

## **BRIEFING: VOLUNTARY & COMMUNITY SECTOR STRATEGY**

The Island Strategic Partnership recognises the unique contribution the voluntary and community sector can play in achieving the social, economic, environmental and cultural goals of the Eco Island Sustainable Community Strategy.

The Isle of Wight Council, the Isle of Wight NHS and the Isle of Wight Rural Community Council asked local voluntary and community organisations and Island residents how organisations can work together to create a thriving Third Sector on the Isle of Wight to help ensure these goals are achieved. This information has informed the development of the new Voluntary Sector Strategy that was adopted by the IW Council in April 2009.

The Voluntary Sector Strategy sets out a framework to guide a new style of working relationships between the Third Sector and public services at a time of some major national policy programmes that will affect the way all sectors work together. It also recognises that the commissioning of public services and investment in communities will increasingly give those communities a voice about what services are needed and how they should be delivered.

The Strategy aims to ensure partners treat each other with trust, respect and a mutual understanding of priorities and needs on a day to day basis and that public service commissioning and infrastructure investment make the best of the benefits and creativity of VCOs for Island communities.

The strategy identifies four areas where partners will put effort into developing stronger working relationships. These are:

**Engagement:** The Strategy sets out ways in which trust, transparency and mutual understanding and stronger working relationships between partners can be developed, both through representation of the Third Sector on key partnership bodies and in day to day interactions between officers and VCO representatives.

The Voluntary Sector Cabinet will develop the role of Networks which will be used by VCOs and public sector partners as key strategic links to help inform policy development and underpin a culture of continuous quality improvement through joint working.

The Networks will ensure VCO involvement in commissioning and act as channels for representing the views and experiences of the diverse communities of the Isle of Wight and for communicating with these groups. These changes will be supported by an updated Compact which will set up partnership, governance, consultation and mediation arrangements.

**Funding and procurement** – The strategy acknowledges that the Third Sector generates significant resources through bids for grant funding, fundraising, legacies and donations and direct sales. The strategy includes a commitment from the IW Council to develop a “commissioning prospectus” approach to commissioning services wherever possible. This will replace the current mixed arrangements for funding between the IW Council and VCOs and will identify competitive commissioning opportunities that are open in the first instance to VCOs, with those who are successful being funded for a minimum of three years.

A transparent and competitive selection process, based on pre-published criteria and timescales will be applied by a panel of stakeholders, including VCO representation. The annual prospectuses will ensure an increased focus on achieving outcomes through commissioning, providing opportunities for VCOs to make creative and enterprising proposals to deliver the required outcomes. Service commissioners will be encouraged to use this approach wherever possible.

The strategy makes a commitment to giving VCOs a minimum of 12 weeks to apply for commissioning opportunities, payment to VCOs in advance of expenditure in most cases and an acknowledgement of the need for full cost recovery.

**Volunteering** – Volunteering is the bedrock of the VCO sector, it is the distinguishing factor that supports both the value base and the capacity of the sector. Most of the VCOs on the Island are 100% reliant on volunteers for the day-to-day running of their organisations. The Eco Island strategy recognises the importance of volunteering and unpaid involvement in a community in building strong and vibrant communities and of partnerships that work together to increase participation in quality volunteering opportunities.

The Strategy recognises the need to offer volunteers reasonable expenses for attendance at relevant partnership meetings.

The Strategy makes a commitment to continuing to provide financial support to the IWRCC's Volunteer Centre service in recognition of its role in supporting best practice in the recruitment and management of volunteers as part of the wider objective of building active and sustainable communities.

Partners will also work together to address workforce development in the sector and to encourage public and private organisations to develop a local Employers Supported Volunteering Scheme.

**Infrastructure** – An important part of building sustainable communities on the Isle of Wight is to ensure effective use of local resources. The IWRCC, is committed to delivering an effective local Council for Voluntary Services role, providing support on funding, governance, charity law and organisational development. Alongside this support for local VCOs, there is scope for increasing collaboration of infrastructure resources, such as buildings, "back office" functions, technical and specialist support and workforce development, across and between VCOs on the Isle of Wight. This will ensure more effective use of the investment available to VCOs and potentially help to strengthen local organisations.

A key strand of the Strategy is a commitment to increasing and supporting opportunities for collaboration to build and maximise VCO capacity and resources locally. Public sector partners will investigate how future management of their property portfolio can support the work of VCOs, including through the IW Council's Community Asset Transfer Strategy. Subsidised training places and skills transfer programmes will also be offered by partners.