

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

Executive Summary

1. Vision, Mission, Values and Objectives

1.1 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.

1.2 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

1.3 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.

1.4 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.
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2. 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 Set¹.

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.

¹ <http://www.communities.gov.uk/localgovernment/performanceframeworkpartnerships/nationalindicators/>

3. 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.