

Third Sector Infrastructure/Community Planning Interface – Exploration – Fife.

1.0 Starting Position

Infrastructure Support/Development Organisations

Volunteering Centre Fife – Volunteering Centre Fife came into being in 2003 following an amalgamation of three volunteer centres and a development agency and has a Fife Wide remit for promoting and developing volunteering and volunteering opportunities.

CVS Fife – CVS Fife came into being in 1999 following an amalgamation of four of the five ‘CVS’s’ that existed at that time. CVS Fife represents the interests of Fife’s Voluntary Sector on the Fife Community Planning Partnership Board and supports, develops and facilitates Fife’s Voluntary Sector engagement in Community Planning. CVS Fife also provides a range of support and developmental services to Voluntary Organisations in Fife.

VONEF – VONEF was the ‘fifth’ CVS in Fife (see above) and elected to remain as an independent CVS covering the North East Fife area of Fife. VONEF provides a range of support and developmental services to Voluntary Organisations in North East Fife.

Fife Council – Fife Council also provides services that would fall under the broad umbrella of ‘Infrastructure Support to the Third Sector’. POS (Policy and Organisational Support) are the key link with Fife Council from a policy perspective. Development Services provide specialist support to the area of Social Enterprise and chair the LSEP. Community Services are the lead service within Fife Council re Capacity Building.

Fife Rural Partnership – FRP have a specific remit in ‘rural proofing’ re the Fife Partnership but have engaged in developmental work, particularly around Community Trusts. FRP is primarily resourced via Fife Council.

Community Planning Interface – CVS Fife leads on developing the interface between Fife’s Voluntary Sector/Voluntary Organisations and the Fife Community Planning Partnership. A number of Voluntary Sector forums – Children’s Services Forum; Mental Health Forum; Day Care Providers; Employability (in process of being established) - are either facilitated and/or supported by CVS Fife and along with the integrated communications system (data-base; Web-site; e-bulletin and newsletters) are used to enable a flow of two way information takes place.

2.0 Stakeholder Group.

A Stakeholder Group was formed in late 2008/early 2009 to explore and take forward discussions/thinking around infrastructure/interface. The stakeholder group consist of, **VONEF***; **Volunteering Centre Fife***; **CVS Fife***; **CARF**** (**Citizens Advice and Rights Fife**); **POS (Fife Council)**; **Fife Council Development Services (LSEP)**; **Fife Rural Partnership**; **Fife Community Planning Partnership (Community Planning Manager)**. **Scottish Government**

Third Sector Team has open invitation and has made two out of three meetings to date.

*** Board Members Involved**

**** CARF are an important Voluntary Sector Organisation and offer the group an independent Voluntary Sector perspective.**

3.0 Process to date

CVS Fife had prepared a 'briefing paper' for the Fife Community Planning Partnership Board in December 2008 advising them of the Scottish Government's direction of travel re Infrastructure/Interface support. Community Planning Manager, Fife CPP is member of stakeholder group.

- **At the first meeting** of the Stakeholder Group Geoff Pearson summarised the position of the Scottish Government and answered various questions.
- Group agreed to
 - Undertake mapping exercise around Third Sector Infrastructure Activity in Fife.
 - Develop proposals around notion of VSSG (Voluntary Sector Strategy Group) – Arising from discussion around Community Planning Interface
 - Prepare a discussion paper to examine structural options for Volunteer Centre/the CVSs.
 - Devote time at next meeting to develop 'our ideal vision'.
- **At the second meeting**
 - Mapping exercise completed – will use as we progress
 - Visioning exercise undertaken – (good fun/discussion) – via three groups. We asked what we put in place if we were starting from scratch. Notion of 'single point of entry' figured strongly as did 'difficult to get away from notion of single organisation'
 - Discussed 5 structural options. Following discussion agreed to look more closely at 'Closer Collaboration' and Full Merger.
 - Discussed and approved in principle the paper presented on VSSG and requested a few 'refinements' e.g. linkages with CPP. Development of VSSG would coincide with development of Fife's SOA and the 2010 refresh of Fife's Community Plan.
 - Agreed to give further thought/timeline about CPP buy-in.
- **At the third meeting**
 - VSSG now signed off (becomes Third Sector Strategy Group). Membership reflects Third Sector engagement with Community Plan. (very happy to share this paper with all/anyone)
 - Agreed timeline for reporting in to/getting CPP buy in.
 - Major discussion around structural options for Volunteer Centre/CSVs
 - **Agreed**
 - In principle that three organisations would merge/become a single new organisation
 - Shadow Board to be established by March 2010

- ‘Aspiration’ that new organisation to be in place by April 2011
- POS/PPP Manager to prepare paper which will go to Boards of Volunteer Centre Fife; VONEF; CVS Fife.

Note; All of third meeting agreements to be ratified by Boards of Volunteer Centre Fife; VONEF and CVS Fife.

4.0 Summary/Comment

Perhaps the defining moment in the process followed in Fife is when we undertook the ‘Visioning Exercise’. It became apparent to all the participants – the enthusiasts and the sceptics - that what we currently have in place is not what we would put in place if we were starting out over again. A similar thought emerged following discussion of the papers around the VSSG. From At CVS Fife we thought we were doing OK – we still think we were doing OK. But the Third Sector Strategy Group proposals that have emerged from the discussion papers and will be set up has the **potential** to be so much better and create a much stronger voice for the Third Sector viz a viz influencing Community Planning and the Single Outcome agreement. In short going through this process has the **potential** to improve the services and support to Third Sector Organisations and develop a better and stronger interface between the Third Sector and Community Planning. There are though resource/service implications that flow from the direction of travel.

It is important that any drive to reach the potential referred to and highlighted above does not take away from what is already in place. The challenge is to ensure that the changes that we are being encouraged to implement and embrace add to rather than come at the expense of a drop in current services.