



Belfast City Council

Report to: Development Committee

Subject: Consultation on DSD's Regional Infrastructure Programme review

Date: 15 September 2010

Reporting Officer: John McGrillen, Director of Development, ext 3470

Contact Officer: Cate Taggart, Community Development Manager, ext 3525

Relevant Background Information

We have been asked to respond to the Department for Social Development's Voluntary and Community Unit's (VCU) review of its Regional Infrastructure Programme for the Community and Voluntary sectors. The consultation runs from 5 July 2010 to 30 September 2010 with a new framework for the programme to be finalised in November 2010.

The aims of the review are:

- That the programme remains relevant to Government objectives and the needs of the Department;
- Priorities for support to the voluntary and community sector are clearly identified and prioritised;
- The criteria for the programme are clearly stated; and
- Regional support is geared to help the voluntary and community sector improve its relationship with public bodies and maximise its contribution to public life in Northern Ireland

The programme has been running for twenty years and the current recipients are:

- Advice NI
- Churches Community Work Alliance
- Citizen's Advice
- CO3 –Chief Officers Third Sector
- Community Change
- Community Evaluation NI
- Law Centre NI
- NI Council for Voluntary Action
- Volunteer Now
- Women's Centres Regional Partnership

A special briefing session on the consultation was held for Members on 31 August. The consultation document was also passed to departments across council (via the Policy Officer Group). In addition, Community Services held a workshop for staff.

The feedback from these consultation activities has been used to create the attached draft response.

Key Issues

The VCU review presents a series of suggestions and proposals. A draft council response to these is attached to this paper. In particular the consultation presents three discreet options for the future of the programme:

Option A. 'Renew and enhance' - Continue to fund existing organisations and require them to show how they can amplify their role to fill any gaps

Option B 'Renew and supplement' - Renew funding for all or most existing funded organisations and seek new bids from these and others to fill gaps

Option C 'Clean sheet and development period' -Create a comprehensive new structure and invite bids whether from existing

Part of the council's response to the consultation is a proposal for an alternative option. This would take the best aspects of option A and option C. In such an option, groups would continue to be funded under existing arrangements for a pre-defined period of time. During this period, a comprehensive review would take place and a new structure created.

Resource Implications

There are no resource costs associated with this consultation response.

Recommendations

The Committee is asked to :

- Approve the suggested response; or
- To suggest additional comments or changes that they feel need to be made.

Decision Tracking

Further to approval that the agreed response be communicated to DSD

Timeframe: October 2010

Reporting Officer: Cate Taggart

Documents Attached

Appendix 1: Draft consultation response and covering letter to the Voluntary and Community Unit, DSD.