

State of the Sector Report 2013

Summary Response – London Borough of Richmond upon Thames

The State of the Sector Report is welcome research into understanding better the needs and aspirations of the local sector and the how the Council can improve its relationship and support of the sector in the future.

This summary response draws out the main issues broadly in relation to the Councils following roles:

- Providing community leadership
- Building community capacity
- Being a strategic commissioning body

We will be working with Richmond CVS and partners on an action plan to be produced in March 2014.

Significance of the Sector

The report articulates the huge wealth, in terms of both people and financial resources that the voluntary sector brings to the Borough. It is estimated that there is the equivalent of 22,000 volunteer positions in the borough contributing the equivalent value of £53 million in volunteer time; projected employment is 4,947 posts equivalent to 1,640 full-time posts; the total income of the sector is projected at £113m. Even at this statistical level it is clear that the sector plays a significant economic role in the borough. However the Council is clear that it does not want to lose sight of all the other benefits that the sector brings to the well-being of the Borough, that of connecting communities, bringing innovation, flexibility and altruism to making a difference to peoples lives.

Providing Community Leadership

Relationships

The report explored the quality of relationships between the voluntary sector and a range of other partners including the Council, funders and other infrastructure voluntary sector organisations such as Volunteering Richmond and national agencies. Overall relationships were perceived as good which is very positive. However there were areas where relationships could be improved.

In addressing this, the Council will be working with RCVS on reviewing the Compact and revisiting the principles of partnership, openness and dialogue. In addition the Council will

be working with commissioners on identifying key learning points from recent commissioning programmes and improving our working practice in procuring new services.

In respect of volunteering, the Council has been working with Volunteering Richmond as part of the current contract to balance the needs of both volunteers and voluntary organisations. RCVS is also committed to building capacity in the voluntary sector that will help organisations develop their volunteer programmes.

Partnering

There was an excellent response to this part of the survey. 79 respondents reported that they were partnering with other voluntary organisations with 22 of which indicating co-production or joint service delivery.

We want to strengthen this work through the Compact and building the value of partnerships into future commissioning programmes where appropriate. RCVS also has a role in helping to broker partnerships and signalling to organisations future priorities for statutory and non-statutory funders, where it would be beneficial for organisations to come together. Partnering should harness the independence and difference between organisations which brings value and this needs to be reflected in the Compact too.

Building Community Capacity

Effective strategic representation and a strong sector voice is a key outcome for the Council, and this function has been specifically commissioned from RCVS within their main contract. The report cites examples of influence of the voluntary sector, but only where there are specific opportunities. It is not necessarily “embedded” or “enabled” in a more structured way. For example the Charity Law Working group was successful in producing revised contract terms and conditions. There is a lack of systematic strategic influence of the voluntary sector, but where engagement does occur it works well. A range of partners are consulted too e.g. EMAG, RCVS, Age UK etc., and it is not clear that these collectively have a unified voice at a strategic level. One of the mechanisms for achieving strategic representation voice is through the Voluntary Sector Strategic Partnership (VSSP). Members of the VSSP have valued it as a means of exchanging information but it does not fulfil its function as providing a form of strategic engagement and dialogue with the wider voluntary sector, which can then be used to strengthen discussions RCVS, as the sector representative, has with the Council. There was also lack of clarity around how relevant issues were escalated to the Council. Some organisations also had their own relationships with e.g. Council officers and did not use the VSSP as a route to representation.

RCVS has made clear in their response that they will be reviewing the structure of the VSSP and this will be supported by the Council. We would welcome the views of the sector on how best strategic representation and voice can be achieved. The Council will also be considering how it allows that strategic discussion to happen and ensure that the sector voice is heard; “are the doors open”?

Strategic Commissioning Body

The report reviewed the impact of commissioning on voluntary organisations. It was evident from the response that organisations and commissioners have found this challenging but with some significant rewards, both in terms of learning but also where organisations have successfully bid to deliver services and/ or worked in partnership. It is also clear that some of the challenges have had positive impacts too for example, organisations forging new partnerships which have achieved better outcomes for service users. The Council will take on board learning from recent commissioning exercises and share this more widely within the Council.

Future Opportunities

The sector highlighted a number of opportunities for the future including: personalisation, Social Value Act, commissioning, social media, business and external relationships and Achieving for Children. The Council will be working with RCVS to explore how they are supporting organisations to respond to these new agendas, as well as internally considering how, for example: Social Value continues to be incorporated in commissioning, and also the expectations of our new partner Achieving for Children around its relationship with the voluntary sector.