

VOLUNTARY SECTOR JOINT LIAISON COMMITTEE

MINUTES of an extraordinary meeting held on 24th October, 2006.

Present: Councillor Miss J. Cole (Chairman); Councillor Ms. L. Burnett (Vice-Chairman); Councillors G.A. Cox, Mrs. V.M. Hartrey, H.J.W. James, Mrs. M. Kelly Owen, A.J. Readman, Mrs. M.R. Wilkinson and A.C. Williams.

Also present: Councillors G. John, G.C. Kemp and N. Moore.

Representatives of the Voluntary Sector: Ms. R. Connor (Vale Centre for Voluntary Services); Mr. P. Clarke (MIND in VOG); Ms. G. Reed (Vale CAB); Ms. T. Burris (Age Concern); Ms. Y. Rodgers (Barnardo's Cymru); Ms. L. Nelmes (Penarth Youth Project) and Mr. Bin Sufyan (Muslim Welfare Association).

456 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE -

These were received from Councillors A.G. Powell and S.T. Wiliam and Ms. A. Steere (Vale Volunteer Bureau)) and Ms. H. Powney (VOG Victim Support).

457 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST -

There were no declarations of interest.

458 SOCIAL SERVICES BUDGET ACTION PLAN (REPORT OF THE VOLUNTARY SECTOR) -

Representatives of the Voluntary Sector had requested that an extraordinary meeting of the Voluntary Sector Joint Liaison Committee be held to consider the impact on the local Voluntary Sector of the cuts proposed in the Social Services Budget Action Plan.

Social Services were facing a predicted overspend of £5.5m. in the current financial year. In May 2006, Community Services were asked to develop an Action Plan to identify how spending across Social Services could be reduced.

There were several elements of the Action Plan that impacted directly on the Voluntary Sector. The Action Plan was divided into four sections:

- Community Care and Health Services (CCH);
- Children and Family Services (CF);
- Strategy, Performance Management and Commissioning (SPMC);
- The Whole Directorate (CS).

The Voluntary Sector were concerned about the overall effects that the proposed cuts would have and most particularly in relation to the following:

- CF3 discontinuation of grant to Cyffle Cyntaf;
- CF4 discontinuation of grant to Vale Women's Aid;
- CF5 discontinuation of grant to Amelia Methodist Trust Farm;
- SPMC4 review of carers services "to either reconfigure the use of this grant or to stop services in its entirety to carers"
- CS4 reduction of the level of funding to voluntary organisations in receipt of funding from Social Services by 10% (this would impact on 35 projects run by 23 organisations).

The report by the Voluntary Sector indicated that the Social Services Budget Action Plan appeared to work against the Council's good working relationship with the local Voluntary and Community Sector. It was also thought, by the Voluntary Sector, that the Action Plan contravened the Council's clear commitment to provide services and support to the most vulnerable members of local communities. This was evidenced by excerpts contained in the Vale of Glamorgan Council's:

- Community Strategy
- Corporate Plan
- A Healthy Vale - Health, Social Care and Wellbeing Strategy.

The Voluntary Sector indicated that, should the Social Services Action Plan proceed, in its current form, then there would be a loss of jobs in the Voluntary Sector. Some voluntary organisations and their projects would no longer be viable and would cease operation. The cost of restarting such organisations and projects would be enormous. It was estimated that the proposed cuts to the local Voluntary Sector in the Social Services Action Plan would only save £326,309 for the financial year 2007/08.

Whilst the need for the Council to put in place measures to address the Social Services overspend was recognised by the Voluntary Sector, it was thought that short-term savings could prove more expensive for the Council in the long-term. The Voluntary Sector expressed concern at the lack of consultation and arbitrary 10% cut in funding across the board without any assessment. On one organisation a 10% cut could be significant, whereas to another, it might have minimal impact.

The Director of Community Services responded to the points raised by the Voluntary Sector and indicated that unless the Council could come up with a substantially increased budget then it would have no choice other than to only provide statutory services. The Council was in the top quartile in Wales for amount spent on Social Services but the settlement the Council received from the WAG was in the lowest quartile. The Council would now have to reconsider its eligibility criteria having regard to the core Social Services budget available.

The Voluntary Sector indicated that both it and the Council provided public services, so any cut in their provision, could result in more pressure for the Council at the critical end, so leading to higher statutory need.

Members stressed that the Social Services Budget Action Plan did not draw attention to failing organisations, only those that were not statutory. Social Services had carried an overspend over several years but had now reached a point where reserves could not cope. Short-term measures were needed urgently to ensure the Council could set its budget for the next year. It was understood that the process would be painful both within the Council and its partner organisation but the level of overspend on Social Services was no longer sustainable. The Council would need to evidence base why Social Services were now in this position and the Welsh Audit Office had been invited to be involved in this process.

In the medium-term it was suggested that the Voluntary Sector could be more involved in the identification of priorities for statutory provision. A more evidenced approach would be needed to lobby the WAG more effectively on the inadequacy of the funding formula for the Vale of Glamorgan. The Voluntary Sector indicated their support and willingness to work with the Council to produce evidence of need.

AGREED - T H A T the Committee support the recommendation of the Voluntary Sector -

That Cabinet reconsider their decision to withdraw and reduce funding to their partners in the Voluntary Sector and the Council undertake with the Voluntary Sector an urgent review of Joint Commissioning funding as part of the ongoing review of the Social Services Budget.