

Voluntary, Community and Faith Sector (VCFS) Commissioning Review of Activity (April 2013-December 2014) v1.00

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The Council has a number of contracts with VCFS partners, as part of commissioning arrangements for the delivery of advice and information services, infrastructure support and volunteering. This followed a procurement exercise in 2012 and outlined in the 2013-16 Delivery and Commissioning Plan. Successful organisations entered into a contract with the council for 2013/14 with a continuation in years 2014/15 and 2015/16 being subject to the budget process for those years.

DELIVERY AND COMMISSIONING PLAN
Voluntary, Community and Faith Sector
2013-2016



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- 1.2 Cabinet (12th March 2013) approved the distribution of funds as follows:

ADVICE AND INFORMATION SERVICES	
Age UK Lancashire	£7,000
LESS	£4,000
North Lancashire Citizens Advice Bureau	£165,000
One Voice (Independent Me)	£14,000
Samaritans	£2,000
Victim Support	£5,000
INFRASTRUCTURE SUPPORT	
Lancaster District CVS	£20,000
VOLUNTEERING	
Lancaster District CVS	£15,500
SMALL GRANTS FUND	
Various	£11,800

- 1.3 The Delivery and Commissioning plan sets out the 'review' stage of the commissioning process and performance management arrangements:

"The council will work with service providers to ensure that contracts are able to deliver effectively. This will include managing important changes, risks and capturing good practice. There is recognition that capacity, skills and knowledge can be developed as part of contractual arrangements and service delivery and this will be supported."

Detailed Outcomes and Success Measures will be developed with delivery partners as part of the procurement and contract development process. However, review arrangements will allow for changes to be managed and new opportunities taken within the general purpose of the funding. Performance Management will be proportionate and will take into account levels of funding, risk and opportunity.

The council will seek to work with partners to capture and review lessons from previous delivery to inform future service delivery. The intelligence gathered through such evaluation will be invaluable in terms of designing future, high impact, services that are efficient, effective and that also add value to other existing provision."

- 1.4 Officers have been in regular contact with all partners throughout the year, being a mixture of planned and ad hoc conversations and monitoring around the management of the contract and overall performance. Whilst these have sought to ensure compliance with agreed contracts the reviews have been proportionate to the size of the contract and in a spirit of collaborating with our partners and developing our own understanding and knowledge of the sector. This approach has helped to reassess need, where appropriate, so that outcomes and measures of success remain relevant and meaningful and to inform future potential investment decisions.

2 CORPORATE PLAN

- 2.1 The commissioning arrangements for the delivery of advice and information services, infrastructure support and volunteering contributed to two key success measures in the 2013/14 Corporate Plan. Performance both individually and collectively against each of these measures are set out below:

2.2 *Success Measure: Local people receiving advice and information through commissioned services.*

More than 19,000 people received advice and information on a range of services. As this is the first (baseline) year for this measure it is not possible to determine with any surety whether this represents good performance overall or is a direct result of an increased awareness and availability of the service. What is clear, it that everyone taking up the service has benefited from the advice and information received and feedback indicates that the economic downturn has resulted in more people actively seeking intervention and support. Going forward, work is jointly underway to assess what real difference these services have made to peoples quality of life and how this can be meaningfully captured.

2.3 *Success Measure: Commissioned services to support the development and capacity of Voluntary Community Faith Sector (VCFS) are performing well.*

Achievements and key issues arising in delivering services relating to this measure are summarised below indicating, how each partner has contributed to the needs of the sector and the citizens of the district.

2.4 ADVICE AND INFORMATION

2.4.1 Age UK Lancashire

- Over 700 older people received advice and information - many having multiple needs and requirements.
- Significant increase in client needs arising from Welfare Reform around the sanctioning of benefits that have had numerous supplementary effects on people's sense of wellbeing, including a continuing demand for access to food banks.
- More than 200 older people received assistance in claiming the benefits they are entitled to, worth a total of nearly £0.5M of benefit gain to the district.

- Around 80 clients reported that their independence had increased through quality advice and information, with a similar number reporting a decrease in social isolation. Work on social isolation continues, particularly around dementia care, working closely with Governance (Democratic Services) in developing Bare and Torrisholme as dementia-friendly neighbourhoods.
- Two clear strands of client have been identified being those of working age (50 – 60/65) who are struggling to cope with changes in welfare reform and related benefit issues, and; those over 60/65 where work is concentrated conducting home visits and dealing with attendance allowance and benefit entitlement matters. Both of these are rising, with the 50 – 60/65 age group being an emerging area of work that has become much more prevalent.
- Age UK has identified a significant rise in referrals to them from the Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) which has brought into question the role and related funding of the CAB through the Community Advice Network (CAN) and that of Age UK who feel that their ability to deliver outcomes continue to be stretched without the benefit of potential additional resources coming from the CAN.
- Like many partners, Age UK found it difficult to meet the increased demand for their core services within the funds provided in the current contract and the ongoing drain on available resources and time.
- Nationally, Age UK are changing their delivery model to deliver targeted advice, information and support through 'personal advisors' in line with the public health agenda of 'Starting Well, Living Well, Ageing Well', which is somewhat different to the current approach.

2.4.2 LESS

- Energy efficiency advice, including home surveys, delivered to nearly 300 households, benefiting over 450 people.
- Held utility bill clinics and complementary sessions with CAB, providing advice and support to nearly 50 people, helping them to save over £6,000 per annum in total.
- Provided training sessions to over 100 participants from community organisations working with vulnerable people needing energy efficiency advice.
- Established seven collaborative relationships with other partners, including Age UK, Help Direct, CAB, Homeless Action, CAN (Community Advice Network and the council)
- The percentage of people's available income spent on fuel bills continues to rise and is an ongoing concern and LESS are increasingly focussed on helping vulnerable people to keep warm rather than on reducing carbon emissions.
- Improved the tracking of support provided to vulnerable households - including multiple interventions and how to address these - with a view to integration with the CAN online referral system when developed.
- LESS has expanded its work across North Lancashire setting up a referral system for the whole county as part of the 'Cosy Homes in Lancashire' scheme and the latest tables on fuel poverty provided by the Department of Energy and Climate Change has seen a significant improvement, with the Lancaster district no longer being in the Top 10 worst areas
- Changes in government policy and direction on the Energy Company Obligation (ECO) scheme is causing some uncertainty with funders, in particular. A LESS consultancy report on Green Deal and ECO for Lancashire Authorities to be published in early summer.

2.4.3 North Lancashire Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB)

- Dealt with over 21,000 issues from over 9,500 unique clients. Advice and information on benefit entitlement and tax credits, arising from changes in welfare reform was the most in-

demand service, overtaking debt matters, although this is still on the rise, particularly post-Christmas with nearly a third of enquires made between December and March.

- Benefit advice and information, including the 'bedroom tax', ESA (Employment and Support Allowance), PIPs (Personal Independence Payment) will continue to be a major source in 2014/15 with the roll out of Universal Credit as well as the ongoing impact of welfare reform with expected increases in debt resulting from reductions in housing benefit.
- The top debt issues for which advice and information has been sought include credit/store card debts, council tax, unsecured personal loans and fuel debt.
- A major issue has been a significant increase, and an apparent more stringent use, of benefit sanctioning particularly around the withdrawal of Jobseeker's Allowance, which has increased the work of the CAB in helping citizens to challenge sanctions considered to be inappropriate or unfair and the hardship caused resulting from benefit being stopped.
- CAB are working in partnership to provide food parcel vouchers where there is a need. Of the 605 vouchers issued in 2013/14, 61% have been provided to people who have had their benefit payment sanctioned.
- A number of initiatives are currently being developed by North Lancashire CAB including:
 - Working as part of the CAN to improve access to advice and information and 'self-help' electronically and the automated referral of cases between organisations within the CAN to ensure that the right advice and support is provided.
 - Becoming an assessment centre for Social Justice training - as part of the CAN partnership - providing a more cost effective way to promote quality of advice and information
 - Undertaking an analysis with a PhD student from Lancaster University aimed at measuring advice needs and access and determining the reasons why people do / do not seek advice
 - Focussing on social policy around the relationship between poverty and health and developing preventative measures with a view to reducing expenditure on dealing with the consequences
- Over 100 volunteers are supported by the CAB of which over half go into full time employment or training, however, the future of CAB nationally is uncertain due to the Money Advice Service set up by Government, which may have an impact on local Advice Bureaus going forward.

2.4.4 One Voice (Independent Me)

- Sustained increase in the number of people seeking advice and information on disability services with 10,648 enquiries since the start of the contract. Demand is high in relation to benefit appeals and care and urgent need applications and there has been an increase in the provision of home visits which provide a valuable holistic approach and opportunities for more effective links with other services for those in need, including fire safety checks and befriending schemes.
- Developed and centralised various referral routes and processes with other 'Independent Me' partners, reducing duplication and providing an improved offer for service users.
- Actively engaged with eleven national organisations to develop a toolkit for user led advice partnerships around accreditation and quality.
- Moved from St. Leonards House to accommodation at White Cross to provide a more integrated service with other 'Independent me' partners and to develop ideas for longer term sustainability.

- Worked with a Lancashire County Council contracted partner (Salvere) to provide individual support plans across the region and delivered locally by One Voice, generating additional income to help sustain the free advice service.
- Similar to other partners, One Voice have experienced a significant number of, in their case, disabled people seeking advice and information due to the impact of changes in welfare reform and the effects of austerity measures and the economic downturn which have pushed them into crisis through job losses etc.
- Sanctioning of benefits have also had a major bearing on the wellbeing of those with serious, ongoing mental health issues who appear to be penalised for missing Job Centre appointments for genuine reasons relating to their condition.
- In December 2014 the board of One Voice took the decision to close the organisation. Council officers are in the process of considering options regarding the support of potential provision to meet the needs that the contract with One Voice had been providing.

2.4.5 Samaritans

- Dealt with over 5,000 calls which is consistent with previous years due, in the main, to the way in which the national telephone distribution system and 'cloud' software works to keep to a minimum the chance of a caller not getting through to a Samaritan representative.
- The overall trend of the calls received represents an increase in the number of callers with 'multiple problems', mainly around money worries and issues with benefit cuts leading to debt which, in turn, is causing health issues and people increasingly struggling to "see a way out".
- The local branch has worked closely with Network Rail following a national review which identified Lancaster as a 'suicide' hotspot. Training developed from that established with Network Rail locally has subsequently been engaged by Samaritans at a national level. Outreach work has also been undertaken with HM Prison Lancaster Farms with a change in focus on adults, rather than youth offenders, with 'listeners' training being enhanced to help them consider different issues they might be approached about. This was one of a series of twelve outreach meetings that the local branch of the Samaritans holds in the community each year.

2.4.6 Victim Support

- Dealt with almost 900 community cases and over 500 Witness cases, of which around two-thirds of clients said they were 'very satisfied' and a quarter 'satisfied' with the service received. There was also an increase in the number of cases referred to other agencies and organisations to nearly 350.
- In line with national trends, crimes of violence represented the largest number of crimes with domestic violence crimes increasing. Whilst the numbers of victims being supported has reduced slightly, the seriousness of cases being dealt with are increasing and are longer term and more complex requiring intensive use of resources.
- Additional volunteers have been recruited and trained and specific training has been provided in safeguarding vulnerable victims; homicide support, sexual and domestic violence, disability awareness and Race / hate crime awareness.
- An increased risk for Victim Support is the new process for securing funding following a change in control of Criminal Justice by the Police & Crime Commissioners which now requires organisations to bid for financial support. This change meant that the local branch had to bid for the provision of domestic abuse services in Lancaster and, like other organisations, led to a review of the existing organisation and management structure which

has resulted in improved and more coordinated work with the Youth Offending teams and the introduction of new and extended services that are important locally.

2.5 INFRASTRUCTURE

2.5.1 Lancaster District CVS (LDCVS)

- LDCVS has worked with a number of organisations providing support in improving their resilience in difficult economic times. The support now provided has changed noticeably with an increasing split within the sector between the larger organisations – who are more likely to win tenders for contracts and funding - and smaller organisations that are more community group based and are generally getting smaller and more reliant than ever on volunteers. LDCVS are increasingly aware that a large number of organisations they work with are experiencing the impact of welfare reform on their client group, resulting in an increase in demand for services.
- Over 100 individuals within VCFS organisations have undertaken specific and tailored training and received support to develop their knowledge, confidence and skills, including an introduction to writing small funding bids; managing volunteers and legislation affecting the sector generally.
- Nearly 80 organisations from across the district have been directly supported by LDCVS to improve the service quality they offer.
- LDCVS have also been integral to the development of the 'Morecambe Interagency Group', which they regard as *"a valuable and much needed resource in supporting partnership working in the light of other partnerships losing funding."* A number of important collaborations have resulted from this group with the support of CVS, including work with Barnados; training, development and awareness raising and peer support for young advisers and carers and supporting the Warm up the West End project.

2.6 VOLUNTEERING

2.6.1 Lancaster District CVS (LDCVS)

- In the first year of the volunteering contract nearly 300 individuals have been signposted or placed within a Volunteer Involving Organisation – almost a third up more than expected – through one-to-one support and processing applications online.
- There has consistently been over 120 'live' volunteering opportunities available on the district volunteering database at any one time. This is lower than anticipated as a number of organisations requiring volunteers have not always clearly defined the roles which is a requirement for entry on the database as a 'live' volunteer opportunity and is being addressed.
- Over 70 volunteers have been provided with entry level training. This is below expectations, largely because of 'no shows' at the volunteer readiness courses from people directed to LDCVS who would otherwise have their benefits sanctioned, rather than on their own volition. Individuals attending these courses are less skilled than anticipated requiring a higher level of support than was originally planned. Those volunteers with higher levels of skill and experience tend to have networks already in place that enable them to make their own arrangements to realise volunteering opportunities.
- Over 950 people have accessed the Volunteer Lancaster website which has been supported by eight promotional and marketing events, including a fair for the I2I work programme, attended by over 500 people and, through the Morecambe Interagency group and events at Walter Lyon House Residential Rehab and at the Royal Lancaster Infirmary.
- Work is continuing with the University of Cumbria and Lancaster University in particular to support student volunteers, with meetings ongoing to ensure the offer compliments need

and provides suitable opportunities for students, to broker volunteering through the universities going forward.

2.7 SMALL DEVELOPMENT GRANTS

- 2.7.1 Since the establishment of the Lancaster Community Fund (Individual Cabinet Member Decision December 2013 refers) the Small Development Grants element of the commissioning funding is administered by the Community Foundation for Lancashire. The funding panel met in March 2014, involving Council Elected Members (Councillors Barry and Leytham) and representatives from the VCFS sector. A list of the twenty-three organisations who were successful with their applications and the amounts awarded are set out in Appendix B attached to this report.
- 2.7.2 The funding round for 2014/15 is currently underway.

3 COMMON THEMES

- 3.1 Activities and experiences of partners who have been commissioning for the delivery of advice and information services, infrastructure support and volunteering has identified a number of common themes that are having an impact on people's lives.
- 3.2 People who found themselves in difficult circumstances but were able to cope without accessing the services of the VCFS are increasingly finding themselves in need of assistance across a range of issues and concerns.
- 3.3 Whilst advice, information and support around the implications and impact of welfare reform is now in most demand, other factors continue to be needed and in many cases are also on increase. Welfare reform has though had the most dramatic effect on people's lives and on the support they need and this is likely to be exacerbated by the impending roll out of Universal Credit.
- 3.4 The nature and type of information and advice provided by partner organisations is constantly evolving to best meet changing demands resulting from austerity measures that are now starting to bite and are ongoing and the necessary adjustments that people are necessarily having to make to their lifestyles.
- 3.5 The array, diversity and complexity of advice and information needs that people require is widening with a range of inter-related needs required, particularly in light of the current approach to benefit sanctioning as part of the welfare reforms, with cases taking longer to deal with and the work of partners now being more reactive than pro-active as a result.
- 3.6 The CAN partnership has developed a greater collaboration amongst partners although some concerns have been raised regarding the distribution and monitoring of funding of the partnership. As current funding comes to an end in summer 2015 there may be an opportunity to review and re-shape this going forward if considered appropriate.

4 LOOKING FORWARD

- 4.1 Meetings have continued to take place with all commissioned partners in 2014/15, to review the performance of last year, to review success measures going forward and to continue conversations around changes within the sector. Performance information against measures, including any new measures, will start to be reported at the end of quarter 1 (2015/16), though some measures are reported annually.