

MIDDLESBROUGH COUNCIL

AGENDA ITEM: 6

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD

13th October 2015

SCRUTINY AND THE VOLUNTARY & COMMUNITY SECTOR

PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1 To present to the Board a proposal to further develop the links between Scrutiny and the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) in Middlesbrough.

RECOMMENDATION

2. Members of the Board are recommended to address the information presented by the Head of Democratic Services and MVDA's Strategic Development Manager and outline any views on the proposals presented.
3. If the Board is in agreement with the proposals the Head of Democratic Services and MVDA's Strategic Manager draft up protocols, which will provide a framework on how the new approach is to be governed and co-ordinated. The protocols will be presented to a future meeting of OSB for approval.

BACKGROUND

4. It is fully recognised that voluntary and community organisations (VCOs) play an important role in Middlesbrough in supporting local communities. It is further recognised that the VCS plays an integral role in being part of the solutions in addressing the key challenges facing the town. VCS expertise and reach is of great value to the people of Middlesbrough and VCOs have a strong record of delivery in the town. The Mayor has recently stated that Middlesbrough Council will continue to engage with the VCS to ensure that as a town we maximise the potential of the Social Value Act.
5. It is also evident that fundamental change to the way the Council operates is required if it is to meet the challenges presented by unprecedented public spending cuts, increasing costs and growing demand for services, and also continue to deliver the Mayor's Vision. The Council's Change Programme outlines the Council's plans to achieve this change for the period 2015 – 2018, a period for which the Council's Medium Term Financial Plan identifies

required savings of £56 million. The proposals outlined in this report seek to compliment and support the Mayor's vision to be 'the place to live, work and visit' by maximising the town's intelligence and resources.

6. Scrutiny in Middlesbrough has always sought to involve the VCS in the gathering of evidence and there are many examples of the important contribution that VCOs have made in individual reviews. In addition a review undertaken in 2013 by the Economic Regeneration and Transport Scrutiny Panel on the VCS emphasised the important role that VCOs play in the provision of local public services.
7. The report noted that Middlesbrough Council had spent approximately £4m on procuring services from the VCS in the preceding twelve months and highlighted that there are currently over 600 VCOs and around 9,500 volunteers in Middlesbrough.
8. An economic impact assessment undertaken in 2011/12 in respect of 30 VCOs in Middlesbrough identified that funding of £4.36m was attracted to the area, 340 FTE jobs were supported and £1.1m value generated by volunteers. The Panel concluded that by continuing to work with the VCS, the public sector can help to build social capital, engage better with hard to reach individuals/groups and strengthen the voice and activity of the VCS.
9. The Economic Regeneration and Transport Scrutiny panel also acknowledged that the development of a Draft Local Framework for Voluntary and Community Sector Engagement in Commissioning was a positive way forward and a possible way of not only engaging the sector in service provision but also assisting the Council in commissioning appropriate and cost-effective services. By being more strategically involved in joint delivery and commissioning processes Middlesbrough's VCS has the potential to further improve outcomes for local communities and service users.
10. In light of the above it is apparent that the inherent nature of VCOs coupled with the sector's increasing role in public service delivery means it is uniquely placed to voice the concerns of Middlesbrough residents. It is also widely accepted that public sector organisations can and do gain significantly from working in partnership with VCOs and the benefits vary across policy and geographical areas. Some of the common themes are:
 - **Understanding of the needs of service users and communities** that the public sector needs to address;
 - **Closeness to the people** that the public sector wants to reach;
 - **Ability to deliver outcomes** that the public sector finds it hard to deliver on its own;
 - **Innovation** in developing solutions; and
 - **Performance** in delivering services.
11. In an effort to strengthen the partnership approach advocated for future public service delivery along with the need for scrutiny to triangulate and articulate the views of service users it is proposed that:

- A programme of bi-annual presentations will be scheduled to provide the Overview and Scrutiny Board with the opportunity to develop a greater understanding of the important role played by the VCS in Middlesbrough, including the contribution of faith groups, voluntary community groups and larger charities. The Statutory Scrutiny Support Officer will formulate an annual programme of VCS presentations with MVDA in agreement with the Chair of the Board.
- MVDA will be provided with a copy of the Scrutiny Work Programme on an annual basis following approval by the Board. This will provide the opportunity to highlight any important pieces of work undertaken by VCOs on approved work programme topics and for details of this work to be forwarded to the relevant Scrutiny Support Officer. The panel chairs will be briefed on the information received from the VCS and the evidence sources highlighted by MVDA fed into the relevant review.
- Each year suggestions for possible scrutiny topics are sought from Members, the general public, community councils and schools, as well as via the Council's website. It is proposed that the VCS also put forward ideas / topics which scrutiny may wish to consider and take on board.

FUTURE MEETINGS WITH THE VCS

12. The Board will need to determine when it would want to engage with representatives of the VCS. This may be for an update generally on the work of the VCS or it may relate to a specific topic that the Board has identified and requires further detail on.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

11. No background papers were used in the preparation of this report

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