

**A Voluntary and Community Sector Strategy  
for Welwyn Hatfield  
2010-13**

**Strategy Document**

## Contents

	Page
<b>Introduction</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>Background</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>Vision, Mission, Values and Objectives</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>Principles</b> .....	<b>6</b>
<b>Funding</b> .....	<b>7</b>
<b>Infrastructure</b> .....	<b>8</b>
<b>Engagement</b> .....	<b>9</b>
<b>Communications</b> .....	<b>10</b>
<b>Actions</b> .....	<b>11</b>

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## Appendices

	Page
<b>One</b>	
<b>Steering Group membership</b> .....	<b>12</b>
<b>Two</b>	
<b>Strategy Action Plan</b> .....	<b>13</b>

## 1. Introduction

Welwyn Hatfield has a strong third sector<sup>1</sup>. It is able to respond flexibly to rapidly changing local community needs, with the role of volunteers being critical in ensuring that our communities are resilient and self-sustaining.

Third sector activities support Welwyn Hatfield residents in many different ways. They are an essential part of the fabric of life in Welwyn Hatfield.

For its part, the third sector needs the support and understanding of the public and private sectors to help it thrive and carry out its essential role effectively and with creativity. A strong partnership between public, private and third sector organisations, based on mutual understanding and trust, is key to the well-being of Welwyn Hatfield.

This Strategy aims to help build and strengthen that partnership. It recognises existing good practice and is the product of consultation to identify key concerns and solutions. It sets out principles to guide future work and offers a three year horizon for developing a wider shared approach across the sectors, including the establishment of the Community Forum. At the end of this period the Forum will have established its own identity and developed a longer term strategy.

This Strategy seeks to:

- improve dialogue and engagement between and across the sectors;
- contribute to the rich mix of services and activities that the third sector carries out to help communities to be strong, safe, cohesive, connected and sustainable; and
- work in partnership to enable innovative and cost-effective delivery of services in line with the priorities of the borough's Sustainable Community Strategy.

The Strategy is for **all** of the third sector: for those who are in receipt of funding from public sector partners as well as for those many smaller organisations, social enterprises and community groups that are not. It looks for ways of supporting all of this vital work for the benefit of the people of Welwyn Hatfield.

This Strategy will evolve as understanding of the sector develops and skills at working in partnership matures. It seeks to respond to the key issues of funding, infrastructure, capacity-building, engagement and volunteering. It recognises that the dialogue needs to be extended to include a wider range of public and private sector partners and that, in order to turn dialogue into effective action, there should be a suitable forum that sits within the Welwyn Hatfield Alliance, the local strategic partnership.

The latter role will be fulfilled by the Welwyn Hatfield Community Network which needs to be resourced from within the borough's third sector. The Network will lead on and guide the implementation of the Strategy and Action Plan on behalf of the Alliance.

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<sup>1</sup> "Third Sector" is a government term and includes voluntary, community, faith based organisations as well as other not for profit organisations such as social enterprises. A full definition is available from [http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/third\\_sector/about\\_us.aspx](http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/third_sector/about_us.aspx)

## 2. Background

Government guidance suggests that all local authorities have a Voluntary and Community Sector Strategy. The Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) lays out clear guidelines as to what is needed. In essence, there is a power to improve the social, economic and environmental well-being of an area involving the third sector in the process.

In 2007, the Welwyn Hatfield Alliance recognised the need to develop a Strategy for its work with the third sector. This was to enable local voluntary and community sector organisations to play a full part in achieving the area's vision as set out in the Sustainable Community Strategy. It was recognised that the Strategy should take account of national and local priorities whilst seeking to build capacity in the third sector. This enables third sector organisations to be effective in meeting the needs of their members, beneficiaries and the wider community (including but not limited to those organisations involved in service delivery).

A consortium of local voluntary and community sector organisations, led by Welwyn Hatfield Community and Voluntary Service, was commissioned to prepare the Strategy. A Steering Group was brought together resulting in this final Strategy. An Action Plan has been formulated to show how the Strategy will be implemented, with clearly defined Vision, Mission, Values and Objectives.

The Strategy and Action Plan represents a journey which should be reviewed annually to ensure continuous progress. It complements the Welwyn Hatfield and Hertfordshire Sustainable Communities Strategies.

## 3. Vision, Mission, Values and Objectives

### 3.1 Vision

To promote a Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) that is fully empowered and plays an effective role in the diverse life of the Welwyn Hatfield area.

### 3.2 Mission

To represent, champion and enhance Welwyn Hatfield's diverse communities through:

- developing and promoting VCS-led solutions to meet Welwyn Hatfield's diverse needs and aspirations;
- providing a range of accessible high-quality information services, support, learning and advice; and
- bringing VCS groups together to co-ordinate community activity and opinion and to share knowledge.

### 3.3 Values

The VCS is an essential part of a sustainable local community. It is an invaluable part of the provision of effective services, particularly to Welwyn Hatfield's most vulnerable and excluded communities.

The VCS must maintain its independence in order to protect and respond to the needs of its beneficiaries, members and clients. It has a critical role to play in improving quality of life for all in Welwyn Hatfield by influencing positive change, improving community and social cohesion within the area. Collaborative working and networking is an effective way of maximising limited resources and achieving a stronger collective voice.

The VCS has a key part to play in promoting equality, celebrating the diversity of Welwyn Hatfield and contributing towards a safer, stronger, sustainable community. It provides highly skilled, effective and specialist services across the area. The breadth of work, wealth of knowledge and depth of experience contained within the VCS in Welwyn Hatfield is an invaluable resource and adds value.

### 3.4 Objectives

The Welwyn Hatfield VCS Strategy seeks to:

- raise awareness of and within the VCS;
- improve sector representation in appropriate bodies within Welwyn Hatfield;
- increase the influence of the sector in the borough;
- facilitate access to finance by signposting to the generation of diverse funding streams;
- enable and support a viable, appropriate VCS infrastructure; and
- enhance the sustainability of strong community life in Welwyn Hatfield.

This Strategy seeks to build seven primary activities in Welwyn Hatfield:

- develop and enhance cross-sector networks central to Welwyn Hatfield and the VCS;
- signpost and commission information and research appropriate to the needs of the VCS;
- provide forums for discussion and engagement;
- enhance public / private sector support for the VCS;
- increase the knowledge and skill base of staff and volunteers;
- facilitate sound financial management; and
- encourage appropriate fundraising.

To do this the VCS will seek to:

- research ways of enhancing specialist support services in the borough;
- engage with the Hertfordshire Training and Development Consortium, the Hertfordshire Funding Advice Network and the Small Groups Development Network;
- achieve better representation of the VCS within Welwyn Hatfield and implement representative mechanisms;
- advocate VCS infrastructure development through the Hertfordshire Assembly, which is the new representative body for the third sector in the county;
- improve outreach to specific thematic and/or geographically focused groups;
- review and enhance links to existing community networks;
- develop and implement appropriate marketing initiatives for the sector;
- review and refresh the website;
- develop appropriate communications' processes to improve internal and external communications;
- increase income generation and improve internal financial controls; and
- research options for a dedicated resource centre.

## 4. Principles

The guiding principle of the VCS Strategy is National Indicator 7, which seeks to “create an environment for a thriving third sector”. This measures the contribution that local government and its partners make to the environment in which independent third sector organisations can operate successfully. It is further informed by other National Indicators from the Safer and Stronger Communities’ section of the National Indicator Set<sup>2</sup>.

This Strategy embodies the following principles. It:

1. is developed in partnership between Welwyn Hatfield alliance, the third sector and other key partners such as the private, health and education sectors
2. supports local capacity building and third sector infrastructure needs as well as service delivery needs, working with the whole sector and not just the organisations that the public sector funds
3. is consistent with the themes in the Welwyn Hatfield sustainable community strategy by building a trusting relationship and recognising the value that the third sector brings to Welwyn Hatfield
4. aligns with similar initiatives including Hertfordshire volunteering and community cohesion strategies and the local area agreement
5. reflects central government guidance on how public authorities engage their third sector in service design and planning, delivery and evaluation
6. recognises and adopts the principles set out in the compact and its codes of good practice
7. reflects government guidance on how to work effectively with third sector organisations
8. recognises that small community groups and specialist voluntary sector organisations have a crucial role and should be nurtured
9. recognises that local volunteering should be encouraged and supported
10. demonstrates value for money to taxpayers and others by encouraging efficiency and collaboration between organisations
11. promotes the sharing of knowledge and learning between organisations and across sectors
12. builds on existing good practice and arrangements already in place in Welwyn Hatfield
13. promotes innovation to better meet community needs
14. respects the third sector’s independence and
15. recognises that, by acting together purposefully, more can be achieved for our communities.

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.communities.gov.uk/localgovernment/performanceframeworkpartnerships/nationalindicators/>

## 5. Funding

1. Funding for the third sector in Welwyn Hatfield should be structured to comply with best practice guidance. Members of the Welwyn Hatfield Alliance, particularly public sector agencies, should also have due regard in how they fund local voluntary and community sector organisations. This will help to maximise benefits to the local community while also meeting any legal or regulatory framework. Funding arrangements should distinguish between grants, infrastructure and service contracts as follows:
  - a) Grants – specific grants of varying value to support organisations to deliver Welwyn Hatfield Sustainable Community Strategy priorities that are neither b) or c) below;
  - b) Contracts – funding to provide clearly defined services with agreed outputs and outcomes; and
  - c) Infrastructure – core funding to second-tier organisations to ensure they have the capacity and ability to support local front line voluntary and community sector organisations.
2. To avoid duplication and confusion in the third sector, Welwyn Hatfield Alliance partners may also wish to consider developing joint funding and commissioning with a clear link to strategic priorities and outcomes.
3. Where appropriate, Welwyn Hatfield Alliance partners should seek to engage with the third sector in the commissioning and specification of service needs.
4. Standard and simple guidelines and templates should be developed and tailored to the needs of the service/tender/grant programme to be delivered. These should be made available via Alliance partners websites.
5. The process by which organisations apply for funding should be clearer including the use of websites and existing third sector networks.
6. A more transparent approach must be applied to third sector funding decisions. To this end, any funding / tender review panels should be as fully representative as can be achieved.
7. Service contracts should be subject to competition where appropriate. The reasons why competition is appropriate must be transparent. The introduction of such contracts needs to be phased (i.e. in a rolling programme) and in accordance with COMPACT principles. Information about which areas are subject to competition must be made available and guidance provided as part of the tender process in advance of any proposed changes
8. It is recognised that the third sector will need to strengthen its skills and capacity in order to respond to a more contractual environment, given the demand that public sector partners must demonstrate value for money to taxpayers. However, “value for money” must not solely concentrate on financial cost, but also on wider benefits. Tools such as the Social Return on Investment should be considered <sup>3</sup>. Welwyn Hatfield Alliance partners should seek to work in partnership with the third sector to develop a programme of support for organisations that will go through a tender process, in order to build an understanding and capacity within the sector. This needs to include an appropriate programme of training and / or workshops.
9. Welwyn Hatfield Alliance partners need to recognise the potential impact of tendering on small organisations, and that more work will need to be done to address this issue.
10. The third sector should be encouraged to develop its own long-term funding stability through exploring a range of funding options, including Social Enterprise and endowment building.

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<sup>3</sup> please see <http://sroi.london.edu/> and other SROI links

11. Funding changes must be advised at the earliest possible opportunities. Changes in budgets need to be discussed with the funded partners and the wider third sector, through the Welwyn Hatfield Community Network. Guidance in the COMPACT's Code of Good Practice on funding should always be observed, with any deviation only in exceptional and unavoidable circumstances.

## 6. Infrastructure

The Strategy should be consistent with the definition of infrastructure from within the DCLG guidance:

*"Infrastructure is the physical facilities, structures, systems, relationships, people, knowledge and skills that exist to support and develop, co-ordinate, represent and promote front line organisations thus enabling them to deliver their missions more effectively"*

*"Infrastructure organisations, often called 'second tier', intermediary or umbrella organisations, provide support to frontline organisations. They are usually generic (support all frontline organisations within a particular geographical area) or specialist (supporting a particular sub-sector of the VCS or offer a particular area of expertise)"*

The Strategy is also consistent with the conclusions of the 2002 Treasury Review into the role of the VCS in Service Delivery:

*"Capacity Building is about ensuring that Third Sector has the skills, knowledge, structures and resources to realise their full potential. It is a second tier activity that supports front line first tier activity and typically involves removing barriers to involvement and investing to maximise the contributions that Third Sector can make. It is as much about releasing capacity as about new capacity"*

In any attempt to build a working partnership there can at times be misunderstanding and confusion. In developing this Strategy, the VCS for Welwyn Hatfield recognises much good work has been done in this area, but recognises that progress has still to be made in others. This Strategy seeks to look ahead to the future so that by working with and supporting third sector infrastructure within Welwyn Hatfield, everyone benefits and a better quality of life can be achieved.

The key criterion is resourcing: while much of this Strategy can be effected by a re-aligning of existing activity, there is part of it that needs resources to be allocated. One outcome is a strong recommendation that all Alliance partners consider closely how the proposed Strategy can be supported financially.

The Welwyn Hatfield Alliance recognises the vital roles of the local CVS and other specialist infrastructure organisations, including those with a county-wide remit such as the Community Development Agency for Hertfordshire (CDA for Herts). It is important that this recognition continues in implementing best practice in terms of engagement, transparency, relationships and partnerships. One such area is in the membership and representation across the Alliance's structure. Membership and roles will need defining, in partnership with the third sector, taking due cognisance of this Strategy.

The Alliance also needs to work with local infrastructure organisations (generic as well as specialist) to undertake a capacity health-check to enable a clearer picture to be created of Welwyn Hatfield's third sector needs and their ability to satisfy them. This work will inform the future Strategy and funding decisions. The Strategy will take account of work already undertaken in the area (such as *The Hidden Need*<sup>4</sup>) as well as work planned for the future.

<sup>4</sup> please see [http://www.eastspace.net/hertscf/documents/Final\\_The\\_Hidden\\_Need.pdf](http://www.eastspace.net/hertscf/documents/Final_The_Hidden_Need.pdf)

A key area for the Strategy is to develop the financial sustainability of local infrastructure organisations. This is recognised as being difficult at the best of times, let alone in a recession, but the added value – the social return on investment – of the third sector means that, investing appropriately in good, fit for purpose infrastructure pays huge dividends.

As part of its approach to infrastructure, and in partnership with public sector organisations and Volunteer Centres, the Strategy will seek to promote and develop further volunteering in Welwyn Hatfield.

Funding advice is a core activity of all infrastructure organisations. A network of officers representing these organisations, for information sharing and reviewing levels of advice, would be beneficial. It is recognised that the countywide funding advice network (FAN) is a key element of local advice. The Small Groups Development Network (a county wide, Big Lottery Fund BASIS2 funded project, lead by Hertfordshire Community Foundation and, in Welwyn Hatfield terms, based in the CVS) came on stream in September 2009. This will have a major input into advice and guidance for small groups. This area of work must be kept under review, to avoid duplication and ensure best value.

## 7. Engagement

Engagement is vital to any third sector Strategy. This Strategy will be guided by the work of the East of England's Regional Empowerment Partnership<sup>5</sup>. Consultation responses in developing this Strategy identified a need for a more coherent engagement policy, which addresses how to engage with the whole third sector in Welwyn Hatfield, not just the large organisations or those funded by the public sector. The Strategy will seek to create and improve techniques, processes and procedures for better engagement with the whole third sector, in order to better to understand community needs.

There are a number of existing engagement activities including consultations, representations, communications, collaborations and partnerships. These activities need to be sustained but with better targeting and coordinating. A fear was voiced that small community groups can get "over consultation fever" and no longer contribute, especially if previous consultations showed no evidence that those consulted were listened to. To ease this, an agreed definition, and model, of engagement must be developed in partnership with the third sector as part of the Strategy. This should take account of definitions in the public sector and voluntary sector national guidance on best practice, including the relevant COMPACT code of good practice.

In undertaking engagement partners will recognise the DCLG lessons of effective engagement<sup>6</sup> and seek to apply these in all consultation exercises. This Strategy will form part of the Alliance's integrated Communication Strategy hence ensuring that the Alliance has ongoing effective methods for engaging with the third sector as partners in meeting the needs and aspirations of the people of Welwyn Hatfield.

There is need for an engagement approach and structure that is supported by all key partners and makes the links between the third sector, local, regional and national priorities. A consultative partnership must therefore be created as part of the structure of the revisited Community Network. The composition of the group, and its terms of reference will need to be developed in collaboration with the Welwyn Hatfield voluntary and community sector, working closely with and within the Alliance.

The development of LINKs (Local Involvement Networks) and other similar networks should help to better engage the Health & Social Care third sector groups in both the commissioning and monitoring of services in the future. This is recognised as vital, but as "work in progress".

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<sup>5</sup> please refer to <http://www.inspire-east.org.uk/communityempowerment.aspx>

<sup>6</sup> please see <http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/communities/ndccommunityengagement>

## **8. Communications**

Clearly, no Strategy can be effective if no one knows about it, or if people and organisations do not feel engaged with it. It is the intention of the Strategy to improve communications between and within all sectors.

As part of the foundation for this ongoing work, [www.welhat-vcs.net](http://www.welhat-vcs.net) and [www.welhat-vcs.org](http://www.welhat-vcs.org) have been registered to form part of the ongoing development of a working Strategy.

This has, despite much effort, achieved mixed success with lessons to be learnt across all the sectors. A key part of the recommendations is that a working group be set up, within the Alliance, to consider how best to get across all the various messages and ensure that not just this Strategy, but all the various aspects of the work of the Alliance and its partners, is both understood and accessible to the widest audience.

## 9. Actions

The development of this Strategy has proved worthwhile by showing publicly the commitment of Welwyn Hatfield Alliance to commit to meaningful engagement with the third sector in Welwyn Hatfield. The test will be in its implementation and resourcing but progress has been made in completing the Strategy.

This Strategy sets out, within its Action Plan, those activities which need to be done by whom and by when. This is important in terms of moving the Strategy from being good to becoming meaningful. These are:

- The Strategy to be reviewed and updated annually by the Alliance;
- Undertake a “health check” of need and deprivation in Welwyn Hatfield and formulate actions to contribute towards addressing that need and deprivation;
- A local impact assessment to be explored to include the use of Social Return on Investment;
- Review and enhance third sector involvement in the Welwyn Hatfield Alliance, such that a VCS Forum is created to sit within the Alliance;
- Refresh and review the Welwyn Hatfield Community Network so that it is able to lead on the implementation and development of this Strategy;
- Welwyn Hatfield Alliance to explore setting up and implementing the Compact;
- All Alliance partners, including the third sector, to implement DCLG guidelines on engagement with the third sector;
- Third sector, via the VCS Forum, to be part of ALL decision making and, in particular, the commissioning and tendering development process;
- The VCS Forum to explore longer term financial stability for the sector, including improved social enterprise development, and the use of endowment funding;
- Third sector funding to be reviewed and simplified, aiming to ensure there is core funding support with clear distinctions between grant, contract and other funding;
- Alliance partners to consider a joint funding and commissioning framework, including the use of common templates, to ease duplicated effort and enable better access to funding;
- Capacity enhanced so that more third sector organisations, especially smaller ones, can compete for tenders and similar programmes;
- Infrastructure organisations to be supported to ensure that service delivery can be maintained and enhanced, with the imaginative use of performance reward grant and other funding streams to be considered in this context;
- Develop and enhance volunteering opportunities in Welwyn Hatfield; and
- Set up a working group to ensure better and more effective communication with and within the local third sector.

## 10. Appendices

### Appendix One - Steering Group membership

#### Core Group

Carmen Dillon	Director	Welwyn Hatfield CVS
Eliud Matindi	Development Officer	Welwyn Hatfield Ethnic Minority Group
Kate Belinis	Chief Executive	CDA for Herts
David Fitzpatrick	Chief Executive	Hertfordshire Community Foundation

#### Consultative Group

Andrew Anastasia	Chief Executive	Child UK
Jan Asztemborski	Agency Manager	Anchor "Staying Put" project
Jaki Augustus	Service Manager	Woodhall Community Centre
Tony Bailey	Chair	Hert Savers Credit Union
David Bartlett	Chairman	WH Sport and Physical Activity Alliance
Peter Christmas	Project & Quality Manager	Groundwork Hackney
Jan Gough	Director of Operations	Age Concern/Help the Aged, Hertfordshire
Sandra Miller	Area Manager	Parentline Plus
Christine Novelli	Chair	Welwyn Hatfield Inter Faith Group
Debbie Rixon	Bureau Manager	Welwyn Hatfield Citizens Advice Bureau
Peter Simmons	Development Officer	Welwyn Hatfield Sports Partnership
Annabelle Waterfield	Chief Executive	Hertfordshire Action on Disability