



GCVS Briefing Note: Voluntary Sector Involvement in Community Planning February 2007

Aims of this paper

1. Aims

This briefing paper has been prepared by the Glasgow Council for the Voluntary Sector (GCVS) for charities and voluntary organisations. The aims of the paper are:-

- i) to provide further detail about the sector in Glasgow.
- ii) to highlight the significant range of organisations that voluntary sector engagement structures and process will bring together.
- iii) to support the positive contribution the voluntary sector can make to the range of different community planning structures now being set up in the city encompassing community planning, health, community learning, housing, community safety, and much more.

Developing voluntary sector engagement

2. The case for developing and funding Voluntary Sector engagement structures

This section discusses the voluntary sector as a vital resource within Glasgow; the role of the sector in community engagement, the mechanisms required to make the most of the sector's role and the progress made in 2006.

Scale and Range of Activities

2.1 The Glasgow Voluntary Sector: the scale and range of activities

The Glasgow Voluntary Sector is playing a growing part in delivering Glasgow's economic and social objectives. It has a turnover of over £426 million pounds, a workforce of over 16,000 and almost 30,000 volunteer positions within organisations that also have paid employees. The sector works across all 5 Community Plan themes, and has a direct impact on the achievement of targets and outcomes for Glasgow Community Planning Partnership (GCPP) and its partner agencies.

The sector plays a particularly vital contribution to social inclusion and social cohesion in the city. Over 70% of the people the sector works with each year – literally hundreds of thousands of people - are identified by public agencies as being disadvantaged, many within the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) classification. The sector provides many frontline and crisis services in the city, addressing homelessness, addictions and violence, and supporting mental health, child protection and criminal justice initiatives.

Community and voluntary organisations staffed and unstaffed are at the forefront of local health improvement, equalities work, integration work, informal learning, sports, arts, community safety, youth work, support for the elderly, childcare and befriending.

The Voluntary Sector has built expertise and actively engaged with groups and individuals to address harassment or discriminatory practices within local communities. In terms of improving links with equalities groups, GCVS working with a number of members' networks, including Glasgow's Equality Network Forum (ENF) which brings together representatives from: Glasgow Black and Ethnic Minority Voluntary Sector Forum; Glasgow Disability Alliance; Glasgow's Women's Voluntary Sector Forum and West of Scotland LGBT Forum, has supported development of the Equalities Partnership in the city.

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Roles of the Voluntary Sector

2.2 From service provider to advocate: the many roles of the voluntary sector

The sector is increasingly engaged in direct service delivery, and in that role has a major contribution to make to Community Planning through the intelligence and information it has, and through the positive impact its work can have on the challenging targets the city has for reducing worklessness, addictions, improving quality of life, safety.

The sector also plays an important role as an advocate. It provides information and advice, promotes advocacy and human rights, and assists people to have their voice heard. It is an important conduit to Glasgow citizens. It levers in major, independent funds to the city, it is the source of much of the innovative practice in the city, it acts as a test-bed for new initiatives, and increasingly it is developing new forms of partnership working across all 3 sectors.

For all these reasons the sector has much to contribute to finding solutions to some of Glasgow's intractable problems.

A Far-reaching Sector

2.3 A far-reaching sector: the relevance of the voluntary sector to Community Planning

There are 860 voluntary and community organisations in the city with paid staff; there are at least as many again – including faith groups, uniform groups and self-help groups - who operate on a purely volunteer basis. GCVS is currently negotiating with Glasgow Community Planning Partnership to collect definitive data on this.

Over 50% of the staffed organisations (467) classify themselves as city-wide: operating across significant parts – or all - of the city. They want and need to contribute to city-wide planning processes, but also tell us they require information about what is happening at local level, insofar as it impacts on their clients and their services.

The balance of staffed organisations (420) and most of the unstaffed organisations in the city, operate at a local level and want to engage with local neighbourhood and community structures and processes. However they also tell GCVS they want and need to keep up to a certain degree with city-wide information as it could impact on their work and their clients.

The voluntary sector draws on in-depth expertise and skills from both local and city-wide perspectives to share with other partners involved in Community Planning.

Ensuring Accountability

2.4 Community Planning and the voluntary sector: Ensuring Accountability

The voluntary sector involvement in Community Planning must be underpinned by transparent accountability systems. Voluntary sector members elected to local community planning partnership boards should be supported to consult with voluntary organisations across each area. The *National Standards for Community Engagement* require the sector to promote good practice in decision-making and ensure there is provision of scrutiny structures to our representatives.

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Current State of Play

2.5 Community Planning and the voluntary sector: the current state of play

There are now a wide range of partnership structures in Glasgow – at city-wide and local levels, which expect - and would benefit from – strong, coherent, co-ordinated, well informed, voluntary sector input. At city-wide level these include the Glasgow Community Planning Partnership and the other major strategic partnerships.

At local level these include Local Community Planning Partnership Boards, Community Health and Care Partnerships, Public Partnership Forums, Childcare Forums, Local Housing Forums, Community Safety Forums, Hubs, and other ad-hoc groupings.

At the present time there are no dedicated, specific resources being deployed to help the Glasgow voluntary sector engage either at local or city-wide level with community planning, to get information, to share information, to contribute to planning processes, to help shape their own and other services. While keen to be involved, without such resources, voluntary organisations – large and small, local and city-wide - have made it very clear that they won't be able to communicate with public sector partners, won't be able to effectively engage with the planning structures and processes, and won't be able to make as an effective contribution as they would wish to do.

Progress and Consultation

2.6 Community Planning and the voluntary sector: progress and consultation

An important step forward in engaging the voluntary sector in community planning was taken this summer by Glasgow Community Planning Partnership (GCPP). The Partnership funded a one-off exercise to enable GCVS to support the election of voluntary sector reps for each of the 10 Local Community Planning partnerships (LCPPs), and to consult with the sector about how best to support its strong future engagement.

Two meetings were set up for voluntary organisations in each community planning area, as identified by Infobase, GCVS' research arm. This provided a forum for 230 organisations to discuss how to develop the role, remit and nomination process for the voluntary sector representative on the LCPP. They also had the opportunity to feedback on recruitment and selection process and identify local support arrangements.

The meetings led to the election of voluntary sector members on eight local community planning partnership boards by the end of October 2006. Six of the voluntary sector members were elected through a postal ballot and two were adopted at widely advertised voluntary sector meetings.

GCVS held two city-wide meetings, in June and November 2006, to gauge views from 70 voluntary organisations who serve within either the city or at least two community planning partnership areas. From these meetings, a structure for involvement was suggested, and GCVS was recognised as providing representation and information, and feeding in to the Central Partnership. A city-wide steering group was proposed to engage on a quarterly basis with city-wide organisations.

As a result of a series of meetings, there is now both broad consensus about the way forward, and consistency about what should happen across the city.

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Involvement structures

3. Community Planning involvement structures for the voluntary sector

GCVS has been working with Glasgow Community Planning Partnership (GCPP) to facilitate the selection of interim voluntary sector members for the local Community Planning Partnerships. We facilitated events for all city-wide voluntary sector organisations and the selection process for interim voluntary sector members in each of the local community planning partnership areas across the city. Emerging from this process is support for networking across community planning areas.

3.1 Local voluntary sector support networks

It was unanimously agreed, at the 10 local community planning area meetings for voluntary organisations, that mechanisms should be put in place to increase voluntary sector involvement in community planning. In most areas, the mechanisms requested included:

- access to consistent and useful information;
- opportunities to meet, brief and receive feedback from voluntary sector members involved in different partnership structures;
- a periodic opportunity to get together as organisations to discuss involvement in community planning and to agree key issues to take forward within the local community planning partnership. Most areas suggested quarterly meetings to coincide with Local Community Planning Partnership meetings although some preferred more frequent meetings.

In most areas, organisations made it clear that the mechanisms should be carried out via some form of Local Voluntary Sector Network. There is no 'one-size-fits-all' solution across all 10 areas. Most areas talked in terms of a formalised, independent structure, but this may not be needed in every area. Some may opt for a more 'virtual' and informal mechanism structure for communicating and planning collectively.

3.2 Objectives of the local voluntary sector support structures

Whatever the final form of local support structure – which should be decided by the local voluntary organisations - each area agreed that it must meet the following objectives:

- To provide a baseline structure that is fit for purpose to deliver voluntary sector engagement and involvement across a number of different agendas – community planning, CHCPs, local housing forums, etc;
- To provide a consistent level of high quality support to build voluntary sector engagement and involvement across the whole range of work in local partnerships and across the whole range of local voluntary organisations;
- To manage the different selection processes for voluntary sector members on different partnership structures and provide support to them as required;
- To be developmental and collaborative, to create synergy with community engagement and other support mechanisms provided by GCPP Ltd;
- To work actively to improve the quality of local partnership working.

Involvement Structures Objectives

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Resources required

3.3 Resources required for the local voluntary sector support structures

Baseline resources to support the development of local engagement and involvement structures would need to cover:

- Meeting expenses: including room hire as required, refreshments, travel and carers expenses
- Administration time: to cover mail outs, photocopying, printing, postage, diary management
- Communications capacity: newsletters, e-bulletins, information briefings
- IT resources: providing back-up for voluntary sector members on boards, developing web-based information and communication resources
- Learning and development resources
- Development time: to build local capacity and create opportunities for cross city collaboration and ideas development.

It has been unanimously agreed that, wherever possible, this work must be carried out by a local organisation. In many areas there are local organisations willing and able to take on the work. In other areas this capacity may need to be developed.

City-wide Mechanisms

4. City-wide mechanisms

Of the 860 organisations with paid staff currently listed on Infobase, 54% (467) of them operate on a city wide basis. When asked about local and citywide engagement, it was clear that very few organisations have the resources to engage across each of the local areas and that additional mechanisms are required to maximise their input.

While organisations have made it clear they have the responsibility to respond and contribute to community planning consultation and working groups, in order to be able to do that effectively they told us they would require the following:

- Accessible information, minutes, meeting dates, agendas for meetings together with any sub- or working-groups for local and city wide structures;
- A combination of meetings, events, websites, newsletters, electronic and paper based communications enabling organisations to buy into what is most relevant and appropriate for them;
- Access to reports on local and city wide developments of interest and relevance to the sector;
- Training and development resources to build the capacity of those representing the sector across the city and to foster mutual understanding and partnership working;
- Mechanisms to allow the sector to prioritise issues and maximise its contribution
- Effective feedback mechanisms whereby organisations can follow the progress of issues raised and contributions made;
- A central community planning information library.



City-wide Network

4.2 City-wide network

As well as local support structures, organisations were specifically asked how they could act more collectively and coherently. They identified the need for a specific city-wide structure to engage with community planning for a number of reasons:

- to ensure effective links and the co-ordination of city wide activity at a local level;
- to enable the voluntary sector member on the city-wide Partnership to be fully briefed on issues and accountable for how these are taken forward;
- to provide a central forum where organisations could engage in the wider strategic discussions around community planning in order to be pro-active, positive and developmental.

GCVS was asked to co-ordinate a city-wide network, and to seek the appropriate level of resources so that the sector can engage effectively throughout the City. We have identified the following functions, posts and services, which, we consider together would enable us to co-ordinate the sector's activities and would enable city-wide organisations to make the necessary effective contribution to Community Planning:

- A Voluntary Sector Involvement Co-ordinator to focus on city wide involvement structures and create synergy with local support mechanisms;
- A Networking and Information Worker to ensure the effective development of and support for city-wide networks where required and to produce information in a range of formats for different audiences;
- A communications and marketing budget to ensure consistent messaging across a range of media;
- Administration resources to cover mail outs, meetings, photocopying and postage;
- A budget to meet the costs of venues and meetings;
- A resource library budget for learning materials and information packs;
- A good practice development budget to improve joint working;
- Finance or contracts budget (only if administering local budgets).

Equalities Hub

4.3 Equalities Hub

The development of voluntary sector involvement structures complements the Equalities Hub, which is a significant new partnership funded by Community planning to increase knowledge and practice of equalities and diversity. By working together, there is an opportunity to influence the methods, measures and outcomes on equalities achieved by all partners.

The management of the Hub is being undertaken by a new limited company: Glasgow Equalities Partnership (GEP). This company has been formed collectively by the four Equality Networks each of which can have two GEP Directors. GEP will hold the funding for the Equalities Hub, will be responsible for ensuring that the work of the Hub is successfully delivered against defined benchmarks and will be responsible for employing any staff.



Conclusion

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Community and voluntary organisations across the city have demonstrated an enthusiasm for involvement in the Community Planning process.

So, it is vital that voluntary organisations have their say in the development of community planning through accountable decision-making mechanisms. This is promoted to ensure the voluntary sector's contribution fits within its shared values of social justice, engagement, sustainable communities, self-determination, reflective practice, and working and learning together.

Useful Information Sources

Useful information sources

Glasgow Council for Voluntary Sector

11 Queen's Crescent, Glasgow, G4 9AS

Tel: 0141 332 2444

Email: <http://www.gcvss.org.uk>

Glasgow Community Planning Partnership

39 St Vincent Place, G1 2ER

Tel: 0141 572 1300

Email: <http://www.glasgowcommunityplanningpartnership.org.uk/>

National Standards for Community Engagement

The National Standards for Community Engagement set out best practice guidance for engagement between communities and public agencies.

Communities Scotland, Highlander House, 58 Waterloo Street, Glasgow G2 7DA

Tel: 0141 226 4611

<http://www.communitiesscotland.gov.uk/>

The briefing is available in pdf format or hard copy and further copies can be obtained from GCVS at no cost. In addition to the briefing, further information is available from the Policy and Strategy Team at GCVS.