

STATEMENT OF INTENT – VOLUNTARY AND COMMUNITY SECTOR

Submitted by: Head of Business Improvement and Partnerships – Mark Bailey

Portfolio: Safer and Stronger Communities

Ward(s) affected: Non-specific

Purpose of the Report

To seek support for a statement of intent that outlines Newcastle Borough Council's ongoing commitment to the voluntary and community sector (Department for Communities and Local Government have recently released Best Value statutory guidance, setting out some reasonable expectations of the way best value authorities should work with voluntary and community groups when facing difficult funding decisions).

Recommendations

- (a) That Cabinet notes the report.**
- (b) That Cabinet endorses the proposals contained in the report.**

Reasons

To identify Newcastle Borough Councils commitment to the voluntary and community sectors.

1. Background

- 1.1 Newcastle Borough Council (NBC) have consistently considered the voluntary and community sector as a key partner in the delivery of services across the borough and have implemented a number of initiatives to support this concept including Locality Action Partnerships and a Third Sector Commissioning Framework.
- 1.2 Newcastle Borough Council committed to a local compact in November 2007. The local Compact clarifies the relationship between voluntary and community sector organisations in Newcastle-under-Lyme and local public bodies in terms of how they work together and the expectations of each party.
- 1.3 In May 2011 the Head of Business Improvement and Partnerships was approached by the Chief Executive Officer of Newcastle Community and Voluntary Support to request that Newcastle Borough Council produce a 'statement of intent' to outline their commitment to the voluntary and community sector.

2. Issues

- 2.1 The coalition government have set out their commitment to deliver the Big Society which aims to put more power into people's hands and transfer decisions, intervention and power from central government to local communities. There are three key parts to the Big Society agenda:
 - (i) **Community Empowerment** – giving councils and neighbourhoods more power to take decisions and shape their area.
 - (ii) **Opening up public services** – enabling charities, social enterprises, private companies and employee-owned co-operatives to compete to deliver services.

- (iii) **Social Action** – encouraging and enabling people to play a more active part in society, particularly through volunteering opportunities
- 2.2 The voluntary and community sector are considered integral to the development of the Big Society.
 - 2.3 There is general recognition that there are already significant amounts of ‘Big Society’ already being delivered.
 - 2.4 Due to national reductions in public spending and grants, a number of local authority areas have reportedly experienced disproportionate cuts to Voluntary and Community sector organisations.
 - 2.5 Newcastle Borough Council is currently undertaking a number of changes internally and externally, including a review of spending, services, priorities and partnership arrangements.
 - 2.6 During the National Council of Voluntary Organisations (NVCO) annual conference, the Secretary of State for Department of Communities and Local Government has stressed that:
 - (i) councils should not pass on disproportionate cuts to local voluntary and community groups or inflict bigger reductions to budgets than they take on themselves.
 - (ii) councils should talk to voluntary and community groups at a very early stage about how services need to change.
 - (iii) organisations should be given at least three months’ notice about the need to end or alter a grant or other support.
 - 2.7 The Department of Communities and Local Government have recently released ‘Best Value – statutory guidance’ which sets out some reasonable expectations of the way best value authorities should work with voluntary and community groups when facing difficult funding decisions.
3. **Options Considered**
 - 3.1 **Option A – To support and agree the statement of intent and promotion of the statement**
 - (i) This option will assist in maintaining and developing the relationship between Newcastle Borough Council and the Voluntary and Community Sector.
 - (ii) This option also anticipates and supports the governments’ statutory guidance.
 - 3.2 **Option B – Not to support the statement.**
 - (i) This option may have a negative impact on the good relationship that Newcastle Borough Council currently have with the voluntary and community sector
4. **Proposal**
 - 4.1 The proposal is to agree with Option A to support the statement of intent and to agree to it being promoted through the partnership voluntary sector forum.
5. **Reasons for Preferred Solution**
 - 5.1 The statement is aligned with the ‘Best Value Statutory Guidance’, however, outlines the local commitment to the sector.

5.2 Any support to the voluntary and community sector is considered important given the emerging agenda of Big Society, localism and public sector reform.

6. **Outcomes Linked to Sustainable Community Strategy and Corporate Priorities**

6.1 The voluntary and community sector are key partners of the Newcastle Partnership and therefore are a direct link to the Sustainable Community Strategy. Both sectors work closely with Newcastle Partnership to deliver services to meet the partnership priorities. The voluntary and community sector are considered integral to the development of Big Society and public sector reform.

7. **Legal and Statutory Implications**

7.1 None currently although there is likely to be statutory guidance in the near future.

8. **Equality Impact Assessment**

No specific equality issues identified.

9. **Financial and Resource Implications**

9.1 No additional financial or resource implications at present. The statement is intended to reflect the ongoing commitment to the voluntary and community sectors.

10. **Major Risks**

10.1 No major risks identified. Although failure to invest in the sector will contribute to the risk associated to the delivery of Big Society and public sector reform.

11. **Sustainability and Climate Change Implications**

None

12. **Key Decision Information**

12.1 This is not a key decision item.

12.2 This items is included in the forward plan.

13. **Earlier Cabinet/Committee Resolutions**

None.

14. **List of Appendices**

Appendix A -Statement of Intent