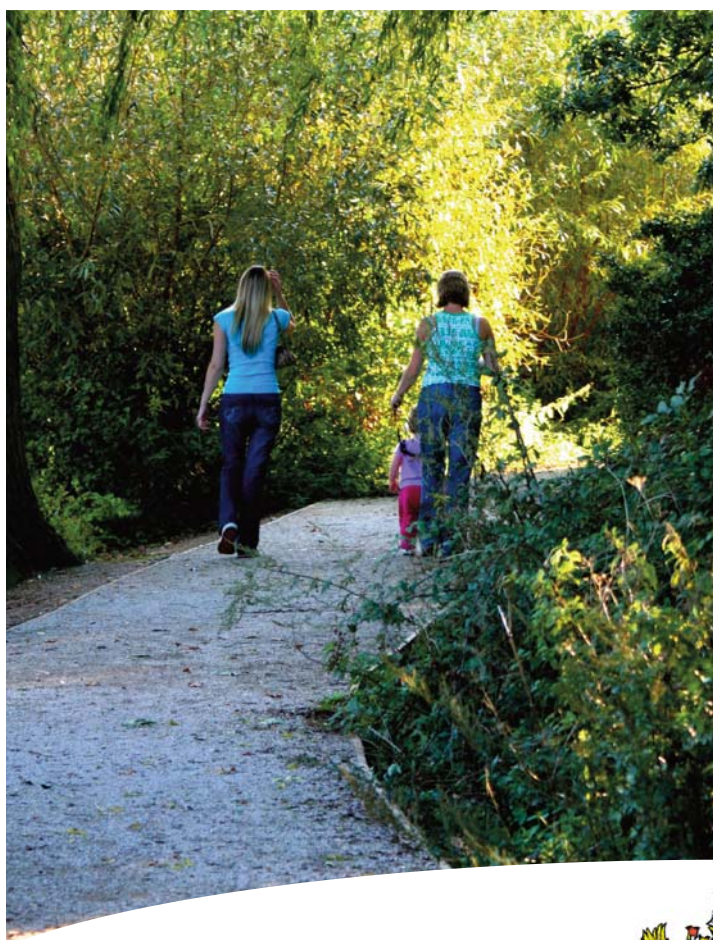


Final Report of the Project Team to the Review Committee

Review of How Voluntary and Community Groups Function in the District



REVIEW OF HOW VOLUNTARY AND COMMUNITY GROUPS FUNCTION IN THE DISTRICT

1 Index

1	Index.....	1
2	Glossary.....	1
3	Introduction.....	2
4	Terms of reference	3
5	Methodology	4
6	Findings.....	5
6.1	Changes to the sector.....	5
6.2	Role of a CVS and Volunteering Centre	6
6.3	Rayleigh and Rochford Association of Voluntary Services	7
6.4	Rochford and Rayleigh Citizens Advice Bureau	8
6.5	Other Community and Voluntary groups.....	9
6.6	Findings.....	10
7	Conclusion	11
8	Recommendations.....	17

2 Glossary

CAB	Citizens Advice Bureau
CAVS	Castle Point Association of Voluntary Services
CCG	Clinical Commissioning Group
CVS	Community Voluntary Service
EACVS	Essex Association of Community Voluntary Services
ECC	Essex County Council
LSP	Local Strategic Partnership
NAVCA	National Association for Voluntary and Community Action
PCT	Primary Care trust
RRAVS	Rayleigh Rochford and District Association for Voluntary Services
RRCAB	Rochford and Rayleigh Citizen Advice Bureau
VE	Volunteering England

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3 Introduction

- 3.1 Over the last few years there has been talk by the Government about the “Big Society” and measures introduced under the Localism Act such as the Community Right to Challenge and the Community Right to buy. This has coincided with the introduction of cuts in public expenditure which has had a knock on effect to grant funding from Local Authorities and also a reduction in grant funding from other sources.
- 3.2 The Committee felt that in light of the introduction of the concept of the "Big Society" and the reductions in available grant funding from all sources it would be timely to look at how voluntary and community groups function in the district to try to identify best practice / different successful operational models and also to raise awareness of the problems / issues affecting the sector.
- 3.3 As this was an area that interested all Members of the Committee it was agreed that it would be an all Committee review.

REVIEW OF HOW VOLUNTARY AND COMMUNITY GROUPS FUNCTION IN THE DISTRICT

4 Terms of reference

- 4.1 Following discussions and a meeting of the Committee and the Community Planning Officer, it was agreed that the terms of reference for the review would be 'To compare Voluntary and Community groups in and out of the District'.
- 4.2 It was further agreed that the grant funding process of the Council would not be examined as part of the review.

5 Methodology

- 5.1 The project team decided that they would meet with groups from in and out of the District to try to identify best practice / different successful operational models.
- 5.2 As a first round of meetings it was agreed that they would meet with Rayleigh Rochford and District Association for Voluntary Services (RRAVS), Rochford and Rayleigh Citizens Advice Bureau (RRCAB), Castle Point Association of Voluntary Services (CAVS), Maldon & District Community Voluntary Service and the Essex Association of CVS (EACVS). As the CVS' are the umbrella organisations for each area it was felt that they should be the first organisation that the Committee talked to. The RRCAB was keen to meet with Councillors and so it was agreed that they would attend a formal Committee meeting. All other meetings were informal private meetings with the Committee Members.
- 5.3 A visit to RRAVS premises were also arranged to allow Members to see the various parts of their operation.
- 5.4 To aid comparison between the various organisations, a questionnaire was prepared, which was sent to each of the three CVS' in advance of the scheduled meetings. This questionnaire was amended slightly for the RRCAB and also the EACVS due to the differing nature of their roles.
- 5.5 Finally a shorter questionnaire, with only those questions relevant to the smaller voluntary groups, was prepared and placed on the Council's web site so information could be gathered from the other voluntary groups in the District. A link to the questionnaire was sent to as many of the voluntary groups in the District as possible.

6 Findings

6.1 Changes to the sector

- 6.1.1 During the review the Committee received input from a number of different Community Voluntary Services (CVS) across Essex. The majority of these groups are run by a mixture of full time and/or part time staff and volunteers and are reliant on the support of grant funding from their local authority, the PCT and also Essex County Council for their core services. This funding model usually means that they are small and lack capacity in certain areas.
- 6.1.2 For the majority of local authorities there is a CVS that covers the same area. Each of these CVS' works to co-ordinate, support and strengthen the work of the voluntary and community sector (VCS) within their district. The majority of these groups also have a Volunteer Centre (VC) as an integrated service which to some extent is inter-dependent on each other through shared facilities and information.
- 6.1.3 The CVS will normally look to identify gaps in services within the District and develop services to fill these gaps. Each CVS operates in different ways; any services developed to fill identified gaps in provision will either be kept within the umbrella of the CVS or alternatively be set up as an independent group which will operate away from CVS influence.
- 6.1.4 One group that the Committee contacted, CAVS, had expanded from the standard model of a CVS. In 2008 they had made the decision to bid to run a number of children's centres in Castle Point on behalf of ECC. This had allowed them to grow in size and whilst they still provide the same services and receive grant funding from the same sources as other CVS' in Essex, they also generate income from their own activities, which gives them more ability to submit bids for other work within their Borough and across Essex.
- 6.1.5 The funding for the CVS' in Essex has come in the past from three main sources:-
- The relevant Local Authority
 - The PCT
 - Essex County Council
- 6.1.6 The grant from the relevant Local Authority has been reduced in some cases in line with the cut in grant funding to the local authorities from the Government. In the case of RRAVS their funding was reduced from £27,000 per annum in 2010/11 to £15,000 per annum in 2011/12.
- 6.1.7 In addition to this reduction from April 2013 there will be no grant funding from the PCT as the CCG will have taken over responsibility for the majority of health matters and social health matters being

REVIEW OF HOW VOLUNTARY AND COMMUNITY GROUPS FUNCTION IN THE DISTRICT

transferred to ECC. It is expected that the CCG will look to provide funding to groups on a commissioning basis.

6.1.8 It is also expected that ECC will also move to a commissioning model of funding shortly, although the timetable for this transition is uncertain. It is unclear whether this type of funding will cover the running of the CVS' core services. In addition other funding sources such as the Big Lottery have also moved away from funding core services, instead they look to fund new initiatives and projects.

6.1.9 It is important to understand what is meant by commissioning, as this term is often used interchangeably with contracting, purchasing or procurement. This useful definition from the Audit Commission, which is used in the Enabling Commissioning Framework, captures the key elements of the commissioning task (in this instance for community care):-

“Commissioning is the process of specifying, securing and monitoring services to meet people’s needs at a strategic level. This applies to all services, whether they are provided by the local authority, NHS, other public agencies, or by the private and voluntary sectors.”

6.1.10 This definition emphasises the cyclical nature of the activities involved, from understanding needs and analysing capacity, to monitoring services; commissioning is an ongoing process, not a one-off event.

6.1.11 Commissioning also includes managing the market to ensure the right mix and pattern of services to meet statutory guidelines and local objectives within the resources available.

6.1.12 When a local group is involved in commissioning, it takes the Officer away from their usual duties, as opposed to national organisations that have specialist staff that in the main concentrate on just funding applications.

6.2 Role of a CVS and Volunteering Centre

6.2.1 As a National Association for Voluntary and Community Action (NAVCA) registered organisation, a CVS is required to deliver five core areas of service:-

1. **Information and Advice including support services** – This can be via a web site and/or via newsletters and other regular publications and updates. Most CVS will have compiled a Directory of Voluntary and Community Organisations or similar.
2. **Consultation and Representation** - The CVS should represent the views and concerns of voluntary organisations to other agencies. This is via its membership and requires accurate exchange of information and by identifying the needs of its

REVIEW OF HOW VOLUNTARY AND COMMUNITY GROUPS FUNCTION IN THE DISTRICT

member organisations and presenting these effectively to other agencies.

3. **Practical Assistance** - This can be by identifying suitable funding using specialist tools, by helping with publicity or by providing advice and training around bid writing. Facilitation of events specifically focused to communicate changes in policy and structures which may impact the sector or assist with the sharing of best practice between member groups..
4. **Service Development** – To identify unmet needs and develop appropriate funded services to fill these needs either on their own or with partner agencies.
5. **Supporting Strategic Partnerships** – This is to co-ordinate effective planning of new services and activity with the aim to eradicate overlaps in services and enable effective joint working

6.2.2 As an accredited member of Volunteering England (VE), a volunteering centre is required to deliver six core functions:-

1. **Brokerage** – To match the individual volunteer to the most suitable opportunity; to hold information on a comprehensive range of opportunities; to offer potential volunteers the support, encouragement and information they need.
2. **Marketing Volunteering** – To promote interest in volunteering and community activity.
3. **Good Practice Development** – By promoting good practice in volunteer management in all volunteer involving organisations; to advise on training, workshops and opportunities for potential volunteers, managers and staff.
4. **Developing Volunteering Opportunities** – To work in close partnership with statutory, voluntary and private sector agencies as well as community groups to develop local volunteering opportunities; to advise local CVS member organisations of different opportunities and methods to encourage volunteers.
5. **Policy Response and Campaigning** – To participate in campaigns on issues that affect volunteers or volunteering; to collaborate on joint issues affecting neighbouring Volunteer Centres.
6. **Strategic Development of Volunteering** – To be aware of strategic thinking and planning at a Regional level; to be a fully accredited member of Volunteering England.

6.3 **Rayleigh and Rochford Association of Voluntary Services**

REVIEW OF HOW VOLUNTARY AND COMMUNITY GROUPS FUNCTION IN THE DISTRICT

- 6.3.1 RRAVS were formed in 1998, they are the umbrella organisation representing the interests of all voluntary and community groups in the Rochford district. They provide the link between the voluntary and statutory sectors to monitor, support and feedback on all aspects of community life.
- 6.3.2 They are members of the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) and are part of the Community Development Partnership, which is one of the thematic partnerships of the LSP.
- 6.3.3 Between 2009 and 2011 the LSP provided funding for a Chief Officer post for RRAVS via Performance Reward Grant monies received from ECC. The purpose of this appointment was to build capacity in the third sector in the District including increasing its financial sustainability. Unfortunately this funding ceased in 2011 at the end of the two year agreement and the post of Chief Officer was made redundant.
- 6.3.4 This has meant that RRAVS due to their current size and priorities appear more reactive, they have limited funds and are not able to attend the various meetings in the District and elsewhere which would enable it to keep up the profile of the third sector in the District. They are reliant on grant funding and appear to lack the capacity to be able to compete for funding from certain other sources.

6.4 **Rochford and Rayleigh Citizens Advice Bureau**

- 6.4.1 During the Review Members met with representatives from the Rochford and Rayleigh Citizens Advice Bureau. A copy of the minutes of the meeting can be found [here](#). This is another group that has suffered from a reduction in Local Authority grants.
- 6.4.2 Unlike the local CVS most people in the street have heard of the Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB), however, if asked the majority of these people would probably say that they thought that the CAB was funded by central government.
- 6.4.3 In fact whilst the CAB is a National Organisation the local branches such as the Rochford and Rayleigh Citizens Advice Bureau (RRCAB) are local independent charities. As such they have to raise their own funding and do not receive any funds from the National Organisation. Most local CABs receive a grant from their local authority which makes up the bulk of their funding. The RRCAB have seen their funding from the local authority reduce in the last couple of years, but have managed to obtain one off funding from other sources. It is a fundamental principle of the CAB service across the country that it offers a free service to all its customers. The CAB does not ask directly for donations from those people that it assists.
- 6.4.4 The two areas that the RRCAB find that they are asked about most are benefits and debt. Due to changes in the benefits system (Local Council Tax Support Scheme, Universal Credit and Personal

REVIEW OF HOW VOLUNTARY AND COMMUNITY GROUPS FUNCTION IN THE DISTRICT

Independence Payments) due to start in April 2013 the RRCAB expect to have to provide more advice to help residents through these changes.

6.4.5 In recent times the RRCAB have operated an outreach service where they have called on targeted residents to bring awareness of benefits and services people may be entitled to, to help them keep warm in cold weather. They are looking to continue this service subject to a successful bid for funding.

6.4.6 The RRCAB operate with one full time member of staff, 6 part time members and 70 volunteers. Whilst the RRCAB do use the RRAVS volunteering section to obtain some volunteers, they also advertise directly and use word of mouth. These volunteers are thoroughly trained which can take up to a year before being allowed to advise clients.

6.5 **Other Community and Voluntary groups**

6.5.1 As part of the review a questionnaire was sent to all those community and voluntary groups that the Council or RRAVS had the contact details for. From this mailing 40 replies were received and the responses were analysed. The following information was established:-

- Over 75% of the groups raise their own funds through their own fund raising. As some of the groups contacted were scouts, guides, football clubs or similar this answer was to be expected. As one group mentioned they only sought assistance from RRAVS when they were looking for capital funding. These types of group will usually cover their operating costs either by subscriptions or their own fundraising.
- Just over 30% of the groups contacted found some of their volunteers through the volunteering centre at RRAVS. Again some of the groups contacted by their nature will obtain volunteers from the parents of the children that their services are aimed at.
- Over 50% of the groups that responded are run completely by volunteers.

6.5.2 The final question on the questionnaire was seeking the smaller groups views on what would happen to the local community and voluntary groups in the short and long term following the reduction in funding that has taken place. This produced a number of comments which can be summarised as follows:-

- Cuts have to be made and you have to budget more carefully with the funds that are available.
- Difficult to maintain accommodation or pay for transport.

REVIEW OF HOW VOLUNTARY AND COMMUNITY GROUPS FUNCTION IN THE DISTRICT

- Small groups who raise own funds will continue to exist while others will have to close.
- The withdrawal of the discretionary rate relief has meant additional strain on their finances.
- Groups will not be able to expand their services but will be restricted to their existing offering.

6.6 Findings

- 6.6.1 When RRAVS are compared to CAVS from the neighbouring Local Authority it can be seen that larger organisations, who are able to generate their own funds, and therefore increase their capacity (staff etc.) are more pro active. CAVS are able to attend more meetings, so raising their own profile and also that of the third sector organisations in their Borough, spotting opportunities when they first occur.
- 6.6.2 More funders are moving over too a commissioning model of funding. If an organisation does not have the capacity then this way of funding will mean that they will lose out and will lead to less capacity etc. Those groups that generate their own funds and have capacity will be able to bid for more work under the commissioning model and so will increase in capacity etc.
- 6.6.3 In the longer term there will probably be two types of Voluntary Sector group, the first will be those small organisations who focus on a certain niche areas which are operated by volunteers, raise their own funding via collections or donations etc. The second group will be the larger organisations that have built capacity and generate their own funds by bidding for work in the market place.
- 6.6.4 It is difficult to see how a group could transform from a small group to a large group by building the necessary capacity in their organisation. In fact a lot of the smaller groups will probably be happy to continue to be run by volunteers and carry on as they have always done.
- 6.6.5 For those groups that do wish to try and grow the government has given them support via the Localism Act. This does not mean that the organisations will automatically grow, as they could remain the same size while taking advantage of the changes it has introduced, but there is an opportunity to generate income for the organisation if they choose to do so.
- 6.6.6 The Localism Act introduced the Community Right to Challenge (where communities can challenge to take over local services that they think they can run differently and better,) and the Community Right to Buy. There is currently funding available to allow groups to explore opportunities and build capacity to assist them in this respect.

7 Conclusion

- 7.1 Whilst the report covers how the voluntary and community groups function in the District it is difficult not to focus on RRAVS who as the CVS are the umbrella organisation for these groups.
- 7.2 As previously mentioned a CVS is required to deliver five core areas of service. The problem being as in any organisation is that while a role is being fulfilled you need to look to what level this role is being fulfilled and whether it meets the needs of its consumers. If it was a business you were looking at, its level of success at achieving its aims would be measured in the amount of profit it made. In the case of a voluntary organisation this is much more difficult to measure in that there is no profit as such and consumers do not have the choice of visiting another store say, as the voluntary organisation has a form of monopoly in the area. For example there is not a number of CVSs competing in the same District.
- 7.3 During the Review and from talking to representatives from various CVSs it was clear that each CVS approach the roles differently. It could also be seen that each one had different strengths and while they could be seen to be strong in certain areas this was to some extent balanced by their offering in another.
- 7.4 The aim of the review was to recognise best practice and try to highlight it when seen.
- 7.5 It is clear that the timing of the review has coincided with what is a difficult time for all voluntary and community groups but more so for a CVS when two of its main funders are going through changes that will have a knock on effect to the funding they provide. With the uncertainty regarding the level of funding RRAVS will receive from its other two main funders it is only natural that the Council should wish to look at the operation of the CVS more closely.
- 7.6 Over the last two full financial years the expenditure of unrestricted funds has exceeded unrestricted income and RRAVS have had to take money from their reserves to balance their budget. At the meeting with RRAVS members were advised that this situation would be the same for this financial year. In the long term this cannot continue, even more so if two of its three funders do not continue. RRAVS only have a limited amount of reserves and cannot continue to draw these down. The levels of funding previously seen cannot be made up by this authority which leaves RRAVS with some difficult choices about their future. The cost of the premises they occupy and their wage bill for the 2011/12 financial year was as much as the grant monies they received.

REVIEW OF HOW VOLUNTARY AND COMMUNITY GROUPS FUNCTION IN THE DISTRICT

- 7.7 Irrespective of the level of funding it was clear from the meetings held with the CVSs and the answers to the questionnaires from the voluntary and community groups that there are some areas of best practice which can be recommended.
- 7.8 Whilst RRAVS currently hold an annual community information day which enables the public to see what some of its groups do other CVSs hold meetings with their member groups. This provides the opportunity to discuss issues affecting the sector rather than just sending out a newsletter. These meetings could possibly take the form of community breakfasts, along the lines of the Council's business breakfasts, with guest speakers from funding organisations, being held quarterly on both sides of the District.

Recommendation No 1

It is recommended to RRAVS that regular meetings of the voluntary and community sector groups are held within the District led by the voluntary sector.

- 7.9 A lot of the voluntary and community groups within the District operate without paid staff and rely on the good will of their volunteers. Funding opportunities can occur outside the monthly funding letter and sometimes these groups just need support and assurance that they are not alone. With the use of social media and/or a community forum it would be possible to allow groups to interact and also obtain/share funding details when needed.

Recommendation No 2

It is recommended to RRAVS that the use of social media is explored to contact the voluntary groups in the District and to encourage interaction between them.

- 7.10 As part of any application to the main funding sources it is necessary to provide a profile of the area that you are supporting.

Recommendation No 3

It is recommended to the Executive that the profile of Rochford be updated annually and published on the Council's web site to assist groups completing funding applications.

REVIEW OF HOW VOLUNTARY AND COMMUNITY GROUPS FUNCTION IN THE DISTRICT

7.11 To assist the voluntary organisations in the District it would be useful to provide details of contacts etc. and funding opportunities on the web site. Also to possibly provide the location of groups on the Council's mapping facility should they so wish.

Recommendation No 4

It is recommended to the Executive that the Council's website includes a page dedicated to information on voluntary organisations in Rochford, with all future Rochford DC grant aid forms and to include a section providing the opportunity for groups to have their details in the maps section.

7.12 During the review the team heard from a number of groups and it became clear how important it was to keep up the profile of the voluntary sector. One of the ways that this can be accomplished is by attendance at strategic meetings. Some of the main funders attend these meetings and it is important that the Districts voluntary sector is represented so that when projects are discussed the relevant group can be identified.

Recommendation No 5

It is recommended to RRAVS that there is representation, at the appropriate level of the Rochford District voluntary sector, at strategic meetings.

7.13 It is clear from the evidence above that RRAVS cannot continue to operate at a loss even if they do receive the same level of funding as last year.

Recommendation No 6

It is recommended to RRAVS that they look to restructure the CVS to ensure that they can work within their annual funding.

7.14 It was noted how an organisation was able to grow once they were able to move away from a reliance solely on grant funding. Whilst

REVIEW OF HOW VOLUNTARY AND COMMUNITY GROUPS FUNCTION IN THE DISTRICT

the right opportunity needs to be identified and the group need to ensure that they do not lose sight of their core functions, it can provide a degree of financial stability that grant funding cannot.

Recommendation No 7

It is recommended to RRAVS that they look to try and develop a separate income stream rather than rely solely on grant funding.

7.15 The project team were interested to hear how other groups ran their operations and it was noted how several other groups made use of volunteers to run some of the key roles in the organisation rather than paying staff on a part time basis. In view of the high level of running costs that RRAVS have incurred over the last few years the team would recommend that this is examined as a possible way of reducing their outgoings.

Recommendation No 8

It is recommended to RRAVS that they investigate the use of volunteers to undertake key roles rather than paying staff to perform those duties.

7.16 Members were very supportive of the CAB and the work they undertake, they recognised the challenges that the CAB will face over the next year as changes to the benefits system are made. Whilst there is a limited amount of grant funding that the authority can supply Members were keen that residents were made aware of the constant need for funding that the CAB have.

Recommendation No 9

It is recommended to the Executive the Council publicise the work of the CAB to ensure that the public understand that while the Local Authority fund the work of the CAB, donations from the public are necessary.

REVIEW OF HOW VOLUNTARY AND COMMUNITY GROUPS FUNCTION IN THE DISTRICT

7.17 During the meeting with the project team and the CAB it was mentioned that a number of people that make contact with them only need sign posting to various agencies and are then able to deal with their problems themselves. The Committee understand that these enquiries are dealt with via a face to face interview and it was felt that it would be better use of their time if these enquiries could be dealt with by phone.

Recommendation No 10

It is recommended to the CAB that they investigate whether it would be possible to deal with those one off clients who only need signposting to various agencies, via a telephone advice line rather than a full face to face interview.

7.18 The project team were advised of some examples of complex cases that the CAB had become involved with. The team felt that in certain cases it was the lack of advice provided by the Government departments that had caused the problems.

Recommendation No 11

It is recommended to the Executive that the Council lobby central government to ensure that various departments such as DWP, provide full advice to their clients, rather than letting the CAB offices around the country deal with the problems that occur because of the lack of clear guidance and assistance from these departments.

7.19 For those more complex cases where a number of meetings with the client is necessary and the CAB employees have to become involved in complex issues it was felt that there should be a way for the CAB to seek reimbursement when the problem was not of their clients making. If you use a no win no fee solicitor you expect them to claim their costs from your opponent. In the same way it was felt that if the CAB carries out work on behalf of a client due to problems that have been caused by no fault of their client then the CAB should be able to claim back their costs from the other party especially in those cases involving government departments.

Recommendation No 12

It is recommended to the CAB that they investigate whether they are able to claim for time and costs from Government departments when it can be proved that someone has not received correct advice from their employees.

REVIEW OF HOW VOLUNTARY AND COMMUNITY GROUPS FUNCTION IN THE DISTRICT

7.20 Whilst the project team did not investigate the provision of office space provided to the CAB reference was made at the meeting with the CAB improvements to their systems and how both offices were needed. It was felt that it would be useful with the use of newer technologies by the CAB if the Council's Estates department could carry out a review with the CAB to examine the best use of space is achieved.

Recommendation No 13

It is recommended to the Executive that Estates review the use of the accommodation provided in Rochford and Rayleigh with the CAB to ensure the best use of space.

8 Recommendations

Recommendation No 1

(Section 7.8, Page 12)

It is recommended to RRAVS that regular meetings of the voluntary and community sector groups are held within the District led by the voluntary sector.

Recommendation No 2

(Section 7.9, Page 12)

It is recommended to RRAVS that the use of social media is explored to contact the voluntary groups in the District and to encourage interaction between them.

Recommendation No 3

(Section 7.10, Page 12)

It is recommended to the Executive that the profile of Rochford be updated annually and published on the Council's web site to assist groups completing funding applications.

Recommendation No 4

(Section 7.11, Page 13)

It is recommended to the Executive that the Council's website includes a page dedicated to information on voluntary organisations in Rochford, with all future Rochford DC grant aid forms and to include a section providing the opportunity for groups to have their details in the maps section.

Recommendation No 5

(Section 7.12, Page 13)

It is recommended to RRAVS that there is representation, at the appropriate level of the Rochford District voluntary sector, at strategic meetings.

Recommendation No 6

(Section 7.13, Page 13)

It is recommended to RRAVS that they look to restructure the CVS to ensure that they can work within their annual funding.

Recommendation No 7

(Section 7.14, Page 14)

It is recommended to RRAVS that they look to try and develop a separate income stream rather than rely solely on grant funding.

Recommendation No 8

(Section 7.15, Page 14)

It is recommended to RRAVS that they investigate the use of volunteers to undertake key roles rather than paying staff to perform those duties.

Recommendation No 9

(Section 7.16, Page 14)

It is recommended to the Executive the Council publicise the work of the CAB to ensure that the public understand that while the Local Authority fund the work of the CAB, donations from the public are necessary.

Recommendation No 10

(Section 7.17, Page 15)

It is recommended to the CAB that they investigate whether it would be possible to deal with those one off clients, who only need signposting to various agencies, via a telephone advice line rather than a full face to face interview.

Recommendation No 11

(Section 7.18, Page 15)

It is recommended to the Executive that the Council lobby central government to ensure that various departments such as DWP, provide full advice to their clients, rather than letting the CAB offices around the country deal with the problems that occur because of the lack of clear guidance and assistance from these departments.

Recommendation No 12

(Section 7.19, Page 15)

It is recommended to the CAB that they investigate whether they are able to claim for time and costs from Government departments when it can be proved that someone has not received correct advice from their employees.

Recommendation No 13

(Section 7.20, Page 16)

It is recommended to the Executive that Estates review the use of the accommodation provided in Rochford and Rayleigh with the CAB to ensure the best use of space.



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