

**Voluntary and Community Sector Annual Assembly 28 April 2009  
Annual Assembly Notes**

**Recommendations**

**The Board is asked to:**

1. Consider the issues collected through the discussion groups held at the Annual Assembly (see Appendix 1 for a full version of the notes).
2. Use the key findings to assist with the development of the Annual Work Plan (see Draft Workplan).

**1. Background**

- 1.1 The VCS Annual Assembly was held on the 28 April 2009. The event was designed to include a mix of presentations, group working activity and networking opportunities. One of the key aims of the day was to gather the views of the wider VCS Assembly membership in order to inform the key areas of work to be taken forward by the VCS Assembly Board through 2009/10.

**2. Feedback from discussion groups**

- 2.1 The Annual Assembly included a 45 minute session based around the following discussion groups/Forums of Interest:

- Compact
- Shropshire Infrastructure Partnership
- VS Training Providers Consortium
- Disability Forum
- Shropshire and Telford & Wrekin Mental Health VS Forum
- Health and Social Care Forum
- Community Transport Forum
- Children's Summit
- Visual Arts Network

- 2.2 Each group was asked to base discussion around the following format:

- Talk about the Forum of Interest and opportunities to find out more
- Think about the key issues currently affecting:
  - The Forum of Interest
  - Cross-cutting issues impacting on the Voluntary and Community Sector

- Consider issues that the VCS Assembly Board should address on behalf of the wider Assembly. Highlight 3 key priorities.

2.3 The detailed notes obtained from each group are included in Appendix 1. Many of the groups suggested useful actions which have been used to assist with the development of a draft Work Plan.

2.4 A number of common priorities appear to have been raised within the discussion groups. Key areas of work Assembly members would like the VCS Assembly Board to lead on included:

- Mapping and gathering of information.
  - Including consultation with the VCS
  - Data collection (with links to the county evidence base)
  - Production of information resources for the VCS
- Information sharing and communication
  - Work with new Councillors
  - Raising awareness with partners and the public sector
  - Facilitating communication within the VCS including networking opportunities
- Funding and resources
  - Working in partnership to move towards longer term funding arrangements
  - Clarity over funding/commissioning processes
  - Working with funding providers/budget holders/commissioners
  - Providing information concerning contact points for funding support and advice
- Supporting the promotion of volunteering and training opportunities.
  - Working closely with Forums such as the Infrastructure Partnership and VS Training Providers Consortium
  - Identifying areas of need concerning training
  - Assisting with promotion concerning volunteering and training
- Recognising the impact of national policy and key local issues and working in partnership to manage those impacts at a local level.
  - Working on key sector wide issues such as the economic downturn

### **3. Next steps**

3.1 The Board is asked to consider the key issues presented above and the detailed information provided as Appendix 1. A draft Work Plan has been developed in order to take forward the information obtained at the Annual Assembly and to adequately respond to the requests made by the wider Assembly membership (alongside previously identified areas of work). The Board are asked to consider the contents of this report when commenting on and contributing to the development of the Work Plan.

# APPENDIX 1

## Notes from the Discussion Groups held at the VCS Annual Assembly 28 April 2009

### Compact

#### About the Compact

Sam Hine provided an overview of the Compact and how it had been developed and highlighted the importance of ensuring that members of the VCS Assembly were happy with the key principles and codes of practice. The group were encouraged to focus the discussion upon the four key areas of the Compact:

- Funding
- Volunteering
- Consultation
- Equalities & Diversity

#### Key issues

- Delivery of future funding – Sam spoke about the way in which fundings would be distributed by the new Council. Main sources are capital funding for community buildings, grants allocated by the Local Joint Committees and grants allocated by the Area Partnerships. Directorates would also provide grants through service level agreements and contracts. Staff working as part of the Council's Community Working section will be able to offer advice.
- Consistency of future funding – Members of the group highlighted the differences in funding that have occurred due to different policies and allocations of the district and borough councils. It was agreed that in future consistency was important but that it should be recognised that moving towards more consistent approaches could have an impact on some groups and organisations.
- Funding in 2010/11 – Many VCS groups and organisations are still uncertain over funding after this current financial year (in which funding continued from 2008/09 agreements). Sam explained the process taking place to take this forward and suggested that in as many cases as possible Council officers would arrange individual discussions to confirm future arrangements. 6 months notice would be given if any funds had to be withdrawn and support would be offered to find alternative funding.
- Inflexible and short term funding – Many national and Government led funding schemes have lots of different restrictions. This cannot be influenced by the Council but the Council has worked to make its own funding as flexible as possible and hopes to move towards 3 year funding agreements in future.
- Volunteering – It was suggested that the new Council may be a good source of volunteers.
- New partnership structures – Sam explained that for community specific projects the Local Joint Committees (LJCs) were the most appropriate contact point and for projects covering a much wider geographical area the Area Partnerships (North, Central and South) should be contacted (to avoid going to multiple LJCs). For countywide projects work would take place to try and link up and prevent any additional work for groups having to approach all 3 areas. Regeneration Officers would assist by giving advice on the most appropriate routes.
- Consultation – It was felt that many VCS groups and organisations have very useful information that is not collected or used to assist with activities such as the development of the annual Evidence Base.

## Actions

- Provide information about new funding structures/opportunities.
- Provide contact details for the Community Regeneration Officers.
- Promote volunteering opportunities within Shropshire Council.
- Agree how VCS information may be better collected and used.
- Encourage more visits from funding providers/commissioners – some members of staff may benefit from learning more about/seeing work underway within the services they fund.
- Compact Monitoring and Review was highlighted as a key action and it was felt that an Implementation Group would help to take this forward.

## Priorities

1. Volunteering – promoting volunteer opportunities in the Council.
2. Funding – regular visits to organisations so funders properly understanding.
3. Assisting with the sharing and information and evidence gathering.

## **Shropshire Infrastructure Partnership**

### Priorities for the Forum

1. Countywide standards which meet the needs of local organisations ensuring range of services available locally for VCOs to access e.g. training, volunteering.
2. Information sharing for ICT needs – security, data resilience, policies, awareness of emerging technologies.
3. Build on existing resources but improved signposting and publicity especially peer mentoring.

## **VS Training Providers Consortium**

### Overarching issues

- Affordable courses that are of interest rather than leading and accreditation. No funding support available. Full cost recovery = too expensive for users.
- Rurality = small numbers and increases the problem of services costing more.

### Training issues for the next 12 months

- Feed people into training if know more working together and also consortium feeding into other training providers.
- Training requirements of volunteers e.g. availability of basic health and hygiene training. First aid? Don't know to access appropriate training. Good way to find out what's on via Digest list.
- CCS can offer a lot of support/development – trustees, village halls, volunteer management including winding down and up voluntary organisations.
- In house training required for individualised training for organisations.
- Volunteers need training to be valued and for retention purposes.
- Mandatory training – localised or in-house.
- Contract requirements demand training in specific issues.
- Cost of training = too high for some organisations especially for paid employees rather than volunteers.
- Volunteers = free, paid staff not.

- NCVO training programmes too high and not accessible – often in London. Need Council's help.
- Increased numbers of volunteers coming forward during recession. Look good on CV rather than doing nothing. Particularly looking at training opportunities – problem = short term volunteers, looking for work and using volunteering to do so. Problem = organisations invest in individuals who then move on relatively quickly.
- Pressure group role for group? Bring together voices from disparate groups.
- CRB checking = increasingly difficult. Few organisations that can do them. 2010 changes.
- CCS taking on role of becoming registered body for CRB checks.
- Major changes to legislation need to be disseminated effectively. Mechanism needed.
- Cross-border issues e.g. CRB check, training of volunteers who work in Shropshire but live outside.
- Regional influence needed to address above.
- Support needed re change of legislation i.e. CRB changes – help required. Get emails but more support what it means.

#### Priorities

1. Cost of training and accessibility of some particular issues regarding mandatory contract related training requirements. Sometimes free training is available for volunteers but paid staff need training too and this can be unaffordable. In house training (or small local groups together) won't be ideal.
2. Recession impact – increase in volunteers looking to develop CV. Particularly interested in training. Potential drain on VCS resources as often short-term before moving into work.
3. Access to information – training and funding, CRB.

### **Disability Forum**

#### Training

- Skills resources.
- One to one training for organisations.
- Groups don't have the resources to attend or staff to be trained.

#### Support

- In administrative role, IT skills, publicising, marketing, bid writers.
- Fund raising, profile raising, PR, managerial skills, virtual office assistant.

#### Priorities

1. Sustainable funding
2. Resources – core of resources available to multi groups.
3. Training

### **Shropshire and Telford & Wrekin Mental Health VS Forum**

#### About the Forum of Interest

Lilian talked about Michele's role and her involvement with Shropshire, Telford & Wrekin Mental Health Forum. She gave background information on the Forum – how it started, how long it has been running and about the quarterly meetings that are held. She also mentioned that the Forum has terms of reference and a draft constitution which will be put to the Charity Commission in due course. The meetings have standing agenda items

where the Joint Commissioner for Mental Health (Shropshire County PCT) and the Director of Mental Health (South Staffs & Shropshire Healthcare) have a two way debate with the Forum on current issues.

It was felt that having regular attendance from the statutory sector over the past few years had helped improve the relationship between the voluntary sector and the statutory sector. Lilian reported that anyone with an interest in mental health is welcome to attend these meetings and raise any issues/items of interest or concern. The meetings are based in Shelton, refreshments and sandwiches are always provided but travel expenses are not paid.

Lilian talked about the training that the Forum has organised throughout the year and that members have attended, in particular CSIP database for outcome measures. A number of voluntary organisations are now using this tool. Members have also benefited from Mental Health Act training. Lilian talked about the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment and how the Forum needs to get involved in this. Minutes of previous meetings were circulated to the Group for information. Lilian also mentioned the Forum newsletter which is produced on a quarterly basis. This is circulated widely by e mail and posted to those who do not have access to email. Copies were circulated to group members.

#### Interest in the Forum

Some found it difficult to choose. A number of people in the room have a generic interest in mental health and placed themselves at different tables around the room. Many forum members were at different tables around the room in an effort to spread their interest and increase awareness of mental health.

#### Key issues currently affecting the Forum and cross-cutting issues

Felt more discussion around cross cutting issues than Forum of Interest. People have difficulty in attending all the correct meetings i.e. which ones are influential. Networking is a key issue at the Mental Health Forum. The Forum has representation on the Shropshire Local Implementation Team (LIT). Have one place on the VSA Board but have not elected a representative yet, hoping to do this at the June meeting. Most felt that the groups they sit on need to be relevant and productive. Each member talked about the organisation they work in for the benefit of others around the table.

Group members were asked if they thought they influenced people. In terms of advocacy services – yes they felt that more professionals were less wary of advocacy. Now have more understanding on what advocacy is about. SIAS reported that the MHA now includes advocacy which has been a positive move. Relationships with statutory sector professionals have improved although there is still room for improvement within some less informed teams.

#### Suggested Actions

- The group would like to see a list of which organisations receive local authority funding.
- The statutory sector needs to understand what the voluntary sector does and how much value they give. Voluntary organisations are more cost effective in what they do then the statutory sector employing members of staff.

Felt the Forum of Interest is a big voice if they are heard. If voluntary organisations are looking to survive they need to obtain funding. There is strength in numbers but organisations are wary of sharing their information with others. Trust between organisations takes time.

There has been an increase in the workload of voluntary organisations due to the credit crunch i.e. people losing their jobs, possibility of losing their homes etc.

Issues that the VSA Board should address

- Communication between sectors and within sectors needs to be open and honest.
- Mental health directory needed including main contacts in both statutory and voluntary agencies.
- If mental health issue goes to the VSA what will the Assembly do with it and how will we know?
- The credit crunch and the impact it will have on mental health.

Priorities

1. Communication between sectors and within sectors – a mental health directory could be beneficial.
2. Clarity over how issues from individual forums/ or affecting individual forums will be handled by the VCSA.
3. A focus on the credit crunch and the impact this is having on mental health.

## **Health and Social Care Forum**

Priorities

1. Funding – realistic level of funding based on cost of service provision.
2. Impact assessments – coordinated by FOIs to understand and mitigate potential loss of services.
3. Political – Impact on local people and organisations as the ever changing national agenda for Health and Social Care evolves.

## **Community Transport Forum**

It was stated by the chair (and agreed by all) that Voluntary and Community Transport impacted on most aspects of Shropshire residents lives. So, understandably, the CT Forum's knowledge and influence spans across many of the other forum's activities.

Key Issues that were raised by members of the group:

- There was a need for CT groups to know who their points of contact were in the new Shropshire Council and a need for just one contact not many.
- Questions were asked about the Council's environmental policy and how is imparted on the CT sector. It was agreed that the CT Forum should invite a relevant Council Officer to a Forum meeting.
- It was discussed that it should be noted that funding support for voluntary CT organizations was precarious and seeking funding took up a significant amount of staff's time.
- The funding process to the Council should be made simpler.
- It was discussed that the VSA, LJsCs and Area Partnerships should coordinate their activities and priorities for Shropshire.
- There is an issue around getting statutory bodies to understand and recognise the work of voluntary sector organisations and that many need paid members of staff to provide continuity of support and advice to these organisations.
- It is difficult to quantify the 'outcomes' of voluntary sector services as many are not necessarily hard outputs but improving 'quality of life' for residents.

- Issues were raised about voluntary organisations funding CRB checks for their staff. It was suggested that the Council should act as the Designated Authority for all voluntary sector organisations they support and provide the admin for free.
- It was agreed that all new Shropshire Councillors should be briefed on the VSA and the value of support voluntary sector organisations.

#### Priorities

1. Briefing new Shropshire Councillors on the work of the voluntary sector (and Assembly) – broken down into forum area.
2. Raising the profile of the environmental impact of the voluntary sector.
3. Raising awareness of funding uncertainty or voluntary projects and having a clear point of contact in the new Shropshire Council.

### **Children's Summit**

#### The role/function of the Children's Summit

- Explained how group works – representation of voluntary sector and how it has an impact. Speakers, networking, sharing information and funding bids.
- Need to reach out to smaller groups and organisations.
- Possibly move around the county.
- Groups can feed into Integrate newsletter.
- Also Summit feeds into Children's Trust.
- In north how reps sit on local partnership.

#### Actions

- Need to address gaps of reps on key groups e.g. mental health etc.
- Need second rep for South group for local partnership.
- Need second rep for Central group for local partnership.
- Issues in South or managing young people's agenda within Health and Well-being groups and still make sure that issues are raised.
- Issues in timing of meetings – some can't make day and some can't make evening.
- Issues around feedback of reps on groups – not always happening.
- Hoping to have elections for new chair in summer.
- Done some mapping in South – need to link that information in.

#### Interest in the Forum

- To find out what's going on and how it fits.
- Understand context and highlight group in terms of what group does and how can link into.
- Raise profile.
- Look for funding.
- Listen, learn and understand links with community officer role.
- Knowing what's going on – getting information.
- Making connections with other organisations with similar interests – networking, learning, sources of funding.

#### Issues

- Availability of disability awareness – especially autism.
- Awareness training – lack of information/understanding.
- Identify gaps and analysis.
- Compact – each FOI should get a copy and comment on plus feedback from the Assembly.

## Priorities

### 1. Communication

- Cross cutting issues between different FOI.
- Sharing information and feedback from group reps.
- Not all IT based range of methods.
- Champions in each area.

### 2. Broadening representation across Shropshire on all key groups.

- E.g. Joint Commissioning, local partnerships etc.

### 3. Mapping

- Gaps
- Linking to existing work/mapping
- Don't duplicate

## Visual Arts Network

### Issues

- Partnership working
- Making artists and groups known
- Signposting to other groups and projects
- Engaging community interest through the VCSA
- Putting out accessible information (using the VAN website)
- Working to make disability art more mainstream

### Priorities

#### 1. Wider benefits to community of arts – life enhancing, inspiring.

- Health and well-being
- Tourism
- Income/businesses
- Education
- Cultural sense of belonging/ to Shropshire

#### 2. Information Sharing

- Networks
- Promoting and emerging
- Clear transparent and accountable
- Info sharing with statutory sectors
- Inclusion
- Cross themes – partnerships
- Cohesive information
- VAN website

#### 3. Representation of arts and artists

- Promotion and recognition
- Making art
- Access and inclusion