

Report on the consultation of the VCS Commissioning Framework

Introduction to VCS Commissioning Framework

Dacorum has a thriving voluntary & community sector (VCS). Many organisations receive support from the council in the form of grants and a few organisations receive core-funding.

We are now looking at moving away from historic core-funding to a more open and transparent funding model. Representatives from both core-funded organisations and the Council have been working together to plan the new model which is based on best practice. The VCS commissioning framework explains this new model. It includes a combination of Strategic Partners, grants and procurement. The default position at the end of funding agreements in the future will be to cease the funding and decommission.

Commissioning is the whole cycle of activity - from assessing the needs of people in an area, designing services around those needs, appraising options of how those services are best delivered, selecting a provider, monitoring, reviewing & then evaluating. Procurement can be an element of this but sometimes a grant is just as appropriate for delivering services.

In the future we will be looking to the VCS to have a greater role in public service delivery. The new model will present opportunities for VCS organisations to bid to deliver services. This framework lays the foundation for a more open and transparent approach to commissioning the VCS in Dacorum.

The Consultation

In line with the local Compact, the consultation of the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) commissioning framework was held for 8 weeks from **12th August until 7th October 2010**.

It was sent to DBC staff, DBC Members, the local VCS & all their partners, and the Dacorum Partnership.

Two briefing sessions were held to give people the opportunity to become more informed about the framework. The sessions weren't very well attended, but feedback from the people who did attend, said they found it very useful.

In total we received 5 responses to the consultation. This was disappointing given that the consultation documents were sent out to hundreds of organisations and individuals. It also means the consultation was not statistically valid.

Results of the Consultation

The majority of the respondents **agreed** that in the VCS commissioning framework:

- the reasons behind the change to a commissioned approach are clearly explained;
- the process for procuring services is clearly explained;
- the eligibility requirements for the Strategic Partner Programme (SPP) are clearly explained;
- the assessment criteria for the SPP are clearly explained;
- the application process for the SPP is clearly explained;
- the proposed model for funding the VCS is fair.

Suggestions for assessment criteria for the SPP included:

- that SPs act as a 'beacon' for aspiring service providers and demonstrate ongoing innovation in delivery mechanism;
- That SPs are able to demonstrate a need that has not previously been identified by Dacorum [DBC].

One question about the SPP that was raised by a respondent was:

- Only CAD & Volunteer centre meet *ALL* SPP criteria. Other organisations will qualify for *some* of the SPP criteria, will they still be considered?

See Annex A overleaf for general comments given by respondents.

Annex A

General Comments:

- 9.3.1 Could this be explained in more detail?;
- 9.6.4 'Equal opportunities' statement should perhaps read 'equalities' policy statement;
- 9.6.5 Could read 'The ability to demonstrate visible and measurable outcomes';
- Should we say that this policy may be amended at any time in light of national or local policy?;
- The issue of dependency on the Council for continued existence is one which needs to be considered not purely on financial grounds, but also to take into account the social value the service delivered provides and the options an organisation has to raise funds from the clients they serve or the appeal their work has in raising funds from the general public;
- We agree the requirements [for the Strategic Partner Programme] are clearly explained. The point we would raise is how these are put into practice in due course. The use of phrases such as 'developing capability and capacity' and 'providing second tier support' can in a narrow definition be seen to relate to the two infrastructure organisations in receipt of grant funding from the Council (Community Action Dacorum and Volunteer Centre Dacorum). In section 9.1 the wording states “invest in a number of strategic partners,” and this sets an expectation of more than two organisations receiving support through the Strategic Partner Programme;
- The points we have raised above relate to how the programme is implemented. The ongoing dialogue post this consultation will we are sure provide the opportunity to discuss the points we have made.
- That is should be clear that the use of Council premises will be at a market rent which will be refunded by a grant. That way we will have the ability to withdraw grants to those organisations who do not demonstrate adherence to our policies and deliver agreed outcomes. This model works well in other boroughs.
- The concept that Dacorum [DBC] is able to identify all needs in Dacorum is deeply flawed. Dacorum [DBC] is only likely to identify needs that suit Dacorum's [DBC's] own Council and political targets; I believe it is wrong to use DBC's own identification of needs as the criterion for commissioning. I believe that it should also be left open for organisations to identify needs themselves and submit these to DBC with a proposal for commissioning.
- This is the response from Tring Town Council formulated at its Finance & Policy Committee held 6.9.10: Tring Town council objects to the proposed framework, in particular Item 8 Commissioning & Procurement and Item 9 Strategic Partner Programme. The council [DBC] considers the emphasis should be on identifying need, and only late the voluntary partner organisation. Item 10 Grants - capping grants at £10,000 for organisations not in the first two processes would lead to difficulties for charities seeking to support the most disadvantaged.