

Transforming Local Infrastructure – North Yorkshire

The Chief Officer's Group (COG) is a sub-committee of the North Yorkshire & York Forum (NYFF) and is the lead group for support and development (infrastructure) support to the voluntary sector in North Yorkshire.

The COG have developed the joint local support and development organisation (LSDO) Strategic Plan (uploaded onto the Blog for reference) over the past year. The Strategic Plan is the basis for negotiation with North Yorkshire County Council and NHS North Yorkshire and York.

This plan will be the starting point for our discussions on the North Yorkshire Transforming Infrastructure Fund bid in order to build upon the work already accomplished over recent years.

The next phase of development is to engage with the wider range of infrastructure partners around the aspirations of this plan, and the advent of the TIF is creating an opportunity to properly address this over the next 2 years, as well as take forward more innovative and necessarily efficient approaches. Some of the aspirations in the plan will be harder to deliver following the recent and substantial cuts to funding.

Parallel to the work of the COG, NYFF, the York and North Yorkshire Partnership Unit and North Yorkshire Learning Consortium (now Your Consortium) have been working with IPPR North on a piece of research into the economic impact of the voluntary sector., This includes some very useful data on the current and predicted support needs of the sector which updates previous research. (this is also uploaded onto the Blog and will be officially published in the near future)

Below is a summary of the current COG thinking about what needs to happen next. All of this is for discussion, comment and evolution as we put together the TIF bid.

What we need in North Yorkshire to meet current challenges:

Bold and truly transformative approach including

- World class model of collaboration
- Slick back office and high quality delivery
- Enterprise culture promoting sustainability
- Maintenance of local delivery
- Effective community development
- Centres of excellence
- County/sub-regional specialists to support local delivery
- Strong &, unified voice for the sector
- Exploration of new approaches to delivery, especially high tech solutions

What the Lottery are looking for:

- Efficient and effective consolidation and collaboration, eg rethinking business models, asset consolidation, merger of back office functions and shared services
- Fresh thinking about the support that civil society needs, integration of services
- Better links with local business, more peer to peer support within the sector, stronger partnerships with strategic bodies
- Long term sustainability that does not rely on government support

This is the last tranche of government money for infrastructure development and needs to support sustainable transformation. The fund will not pay for existing delivery unless there is a strong case for this whilst achieving the transformation.

Our bid should:

- Have a clear vision of needs in the County
- Consensus on the best way of meeting those needs
- Focus on how to provide what the sector needs in the most efficient way possible – not on what providers want to provide
- Be about redesign of infrastructure – not more of the same

Our most important priority is to identify those organisations with a commitment to working in partnership to achieve this.

Agreeing on a collaborative approach means giving up competition with every partner being open to change in what they do and how they do it (or even whether they do it) in the interests of better outcomes for front line organisations.

What do front line organisations want from infrastructure providers?

- Free/low cost services
- Easy access to the right intervention – one stop shop, clarity, quality
- ‘Sort it out’ - practical hands on help with supported implementation of good practice
- Funding advice and access to contracting opportunities with appropriate skills support & training e.g. business planning
- Facilitated relationships with local funders/contractors/commissioners, ‘
- Quality accreditation & support to be ‘fit for purpose’
- Future scanning
- Excellent local knowledge – with access to contacts & networks
- Information and communication
- Influence and voice

What do other stakeholders want from infrastructure providers?

- ‘Management’ of their relationships with the sector – easy point(s) of contact, accountability, communication
- Capacity across the sector to meet stakeholders’ objectives
- Help in meeting local needs, identifying gaps & developing solutions

Key questions for partners to consider

- Do frontline organisations want their capacity built or their immediate problems solved?
- Are we here to help the sector implement government policy (national or local)?
- Are we here to support frontline organisations or is there a wider purpose to infrastructure work?
- Do we have common values that can underpin our collaboration?

We will need to clarify our collective core purpose and our suggestion is that we build on the vision as set out in the joint Strategic Plan.

Current thinking on how we might meet the TIF outcomes

1. Frontline civil society organizations can access a wider range of high quality support, networking and volunteering brokerage opportunities and value them more highly

This is about what we actually provide – the range and quality of our services.

Discussion point

We know that local support services that are rooted in their local community and have excellent knowledge about their ‘patch’ are highly valued. But it is no longer realistic to provide the full range of possible support services ‘on site’ in every area and – specialism and expertise is usually more efficiently provided over a larger area.

Equally, specialist services that cover the whole County or region may lack the local contacts and credibility that could make what they offer more accessible to smaller organizations.

Local bases are essential for the community development aspect of infrastructure work. This must not be neglected through undue focus on the ‘business’ needs of larger organizations – but the needs of larger organisations must also be catered for.

Current thinking:

- Develop 3 or 4 LSDOs as ‘hubs’ covering cross-District areas. Concentrate specialist provision for the wider area in these hubs.
- Other organisations become ‘spokes’ to the hubs – providing a local front door, local knowledge initial advice and signposting, and access to

specialist support in the 'hubs'. Other key community organizations (village hall consortia etc) could also have a role to play as 'spokes' in infrastructure delivery

- Develop recognised foci of specialisms available to all organizations across the County/sub-region based in or accessible via the hubs. This can– include county-level specialist organizations,
- Removal of duplication of effort. This should include mergers and other forms of closer collaboration where there is a clear practical & business case for this
- Develop new models for remote delivery of specialist support services – skype, video conferencing, more seminar based advice
- Programme of workforce development and accreditation across the infrastructure workforce & unified approach to workforce development (including volunteers)
- Operate a 'single point of contact' and 'no wrong door' approach to improve access to all support services. From the outside, we should look like a single coherent support service.

2. There is stronger local leadership for civil society organizations which contributes to better partnerships with local businesses and the local statutory sector

This is about our relationships – with front line organizations, with each other, and with private and public sector partners

Discussion point

The environment for partnership working is rapidly changing – in future we need to be more flexible about boundaries (eg the new health consortia do not match with District boundaries, the LEPs don't all match with County/sub-regional boundaries). The LSDO 'hubs' may be well placed to take a lead role in redefining our own working boundaries.

Leadership on different issues can come from any part of the sector – but needs to be accountable and well supported. The role of infrastructure is to provide the framework within which the voice of the sector can be debated and expressed.

Statutory partners want to have straightforward mechanisms for communicating and engaging with the voluntary sector, and a recognized point of contact.

Many sector organizations are recognizing that there is much to learn from the business sector, in terms of enterprise and the more 'commercial' approach that seems necessary in relation to contracting and personalization. Our support services should focus on where the support needs are unique to the sector while forging better links to business support providers.

We need to create better dialogue with businesses which provide similar services to the sector.

We need to create a consistent approach to local representation based on the Hambleton model of Development Officer meetings between staff from different sectors involved in supporting voluntary sector organizations.

Current thinking:

- Reach consensus on model for sector 'voice and influence' work and implement (work has already started on this).
- Promote ourselves and the sector forcefully to our partners & stakeholders
- Build more overt partnerships with the business sector.
- Create opportunities for mutual learning across sectors – induction support, mentoring, training
- Create open approach to collaboration with non-sector organizations around sector support, strengthen existing networks
- Build on existing good practice and take it one step further

3. Infrastructure organizations, including volunteering infrastructure, are transformed so that they are more efficient and are able to learn and grow with less dependence on state funding

We have to put forward a vision in which we look different at the end of the 2 year period. This must be about radical change and innovation and not about making what we do look different whilst we carry on as we were.

Current thinking

Efficiencies required

- Fewer organizations delivering full range of generalist infrastructure services - mergers and consolidation.
- Deliver 'first contact' initial support through a more diverse range of organizations
- Concentrate specialisms/expertise in a smaller number of organizations/individuals
- More efficient delivery models appropriate to huge county – making use of opportunities presented by web technology, join up with Connected North Yorkshire so that voluntary sector can benefit from broadband roll out.
- Create a single Volunteer Centre with slick back office while maintaining locally based front doors for local people

Sustainability aspirations:

- We are committed to providing free support to those that need it – small/new groups, initial advice, those in crisis
- BUT We need to develop our income generating activities within a new culture of enterprise

- Develop chargeable consultancy services – perhaps under a collective trading arm. Our main resource is expertise & knowledge.
- Make best use of the resources we already have – buildings, facilities, equipment – work more collaboratively to spread this resource.
- Focus on what we're best at and where we provide better value than the private sector.

Please post comments on this, and the other attached documents, on the blog at <http://wp.me/p1G8xR-o> during August.

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