

Harnessing the Potential of the Third Sector to Help Achieve Council Objectives - Demonstration Project August 2008

Summary sheet

The Big Lottery Fund has joined with partners from Argyll & Bute Community Planning Partnership to take forward a Demonstration Project aimed at building on existing, and developing new, practices to strengthen work with the third sector. Argyll & Bute Council is taking the lead in the project, and Council Leader Dick Walsh chairs the Board to oversee the plans. The project has a short life, but has short-term and long-term objectives and actions. The end product will be a report which is likely to recommend developing existing good practice, as well as creating new procedures to increase the potential of third sector in its work with Council and other community planning partners.

The project is looking at four key areas: **Funding** – ensuring that funding streams are appropriate and considering issues such as the impact of local community action plans, the removal of ring-fencing, etc ; **Assets** - improving community sustainability through the Third Sector's ability to acquire assets; **Procurement** – removing barriers and identifying training to enable third sector bodies to successfully bid for contracts; and **Social Enterprises** – putting procedures in place to ensure existing and new social enterprises have access to training and information to allow them to develop and grow.

A thread which underpins all of these themes is the importance of ensuring communication is effective and that third sector organisations are aware of opportunities available which will help them develop and become more sustainable. Thus the Demonstration Project is starting a consultation process with the third sector in Argyll & Bute and is urging groups to feedback views, criticisms and comments. Details of the project are available on two third sector websites – www.argyllcommunities.com or www.absen.com – and a questionnaire will be produced to ease this process. The results of this initial consultation will influence the final report. This report will be the basis of a planned future and wider consultation which will determine how the long-term aims can be addressed.

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Harnessing the Potential of the Third Sector to Help Achieve Council Objectives DEMONSTRATION PROJECT

1. SUMMARY

- 1.1 The Demonstration Project was established in June 2008 to harness the potential of the Third Sector to help achieve Council objectives.
- 1.2 The Demonstration Project Team was tasked with taking forward the work detailed in the COHI Report, March 2008, and the political direction of Government, which recognises the role that Councils play in enabling communities to achieve their potential.
- 1.3 To ensure Argyll and Bute Council is fit for this role, the Demonstration Project Team was tasked to look at current Council policies and procedures and identify barriers and opportunities. This report outlines progress to date, recommendations and the next steps.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 The Board agree in principal to the continuation of the Demonstration Project to a second phase.
- 2.2 The Board commit in principle to the resource implications of taking forward the Demonstration Project, subject to more detailed financial information.
- 2.3 The Board continue to oversee the work of the Demonstration Project.
- 2.4 The Board approve the general recommendations detailed in this paper.
- 2.5 The Board approve the recommendations detailed in each Project Outcome Report.

3. DETAIL**3.1 *Consultation and research***

- 3.1.1 The Demonstration project has undertaken consultation and desktop research with a range of internal and external partners to look at the four main outcomes as detailed in the Demonstration Project OBC and Action Plan.
- 3.1.2 The consultation included a questionnaire which appeared on two Third Sector intermediary organisation websites and was distributed with the Council's ALERT funding bulletin. In addition, each Team Leader contacted

stakeholders individually; and the Third Sector Steering Group acted as a focus group, allowing discussion on issues and ideas for progress.

- 3.1.3 The findings from this consultation and research have been used to form the recommendations and suggestions for the next steps for the Demonstration Project.

3.2 ***Findings – General***

Findings that relate to each particular outcome can be found in the individual outcome reports. Many of these findings were applicable to all outcomes and these have been summarised and detailed below. On the whole, findings from the Demonstration Project research and consultation exercise confirmed people's perceptions of the main areas for improvement.

- 3.1.1 **Examples of good practice in working with the Third Sector exist in some Council departments but awareness across the Council of the benefits of working with the third sector, and the underpinning knowledge such as community benefit, social capital etc. varies significantly.**
- 3.1.2 **The Council has undertaken work to help identify and measure social benefit in resource planning, and has a strategy for working with the Third Sector. It has developed the following;**
- (i) *Sustainability Toolkit***
 - (ii) *Outline Business Case Scoring System***
 - (iii) *Weightings for community aspects within the procurement process***
 - (iv) *Volunteering framework***
 - (v) *Corporate Plan***
 - (vi) *Corporate Planning and Performance Framework***
 - (vii) *Consultation Toolkit***
 - (viii) *Draft Community Engagement Strategy***

This work needs to be consolidated and developed into a coherent overarching framework for the Council's relationship with the Third Sector.

- 3.1.3 **There is not a general awareness within the Third Sector of how they can contract services from the Council, apply for grant assistance or have an impact on service delivery. There is no framework for the flow of information between the Council and the Third Sector.**
- 3.1.4 **There are many ongoing related strands of work such as the Corporate Planning and Performance Framework, Single Outcome Agreement, Community Engagement Strategy, Fairer Argyll and Bute Plan and others that the Demonstration Project must continue to work with in finding ways forward. Much of this work involves Community Planning Partners and there should be a framework for this work based on shared principles of transparency, accountability, communications, equity and respect between partners.**

3.2 *Overarching recommendations from themes*

Recommendations that relate to each particular outcome can be found in the individual outcome reports. Many of these recommendations were applicable to all outcomes and these have been summarised and detailed below;

- 3.2.1 That there is a wider consultation, both internal and external, to fully inform the Project and make best use of existing resources.**
- 3.2.2 That the Council adopts an intelligent client approach for all Third Sector work rather than a specific department. This will help the Council have a strategic view of the Third Sector and the Third Sector have a strategic view of the Council.**
- 3.2.3 That the Council develop a comprehensive approach to working with the Third Sector which reflects the diversity of the Third Sector but within an overarching framework. This framework will enable appropriate signposting through the single point of contact, and would be useful in gathering intelligence on the Third Sector and its needs.**
- 3.2.4 That a mechanism is established for ongoing communication between the Council and the Third Sector and a promotional strategy to highlight opportunities and contributions from both.**
- 3.2.5 That the Council, with the Community Planning Partners, develops a Compact with the Third Sector which will lead to improved partnership working, and that this work should be part of the development of the Third Sector interface with CPP.**
- 3.2.6 That work should be undertaken to identify options for service delivery where the Third Sector can bid for contracts.**
- 3.2.7 That the Council considers the Public Social Partnership Project in Oban as a pilot for Third Sector service delivery.**

4 RISK

- 4.1** The main risk facing the Demonstration Project is that both sides of the equation, Council and the Third Sector, do not move together. This will result in either the Third Sector organisations investing time, effort and commitment in something that the Council is unable to deliver, or alternatively the Council developing a framework that the Third Sector is not ready to participate in.
- 4.2** There is a perceived financial risk to the Third Sector in changes to ring fenced funding and the move from grant dependence to contracts. These risks could be lessened by developing a risk register for what has been ring-fenced and engaging the Third Sector in discussions.
- 4.3** The main risk to the co-ordination of the project is lack of resources and competing priorities on staff time.

5 NEXT STEPS

- 5.1** Responses from the consultation questionnaire and from informal meetings with stakeholders have shown an overwhelming desire for a further consultation based on the findings from this first phase. This second phase of consultation would involve more stakeholders and be over a longer period of time, essentially building relationships and an agreed way forward. This would form the basis of a Compact between the Community Planning Partners.
- 5.2** To do this the overall management of the project should continue to be overseen by the Demonstration Project Board to give it the status required to drive forward change. The Project Team should continue in their roles, to ensure expertise in the areas of work covered by the Project but membership should be expanded to include other identified expertise such as Social Work and Finance.
- 5.3** There is a need to either realign or provide additional resources to undertake a second phase of consultation and implementation of findings, and the Demonstration Board need to be aware of this in deciding the way forward. This is not fully costed but is likely to include dedicated staff to co-ordinate the Project, wide-spread consultation event and a contract for desk top research as specified earlier.
- 5.4** The alternative to taking forward a second phase of the Demonstration Project is to continue to develop each of the individual outcomes/themes with a central reporting point identified to ensure these outcomes are not developed in isolation. This central reporting point should be an existing structure such as the Organisational Development Policy and Performance Group.

6 RESOURCES

- 6.1** There are resource implications for a second phase of the Demonstration Project.
- 6.2** Actions specific to the individual outcome reports will, in part, be included within the service planning process. This needs to be costed and further developed.
- 6.3** Actions relating to the social economy may be funded through the Local Social Economy Partnership. This includes; £5,000 to research potential social enterprise activity in priority areas, £2,400 to develop a public social partnership, £1,200 to promote public tender website.
- 6.4** Actions relating to community consultation will be partly funded through WALT Challenge Fund. Funding from WALT is £20,000 yr1 (and a further two years at £18,000).
- 6.5** The publication and promotion of a report will be resourced by Big Lottery Fund.

- 6.6** The following resources have been identified as additional;
Desktop research on linking funding streams with priorities, risks of ending of ring-fenced funding and analysis of Third Sector to develop a tiered approach.
- 6.7** There is no identified resource for co-ordinating the project. This role is currently shared by Margaret Fyfe and Arlene Cullum with limited administrative support.

7 TIMESCALE

- 7.1** The intention is to develop an action plan for Phase Two of the Demonstration Project and a brief for consultation with partners. This plan and brief will be delivered by 31st January 2009.
- 7.2** The Consultation will begin in Spring 2009.

8 CONCLUSIONS

- 8.1** The findings and conclusions of the first stage of the Demonstration Project should be developed, refined and validated. It is clear from the consultation and research that though there are work streams appropriate to each individual outcome, the most pressing need is for an overarching framework to working in partnership with the Third Sector. This overarching framework needs to be flexible if it is to successfully harness the diverse range of abilities and aspirations within the Third Sector. A further stage of consultation and research is therefore required and this should be wide-ranging and include all Council departments, the wider Third Sector and Community Planning Partners. This work has resource implications for the Council, not all of which can be met through existing budgets.

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Project Outcome

Funding streams are appropriate and linked to strategic plans

Introduction

The purpose of this theme of the project was to look at funding within the Council to gauge the scale and type of funding involved. Then to consider the extent to which funding streams are linked to local and strategic action planning.

Background (rationale for the outcome)

The issue of funding was raised by the report of the Carnegie Commission for Rural Community Development. Communities experienced difficulties due to the need to put together complex 'cocktails' of funding in order to sustain their activities. Funding was often short term with an emphasis upon innovation which worked against the funding of tried and tested services which were serving clearly identified and ongoing needs in the community.

There was a need to develop a more sophisticated approach which utilised grant aid, service level agreements and procurement methods to make the most appropriate response and also give greater long term security of funding.

The Council has entered into a dialogue with a Steering Group made up of representatives of the 3rd Sector to agree ways of strengthening the partnership with the Council and the Community Planning Partnership and funding those developments through the Fairer Scotland Fund.

The Council has also begun a process of relating budgets and expenditure much more closely to planning and policy priorities.

Research Undertaken

Information was gathered from three sources on payments made by the Council to the 3rd Sector:

- Research undertaken in 2008 by Shona Strachan of Argyll and Bute Council to gauge the level grant aid awarded by the Council to the 3rd Sector.
- A similar trawl was undertaken on the current position by Strategic Finance.
- A review was undertaken of the list of all payments by the Council to Third Parties to identify those which are made to the 3rd Sector.
- Questionnaires were issued to voluntary sector organisations to canvas opinions on various aspects of the Council Support.
- A focus group was held with the Third Sector Steering Group currently in a dialogue with the Council over future developments.

Barriers identified and how overcome and limitations

The analysis of grant aid and other forms of assistance totalling £15.7m would suggest that there is no strategic overview influencing the way this assistance is disbursed. However, it should also be recognised that the recipients and the reasons for providing the assistance are very diverse. There is also a wide spectrum in terms of the relationship between the Council and the recipient from direct service provider to total grant dependency and a range of permutations in between.

A point highlighted by the Carnegie Commission and re-iterated in the focus group with the Third Sector Steering Group is the emphasis by funders on innovative projects addressing new policy priorities usually with short term funding attached. Clearly there is a need for sustained funding for mainstream provision which may have been innovative at one time but is now addressing an established, real and ongoing need. This undoubtedly creates a cycle of developing new projects to satisfy funding criteria while it becomes harder and harder to find funding for essential, core activities which appear less 'exciting' to funders.

This is a widespread phenomenon affecting local and national funders. It may have a number of different drivers. Shortage of funds and desire to make an impact with available funds may be one reason. Focusing on innovation gives a rationale for refusing more traditional requests where there is not enough money to meet these. Funders want to see their money making a difference in some fairly public way but also want to have a rationale that justifies them refusing all the applications they cannot fund.

This is a very clear pattern and it needs to be addressed. Funders should perhaps have limited amounts of money for innovation and accept that the bulk of the money is required for more mundane but necessary core costs. Looking at relationships that are more about service provision and contracts might be a way of recognising this more clearly. Developing a new rationale for funding relationships which takes account of these issues and provides a sensible way forward is probably the key challenge.

Findings and conclusions

1. There is a lack of a strategic rationale with governs all of the financial assistance provided by the Council to the 3rd Sector.
2. There is a wide spectrum in terms of the relationship between the Council and recipients from direct service provider total grant dependency and a range of permutations in between. There is a need to develop policies which reflect this diversity.
3. Payments to the 3rd Sector total £15.7m; £13.7m of this is paid out to only 43 organisations.
4. 1255 payments of less than £1,000 total only £0.6m.
5. This diversity underlines again the need for a range of appropriate responses.
6. The two services paying out the largest sums of money are Housing (including Homelessness and Supporting People), £6,170,150 and Social Work (including Elderly Care, People Affected with Disabilities, Residential Care Homes), £6,956,923. This would suggest that these two services should be more involved in future discussions.
7. The end of ring fencing is likely to open up competition for funding to a wider range of organisations where it was protected before and restricted to a particular type of organisation.
8. Councils may choose to use formerly ring fenced funding for purposes other than supporting the 3rd Sector and may even use the money to make budget savings.

Implications (policy/resources etc)

A more detailed analysis is required of present funding assistance. A more representative survey is also required of stakeholders in receipt of assistance from the Council.

Probably some more resources are required to be injected into the system to create favourable conditions for change, however, it should be recognised that this is an area where demand will always outstrip supply. It should also be recognised that the total level of finance involved is significant, a figure of about £15.7m.

Is it possible to create an overarching policy that makes the best use of these resources and creates a framework of differing but appropriate relationships to maximise the impact? Greater emphasis on the importance for the 3rd Sector of full cost recovery for the delivery of valued and quality services needs to be part of this review.

Risks

There is a long term risk to the 3rd Sector of the consequences of the current funding situation. This is particularly so in a rural area with the difficulties of service delivery in remote communities and the danger of non-viability and depopulation.

There are also risks to the Council in contracting out more and more services to a 3rd Sector where there are enormous variations in capacity, resources, reserves and competence. There will also be pressure on the Council to intervene when there are failures in service delivery.

Recommendations

1. There is a need for a further analysis of payments to the 3rd Sector due to the scale and complexity of the information.
2. Commit to policy development that will recognise the diversity of assistance given and develop a continuum of appropriate relationships aimed at maximising the return for the investment made in terms of quality local services.
3. Support to Social Enterprise organisation should perhaps mirror that of the Scottish Government with a two tier approach. Investment to encourage new enterprises and a more intensive support and investment in well established enterprises capable of early expansion and growth.
4. The Council should be beginning to consider its future attitude to the end of ring fencing.
5. Housing and Social Work are the two largest players in payments to the 3rd Sector and should be more involved in future discussions.

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Project Outcome
Improve Community sustainability through the Third Sector's ability to acquire assets.
Introduction
<p>In order to achieve the Project Outcome the intention is to, firstly, review existing Council and CPP – Asset Development Group procedures to identify opportunities for engagement with the Third Sector, and thereafter revise the Council's disposal procedures and processes to allow this to happen.</p> <p>In doing so it will be necessary to put in place a framework to enable engagement with the Third Sector and also to obtain sign-up from the Community Planning Partnership.</p>
Background (rationale for the outcome)
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Historically the Third Sector has found difficulty competing to acquire surplus Council property.• In the past conflicting Council priorities could mean that the need to secure a capital receipt often prevailed over the potential of achieving wider community benefits or objectives.• Perceived inconsistency of approach by the Council in its treatment of surplus assets.• The Council's need to review its management and treatment of surplus assets in light of emerging national initiatives.
Research Undertaken
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Meeting with the Big Lottery Fund – Discussion held on best practice guidance and review of possible assessment forms.• Meeting with the Community Planning Partnership Manager – Discussion held on engagement with CPP Members and reporting timescales.• Meeting with sample members of the CPP-Asset Development Group – Individual discussions held to gauge willingness and current commitment to supporting Third Sector. E.g. Forest Enterprise's "Sears" programme.• Meeting with Estates Office, Strategic Finance and Corporate Funding Manager- Exercise carried out to process map current and revised disposal procedures.• Meeting of Asset Management Board – Revised asset disposal procedures

accommodating opportunities for Third Sector to register interests were approved.

- Telephone interview with ABSEN – Mike Geraghty. Interview explored current perceptions around existing Council procedures for disposal of its surplus property and the potential for using ABSEN website for pre-marketing circulation of property details. Third Sector perception issues highlighted around the Council's apparent inconsistent approach to allocating capital grants/receipts in respect of assets and organisations.
- Telephone interview with Cathy Paterson as Third Sector representative. Interview carried out as per ABSEN interview above.
- Questionnaires issued to Voluntary Sector organisations on current asset use and future requirements.

Barriers identified and how overcome and limitations

- Response to Questionnaire was unfortunately very limited and not enough to establish a representative view on the existing use of assets, possible future requirements and engagement with the Council at this stage. This might be overcome by a more comprehensive sampling of organisations either by a different type of questionnaire – i.e. postal, or by a stakeholder event of some description.
- Being sure of reaching all potential parties or organisations. The nomination of a suitable, or a number of suitable web-based portals for posting information on potential surplus property would be helpful. It is thought that this nomination should be made by the Third Sector Steering Group in conjunction with ABSEN and the Council's of Voluntary Service.

Findings and conclusions

The Council's surplus property management procedures have been revised to incorporate a facility for Third Sector partner organisations to register an interest with the Council in respect of any assets potentially surplus to requirements.

The success of these new arrangements will depend to an extent on the ability of the Council, the CPP and the wider Third Sector to agree on the best method of disseminating guidance and best practice advice to interested organisations on how these revised procedures will work in practice.

These revised arrangements will not address the perceived issue of an inconsistent approach by the Council towards allocating grant funding and financial support to the Third Sector. This area is regarded as being beyond the scope of this paper but should be considered for follow up action by the Project Board and the Council, if appropriate.

Implications (policy/resources etc)
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Some resources will be required to develop the Council's web-site to accommodate appropriate links to agreed Third Sector web sites/information portals.• There will be some cost to the Council in helping to develop the guidance and best practice advice. At this time these costs have yet to be assessed.• There could also be a cost of holding a stakeholder event of some description and possibly a further postal questionnaire. This will have to be determined by the Demonstration Project Team having regard to each Project Objective.
Risks
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• No financial resources being made available• No agreement being reached in terms of a communications strategy• Loss of key personnel or competing strategic or operational priorities.
Recommendations
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Further guidance required from Steering Group in respect of an appropriate communications strategy and information sharing procedures.• Prepare guidance and good practice procedure notes in advance of the above. This will be a matter for the Council's Estates Service overseen by the Asset Management Board at this stage.• That the Board consider how best to approach the "perceptions" issue highlighted in the Conclusions Section above.

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Outcome 3 Report 10 12 08

Project Outcome
Procurement Policies of ABC and CPP Partners have a clear and strategic view of the Third Sector as a service deliverer.
Introduction
<p>The third sector makes a significant contribution to the delivery of Council services and yet often has no formal recognition within the Council's supply chain. Third sector organisations carry out substantial functions without any formal contracts. Not only are they operating without the legal protection that supply contracts would bring, both for the organisations cash flow over the period of a contract but also for their employees on termination, but also the value of the service they provide is not measured by the Council.</p> <p>The Demonstration Project provides an opportunity for the Council and suitable third sector organisations to develop contractual relationships that could not only give the sector equivalent status to private sector suppliers but indeed could lead the way in developing supply chain management across the Council operations.</p>
Background (rationale for the outcome)
<p>Third sector organisations provide services to the Council under a variety of contractual arrangements, ranging from formal supply contracts won through competitive tendering, to service level agreements negotiated on a single supplier basis, and to grant funding for informally agreed outputs.</p> <p>It is desirable for both supplier and client that a formal contract exists which represents an exchange of commitment and gives each body a measure of certainty in service delivery and payment.</p>
Research Undertaken
<p>The time constraints for the project have limited research to a desktop exercise, apart from very few meetings with third sector representatives and a single web based consultation</p>

which evoked a very limited response.

Discussions with the Scottish Procurement Directorate have revealed that they are in a similar position to the Council with regard to third sector organisations and are only now engaged in mapping the sector with results not expected for several months.

The main body of work carried out by the Scottish Government, which has relevance to this report is the Community Benefits in Public Procurement Report.

Barriers identified and how overcome and limitations

The main barrier is the diverse nature of the third sector. This diversity is also one of the strengths of the sector and providing a “one size fits all” solution would be to neglect this strength. The supply chain solution must have a place for all organisations who wish to participate. The main limitation of the conclusions at this stage is that they are based on largely academic research and require to be properly tested in the sector. The limited responses from the consultation do support the conclusions.

Findings and conclusions

1. There is a desire from larger, well organised third sector bodies to move to a contractual relationship with the Council.
2. Third sector organisations believe that they deliver a quality service and provide other enhancements to the community as a whole and wish those aspects to be reflected in any bidding process; they do not wish to compete solely on price.
3. While many third sector organisations are already capable of successfully bidding for contracts from the Council, there is also a need for specific training to be provided on the necessary bidding skills to allow the third sector to compete on a level playing field with commercial operations.
4. Not all, or even the majority of third sector organisations wish to follow the route of formal contracts and would prefer to remain in a grant aided or non financial relationship with the Council.
5. There is a desire from third sector organisations to be made aware of all Council contracting opportunities.
6. The Council’s growing capabilities in e-trading present an opportunity for third sector organisations who do not wish to invest their scarce resources in administration.
7. The Council should examine the use of including “community benefits” within the specification and evaluation criteria of tender documents.
8. Where appropriate the Council can specify supply chain requirements within tender documents and can also provide supply chain assistance specifically to third sector organisations through facilitating access to national public sector contracts.
9. There is both a training need and a resource implication for the Council in changing the nature of the relationship with third sector organisations.

Implications (policy/resources etc)
<p>There is much that is written in this report that already forms parts of general procurement policy or is covered by existing projects. The resources and policy implications therefore are less dramatic than might otherwise have been the case.</p> <p>There is a resource requirement in terms of staff time to engage more thoroughly with individual third sector organisations in the second phase of the Demonstration Project. This is necessary to provide proper validation for many of the conclusions above.</p>
Risks
<p>Achieving the objectives outlined above is essentially a change management exercise, both for the third sector organisations who wish to embrace the changes and for commissioning staff within the Council. The main risk here is that both sides of the equation do not move together; this will result in either the third sector organisations investing time, effort and commitment in something that the Council is unable to deliver, or alternatively the Council developing a bidding regime that the third sector is not ready to participate in.</p>
Recommendations
<p>That the findings and conclusions of the first stage of the Demonstration Project require to be developed, refined and validated. In particular it is necessary to examine more closely the opportunities to include “community benefits” within bidding criteria and to ensure that this is carried out to the full advantage of the residents of Argyll and Bute, but also in a manner that is legal and complies with the best practices of procurement and value for money.</p> <p>It is important now to engage fully with individual third sector organisations operating within Argyll and Bute, particularly those who have current significant financial relationships with the Council. Their aims, aspirations and capabilities in relation to the goals of this project must be explored and plans put in place to address any gaps.</p>

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Outcome 4 Report 10 12 08

Project Outcome

Social enterprises are able to access appropriate training and information to enable them to become sustainable in the long term.

Introduction

The purpose of this theme of the project is to identify the barriers that prevent social enterprises to become flourishing and sustainable organisations which are able to contribute to sustainable economic growth in Argyll and Bute.

Background (rationale for the outcome)

Sustainability is a fundamental issue for the 3rd sector across Scotland, not just in Argyll and Bute, although the challenges of remoteness, peripherality and insularity add an additional dimension of complexity. Economic sustainability is a product of both access to finance and organisational support in the development of appropriate skills. Core to this is the ability to access appropriate information and training from the relevant sources.

One of the basic needs of the 3rd sector is to be able to easily access the advice and support that it needs to develop and build capacity. The geography of Argyll and Bute alongside its complex structure of organisations, their different boundaries, remits and responsibilities makes communication and information sharing very difficult. This makes it even more of a priority to provide clearly available information to the sector and to develop very tight partnership working.

The Council is dependent on the 3rd sector to deliver a range of services from recycling waste to a range of care services, however the Council currently has no 'single door' point of entry for 3rd sector organisations. The range of Council services that interact with the 3rd sector is very broad in terms of its interaction and covers some specialised service areas including recycling and the care sector. The Council also offers support and advice in more general terms to organisations through the Community Learning and Regeneration Service and also funding through the LEADER programme. Communication between Council services about their relationship with the 3rd sector is not apparent and this can result in frustration within the sector, a missed opportunity to share good practice between Council

services and a continued lack of understanding by Council officers about the role that the 3rd sector can play in a partnership approach to service delivery.

Training is a major component of 3rd sector sustainability, from general issues relating to governance and fundraising, to specific service related training that requires specialist support. Again the provision of this type of support is challenging given the geography of the area, and the greater the coordination and partnership working between organisations, the more accessible this will become to the sector.

Research Undertaken

- Questionnaires were issued to voluntary sector organisations to canvas opinions on various aspects of the Council Support.
- A focus group was held with the Third Sector Steering Group currently in a dialogue with the Council over future developments.

Consultation

- Telephone discussions were undertaken with members of ABSEN, Here We Are and Mull and Iona Community Trust
- **Consultees**
Here We Are – Christina Noble
ABSEN – Mike Geraghty

Mull and Iona Community Trust – James Hilder

Alan Miller, Operational Services, ABC

Barriers identified and how overcome and limitations

1. Clear mapping of support available to the 3rd sector

3rd sector organisations are frustrated by the complex landscape of organisations offering advice, training and funding support to the sector. There is confusion over the role of public sector organisations and their responsibility towards the sector, but there is also a lack of clarity within the sector about the respective roles of the 3rd sector support organisations themselves.

This is an issue for all partners, but the Council has a specific role in clearly identifying the type of support and advice that it can offer, signposting which service fulfils which

role and improving its organisational approach to working in partnership with the 3rd sector.

2. Central access point of information for the 3rd sector

In support of point 1 above, there is a clear desire by the sector to see a central/single point to access information on support *from all sectors*. There is an expectation that the agencies offering support should clearly identify what they can provide and ensure that this is not duplicated. Within this context, the Council has a specific role in identifying a mechanism to create a single point of contact for 3rd sector organisations seeking support.

3. Single contact point within organisations/services for 3rd sector organisations

There is a strong desire by 3rd sector organisations to have a clearly identified contact person for the particular service. This is a cascade of point 2 above, where a well managed single entry point will hold excellent information on relevant contacts and will give good quality direction to an enquirer, putting them in touch with the correct person.

4. Training

Groups that responded to the project questionnaire were interested in accessing training and identified a range of sources and areas of desired activity. It was clear that those organisations that are delivering specific services rely on and benefit from nationally delivered courses. Those specifically referred to included the Council, the Volunteer centre, STRADA, Scottish Women's Aid. There were some references to the difficulties in financing travel. The Social Enterprise Academy offers training, often alongside the Council, and the Council could develop closer links to ensure a co-ordinated approach to training.

Findings and conclusions

9. There is an overall lack of coordination in the support available to the 3rd sector. A single map of this is required to identify areas of overlap and gaps.
10. There is a desire to see a single point of information which links to the mapping required above and provides comprehensive access to that information.
11. There is confusion amongst many 3rd sector organisations about who to contact for what information and support in organisations, agencies and Council services. This relates particularly to more general 3rd sector organisations where 'community development' and 'capacity building' are the organisational objectives, but also is an issue with more specific groups.
12. 3rd sector organisations that work with the Council on very specific areas of service provision have a more clearly identified route to a contact person. In this case, the

Council can provide clear information on the specific types of training or sources of training that are needed for this service delivery agreement or contact. The Council can also signpost wider networks (such as GRAB) which provide networking and support to 3rd sector organisations with shared specialisms.

13. There is a clear opportunity to exchange good practice within the Council in dealing with the 3rd sector where currently different Council services are developing alternative and individual approaches to dealing with the sector in isolation.
14. There are many issues facing the 3rd sector that are also experienced by the small business sector in Argyll and Bute. Where systems are in place for small business suppliers, the 3rd sector should be actively encouraged to participate, and given the tools to do so.
15. The Council has an action point to coordinate its own information in relation to the 3rd sector.
16. The development of Business Gateway should include support to the 3rd sector, identifying the entry level requirements and working in partnership through the development process to ensure that quality advice and signposting takes place for those aspirational organisations that need broader support, such as on governance issues, prior to starting up as a trading business.

Implications (policy/resources etc)

There is much that is written in this report that already forms parts of general procurement policy or is covered by existing projects. The resources and policy implications therefore are less dramatic than might otherwise have been the case.

There is a resource requirement in terms of staff time to engage more thoroughly with individual third sector organisations in the second phase of the Demonstration Project. This is necessary to provide proper validation for many of the conclusions above.

Risks

As part of the Council's commitment to continuous improvement and organisational development, as identified in the Corporate Plan, the review and improvement of the Council's relationship with the 3rd sector presents a challenging corporate project. Further work will be required to scope this and identify the resources needed to implement it.

If this is taken forward by officers, the resources identified will have to be programmed into service/work plans and resultant accommodation made with competing priorities.

Recommendations

- ~~6. There is a need for a project working group to be established to take forward organisational change on the provision of advice, support and signposting by the Council~~
7. Support should be given by the Council to the 3rd sector to assist them to undertake a similar exercise in coordination of advice and support, with the objective of providing a single access point for information and advice on all aspects of the 3rd sector.
8. Recommendations 1 and 2 must be developed within a tight partnership framework and excellent inter-project communication.
9. Business Gateway development should include a clear signposting mechanism and entry level requirements for 3rd sector organisations.