

Evidence Base

Summary

One of the actions in our existing Action Plan is to create an Evidence Base, to demonstrate the value of the VCS in Shropshire. This paper is intended to crystallize thinking about the intended audience and purpose of the document and the type of content that it needs to contain.

Recommendation/actions

1. The **Board is asked** to discuss the content of the paper and specifically comment on whether it agrees with:
 - a) the stated purpose of the document
 - b) the key messages to be contained within the document
 - c) the style of the document
2. The Board prioritise this work in the Annual Action Plan, recognising that it is a significant piece of work and that therefore:
3. The Board supports the work by:
 - Agreeing the membership of a small advisory group to support the VCSA Coordinator finding appropriate contacts for good case studies
 - sourcing photographs
 - suggesting alternative sources of information

Purpose:

The purpose of the Evidence Base will be to market the sector effectively. The intended audience will primarily be decision makers in the statutory sector. The messages, which may seem obvious to the VCS and may have been articulated before, need **evidencing (local evidence), packaging simply** and **saying again** at every opportunity.

The Evidence Base will be a tool that our Representatives and Members can use to raise awareness of the value and potential of the sector.

Our goal is that the public sector increasingly turns to the VCS for solutions and maintains or increases its support to the sector in these tough times. To achieve this, decision makers in public sector organisations which include Officers, but also elected Members, non-executive Directors, and Lay Members etc...need to understand our key messages and have them at the forefront of their minds.

Messages & Evidence:

Given the fairly low level of response from the Assembly in response to the survey on the recession, and the fact that we know that the Assembly membership does not cover even 25% of the total sector in Shropshire – I would not propose to evidence the document based on surveys we have conducted ourselves (action 7.4 in Annual Action Plan). Instead I propose that we need to blend statistical information and research from reliable and respected sources, and where these do not have data specific to Shropshire, supplement the information with case studies from Shropshire.

In the section below I have suggested some of the possible messages and, *in italics* possible sources of evidence.

The Board is asked to consider if these are the messages they would like to see in the document and if they are aware of other good potential sources of information.

The messages might include:

- **The significant size of the VCS in Shropshire:** giving the message that the well being and quality of life enjoyed in Shropshire is already significantly underpinned by the VCS and it would be unwise to undermine this.
Third sector survey Mori (2009), The Place survey (2008)
- **The hidden benefits:** giving the message that any voluntary/community activity contributes towards social cohesion, improved mental wellbeing etc., not just the obvious ones.
Shropshire Case Study: some individual volunteers' stories – across the age groups, national reports?
- **Volunteering isn't free but it is fantastic value for money:** giving the message that VCS are a fantastic choice for delivering services and meeting community aspirations, but that it needs to be properly resourced.
Case study following the support offered to a volunteer from recruitment through to ongoing support.
Case study showing social returns on investment
- **VCS organisations are professional**
Accreditation schemes: examples of Shropshire organisations already accredited
- **VCS organisations are innovative*** and flexible, they can adapt and take risks that larger more bureaucratic organisations can't
Examples of innovation e.g. disabled holiday's innovations in IT awards
- **Work together in partnership:**
Case study e.g. the connections to Opportunities Consortium
- **VCS organisations understand the needs/aspirations of their communities:**
Case studies of organisations that have met the needs of the population, & successfully offered a creative solution
- **VCS organisation are significant employers**

Apart from the first bullet point above, which is a very general point and applicable to the sector as whole, it might be possible for each Forum of Interest to offer case studies – so that as well as the general messages we can be showcasing the Forums of Interest.

Sample information for discussion:

I have extracted some Shropshire specific information from the 2009 Third Sector Survey & the 2008 Place Survey and used it to begin a narrative and I would be interested in the Board's feedback on this piece of work.

Standing at 1,369 organisations, Shropshire's Third Sector is the 5th largest in the region (Third Sector Survey, Ipsos Mori 2009). Overall in Shropshire 32.2% of the population take part in regular volunteering (at least 1 hour per month), compared to only 23.2% in England as a whole (2008 Place Survey). Taken together, these two statistics emphasise the reliance of Shropshire County on Third Sector organisations to contribute to the quality of life of its population, compared to neighbouring authorities.

95% of Third Sector Organisations in Shropshire are either comprised solely of volunteers or rely on volunteers as part of their work (Ipsos Mori 2009). It is difficult to put a value on the benefits of volunteering, Volunteer England (2009) suggest a variety of methodologies to place an economic value of people giving time to the community, but warn against forgetting

the additional benefits and impact that can be accrued such as community development, integration, diversity, awareness of social issues and raised self-esteem of service users and beneficiaries.

If we indulge for a moment the idea that a meaningful economic value can be placed on volunteering, then taking a conservative view, the *minimum* annual economic contribution of volunteers in Shropshire is £12 million pounds [based on a population of 290,900 (ONS 2007), 32% of which volunteer for 12 hours a year as a minimum (2008 place survey) & taking a standard volunteer hour to be £11, the average hourly wage in Shropshire in 2008 (Shropshire.gov.uk/factsfigures)].

In reality the impact of the sector will be much greater than this considering this assumes a minimum level of volunteering (1 hour/month) and takes no account of the social & health benefits, which in turn impact on a reduced burden on public sector services such as health and social care.

Style:

Something colourful and professional – could use the Community Strategy Document as a guide. Copies will be tabled at the Board meeting.

Being Proactive:

We need to be prepared for this working and ready to articulate what practical ideas, aspirations and creative solutions the sector has.

We could include a loose leaf register of those organisations (or FOI) which are interested in taking on more service delivery roles, or who believe they have creative ‘invest to save’ solutions and would welcome a better interface with the statutory sector to discuss these ideas. Please see discussion in Horizon Scanning Paper.

(NB: Do we need to take advice on protecting your intellectual property, before you share creative ideas?)

Recommendations

- 1) The Board approve the concept of the Evidence Base as described here
- 2) The Board prioritise this work in the Annual Action Plan, recognising that it is a significant piece of work and that therefore, other actions may not be progressed.
- 3) The Board supports the work by:
 - Agreeing the membership of a small advisory group to support the VCSA Coordinator
 - finding appropriate contacts for good case studies
 - photographs
 - suggesting alternative sources of information