Review of Warwickshire voluntary sector infrastructure (support) service needs: 2014 survey findings

What are infrastructure support services?

When a voluntary sector group or a volunteer needs help or support, they can contact an infrastructure support organisation for free help. These organisations are also voluntary sector groups themselves. They are usually funded by a Council. The support they provide means that groups and volunteers can find out about things like funding and filling in grant applications and get training on running safe and successful services. Groups can also learn about recruiting and supporting volunteers. The support services organise meetings so that groups and volunteers can meet each other and share ideas.

What about the survey?

Between February and July the Localities & Partnerships Team surveyed people about how best to support Warwickshire's voluntary and community sector (VCS). We wanted to find out what sort of help and support groups, volunteers, and WCC service commissioners (people who buy services for the Council) need in the future.

In light of a reduced budget from 2015, it is important that we invest in a service that meets the main needs of the groups and volunteers that will be using it. Our recent survey suggests that the following types of support are the main ones that are needed:

VOLUNTEERING ~ Management support to organisations that recruit, train and support volunteers into good quality, lasting placements

ADVICE ~ Support to small and large VCS organisations including fundraising advice and information, and help to complete good quality competitive tendering applications. The support should be available using different means, from face-to-face and telephone to e-learning opportunities using the internet

COMMUNICATIONS ~ Communicate information between the VCS and WCC, and support partnership working. Collect and share information. Monitor activity in the sector and any issues it is facing, and make sure that the activity is reported . Be a voice for the voluntary sector to WCC so that the Council can better understand its needs and abilities. (The service will also need to complete monitoring information on work delivered.)

STRATEGIC ~ Work with WCC service commissioners, coordinate and support VCS bidders for contracts, and work with WCC to develop opportunities for local groups to deliver services. The service also needs to support WCC to develop strategies and responses to local and countywide priorities

In addition, the survey responses have helped us to identify how the VCS and WCC commissioners want the support service to be delivered. The main points are listed below:

Services will be delivered across all areas of the County including rural communities, with staff and resources being available locally

The service will show that it is reaching people and groups from all sections of the community, especially those facing the most disadvantage

Work with groups and volunteers will be done face to face when needed. This will help make sure that things like lack of internet and IT equipment, mobility issues, and cultural and language needs don't make it hard for people to use the service

Groups and volunteers helping older people, people of all ages with disabilities, and children and young people will be supported by the service. This is to make sure that community-based services for these groups are encouraged

If the service is delivered by more than one organisation they will work together to avoid duplication. Service users will see a 'one-stop-shop'

The service will show both value for money and ongoing improvement throughout the life of the contract

The service will avoid competition and conflicts of interest with other VCS organisations when bidding for contracts

The service will work closely with the Localities and Partnerships Team. It will also work closely with other Council teams that are developing community based services

The service will be available both during working hours and out-of-hours, as required by the groups and volunteers wanting to use it

More use will be made of e-learning and web-based support services so that groups and volunteers can get help in different ways to suit them

Who took part in the survey?

We are grateful to all the people who took the time to share their thoughts with us.

- **604 online and paper survey responses from groups and volunteers**

- **17 employed and volunteer representatives of Warwickshire VCS groups at a face to face focus group**

- **25 employed and volunteer representatives of Warwickshire BME and Disability awareness groups at 2 face to face meetings**

- **7 telephone interviews with senior staff from Warwickshire-based infrastructure support services**

- **5 telephone interviews with senior commissioning officers from WCC**

- **20 commissioner and officer responses to an online survey**

- **3 consultation workshops attended by infrastructure support services staff and WCC officers**

What happens next?

We will now start to define exactly what support services we want to invest in. We will seek approval from WCC to tender for the service, and our service description will be publicised so that groups and organisations can bid to deliver it. Once the bids have been received and scored we will announce the winning bid, and agree details of how we will work together to start delivery of the new service in 2015.

Any questions?

If you would like to ask any questions please contact the Localities and Partnerships Team at thirdsector@warwickshire.gov.uk or 01926 456102.