

Neighbourhoods Scrutiny

26th January 2017



Report of: Strategic Director, Neighbourhoods

Title: Voluntary and Community Sector Update

Ward: Citywide

Officer Presenting Report: Strategic Director, Neighbourhoods: Alison Comley

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Recommendation

To note the Mayor's Magazine Article to the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) to open a City-wide discussion on the future of the VCS.

Summary

The briefing note displays a summary of the key messages contained within the Mayor's article for 'Thrive' Magazine, addressing the Voluntary and Community Sector. Alongside this article the Mayor has also made a request that Scrutiny plays a key role in the discussion on the future of the VCS in Bristol.

The significant issues arising are:

- The challenges being faced by the VCS.
- To note the request for a proactive approach to developing the future VCS needed in Bristol.
- To see the development of a future VCS as a City responsibility, with both public and private sector fully engaged in development.
- The need for Scrutiny to play a key role in the discussions on the future of the VCS.
- To note the changes being brought about by the VCS Prospectus.



Context

To provide Commission members with the Mayor’s vision for the development of a future VCS in Bristol to help shape Scrutiny input on this subject.

Proposal

1. Neighbourhoods Scrutiny Commission is asked to note the contents of the briefing note and Mayor’s article and to consider means of engagement into the discussions on the development of Bristol’s future VCS.

Appendices:

The Mayor’s Article for Thrive Magazine – October 2016

Marvin's article for Thrive Magazine - Oct 2106

It is a real honour to be writing in Thrive as the Mayor of Bristol. It seems like only yesterday I was the Networks Manager of the Black Development Agency, working closely with Voscur and Bristol City Council's Community Development Team on the first iteration of Prevent (which we renamed "Building the Bridge"). Alongside this, we were supporting our members to ensure Bristol's VCS had a voice in the Local Area Agreement discussions shaping the local authorities approaches at that time.

I recognise the challenges faced by the VCS over recent years. Funding cuts and tendering processes have resulted in a number of critical service providers such as Nilaari losing staff and others such as Hawkspring holding on to survival by their fingertips. This is not only bad for their service users. It is bad for the city.

I want to use this opportunity to open a conversation with the VCS on how the city can best work to secure its future, not merely having a thriving VCS for its own sake but because it is a vital provider of services and both a symbol and source of the social strength and resilience, societies need.

Let me start by sharing a few principles I intend to work to:

First I want to reframe the way the city assesses the value of Bristol's VCS. Its full value cannot be captured simply by adding up the cost of the services it provides to the public. The full value is to be found in the social capital brought to communities through the local connectivity, social organisation, leadership and ownership and the evidence that people can lead themselves. It's found in the pathways and support to employment provided by formal and informal volunteering, role modelling and mentoring provided by organisations who have at their core a responsiveness to the opportunity and need on their streets and on the doorstep. It's found in the extra effectiveness of services that can only be realised when the organisations and staff are personally known and trusted by the local people turning to them for support or services. And it's realised through being the local group that is best placed to identify, understand and exploit the opportunities for the early interventions that avoid the personal tragedies and expensive interventions that come with late interventions and crisis. All this is more difficult to measure than simply adding up the costs of staff and services, but it is real and must be taken into account.

Second, I believe we must become proactive in developing the picture of the kind of VCS we want and then build tendering and grant making strategies that deliver it. This cannot be left to a technically coherent procurement process that runs and gives us whatever it provides without a view on what Bristol's VCS should be. We need to anticipate our future population's size, shape, strengths, weaknesses and what demands that will place on the city for support and services. We must take a forward view on the extent to which local government, the NHS, business and other institutions will be able to meet those demands, exploit opportunities and recognise that a thriving VCS is not an optional extra, but integral to our city's ability to deliver. We must not, and will not, have a "VCS of the gaps" philosophy where we turn to the voluntary sector to pick up what the public and private sectors leave behind. We must hold the VCS in higher regard than that. Rather, we must have a shift in mindset that begins to see the VCS, both as a service provider and through its full role, as the first port of call and the primary means for delivering the future city we want. This makes both social and financial sense. It's a philosophical shift that begins to see the primary role of

the public sector as the servant, supporter and enabler of VCS effectiveness. This is not a big government, small government argument. It's part of an argument for government that is big enough and an argument for a shift to a community organising based approach to governance and meaningful community leadership.

Third, I want the city to understand that supporting, driving and making space for the development of the VCS cannot, and should not, be a task for Bristol City Council alone. It is a city responsibility. The VCS we get, both as a response to unmet needs and available professional and financial support, is not only the product of decisions and non-decisions made by the council. It is a response to the city as the city works through employment practices, successful and unsuccessful public services, educational success and failure and social cohesion. Every sector in the city gains benefits from the VCS at the very least through the services it provides to workers and their family health, through the social interventions they make that provide for more stable communities and cohesive communities and the reduced public expenditure it facilitates. As we all benefit, so we all must take collective responsibility and coordinate collective investment in building the role and resilience of social infrastructure within which people live, the public provides services and business make and sell goods and services.

Our vision for Bristol's VCS must be a City vision, led by the VCS itself, facilitated by the mayor and developed and owned with the city's major public and private sector place shaping organisations. This must translate into a coordination of our grant making, procurement and investment plans to ensure we get the outcomes we want and need.

I would welcome your responses as I start to ensure these principles are grown into our relationship, not least through the VCS Prospectus.