

TITLE OF REPORT: Review on Helping to Increase Support /Capacity of the Voluntary Sector

REPORT OF: Paul Dowling, Strategic Director, Communities and Environment

Summary

At its meeting on 16 April 2018 (minute CR36 refers), Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee requested a review of ways to help increase the support and capacity within the voluntary and community sector (VCS) in Gateshead.

In particular, Councillors were keen to focus on how the Council is working to support the smaller grass roots organisations in the Sector, how it communicates the support on offer, and identify any areas where the Council could make changes and improvements to its offer.

This report sets out a scope for the review, and a timeline for evidence gathering to inform the review throughout the remainder of 2018/19 and into 2019/20.

Purpose of the review

This is not intended to be a review of the overall health and vitality of Gateshead's VCS, or its effectiveness - although the review may highlight some examples and practices that could be shared and developed further.

Rather, it is a review that aims to:

- establish the extent and nature of the types of support the Council currently provides to the VCS across a spectrum of service areas
- how this activity is resourced and coordinated
- assess the effectiveness of this Council support in helping the VCS address the needs of Gateshead residents.

The review will help develop the understanding of the type of support required by the sector, where it is needed the most and why, and in the light of this, where the Council's role, support and resources may be focussed to maximise impact.

The Council provides a wide range of support which includes:

- Financial support in the form of grants and cash contributions
- NNDR Charitable Rate Relief
- Advice and guidance both directly and through commissioned organisations such as Newcastle Council for Voluntary Service
- Commissioned work and contracts

- Sign posting, promoting, sharing and networking
- Community development and capacity building, including funding advice and project activities
- Promotion and development of volunteering opportunities
- The Gateshead Compact

Background and Context to the Review

Gateshead is facing unprecedented demand on its resources. Since 2010, the Council has reduced its budget by £157m, in the next financial year, the Medium Term Financial Strategy indicates a further £29m to enable the Council to set a balanced budget.

At the same time, the demand from residents is increasing exponentially, particularly as a result of increased pressures on services for children and adults social care, the health inequality gap that exists in Gateshead and the rapidly changing demographic profile, including growth of new migrant communities and existing communities within the borough.

In addition, a significant challenge for many residents in Gateshead has been the direct impact of welfare reform and especially the roll out of Universal Credit. There has been a tangible growth in the number of individuals and families who have been adversely affected by the level of benefit received and significantly, the many number of claims rejected, and sanctions imposed. The result is increased hardship, debt, poor mental health, poverty and reliance on community support.

Gateshead Council has adopted its new strategic approach “Making Gateshead a Place Where Everyone Thrives”, and this will now supersede the current Council Plan. The pledge “*Support our communities to support themselves and each other*” is at the very heart of the Council’s approach to volunteering and community support.

The Council’s Medium Term Financial Strategy 2019/20 to 2023/24 states that the Council will continue to seek to mitigate demand pressures within services by capacity building within communities, including, where appropriate, work with partners and volunteers.

As part of its policy and research role, Newcastle CVS (Council for Voluntary Service) carried out a study of voluntary and community organisations and social enterprises, in Gateshead and Newcastle. The report “GaN Canny”, was published in March 2018.

The report’s key findings identified that funding and sustainability is the most pressing issue for voluntary and community organisations in Gateshead and Newcastle. Increased demand for their services - many organisations reported year on year growth in demand. The recruitment and retention of volunteers is the second largest area of organisational challenge. The rate of change and short-term grants and contracts was having a destabilising effect on medium and larger sized organisations in relation to staffing, accommodation and strategic planning and engagement.

Certain groups of people were identified as having additional needs that weren’t being met; in particular refugees and asylum seekers, young people and older people.

The themes of loneliness and isolation, not just around older people, were raised. Sometimes these were referenced to facilities and activities that no longer exist.

The big challenge remains of greater demand, fewer resources and more clients having more complex needs. The issue of the number of clients with a much higher level of needs, and more problems needing resolution is a major challenge.

Methodology and timeline

15 October 2018 – Agree the scope of the review

03 December 2018 – Evidence gathering session to cover the analysis of the Council's role in and budget for supporting the voluntary sector and to consider evidence from voluntary organisations.

21 January 2018 – Evidence gathering session

04 March 2019 – Evidence gathering session

01 April 2019 – Evidence gathering session

June 2019 – to be confirmed – draft report for consideration

July 2019 – to be confirmed - final report

Recommendations

Overview and Scrutiny Committee is asked to:

- i. Comment on the scope of the review and agree to a series of evidence gathering sessions at meetings between November and April
- ii. Provide feedback on any information Councillors feel could contribute to the evidence gathering process.