

## VOLUNTARY & COMMUNITY SECTOR STRATEGY

The Island Strategic Partnership recognises the unique contribution the voluntary and community sector can play in achieving the social, economic, environmental and cultural goals of the Eco Island Sustainable Community Strategy.

The Isle of Wight Council, the Isle of Wight NHS and the Isle of Wight Rural Community Council asked local voluntary and community organisations and Island residents how organisations can work together to create a thriving Third Sector on the Isle of Wight to help ensure these goals are achieved. This information has informed the development of the new Voluntary Sector Strategy that was adopted by the IW Council in April 2009.

The Voluntary Sector Strategy sets out a framework to guide a new style of working relationships between the Third Sector and public services at a time of some major national policy programmes that will affect the way all sectors work together. It also recognises that the commissioning of public services and investment in communities will increasingly give those communities a voice about what services are needed and how they should be delivered.

The Strategy aims to ensure partners treat each other with trust, respect and a mutual understanding of priorities and needs on a day to day basis and that public service commissioning and infrastructure investment make the best of the benefits and creativity of VCOs for Island communities.

The strategy identifies four areas where partners will put effort into developing stronger working relationships. These are:

**Engagement:** The Strategy sets out ways in which transparency, mutual understanding and stronger working relationships can be developed, both through representation of the Sector on key bodies and in day to day work. The Voluntary Sector Cabinet will continue to develop the role of Networks, that will ensure VCO involvement in commissioning and act as channels for representing the views and experiences of the diverse communities of the Island. These changes will be supported by an updated Compact which will set up partnership, governance, consultation and mediation arrangements.

**Funding and procurement –** The strategy acknowledges that the Third Sector generates significant resources through bids for grant funding, fundraising, legacies and donations and direct sales. The strategy includes a commitment from the IW Council to develop an outcomes focused “commissioning prospectus” approach to commissioning services wherever possible. This will replace the current mixed arrangements for funding between the IW Council and VCOs and will provide a transparent and competitive process that will also provide opportunities for VCOs of all sizes to make creative and enterprising proposals as appropriate. The strategy makes a commitment to giving VCOs a minimum of 12 weeks to apply for commissioning opportunities, payment to VCOs in advance of expenditure in most cases and an acknowledgement of the need for all reasonable organisational costs to be funded.

**Volunteering –** Volunteering is the bedrock of the VCO sector, and its importance in building strong and vibrant communities is recognised. The Strategy identifies the need to pay volunteers reasonable expenses for attendance at relevant partnership meetings. It makes a commitment to continuing to fund the IWRCC’s Volunteer Centre service in recognition of its role in supporting best practice in the recruitment and management of volunteers. Partners will also work together to address

workforce development in the sector and to encourage public and private organisations to develop local Employers Supported Volunteering Schemes.

Infrastructure – Whilst the needs of voluntary and community groups vary, all need some or all of a building, equipment, staff and volunteer skills, in order to thrive. The IWRCC provides support on funding, governance, charity law and many other organisational issues but there is scope for increasing collaboration of infrastructure resources, such as buildings, “back office” functions, technical and specialist support and workforce development, across and between VCOs on the Isle of Wight. The Strategy commits to supporting opportunities for collaboration to build and maximise VCO capacity and resources locally. Public sector partners will investigate how future management of their property portfolio can support the work of VCOs, including through the IW Council’s Community Asset Transfer Strategy and subsidised training places and skills transfer programmes developed.