

Washington Area Committee

4th November 2010

Report of the City Services Directorate

Influencing Practice, Policy and Strategy

1. Why has it come to Committee?

- 1.1. This report offers Members the opportunity for consultation on plans and strategies relevant to Washington. It also provides information and updates which will encourage Members to feed into proposals for service or policy change.

2. Purpose and objective of the consultation

- 2.1 Sunderland City Council is currently consulting with the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) on the Draft Community Assets Policy in order to receive their comments on a Council policy which has a direct impact on them.
- 2.2 The Draft Policy takes into account National and Local Policy providing clear guidelines for VCS organisations and details on the framework for the decision making processes necessary for a transfer of a council owned asset e.g. community building.
- 2.3 The draft policy sets out a three stage approach to a transfer of a council owned asset to the VCS. Evidence of need is the first stage of the policy and consideration needs to be made of:
 - a) Existing provision in the area (either VCS, Council or other public or private sector) that meet the proposal
 - b) Taking into account (a) whether there is identified need for this proposal
 - c) Whether the proposal meets strategic and council priorities
 - d) Whether the proposal allows for co-location of services
 - e) Whether the proposal requires a specific facility or can it be supported in an existing facility
 - f) Whether there is evidence of partnership working.
 - g) Identification of financial support including external funding and volunteer time

To summarise there need to be a clear evidence of need in the local area and following that there needs to be a robust and sustainable business plan in place.

The second stage of the policy involves reviewing governance arrangements. A "Community Asset Readiness Assessment Tool" (CARAT) has been developed by the Council using guidelines from the Charity Commission to assess building and governance capacity of VCS organisations. This considers a range of indicators including assessment of staff and volunteer policies, management committee skills, legal, financial and legislation compliance.

Alongside the CARAT a full evaluation of the asset management information will be provided such as a condition survey, Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) compliance, market value, potential rental value and compliance with statute.

The final stage of any assessment of transfer is the requirement for the VCS organisation to provide information on how they will sustain the management of the building which includes:

- Financial – funding in place for revenue to support the building and ongoing maintenance plan
- Programme – Evidence of local support and need for the proposed programme
- Governance – Skills of management committee and volunteers including premises management experience
- Partnerships – Letters of support and identified partners, being a signatory to the Sunderland Compact
- Community Need – Evidence of local community consultation
- Sunderland Strategic Priorities – Programme delivery meeting partnership and Council strategic objectives

2.4 Members of Area Committee have an active involvement with VCS organisations within their area and through the Area VCS Networks. The Policy has an impact on the assets currently occupied by the VCS and VCS organisations within all Area Committee areas. This impact is explained in the first stage of the transfer where co-location and partnership working with existing organisations will be explored. This will enable promotion of co-location, sharing of resources, volunteer support and usage of under utilised buildings.

2.5 In addition any new requests received by members from VCS organisations for access to council owned buildings can be directed through the stages of the Policy. The Policy states the support which the Council will provide and the necessary steps a VCS organisation must take to ensure they are delivering to key priorities and are able to sustain a building.

2.6 Area Committee member knowledge and experience can be fed into responses to consultation questions which are detailed throughout the Draft Community Assets Policy and can be downloaded from www.sunderland.gov.uk/communitydevelopment Alternatively copies are available by contacting the Community Development Team on 561 5002 or emailing communitydevelopment@sunderland.gov.uk

2.7 The Council has 85 assets occupied by the VCS and 16 of them are in the Washington Area, which are shown on the attached map.

3. Timescale of exercise and feedback

3.1 The consultation period ends at 4.45p.m. Friday 26th November 2010, following which all comments will be addressed and the Policy will be submitted to DLT 15th December 2010, EMT on 18th January 2011, Portfolio Holder Briefing 31st January 2011 and presented to Cabinet for approval on 2nd February 2011. .

4. Recommendation(s)

Members are requested to consider the draft Community Assets Policy which is currently subject to consultation and to participate in the consultation process to ensure that the strategy will effectively address the requirements of the Voluntary and Community Sector in the Washington area of the City.

Annex 1: Washington Area Map

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