

## Horizon Scanning Paper

### Summary

This paper collects together items that Assembly Representatives have suggested for discussion, together with other issues brought to the attention of the Assembly Coordinator from the statutory sector. It is intended to stimulate discussion amongst the Board and help to shape and prioritise the forward Action Plan of the Assembly.

### Recommendations/Actions

The Board is asked to discuss the content of the report and consider:

- Are the issues raised appropriate for the Assembly to take forward?
- Are those issues which are to be taken forward adequately addressed in our current Action Plan?
- What additional actions need to be taken?

## 1. View from the Forums of Interest:

The items raised by Representatives fall into two categories: service delivery & communication and signposting.

### 1 a) Service Delivery:

Feedback from Board Members indicates that more action is still needed regarding the involvement of the voluntary sector in public service delivery. It is recognised that some of these issues have been raised before, but further progress needs to be made.

Concerns include:

**Duplication:** services being developed and provided by the public sector which overlap with services already provided by the VCS.

**Conflicts of interest:** more visible separation between the Councils' service provision arm and its commissioning arm to guard against Council provision potentially 'getting there first'?

**Lack of interface:** a greater interface between the voluntary sector and statutory sector to allow more joined up and forward thinking about possible developments at the earliest opportunity; changes in policy direction & new initiatives need signalling at the earliest possible stage.

**Contracts:** need to move to multi-year, as with private sector.

**Lack of ambition:** there are opportunities out there led by VCS organisations (e.g. green sector) which could be developed and lead to employment opportunities, but they do not seem to be recognised.

**Assurance and accreditation schemes:** there are a number of accreditation schemes available for organisations. These can be used to debunk the idea that VCS organisations lack professionalism, and are set to become more important in demonstrating fitness to deliver services. Should we do more work on raising awareness of these encouraging groups to go through accreditation processes?

It needs to be recognised that these issues affect a significant section of our membership, but not all.

Our current Action Plan makes some reference to service delivery issues, but does not deal explicitly with these concerns. Our current related actions are:

- 4.4 prepare information for commissioners and budget holders about working with the VCS
- 5.7 promote tendering opportunities
- 5.8 Make national guidance on commissioning available at local level

In the last quarter I have met with both Nigel Denton, Head of Procurement Services at the Council and Simon Kenton, Head of Joint Commissioning and had informal conversations about the way forward, strengthening relations etc.... This was in response to actions 4.4, 5.7 & 5.8 of the Action Plan, and prior to the detailed feedback, from individual Board Members outlined above. Agreed outcomes from the above meetings were:

- Opportunity to contribute to the JSNA – highlighted in e-bulletin
- Information about advertisements of tenders – highlighted in bulletin
- Strengthening information about Assembly in staff inductions

We also observed that it was essential for VCS organisations to be ‘in the loop’ from the very beginning of service development and delivery and that by the time the contracts were being tendered it was often too late.

Contracting decisions are quite dispersed across the Council so it is not always obvious with whom we need to be working. Although the importance of the VCS and the existence of the Assembly does feature in induction training, it is in very general terms.

A possible way forward, discussed with Nigel Denton, which may help to improve the situation with and **ambition**, was the creation of a register of VCS organisations in regard to improved **interface** Shropshire who are interested in service delivery, including **ambitions** for service delivery and creative ideas for a particular sector, as well as actual service delivery experience. We could use this document in a number of ways:

- a) Can be distributed to key officers and used in induction training (Nigel Denton is happy to identify the appropriate people).
- b) We could include this as part of our work demonstrating the potential of the sector (see evidence base paper).
- c) Gives us a natural grouping to whom relevant information can be distributed and amongst whom further discussion can take place.

**Recommended action:** *collate document as described above*

The more specific issues around governance (duplication, conflicts of interest etc...) could be to take these forward through the Compact Implementation Group (CIG).

**Recommended action:** *table specific concerns at the next CIG.*

The work on accreditation could be taken forward with the Shropshire Infrastructure Partnership.

**Recommended action:** *add to discussions with the Shropshire Infrastructure Partnership Information Officer.*

## **1b) Communication & Signposting**

Feedback from Board and other Assembly Members also indicates that more work needs to be carried out on communication. To group these into themes:

**Clarity about structures & signposting:** There needs to be some further clarity about how the various partnership groups fit together, how these relate to the Local Joint Committees and how all this fits with the Assembly.

There needs to be some simple communication which explains the difference between the Assembly and Infrastructure organisations and what each offers. It would be useful if we could identify VCS –‘experts’ or first points of contact, for each of the Compact themes.

Lack of clarity around decision making processes in the PCT

**Recommended action:** *action 1.3 is around production of information sheets and it is recommended we prioritise production of fact sheets covering these two issues in the next quarter. The PCT issue will be raised by the VCS coordinator at the next COMPIC meeting.*

**Supporting the Forums of Interest:** Forums of Interest sometimes feel isolated from the Board. Where the coordinator has been able to attend FOI meetings has been welcomed, although it was not the intention that the coordinator would give ongoing support to the Forums of Interest by attending each meeting.

**Recommended action:** *as part of our work on action 3.5 (establish regular feedback from FOI) it is recommended that following each Board meeting, the VCS coordinator issues not only the quarterly newsletter, but also a suggested ‘briefing’ for each Representative to take along to their meetings.*

**Opportunities for Forums of Interest to work together:** Specifically it was noted by the Waste and Recycling Forum that a number of organisations across Shropshire are focused on supporting people with mental health difficulties and the question was asked if some coordination of this would be beneficial. This plays into the general idea that the Forums of Interest could sometimes identify cross cutting themes and do some coordinated work together.

## **2. View from the Statutory Sector:**

### **Public Sector Spending Squeeze and Potential Change in Political Administration**

These two issues are well rehearsed in the general media. There is a significant gap in the public finances, and, as a consequence our public sector partners in Shropshire are already preparing for lean times ahead. In addition, it is widely predicted that the upcoming general election is likely to result in a change in political administration. It is likely that the Third Sector may be looked to for potential **value for money** solutions.

We can look at these changes as potential opportunities or threats, but either way need to position the VCS in Shropshire in the best way to respond. Essentially this comes down to marketing the sector effectively. The messages, which seem obvious to us and may have been said before, need evidencing, packaging simply and saying again at every opportunity. In particular I think there may be new service delivery opportunities. Amongst our messages we need to make sure we evidence that while volunteering and the VCS provide good value for money, it is not ‘free’.

**Actions:** 4.1 working with new members, 6.4 create Evidence Base and 7.4 demonstrating value of VCS, are all relevant to responding to this development.

**Recommendation action:** *prioritise the ‘Evidence Base’ work as the major piece of work for the next quarter, include with that the collated ‘service delivery’ document as described earlier in the paper and work towards presenting this to Members etc.....in the following quarter.*

## **Transformation of Social Care Programme**

Branded as 'My Life, my Choice' this Council programme is working towards changing the nature of adult social care provision in Shropshire. There are two aspects to the programme one is 'personalisation' – this is around individuals holding their own budgets and choosing their own packages and providers of services. The Council has a target that by March 2011, 30% of adult social care clients in Shropshire will be managing their own budgets. The second aspect of the programme is around keeping people well; this is a very broad agenda and could encompass a range of activity. There will be money available for 'pump priming' projects, but they need to aim to be self sustaining. The Programme Team are very keen to engage with the VCS and have already been out to talk to some Forums of Interest. If your Forum of Interest would like to get more information about this, perhaps have a visit from one of the Programme Team, please let me know.

## **Digital Switchover**

The main switchover for Shropshire will be coming in 2011, the VCS are potentially well placed to support vulnerable individuals respond to this change. It has been suggested to invite a member of the Digital Switchover team to come and speak about how organisations might prepare to offer support. The Board is asked if this is something they would like to pursue?

## **The Community Strategy**

Copies of the Final Draft Strategy will be available at the Board meeting. This Strategy will set the agenda for the Shropshire Partnership up to 2020. All the organisations that form part of the Partnership will need to demonstrate how their strategies (including future commissioning and funding strategies!) support the vision set out in this Community document, so it is worth checking to see if you think they have the fundamentals right. Board Members are asked to encourage their Forums of Interest to take a look at the final draft Strategy and feedback their comments.

## **External Funding Strategy**

Shropshire Partnership is seeking support from VSC Assembly Board to help develop the Shropshire Partnership External Funding Strategy which will be a key strategy for all partners, in the public and voluntary sector. This will help bring in more resources to help deliver better services for the people of Shropshire in line with the priorities/actions identified within the Community Strategy:

There are major challenges at the moment in securing external funding including:

- Less external resources available, particularly from sources such as European funding, government grants, lottery etc
- Bidding processes becoming more competitive
- Some funders looking at a smaller number of larger bids which involve a number of partners
- Funders expecting a more joined up/partnership approach to bidding and delivery of projects
- Sustainability becoming increasingly important
- Greater scrutiny of delivery by many funders

If Shropshire is to be successful in attracting large sums of external funding there is a need for all partners to work collectively and make best use of people's knowledge, skills and expertise to address the challenges above.

The Shropshire Partnership External Funding Strategy will help identify the priorities for action as well as sending a clear message to funders that partners are coordinated and joined up in their approach to external funding.

A Task and Finish Group is being established to oversee the development of this strategy. It is anticipated that there will be 4 meetings between December 2009 and May 2010 with work progressing electronically where possible. Sheena Griffiths, from West Mercia Police, will be Chair of the Group and a member from Shropshire Council's Funding and Programmes Team will take on the secretarial role. Draft Terms of Reference have been produced for ratification, will be agreed at the first meeting - provisional dates for this first meeting are the 9th or 14th December.

The importance of engaging the voluntary sector in the development of this Strategy has been recognised and Board Members are asked to consider if they wish to support this work.