

Swindon Local Area Agreement STATEMENT OF INVOLVEMENT

- 3.1 We have been very clear from the outset that the voluntary and community sector (VCS), is an equal partner in the Local Area Agreement process; not just at delivery stage but also at development stage.
- 3.2 This statement details the work so far, the approach to involvement we have followed, the evidence of partnership working and concludes with a proposal to create a jointly funded Community Liaison Officer who will act as a link between VCS and Public Sector organisations.
- 3.3 To ensure as wide an audience is reached with draft proposals of Swindon's LAA, a website was launched and a fortnightly electronic newsletter published to engage all sections of the Swindon community. Over 450 subscribers receive this newsletter and Voluntary Action Swindon forwards it to over 350 members.
- 3.4 Swindon's VCS magazine Voluntary News has featured articles on the LAA. This monthly publication reaches an audience of 200 + groups with 17 copies supplied to branch Libraries within the Borough of Swindon, 23 copies to Social Services, 2 copies to Youth Services and 10 copies to the Council Members Room in the Civic Offices.
- 3.5 Work to date has focused on three key areas:
 1. Raising awareness of the LAA and its importance to the sector – presentations and information updates have been supplied to Swindon Strategic Partnership bi-monthly meetings in July, September, November of 2005 and January 2006.
 2. LAA Officers have placed the aspirations within the 19 outcomes before all five Equality Sector coalitions, Older People, Disabled People, Black and Ethnic Minority people. Women's Group and the Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual and Transgender coalitions. These umbrella forums are made up of individuals who represent dozens of smaller voluntary and community organisations throughout the Borough who would normally be amongst the hard to reach sectors of our community. Feedback has been positive with particular involvement demonstrated through the writing of an all-sector Equalities Statement which is explored in section 4.
 3. Numerous one-to-one sessions with members of the VCS were held during the scoping stage of the LAA in the late Summer and early Autumn to ensure their ambitions were included within outcomes and targets under the four LAA blocks. Examples of this include the Swindon Domestic Violence Forum, Swindon Racial Equality Council, Swindon Council Tenants Voice and Swindon Voluntary and Community Forum, Neighbourhood Renewal Task Group and the Wiltshire Renewable Energy Forum.
- 3.6 Although not naturally associated with the VCS, the Parish and Town Councils have been engaged in the LAA development stage and received presentations at both the Parish Clerks' Forum on the 7th December and the Borough/Parish Consultation Meeting on the 15th December. A criticism raised by our partners in Parished areas is that although the Borough of Swindon is 74% rural, the emphasis of the LAA outcomes are urban focused on the town of Swindon. Parish Councils have requested a seat around the table stating they do not believe the VCS

representatives speak for their organisations. One Parish Council proposes using community halls for IT training community shops and social enterprises. It is our intention that we will continue to strengthen partnership working in the months and years ahead and that leaders of the four blocks will be challenged to evidence rural engagement.

- 3.7 The Swindon Partnership Board has agreed that the current approach to actively encouraging VCS involvement is extended. Block leads have been consistently challenged about the involvement of this sector. Steps are being taken to identify suitable VCS representation where gaps have been identified on all the four LAA block partnerships.
- 3.8 A recommendation of the revised Swindon Strategic Partnership structure adopted in February 2006 accepted a representative of the VCS as a member of the Swindon Partnership Board.

Evidence of partnership working

3.9 **Safer & Stronger Block:**

"A partnership workshop took place on 18th January. This was the first stage in obtaining full buy in to the partnership teams from all partners. The Voluntary and Community sectors were well represented at this workshop through the Race Equality Council, Swindon Federation of Community Organisations and Voluntary Action Swindon as well as the Neighbourhood Renewal Board, Pinehurst Initiative Forum and Penhill Forum. The focus of the workshop will be on definition of the areas, the scope of the teams and moving the project forward through appropriate project management structures. Representatives from the voluntary sector and the community already serve on the Safer & Stronger Block, thus ensuring they have a key role to play in designing and delivering the project. The workshop will also give further consideration to how to set baselines by which the success of the teams can be measured - it would be inappropriate to specify how this will be achieved without involving partners in the discussion"

3.10 **Children & Young People Block:**

Trish O'Donnel of NSPCC and Johanna Bryant of STEPS 10-18 project have played an intrinsic part in developing the outcomes for this block as members on the C&YP Partnership Board. Within Outcome 9 we have a stretch target of 80% of looked after children achieving 5+ GCSE A – G grades by 2009. The voluntary sector agencies such as the Family Welfare Association, North Swindon Family Centre, Walcot and Welcome Family Centres contribute to the delivery of Outcome 8: We will increase the number of children who are safe... in undertaking common assessments and acting as lead professionals. STEP 10 – 18 Project is working closely with the Youth service in the delivery of Outcome 9: Increasing the number of young people in law abiding and positive behaviour by increasing participation and volunteering among young people. The 10 year child care strategy will focus its work in Neighbourhood Renewal Areas using Sure Start in association with VCS groups through a range of private and community and voluntary sector child care providers as a vehicle to deliver this. The not for profit organisation, Swindon Mediation Service, will be active partners in the delivery of many targets within this block.

- 3.11 Healthy Communities & Older People Block:
The Gay Men's Health Project is a member of the Swindon Sexual Health Strategy groups. Their work feeds into Outcome 15, indicator 3. Gary Jefferson (Previous Manager of the project) played an active part in the development of the strategy and the promotion of sexual health within the Gay community. The Gay Men's Health Project are also actively engaged in research to identify the needs of gay men which is incorporated into the planning process.
- 3.12 Economic Development & Enterprise Block:
Addressing inequalities within Swindon and creating opportunities for work and training has been a key driver of this block. This means VCS will play a key role in delivering on our important outcomes taken up through the Learning Curve voluntary sector training consortium. Jobcentre plus will increase their activity in Neighbourhood Renewal areas by developing employment opportunities at the Parks and Walcot Opportunity Shop. We have an intention to step up this work of Jobcentre Plus through identifying VCS organisations able to deliver positive employment and training opportunities.

Creating a Community Liaison Officer

- 3.13 How the public sector contributes to building the capacity of the VCS is one of the key themes of Swindon's Local Area Agreement. The sector needs support and capacity to enable it to engage with and inform more effectively with service delivery makers and decision making processes in the Borough.
- 3.14 The Public Sector always faces a challenge when it wants to consult and engage with the VCS. This is not surprising given the disparate nature of the VCS and the increasingly fast pace of change and decision making that the Public Sector is involved in which the VCS simply cannot keep up with.
- 3.15 To aid engagement and simplify the communication process we are proposing to create a new post, funded in partnership with all LAA agencies to act as a clear and identifiable point of contact for the VCS to feed into the partnership structure and decision making process while providing the public sector with a clear way of 'plugging in' to VCS activity.
- 3.16 The Partnership Board at its meeting on the 31st January 2006 signalled approval to scope the job remit. This may include areas such as:
- Mapping, developing and supporting voluntary & community sector networks and representative meetings in terms of their role in relating to and supporting the LAA and other matters.
 - Co-ordinating events, activities and meetings in order to lead a dialogue with groups and networks with a view to collecting views, opinions and feedback to the public sector via the four block of the LAA and the Partnership Board.
 - Advising and supporting designated bodies' staff and others from the statutory and business sectors on good practice on consultation and communication mechanism to reach out disadvantaged and hard to reach groups.
 - Produce regular reports to the Partnership Board including evaluations of progress towards LAA outcomes and other matters.
- 3.17 Full consultation will be held with our partners in the voluntary and community sector. We are exploring the opportunity of contracting the post to the VSC.

Subject to agreement and approval, we would aim to have this post filled no later than June 31st 2006.