

SOUTH DERBYSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL
REVIEW OF SUPPORT FROM
SOUTH DERBYSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL
TO THE LOCAL VOLUNTARY AND COMMUNITY SECTOR

12TH DECEMBER 2005

Facilitated discussion led by Neil Moulden of Derbyshire Dales CVS

Malcolm Roseburgh of South Derbyshire District Council introduced the session. He explained that the event was part of a consultation process that was taking place as part of the District Council's grants review, their first for five years. He said that SDDC were very keen to get feedback from the voluntary and community sector about their grants programme, and that they were aiming to improve the service offered to the voluntary and community sector, and improve equity and transparency.

He introduced Neil Moulden from Derbyshire Dales CVS who would be facilitating the session, and Dawn Robinson from South Derbyshire CVS who would be taking notes.

Neil explained the format of the event, and circulated a sheet with the main points for discussion. (These are shown below, and the responses to each point are summarized)

Participants own experiences of the District Council's grants programme. (i.e. have they received funding, have they applied but been unsuccessful etc.?)

- A wide variety of organizations were present at the event, and their experiences of funding from SDDC had been equally varied.
- Money from SDDC had funded a wide-variety of work from one-off projects to major core funding, large pieces of capital expenditure (e.g. restoration / refurbishment of buildings, DDA compliance etc.), through to very small grants to small social groups.
- Four of the groups present had not received funding from SDDC. Some of these had applied but not been successful. Some had not applied as yet.
- Some groups had received in kind-support, for example free accommodation, expertise and equipment, and this was seen as very valuable.

Impact of the grants programme – what difference has it made to individual organizations, and to the community?

- It was agreed that SDDC's investment in voluntary sector 'infrastructure' had had a significant impact on the vibrancy of the local sector.
- SDDC's investment in capital projects (e.g. building renovations) was seen as having had a major impact on the local community.
- There had been an impact on family life, cohesion of communities and protection of children, but this was limited by the lack of resources being put in to this area of work.
- There were problems for organizations that are based in Staffordshire and Leicester but serve South Derbyshire in terms of the amount of funding they might receive and the impact that they can have in the area as a result.
- Funding for the CVS was seen as having a positive impact on the health of the local VCS, and on the ability of the VCS to have an influence on strategic planning in bodies such as the Local Strategic Partnership. Working in partnership was seen as very important in local community development.
- It was noted that funding from SDDC can often be a powerful lever in terms bringing in funding from other agencies, and therefore had added value.

Are there types of work, or geographic areas that:

Should continue to be supported at the current level ?

Need more support ?

Are currently excluded due to the criteria for funding or because of other factors?

- It was agreed that isolated rural areas of the District could sometimes miss out on funding opportunities, and that work should be done to ensure that people in those communities are aware of the funding available.
- Small groups and those 'not in the know' were seen as being at a disadvantage, compared with sophisticated and well-networked groups (e.g, those involved in, or aware of, the LSP etc..)
- It was noted that the funding only up to 25% of project costs is not useful for some organizations if there is little prospect of their getting additional funding from elsewhere. However, some participants, referring back to the previous point about SDDC funding leveraging in extra resources, felt that this could be a positive policy in terms of adding value to the grants programme.

- Increased support for projects working with families, children and young people was seen as important.

Is the balance between revenue and capital funding, and between project and core funding correct?

- It was agreed that both are important, and that it should not be a case of either / or.
- There was some discussion about the relative value of capital and revenue funding. Some felt that capital investment in, for example, buildings represented a more valuable use of finite resources. However, others felt that offering on-going core funding – say for three years at a time – would enable organizations to make a real impact in the area by investing in the human resources that organizations have.

Are the application process and the criteria for funding clear? Are there ways this could be improved?

- It was agreed that there needed to be clearer routes in to SDDC's grants programme, particular for smaller groups. Some are simply unaware that SDDC gives grants.
- There needed to be more openness about the reasons for decisions, and people should be offered better feedback about why their application had been unsuccessful, and encouraged to apply again when appropriate.
- Personal contact with someone in SDDC would make the application process more accessible, and reduce the need for applications to be sent back to applicants so frequently. (One participant had had an application returned three times). However, it was acknowledged that SDDC had taken steps to improve this, and that SDDC staff had been very helpful.
- There was some discussion about whether funding advice and support sat better with the SDDC or with the CVS. Having both available was seen as the ideal, but it was recognized that finite resources made this difficult. The point was made that funding advice from CVS is also linked to community and organizational development, and therefore was likely to be more effective than funding advice given in isolation.
- The introduction of Service Level Agreements, giving both sides a clear indication of what SDDC expects to see happen as a result of its grant was seen as a positive thing. The SLAs should be for at least three years.
- Some people felt that the application process was complex relative to the size of the grant that could be awarded.

Do you believe that the grants programme currently meets the District Council's corporate objectives?

- Those who were aware of the proposed changes to SDDC's corporate objectives felt that this was a positive change, and it seemed that the

authority and the voluntary sector were now closer together than ever before in terms of priorities.

- There was a clear dichotomy between those who were aware of the strategic dimension to grant-giving and those who were unaware of the factors that influenced this. (For example a number of people in the group were unaware of the Local Strategic Partnership, and how this might affect the priorities in SDDC's grants programme.)