

MIDDLESBROUGH COUNCIL

FINAL REPORT OF THE CULTURE AND COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY PANEL – WORKING RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE VOLUNTARY AND COMMUNITY SECTOR

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AIM OF THE REVIEW

1. The Panel is aware that a great deal of work has already been undertaken in this area, including a 2013 Scrutiny Investigation, an extensive consultation exercise carried out by MVDA in 2016 and a resulting Executive report approved in 2017. Nevertheless, the Panel wished to carry out an assurance review into existing and planned works.

TERMS OF REFERENCE

2. The term of reference for the scrutiny Panel's investigation were as follows:
3. a) To review the current working relationships between the Council, the Voluntary Community Sector (VCS) and, by extension, the Middlesbrough Voluntary Development Agency (MVDA).

INFORMATION REQUESTED/ RECEIVED

4. The Panel was provided with information/evidence from the following organisations/ representatives:

Mr Adam Allen – Director Culture and Communities
Mr Mark Davies – Chief Executive MVDA
Mr Martin Harvey – Community Infrastructure Manager
5. Due to the limited remit of the review, no further information was requested or required.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

6. Voluntary and community sector (VCS) organisations are engaged in a wide range of important public services activities, including health, social care, education, training and housing. Such organisations are often community-led and established in response to local need. This means that they are in a strong position to understand citizen and community needs and to meet these through the services that they provide. VCS organisations cover a wide and diverse range of functions, including grass roots community organisations, community centres and sports clubs, local and national charities, social enterprises and mutual organisations.
7. In 2013 the Economic Regeneration and Transport Scrutiny Panel carried out an investigation which, in part, examined how the Council could work more effectively with the VCS. That investigation showed working relationships to be positive and governed by a Compact agreement. Part of the Panel's recommendations at that time were to update the Compact to maintain effective working relationships.
8. In March 2017 the Executive Member for Culture and Communities submitted a report that showed how relationships could be further strengthened to allow both the VCS and the Council to achieve their respective strategic aims. The report showed that effective relationships with the VCS was often a good indicator of a vibrant and successful place. The report also pointed out that a vibrant VCS brings significant benefits in terms of knowledge, expertise and experience of local communities that Council services could

benefit from. However, the report did identify areas of improvement between existing relationships including,

- a. The relationships were reactive rather than proactive, and often engagement with the VCS tended to be financially led
- b. Services that did not commission externally tend to engage less with the VCS

9. In order to make the required improvements the Executive approved a number of recommendations namely,

- Improving knowledge and communication
- Understanding the sector's contribution
- Encouraging proactive engagement in business as usual
- Demonstrating impact
- Developing business models
- Increasing formal delivery role
- Connecting the VCS and Council
- Identify potential future funding aspirations
- Managing the strategic relationship

10. While a time table was put in place to achieve these goals, the Panel recognises that some are longer term actions.

11. **TERM OF REFERENCE A** - To review the current working relationships between the Council the Voluntary Community Sector (VCS) and by extension the Middlesbrough Voluntary Development Agency (MVDA).

12. The panel heard that the actions outlined in the Executive report "Strengthening the Relationship with the VCS" were being progressed and as such the Service Area could only provide an update on these.

13. The Council, MVDA and VCS groups had engaged in several, productive, themed meetings to progress these actions. For example, with regards to the "Strengthening our local economy and employment opportunities" theme, the Council had implemented the 50 Futures Initiative. This was a Work Experience programme aimed at getting people into working environments who may not have had an opportunity to access such schemes.

14. The Panel was also made aware that, after analysis, Middlesbrough and the Tees Valley, were a "cold spot" for funding and did not receive the levels funds they may be entitled to. There were several reasons for this including the quality of funding bids as well as the time some VCS groups can commit to such bids.

15. The Panel was also advised that closer working relationships were being furthered with the introduction of Council's Social Regeneration Agenda, launched in March 2019. In preparing for this launch the MVDA carried out the "Community Conversation" to gauge community opinion about what they wanted to see from the Agenda. The Social Regeneration Agenda was about having a different kind of conversation with local communities in order to establish where resources would be best directed. Previously, Council spending on such matters has been left to Council Officers, primarily.

16. In order to strengthen existing relationships, the Council would utilise the Place Brand in order to broadcast the message of partnership working to audiences outside Middlesbrough.
17. As well as strategic initiatives, the Council and VCS continued to enjoy a mutually beneficial relationship via the use of Community Facilities.
18. The Panel heard there was a network of eight larger community facilities with Libraries operating out of two, namely the Neptune Centre and Rainbow Centre. All community facilities relied on the VCS as there was a great deal of activity taking place within them by these groups. For example, in a typical week more than 80 groups were involved in delivering activities, which equated to more than 200 hours of provision in community facilities.
19. 60% of Community Facility use was due to VCS groups, groups that tended to be small and volunteer led. When accumulated, and taken over a 48 week period, more than 10,000 hrs of use in community facilities was due to Community Sector organisations.

CONCLUSIONS

20. The Culture and Communities Scrutiny Panel reached the following conclusions in respect of its investigation:

TERM OF REFERENCE A – To review the current working relationships between the Council the Voluntary Community Sector (VCS) and by extension the Middlesbrough Voluntary Development Agency (MVDA).

- Current relationships between the Council, MVDA and VCS are positive and mutually beneficial.
- Improved working relationships are critical for both the Council and the MVDA for each to achieve their strategic aims.
- Previously identified areas of improvement in the relationships are continually being strengthened.
- That the Council and MVDA are structuring their approach to improved working relationships and have clear plans to achieve this.

RECOMMENDATIONS

21. Following the submitted evidence, and based on the conclusions above, the Culture and Communities Scrutiny Panel's recommendations for consideration by the Executive are as follows:

- a) That the Council and MVDA continue to work to existing plans to ensure that future working relationships between the Council and MVDA will continue to be strengthened.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Panel would like to thank the following for their input during the investigation:

Mr Adam Allen – Director Culture and Communities
Mr Mark Davies – Chief Executive MVDA
Mr Martin Harvey – Community Infrastructure Manager

BACKGROUND PAPERS

The following sources were consulted or referred to in preparing this report:

- Final report of the Economic Regeneration and Transport Scrutiny Panel – Voluntary and Community Sector and Middlesbrough Voluntary Development Agency – November 2013
- Executive Report – Strengthening the relationship with the VCS – March 2017

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