

Cabinet 8 January 2014	 TOWER HAMLETS
Report of: Aman Dalvi, Corporate Director Development and Renewal	Classification: Unrestricted
Tower Hamlets Voluntary & Community Sector Strategy	

Lead Member	Cllr Alibor Choudhury
Originating Officer(s)	Dave Clark
Wards affected	All wards
Community Plan Theme	A Prosperous Community/ A Safe and Cohesive Community/A Healthy and Supportive Community
Key Decision?	Yes

Executive Summary

1. This report is to inform Cabinet of the work on the refresh of the Tower Hamlets Voluntary & Community Sector Strategy (VCS) (formally the Third Sector Strategy), which ran from 2009-2011. The new document takes into account the change in language at a national level – and adopts the preferred local term – the Voluntary and Community Sector.
2. It is also proposed the refreshed strategy is adopted as a Tower Hamlets Partnership Strategy as opposed to being a Council initiative with partnership ambitions.

Recommendations:

The Mayor in Cabinet is recommended to:

1. Note the aim and objectives of the Strategy
2. Note the detail of the Strategy including the process of developing annual action plans in order to deliver and achieve agreed vision and objectives
3. Agree the Strategy on behalf of the Council, noting that it has been developed and is to be delivered as a Partnership initiative

1. REASONS FOR THE DECISIONS

- 1.1 To enable the strategy to be formally used as the Council's guide to working with the local Voluntary and Community Sector as one of the key approaches to improving the life of local people.
- 1.2 To approve the adoption of the strategy as a Tower Hamlets Partnership initiative.
- 1.3 To enable the strategy to be presented to the Tower Hamlets Partnership with the endorsement of the Council.

2. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 2.1 The Strategy could be approved as a Council Strategy but with an aspiration to deliver activities in partnership with local Voluntary and Community Sector Organisations and other statutory partners.

3. DETAILS OF REPORT

Background

- 3.1 The previous strategy was a Council owned and authored document. A main driver for this was NI7, which focused attention on helping the Voluntary and Community Sector to thrive, rather than on successfully delivering its outcomes. It was also written at a time when the sector in the borough was without a Council for Voluntary Services ("CVS") and was experiencing considerable turbulence.
- 3.2 The new strategy has different drivers. This includes building on the progress made under the previous strategy, the benefits of an established CVS and significant overall improvements in local partnership structures.
- 3.3 The combined effect of these changes is that the sector has become more organised and more cohesive. In many ways, it can be a more effective partner for the public sector. Meanwhile, the ongoing poor economic situation, significant Government policy changes, and developments within Tower Hamlets mean that both the Council and the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) need to reconsider the context in which they operate and how they can collaborate effectively.
- 3.4 A decision was made at the outset to write the new strategy in a way that invited the VCS into a conversation about the sector's role in the borough, as an equal partner. This fitted well with the status of the document as a 'consultation draft' which has now undergone revision in the light of suggested changes, many of which have come from VCS organisations. It also recognises the different experiences and expertise that the VCS bring to Tower Hamlets.

- 3.5 It is also worth noting, that at the commencement of the ‘refresh process’, it was not clear whether the document should be written as a Council Strategy: using the language of partnership, or whether it should be formally adopted as a strategy by the Tower Hamlets Partnership.
- 3.6 In practice, the Council has multiple roles in its relationship with the sector. Whilst the Council can influence the VCS, it does not control it. The Strategy shows that there is considerable vibrancy in the sector and it raises significant funds externally. It is an independent partner, which is a valuable partner to the Council and other statutory agencies. In this context it must be recognised that the VCS also has multiple roles including service design, service delivery, voice and representation, campaigning, and working with people to enable them to effect change.
- 3.7 In developing the ‘refreshed strategy’ there has been a deliberate focus to ensure the involvement of a broad spectrum of both voluntary and community sector partners. Activities completed in support the refresh of the Strategy include:
- § Extensive discussions with VCS forums/representatives
 - § Consultation with key officers/stakeholders within the VCS
 - § Presentation to members of O&S Committee
 - § One-to-one meetings with Directors
 - § Presentations to DMT’s
 - § Presentations and discussions with colleagues from LBTH directorates
 - § Public Health Team, Clinical Commissioning Group, TH Homes
 - § Consultations with key officers within the Council including SPP Officers and LBTH Grant Officers

The Strategy

- 3.8 The refreshed VCS strategy is attached as Appendix 1. The following information provides a useful overview.

Ownership

- 3.9 It is proposed that the Strategy becomes a Partnership document, as the activity of – and support to – the local voluntary and community sector is cross cutting. The VCS is involved in all of the themes of work identified under the Community Plan.
- 3.10 Not developing this within the context of the Tower Hamlets Partnership is likely to lead to duplication and possible confusion, which will be to the detriment of the Council and partners, including the VCS, particularly when resources are constrained. The Council could also stand to benefit from good practice from partners, target resources more effectively and better meet resident need if there is consensus about the strategy for the VCS in the borough.

Overarching Aim

- 3.11 The aim of this strategy is to “to improve the quality of life of local people by supporting the development of a healthy Voluntary and Community Sector”.
- 3.12 This builds on the aim of the 2009-2011 Third Sector Strategy that was to create the environment for a thriving VCS in Tower Hamlets. The new Strategy focuses on the key strengths of the VCS: the benefits it brings to local people. It recognises the depth, breadth and importance of the role played by the Voluntary and Community Sector in providing services and activities, supporting cohesion, representing particular people-groups, challenging the status quo, engaging, and empowering local communities.
- 3.13 This Strategy intentionally focuses on the contribution of local organisations – and the impact they have on local people.

Strategic Objectives

- 3.14 Four strategic objectives in support of the aim of the strategy - to improve the quality of life of local people by supporting the development of a healthy Voluntary and Community Sector - have been agreed; these are to:
- i. Ensure that the sector can shape strategy - recognising the importance of voice and representation, co-production and commissioning,
 - ii. Ensure that the sector is resilient and financially sustainable and encourage entrepreneurial approaches, including by exploring social finance, shared savings and consortium working, as well as trying to level the playing field and include smaller organisations.
 - iii. Strengthen social capital by increasing the quantity and quality of participation in the VCS – volunteering, cross sector partnership and local leadership.
 - iv. Enhance communication, information sharing and joint accountability: including developing the structures that will support this and improving measurement, monitoring and evaluation processes.

Scope

- 3.15 The Strategy will be supported by an annual action plan. Proposals for year 1 (2012/13) are well progressed. Medium and longer-term proposals to address areas of weakness and deliver the agreed vision are constantly evolving through joint work with the sector and other partners.

4. COMMENTS OF THE CHIEF FINANCE OFFICER

- 4.1 This report asks Cabinet to consider the draft refresh of the Third Sector Strategy. At this stage the intention is to progress the draft to the next stage of consultation with organisations which comprise the sector and the Tower

Hamlets Partnership. The costs of this are not significant and can be contained within the existing budget for the Third Sector Team. Going forward actions arising from the revised strategy will need to be evaluated and considered within the parameters of the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy.

5. LEGAL COMMENTS

- 5.1 The Tower Hamlets Community Plan sets out the vision and priorities for the borough which have been set by the Council and its partners. From the Council's perspective, the Community Plan includes its sustainable community strategy for the purposes of section 4 of the Local Government Act 2000. The Community Plan makes clear that individuals and organisations from the third sector are delivery partners in relation to a number of key objectives. This is particularly the case in respect of achieving A Prosperous Community, in respect of which the third sector strategy is recognised as part of the delivery framework that informs partnership working.
- 5.2 Having regard to the Community Plan, it seems that further developing the VCS strategy may be supportable as being necessary to deliver a variety of Council functions. Section 111 of the Local Government Act 1972 permits the Council to do things (whether or not involving the expenditure, borrowing or lending of money or the acquisition or disposal of any property or rights) calculated to facilitate, or conducive or incidental to, the discharge of any of its functions. The Council also has power under section 1 of the Localism Act 2011 to do anything that individuals generally may do, subject to specified restrictions and limitations imposed by other statutes. It may be considered that development of a strategy to support the VCS is something an individual may do and thus also something that the Council may do.
- 5.3 The VCS strategy refers to the Council's commitment to use of local service providers wherever possible. That commitment is subject to the Council's obligations to consult and consider improvement to economic, social and environmental well-being which arise under the Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012 and to the obligations of fairness and transparency under the Public Contracts Regulations 2006. The Council must also comply with its obligation as a best value authority under section 3 of the Local Government Act 1999 to "make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the way in which its functions are exercised, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness".
- 5.4 When considering the VCS strategy the Council must have due regard to the need to eliminate unlawful conduct under the Equality Act 2010, the need to advance equality of opportunity and the need to foster good relations between persons who share a protected characteristic and those who don't. Some form of equality analysis will be required and officers will have to decide how extensive this should be.

6. ONE TOWER HAMLETS CONSIDERATIONS

- 6.1. The contribution of organisations to delivering One Tower Hamlets is explicitly recognised in the Voluntary and Sector Strategy.
- 6.2. The organisations which are key partners in the Strategy as well as the wider VCS play a key role in delivering services that address inequality, improve cohesion and increase community leadership: the deliveries of these services are real examples of 'One Tower Hamlets' in practice.
- 6.3. An Equalities Impact Assessment has been undertaken and is attached as Appendix 2.

7. SUSTAINABLE ACTION FOR A GREENER ENVIRONMENT

- 7.1 The aims and priorities outlined with the Voluntary and Community Sector Strategy support the spirit of SAGE. The Council, its key partners are supporters of proposals that will meet these priorities and assist in the implementation of the strategic aims of SAGE.

8. RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1. A number of different risks arise from the various elements delivering a broad strategy involving a range of external partner organisations. This has been recognised within the VCS Strategy and appropriate mitigating action has been built into implementation plans.

9. CRIME AND DISORDER REDUCTION IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 The services that will be provided through the implementation of the Voluntary and Community Sector Strategy cover a broad spectrum of activities, some of which are key drivers in contributing to the reduction in crime and disorder and in particular, improving community cohesion.

10. EFFICIENCY STATEMENT

- 10.1 Implementation of the VCS Strategy will help to provide greater transparency and clarity in the achievement of targeted outcomes throughout the Sector with regard to the council's grant funding programmes.
- 10.2 Priorities which are clearly linked to delivering outcomes as set out in the Strategic Plan and Community Plan will deliver improved benefits for local people within finite resources, through for example:
 - Giving priority to organisations and schemes, that promote social inclusion by reducing social exclusion

- Supporting service providers who deliver cost effective services that benefit the local community and meet the needs of the area.

Linked Reports, Appendices and Background Documents

Linked Report

- NONE

Appendices

- Appendix 1 Tower Hamlets VCS Strategy
- Appendix 2 Equalities Impact Assessment

Background Documents – Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements)(Access to Information)(England) Regulations 2012

- NONE

Officer contact details for documents:

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