

**THE VOLUNTARY SECTOR
(Report by the Head of Democratic and Central Services)**

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 This item on the Panel's Agenda provides Members with an opportunity to consider how they will take forward their investigations into the voluntary sector in Huntingdonshire.

2. HUNTINGDONSHIRE COMMUNITY SAFETY PARTNERSHIP COMMENTS

2.1 At the last meeting, the Panel received a presentation by Julie Farrow, the Chief Executive of Hunts Forum of Voluntary Organisations on the Forum's work with the voluntary sector. She drew attention to the impact on third sector organisations of the Council's future financial plan.

2.2 The Panel has acknowledged the extent of the work undertaken by volunteers and its value to local communities and, as a result, has decided to investigate the likely impact of the Council's financial plans and alternative ways of supporting the voluntary sector. The latter will include, but not be limited to, looking at the concepts of Localism and the Big Society. The Commissioning Agreement between the Council and Hunts Forum of Voluntary Organisations is attached at Appendix A. It indicates the scope of the work the Forum undertakes on behalf of the Council.

2.3 To assist with this work, in accordance with the Council's standard scrutiny study methodology, a limited search has been carried out of available material on this subject. Greg Clark MP, the Minister for Decentralisation in the Government Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG), recently has written to all Council Leaders about supporting the voluntary sector and small firms. In his letter, he expresses the view that voluntary groups can play a vital role in delivering high quality and innovative front line services to the public. Although he states that small businesses, being close to the people they serve, can bring an unparalleled understanding of local needs, it might be argued that voluntary groups are better placed to do this. He goes on to say voluntary groups can draw on the enthusiasm of volunteers and the goodwill of local communities and can, in many circumstances, offer good value for taxpayers' money when commissioned to provide services. The Minister recognises that some councils are working with voluntary groups to redesign services. DCLG will be trying to identify and promote best practice in this respect.

2.4 The Panel has discussed the possibility that Hunts Forum might seek support for its work from Towns and Parishes. In addition, the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Economic Well-Being) during its deliberations on the Budget and MTP has drawn attention to the need for the voluntary sector to review its own ways of operating. Having set the general context for this work, the Cabinet Office's Office for Civil Society has published guidance entitled *Better Together - Preparing for local spending cuts to the voluntary, community and social enterprise sector*, which identifies some parameters for the service redesign process. This document is attached at Appendix B.

- 2.5 The Centre for Public Scrutiny has produced a further document that the Panel might find useful. It is called *Measuring what matters - A guide for overview and scrutiny committees about using 'social return on investment' to measure social value* and it is attached at Appendix C. Specifically, it will provide a way to incorporate a Social Return on Investment approach into the review about the impact of the Council's future funding decisions.

3. CONCLUSION

- 3.1 Representatives of the voluntary sector have addressed the full Council and the Overview and Scrutiny Panels for Social and Economic Well-Being on the sector's role, value and the impact of the Council's future spending plans. The Social Well-Being Panel has decided that it will look at these issues and alternatives ways in which the voluntary sector might be supported. A similar process is occurring all over the Country. It is a subject that has received the attention of the Government and other national organisations. Two publications produced as a result are attached to this report. Members are invited to consider how to proceed with its study on the voluntary sector in Huntingdonshire.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Minutes and Reports of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Social Well-Being) on 1st February 2011.

Cabinet Office / Office for Civil Society - *Better Together - Preparing for local spending cuts to the voluntary, community and social enterprise sector*

The Centre for Public Scrutiny - *Measuring what matters - A guide for overview and scrutiny committees about using 'social return on investment' to measure social value*

Commissioning Agreement between Huntingdonshire District Council and Hunts Forum of Voluntary Organisations

Contact Officer: A Roberts, Scrutiny and Review Manager

☎ (01480) 388015

✉ Anthony.Roberts@huntsdc.gov.uk