

SHAPING A STRONGER SWINDON 2008-2011
A THIRD SECTOR DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

Consultation Draft
May – September 2008



1. Vision

Swindon is a place where a vibrant and sustainable third sectorⁱ makes an essential contribution to communities and to Swindon as a whole; where the sector thrives as a partner alongside the public and private sectors and where it has a strong voice and the capacity to play its role.

2. Scope & Purpose

This strategy has been produced by the Local Area Agreement Partnership (“the Partnership”). This document is aimed at all statutory, private and third sector organisations operating within the Local Area Agreement (LAA) partnership in Swindon.

The strategy highlights and capitalises on the special contribution that the third sector can make to achieving Swindon’s objectives and priorities. It emphasises the vital role the third sector has to play in:

- place-shapingⁱⁱ,
- building social capitalⁱⁱⁱ within communities,
- connecting people^{iv} to shape their communities, and
- the reform of public services^v.

This Strategy recognises that, alongside the above, the aim is to achieve a cohesive and integrated Swindon community. However, community cohesion is a vast issue and has more implications than can be addressed by this Strategy.

A thriving, healthy and diverse third sector is the heart of a successful modern democracy. This strategy lays out a vision of the third sector, private, public and statutory organisations working together at all levels and as equal partners to bring about real change for the people of Swindon.

This strategy recognises there is no one-size-fits-all for the third sector as the organisations and groups that make it up are so varied. For the purposes of this strategy the sector is considered as being made of up of three distinct elements. However even with this distinction, the boundaries between the elements can be hard to define and this is a challenge we face.

- Voluntary^{vi} – non-profit often employing paid workers;
- Community^{vii} – active on a local or community level, representing people on a neighbourhood or communities of interest basis;
- Social enterprise – generates income to further its social or environmental goals.

HM Treasury’s cross-cutting review of the role of the voluntary and community sector in 2002 highlighted the sector’s diversity and how this allows it to offer many skills and expertise as summarised here:

- it has independence from institutional pressures allowing for freedom and flexibility to try new things;
- it has specialist knowledge and skills through direct experience from user perspective;
- it acts as a voice for marginalised and vulnerable groups;
- it brings added value, offering additional benefits from the use of volunteers, and offering choice to service users.

3. Swindon's Approach

This strategy sets out a clear strategic direction of how the Partnership wants to develop the capability and support the activities of the third sector in Swindon. It is built around five main themes, identified at two cross-sector workshops held in the Borough in 2007:

- Recognising difference
- Financial stability and independence
- Organisational development
- Governance
- Relationships

These areas are recognised to be crucial to the development of a thriving third sector in Swindon. This Strategy will enable Local Area Agreement partners to develop more specific activity based on their particular work with the third sector e.g. whether the involvement is with the designing or delivery of services, as an advisor on user related issues, or as a campaigner or 'critical friend'. For this strategy to be effective all parties will need to:

- work together wherever possible to ensure consistency and efficiency,
- consistently monitor activity towards achieving the objectives,
- plan and manage work across their organisations to assist in the building of social capital, the delivery of high quality value for money public services and involvement in policy development.

This strategy contains an Action/Delivery Plan that identifies appropriate partners who will take responsibility for specific activity focused around the five themes within set timescales.

4. NATIONAL CONTEXT

Over the last 10 years there has been a drive towards creating a framework for working in partnership in which the third sector can contribute and flourish, be strong and independent. To strengthen partnership working between the statutory and third sectors, Compact was launched at a national level in 1998, and local authorities have since been encouraged to develop Compacts at a local level.

Following national research, various policies and programmes, such as Futurebuilders and Capacitybuilders (Change Up), have been introduced as a driving force in developing the capacity of the sector and have helped develop the infrastructure support the third sector require to help them deliver better services.

The drive to open up procurement processes to the third sector was initiated in 2004 by guidance “Think smart...think voluntary sector!” It outlines a national commitment to extending the role of the sector in the delivery of public service contracts, building effective relationships and removing some of the barriers the third sector faces in successful delivery, and encourages local government to develop procurement strategies that are fair, proportionate, cost effective and result in mutually beneficial contracts and partnerships.

The recently published White Paper ‘Strong and Prosperous Communities’ suggests that the expertise of the third sector should be harnessed and developed to enable local partnerships to fulfil their place-shaping role. This will be achieved by recognising the diversity of the sector, by empowering and building capacity and by listening to local representative organisations, service users and community groups to identify priorities and meet needs.

5. LOCAL PROGRESS

Swindon has for 40 years been one of the fastest growing towns in the country and this growth brings both opportunities and challenges. There is great opportunity for the third sector to further develop partnership working with the public sector through various Borough-wide strategies that aim to tackle these challenges.

a. Compact

The Compact is the agreement between the public and voluntary and community sectors to improve their relationship for mutual advantage and community gain. Organisations enter into the Compact voluntarily, it is not legally binding, and by doing so agree to work by the key principles and undertakings set out in the Compact and the 5 Codes of Practice; Black & Minority Ethnic, Community Groups, Consultation, Funding, and Volunteering.

At a local level, the Swindon Compact has been in place since 2006 and provides a framework for partnership working. 56 statutory and third sector organisations are currently signed up to the Compact, indicating their agreement to embed the Compact principles and five codes of practice into their organisation’s working practice. A Compact Implementation Group has been established to coordinate activity concerning the implementation of Compact within both sectors and also to improve partnership working and the development of services between sectors.

b. Sustainable Community Strategy

At the end of 2006, Swindon Strategic Partnership announced it would be refreshing the Community Strategy, which was set to run until 2010. It then began its consultation on the development of a new Sustainable Community Strategy. With 100 partners from all three sectors, "A Shared Vision for Swindon 2008-2030" has been created as a blueprint to shape future plans for organisations from the public, voluntary and business sectors within Swindon.

c. Local Area Agreement

Swindon's Local Area Agreement has been in place since 2006 operating under four blocks:

- Economic Development & Enterprise
- Children & Young People
- Healthy Communities & Older People
- Safer & Stronger Communities

To aid engagement and simplify the communication process between sectors, the LAA Partnership Board created a new post of Community Empowerment Manager to act as a clear and identifiable point of contact for the third sector to feed into the partnership structure and decision making process while providing the public sector with a clear way of 'plugging in' to third sector activity. This post acts as a liaison between Partnership Board members and third sector organisations and is jointly managed by Voluntary Action Swindon and Swindon Borough Council.

As part of the Safer & Stronger Communities Block, the Stronger Communities Forum has been set up as an opportunity for everyone working to improve quality of life and address inequalities to come together. Not only does the Forum enable attendees to network, and share ideas and information, it also enables coordination of activity that contributes to the LAA targets and to provide a reporting mechanism to the Partnership Board.

Swindon is starting its new LAA in June 2008. A Swindon Story, based on evidence collected during an extensive consultation prior to the compilation of the Sustainable Community Strategy and further discussions with all sector partners and the community, will highlight Swindon's priorities to 2011. Under the existing four blocks, the third sector has already played a significant role and will continue to actively contribute to achieving targets, improving outcomes for local people.

d. Commissioning

In recognition of the increasingly business-like nature of the relationship between the public sector, particularly in services relating to health, and the third sector, considerable emphasis is being placed on improving services through a commissioning process. Both Swindon Borough Council and Swindon Primary Care Trust are developing processes to move more towards commissioning services than providing grants.

In August 2006 Swindon Borough Council Cabinet took the decision to change the majority of its Community Grants budget to commissioned services in specified

sectors. A consultation with the third sector in Swindon has already begun and, by 2009, advice, infrastructure, domestic violence and refugee & asylum seeker services will be commissioned.

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6. STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

Activity around the following strategic priorities has been divided into Actions and Aspirations. For the purposes of this Strategy, Actions are those activities which will be reflected in the Action Plan and will therefore translate into work in the near future. Aspirations, however, are those activities the Partnership would like to pursue in an ideal world if the resources and sufficient funds were available to enable them to be fulfilled.

a. Recognising Difference

ai. Objective:

Empower and guide the third sector to participate in and contribute to shaping services - this will create an environment where all voices are heard at all levels.

Providing a means for individuals and communities to make their voices heard, and helping those voices to campaign for change is critical for achieving excellent public services, strong and cohesive communities and a thriving democracy. This role is particularly important in respect of groups that are marginalised in decision making, due to disadvantage or discrimination. There are organisations, communities and individuals who do not feel their voices are heard adequately, and there are those who feel overwhelmed by the volume of communication and consultations they are asked to be involved in. Activity should focus on balancing these differences, and reaching and understanding the multiplicity and diversity of voices within the third sector.

aii. Actions

1. Implement the existing election process to achieve third sector representation on bodies, e.g. executive groups and boards, that manage delivery of services using Stronger Communities Forum members as electoral pool.
2. Identify ways to ensure third sector representatives feed back information from service delivery bodies to third sector organisations, and feed up any issues raised by the third sector to service delivery bodies.
3. Find ways to effectively communicate in the best way to the relevant third sector organisations and individuals using a variety of methods including new technology and more traditional methods.
4. Fund research into existence of small local groups and develop new and existing networks to allow them to engage more fully.

aiii. Aspirations

1. Develop a fully staffed community empowerment network, based on successful models from existing government-funded projects.
2. Work with partners to develop a network of 'wiki sites', each based on a particular geographic or issue-based area of interest.
3. Identify innovative, wider reaching and fully accessible approaches to consultation and engagement through research and work with a full range of third sector organisations.

4. Develop residents' fora and ways to enable the fora to communicate with each other and with statutory sector.

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b. Financial Stability & Independence

bi. Objective:

Encourage innovative and proactive attitudes to financial management - this will lead to a third sector that is self-reliant and independent.

To respond to financial challenges organisations must be strategic, entrepreneurial and flexible. Above all they must have in place transparent and robust accounting systems and be able to act in a way that meets the needs of the communities they serve, as well as partnership priorities. Short-term funding arrangements can create a climate of uncertainty and administrative processes and arrangements relating to financial management are often complex so third sector organisations must be prepared to tackle these challenges.

bii. Actions

1. Identify the most effective systems of financial management for third sector organisations that are robust and fit-for-purpose.
2. Find ways to enable the third sector to be competitive and successful when taking part in the commissioning process, making strong pitches and writing robust funding applications.
3. Identify the best ways of developing third sector understanding of, and access to, commissioning processes.
4. Work with LAA Partnership Board to find a workable solution for all sectors around the use of full cost recovery.
5. Find ways of communicating good practice examples to demonstrate the value to the third sector of income diversification.

biii. Aspirations

1. Develop a "Swindon Money" or Local Exchange Trading Systems (LETS) scheme to allow the free exchange of goods and services between sectors and organisations.
2. Work with partners and Business Link to identify activity to encourage the development of social enterprise and set up a support network.

c. Organisational Development

ci. Objective:

To build a strong and sustainable third sector in Swindon through a programme of developmental initiatives - this will enable the sector to play its part in the Swindon's growth and development.

The third sector has a unique role in designing and delivering services as well as in bringing people together, creating strong and cohesive communities. As a partner in innovation, the sector has independence from institutional pressures allowing for freedom and flexibility in developing projects. When delivering services it can bring added value. When designing those services it brings specialist knowledge and skills through direct experience from the user's perspective. As an advocate, the sector provides a voice for marginalised and vulnerable groups. The third sector operates in an increasingly complex environment with the ever increasing demand for volunteers, rise in commissioning, and delivery of services covered by new regulatory frameworks. Organisations must, therefore, be supported to develop in a way that enables them to thrive despite the challenges.

cii. Actions

1. Work with LAA Partnership Board to identify and raise the profile of outcome based performance management.
2. Find new ways of bringing smaller community groups into existing networks.
3. Identify peer-learning opportunities around performance improvement.
4. Work with LAA Partnership Board to find ways of building capacity around recruiting and retaining volunteers within both statutory and third sector organisations.
5. Work with the third sector to find ways of developing organisations' strategic capability.
6. Raise the profile and importance of the use and management of appropriate quality assurance systems.
7. Find ways of promoting volunteering more widely and effectively and encourage and promote good practice in volunteering.
8. Negotiate a local agreement with partners to deliver formal and informal learning and management development for third sector organisations.

ciii. Aspirations

1. Work with Swindon Employees in the Community Network (SEitCN) to extend their reach and membership, and develop their services further to fit the needs of the third sector.
2. Encourage organisations from all sectors that involve volunteers to work towards the Investing in Volunteers Standard and identify funding to enable them to do so.
3. Work with partners to develop a Swindon third sector leadership academy to provide accredited training to the third sector.
4. Carry out research into the scale and scope of the need for volunteers.

d. Governance

di. Objective:

Develop a strong and well-governed third sector with legitimate, accountable and transparent frameworks of business - this will enable the sector to be sustainable and viable over the long term.

Good governance is central to the health and success of an organisation and therefore should be high on the agenda. Third sector organisations working for public benefit are increasingly held accountable for their outcomes and expected to demonstrate how well they are governed and that they are able to effectively manage contracts. Governance goes beyond compliance with the law and includes strategic development and leadership. Strict governance arrangements mainly apply to larger organisations and those employing staff. However even small community based groups need to have a formal structure, particularly if they are handling even small amounts of money.

dii. Actions

1. Work with LAA Partnership Board and SEitCN to further develop a project around sharing private sector expertise with the third sector management.
2. Find ways to better communicate existing resources relating to guidance and advice for management committees.
3. Ensure compliance with **VISIBLE^{viii}** standards by third sector organisations managing buildings.
4. Set up a management board mentoring programme for trustees.
5. Work with third sector organisations to establish a trustee board appraisal programme against key performance indicators.

diii. Aspirations

1. Carry out needs analysis for trustee development for groups of different sizes.
2. Work with third sector organisations of relevant size to ensure all management committees are working to National Occupational Standards for Trustees and Management Committee Members.
3. Carry out full management board training needs analysis annually and develop programme of skills development with organisations of relevant size.

e. Relationships

ei. Objective:

Develop meaningful and productive partnerships and strengthen effective working and communication – this will enable the sector to contribute its resources towards common goals of the LAA.

Genuine partnership working has the benefit of maximising the opportunities for both sectors to work together to develop and implement public policy that is sensitive to the needs of communities. The Swindon Compact expresses the commitment of both the statutory and third sectors to work in partnership to support the development of healthy and vibrant communities in Swindon. It is a tool for problem solving, and creating new ways of working, and challenging personal behaviour and organisational conduct. It sets a backdrop for partnership working which is essential for delivering the Vision for Swindon and also the Local Area Agreement.

eii. Actions

1. Work with Compact Implementation Group to raise the profile of the Swindon Compact and its five Codes of Practice – Funding, Consultation, Volunteering, Black & Minority Ethnic Groups and Community Groups.
2. Work with public and third sector partners to develop a work-shadowing scheme to achieve an understanding of each sector's needs, aims, objectives and constraints.
3. Work with the LAA Partnership Board to develop a cross sector partnership improvement plan, based on that incorporated in I&DeA Partnership Improvement Programme (Appendix). This programme involves working with a mix of groups from the public and third sector work together to build their capacity to work more effectively in partnership, and to model a new way of developing sustainable cross-sector relationships. By using a flexible and adaptable approach local solutions can be identified and developed to improve *local* partnership working.

eiii. Aspirations

1. Conduct full audit of third sector in Swindon, including assessment of financial savings created by third sector service provision and by involvement of volunteers.
2. Achieve full Compact sign-up and compliance by third sector organisations.
3. Mainstream the operation of Swindon Compact and its Codes into all areas of public sector activity.
4. Work with partners to develop Compact Plus for Swindon.

7. IMPLEMENTATION

The Stronger Communities Executive Group will have responsibility for taking forward and monitoring compliance with this strategy across partner organisations and will provide regular reports to the LAA Partnership Board.

Background Documents

A Shared Vision for Swindon 2008-2030

Cumbria County Council – Third Sector Strategy 2007-2010

Darlington Borough Council – A Voluntary and Community Sector (Third Sector) Strategy

DCLG – Principles of representation: A framework for effective third sector participation in Local Strategic Partnerships

DCLG – Third Sector Strategy for Communities and Local Government

I&DeA - Partnership Improvement Programme

Local Government White Paper – Stronger and Prosperous Communities

Ministry of Justice – Third Sector Strategy: Improving policies and security better public services through effective partnerships

Swindon's Compact and Five Codes of Practice

Swindon's Local Area Agreement

The Role of the Voluntary and Community Sector in Service Delivery – A Cross Cutting Review - HM Treasury

8. APPENDIX

Improvement & Development Agency (I&DeA) - Partnership Improvement Programme (PIP)

Programme objectives

The 2006–2009 Programme has four principal objectives:

- build trust and mutual understanding across sectoral divides;
- enable senior staff in local government and the VCS to take the lead in responding to the challenges of working across VCS/local authority boundaries and in VCS/ local authority partnerships;
- develop and implement local improvement plans for more effective engagement and partnership working across sectoral divides;
- share models of effective cross-sector partnership working and areas of best practice.

Programme outcomes

By the end of the programme it is expected that participants will:

- understand the policy context and organisational pressures for VCS/local authority partnership working;
- know about the distinctive organisational features and challenges of voluntary and community organisations (VCOs) and local authorities;
- understand the organisation, management and accountability challenges of VCS/local authority partnership working;
- understand the pre-conditions for effective cross-sector partnership working;
- apply this knowledge and understanding to achieving improvements in cross-sector partnership working.

For more information on the Partnership Improvement Programme, please visit www.idea.gov.uk.

ⁱ Third Sector

The third sector incorporates a huge diversity of non-governmental organisations. They are value driven and principally re-invest surpluses or raise funds to further social, environmental or cultural objectives. The sector includes community groups, voluntary organisations, faith and equalities groups, charities, social enterprises, cooperatives, mutuals and housing associations.

ⁱⁱ Place-shaping

Place-shaping is the responsibility of local government and all the local partners in the public, voluntary and business sectors. It is about creating attractive, prosperous, vibrant, safe and strong communities where people want to live, work and do business. The emerging agenda around 'place-shaping' describes how partners can work with residents to develop and deliver high-quality public services that meet the needs and preferences of local people.

ⁱⁱⁱ Social capital

Social capital consists of the networks, norms, relationships, values and informal sanctions that shape the quantity and cooperative quality of a society's social interactions. Social capital can be measured using a range of indicators but the most commonly used measure is trust in other people. Where social capital is high, individuals and their communities tend to be healthier, happier and more productive.

^{iv} Connecting people

The third sector is at the heart of work to build strong, active and connected communities. All communities can thrive, with the capacity to bring people together to deal with common concerns and achieve change. This is increasingly important as Swindon faces economic and demographic change, particularly relating to migration and increased ethnic diversity.

^v Reform of public services

Public service reform is at the heart of the political agenda – to create services that are framed around national minimum standards; that are accountable; that wherever possible are devolved to the front line, allowing for local creativity and reflecting local needs; and which respect and meet the needs of diverse communities. Third sector organisations already play an important role in public service delivery, and there is scope for them to take on an even greater role in the future.

^{vi} Voluntary Organisations

Voluntary organisations are usually formally constituted and may not be rooted in any particular neighbourhood. An organisation is voluntary when the legal responsibility for the organisation rests with a group of people who are not paid and who choose to be involved. Voluntary organisations are structured, non-profit, non-statutory and autonomous.

^{vii} Community Groups

The members of community groups are mostly people from a specific neighbourhood, or community based on ethnicity or culture. The group is often informal, has no paid workers and is largely dependent on voluntary effort.

viii **VISIBLE Standards**

Operating standards for community centres and multi-purpose community organisations that are:

- Mission and performance focused
- Endorsed by the National and Local Government
- Endorsed by the Charity Commission

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