

Voluntary and Community Action South Bedfordshire

Action for Growth

Strategic Plan 2006—2009



Across South Bedfordshire there are hundreds of voluntary organisations and community groups, large and small, working selflessly to improve lives in their own communities and beyond.

Many of these organisations and groups would benefit from extra help and support to enable them to fulfil their potential and offer even more to the people they serve. Voluntary and Community Action exists to give them this kind of help and support.

INTRODUCTION

Voluntary and Community Action South Bedfordshire promotes local voluntary and community action (including volunteering) as a powerful force for change, both for those involved and for the wider community. The voluntary and community sector in South Bedfordshire has an estimated 25,000 people working as staff, volunteers, trustees or management committee members within 1,500 voluntary organisations or community groups providing services to some 170,000 clients.

Voluntary and Community Action places the needs of its members, voluntary organisations, community groups and volunteers at the heart of its activities and provides a range of services that seek to increase the quality, quantity, contribution and accessibility of voluntary and community action throughout South Bedfordshire. We recognise the value this brings to society, the diversity of local communities and the important contribution the voluntary and community sector can make to the quality of life of those who live, work and pursue leisure activities within South Bedfordshire.

This Strategic Plan builds on previous successes and lessons learned, and covers the work of Voluntary and Community Action from April 2006 to March 2009.



WHO WE ARE

Voluntary and Community Action is a local infrastructure organisation working within the voluntary and community sector to increase the quality, quantity, contribution and accessibility of local voluntary and community action throughout South Bedfordshire.

What do we mean by infrastructure?

Infrastructure is the physical facilities, structure, systems, relationships, people, knowledge and skills that help front-line organisations to achieve their aims.

OUR VALUES

Our values determine what we do and the way we do it. In summary, Voluntary and Community Action:

- believes that voluntary and community action is fundamental to the development of a democratic and socially inclusive society
- values diversity and is committed to equality of opportunity
- values the work of volunteers and is committed to volunteering
- is committed to sustainable development
- values its independence and is committed to working in partnership with others
- values the relationship between trustees, staff and volunteers
- is committed to the achievement of quality standards and services.

Our Values Statement and Equal Opportunities and Diversity Policy expand upon these values further.

OUR VISION

South Bedfordshire will be a place where a vibrant, effective and sustainable voluntary and community sector plays a full part in contributing to the quality of life of all who live, work and spend their free time here.

OUR PURPOSE

To develop, enable, promote and support local voluntary and community action throughout South Bedfordshire.

OUR MISSION

To empower local voluntary organisations and community groups to:

- identify and make planned responses to community needs through effective voluntary and community action
- have the skills, knowledge, structures and resources to fulfil their potential
- develop and implement good practice in governance, service delivery, volunteering and as an employer
- be committed to performance improvement
- recognise diversity, provide equality of opportunity and enable participation from all sections of the community
- respect and value volunteers for who they are and what they contribute
- have a high profile within local communities and with local opinion formers
- have a positive impact upon the lives of those with whom they work.

This mission will not be achieved in one or two years. It will require a determined effort over many years on the part of Voluntary and Community Action South Bedfordshire, the local voluntary and community sector, funders and others. This Strategic Plan sets out the next steps towards achieving our mission.



OUR STRATEGIC OUTCOMES

1. Voluntary organisations and community groups have the skills, knowledge, structures and resources to fulfil their potential for responding to the needs of, and providing services to, their communities.
2. More people are able to access a diverse range of volunteering opportunities that meet both the needs of volunteers and local volunteer-involving organisations.
3. Voluntary organisations and community groups have a strong voice and an active involvement in influencing the decisions that shape the community in which they operate.
4. The voluntary and community sector takes a leading role in enabling people to create, run and sustain the voluntary and community groups, volunteering opportunities and social networks required for new and growing communities.
5. Voluntary and Community Action South Bedfordshire is a model of good governance, is fit for purpose and has sufficient resources to fulfil its purpose and better achieve its mission.

HOW WE WILL WORK

Working in partnership with others we will

- continue to find out what the current and future needs of the voluntary and community sector in South Bedfordshire are
- engage better with socially excluded and other hard to reach groups, including those in rural areas
- take time to build and nurture effective and inclusive local networks, build relationships and get people involved
- increase the numbers of local people coming forward to volunteer and find ways of attracting new trustees and management committee members
- use its expertise to support the development of good practice within voluntary organisations, community groups and other volunteer-involving organisations
- enable the voluntary and community sector to have an effective voice in local partnerships and when working with other agencies
- obtain the resources it needs to perform its role effectively and meet increased demand for services.

OUR ROLE AND FUNCTION

Voluntary and Community Action South Bedfordshire is committed to strengthening the effectiveness of the voluntary and community sector in South Bedfordshire by developing, enabling, promoting and supporting local voluntary and community action. It seeks to achieve this through advocacy; capacity building activities; enhancing the provision of volunteering opportunities; the exchange of information; the provision of training, advice and consultancy; and by working in partnership with others.

Voluntary and Community Action works with local voluntary organisations, community groups and other volunteer-involving organisations by:

Volunteering

- promoting volunteering and local volunteering opportunities
- developing and brokering volunteering opportunities
- providing advice and guidance for people seeking volunteering opportunities
- building the capacity of volunteer-involving organisations to recruit, manage and retain volunteers

Development

- providing advice and guidance on a range of organisational, management and development issues
- promoting and developing good practice within voluntary and community action
- providing health checks for voluntary organisations and community groups
- providing outreach support to small community groups, marginalized communities and neighbourhood renewal areas
- identifying and addressing unmet needs and supporting the development of new groups

Training

- providing informal learning and accredited training
- organising training and skills development workshops
- developing bespoke training for local voluntary organisations and community groups
- organising briefing, networking and consultation events

Funding Advice and Resources

- providing information on funding sources, including grant directories and databases
- assisting with the completion of grant application forms
- advising on fundraising events and strategies
- providing access to small grants through local grant schemes
- providing access to meeting rooms, equipment, ICT and photocopying services

Information

- providing a library of books, pamphlets and multi-media resources on issues of interest to the sector
- providing promotional leaflets, information and resource sheets
- distributing a regular newsletter or mailing to voluntary organisations and community groups
- providing a database of local voluntary organisations and community groups

Partnerships

- providing co-ordination, liaison and networking within the voluntary and community sector and with other sectors
- advocacy, representation and providing a voice for, and on behalf of, the voluntary and community sector
- promoting and participating in partnership, collaborative and cross-sectoral working
- contributing and responding to public policy debates and other issues affecting the voluntary and community sector.



OUR PROGRAMME OF ACTION

We have developed a clear programme of action to achieve our strategic outcomes over the next three years. We will ...

1. Partnerships and Public Policy

- 1.1 Monitor and respond to public policy developments and other issues affecting the voluntary and community sector, locally, regionally and nationally.
- 1.2 Enable the voluntary and community sector to contribute to, influence and benefit from opportunities for greater partnership, collaborative and cross-sectoral working.
- 1.3 Develop and facilitate effective community involvement and consultative mechanism(s) with statutory agencies and within the voluntary and community sector.

2. Information Services

- 2.1 Raise awareness and understanding of the role and activities of Voluntary and Community Action South Bedfordshire.
- 2.2 Use the organisation's information management systems to maintain information on the services and needs of, and our relationships with, voluntary organisations, community groups and public sector agencies working in South Bedfordshire.
- 2.3 Collate and make available information of interest to the voluntary and community sector, local opinion formers and other stakeholders.
- 2.4 Develop and publish information, advice and guidance on a range of organisational, management and development issues affecting the sector.



3. Volunteering

- 3.1 Increase the number, range and quality of local volunteering opportunities within South Bedfordshire.
- 3.2 Market and raise awareness of the range and diversity of local volunteering opportunities and the benefits to be gained through volunteering.
- 3.3 Support local volunteer-involving organisations in their recruitment and retention of volunteers and in their development of good practice.
- 3.4 Develop and increase access to volunteering:
 - in rural, new and growing communities
 - for those at risk of social exclusion and/or who have extra support needs
 - within sports clubs and organisations.
- 3.5 Develop ways of attracting more volunteers to act as trustees and management committee members.

4. Training and Development

- 4.1 Plan, organise and deliver programmes of training workshops and courses designed to meet the learning and skills development needs of employees, volunteers and trustees within local voluntary organisations and community groups.
- 4.2 Capacity build, through consultancy and outreach work, local voluntary organisations and community groups so that they are better able to fulfil their potential.
- 4.3 Facilitate networking opportunities that enable the voluntary and community sector workforce to identify needs, share experience and learn from others.
- 4.4 Increase voluntary organisations' and community groups' understanding of, and ability to:
 - implement effective governance arrangements
 - address workforce development issues
 - use performance improvement approaches.

5. Funding Advice

- 5.1 Provide accessible information on a wide range of funding sources.
- 5.2 Build the skills capacity of local voluntary organisations and community groups to identify, apply for and manage funding for their activities and services.
- 5.3 Increase organisations' understanding of, and ability to implement, diverse funding streams.
- 5.4 Build relationships with local funders and facilitate the provision of funding for voluntary organisations and community groups.

6. Management Services

- 6.1 Improve current facilities and develop new premises for the delivery of services within the voluntary and community sector for South Bedfordshire.
- 6.2 Review, develop and implement all appropriate organisational and employment policies.
- 6.3 Increase the capacity, skills and knowledge of staff, trustees and volunteers.
- 6.4 Increase the organisation's financial resources and develop its financial, human resource and facilities management systems.
- 6.5 Develop and manage the activities of the organisation in accordance with the quality standards set down by relevant agencies.

MEASURING OUR SUCCESS

We appreciate that it is often hard to define or measure improvements in many areas of our work. Nevertheless, we will seek to measure our success by:

- providing quality services to more voluntary organisations and community groups – measured by user feedback
- publishing information, advice and guidance on a range of organisational, management and development issues affecting the sector – measured by the number and range of material published and the level of requests for the material
- providing a diverse range of volunteering opportunities – measured by the increase in the number and range of opportunities registered
- increasing the number of volunteers across Bedfordshire by 6½ % – measured by a public opinion survey
- successful delivery of our training and development programme leading to demonstrable changes in the way organisations work – measured by user feedback, case studies, course attendance and qualifications gained
- increasing organisations' ability to identify, apply for and manage funding for their activities and services – measured by user feedback
- developing and managing our activities in accordance with the quality standards set down by relevant agencies – measured by our progress in meeting quality standards.



OUR OPERATING CONTEXT

Key issues that are likely to have a major impact on our activities and services include:

- Government frameworks for community capacity building and the delivery of voluntary and community sector infrastructure services
- working with community groups and residents in deprived urban communities to bring about neighbourhood renewal
- working with rural communities and residents to tackle rural renewal
- support for the voluntary and community sector in rural areas
- the work of local strategic partnerships and the increased emphasis on partnership working within public services, the economic community and with the voluntary and community sector
- the modernisation of public services, especially local government and the NHS, and the refocusing of the relationship between the public, private and voluntary sectors
- the increasing emphasis on public (and patient) involvement in the design, delivery and evaluation of public services
- substantial house building and the development of new communities in South Bedfordshire
- the promotion of active citizenship and social cohesion, including the need to ensure that Black and Minority Ethnic groups, and those at risk of social exclusion, can access our services
- the promotion of social enterprises and the need to find more sustainable funding
- the development and implementation of the Bedfordshire and Luton Compact
- charity regulation and reporting, the need to demonstrate quality and to model good practice.

Research undertaken by the Active Communities Directorate (part of the Home Office) shows:

- a lack of resources, short term funding and poor investment of voluntary and community sector provision
- ineffective approaches to workforce development; the recruitment, management and retention of volunteers and in accessing funding

- patchy capacity within the public and private sectors in dealing with the voluntary and community sector
- little use of tools and techniques for improving performance and developing good practice
- low use of ICT, with a lack of awareness, training, equipment and on-going technical support
- main barriers to volunteering are lack of time, work and family commitments.

Research, increased demand and feedback from members/clients has shown a need for:

- delivery of training in organisational development and management skills
- support with the recruitment and training of volunteers
- help with funding advice and the completion of grant applications
- support with the marketing and promotion of their activities and opportunities to engage with the public, users, funders, public sector agencies and other stakeholders.



OUR UNIQUE POSITION

Voluntary and Community Action is in the unique position of being able to provide:

- staff with the necessary knowledge, understanding and skills to provide support that is tailored to the needs of local voluntary organisations and community groups
- an understanding of local communities and a knowledge of the local environment and the voluntary and community sector in South Bedfordshire
- independent and confidential advice and guidance.

Most community activity takes place within a neighbourhood, parish, locality or within a community of interest spread over a wider area. Appropriate and accessible support needs to be provided to individuals and community groups as and when they need it. While this support can come from a range of different bodies; operating locally, regionally and nationally; including specialist umbrella bodies, local authorities, regional agencies and other local development agencies, we believe Voluntary and Community Action is also an organisation that is:

- voluntary and community sector owned and led

- open, accessible, participative and consultative
- empowering, facilitative and collaborative
- representative and accountable
- committed to continuous improvement, needs led and outcome focused
- pro-active and flexible to respond to new needs and opportunities.

OUR FUNDING

Our expected budget for each of the next three years is £400,000 pa. We need to secure this on an ongoing basis through funding applications to public sector agencies, trusts and other funders of voluntary and community sector.

- 16% of our income is secured from local authorities
- 46% is from other public sector funding
- 31% is from applications to trusts and funders of voluntary and community sector
- 7% is generated through fees and service charges.

INVESTING IN VOLUNTARY AND COMMUNITY ACTION

There are now opportunities for organisations, charitable trusts, local or public authorities, and businesses to invest in an effective voluntary and community sector in South Bedfordshire. The major benefits of investing in Voluntary and Community Action South Bedfordshire are:

- a healthy, vibrant and independent voluntary and community sector enriches the life of all communities and adds value to what the public and private sectors can achieve
- more effective, inclusive, well informed and diverse public services, community strategies and partnerships
- more prevention of social, economic and environmental problems including crime, homelessness, drug abuse, unemployment and anti-social behaviour
- more effective, inclusive, well informed and diverse neighbourhood renewal, rural development and regeneration
- more participative, inclusive and cohesive civil society, for example through increased community involvement, volunteering, neighbourliness, arts, sport, advice and the sector's representation role

- an opportunity to work in partnership in a way that enables your organisation to achieve its corporate and community involvement objectives.

If your organisation, charitable trust, local or public authority, or business would like to invest in an effective voluntary and community sector in South Bedfordshire or discuss any aspect of this Strategic Plan please contact our Director John Gelder by email: john@action-southbeds.org.uk or by telephone: 01525 850559.





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