

Transforming Local Infrastructure Update

Macc is leading Manchester's Transforming Local Infrastructure Programme working in partnership with other local infrastructure agencies to develop a better and more cohesive range of services for voluntary and community sector organisations in Manchester.

The government has awarded our project a grant through Transforming Local Infrastructure, which is being delivered by Big Fund (the non lottery funding arm of the Big Lottery Fund). Transforming Local Infrastructure is providing better support for frontline civil society organisations by transforming local infrastructure services. Manchester is one of 72 out of 140 partnerships across England have received awards as part of a £30 million investment from the Office of Civil Society.

The partners in Manchester's programme are:

- Macc (lead)
- The Lesbian and Gay Foundation
- Manchester BME Network
- The Charity Service
- Voluntary Youth Manchester
- Learning Skills and Employment Network
- Manchester Environmental Resource Centre Initiative (MERCi)
- Faith Network 4 Manchester
- Gaddum Centre
- Greater Manchester Youth Network
- People's Voice Media
- Third Sector Essentials CIC
- Manchester Council for Community Relations
- TogetherWorks

The starting point we have taken is that no matter how many organisations are involved in delivering support to local voluntary and community sector groups, it should be simple and easy for groups to find, access and use the support they need. Our approach will build on the development of Manchester Community Central and the initiative of the City Council in rationalising support services. Local groups will see a streamlined service which is easier to access, offers clear leadership, regular consultation and feedback. By working together the various support organisations can reduce duplication of effort and this in turn will create efficiency savings and release capacity.

In designing the project, we also looked at the environment faced by local voluntary and community sector groups:

- Reductions in availability of grants from public sector and trusts
- Even shorter term funding
- Commissioning culture is confused and confusing
- Loss of workforce (paid and voluntary)
- Lack of co-ordination, high levels of duplication in frontline and infrastructure
- Lots of groups with poor governance

- Lack of knowledge amongst new commissioners, private sector & philanthropy about how to work with the sector
- Lack of leadership around new forms of investment such as social finance
- Delivering services: open public services should not just be about responding to tenders but civil society organisations being the vehicles for public involvement in co-production. It should also not just be about need: cultural, social activity creating positive impact (as opposed to averting a negative impact).
- Groups want small grants, training, information, engagement with public sector

We were also very aware that most of our contact tends to be with medium or large voluntary sector groups organisations. In most parts of the country, local voluntary sector infrastructure tends not to engage particularly well with small community groups. So to reach out to those groups we are focusing on developing free / very low cost support, information and networking, support around social media as a means of engagement and promoting access to small grants to support activity costs. Most small groups want to stay small and local not becoming overcomplicated: a turning point in the life of a purely voluntary group is when it becomes an employer for the first time and many find it difficult having taken this step to go back and become cash dependent.

Our programme is designed to increase the range of services and activities available to support our local sector. Examples of activities include:

- **Building relationships with the private sector** – we will develop a support function for local businesses who wish to develop the corporate social responsibility role, facilitating pro-bono support for local groups and developing sponsorship models. However, it's important that the voluntary sector doesn't see the private sector simply as a new source of funding or volunteers. We want to build relationships which enable new ways of working together
- **A'state of the sector' survey for Manchester** - in partnership with other infrastructure organisations across Greater Manchester, we will be launching in September the first proper survey of the voluntary and community sector in Manchester. It will enable us to show the scale of the contribution the sector makes to life in Manchester. You will already have seen the database update Macc and partners have put together to ensure our database is as up to date as possible in advance of this survey.
- **A CRB checking service for local groups and people wishing to volunteer** – currently being developed by Gaddum Centre. News of the launch of this service will be available soon.
- We are working with The Charity Service to improve **fundraising support** and **increase donations** to local groups.
- A “universal offer” to the local sector of **information, networking and representation**.
- Local organisations in all sectors will be able to engage with the voluntary and community sector through a single **Voluntary Sector Assembly for Manchester** similar to a Chamber of Commerce. This will work through networking approaches including meetings and online discussion.
- **Small community groups** will be given access to a wider range of basic free resources on a no-fee subscription basis. This will be launched in September 2012.
- **Local commissioners** will know where to find and engage relevant local organisations in the delivery of services and activities in order to engage with local communities.

The Programme runs from April 2012 to September 2013. As the project continues, we'll announce the availability of new services – watch this space!