

Leisure, Culture and the Third Sector Scrutiny Board

12 October and 7 December, 2015

Summary of Matters Considered at the Board

Report of the Chair, Councillor Ahmed

The Scrutiny Board met on 12 October and 7 December, 2015 and the following items were considered. I have selected the main points of the discussion that I feel members of the Council will be particularly interested to know more about. For more detail, a copy of the minutes is available on the Committee Management Information System (CMIS) via the Council's website at <http://cmis.sandwell.gov.uk/cmis5/>

12 October, 2015

1. The Role and Impact of Third Sector Infrastructure Organisations in Sandwell - Sandwell Community Information and Participation Service

The Board received a presentation from Sandwell Community Information and Participation Service (SCIPS) on the support it provides to the third sector in Sandwell. The services SCIPS provides are free to organisations and individuals operating in Sandwell and the Council holds a service level agreement with the organisation, which aims to:-

- provide training for tenants groups and organisations
- provide support and confidence building to organisations
- provide development and capacity building, leading to local initiatives, especially the provision of activities and services
- support and enable effective consultation by the Council and partners
- support groups to develop initiatives and to attract funding to deliver and sustain them

SCIPs also delivers a number of projects funded externally. Sometimes partnerships are formed with other infrastructure organisations such as Sandwell Council of Voluntary Organisations and the Volunteer Centre Sandwell when necessary to submit bids for larger projects.

SCIPS feels that supporting small, grass roots organisations is very important, to enable them to evolve into larger organisations. Supporting small ideas and facilitating connections is also very important to SCIPs. The Organisation has recently purchased a software package - “Your Value” - which provides a tool to assess the impact of community groups. It is anticipated that its first report will be produced in April 2016.

The Board notes that there is not an even spread of community organisations across the borough, with some neighbourhoods having many, whilst others have none. Those areas with strong community infrastructures have usually been involved with large regeneration projects in the past.

The Board feels that service level agreements with third sector organisations should be more closely tied into local neighbourhood plans in order to address need from a bottom up approach to fill in the gaps in terms of capacity building.

2. Facing the Future – Community Partnerships Project

The Board noted an update on the Community Partnerships project within the Facing the Future Programme.

It is noted that the project is progressing and the Cabinet Members for Finance and Resources and Leisure and the Voluntary Sector have led a number of workshops with the third sector and other partners to deliver the project’s message and provide a strategic context.

The Board remarked that, whilst some larger organisations seek funding from the Council, there are many smaller ones that only want advice and guidance and providing connections between organisations is important.

Looking ahead, further workshops will be held within town settings to enable smaller groups and organisations to contribute to the discussions and explore opportunities for development. Following this the outcomes will be put to the cabinet leads for further exploration. The Director-Neighbourhoods stressed the importance of members providing local intelligence to identify these small organisations to ensure that they were consulted and involved in the project.

The Board looks forward to receiving updates as the project develops.

3. Discussion with the Cabinet Member for Leisure and the Voluntary Sector

The Cabinet Member attended the Board to discuss her work programme. This new portfolio area for 2015/2016 plays a key role in delivering success in the Community Partnerships and Locality Working projects within the Facing the Future Programme.

The Cabinet Member stressed the importance of building relationships with communities, identifying partners to deliver services and accessing external funding to support those partners and communities. She too stressed the importance of member intelligence at a local level and is keen to hear examples of good practice in these areas to enable the Council to replicate them where possible.

7 December, 2015

The Role and Impact of Third Sector Infrastructure Organisations in Sandwell - Sandwell Council of Voluntary Organisations

The Board received a presentation from Sandwell Council of Voluntary Organisations (SCVO) on the support it provides to the third sector in Sandwell.

Approximately one third of SCVO's funding comes from the Council. It offers a variety of support, but the majority is around governance and fundraising/bid writing. Around a half of enquiries to SCVO relate to start ups and it deals with around 80 cases a year from initial enquiry to set up.

An online portal is provided, which details funding opportunities and in 2014/2015 SCVO supported the delivery of an additional £1.25m into the borough

SCVO sees itself as the strategic voice of the sector and is represented on a number of fora including the Safer Sandwell Partnership; Right Care, Right Here; Sandwell and West Birmingham Clinical Commissioning Group; West Midlands Police and the West Midlands Police and Crime Commissioner's board. SCVO also works collaboratively with local voluntary sector infrastructure partners in Dudley, Walsall and Wolverhampton through the Black Country Together project, which aims to facilitate cross-border partnerships and attract funding into the sub-region. It has also been involved in some of the discussions around the development of the West Midlands Combined Authority. SCVO acknowledges that, due to funding reductions, its ability to do outreach work is limited and therefore it is sometimes difficult to engage

small grass roots organisations. In an effort to raise its profile with these organisations, SCVO has been piloting evening surgeries and breakfast meetings to get organisations together to discuss funding opportunities.

The Board expressed concern that there could be some duplication in relation to the delivery of support to the third sector. Members were also unsure as to how community development work would be delivered following the restructure of the communities team. It was noted that savings from the restructure were to be re-invested into the third sector, however it was not yet clear how that money was being distributed. Members were also unclear with regards to what other directorates commissioned from the third sector from their own budgets and what other public sector organisations such as clinical commissioning groups commissioned from the third sector. The Board agreed that these areas would be explored further at a future meeting.

The Board is also hoping to hear from Locality, a national organisation supporting community organisations and volunteers, at a future meeting.

Councillor Ahmed

Chair of the Leisure, Culture and the Third Sector Scrutiny Board