

RAYLEIGH, ROCHFORD AND DISTRICT ASSOCIATION FOR VOLUNTARY SERVICES (RRAVS) – CORE FUNDING SUPPORT

1 SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report seeks Members' views on a request from RRAVS for the District Council to become an equal supporting partner by looking at increasing its core funding support to up to £10,000 per annum, to help the organisation address the increasing demands now being placed upon it.

2 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 At the present time, RRAVS is supported by a number of organisations, including the District Council, the County Council and the Primary Healthcare Trust (PCT). All have service level agreements with RRAVS.
- 2.2 The current level of funding from the Council comprises £1,750 general grant. The County Council's grant to RRAVS is currently almost £16,000 per annum whilst the PCT provides £10,000 per annum. The current service level agreement between this Council and RRAVS will expire in March 2005.
- 2.3 There is also a specific funding allocation from the County Council passported through this Council in connection with Community Transport (£10,000 in 2003/2004 and up to £33,500 for 2004/2005).

3 DETAILED CONSIDERATIONS

RRAVS Request

- 3.1 RRAVS has approached this Council, with a view to seeking an increase in core funding from 2005/2006, in line with the other main funding partner agencies. The amount being sought from this Council is £10,000, although any sum over and above the current level of general grant funding support (£1,750) would be welcomed.
- 3.2 RRAVS is looking to the District Council to be at least an equal supporting partner in respect of voluntary services. Such support would help address the particular issue of core funding which supports not only the day to day operation and service improvement and expansion, but also enables involvement in the increasing agenda being placed on the voluntary sector. RRAVS point out that having made enquiries of other Essex CVSs, the support received from Rochford District Council appears to be the lowest from the responses obtained.

- 3.3 In support of its case, RRAVS cites the work it currently undertakes in terms of the administration and organisation of the voluntary sector in Rochford. It brings the voluntary sector together four times per year and organises the Voluntary Sector Open Day Event in the Mill Hall in October. It coordinates and advises groups across the voluntary sector.
- 3.4 RRAVS produces and regularly updates its District-wide Voluntary Services directory. Through specific funding from the County Council via this Authority, it is also responsible for the management and operation of the Community Transport initiative which is being progressed to Trust status (and is also programmed for further examination by this Committee in the near future).
- 3.5 RRAVS also oversees a laptop project for the elderly, which to date has resulted in some 130 elderly persons developing IT skills. More recently, RRAVS has appointed a Funding Coordinator, on a short-term 12 month contract basis, in an attempt to build up its funding capacity and to provide guidance and support on funding applications to the voluntary sector through seeking further opportunities to secure financial support.
- 3.6 RRAVS considers that with the increasing demands now placed upon it, in terms of Community Development and providing more services via the voluntary sector, it needs to secure additional core funding to ensure that it has sufficient capacity at the centre to respond to the growing demands placed upon it and to investigate provision of increased services.
- 3.7 As of next April, all Councils will need to enter into “Compacts” with the Voluntary Sector in their area and publish those Compacts. Compacts are not intended to replace Service Level Agreements nor will they be binding contracts. However, they will be statements of broad principles, covering such matters as the need for working together, appropriate and sustained funding, consultation, common policy objectives and volunteering. A draft Compact based on the suggested national template has been presented to the Local Strategic Partnership for consideration and comment and will be submitted to this Committee in January.

4 OFFICER COMMENT

- 4.1 It is clear that RRAVS feel that more and more requests are being made on what is, on the face of it, a voluntary service. At the same time, there is no doubt that the opportunities for the voluntary sector to play a key role in shaping and delivering local services are increasing. This is not just as a result of Government legislation and guidance, but is also in response to the demands of the voluntary sector nationally and increasing public expectation around community development in localities. RRAVS participates, for example, with the District Council in partnership meetings such as the Local Strategic Partnership and the Joint Health Forum with the Primary Care Trust. For RRAVS to maintain and improve its services, in liaison with other partners, core funding is considered to be a key issue.

- 4.2 In the context of the District Council committing to additional core funding support of up to £10,000, it is difficult to envisage how such an increase in commitment could be made at this time, given the financial uncertainty facing the Council. Nonetheless, it might be possible to look at additional funding being made in relation to specific projects which are in line with the Council's own aims and objectives.
- 4.3 As part of our continuing commitment to service improvement, there might be further ways in which RRAVS can help the Council in return for specific targeted funding support.
- 4.4 At this point in time, it would appear relevant for the Council to liaise with RRAVS' other principal funding partners to see how they view their long term funding of RRAVS and to see whether, collectively, we can all help RRAVS to meet the perceived additional demands placed upon it. It would be useful too, at this stage, to look at whether there are potentially other funding partners, and in addition, to look at the role and functioning of RRAVS relative to the other key similar voluntary agencies the Council support - the STAR partnership in particular.
- 4.5 It appears that RRAVS has traditionally focused on administration, information, coordination and support across the voluntary sector, with some limited projects directly managed, whilst the STAR partnership, as it has progressed, has focussed primarily on project development and building up capacity in the local community. Some work around improving the interface between the two agencies might be of benefit to the whole of the District and to both organisations.
- 4.6 It is therefore suggested that the Council maintain its current level of support of the organisation, with the appropriate level of increase to allow for inflation, but concurrently talk to other key funding partners around the issue of capacity and enhancing support for RRAVS in the long term. Also, it would be worthwhile to look at the role/relationship between RRAVS and other local community voluntary organisations such as the STAR partnership to see whether collectively capacity across the voluntary sector can be increased to the benefit of the District and the organisations concerned.

5 RECOMMENDATION

- 5.1 It is proposed that the Committee:
- (i) confirm its commitment to providing core funding to RRAVS at the existing level of grant (plus inflation) for 2005/2006;

- (ii) at the same time, request that officers investigate with other key partner agencies funding RRAVS as to how the capacity of the organisation can best be secured to meet the demands now placed upon it and in the future, including a broader look at other similar voluntary agencies within the District, with a report back by March 2005.
- (iii) invite RRAVS to a future meeting to explore ways of expanding core capacity to meet the growing demands now placed upon it.

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