



Annual Report 2011/12

**Shropshire Voluntary and
Community Sector Assembly**



Executive Summary

This report covers the significant progress made, and activity delivered by Shropshire VCS Assembly over the last 12 months. Shropshire's Voluntary and Community Sector has been playing an increasingly prominent role in the development and delivery of national and local policy and it is anticipated that this influence will continue as the Government's vision of transferring power from the state into the hands of local communities is realised.

Considerable work has taken place to address the priorities identified at the 2011 Annual Assembly and this work will continue alongside work to address new and emerging challenges and opportunities.

The report does not do justice to the range of work undertaken by the Assembly's Forums of Interest or its individual members but does help to demonstrate the work of the VCS Assembly Board and the partnership groups that have been established in the last year.

During 2011/12 the VCS Assembly Board:

- Established new partnership groups in order to work to address three main priority themes.
- Welcomed two new Forums of Interest: the Information, Advice, Advocacy and Guidance Forum and the Shropshire Older People's Assembly (SOPA).
- Developed a new role in order to support the development of the 14 VCSA Forums of Interest.
- Started work to develop new structures designed to better enable Shropshire's VCS groups and organisations to work collaboratively to win funding and contacts.
- Initiated work to build new partnership arrangements with Shropshire's private sector.
- Supported the growth of strong working relationships between the VCS Assembly and Shropshire Council's Elected Members.
- Established new working relationships with representatives of Shropshire's Town and Parish Councils.
- Further developed working relationships between the VCS Assembly Chair, Board Members and senior level Boards such as the Shropshire Partnership Leaders Board and Shropshire Council's Senior Management Board.
- Continued to implement the Shropshire Compact through a more integrated approach, working with partnership groups.
- Worked to further build communication mechanisms including additional newsletters and briefings for partners.
- Acted on the feedback obtained at last VCS Annual Assembly 2011.
- Focused on maintaining strong representational arrangements.

More information concerning the core work undertaken by the VCS Assembly Board and the progress made since the last Annual Assembly is included below.

Introduction

The Shropshire Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) Assembly works to represent Shropshire's voluntary groups and organisations. There are over 300 members representing the diversity of the voluntary and community sector in Shropshire. Many members are small groups relying entirely on the dedication and commitment of volunteers, others are larger VCS organisations delivering a range of services to the people of Shropshire.



Shropshire VCS Assembly works to bring the sector together, providing a common voice, and an opportunity to work together. It encourages and promotes partnership and collaboration both within the sector but also with other sectors. In particular the VCS Assembly allows the VCS to work with the Public Sector to increase cross sector understanding and facilitate joint projects and initiatives that allow the needs of local people and communities to be met more effectively.

Any VCS group or organisation operating in Shropshire is encouraged to become a member and to participate in the Assembly as much or as little as suits their organisation. Membership is free of charge and the benefits of joining include:

- Being first to hear of the latest events, training and networking opportunities
- Meeting other VCS groups and organisations to exchange information and ideas,
- Working together in different groups and forums to address common problems
- Receiving news of funding and consultation opportunities
- Receiving news of tender and employment opportunities
- Learning of new partnership and service delivery opportunities
- Accessing reports and information
- Joining in at the annual event
- Working as part of one or more Forums of Interest

All members are kept up to date with the latest developments through the website, information bulletins, emails and regular newsletters.

The Assembly is led by a Board which meets approximately 5 times a year, with sub groups meeting more frequently. Through its meetings, the VCS Assembly Board works to deliver an annual work programme and to respond to the issues raised by its members. The Board is formed of representatives from the different Forums of Interest and three area representatives (Northern, Central and Southern areas).

Forums of Interest are groups of VCS organisations which come together to discuss and address common issues. Forums of Interest may deliver similar activities/share aims, provide common types of service and target similar client groups. New Forums of Interest are developing all the time. Established forums now include:

- Voluntary Sector Mental Health Forum
- Health and Social Care Forum
- Shropshire Pan Disability Forum
 - Disability Network
 - Visual Impairment Forum
 - Deaf and Hard of Hearing Forum
- Children and Young People's Summit
- Shropshire Community Transport Consortium
- Visual Arts Forum
- Shropshire Community Recycling Network
- VCS Training Providers Consortium
- Shropshire Infrastructure Partnership
- Housing Support Forum
- Shropshire Heritage Forum
- Social Enterprise Forum
- Information, Advice and Advocacy Forum
- Shropshire Older People's Assembly

More information on the Assembly's Forums of Interest is available as a separate document. This includes a summary of the work of each of the Forums of Interest. Strong communication with Forum of Interest members and the engagement of small groups are top priorities for the VCS Assembly Board.

VCSA Strategy and Annual Assembly 2011

At the VCS Annual Assembly in 2011 Sonia explained that the VCS Assembly had been successful in its work to establish a voice for the sector. She spoke of how the Forums of Interest came together to influence the work of the VCS Assembly Board. She also detailed the changing environment facing the sector and how this was requiring a different and collective response.



Big Society and the Localism Bill (now the Localism Act) had started to highlight the changes that would impact on the voluntary and community sector including the introduction of new payment mechanisms such as personal budgets and reductions in funding brought about by Public Sector cuts and transformation.

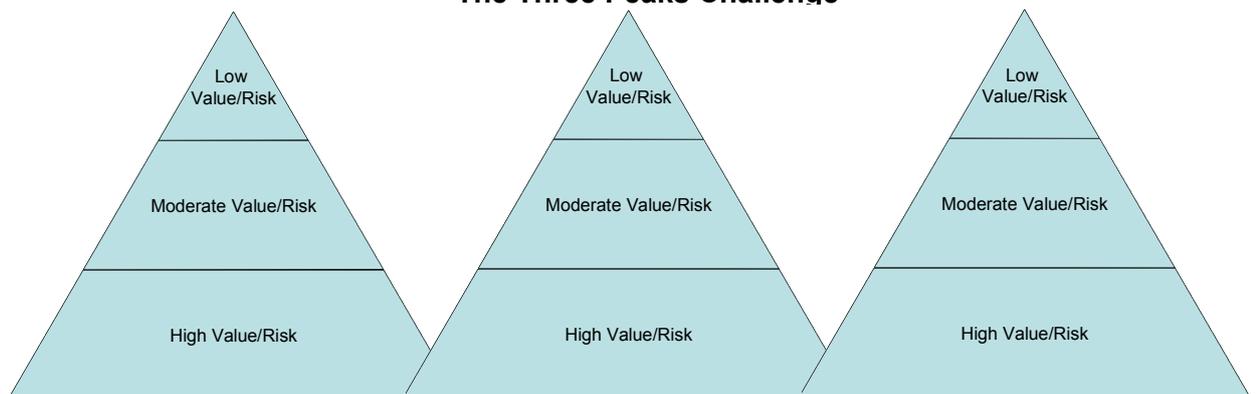
At the 2011 Annual Assembly Sonia outlined the work the Assembly Board had undertaken to produce a strategy. She spoke about the evidence that had been gathered through the completion of a review including a questionnaire to all Assembly members and more detailed survey and discussion work with the Forums of Interest. A sub group had been established to act on the feedback received and to develop a draft Strategy.

Key principles of the Strategy's development are transparency, support for the Forums of Interest, ensuring the VCS is seen as an equal partner by other sector representatives and working to maximise involvement and influence in the development of the 'New World'. Sonia commented that Forums of Interest have different needs, different aspirations and required different types and levels of support.

Sonia worked to inform the audience of the main contents of the Strategy and its key building blocks. She explained that the Strategy was partially built on areas of commonality with the Public Sector. Sonia described the main elements of the Strategy as the 3 peaks challenge. The three key themes are:

- Commissioning
- Performance
- Community Rights to Buy and Challenge

'The Three Peaks Challenge'



Commissioning Framework

Performance Framework

Rights to Challenge and Buy

Task groups had started to meet for each theme, reporting to a VCS Task Group. Sonia introduced the VCS leads for each group and encouraged members of the Assembly to contract the leads if they would like to get more involved in the work. Sonia highlighted the progress made to date and the importance of drawing the different elements together, recognising overlap and common issues and working across groups where appropriate.

A key priority cutting across the work areas is the engagement of small groups. Sonia stressed the importance of allowing new, small and less developed groups and organisations the opportunity to grow and develop if they wished and to progress through the levels of development described. She explained that small groups and organisations were at the heart of the Strategy and would not be forgotten in favour of a focus on larger, more developed organisations.

Sonia spoke about work on the horizon including:

- Knowledge gathering and sharing
- Private sector links
- Links with Elected Members
- Impact and changes to healthcare commissioning

Sonia ended the presentation by asking the audience to show their support for the Strategy and the proposal that the funding offered by Shropshire Council should be used to support the development of the sector, in particular the Forums of Interest by:

- Providing resources to support current and new Forums of Interest. Supporting them to operate in fair, transparent ways and to respond to new challenges and opportunities.
- Identifying new and existing partners (internal and external) able to provide in-kind support.
- Working to develop VCS Organisations to deliver services through social enterprise, Forums of Interest/ consortia and through Special Purpose Vehicles/joint ventures.

Sonia also explained that she wished members to comment and influence the Strategy through the use of the evaluation forms, comments boards and by email and telephone. She asked members to get more involved. Sonia mentioned the Board was due to meet in the next week and would consider all feedback received.



Since the 2011 Annual Assembly the priorities described above have been developed and acted on and this report seeks to highlight key developments and achievements over the last 12 months.

Progress Report

The tables below summarise the common issues, concerns and comments that have been raised through the workshops and events that have been held since the last VCSA Annual Report. The work that has taken place to address these issues is briefly summarised. The report covers the work of the VCS Assembly Board but is not a reflection of the diversity of work and considerable achievements of all the VCS Assembly's Forums of Interest and member groups and organisations.

You said...	The VCS Assembly responded by...
You were concerned about personalisation and changes in the way adult social care services are delivered	Holding a workshop in July to give VCS Assembly members the opportunity to work together and with key individuals from Shropshire Council and Shropshire County Primary Care Trust. A wealth of information was collated and fed to the appropriate people to act on. Further work has since taken place and some Assembly members have reported back that they have become involved in local initiatives as a result of the session.
You wanted closer links between the VCS Assembly and the development of Shropshire's Health and Wellbeing Board and GP Commissioning	The VCS Assembly Chair has been representing the VCSA within the key strategic meetings that have been taking place to establish new Boards and set up interim arrangements prior to the more formal introduction of new working practices.
Learning more about commissioning and how the VCS can be commissioned by the public sector was a priority	Commissioning has remained a priority throughout the year. Anne Seymour, as Commissioning Lead, has undertaken a huge amount of work both individually and with other Assembly members through partnership groups. The work being undertaken to support the Forums of Interest has included the provision of commissioning workshops and considerable joint work with local commissioners.
You wanted the VCSA Board to become involved in the work Shropshire is undertaking to develop a Joint Strategic Needs Assessment – an evidence base of need.	The VCS Assembly secured a representative within the partnership group meeting to develop the Shropshire Joint Strategic Needs Assessment. Regular reports have been made to the VCSA Board and wider engagement will be planned as the work develops.
You wanted to know how to get involved in Place Based Interventions (PBI) – local partnership initiatives that work with a specific community or part of a community to address identified problems and needs.	We have been publishing regular updates on these PBI projects via the Assembly newsletter and website. More VCS organisations are now involved in these projects as a result of this work.
You wanted the Assembly to explore how it could prevent large competitors coming into Shropshire and taking the business of local VS organisations	The development of the contracting vehicle/consortium is designed to allow the VCS to compete with other service providers by working together.

You said...	The VCS Assembly responded by...
<p>You wanted the Assembly to work with the statutory sector to avoid competition between statutory and VCS services and to encourage cross sector delivery</p>	<p>Much of the joint work that has taken place over the last year has involved policy and process design but a commitment has been made to move towards looking at cross sector service delivery and joint ventures in the coming year.</p>
<p>You feel that some of the positive work and new commitments aren't filtering throughout Shropshire Council and through all staff</p>	<p>Two workshops for Council Staff have been held by the VCS Assembly Support Team to spread the messages within the Council. The VCS Assembly Chair and Vice Chair have presented to the senior managers at Shropshire Council to raise awareness widely and working with the VCS has been a key message within a series of induction/briefing sessions that have been held for <u>all</u> Shropshire Council staff.</p>
<p>You were concerned that the Assembly's agenda is driven by Shropshire Council</p>	<p>The VCS Assembly Board established the priorities for the year and continues to work to address them. The Chair and other Board members are also responsible for establishing new groups and initiatives. Shropshire Council does not have representation on the Assembly Board (although it does host the VCSA Support Team).</p>
<p>You wanted more information on the Localism Bill (now the Localism Act) and said national policy was confusing</p>	<p>We have been including regular updates on the Localism Act through the VCS Assembly newsletter and have been issuing information on the VCSA website. We also included information on the Localism Act in the Have Your Say workshop held in February. Further briefings are planned once national government issues more detailed regulations on the Localism Act and the Community Rights to Bid and Challenge.</p>
<p>You were very worried that Payment by Results would be rolled out without recognition of the challenges this brings for VCS groups and organisations</p>	<p>Rosemary Collie and Hilary McGlynn have led work to ensure this concern is well communicated and evidence of concerns was compiled through use of a survey to all Assembly Members. Shropshire Council has committed to adopting a flexible and combined approach to payment methods where this is possible (some national schemes may not allow this).</p>
<p>You wanted to understand more about the work of the VCSA Board</p>	<p>The VCSA issues a quarterly briefing detailing the work undertaken by the Board. All Board papers are issued via the Assembly website. A Chairs newsletter is now also produced to allow additional information and issues to be covered.</p>
<p>You wanted access to the information discussed at partnership meetings</p>	<p>All partnership groups established by the VCS Assembly have their papers published on the Assembly website. A VCS consultative group also meets regularly to allow any Assembly member to get involved and influence the work taking place.</p>

You said...	The VCS Assembly responded by...
More information on tender opportunities would be helpful	The VCS Assembly newsletter now includes all tender opportunities issued by Shropshire Council. We are currently exploring other sources of information on tender opportunities so that this may be expanded.
Information on funding opportunities is important to you	The VCS Assembly continues to use its fortnightly newsletter to promote funding opportunities. This is assisted by regular funding news from Shropshire Council's External Funding Team.
Networking with other VCS groups and organisations is valuable	Through 2011/12 the VCS Assembly has increased the number of workshops it has held to allow its members to get together. We also continue to promote local and national events and networking opportunities through the Assembly newsletter.
Consultation information is important so you have the opportunity to comment as local policies and practice are developed	This is a core area of work for the VCS Assembly. The newsletter includes details of local consultations but we have also worked to hold workshops and meetings around consultation opportunities to allow the Assembly to collate more detailed or joint responses where appropriate.
You wanted to develop links with Shropshire's Town and Parish Councils	The VCS Assembly Board has been looking at the changes impacting upon Town and Parish Councils, particularly in relation to public sector reform, neighbourhood planning and the introduction of local budgets. A steering group has also been exploring local level partnership pilots designed to bring together Town and Parish Councils, Elected Members and VCS groups and organisations.
The VCS Assembly should have a dialogue with Council Elected Members.	A briefing on the work of the VCS Assembly and its priorities was held for Shropshire Council's elected members in July and work with Elected Members has continued through the partnership groups. Shropshire Council's Portfolio Holder for Flourishing Shropshire Communities and his deputies continue to provide valuable support for the VCS Assembly.
You would like the VCS Assembly Board to consider good practice in other areas of the country.	As each new project has developed research into good practice has been undertaken. However, increasingly the Assembly has found that few areas of the country have the same strength of partnership between the VCS and public sector that exist in Shropshire.
You wanted the Assembly to find a way of bringing the VSC and business together	This forms one of the 3 main projects currently being delivered – Extended Partnerships. A range of new relationships and ways of working are currently being set up.

You said...	The VCS Assembly responded by...
A greater range of communication methods should be adopted by the Assembly.	Focusing on looking at more communication methods. David Fairlough has worked with the team to set up a Facebook page and initiate a website modernisation project that will also cover email communication and online networking and information sharing opportunities.
Social Enterprise needed to be more integrated into the work of the VCS Assembly.	The Social Enterprise Forum is now more established and working hard to bring local networks together to represent social enterprise in Shropshire. Sue Fry is taking the lead in her role as an Assembly Board member.
You would like the VCS Assembly to focus on the needs of small groups and organisations.	The need of small groups continues to be a main priority for the VSC Assembly and is a common thread through all the projects and initiatives underway. In particular the needs of small groups are being considered as part of the development of the contracting vehicle/consortium.
Social Impact Measurement is something you feel you need to know more about	The Assembly has been promoting local training opportunities but also working in a partnership group with local experts to bring together resources – there are plans to develop a web based resource.
You were concerned that the changing environment and its new challenges would lead to volunteer fatigue	The VCS Assembly Board recognises that, as the amount of work it undertakes grows, increasing pressure is being put on unpaid volunteers as well as paid VCS staff. The Localism Act, with its focus on transferring power and responsibility to local communities, also suggests that demands on volunteers will grow. These concerns are being communicated to partners and considered in the development of new projects and ways of working.
You were concerned that there is competition within the VCS rather than collaboration	The work taking place to support the Assembly's Forums of Interest and establishes the contracting vehicle/consortium offer the opportunity for organisations to work together rather than compete.
That the Assembly should work to provide more support for the Forums of Interest and continue to develop new forums to ensure the whole sector is represented.	Two new Forums have joined the Assembly in the last year. Work is currently underway with other VCS networks that have expressed an interest in joining, and to look at where gaps exist. It is recognised that it is not always a quick process to establish new forums. Support needs of existing Forums are being research and met through the Forum Support Project.
You wanted more information about VCS Forums and what they offer	This information has been made available on the VCS Assembly website and in a separate briefing sheet updated for the Annual Assembly 2012.

Priorities and Partnership

Shropshire Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) Assembly and Shropshire Council developed new partnership arrangements to consider the implications of the Government's Localism Act and other key policy documents such as the national strategy 'Building a Stronger Civil Society'. Recognising that the national agenda seeks to promote the devolution of power, responsibility and resources to the community level and encourage the transfer of local assets and services to voluntary organisations, Shropshire VCS Assembly worked with Shropshire Council to establish a VCS Task Group to lead the process of change.

The group comprises Shropshire Council's Chief Executive, Senior Managers from Shropshire Council, Elected Members, The VCS 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 VCS Board member and a Senior Manager in Shropshire Council. Each group includes Council Officers, Elected Members and VCS Assembly Representatives.

Partnership task groups and leads are as follows:

Commissioning

Anne Seymour, VCSA Board Member, VCS Lead

Mike Morris, Head of Commissioning and Procurement, Shropshire Council Lead

Performance

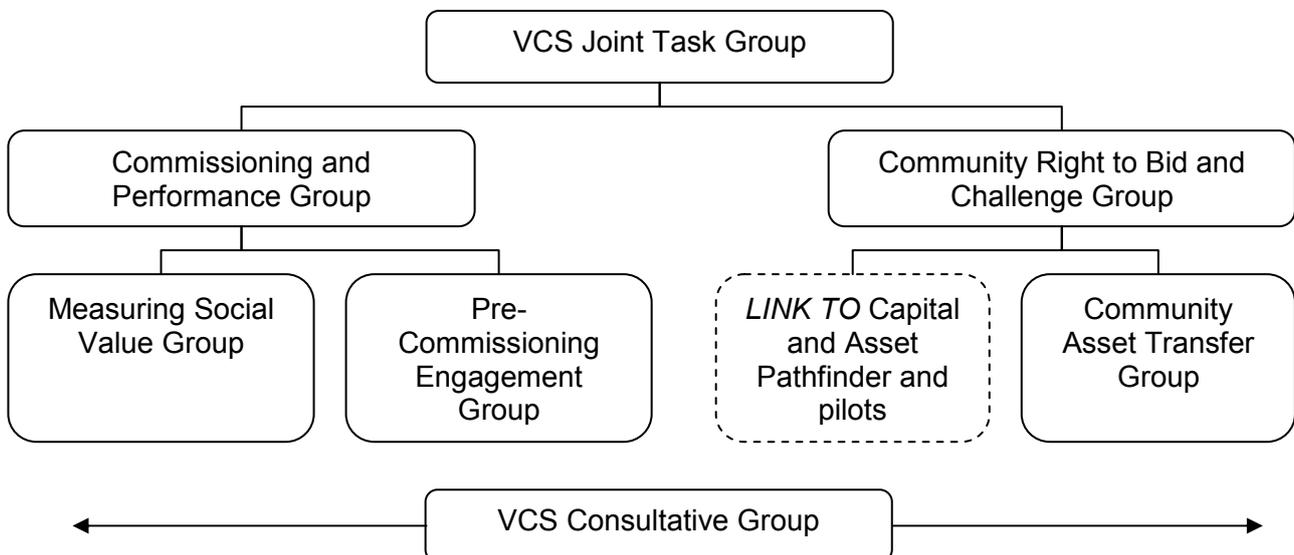
Rosemary Collie and Hilary McGlynn, VCSA Board Member, joint VCS Leads

Wendy Marston, Corporate Head of Business Improvement, Shropshire Council Lead

Community Right to Buy and Community Right to Challenge

Bob Morgan, VCSA Board Member, VCS Lead

Mike Hyatt, Corporate Head of Strategic Planning, Shropshire Council Lead



As the work progressed through the year the Performance and Commissioning Groups combined to ensure an integrated approach. More information on each of the strands of work is included below. All of the key documents described in the work below were issued to VCS Assembly members as part of the recent 'Have Your Say' consultation which ended on 30 March 2012. The consultation period also included a workshop which was well attended by Assembly members and held on 2nd February 2012. More information on this is available by following the Have Your Say link on the VCS Assembly website:

<http://www.shrop.net/shropvcsassemblies>

Commissioning

In March 2011 the Cabinet Office published a Modernising Commissioning Green Paper that commented on a need to: *'support the creation and expansion of mutuals, co-operatives, charities and social enterprises, and enable these groups to have a much greater involvement in the running of public services.'* This set some context for the work the VCS Assembly had started to undertake.

It was recognised that improved commissioning practice would encourage a flourishing VCS, increasing community involvement in activities which were previously provided and dominated by statutory service providers; enhancing the responsiveness of local authorities and other local commissioning bodies to the community's needs and priorities; and supporting local economic growth. The Commissioning group sought to:

- Generate greater transparency and the right sort of support to allow smaller organisations to take part in commissioning processes.
- Clarify principles and procedures, particularly identifying where there are blocks in the current system.
- Consider good practice in decommissioning – understanding opportunities and risks, ensuring a more level playing field of providers, training those with less capacity, ensuring an active market.
- Understand the potential to shape the environment we want in Shropshire in terms of commissioning and service delivery.
- Produce a Commissioning Strategy and supporting information.

Commissioning Strategy

A Commissioning Strategy has been developed to provide an overview of Shropshire Council's approach to commissioning. It sets out the national and local policy context, key commissioning objectives and details elements of the commissioning process. It has been designed to promote good practice in commissioning and to act as a resource for local service providers aiming to deliver commissioned services.

The Commissioning Strategy will sit alongside other documents and guidance. Work is currently underway to extend this work to other public sector commissioners to continue to develop and improve commissioning practice across the public sector in Shropshire.

Commissioning Engagement Guidance

Guidance has been designed to sit alongside the overarching Commissioning Strategy. The guidance sets out how commissioning will be undertaken and how the sector will be involved at each stage. It sets out a step-by-step process to follow, acting as guidance for commissioners and potential service providers. Effective commissioning ensures all stakeholders (including service users and service providers) are effectively engaged in the process of identifying needs, service design, delivery and review, resulting in services that best meet local needs and deliver the best outcomes.

Commissioning Intentions Document

A Commissioning Intentions document has been designed to communicate commissioning opportunities to VCS organisations, Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) and other potential service providers operating in Shropshire. The document collates information from across all Shropshire Council's service areas. It highlights where current contracts and financial arrangements are coming to an end and where new tender opportunities are anticipated. The aim of the document is to communicate potential service delivery

opportunities as early as possible, allowing any interested service providers to undertake work to prepare for future opportunities.

As the document and its underlying processes become more integrated into the work of the Council the Commissioning Intentions document will become more focused on the outcomes that Shropshire Council intends to commission rather than services. Focusing on outcomes will offer the opportunity to innovate and deliver services in new ways to best meet local needs.

Decommissioning Guidance

Decommissioning Guidance has been produced to encourage and promote good practice in decommissioning. Decommissioning is a vitally important stage of the commissioning cycle and can lead to improvement if done well. The guidance sets out how to decommission effectively and will help both commissioners of services and service providers by communicating what to expect from the decommissioning process and how to work together to ensure the best outcome for service users.

Grants and Contracts research and recommendations

The use of VCS grants and contracts in Shropshire was researched and a series of recommendations developed. The recommendations were designed to generate clarity in the definitions and use of grants and contracts to bring about greater consistency and transparency. Overall it is suggested that grants are more appropriate for smaller values, shorter term initiatives and to trial new ways of delivering services. It is anticipated that some large grants will move to contracts to open up opportunities to all. A Grant Guardian role in the form of a small decision making group (including VCS Assembly representation) is currently being established to lead this change and implement new ways of working in line with the Commissioning Strategy. Other work in support of this will be in the form of support and training opportunities for commissioners.

Performance

The current Government has suggested that performance measurement under the previous Government had been overly bureaucratic and become a burden on the VCS and other service providers. National Indicators have reduced significantly in number and there has been a move towards the design of local performance measures. This context has allowed the group leading on Performance to adopt new principles at the local level; designing an approach that will allow for proportionality, accountability and transparency.

Current work includes mapping existing performance metrics, looking at case studies where a strong outcomes focus has been taken to VCS commissioning/performance and developing a new model/approach. Work completed includes:

- A performance survey to understand VCS Assembly members' views and concerns in relation to performance.
- Research into good practice including work that has taken place in other areas of the county such as Bristol, Camden, Harlow, Runcorn and Worcestershire.
- Consideration of the guidance produced by national bodies where a strong outcomes approach has been implemented – such as the Big Lottery, Charities Evaluation Service and OPM (Office for Public Management).
- The provision of VCS led training for Council staff to give an overview of the range of tools being used to measure impact in the sector; to explore more specific approaches such as Outcomes Stars, Social Accounting and Social Return on Investment.

Performance Framework

A Performance Framework has been developed to set out a new approach to performance management. It sets out a new 3 tiered system of managing commissioned services. The framework is designed to introduce a more proportionate system of performance monitoring – making performance requirements appropriate to the value/scale/risks of a contract/grant. It moves away from a 'one size fits all' approach and promotes the adoption of proportional and appropriate performance requirements and quality assurance. The framework also promotes a flexible approach to the use of payment mechanisms, again using the three tiered system to ensure payment approaches are appropriate to the value/scale/risks of a contract/grant. It is now important to consult on this approach to ensure it meets the objectives it has been designed to achieve: proportionality, flexibility and transparency.

Performance Guidance

A Performance Guidance document has been produced to support the implementation of a new approach to performance and the implementation of the Performance Framework. Performance measurement of contracts and grants will become more focused on outcomes and the framework will be used to ensure that performance management and payment options are proportionate to the value, size and risks of the contract, funding or grant opportunity.

Social Impact Tool Research

A Measuring Social Value sub group has been meeting to undertake a number of key projects.

- The development of clearer information on Shropshire's strategic outcomes/priorities.
- The development of an outcomes/measures bank to assist in the identification/development of measures.
- Development of a resource/ signposting webpage for social impact tools.

Community Right to Bid

The Community Right to Bid has been designed to provide an opportunity for voluntary and community groups and organisations and town and parish councils to take ownership of local assets.

The Community Right to Bid process includes the identification of assets of community value, these are then listed and the list maintained by the local authority. When listed assets come up for sale or change of ownership, the Right to Bid gives community groups the time to develop a bid and raise the money to bid to buy the asset when it comes on the open market.

In order to prepare for the introduction of the Community Right to Bid, the partnership group leading this element of work has established a sub group to develop a Community Asset Transfer Policy (described below). It has also:

- Responded to the national consultation.
- Considered how to integrate this new process into Shropshire Council's Asset Management Strategy, supporting plans and its Asset Disposal Policy.
- Worked to assess how local planning and consultation processes can enable the identification of assets of community value.
- Considered national best practice in community asset transfer.

Community Asset Transfer Policy

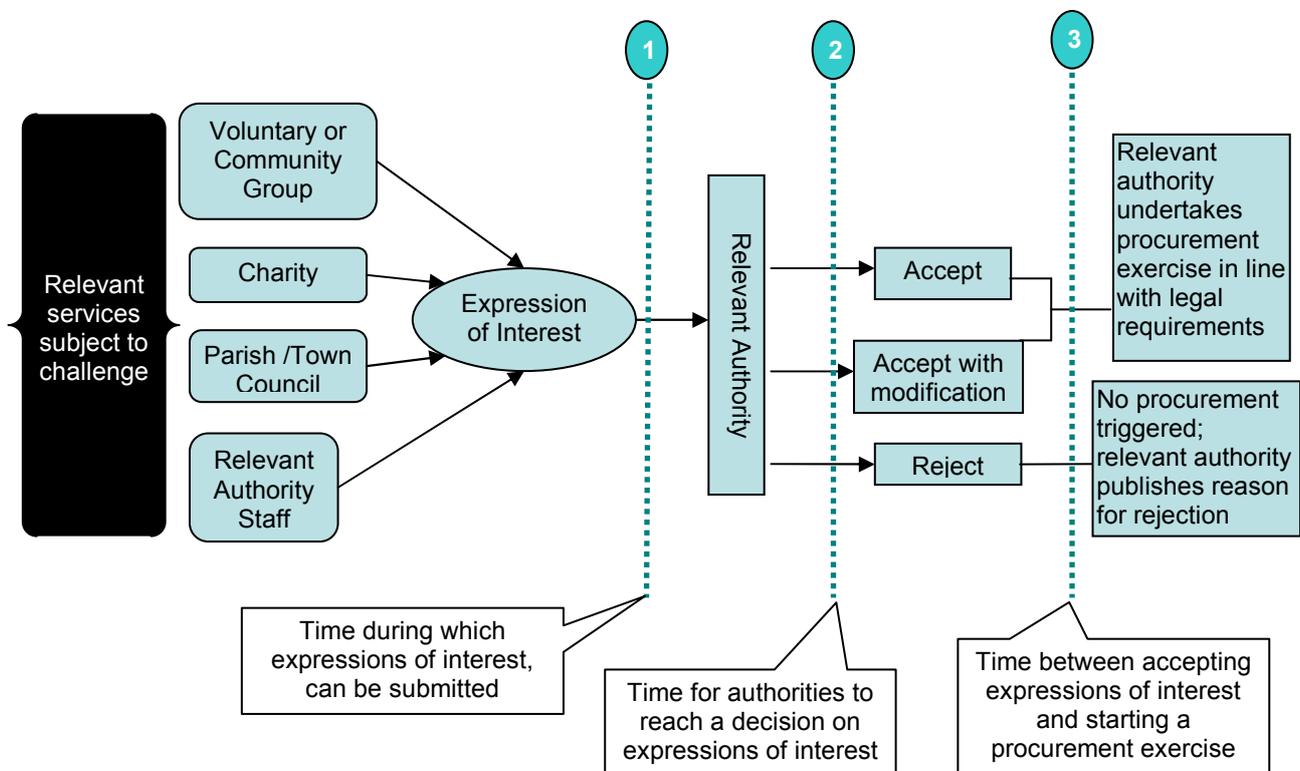
A Community Asset Transfer (CAT) Policy has been prepared by a sub group to enable Shropshire Council to positively respond to requests from voluntary and community groups to take on a Council owned asset (as a lease or through sale). The policy complements the implementation of the Community Right to Bid and the Council's Asset Strategy and supporting documents. The CAT Policy will be supported by a number of appendices and guidance documents designed to assist both Shropshire Council officers and local groups and organisations in their joint work to transfer community assets.



Community Right to Challenge

The Community Right to Challenge hands the initiative to communities with good ideas about how services can be run differently or better, ensures these ideas get a fair hearing, and gives them the time they may need to prepare effective bids to run the service. The Community Right to Challenge allows voluntary and community bodies, parish councils or two or more members of council staff to express an interest in running a local authority run or commissioned service. Where an expression of interest is accepted the local authority will then run a competitive procurement exercise for the contract to deliver that service.

Opportunities of the Community Right to Challenge include opening up markets – moving away from the same service providers delivering the same services for years without change. Challenges could include experience and knowledge of the tender process and potential competition from with a move towards open procurement. The process is shown below:



The Right to Buy and Right to Challenge Group started its work by collectively responding to the Government's consultation documents which set out the proposals for the introduction of these new powers. Since then the group has worked to:

- Develop an understanding of how the Community Right to Challenge will be integrated into local commissioning processes.
- Identify how the process will be managed and resourced at the local level.
- Consider how decision making processes will work.
- Develop draft documents such as an Expression of Interest Form.

The group is now awaiting more information from Government and will continue its work as this additional information is made available.

Forum Support

The aim of the VCS Assembly Support Project is to support, through the Forums of Interest and the wider groups, voluntary and community organisations throughout Shropshire. It will do so by helping to interpret local and national guidance on changes in service provision and to facilitate a two way communication between Shropshire Council and the Forums of Interest. The project will also identify support resources required by the Forums and coordinate training and workshops as required.

Expected Outcomes:

- Increased information provision and collaboration between Forums of Interest, including sharing of best practice and peer mentoring
- Increased transparency between Shropshire Council and VCS organisations
- Maximising sustainability of VCS organisations by communication of available grants, support services and private sector partnerships
- Increased number of groups joining the VCSA to become Service Delivery Organisations.
- Increased number of VCS organisations with the capacity to meet service delivery standards.
- Increased number of Forums of Interest that feel confident to tender for services.
- Increased number of Forums of Interest that feel confident to challenge for assets and services.
- Increased number of VCS organisations delivering payment by results contracts.
- New service delivery models by working in collaboration with the Contracting Vehicle and the Extended Partnership projects (projects explained below).

To date the project has been successful in understanding the needs of the Forums of Interests (evidenced in the Needs Analysis); developing a regular dialogue with Shropshire Council's Commissioners to facilitate an understanding between the VCS organisations and Commissioners (which has included delivering two Commissioning Workshops for VCS organisations); Actively supporting the development of Element 2 (contracting vehicle), the Shropshire Provider's Consortium, including coordinating consultation events and implementing communication tools (Wiggio and Facebook) in order that Forums have access to the latest information regarding the Consortium development and a platform to feedback; actively supporting the development of Element 3, Extended Partnerships; facilitating communication between forums of interest to enable joint working; highlighting premises and accommodation issues, which are being addressed in a new policy; and identifying a number of possible new Forums of Interest to be considered for 2012, (these include Interfaith, Equality and Diversity, Criminal Justice and Sport and Leisure).

Key pieces of work for the coming months include:

- Actively supporting the development of the Shropshire Provider's Consortium (see below); ensuring appropriate consultation with the Forums.
- Coordinating training and communication issues highlighted in the Needs Analysis and work with the Shropshire Infrastructure Partnership to ensure appropriate training is available for organisations wishing to engage in contracting and collaborating for public services.
- Maintaining the dialogue with Shropshire Council's Commissioning Managers and further developing relationships with other public service Commissioners.
- Pursuing the development of new Forums of Interest.

Developing a contracting vehicle/consortium

The VCS Assembly has agreed a number of key principles that will be adopted in the work to develop the contracting vehicle/consortium. These include:

- Collaboration - Promoting collaborative working through one holistic consortium that will not constrict membership and will encourage more engagement from the sector working closely with Assembly Forums of Interest.
- Openness - Offering opportunities to all VCS Assembly members whatever their size. Encouraging small organisations to get involved, ensuring support is available to allow smaller organisations to participate and develop as service providers.
- Transparency - Communicating effectively with VCS Assembly members and other stakeholders. Ensuring information concerning the development of a contracting vehicle/consortium is available to all using email, web pages, workshops and other tools as appropriate.
- Partnership - One of the strengths of the VCS Assembly is its strong focus on partnership working and collaboration both within the sector and also with partners including the public and private sectors. Cross sector service delivery will be supported as appropriate.
- Innovation – Working to obtain the best for service users, recognising that this may include support for service redesign initiatives.

Project Objectives include:

- The establishment of a contracting vehicle/consortium capable of delivering public services under contract through sub contracted VCS organisations.
- A growing number of local partner VCS organisations with the capacity and confidence to design and deliver contracted 'value for money' public services.
- To expand the number of local VCS organisations working in partnership ready to join the contracting vehicle/consortium.
- Establish robust quality, legal, financial and governance arrangements.
- Development of a Business Prospectus including mission, aims, governance and partnership arrangements, membership criteria, and joining processes, etc.

In January 2012 Initiative for Social Entrepreneurs (iSE) were appointed to act as the consultant for the project. The work completed to date has included:

- Collating and analysing existing evidence of the needs of Shropshire's Voluntary and Community Sector and the different contracting vehicle/consortia models available.
- Advice on best practice that would be practically transferable to Shropshire's rural geography and nature of Shropshire's voluntary and community sector.
- Work with public sector commissioners to design a contracting vehicle that fits with future service delivery opportunities.
- Provision of information and communication to ensure engagement opportunities for VSC Assembly members.
- Options appraisal and recommendations of an organisational structure for the Shropshire VCS trading vehicle

The consortium will now be known as the 'Shropshire Providers Consortium'

Extended Partnerships – working with the Private Sector

The aim of this Extended Partnerships project is to raise awareness of the developments of the VCSA amongst external partners and to promote the benefits of working in partnership with the sector in developing service delivery models, skills and workforce training, charitable and corporate giving and working together to better reach and support local communities.

In January 2012 two consultants were appointed to deliver the project: Impact Consultancy and the Shropshire and Telford Community Foundation. The work completed to date has included:

- Desktop research to identify good practice and cross-sector initiatives which could be replicated within the county
- Surveying both sectors to identify current levels, and the nature, of engagement between sectors, barriers and drivers for engagement and to identify where intervention would be best targeted. (in progress)
- Forum members workshop and telephone interviews
- Initial meetings with key private sector stakeholders (Chamber of Commerce, FSB, COG's, Shropshire Business Board, The Academy, Business in the Community) have been undertaken to promote the work and to start to identify potential areas for collaboration / joint working.
- Meetings with the Council's Commissioning Team and the Institute of Social Entrepreneurs to explore how commissioning and the new commissioning vehicle can enable and support the development of cross-sector service delivery partnerships. N.B. Domiciliary Care has been identified as a potential test-bed area for this aspect of the work, although this is still unconfirmed.

The next phase of the work will include a ten point plan including:

1. Host a 'Win Win' Event - aimed at Private Sector outlining the business case for working with 3rd sector organisations.
2. Hold a Dragons Den event – recruit business leaders from within Shropshire to sit on a panel which 3rd sector organisations pitch to in order to receive support (in the form of advice/mentoring etc).
3. Extending the mentoring scheme which is currently run by Shropshire Business Board to include the third sector. Third sector leaders to be trained as mentors as well as third sector organisations to receive mentoring.
4. Step into my Shoes – recruit volunteers from the private sector and the third sector to 'job swap' for the day to build awareness of the challenges and issues faced by each sector.
5. Hold a series of 'Train and Lunch' sessions – recruit volunteers from the Private Sector to deliver training to 3rd sector e.g. on marketing, IT etc
6. Encouraging collaborative service delivery – continue work with commissioners and key providers (e.g. through SPIC) to open up opportunities for joint service delivery, possibly also a meet the buyer event. Continue work with COGS, presentation to Business Board on 18th June, links with Element 2.
7. Series of Briefings aimed at 3rd Sector and Private Sector (e.g. the Business case for collaboration, 5 ways to engage the Private Sector, cash giving etc
8. Cash Giving
9. Encouraging Trustee Recruitment from Private Sector
10. Developing networks with Private Sector and ensuring a website presence with key agencies (e.g. Chamber and FSB)

Compact Working

Implementation of the Shropshire Compact remains a priority within the Assembly's work. The Compact is the agreement which sets out how Shropshire Council and the Voluntary and Community Sector will work together based on shared values, principles and commitments. The Compact was formally approved by Shropshire Council in November 2009 and by the VCS Assembly in December 2009. The VCS Assembly is the compact signatory on behalf of the wider VCS.



The National Compact aims to create strong and independent VCS organisations that will play a bigger part in designing and delivering public services. The VCS Assembly Board recognises that a refresh of the Shropshire Compact will be required to reflect the national document and all the new partnership commitments and principles that have been agreed through the partnership work that has taken place over the last 12 months. This work is planned for 2013/14.

2011/12 saw the introduction of the Shropshire Compact Award. The award was designed to highlight voluntary and community organisations that used the compact to help them provide services for the people of Shropshire. The 2011 Shropshire Compact Award recognised the pioneering Bulky Household Waste Collection Scheme, which is delivered by social enterprises, South Shropshire Furniture Scheme and Shropshire Housing Alliance as a not for profit operation.

During October 2011 as part of the promotion of the compact Councillor Gwilym Butler (Portfolio Holder for Flourishing Shropshire Communities) visited Shrewsbury 'Dial A Ride' to meet service users and get a feel for how essential voluntary services are in our communities.



As well as regularly promoting the Compact the Assembly has had success in reinforcing the values of the Compact with a number of service areas within Shropshire Council. The Assembly is pleased that more services within the local authority are recognising Compact principles and the Assembly is keen to continue with this work during 2012/13.

Working with Our Public Sector Partners

There are many and increasing reasons for the public sector to work with the VCS via the VCS Assembly. The benefits include allowing bodies such as Shropshire Council, Shropshire County Primary Care Trust and others to:

- Obtain collective VCS views to influence strategic planning and policy decisions.
- Improve understanding of issues affecting the VCS.
- Better manage contractual and funding relationships.
- Improve and expand service delivery options for local residents.
- Implement new ways of delivering services and meeting needs.
- Via the VCS, access groups within the community considered hard to reach.
- Obtain a wider knowledge/evidence base by drawing on the skills and expertise of VCS groups and organisations.
- Demonstrate social responsibility and the 'duty to involve'.
- Implement new national policy

The VCS Assembly works with its partners at the strategic level through the Shropshire Partnership Leadership Board and through the Boards and sub groups working to deliver Shropshire's Community Strategy. Shropshire Council and Shropshire Primary Care Trust work with Shropshire VCS Assembly at all levels of work from strategic policy groups to more practical task and finish groups.

Place Based Interventions

Whilst most people in Shropshire have good health, are in employment and live in low crime areas, a minority will have poor health, be unemployed and suffer higher levels of crime and anti-social behaviour. A few neighbourhoods in Shropshire have disproportionate levels of these issues and despite a range of costly interventions, the life chances for people in these communities has not significantly improved.

Vulnerable families typically receive intervention services from around 25 different agencies costing local services up to £330,000 per family per year, without any significant improvement to their situation.

By focussing on the root causes rather than treating the consequences, it is hoped that families can break out of the current cycle of deprivation and become more resilient and self-reliant, and that public money can be used more effectively.

This approach cannot be achieved by single organisations. It requires real partnership working between organisations, including the voluntary sector, and with communities.

The Place Based Interventions Pilot projects aim to achieve this by:

- Building trust between the organisations involved in the delivery of services and to enable more (and better) collaboration and partnership working;
- Developing small scale prototypes that can be scaled up or replicated in other parts of the county;
- Being innovative and creative in the development of sustainable solutions;
- Seeking to identify efficiency savings by delivering better outcomes;
- Being focussed on the needs of people;
- Involving local people in the design of services;
- Being based on whole systems thinking.

There are currently four pilot projects and many VCSA organisations were involved a series of service mapping workshops held last Spring which identified issues, challenges and

opportunities for each area. Now work is on-going to develop prototype projects to address these issues and the VCSA is playing an important role as members of the project teams.

For the north east Shrewsbury pilot a small project group meets weekly to design, test and learn from a series of prototype projects including:

- Community litter management and recycling scheme;
- designing a new process for dealing with debts and arrears;
- Community energy purchasing scheme to reduce costs for local people
- Youth unemployment
- working with vulnerable families to understand the different services they interact with and how support might be better coordinated.

The Ludlow pilot is based around the Sandpits estate and a multi-agency steering group has been established with four project teams focussed on the following areas:

- Health and wellbeing and reduction in welfare dependency
- Establishment of community hubs
- Youth unemployment
- Affordable housing

Activity is focussed around the Rock Spring Community Centre where partner agencies are on hand to provide a one stop shop and a more joined up approach to support. This pilot has benefitted from a Flexible Support Fund grant from Job Centre Plus.

In Market Drayton a multi-agency team has been established and working from Charter Court on the Fairfield's estate every Wednesday. The team of agencies is expanding with other organisations now joining the service hub. Shropshire Housing Group is a key partner and the Tenant Support Worker, as someone who is locally known and 'trusted', is actively encouraging residents who would benefit from this holistic approach to access the team.

The Oswestry pilot is focussed on drug and alcohol misuse, and the Drug and Alcohol Action team have been working with other partners to respond to some of the findings from the service mapping workshop, including establishing a peer mentoring scheme for substance misuse addicts and integrating support between the health services, housing and children's services. The Oswestry Community Alcohol Partnership is focussing its work on addressing alcohol misuse amongst young people. A new project team to build on this work will soon be established.

There is still a lot of work to do to learn lessons from the pilot projects and design new and better ways of helping the most vulnerable families and individuals, but the continuing partnership between public sector organisations and the VCSA is essential to ensuring success in this difficult challenge.

Identifying and communicating key issues

Through VCS Assembly Board meetings, the VCS Assembly has been considering a number of key issues and developments that will impact on the sector. These have included:

- Localised Planning and Place Plans
- The Community Infrastructure Levy
- Public Services Reform
- Changes in public health and NHS structures and services
- The development of Health and Wellbeing Boards
- New commissioning arrangements – Police and Crime Commissioners etc.
- Quality and impact
- VCS use of Public Sector assets

- Changes within Shropshire – Strategic partnerships and the work of the Shropshire Partnership Leaders Board

The Board works to identify key issues and concerns and then feed this information to and from the Assembly's Forums of Interest and partner organisations. Communication and consultation remain key priorities within the Assembly's work.

Communication and Information Sharing

The Voluntary and Community Sector Assembly's core work programme includes a focus on communication and information sharing. The Assembly has worked hard over the past six months to update and modernise communication levels between it and members. The Assembly has undertaken changes to its fortnightly newsletter to make it more user friendly and more useful. All members of the Assembly can have input in to the newsletter if they wish to share good practice, share an event or publicise their organisation.



As well as modernising the newsletter, the Assembly has also begun work on an ICT modernisation project which is designed to enhance communication levels and reach new target audiences through the use of new technology and social media. At present, the VCS Assembly now has a Facebook page which can engage with a wide range of stakeholders including members, commissioners and other partners. This new way of working will play an integral part in communication and information sharing in the future of the Assembly.

Finally as part of the ICT modernisation project the VCS Assembly will be preparing itself for a new website to yet again enhance how it shares information with key stakeholders. The new website project has begun and will be finished during the summer months of 2012. It is hoped that the new website will encompass new technology and provide a much needed revamp of the current system.

As well as technological advancements the Assembly has worked hard to produce a set of key workshops delivered by the sector with the help of Shropshire Council. Three events for the public sector and four VCS events have been held this past year including:

- 8th July 2011 – Have you're say workshop 1
- 2nd Feb 2012 – Have you're say workshop 2
- 6th March 2012 – Commissioning workshop
- 15th March 2012 – Commissioning workshop

The events have been a great success with the sector providing key feedback on consultation documents. The Assembly will continue to hold events like this throughout the next year.

We will continue to communicate with you during 2012/13 through:

- Fortnightly email updates to all
- Members covering funding opportunities, consultations, events and sector news.
- Development of the new VCS Assembly website
- Maintenance of the current VCS Assembly website:
<http://www.2shrop.net/shropvcsassembly>
- The VCS Assembly Facebook page – providing instant communication to all members

- Workshops and annual event
- Provision of membership packs for individuals, new forums of interest and Assembly representatives.

Feedback from VCS Assembly members suggests that regular communication is important as a way of keeping members up to date

Capital and Asset Pathfinder

2011/2012 has been a year like no other for VCS involvement within public service design and transformation. The Assembly Board, along with a group of member organisations, has been able to represent the wider sector within the Capital and Asset Pathfinder Programme.

The Capital and Asset Programme (CAP) has been supported by the Local Government Group (LGG) and the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG). It



is designed to demonstrate how, by adopting a strategic pan-public sector approach to asset management and joining up asset and accommodation plans, money can be saved and the carbon footprint can be reduced. Sharing property and customer information can also lead to better services for local people.

On 11 August 2011 Shropshire Council was selected to be one of fourteen pathfinder authorities across England to join the Coalition Government's Capital and Asset Pathfinder (CAP) Wave 2 Programme. Wave 1 of the programme demonstrated that, by adopting a strategic pan-public sector approach to customer demand, assets, and capital management at the local level, money can be saved and services improved. The original Pathfinders identified reductions in both operating space and running costs of up to 20 per cent.

In Shropshire there is a strong commitment to work with Shropshire VCS Assembly to enable VCS organisations to access new opportunities to share accommodation and get involved in the formation of local hubs. A questionnaire followed by progress updates have been circulated to all VCS Assembly members to allow groups and organisations wishing to get involved to take part in the programme.

VCS involvement in the Capital and Asset Pathfinder programme has led to several voluntary organisations opening a dialogue with Shropshire Council's Customer Insight Team. These discussions are leading towards implementing a Multi Agency Hub in Oswestry Library, where staff from the local authority as well as voluntary organisations will provide Oswestry residents with a 'one stop shop' for services. The Hub is to be created at the end of April 2012 and if successful, the Assembly will be working with other voluntary organisations to see where else hubs can be created.

VCS involvement during these strategic meetings has been a great success. The Assembly would like to thank all volunteers who have given up their time and put in a great amount of effort in to these meetings.

Working with Elected Members

The Government's vision of Big Society, the Decentralisation and Localism Bill, and other national policy documents has brought about a shift of power at a local level. As a result contribution from Elected Members and the VCS will increase as their role as community leaders is recognised; by working together it is anticipated that they will be better placed to develop new opportunities for Shropshire.

Whilst significant progress has been made since the last Annual meeting work is ongoing, and has identified additional aspects that need to be addressed in the future in order to respond to the Localism Bill. The board has considered areas of work to take forward, which include:

- ❖ How the VCS can influence local policy more effectively
- ❖ Increasing and developing stronger communication links with Elected Members on a countywide basis
- ❖ Considering ways to ensure that Forums of Interest and Elected Members have a mechanism to make links and work together effectively.
- ❖ Identifying the experience of VCS Assembly members in relation to work undertaken with Elected Members, especially at a community level.
- ❖ Building social capacity at the local level

As a starting point the VCS Assembly met with Elected Members last July to identify their work and provide an opportunity to focus on key priorities and work areas. The session was very well attended and feedback was extremely positive.

Actions relating to communication and strategic work were identified and have been progressed by the VCS Task Group and its sub groups. These groups have been instrumental in communicating priority issues to Shropshire Council's Elected Members, ensuring membership on all the partnership groups enabling effective communication via a regular Portfolio Holder briefing by Cllr Gwilym Butler, Portfolio Holder for Flourishing Shropshire Communities.

One specific action resulting from the development of this work concerned VCS engagement in Council Scrutiny process which looks at Council policy and key programmes. This allows Elected Members to challenge the work and steer future implementation. In the past VCS representatives had been involved in Scrutiny as co-opted, non-voting members on an ad hoc basis, however these arrangements ceased following a review of the Scrutiny process.

The need for a more consistent and planned approach was identified and Anne Seymour, a member of the VCSA Board, was nominated to work closely with Cllr Tim Barker the Scrutiny Chair to develop new arrangements. As a result of this work Mark Hignett, VCS representative, has been appointed to sit on the panel for the Safe and Confident Communities. Other arrangements for representation of the remaining Scrutiny panels are still under development; however it is hoped that this approach will be adopted by all in due course.

In addition the work of the partnership sub groups (particularly the Commissioning Group), explored how stronger relationships could be developed both at a local and strategic/countywide level. As portfolio holder for Flourishing Shropshire Communities, Cllr Gwilym Butler took a lead in developing partnership arrangements to discuss how partnerships between Elected Members, the VCS and Town and Parish Councils could be developed. A

strong desire to work closely is evident between the VCS and Elected Members and work with Town and Parish Councils is ongoing.

Possible future actions could be –

- ❖ Use the Assembly Forums of Interest to provide specialist knowledge and input within Council discussions and the work of elected members
- ❖ Gain better understanding of the Elected Member relationship with VCS
- ❖ Seek to clarify that links with the VCS does not equate to cheaper service delivery
- ❖ Interpretation of national policy at local level, making it meaningful to Shropshire
- ❖ Establish new relationships based on clear commitments - remove mistrust
- ❖ Develop strategies to remove reliance on short term funding
- ❖ Improve communication, and increase methods to suit a wider audience
- ❖ Hold local events to enable members to develop relationships with the sector
- ❖ Ensure there is a clear process for the VCS to influence local policy development
- ❖ Determine ways to involve the VCS in Scrutiny processes
- ❖ Continue to 'map' what is currently available in communities –services, groups and general resources
- ❖ Widen engagement by holding events outside 'office' hours
- ❖ Work to develop a strong culture focused on volunteering – considering new opportunities and local implementation.



Priorities

Priorities for the coming year include:

- Continual VCS participation in commissioning and quality & performance groups whose focus will move from planning phases to implementation.
- Continue work on social value measurement with commissioners in light of recent government Social Value Act
- Implementation of new powers such as community right to buy and community right to challenge.
- Support VCS Forums of Interest.
- Continue to recognise diversity within the sector by implementing initiatives that will support small and emerging groups and organisations as well as larger, more established organisations.
- Undertake work to assess how the VCS Assembly can work with others to provide support at a sub county level. To include a focus on different needs within Shropshire's three main geographical areas: North, Central and South.
- Identifying the ways in which the VCS Assembly can work to better support communities by building relationships with community leaders including elected representatives.
- Develop new relationships with the private sector.
- Continue to build partnerships and explore options for developing joint delivery of services with other sectors.
- Maintain strong communication with all VCS Assembly members.
- Continue to respond to the issues and concerns raised by members.



VCS Assembly Board Members

Sonia Roberts	Chair
Gill Green	Vice Chair
Julia Baron	Shadow Chair
Val Lewis	Pan Disability Forum
Bob Morgan	VCS Mental Health Forum
Carola Fielden	Visual Arts Network
Sue Fry	Social Enterprise Forum
Mark Hignett	Shropshire Heritage Forum
Dee Ploszay	Shropshire Infrastructure Partnership
Linda Cox	Shropshire Community Transport Consortium
Hilary McGlynn	Children and Young People's Summit
Rosemary Collie	Shropshire Community Recycling Network
Hilary Paddock	Supported Housing Providers Forum
Nicola McPherson	Health and Social Care Forum
Jackie Jeffrey	Shropshire Information, Advice, Advocacy and Guidance
Heather Osborne	Shropshire Older People's Assembly
TBC	Shropshire Training Providers Consortium
Laurel Roberts	Northern Area Partnership
Anne Seymour	Central Area Partnership
Vacant	Southern Area Partnership



VCS Assembly Support Team

Sarah Dodds and Elaine Griffiths	VCS Assembly Coordinator
Penny Bason and Pauline James	VCS Assembly Support Officer
David Fairclough	Shropshire Graduate supporting the VCASA
Ruth Turner	Partnership Administrator
Nicola Wall	Partnership Administrator
David Bell	VCS Assembly Volunteer

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