

## Sefton New Realities Steering Group

### Overview

The Council and representatives of the VCF sectors in Sefton have come together to change radically how the Local Authority and VCF organisations interact with each other.

They have produced “New Realities”, a “can do” collaborative agreement and have designed ways of “re-imagining” local relationships to ensure more equal and more productive partnerships will develop between the local authority and local communities across the whole Borough of Sefton.

Following an unreasonable request from the LA for a payment to allow a roundabout to be used by a local group to commemorate the anniversary of the beginning of the First World War, the Deputy CEO of the LA asked representatives of VCF groups if this situation occurred regularly.

A joint development group was established in August 2014, facilitated by Sefton CVS, to explore how changes could be made to avoid such situations recurring and explore new approaches to working more productively and innovatively with both commissioned and local community action groups. The group committed to developing a framework using an action learning approach to encourage new thinking and practice from which the “New Realities” document was developed and consulted upon in the New Year 2015.

The Development group is taking forward a programme of actions to promote and champion New Realities, through highlighting achievements and exemplars of good practice, identifying where improvements are needed and promoting remedial action.

Members of the development group will be an Ambassador to support the championing of New Realities principles to all front line LA staff, and all managers at all strategic levels.

New Realities is being championed by the Cabinet Member for Communities and the document was adopted by the Council following VCF sector consultation. There will be a press launch due in September 2015. Sefton CVS is holding a full day’s conference ‘New Realities in Action’ for 100 delegates with workshops, key notes and social media tools to promote innovation locally.

## Impact

Sefton Council has integrated this initiative into their “One Council” change programme. “New Realities” is promoted to employees via the Council Intranet page and regular Team meetings at all levels.

Examples of the impact of New Realities:

- Community markets have been introduced with an emphasis on supporting local businesses and community groups giving them an opportunity to promote themselves. The Council provided funds to purchase stalls for the newly formed “Sefton Community Markets” CIC and also ensured that they did not have to pay for a Public amenities licence to trade on the high streets across the borough.
- Increases in advertising costs have inflated the cost of implementing road closures (TRO’s). This increase has impacted the viability of Community organisations to deliver events. Using the new realities principle, a solution of applying for TRO’s in bulk by organisations, with a one off affordable fee was implemented.
- Joint communication programme using a web platform established to generate case studies and learning to encourage good practice replication between the Council and VCF sector.
- New Realities principles included by the Council’s Chief Executive in the recruitment process for the Senior Executive Director appointments.
- The Council is now streamlining the current myriad of contracts and grants issued to organisations from all depts. across the whole Council, The aim is to create a more streamlined and consistent approach to commissioning with increased involvement of organisations within service design with the emphasis on social value.

“Sefton has always had a vibrant and innovative VCF sector. However the New Realities approach has in my view taken this to a new level. A genuine collaborative approach built on mutual trust and respect, delivering real change in how we work together for the benefit of our communities.”

Margaret (CEO Sefton MBC)

