

Voluntary, Community and Faith Sector

Market Engagement Feedback

Cheshire East Council recognises the valuable work that is undertaken across the Borough by a range of voluntary, community and faith sector (VCFS) organisations.

It was really important that organisations from the sector were given an opportunity to attend one of the two market engagement events which took place on 24th and 26th September at Crewe and Macclesfield. In total 61 people attended the events representing organisations from across the sector. Note: due to the popularity of the events, organisations were asked if one representative could attend the event in Crewe.

The aim of the events was to gain the views and experiences from across the sector, to enhance and inform the future service delivery model for the voluntary, community and faith sector infrastructure service.

Key aspects of the service will include building strong relationships, encouraging and supporting volunteering, working with organisations to set up and develop, and ensure organisations and the community are able to express their voice. There was a richness of discussion, networking and sharing of views and experiences which will inform the future development of the specification for this service.

The format for each for each of the events was a presentation on three topic areas social action partner infrastructure contract, social action charter and commissioning following which roundtable conversations took place. A summary of questions posed is detailed below:

Question 1: What do you consider most vital to achieving social action in Cheshire East?

- Listening and engaging with the sector, grass roots, larger organisations and faith sector
- Informal and formal networking, relationship building, listening, encouraging and creating an atmosphere and approach that fosters partnership working, improved communication
- Give organisations the opportunity to embrace innovation, e.g. local authority should be open to new ways of working “ideas” as the local authority can be too prescriptive with approach / share ideas
- Utilising existing / past skill sets
- Sharing a common purpose, aim, and legitimate vision, broader transparency,
- Sharing knowledge, best practice, localised ideas
- Mapping of service delivery across the sector, including resources, opportunity for collaborative resourcing

- Consistency, bringing people together on a regular basis through a number of opportunities, e.g. breakfast meetings, informal networking events, open forums, chief officer network, creating opportunities for cross networking and sharing for improve
- Funding challenges, access to grants, funding,
- Showcasing, visibility to show what the sector is doing/achieving, business engagement how to improved corporate responsibility and tap into opportunities

Question 2: What are the most important factors to maximising the impact of this work?

- Contractual, referrals from local authority, clear key performance indicators, and clear set of needs and priorities
- Flexibility, innovation
- Open new doors and starting conversations
- Measurement of impact, co-production, impact tool for the sector to be developed
- Public sector responsibility must be based on evidence, with accountability / impact of decisions made across the wider sector
- Linking with industry – particularly when the sector can be seen as an ‘expert’ and how the sector can help business and industry
- Engagement of ‘lesser heard voice’ / people accessing services ensuring reach to people across the sector
- Interaction and sourcing to be more collaborative, cross organisational training
- Honesty and transparency in administration of funding
- Open forums could be introduced, in public place, connecting the community that is flexible

Question 3: What would you like to see in the social action charter?

- Stronger relationships, shared understanding, skill share
- Sign up from health
- Right language, best practice and modelling
- Commitment, responsiveness, responsibility, transparency, accountability, clearly defined goals, standards need to be consistent
- Evidence of partnership working – project/funding/consultation/minutes of meetings
- Ensuring knowledge and communication across the sector
- Outcomes and needs – connection with community
- Volunteering opportunities and effective communication across the sector
- Impact and evaluation, measuring the impact
- An event to show outcomes,
- Development of a tool to assess strengths and weaknesses to build upon
- Commitment, behaviours, professionalism
- Need to be clear language, communication is key, consistency

Question 4: what is the best way to work together to develop this?

- Business informal meetings, open VCFS forum, user friendly catalogue of organisations
- Digital offer – online, forums, database, newsletter
- Need to listen to those who don't shout the loudest, social action partnership map and actively seek out organisations/networks this would be a constant requirement and ensure reach is extended
- Key themes for co-production
- Strategic priorities
- Knowing who is who, and what they do / perception and raising the profile of organisations
- Flexible, adaptable, willingness to change and share
- Understanding of local need
- Awards
- Educating businesses about how they can contribute

Question 5: How do you want to connect to other VCFS organisations around social action?

- Community events / meet the funder
- Understand how each other works / common purpose / open communication between all parties
- Volunteer opportunities / volunteer meetings
- Equal representation from partners
- Creating a mechanism of training – sharing these opportunities and intelligence
- Eliminate issue of dependence on public purse for funding → empower (not signpost) VCF sector to find money to sustain their service
- Shared information ↔ Shared vision / shared purpose / avoid duplication
- Data collection need to evolve and share
- Coordination of partnerships / groups
- Match individuals/organisations with shared aims and values
- Networking, relationships, building and facilitating consortiums
- Lord Lieutenant will connect organisations if there is a common shared purpose
- Mapping exercise of the sector
- Locality approach – identify local issues – getting the 'right people, business and industry',

Question 6: How do you want to connect to the Private Sector around social action?

- Community events and opportunities for interaction
- 'what is in it for me' as a business need to have clear expectations / benefit are two way – time and resource, added benefits/value
- Recognition and showcasing the sector
- Local intelligence, supporting local need
- Kite mark / recognition

- Interaction and sourcing to be more collaborative
- Meeting – range of opportunities
- Mutually beneficial funding – corporate social responsibility
- Fundraising for smaller charities rather than annually to support 1 larger charity

Question 7: what is most important to ensuring that your organisation is able to deliver social impact?

- Volunteer recruitment and retention
- Understanding needs of the residents
- Engagement, consultation, sharing skills and expertise
- 'joining the dots' between private, public and the sector
- Training and funding opportunities
- Sharing / learning / facilitating conversations

The event feedback will help to inform the development of the service specification for this service. In addition to the events, there have been opportunities for further gathering the views and experiences of the sector by way of a survey which will also help to inform the approach.

Cheshire East Council would like to pass on their thanks to everyone who has participated in the events and to those who have completed the survey.