

## VCS input to Budget Scrutiny v2

To: BCC Budget Scrutiny Task and Finish Group

From: Diane Rutter, Head of Voluntary Sector Support

Date: 6<sup>th</sup> January 2012



### Who we are and the basis on which these comments are made

Community Impact Bucks is the accredited Council for Voluntary Services, Volunteer Centre and Rural Community Council, for Buckinghamshire (and rural Milton Keynes). We deliver comprehensive support and a strategic voice for the voluntary and community sector and rural communities across Buckinghamshire to ensure they are regarded as equal partners in the delivery of diverse services, responsive to the needs of communities and contributing to their success and well-being.

We promoted the BCC Budget Consultation to over 2,000 recipients of our e-bulletin who cover a wide spectrum of voluntary sector activities and interests across Buckinghamshire, and also via our website and blog. We encouraged individuals to respond to BCC directly. So this paper is based upon our own analysis of the budget consultation and does not incorporate views expressed by others.

### Appreciation of the commitment to VCS funding

As representatives of the VCS we greatly appreciate the commitment made in paragraph 15 of the Report to the Cabinet:

***Recognizing the valuable work carried out by the voluntary and community sector these budget proposals protect the current level of overall funding to the sector.***

*Draft Revenue and Capital Budgets for 2012/13 and 2014/15, paragraph 15*

We welcome this written commitment and have had verbal conversations with councilors during December in which this was affirmed to us.

### Seeking clarification on how the commitment is being upheld

What we do not understand and where we would like to seek clarification is how the above commitment is being upheld in the light of some of the figures given in appendices 1, 2 and 3 of the same report.

Appendix 2 lists service reductions for the year 2012-13. For example:

- Health and wellbeing reduction of £497k
- Children's services reduction of £682k
- Community engagement reduction of £363k

All of these are areas in which the voluntary sector plays a significant part in service delivery. We are concerned as to how the voluntary sector funding is being protected within these cuts.

Appendix 3 gives a more detailed breakdown of each of these budget lines, but it is still not always clear where the current service delivery is by voluntary groups and how that funding will be protected to ensure there is no overall reduction.

### **Stated reductions that we wish to query**

We would like to highlight and question the following reductions over 3 years shown in appendix 3 which would seem to have the effect of reducing funding to the sector:

Under children's services:

- community based open access youth provision across the county by £420k
- commissioned spend on positive activities for young people (presumably this was commissioned from the voluntary sector?) by £31k

Under education and skills

- Support of Governor responsibilities (school governors are volunteers) by £8k

Under community engagement

- Reductions in activities with the Voluntary and Community Sector by £144k (we have since been told by officers at BCC that this is an error and should be zero, but would like to have that confirmed).
- Reduction of service in line with grant reduction by £217k
- Activities within community cohesion and equalities services by £15k

### **New costs that we wish to clarify**

Additional community based services - In appendix 3 under community engagement there is a new cost of £250k in 2012-13 for "additional community based services". We would like to clarify whether these will be commissioned from the voluntary and community sector. How will this funding be accessed by the sector, and what will be the criteria for allocating this funding?

## Other specific questions

Transfer of responsibility - As another observation, in seeking to facilitate the growth of the Big Society in Bucks, whilst we understand that there is a need to pass responsibility back to residents, we are concerned that there is insufficient emphasis on how vulnerable groups are supported in taking back such responsibility. We would ask how the budget includes arrangements for appropriate personal and community support to manage the transition the county is seeking to make?

Rights of Way - In appendix 3 under planning and environment, there are 2 lines relating to expenditure on Rights of Way maintenance. It seems as if rights of way maintenance is going to be transferred to partners including Parish Council and there is an investment starting in 2012-13 to develop this partnership working. However the reduction in expenditure on Rights of way maintenance starts immediately with £47k reduction in 2012-13. So what will be the impact on the parish councils and communities in the first year when there is a shortfall but before the partnership approach is developed?

Community Transport - The Department of Transport has allocated an additional sum to the County next year for Community Transport. Whilst this is not technically ringfenced there is a strong expectation that it will be used to support community transport development in the county. We are concerned that with budget constraints there may be pressure to simply absorb the additional grant and not use it specifically on community transport.

Extract from press release:

*8th December 2011, Transport Minister, Norman Baker MP, announced additional financial support for the establishment and development of Community Transport, the Government is making available a further £10-million to be distributed to 76 local authorities in England, outside London, .... A letter to local authorities and updated guidance will follow in the New Year. .... the funding will be issued before the end of March 2012 for spending as the local authority wishes in 2012/3, and beyond. It will not be ring-fenced. A list of the 76 local authorities and the amounts they will receive will be uploaded onto the Community Transport Association's website. [www.ctauk.org](http://www.ctauk.org) ..... Given the current economic climate this is a real boost for community transport providing the Government's investment reaches the communities and community transport organisations for which it is intended.*

We would like to ask what BCC plan to do with this money?

## Conclusion

Whilst welcoming the commitment to protect the current level of overall funding to the voluntary and community sector, we are unable to see from the budget consultation how that protection is being applied, or to verify it.