

## **OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**REPORT TO:** Overview and Scrutiny Committee **DATE:** 2 December, 2010

**CONTACT OFFICER:** Rafiq Chohan, Assistant Director, Economic Development and Inclusion (875849), Surinder Jassal, Programme Manager (875597)

**WARD(S):** All

### **PART I**

### **FOR COMMENT AND CONSIDERATION**

## **DRAFT VOLUNTARY AND COMMUNITY SECTOR FUNDING POLICY**

### **1 Purpose of Report**

This report presents the Draft Voluntary and Community Sector Funding Policy for all future commissioning, funding and support by Slough Borough Council to the voluntary and community sector (VCS).

### **2 Recommendation**

Members are requested to scrutinise the policy and make suggestions for amendment prior to the report being presented to Cabinet on 13 December. The report will also recommend that existing funding arrangements are terminated at the earliest possible date following implementation of the new funding policy and scrutiny's view on this will be welcomed.

### **3 Community Strategy Priorities**

Celebrating diversity, enabling inclusion  
Being safe, feeling safe  
Prosperity for all

### **4 Other Implications**

(a) Financial

There are no additional financial implications emanating from this report.

(b) Human Rights Act and Other Legal Implications

There are no legal implications. An Equalities Impact Assessment will be carried out.

## **5 Supporting Information**

### **Background Information**

- 5.1.1 The policy sets out a strategic approach to the Council's funding arrangements with the voluntary and community sector, and includes making the link of any funding activity with the community strategy priorities and the LAA, ensuring accountability, transparency, accessibility and consistency in all funding transactions with the VCS, and reviewing funding priorities and criteria in line with changing needs of the local community.
- 5.1.2 This Policy is a result of a strategic review of all the Council's funding, commissioning and support arrangements with the local voluntary and community sector. This included an extensive council-wide mapping exercise providing information on all grants and contracts provided by the council, and related support and monitoring arrangements. A consultation was carried out with the voluntary and community sector to gain their views on current systems and provision, as well as to identify training and support needs and sustainability and development themes for the future. The consultation was sent out to 350 organisations based or working in Slough. A range of funded and non-funded organisations responded to the consultation, from some very small community groups with no paid staff through to large well established organisations.
- 5.1.3 The key issues identified by the voluntary and community sector were around issues of accessibility to information and funding; transparency of processes and decision making; proportionate monitoring; lack of uniformity of information from different directorates; support to complete applications, in particular for smaller groups and organisations where English is not the first language; and the need for small grants to be provided for longer than one year to enable groups to develop. Issues of sustainability, capacity building, and training and collaborative working were also highlighted. All of these issues have been taken on board and are incorporated in the draft policy and are reflected in the priorities for future commissioning/ funding.

### **Policy Details**

- 5.2.1 The key aims of the policy are to improve communication, understanding and trust between the Council and its voluntary and community sector partners; clarify and better co-ordinate all forms of support to the VCS; support accountability and transparency in spending public money, and strengthen partnership working between the Council and VCS.
- 5.2.2 The policy sets out the Council's revised role in providing funding for the voluntary and community sector in Slough. The policy integrates with SBC's Commissioning Framework. At time of writing this report the Policy is still at draft stage and will be presented to CMT. If, after that meeting there are any significant changes required, a further report will be provided to Overview and Scrutiny at the next meeting in January 2011.
- 5.2.3 Slough boasts a very active Voluntary and Community Sector which is valued by the Council and the wider community. The Policy explains that financial restrictions will require the Authority to seek closer alignment of activities funded through VCS organisations with the Sustainable Community Strategy.

- 5.2.4 The Policy details the opportunities that will become available to VCS organisations with the adoption by the Council of a corporate approach to commissioning (the Strategic Commissioning Framework). The Policy recognises the need with the move towards more formal commissioning for the sector to provide quality monitoring information, focussing on outcomes, to assess the impact of services provided, and ensure value for money.
- 5.2.5 In relation to “support in kind” the Policy proposes that where Council buildings are made available to VCS organisations there should be a presumption that such facilities will be shared with other voluntary / community groups. Where possible the Council should be aware of the cost of “support in kind” eg lost opportunity cost of making premises available.
- 5.2.6 Financial resources will be allocated to time-limited grant funding for VCS organisations. Services and activities that are not in receipt of significant or on-going commissioning from the Council will be prioritised for support from the corporate budget. Activities which will be supported through the corporate voluntary sector budget will include capacity building and infrastructure support, volunteering, advice services and activities aimed at reducing inequalities and promoting community cohesion.
- 5.2.7 The Policy was presented to the Voluntary Sector Members Panel on 21 September 2010. The Voluntary Sector Members Panel welcomed the policy and was keen to see greater transparency in all the Council’s dealings with the VCS, as well as improved monitoring and removal of duplication in funding. The Panel was concerned that sufficient time should be given to the VCS organisations during this transition stage from grants to grants/commissioning; and wanted to ensure that adequate capacity building support was provided to the sector to help them make the move towards the more structured commissioning framework.
- 5.2.8 The Policy is being consulted on with the voluntary and community sector in a number of ways, including via the Compact Group, Slough Infrastructure Group, Slough Community Network, and via e-mail to all organisations on Slough Council for the Voluntary Sector’s mailing list.

### **Timescales**

- 5.3.1 A draft timetable with tight deadlines giving the minimum time requirement to each stage of the commissioning procedure has been produced (appendix B). With the proposed possible start date of 12 January 2011, once the policy has been agreed by Cabinet in December, and following correct OJEU guidelines, the earliest date that larger contracts could be awarded is 29<sup>th</sup> June 2011.
- 5.3.2 Further with the current re-structure exercise being carried out, and the proposed move of responsibility for this area of work to another directorate, as well as the need to ensure that any commissioning/tendering of work relating to the voluntary sector is carried out according to the council’s new commissioning framework, it is recognised that sufficient time needs to be factored in for this transition from grants to commissioning, as well as the internal re-structure. Therefore it is proposed that existing funding arrangements will continue to ensure there is no gap in service

provision, and that these funding arrangements are terminated at the earliest possible date following implementation of the new funding policy.

## **6 Appendices**

Appendix Draft Voluntary and Community Sector Funding Policy and RFP/RFQ  
Restricted Procedure deadlines (included in main agenda papers)