

Shropshire Voluntary and Community Sector Assembly

Board Newsletter December 2009



The most recent meeting of the Assembly Board took place on the 1st December. We heard from guest speakers Cllr Martin Bennett (Member Champion for the Third Sector); Celia Bahrami (Director of the Shropshire Partnership) and Laura Rowley (Director of Resources, Shropshire Council). Discussions ranged from the likely impact of the public sector spending squeeze to the clarity and accessibility of Partnership structures. We welcomed a new Forum of Interest and, of course, heard news and issues from yourselves via our Representatives who are out and about attending Forum of Interest meetings, Partnership meetings and generally 'keeping their ears to the ground'. Highlights from the Board Meeting are contained in this newsletter, for more detail, see the Board papers & full minutes of the meeting on our website: <http://www.2shrop.net/shropvcsassembly>.

Budget Special

Laura Rowley (Director of Resources of Shropshire Council) came to speak to the Board about the Budget Consultation 2010/11. Next year a total of £7.1m of savings need to be made and Laura explained the plans for achieving this.

As you might expect Board members asked lots of questions, about the budget and other issues, on behalf of the Assembly and here is a flavour of the answers.

Do cuts in grants feature in these budget proposals?

Cuts in grants do not feature heavily in the detailed budget plans. There are some small planned grant cuts in Leisure and Tourism. Children and Young People's Services and Community Services are not assuming any Voluntary Sector grant cuts. However, the Area Partnership budget for Area based initiatives will cease.

Having only just set up the Area Partnership structures, it does not seem right to be already cutting the £480,000 budget, for Area initiatives.

This budget was created as a growth budget for 2009/10 and was on top of the £1.1m for Local Joint Committees (new money provided by the Unitary Council) and the £0.5m capital managed by Community Services to help with village hall improvements and similar schemes. These latter two budgets are to be maintained and so there is still substantial extra money available to the Sector.

Planning is difficult with year by year settlements, can we move to longer settlement periods? Laura agreed that 3 year grant funding is ideal, however, 2010-2011 is the last year of a 3 year settlement and there will be a comprehensive spending review before the next funding settlement is determined. At the moment, the Council has no idea how much funding they will receive from 2011 onwards and until the Government provides some certainty to the Council over a longer time frame, money will have to be allocated on a year by year basis.

VCS organisations had had a guarantee of maintaining their funding for the first year of the Unitary Authority and then been expecting reviews this year. Many organisations have still heard nothing can you clarify the position?

Laura said that Directorates would only be reviewing where they had concerns, so not all organisations would be reviewed in a formal way. There is a guarantee that a notice period of six months would be given before any cuts are implemented in grant payments. Directorates had been asked to carry out reviews by the end of September so she expected, but could not guarantee, that organisations that had not heard are not presently under review. Laura agreed to ask Directorates to send out a letter to all organisations confirming the funding for next year. A number of voluntary organisations provide services to the Council under contractual agreements, these contracts are subject to the usual negotiation arrangements with the Lead Directorate.

More Questions & Answers on this topic can be found in the full minutes of the Board

Have you got news for me?

Thanks to all of you who have sent in information for, and feedback on, the weekly e-mail bulletins. Don't forget that if you have news you would like to share please get in touch.

Shropshire VCS Assembly Board

Next meeting: **15th March 2010**



Meet Cllr Bennett, 3rd Sector Champion.

Cllr Bennett came along to the Assembly Board meeting to introduce himself to the Board and find out how we can work closely together to promote the Third Sector and address issues of concern.

Cllr Bennett says:

'I must confess to being startled when Cllr Barrow, Leader of the Council, asked me to be Champion for the Voluntary and Community Sector. Moi? Champion? I am old enough to associate "Champion" with a wonder horse - and I have never really thought of myself as a wonder.

Initially I was not even sure that I had much experience, as I tend to think more of the 26 years I have been a Town Councillor in Oswestry and the 22 years I served as a Borough Councillor, but a little deeper thought showed that, during that period, I have also been quite active with voluntary and community groups'.

'Quite active' is something of an understatement, as Cllr Bennett has an impressive portfolio of volunteering experience and association with, and support of local voluntary groups.

'I have always been impressed by the commitment of all those who give so generously of their time to work for the benefit of their local communities.....there is a wealth of practical experience (out there) which sometimes gets lost in the fog of policy and strategy that senior officers and councillors have to work with. I am therefore pleased to champion the cause of the Voluntary and Community Sector'.

The Board looks forward to working closely with Cllr Bennett over the coming year.

What's That Coming Over The Hill?

As a Sector we need to prepare ourselves to cope with the future. One of the items on the Board's agenda was a Horizon Scan. Among the issues discussed were

- A squeeze on public sector spending
- A change in Government
- A new Community Strategy and a shake up in Partnership structures.
- Digital Switchover for Shropshire
- Transforming social care

Find out about our proposed actions to address these issues and more from the full minutes.

Two key actions to look out for are:

- An Evidence Base full of local case studies demonstrating the value of the VCS in Shropshire.
- An open and proactive register of VCS organisations who are interested in service delivery; including those with **ambitions** for service delivery, and **creative ideas** about service delivery, as well as actual service delivery experience.

Forum's Flourish

A group of VCS organisations working with Hearing Impaired individuals in Shropshire are getting together in January for their first meeting as a new Forum of Interest (FOI). The Board welcomed their application to join the Assembly, and they will be linking in to the Board through the existing Disability FOI.

We now have 11 associated Forums of Interest. Each one is made up of a network of VCS organisations working in a common field, that get together to share information and address common issues. All of our FOI's welcome new members. Details of each one are available on our website. New FOI's are also most welcome, please contact the VCS Assembly Co-ordinator for further information.

Open For Business : Don't forget that the main part of the Assembly Board Meetings are open to Assembly Members as observers and you can ask questions by prior agreement with the Chair. **So why not join us on 15th March 1.30 p.m, in the Oswestry Room, Shirehall? Our guest speaker will be Michael Hyatt, Assistant Chief Exec at Shropshire Council.** If there are any issues you would particularly like to see the Board discuss, you can raise these with any Board Member who can submit papers for inclusion on the agenda, or have an informal chat with the Assembly Co-ordinator. The agenda will be sent out two weeks before the meeting (1st March), so please let us have your ideas a week or so before this date.

Contact us

<http://www.2shrop.net/shropsvcsassembly>
or contact the VCSA Co-ordinator in the Shropshire Partnership
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