

# Cheshire East Congress

The Third Sector working together

## **Sustainable Community Strategy feedback from the Cheshire East Congress meeting 16<sup>th</sup> November 2009 The New Life Church, Congleton**

### **Introduction:**

On the 16<sup>th</sup> November 2009, 72 representatives from the Cheshire East Voluntary Community and Faith Sector, came together to discuss the continued development and work of Cheshire East Congress and also how the sector could be involved in the development of a Cheshire East Sustainable Community Strategy. The meeting ran for half a day and was held in Congleton as this was deemed to be the most accessible to all members of the Cheshire East Third Sector.

The Voluntary and Community Network (Cheshire East Congress) has worked with volunteers and community networks in a structured, coherent and transparent way. A framework has been developed which links to the new Council and to other statutory bodies.

The benefit of volunteering is being supported by the CVS infrastructure from the 3 existing volunteer centre sites and the Third Sector generally

The priorities and targets of the Third Sector engagement with the Council and the LSP are:

- **An emphasis on the role that the Third Sector plays in the development of Stronger Communities**
- **To increase the proportion of services delivered by Third Sector organisations**

Cheshire East Borough Council is presently producing a draft community strategy; this document will set out the local priorities for the borough as a whole. It will deal with issues such as:

- **meeting the aspirations, needs and priorities of local communities**
- **local public, private, voluntary and community organisations**
- **achieving local and regional sustainable development.**

The November event provided an opportunity for the sector to contribute to the development of the sustainable community strategy, and detailed below is a summary of the comments received in the workshops, which relate directly to this area:

## **Feedback from the Congress on how Third Sector can more effectively play a part in Cheshire East Strategy**

### **Mapping:**

- Need to understand the links, structure and thematic groups within Cheshire East around the five themes. Where do Housing, older people, transport, culture, leisure, intergenerational partnerships, disabilities, middle age (25-59) and stronger communities fit?
- Clear links between the 5 themes and partnership working need to be demonstrated throughout the strategy

### **Communication:**

- Need to engage grassroots groups
- No in-depth comprehensive recognition internally by the smaller Third sector groups of need to lobby or be involved in strategic plans
- Information needs to go up and down
- Increase awareness of the Community Strategy the LSP and the Local Area Partnerships and make more public
- How are all of the views of the sector captured and how does Cheshire East Borough Council listen and respond to all of those views?
- Important that the 'words' in the strategy are right so it can be quoted, in for example external funding bids, i.e. rural, older people etc..
- Need to build relationships with councillors and develop ways to meet and effectively communicate with key cabinet members
- Provide necessary education and training on priorities.
- Avoid clouding issues with difficult language and jargon

### **Funding /resources and sustainability:**

- Concerns about future of funding, a need for sustainability within the sector in order to resource to allow the sector to play an active part within strategic and area work.
- Concerns about contracts & commissioning and how this may impact on the smaller organisations; concern that only the larger organisations be in a position to be involved

- The Third Sector has a large impact on communities and they need small pots of funding; the commissioning agenda for these organisations seems unrealistic.
- Third sector groups who deliver outcomes for the district and have an impact on sustainable communities are uncertain whether or not the work will be delivered in the future by the Local Authority.
- Concern was expressed re the five thematic groups within the LSP, that the five thematic groups may have been chosen to fit in with national government and national indicators, rather than truly reflecting the needs of the district.

## **Recommendations:**

- The sector needs to have access to a mix of grant and contract funding in order to continue to play its part at all levels
- The statutory sector needs to reflect through its communications the needs of the third sector, ensuring that appropriate means of communication are used for different stakeholders
- The evidence above further supports the need for a mapping exercise and research into the makeup of the Voluntary, Community and Faith sector within Cheshire East which will then determine the structure that Cheshire East Congress needs to adopt.
- The five thematic groups within the LSP should reflect the needs of the district.

## **Conclusion:**

Drawing from the findings at the event, there is a clear indication that groups within the sector are concerned about the resources to continue their work. Concerns about contracts & commissioning and how this may impact on the smaller organisations is also a major concern. Separately there needs to be distinct communication strategies in place, within key agencies, in order to disseminate information, in a timely and effective manner to the Third Sector via the Congress.