 During August 2000 work was undertaken to find an appropriate consultancy organisation. The following criteria were applied to this process;

- ◆ The organisation had not undertaken any previous work appertaining to the BDRC
- ◆ The organisation had no relationship with the current funders of the BDRC
- ◆ The organisation had no pre-conceived opinions of physical disability services in Buckinghamshire
- ◆ The organisation had documented evidence of previous independent reviews
- ◆ The organisation had a recognised insight into 'independent living'
- ◆ The organisation had experience of working with statutory and voluntary sector organisations.
- ◆ The organisation had the available capacity to undertake the review within the recommended time-scale

This process took 6 weeks, as I was hampered by the fact that it was holiday season. It was difficult to speak to the appropriate individuals within the consultancy organisations and therefore this did cause a short delay.

On 5/09/00 Central Consultancy Services Ltd, The Housing & Support Partnership, were appointed, the designated consultant being Nigel King.

1.2 Getting Started

From looking at the very complicated history of the BDRC and previous efforts at reviews there were several challenges for Buckinghamshire Community Action;

- ◆ To ensure that the history of the centre and its evolution was given due reference
- ◆ To ensure that the consultant was inclusive in his research
- ◆ To ensure that the information disseminated during the review was timely, accurate and in an appropriate format
- ◆ To ensure that the consultant had access to all of the stakeholder groups
- ◆ To ensure that the consultant was supported
- ◆ To ensure that the review was undertaken within the terms of reference
- ◆ To ensure that the review was undertaken within the specified time-scale
- ◆ To problem solve

1.3 The Project Group

A Project Group was formed with the following representation:

Buckinghamshire Health Authority	David Beckett
Buckinghamshire Social Services	Janice Campbell
Aylesbury Vale Healthcare Trust	Jane Taptiklis
Primary Care Groups	Jayne Stone
Central Consultancy Services	Nigel King
Buckinghamshire Community Action	Catherine Johnstone (Chair)

It is worth noting that the Primary Care Groups representation was the agreed designated representative for the 5 Primary Care Groups in New Buckinghamshire. Steve Young was the designated deputy for Jayne Stone.

This project group met 3 times during the life of the review although not all members were present at all 3 meetings. Notes of the meetings were produced for internal use by the group and actions highlighted.

1.4 The Tenants Group

The origin of this group is explained in Part 3/3.1/7. of the consultants report.

This group consists of the following organisations;

- ◆ The Alzheimer's Society
- ◆ RNID
- ◆ Aylesbury & District Crossroads Caring for Carers
- ◆ Buckinghamshire Disability Information Network (BDIN)
- ◆ The Direct Payments Advisor
- ◆ Independent Living Exhibition

The Direct Payments Advisor post became vacant during the course of the review. However prior to his departure he was interviewed by Nigel King as part of the Tenants Group interviews.

The group have met regularly re development of the BDRC and have developed a strong partnership. They have documented records of their business meetings and often have representation from Aylesbury Vale Healthcare Trust present, these mainly being from the Estates Department.

From the outset of the review I have attended the above meetings and briefed the group on the progress of the review. I have also acted as the point of reference and mechanism for raising concerns relating to the review.

At the commencement of the review the Tenants Group expressed the following concerns;

- ◆ Was the centre under threat of closure?
- ◆ Was the review to be undertaken by one of the current stakeholder organisations?
- ◆ Would there be an opportunity for them to input into the review?
- ◆ Could they influence decision making?
- ◆ What was happening to their individual leases?

Having a designated one point of contact has proved to be very effective as there have been numerous occasions during the process when inaccurate information and hearsay have raised the level of anxiety of this group. This has been investigated promptly and accurate information fed back. Where this has involved any of the Statutory organisations I have liaised with the representative from the project group and ensured that the appropriate action has been taken.

The question of the individual leases was referred back to Aylesbury Vale Healthcare Trust, Helen Falcon. This issue was considered to be outside the brief of the review as the matter had been referred to Aylesbury Vale Healthcare Trust Legal Department for clarification.

The Tenants Group have co-operated with and supported the BDRC review. The group collectively have served as an excellent resource for the consultant.

1.5 Methodology

The consultant undertook the following activity during the review;

- a) Visits to the Buckinghamshire Resource Centre
- b) Interviews
- c) Questionnaires
- d) Visits to other Disability Resource Centres
- e) Project Group meetings

In this part of the report I am looking at the governance arrangements for each of these areas as the consultant explains in detail the outputs.

a) Visits to the BDRC

The consultant visited the centre on many several occasions during the review. He attended both by appointment and unannounced.

b) Interviews

For all interviews the consultant used prompt sheets to ensure that the same areas were covered with each interviewee. These prompt sheets did not prevent wider discussion.

c) Questionnaires

Copies of the questionnaires used are attached to the consultants final report. There was some difficulty with the targeting of these questionnaires as there is currently no database at the BDRC. We wanted to capture feedback from users/carers and non-users of the centre and to this end the following method was agreed;

Users/carers

Questionnaires were sent to the following;

- ◆ all telephone enquiries to the Independent Living Exhibition from September and October 2000. Visitors to the exhibition voluntarily log their name but not their address in a visitors book, whereas all telephone enquiries have complete mail out addresses.
(280 questionnaires)
- ◆ Users and carers from the following organisations – Alzheimer's Society, Bucks Disability Information Network, RNID, Crossroads.
(approx. 20 questionnaires per organisation)

- ◆ Carers Centres – Aylesbury Vale Carers and South Buckinghamshire Carers sent out approximately 50 questionnaires per organisation. (100 questionnaires)
- ◆ Questionnaires were available within the BDRC and were handed out to visitors to the centre and held at reception. The receptionists were briefed and offered their support to this process.

All mail outs of the questionnaires complied with The Data Protection Act. Buckinghamshire Community Action Freepost envelopes were attached.

Through the outlets above, approximately 500 questionnaires were issued.

d) Visits to other Disability Resource Centres

Three other resource centres were visited and comparative case studies for all 3 can be located in part 2 of the consultants report.

These centres were selected for a combination of factors to include:

- Proximity to New Buckinghamshire
- Constitution
- User led focus
- Outreach
- Evidenced quality of service delivery

I attended all 3 visits with the consultant and on each occasion we spent time with the centre manager.. We were invited to look at all of the facilities available and each centre made requested information readily available.

The consultant followed the same format for each visit.

e) Project Group Meetings

The consultant attended all 3 project group meetings.

1.6 Difficulties Encountered

Management of Centre: There is a buildings manager currently for the centre but he does not have responsibility for the running of the Resource Centre. Therefore there was no one identified point of contact for the review, however the Tenants Group assumed the role collectively.

Communication: As referred to in 1.4 of this report there were numerous occasions when incorrect information, hearsay and gossip raised anxiety levels. The BDRC has had many organisations both statutory and voluntary involved in its evolution, and as a result there are many views held currently as to the way forward for the centre. I am satisfied that where appropriate these views have been recorded and channelled into the review.

Information re Physical Disability Policy and Strategy: The consultant requested the collection of all information relating to this area. With little exception there was no concrete information to collect. Buckinghamshire has no written down strategy for Physical Disabilities and as a result information was disparate and uncoordinated. This meant that collection of information was time consuming and a lot of the information was anecdotal.

Statistics re Physical Disability Services: There is currently no one database at the BDRC. As a result there was no one tangible method of counting users of the centre, neither was there an obvious system for sending out the questionnaires.

User/Carer Forum: Whilst not included in the original brief for the review both myself and the consultant felt that we would like to hold a forum for this group. There were several difficulties encountered;

- ◆ The short time-scale for the review did not lend itself to a forum
- ◆ We could not establish an appropriate venue with access and suitable accommodation and facilities for the target group, which had any availability
- ◆ Advertising for the forum was considered and it was agreed that this may raise expectations in an unacceptable way

Definition of 'User-Led Centre': As referred to in the original brief for the BDRC there was a great emphasis put upon a user-led centre. During our visits to the other Disability Resource Centres it became apparent that the term 'user-led' has a very broad definition. It is important that this is debated and resolved for Buckinghamshire prior to the way forward for BDRC is established.

Model 1:

- ◆ Constitution to reflect a management committee consisting of people with physical disabilities.
- ◆ Only committee members with physical disabilities have a voting right
- ◆ Centre ethos is to develop committee members from users of the centre
- ◆ Minimal decision making devolved to centre manager
- ◆ Centre manager has a remit within the job description to support management committee members in their role

Model 2:

- ◆ Constitution to reflect a management Committee of people with physical disabilities.
- ◆ Only committee members with a physical disability have voting rights
- ◆ Committee members are in the majority professional people who have a physical disability
- ◆ Committee members offer business support to the centre manager
- ◆ The committee invest resources into the development of the centre manager

As you can see from the two models both centres have the same constitution. However leadership of the centre under the banner of user-led is very different. Both are very effective but as you would expect the involvement and experience of users are very different.

At the time of writing this report there was only one outstanding piece of information that had not been forthcoming. This was the financial information relating to the running costs of the BDRC. This information had been requested on numerous occasions but was not made available by Aylesbury Vale Healthcare Trust.

Conclusion

I am satisfied in my role as independent supervisor of the review that the process has been transparent. The consultant has fulfilled the 20 day specified activity and addressed all aspects of the brief.

With the exception of the one piece of financial information outstanding all of the stakeholder organisations have co-operated in full.

The Tenants Group have been very professional in their approach to the review and have co-operated in full.

All organisations and individuals who requested involvement in the review have been included.

It is worth noting that when visiting the other 3 Resource Centres, they all held BDRC in high esteem and 2 of the centres have regular contact.