

Voluntary Sector Partnership Council

REVIEW OF THE VOLUNTARY SECTOR SCHEME – FIRST STAGE IMPLEMENTATION PLAN, AND WELSH ASSEMBLY GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO THE INDEPENDENT COMMISSION'S RECOMMENDATIONS

Background

In October 2003 the Minister for Social Justice and Regeneration announced the establishment of an Independent Commission to Review the Voluntary Sector Scheme. The Commission was asked to consider how the Scheme might be developed or improved, and whether it should be revised or remade. The Commission reported to the Minister in March 2004, and made 59 recommendations, aimed variously at the Assembly Government, the WCVA, and the VSPC. The Report was put out to consultation for 12 weeks ending on 28 June. Both the Report and the consultation results were then discussed at a special meeting of the VSPC on 15 July.

The Assembly Government's response: First Stage Strategic Implementation Plan

A draft Implementation Plan, setting out how the Assembly Government intends to respond to the Commission's recommendations has subsequently been drawn up. This was endorsed by the Social Justice and Regeneration Committee on 29 September and by the full Assembly in plenary session on 13 October.

The draft Implementation Plan is attached. It sets out the action to be taken to implement each recommendation, and the target timescale. It also clarifies whether lead responsibility for taking forward each recommendation lies with the Social Justice Department, or with the Joint Working Group.

Action: Members are invited to note

First Stage Strategic Implementation Plan

Rec' no	Recommendation	Conclusion of the Minister for Social Justice and Regeneration	Action to be taken / being taken	Action by	Milestones	Action taken
Rec 1; page 36	The Voluntary Sector Scheme should not be remade	Agree	The scheme will not be remade	SJR Department		Report to SJR Committee in November 2004.
Rec 2; page 36	<p>Make minor revisions to the Scheme to bring it up to date with developments since 2000</p> <p>Annex M states</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Amend "Assembly" to "National Assembly" or "Assembly Government" as appropriate throughout; • Amend "Assembly Secretary" to "Assembly Government Minister" throughout; • 2.7 - amend "offers equality of opportunity" to "has a duty to promote equality of opportunity"; • 3.9 - amend "establish" to "maintain"; • 3.12 - 21 sectoral reps – might need to be amended by the VSPC in light of the outcome of the discussions with the VSPC (Rec 40); • 4.2 - amend "the Handbook" to "guidance"; • 5.2.5 - amend "health authorities" to "Local Health Boards"; • 6.9 - delete section on brackets referring to specific grant schemes. 	Agree	This has been prioritised	SJR department	Scheme as amended to be re-printed by end of year	Report to SJR committee in November 2004.

Rec 3; page 36 and Rec 4; page 36	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. 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.	Accept	Establish a Joint working group whose membership to be drawn from the Voluntary Sector. Separate advice will be provided on the Joint working group's membership.	Joint working group	Working group to start in September	Draft report in December 2004
Rec 5; page 36	Actively promote consistent application of the Scheme and the Code of Practice for Funding the Voluntary Sector (the Code) by the Assembly Government, Assembly Sponsored Public Bodies (ASPBs) and health bodies. This should be taken forward through the strategic action plan. Annex M states <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Designate the voluntary sector division as the locus for co-ordination of application of the scheme and promotion of the Scheme, and staff it accordingly; • Provide a role description and guidance for Divisional Voluntary Sector Liaison Officers (DVSLOs); • Develop a system for checking compliance with the Scheme and Code annually at Head of Division level, reporting back to VSPC; • Develop clear, brief practical guidance for officials on the requirements of the Scheme; 	Accept in principle	Work to be developed through the New Strategic Action Plan. Some of the proposals are subject to budgetary consequences such as Training requirements on which further advice will be provided. Current arrangements will continue under the VS scheme that provides for a code of practice to be reviewed bi-annually.	SJR department.	Working group in September 2004 SJR department to consider Budgetary implications Review of Code of Practice meetings in December and June	Progress report by April 2004 Progress report by April 2004 Meeting in December 2004

Rec 8; page 37	Ensure that the sector and the relevant parts of the Assembly Government have the capacity and resources to implement and benefit from the Scheme and the Code, for instance by developing training for officials working in the voluntary sector, located in centres easily accessible across Wales.	Accept.	Identifying training needs will be subject to budgetary provision being available and timing of training	SJR department to report.	Report on Guidance Training requirement Budgetary requirement	By January 2005 By March 2005 By April 2005.
Rec 9; page 37	Ensure that the implementation of the Scheme and the Code, especially the provision of funding, acts as a driver for appropriate practice in the sector. Annex M states Areas include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> observance of the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 and European Directives on religion, sexual orientation, age and disability; sound employment practice; treatment of the Welsh and English languages on a basis of equality. 	Accept	Strengthen Terms and Condition of grant aid to include equality standards linked to the amount of grant receivable. Consider introduction of a new equality fund to promote capacity building for community based organisations	SJR department	Final report Final report	January 2005 January 2005
Rec 12; page 54 and Rec 13; page 54	Move to a minimum standard of 12 weeks for all consultations affecting the voluntary sector and amend the Scheme accordingly. Develop and publish a forward plan of consultations.	Agree	Obtain agreement from cabinet colleagues	SJR department	Immediate	Report to SJR committee November 2004
Rec 14; page 54 and Rec 15; page 54	Develop, promote and monitor observance of a guide for officials on good practice in policy development and consultation. The guide should be linked to the Policy Gateway, and should reflect the requirements of the Scheme (see Annex M for further detail). Improve its use of IT in consultations (see Annex M for further detail).	Accept in principle.	Timing is subject to availability of appropriate technology	SJR department	Initial draft report	By December 2004

	<p>Annex M states</p> <p>Good practice guide to include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the new 12 week minimum consultation period; • a requirement to publish feedback or summaries of responses following consultation; • procedures for deciding who should take the policy development lead in a policy area; • guidance on the use of plain language, accessible formats and executive summaries; • guidance on which voluntary organisations to consult, with a central database of up-to-date contact details; • suggestions for more accessible approaches to consultation and policy development, including the use of joint events, use of other formats etc; • involvement of the sector in implementation and evaluation stages of policy making. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue the development of Consult Wales; • Promote Consult Wales to officials and the sector; • Improve the accessibility of the Assembly Government website, in particular flagging up recent consultations, improving the search facility, and including contact details for lead officials for each policy area. 					
Rec 16; page 54	Work with the sector to promote more vigorously the use of secondments between the Assembly Government and the voluntary and community sectors, as set out in the Scheme.	Agree	Involve the relevant departments to explore further opportunities to extend the use of secondments.	SJR Department		Progress report to SJR committee December 2004
Rec 21; page 67	Review the Code as scheduled, in Summer 2004, taking into account the amendments already agreed	Agree	Arrangements for review of the code to continue	SJR department		Two meetings a year to be

	by the VSPC and reflecting the Commission's recommendations, and consulting on any changes. The Code should be updated annually thereafter.					held December and June.
Rec 22; page 67	Adopt a minimum 3-year period for grant awards, with wherever possible an assumption of continued funding, conditional on performance against agreed indicators and periodic review of policy priorities.	Agree	Note that some grants are for short-term annual projects and others are on a rolling programme, these will remain.	SJR Department		Report to SJR committee November 2004
Rec 23; page 67	Strengthen the requirements in the Code: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> To consider granting core funding to organisations where a strategic role is envisaged or capacity building is an objective; To include core costs in project funding where core funding is not otherwise provided; For robust exit or continuation strategies to be agreed where long term funding is not envisaged.	Agree	Core funding is already provided but limited by the total size of the grant scheme/s Full cost recovery where it does not effect performance of the grant line.	SJR department	Proposals on Exit strategies	By April 2005
Rec 24; page 67	Move to a 6-year review cycle for grant schemes, with reviews starting in year 4.	Accept in principle	Some grants are due to be reviewed in the next two years. The cycle of review will begin from date of last review or from planned next review.	SJR Department		Report to SJR committee November 2004
Rec 25; page 68)	Develop, promote and monitor the use of an updated Manual of Guidance for Assembly officials to assist them in following the Code consistently. Make the Manual available to ASPBs and third party funders. The Manual should provide templates for standard arrangements for all stages of the bidding, assessment, award, payment, monitoring, and evaluation processes.	Agree	Review guidance manual and link to training of staff on new revised manual.	SJR Department		Report by December 2005
Rec 26; p 68	Introduce training on the Code and Manual of Guidance, for managers of grant schemes offering funding to voluntary organisations.	Agree	Determine cost of providing training	SJR department	Initial report	By April 2005
Rec 27; page 68	Regularly update the Guide to Voluntary Sector Grants. Include in the Guide ASPB and third party	Agree	Strong consideration of utilising e- government to	SJR department		New version to be updated

	intermediary schemes, and consider feasibility of including schemes operated by Whitehall Departments but available to organisations in Wales.		update guide rather than booklet			and available by April 2005
Rec 28; page 68	Review the outcome of the pilots on eligibility "passports" in England with a view to introducing passporting in Wales.	Accept.	The introduction of a central registration system, including checking credentials equality standards, good employment practice, and governance (passporting) is a priority.	SJR department	Draft report for Minister and Cabinet	October 2005
Rec 29; page 68	Continue with more urgency the work on identifying and quantifying all grant paid to voluntary organisations by the Assembly Government, and its ASPBs, to establish a baseline of funding.	Agree	This is work in progress.	SJR Department		As and when necessary
Rec 30; page 68	Continue to use third party organisations in the voluntary sector as a channel for its money to local organisations, and require them to provide better communication, information and support for smaller organisations.	Accept in principle	– Consideration will be given to strengthening the monitoring & evaluation function within the Assembly and increasing the capability of the County Voluntary councils to improve support for smaller organisations.	SJR Department	Initial report	By December 2004
Rec 31; page 68	Consider the mechanisms and approaches to funding set out in the Treasury Cross-cutting review and Futurebuilders programme and their appropriateness in Wales.	Agree	Needs to be considered as part of the SJR budget setting strategy.	SJR department	Initial report	April 2005
Rec 45; page 86	Make a commitment to providing long-term core-funding through a dedicated funding stream to local volunteer bureaux, subject to performance against agreed indicators.	Accept in principle.	– Approach bureaux to enter into service level agreements.	SJR department		Report before April 2005
Rec 46; page 86	Continue to fund the Active Communities, Volunteering in Wales and Millennium Volunteers schemes.	Accept in principle.	We are reviewing grants schemes within the SJR department and in relation to the assembly wide spending priorities. Qualities of these programmes may be retained	SJR department		Report by December 2004

			but within a single budgeted programme			
Rec 47; page 86	Work with partners, including further and higher education sectors, and through the strategic action plan to ensure that comprehensive suitable training at all levels is available for Trustees, non-executive directors and other volunteers and their managers, throughout Wales, through delivery methods accessible to volunteers.	Accept in principle	Developing an accredited recognised programmes of training will help sustain the sector in the long term	Joint working group	Meeting in September	As and when necessary.
Rec 48; p80	Consider the use of national media to promote volunteering.	Agree	All means of promoting volunteering need to be considered.	Joint working group to propose increasing volunteering	Meeting in September	Initial report in February 2005
Rec 49; page 93 and Rec 50; page 93	Continue to develop its frameworks for funding and supporting community development in full consultation with grass roots community groups and others. Give consideration to the impact of geographically focused community development programmes on adjacent areas experiencing similar problems but not similarly qualifying for assistance.	Accept in principle	Communities directorate to review proposals and report	SJR department	Initial report	By end of 2004
Rec 51; page 93 and Rec 52; page 93 and Rec 53; page 93 and Rec 54; page 93	Review the level of staff resources within the Communities Directorate and the structure of the directorate. Explore ways of maximising community participation and consultation at the grass roots level in the implementation of Communities First. Establish and fund a community development monitoring and evaluation unit within a community development ethos, with officials undertaking appropriate levels of financial monitoring and the voluntary/community sector providing quality assurance, with joint assessment of outcomes.	Accept in principle	Communities Directorate to consider recommendations 49 to 54	SJR department to review	Initial report	By December 2004

	Develop a comprehensive programme of training in community development principles and practice for all agents involved in delivering Communities First and other initiatives related to community development at the national and local levels, including staff of ASPBs.					
Rec 55 page 93	Commission research into practical and realistic ways in which Assembly Government working practices across the board can be made more conducive to genuine community involvement.	Accept in principle	Community participation is conducive to good government. There is need for further research in this area subject to funding availability.	SJR department		Report to SJR committee November 2004
Rec 56; page 93	Ensure that the strategic action plan specifically addresses the need to implement the vision and principles set out in the community development chapter of the Scheme.	Accept	Communities directorate to review	SJR department		Report as practicable
Rec 57; page 95	Ensure that, for future reviews, sufficient time and resources are made available to maximise participation and thoroughness. Arrangements for the review should be set in motion within 4 weeks of each election.	Agree	For a future Government	SJR department		Report to SJR committee November 2004
Rec 58; page 95	Follow the precedent of independence set by the first review.	Agree	For a Future Government	SJR Department		Report to SJR committee November 2004
Rec 59; page 95	Ensure that future reviews do not create undue uncertainty within the sector about future funding, or to lead to unnecessarily short-term funding decisions.	Accept the principle	For a future Government	SJR department		Report to SJR committee November 2004

WCVA						
Rec 17; page 54	Review the arrangements for cascading consultation papers, including the information provided to County Voluntary Councils (CVCs), the use of events to produce informed sector wide responses, and the effectiveness of the sectoral networks in this regard.	Accept in principle.	Explore the creation of sectoral networks at CVC level	SJR department	Initial report	By December 2004
Rec 18; page 54	Take steps to encourage every voluntary organisation operating in Wales to belong to a formal consultative network.	Agree	Consider CVC's to manage sectoral networks within county areas	SJR Department	First draft report	By December 2004
Rec 19; page 54	Develop a system for ensuring that National, UK wide voluntary organisations operating in Wales are aware of the Scheme and Code.	Accept	Consider utilising the protocol agreement with UK wide voluntary organisations to met this objective.	SJR department	First draft	By April 2005
Rec 20; page 54	Advise the Assembly Government on the compilation of the "who to consult" list and the central database of contact details.	Accept	Obtain advice from the sector and other agencies	SJR department	Report	By April 2005
Rec 40; page 76	<p>Work with VSPC sectoral representatives, in consultation with each sub-sector, to improve the reliability and comprehensiveness of the systems for dissemination of information and seeking and representing the views of the sub-sector, with particular emphasis on inclusion of views from local groups and the grass roots.</p> <p>Annex M states</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review and consult on the voluntary sector membership of the VSPC, ensuring that members of each network are informed fully about the role of the VSPC and their representative and consulted fully on who that representative should be, and taking into account the suggestions made to the Commission; 	Agree	Include as part of the communication strategy	SJR department / Joint working group	Draft report	By April 2005

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop performance indicators for sectoral network leads to ensure effective cascading of relevant information, inclusion of all relevant groups, and regular, structured gathering of views from across the sub-sector; • Develop role descriptions for sectoral representatives, with clear objectives and indicators, and work with each network to review their arrangements for dissemination of information. 					
Rec 43; page 80	Review and consult on the “Ministerial map” and arrangements for Ministerial meetings, to ensure that a range of sizes and types of voluntary organisations is represented at meetings, that views presented are representative of the whole sub-sector, and that information about Ministerial meetings is cascaded to interested parties.	Accept in principle	Ministerial meetings have to be effective to ensure best use of Ministers time. The agenda should be more strategic, there should be no duplication of items from one Minister to another. Representation and representativeness of the sector needs to be properly recorded and monitored.	SJR department/Join working group		As and when necessary

Assem bly and WCVA						
Rec 10; page 37	Develop a strategy for raising awareness of and promoting the Scheme, the Code, the VSPC and Ministerial meetings at the national and local levels, including to organisations not currently on WCVA and CVC databases.	Agree	Include as part of the Communication strategy	Joint working group	Draft Report	By April 2005
Rec 41; page 76	Ensure that sufficient resources are available to facilitate the efficient and effective operation of the sectoral networks.	Agree	Subject to budgetary availability.	SJR department	First draft	by April 2005
Rec 42; p 76	Encourage greater participation by AMs in the VSPC, for instance by writing to all AM VSPC members and party leaders: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reporting the disappointment felt by the sector at the low levels of attendance; • asking whether any practical changes might address this (e.g. linking with regional committee dates, or holding meetings on a Friday); clarifying the procedure for raising items at the VSPC.	Accept		SJR department	Monitor attendance for the next two meetings	Report to SJR committee November 2004
Rec 44; page 80	Arrange for the adoption, following consultation, of new protocols for the conduct of Ministerial meetings, based on the drafts agreed in 2003. The new protocols should also reflect the detailed points made at Annex M. Annex M states Ensure that the protocols include requirements: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To hold Ministerial meetings twice a year for each portfolio; • For each portfolio, to hold one meeting a year to fit with the Budget Planning Round and for this 	Accept		Joint working group	Draft report	By April 2005

	<p>meeting to consider funding issues;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• That one meeting a year monitors the implementation of the Voluntary Sector Scheme itself, against agreed indicators;• That both sides formally report at each meeting on activities during the previous period, and on progress against agreed shared objectives;• That all relevant Divisions of the Assembly Government are given the opportunity to attend meetings as appropriate to the agenda;• To refer the minutes of meetings to the relevant Subject Committee to note;• To refer the minutes of meetings to the next VSPC meeting;• To ensure that the minutes are published on the Assembly Government and WCVA websites.					
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VSPC						
Rec 11; page 37	Take responsibility for taking equality of access to funding, recognising the cultural, rural and urban diversity of Wales, through its strategic action plan and, if established, its monitoring and evaluation sub-committee.	Accept in principle		SJR department to provide terms of reference	First report	By December 2004
Rec 32; page 75	Take collective responsibility for monitoring the implementation of the Scheme, the new strategic action plan, and the Code, developing indicators and systems, and considering establishing a funding and compliance sub-committee for the purpose.	Accept	But merge into a single sub-committee. (merge with Rec. 11)	SJR to provide terms of reference	First report	By December 2004
Rec 33; page 76	Agree a schedule of key issues and map out its agendas well in advance, with no more than three major items on any one agenda.	Accept in principle	Given at times the agenda is set also to UK government consultations it is not always appropriate to impose inflexible restrictions.	Joint Working group	First report	By December 2004
Rec 34; page 76	Improve the tracking of decisions made by ensuring that agreed decisions and action points are clearly recorded, with clarity about who will do what and by when. There should be a report back to the VSPC by the Minister at each meeting on progress of decisions made at previous meetings.	Accept		SJR department	Immediate	Report to SJR committee
Rec 35; page 76	Note the minutes of Ministerial meetings and take responsibility for identifying and progressing any common issues or themes, monitoring the success of the meetings, and making proposals to the Assembly Government for issues to be tabled at Ministerial meetings or ways of improving meetings.	Accept in Principle	Notes of Ministerial meeting could be tabled for information at VSPC. Allowing for these to be presented and discussed may necessitate the attendance of officials who took the notes, which I do not believe is an appropriate use of their time. Record of Ministerial	SJR department	Immediate	Report to SJR committee November 2004

			meeting Minutes to be available on the Internet.			
Rec 36; page 76	Amend the VSPC protocols reflecting the Commission's recommendations and the detail at Annex M. Annex M states Protocols to include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> In setting agendas and circulating papers, allow sufficient time for consultation with networks; hold 3 meetings a year, on dates agreed 12 months ahead, at venues across Wales. 	Agreed.	Review protocols taking into account flexibility for the business of government to take a priority	Joint working group	Immediate	Report to SJR committee December 2004
Rec 37; page 76	Investigate individual cases of non-compliance with the provisions of the Scheme or the Code (by Assembly, ASPB, or third party schemes).	Accept in principle.	Process and Protocols need to be established	SJR department	Report back	By December 2004
Rec 38; page 76	Ensure that the Policy Gateway reflects the requirements of the Scheme.	Accept in principle.		SJR department	Initial Report	By December 2004
Rec 39; page 76	Consider potential value in developing links with other Partnership Councils.	Accept -		Join working group to report	Initial report	By January 2005