

Briefing Sheet

Shropshire VCS Assembly Board

13 April 2011



This briefing sets out key issues covered by the VCS Assembly Board at its meeting on the 13 April 2011. This paper is designed to provide an update for Forums of Interest and to promote communication between the Assembly's Forums of Interest and the VCS Assembly Board. The new challenges and opportunities currently facing the sector, such as those contained within the Decentralisation and Localism Bill and other national policy documents, mean the need for strong communications within the Assembly and between its groups are even more important than ever.

New Forum of Interest - Social Enterprise

Jean Jarvis from South Shropshire Furniture Scheme attended the Board Meeting to discuss the development of a new Forum of Interest for Social Enterprise. The Board discussed how the Forum may develop. The discussion explored opportunities for developing links between existing networks such as Partners for Social Enterprise which operates at a sub regional level and provides opportunities for many of Shropshire's social enterprises to network with others. Jean spoke about all the support available for social enterprises and it was agreed that there is work required to communicate with others/ raise awareness and clarify the way in which this new forum will operate.

Partnership work with Shropshire Council

The Board discussed the new partnership arrangements put in place between Shropshire Council and the VCS Assembly. A VCS Task Group has been established to lead a process of change and consider the implications of the Government's Decentralisation and Localism Bill and other key policy documents such as the Modernising Commissioning Green Paper and national strategy 'Building a Stronger Civil Society'. The group comprises Shropshire Council's Chief Executive, Senior Managers from Shropshire Council, Elected Members, The VCS Chair and Shadow Chair and VCS Assembly Board members working as sector representatives.

Reporting to the VCS Task Group are three sub groups. Each group is led by a Senior Manager in Shropshire Council and includes Council Officers, Elected Members and VCS Assembly Representatives. Groups and leads for the VCS are as follows:

- Commissioning – Anne Seymour
- Performance – Heather Osborne
- Community Right to Buy and Community Right to Challenge – Bob Morgan

The Board received a progress report from each of the sub groups.

A VCS consultative group has been established to lead on VCS engagement with the wider sector and to explore VCS issues prior to partnership meetings. Elaine Griffiths has been leading the development of this group and supporting its work. Members of Forums of Interest and the Wider Assembly are encouraged to feed issues into this group. In order to help with this process all papers of meetings are made available via web pages on the VCS Assembly website. See:

<http://shrop.net/2shropnet/AToZOfMini-sites/V/VoluntaryCommunitySectorAssembly/PartnershipWork2011>

Feedback – Annual Assembly 7 April

The Board considered the feedback received from the VCS Assembly Members at the Annual Assembly on 7 April. The verbal feedback and evaluation forms suggested that the event had been helpful and that there was wide spread support for the priorities forming the Assembly's Strategy for 2011 and beyond. The event had covered key themes around sector resilience including innovation, collaboration and partnership. The Board discussed the importance of working to keep members up to date with developments and in building consultation processes into all areas of work. Information from the Annual Assembly is available on the following webpage.

<http://shrop.net/2shropnet/AToZOfMini-sites/V/VoluntaryCommunitySectorAssembly/AnnualAssembly2011>

Financial Support from Shropshire Council

At the VCS Annual Assembly on 7 April Kim Ryley, Chief Executive of Shropshire Council, had made an offer to provide £100,000 to support the sector prepare for the challenges it faces. Challenges include an expectation by national Government that the VCS will play a much stronger role in delivering public services and helping to reduce vulnerability and increase resilience in local communities. The VCS Assembly Board discussed the importance of developing a proposal to spend the money that would provide maximum benefit for the sector. Key themes and principles were agreed including a need to support forums of interest and collaborative working within the sector, a need to work with other sectors and the importance of getting ready to tender for service and compete with other service providers. It was agreed that a separate meeting should be held to complete the proposal and that this should be shared with the wider membership once approved.

Other Key Issues

A number of other key issues were discussed by the VCS Assembly Board and these are briefly summarised below:

- Feedback from Forums of Interest is considered at each Board Meeting and at the April meeting the news from Forums was very mixed. Some Forums are experiencing difficulties and pressures caused by the restructuring and redesign of public sector services, while others are seeing new opportunities for increased VCS involvement and delivery. Future commissioning is currently a big issue for most of the Forums.
- Area representation is a big issue for the VCS Assembly. The Assembly Board is keen to determine how partnership arrangements may work at an area level and is conscious that area representation can be particularly important for small groups and organisations. Feedback from the Forums of Interest and wider membership is encouraged in order to more fully discuss how the needs of members may best be met.
- Personalisation and changes to health services forms another key issue. The Board agreed that a focused workshop would be beneficial. This will be taken forward by the Board and communicated widely.
- Recession and economic impact has been a rolling area of work and it was agreed that it is time to complete the annual sector wide survey to allow the Board to accurately reflect current issues.

Contact Details

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