

ROTHERHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL – REPORT TO MEMBERS

1. Meeting: - Cabinet Member for Community Planning and Social Inclusion and Political Advisors

2. Date: - Friday 16th April 2004

3. Title: - Building Civil Renewal Consultation Paper

4. Originating Officer: - Phil Rees, Planning and Development Manager, ext. 2896

5. Issue

To summarize the Government's Civil Renewal consultation paper, to inform Members of current Government thinking in terms of support for the community sector.

6. Summary

The Home Secretary considers Civil Renewal to be the centrepiece of the Government's reform agenda over the next few years. It is both about "redefining the relationship of the state to the people it serves, locally and nationally, and about economic and social regeneration driven by popular engagement".

7. Clearance/Consultation

The consultation paper was widely circulated and regional consultation events were held up and down the country. Locally, representatives from the Network of Partnerships attended a consultation event in York.

8. Timing

The consultation process came to an end on 26th March 2004. A report on the outcomes of the consultation is anticipated in the Spring and will inform the development of a Capacity Building and Infrastructure Framework to support the community sector.

9. Background

The consultation paper defines community capacity building, and makes explicit statements about the values and principles of community development. Its primary purpose, however, is to consider the key components for community level infrastructure support, and to set out options for the way the Government can "support change in the way that community capacity building is planned and delivered locally".

10. Argument

The paper sets out four key components for an adequate support system or infrastructure for local communities / communities of interest. Essentially, there needs to be:

- a representative and inclusive forum (a network or partnership of local community groups)
- a physical hub or base for individual and collective community activity
- access to generic community capacity building workers
- and easy access to small grants.

The Government sets out three options to provide this support, but recognises that the best way forward may be in combining aspects of each.

- Option A is essentially about Community Planning and suggests that support could be encouraged through incentives. Given the work the Council and our partners have undertaken to support Community Planning, and our understanding that the Community Planning process is about building the capacity and strength of the community sector, it is reasonable to assume that our communities would benefit from any scheme to incentivise Community Planning.
- Option B proposes that support is provided through national voluntary and community sector organisations but is unclear about which organisations might play this role. Consequently, it is difficult to consider all the implications of this approach.
- Option C suggests investing in key local 'anchor' organisations. It is important to stress that many of our community sector organisations / partnerships are relatively new in Rotherham, and have grown to address the problems of their own neighbourhoods and localities, rather than take on the wider role of an 'anchor' organisation for the sector as a whole. Selecting which partnerships to play such a

role would inevitably be contentious. The biggest difficulty with this approach, however, is the uncertainty caused by the reliance on short-term funding. At present, everyone involved in supporting the voluntary and community sector is considering how they can best adapt to the likely funding scenarios post SRB and European Objective One. It would be helpful, however, if the Government committed resources to community capacity building on a long term basis, ending the dependence on external funding, which leads to a 'stop-start' experience for many communities as staff inevitably move from job to job as funding dries up.

In setting out these options, however, the paper does not make clear the role expected of organisations, such as Voluntary Action Rotherham, which have traditionally supported the voluntary and community sector.

Despite a lack of clarity in places, the consultation paper is to be welcomed. For Rotherham M.B.C., the concept of Civil Renewal brings together the strands of community development, democratic renewal, and Community Planning. The Council has shown a commitment to these areas of work over a number of years, which should stand us in good stead.

11. Risks and Uncertainties

A 'mixed economy' approach, combining grant funding with income generation through community enterprise / ownership of assets etc. will be necessary if the regeneration partnerships we have encouraged over recent years are to have a reasonable chance of survival. It takes a long time to reach this level of capacity, however, and there is no guarantee that local partnerships will be able to maintain their current levels of staffing and support.

12. Finance

The consultation looks at ways Central Government may provide infrastructure support, but at this juncture there is no reference to budgets to support this work.

13. Sustainability

The issue of sustainability needs to be addressed, particularly in view of the changing external funding environment – the closure of SRB and Objective One. The South Yorkshire Coalfield Community Development Strategy Group has begun the process of identifying sustainable options for the future. The outcomes of the Civil Renewal consultation and subsequent Government spending on infrastructure support will be very important, therefore, in helping to determine a realistic way forward.

14. Wards Affected

All Wards.

15. References

'Building Civil Renewal – A review of Government support for community capacity building and proposals for change – A consultation paper from the Civil Renewal Unit';

'Building Civil Renewal – Government support for community capacity building and proposals for change – Review findings from the Civil Renewal Unit'.

16. Recommendations

The Cabinet Member and Political Advisors are asked:-

- 1. To note the consultation paper, and**
- 2. To consider further reports in due course, on the outcomes of the consultation, and the wider issue of sustaining support for the community sector.**