

Voluntary Sector Partnership Council

REVIEW OF THE VOLUNTARY SECTOR SCHEME

Proposals for a Strategic Action Plan

The First Stage Strategic Implementation Plan has been drafted to provide a formal Assembly Government response to the Commission's recommendations, and to enable the implementation work to begin. However Recommendation 3 calls on the VSPC, in full consultation with the sector, to: 'develop and publish a new Strategic Action Plan, setting out the next steps in implementing the Scheme in the light of the Commission's recommendations'.

It is envisaged that the Strategic Action will incorporate the recommendations within the Implementation Plan, but will also have a wider more outcome-centred focus.

Action:

Members are invited to note.

Developing the Strategic Action Plan

This paper has been prepared by the Welsh Assembly Government to open discussion with the voluntary sector on implementing the Independent Commission's recommendations on this subject. These call on the Assembly Government to:

"In full consultation with the sector through the Voluntary Sector Partnership Council (VSPC), develop and publish a new strategic action plan, setting out the next steps in implementing the Scheme in the light of the Commission's recommendations. It should assign responsibilities, set deadlines, and identify milestones and indicators for monitoring and evaluation." (Rec. 3; page 36)

"Report at each meeting of the VSPC and annually at relevant Ministerial meetings on progress against the strategic action plan, and use the indicators in the strategic action plan as the basis for the next full review of the Scheme in 2007". (Rec 4; page 36)

The paper sets out proposals for preparing a dialogue on the development of a Strategic Action Plan, and puts forward some issues for discussion on the content of the Action Plan

Introduction

When Edwina Hart, Minister for Social Justice and Regeneration established an Independent Commission to review the Assembly's Voluntary Sector Scheme, she stated the purpose of the review was to:

"enable us to reflect upon the experience of the last four years and consider ways in which the Welsh Assembly Government and the Voluntary sector in Wales can work more closely together in pursuit of common goals"

The Commission was charged with looking in particular at the following issues:

- How the National Assembly might strengthen the position of smaller voluntary organisations working within local communities;
- To what extent some parts of the voluntary and community sector, notably equality groups, lack sufficient capacity and support to enable them to make a real impact;
- The way in which the Assembly Government and its partners in local government and other public agencies provide funding to the voluntary sector;
- How to ensure that the Scheme delivers the aims of the Government of Wales Act - that it should promote and support the interests of the relevant voluntary organisations at all levels in Wales;
- How can the Assembly build on the present scheme and build a stronger, more productive relationship with the voluntary sector.

Philosophy of approach

It is proposed that the Strategic Action Plan should take account of all of the above elements. The Plan should also:

- be developed through engagement with as many and as wide a range of participants as possible
- reflect the Commission's approach to the sector in undertaking the review. Objectivity, impartiality and respect, independence, openness and inclusivity were all key attributes that the Commission utilised in engaging the sector. We should reflect this in our work in implementing the Commission's recommendations.
- seek to build on our achievements to date, including the Voluntary Sector Scheme, the establishment of the Partnership Council, the introduction of the Code of Practice on Funding, and the biannual meetings between Ministers and the voluntary sector.
- have regard to the Assembly's key principles of sustainable development, equality of opportunity and social inclusion.

Key themes

In particular the Strategic Action Plan will be built around the three key themes that the Commission identified:

- **Consistency** – of application of the scheme within the Assembly, by ASPBs and in relation to both the Code of Practice on Funding and of involving the sector in policy development.
- **Clarity** – of responsibility for the application of the Scheme, in policing its operation, monitoring and evaluating its progress and ensuring that the scheme is being properly implemented.
- **Communication** – of the scheme to those who have not previously been able to access its benefits and to obtain the widest involvement of the sector in developing policy, accessing funding, and engaging with ministers.

Within each of these themes, the Strategic Action Plan will draw out the Assembly Government's strategic vision for the sector. The Plan will build on the objectives set out in 'Wales: a Better Country' and in 'Making the Connections', and it will take note of the issues set out in the WCVA's publication "Civil Society, Civil Space". Finally it will examine how the voluntary sector can contribute.

Implementing the Strategic Action Plan

It is a determining factor, and one that the Commission encapsulated in its work, that implementing the recommendations must involve as wide a cross section of the sector as possible, to ensure that those who contributed to the recommendations are party to delivering the results.

Evaluation

The focus of the Strategic Action Plan will be on outcomes and deliverables. It will set targets and identify milestones and indicators for monitoring and evaluating the key objectives. The impact of the strategy will be evaluated.

The VSPC will receive further details from the sector, with the Assembly Government's agreement, as to the proposed indicators and milestones.

Conclusion

Members are invited to comment on the outline approach and the themes for the Strategic Action Plan.