
REVIEW OF HOW VOLUNTARY AND COMMUNITY GROUPS FUNCTION IN THE DISTRICT

1 SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report provides Members with an update on the recommendations from the Report of the Review Committee on 'How Voluntary and Community Groups Function in the District' published in January 2013.

2 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 Over the last few years there have been 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. The Review Committee resolved to look at how this has affected local voluntary and community groups in detail.
- 2.2 The resulting report identified best practice / different successful operational models and also raised awareness of the problems / issues affecting the sector. In total, 12 recommendations were made. This report will provide an update on each.

3 UPDATE ON RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 ***It is recommended to the Rayleigh, Rochford and District Association for Voluntary Service (RRAVS) that regular meetings of the voluntary and community sector are held within the District led by the voluntary sector.***

RRAVS have planned a programme of community breakfast events to be held quarterly. Two have been held so far – one in Rochford themed around health in June (38 attendees) and one in Hullbridge focussing on social care in September (39 attendees). The next event is planned for 27 November themed around 'safeguarding'. RRAVS also hold an annual open day event. This year the 'Your Community' event was held on 8 November at the Mill Hall, Rayleigh which was attended by a number of local voluntary and statutory organisations.

- 3.2 ***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.***

Regular updates are sent using Twitter, Facebook, and emails. LinkedIn and NAVCA boodle are also used to connect with colleagues and partners. Weekly updates and articles are sent to all groups in the district every week by email. RRAVS regularly updates its Facebook page with up and coming events, volunteer opportunities and grant programmes and uses Twitter to

send out volunteering opportunities and news on events. A newsletter is produced and set out quarterly.

- 3.3 ***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.***

There is a dedicated page on the Council's website titled 'Rochford District Profile'. It contains Census 2011 and health related data, as well as general information on the make up of the District. This will be updated annually.

- 3.4 ***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.***

A webpage has been created which links to the grant aid forms and a mapping section. This was launched at the end of October 2013.

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

The Partnership & Operations Manager has attended Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) training with Essex County Council, Children Centre partnership meeting, funding training with the Essex Funding Team and Basildon's Volunteering Conference.

The Strategic Manager has continued to attend the Essex Association of Councils for Voluntary Service. Locally regular attendance to the LSP Executive, Health and Wellbeing Board (HWBB), CSP Steering Group, The Children's Partnership, Commissioning Reference Group (CCG sub group) and the Community Development Partnership. As an active member of these groups the Strategic Manager has raised the issue of Young Carers as a defined priority group. This has taken been raised by the Chair of the Rochford and Castle Point HWBB at the County HWBB and young carers will be included in their framework going forward.

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

The Office Manager role was made redundant in March 2013. The Volunteer Centre Manager was not replaced in April 2013.

The Partnerships and Operations Manager and Strategic Manager roles have been recruited to take the organisation forward with the intention to develop more sustainable income streams in the future. A Volunteer Centre Co-ordinator has replaced the Volunteer Centre Manager.

3.7 ***It is recommended to RRAVS that they look to try and develop a separate income stream.***

Funding secured from 'BIG ASSIST' to commission NAVCA (National Association of Voluntary and Community Associations) to develop a Strategic Plan to include sustainable income streams for the future.

A strategic planning away day was held on 23 September facilitated by NAVCA. The organisation's mission and vision will be updated with new strategic and sustainability plans being prepared.

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

To cover the administration duties of RRAVS two additional volunteers have been recruited since 1 April 2013, taking the number of volunteers supporting a variety of office functions, including financial reporting to ten. In August 2013 changes took place with the Volunteer Centre Manager leaving and being replaced by a Co-ordinator. This has led to new volunteers being recruited. Recruitment of volunteers is on going.

3.9 ***It is recommended to the Executive the Council publicise the work of the Rochford and Rayleigh Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) to ensure that the public understand that while the Local Authority fund the work of the CAB, donations from the public are necessary.***

The CAB has a regular slot in Rochford District Matters, which aims to educate residents about the work that the CAB undertakes and how it is funded.

3.10 ***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.***

Since 2008, the CAB has operated both a drop in service for face to face initial assessments and a telephone service for the same assessments. These assessments last approx. 10 minutes. Clients that present straightforward issues that are able to be dealt with at the initial contact are given information to help them deal with the problem themselves including directing them to the appropriate area of the Citizens Advice public website www.adviceguide.org.uk which contains a great deal of information or signposted to an appropriate agency. The route chosen is dependant on a client's ability to deal with the situation and the complexity of it. Assessors are trained to assess this. Approx. 35% of enquiries are dealt with at this stage. Without carrying out the initial assessment, it is not known whether signposting would be appropriate.

The CAB shares a telephone service with neighbouring Bureaux, enabling the phones to be answered throughout the week; far more than their resources would allow working alone. Clients with straightforward issues are again given information to enable them to deal with the problem themselves. Clients presenting issues requiring full advice who are not resident in Rochford District are referred to their local Bureau who make arrangements for an appointment locally by whatever method is most appropriate. The initial exploration is shared between the Bureaux via a secure network so the client does not need to repeat the information. The CAB also receives referrals from neighbouring Bureaux who have undertaken initial assessments for Rochford residents.

Of the 65% of issues presented which are not dealt with at the initial contact, appointments are made for either a face to face advice session lasting approx. 1 hour or telephone advice, whichever is appropriate to the complexity of the issues presented and/or the client's ability to deal with issues over the telephone. Approx. 90% of clients require a face to face appointment, either because of the complexity of the problem, e.g. paperwork to be consulted, or client is unable to deal with the issues over the telephone.

The traditional method of obtaining advice from the CAB is by visiting their offices. The CAB remains mindful that opening times are not necessarily the most convenient for some people e.g. those who work. They are looking to increase access to advice via technology to enable residents to access advice as easily as possible; thereby helping them solve their problems before they become crises.

Due to the demand for access to the service via the telephone, it can be difficult for people to get through. The CAB is dependant on sufficient volunteers to answer the phones and supervision being available. Due to additional funding being secured to 31 August 2015 from The Big Lottery Fund, more resources are being put into improving access via the telephone in the coming months to enhance the core service; not replace it. Without additional funding this would not be possible.

- 3.11 ***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.***

A letter was sent by the Portfolio Holder for Young Persons, Adult Services, Community Care & Wellbeing, Health and Community Safety to the Cabinet Office to raise this issue.

- 3.12 ***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.

In a small number of cases it is evident that a client may have received incorrect advice from a Government department. In the complicated case that was presented as an example of the type of work the CAB does to the Review Committee, HMRC have overturned a decision not to award benefit after working on this for over a year. The client is being offered compensation. In addition the CAB has written to HMRC requesting compensation for the work they have done and are awaiting a response. HMRC have confirmed the CAB's request is currently being investigated.

- 3.13 *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.*

The Asset Manager has been in contact with the CAB and has an understanding of their business needs in relation to the office space they currently occupy.

4 RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 At a time of limited resources, it is vital that the Council continues to engage effectively with the voluntary and community sector. If RRAVS and the CAB do not operate effectively then further burdens will be placed on the Council.

5 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 Staff time in working with key voluntary organisations.
- 5.2 For 2013/14, the Council funds the CAB with a £60,000 cash grant and RRAVS with a £15,000 cash grant. The CAB also uses Council accommodation at Rochford and Rayleigh and has allocated parking spaces. The Council funds the GRANTfinder licence that is used by RRAVS.

6 RECOMMENDATION

- 6.1 It is proposed that the Committee **RESOLVES** to note the contents of the report.

Amar Dave
Chief Executive

Background Papers:- None

Phone: 01702 318061

Email: andrew.lowing@rochford.gov.uk

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