

VCSA Annual Assembly 2016

Event Summary



Context

On Friday 20th May 2016, Shropshire Voluntary and Community Sector Assembly held their 8th Annual General Meeting. Over 65 representatives attended from local voluntary, community and social enterprise sector (VCSE) organisations and both public and private sector including Shropshire Council, Aardvark Marketing LTD, Shropshire CCG, Big Lottery and Shropshire Association for Local Councils (SALC).

The Shropshire VCSA Annual is an opportunity for VCSE organisations to come together to discuss the highlights of the previous year, discuss relevant topics and issues and determine the priorities for the year ahead.

Welcome from VCSA Board Chair

Rachel Wintle, Chair of the VCSA welcomed all to the meeting and gave a brief outline of the agenda for the event; Rachel specifically welcomed Clive Wright, Chief Executive of Shropshire Council and guest speakers, Rob Macmillan from Third Sector Research Centre and Dan Corry from New Philanthropy Capital.

Rachel explained that she represented the VCSA on different groups and forums. There are lots of conversations happening and the VCSE have an enthusiastic can do approach in Shropshire. Strong networks and relationships have been created through the Assembly and there is always a positive attitude even though there are difficult times ahead. Rachel talked about what inspires her; she discussed wealth management and explained that this isn't what is in your bank account but the people around you, friends, family and colleagues. Rachel encouraged attendees to think about how they can support others and invest time in local communities. A small but random act of kindness can carry a long way, create the chain and carry it on.

Quick Fire Forum Updates

Each of the VCSA Forum Representatives in attendance at the event were asked to give a brief one minute presentation highlighting any achievements from the last year, issues and future work or projects.

1. Criminal Justice Forum:

Angela Parton, Chair of the Criminal Justice Forum gave an update. The forum are still meeting regularly and have mostly been concentrating on Probation Transformation, restorative justice, mental health, reducing offending. The last event of the Employ with Conviction project was held at the end of May 2015 and all the events were well attended by statutory services including the Police and Crime Commissioner. The Forum currently have a survey out which all VCSA members are invited to participate in.

2. Green Shropshire Xchange

Tony Green, the newly appointed Chair for the Green Shropshire Xchange updated attendees about the changes in the Forum and talked about events held in the previous year which covered topics such as climate and energy. A West Midlands Sustainability group has been set up to compliment the recent formation of the West Midlands Authority.

3. 0-25 Summit

Richard Parkes and Salla Virman have recently come on board to Co-Chair the 0-25 Summit; Richard thanked previous Chair, Elaine Griffiths for all her hard work and commitment to the Forum. Approximately 27 organisations feed in to the group and over the past 12 months they have been involved in the work of Building Better Opportunities/European Social Fund bids, restructures and Early Help Commissioning.

4. Pan Disability Forum

June Jones, Vice Chair of the Forum expressed to the attendees that people of all ages with disabilities or those supporting people with disabilities were welcome to attend meetings. Some of the topics from the past year have included Equality, Inclusion, the Care Act, Assistive Technology, the Big Conversation plus more.

5. Partners for Social Enterprise

Mark Gibson the PSE representative thanked the VCSA for all their hard work. Mark explained that the forum is very diverse and cross cutting; many members sit on more than one forum. One of the most recent topics of conversation during forum meetings has been trading.

6. Health and Social Care Forum

Nic McPherson, Chair of the forum told attendees that one of the benefits of meeting was to get together and network with VCSE and public sector partners. Key topics at the last few meetings have included VCS savings which need to be made in Shropshire Council's Adult Social Care budget. The forum have written to local MPs to encourage them to understand the impact that cuts can have on vulnerable people in the community.

7. Shropshire Providers Consortium

Over the past year, SPC have been accessing a variety of opportunities including winning and managing a number of grants and contracts. Lindsay Barton from SPC shared successes with attendees including the Our Community Hubs project.

8. Shropshire Older People's Assembly

Christine Murison from SOPA explained the attendees that the forum was a platform to provide a voice for older people in Shropshire. The forum have met once over the past 12 months where they focussed on Shropshire Council's Big Conversation. There will be another follow up meeting later in the year.

9. Housing Support Forum

Hilary Paddock, Chair of the Housing Support Forum explained that the past year had been quite difficult for housing support across Shropshire. Some customers have seen reductions in services and specialist accommodation which has taken 20 years to establish could be lost very quickly. There are particular concerns around young people and specialist accommodation.

10. Shropshire Training Providers

Sonia Roberts explained that unfortunately the Training Providers Consortium haven't met this year however they are building closer links with other training providers in the county, particularly with the private sector.

11. Shropshire Infrastructure Partnership

SIP provide support to other organisations such as recruitment and management of volunteers, funding advice, training and payroll. There is less or no funding from Big Lottery and Government to support infrastructure.

Clive Wright, Chief Executive Shropshire Council

Clive emphasised that it was important for the Local Authority and others partners to work together with the VCSE and gave a brief overview of Shropshire Council's current financial situation. Clive continued to express his concern about the difficult times ahead and encouraged the VCSE to share their concerns, ideas and needs. Shropshire Council currently delivers or commissions 155 services, as available monies are diminishing around 147 services will either be cut back or cut out altogether. The Local Authority are looking at how they can change what they can do to minimise the impact of these cuts. Clive asked that the VCSE would bring their willing attitude and experience in

order to support the Council achieve the best outcome for service users in Shropshire. The problems in Shropshire are compounded by a £10 million increase in costs every year due to the demography; the older population move to Shropshire to retire but as it is such a rural county, older people may become lonely or isolated and the knock on effects of this are ill health. There needs to be changes to behaviour in communities in Shropshire in order to generate income and savings e.g. encouraging more people to recycle; if everyone recycled just 200g of products, this could save up to £600,000 a year. Clive left attendees with some final thoughts around community activity and changing the way we work to ensure that money gets to the people and places that need it and ensure it goes further.

Rob MacMillan, Third Sector Research Centre (TSRC)

Presentation Title: Unsettlement and transition: the voluntary and community sector in austere times

Rob MacMillan was the first guest speaker at the event; Rob is a Research Fellow at the TSRC based at the University of Birmingham and has been involved in research on the VCSE for over 15 years.

Some of the key points in Rob's presentation included:

- National perspective and the key challenges facing the VCSE including austerity, cuts, changing role of the state changes in the notion of Big Society, decoupling, welfare reform.
- Challenges around the boundaries and responsibilities between the public sector and VCSE; more focus on how the sector is shaped for the future and what the VCSE should be for.
- There is unsettlement around resources, approaches and relationships and this is currently all thrown up in the air.
- Rob gave the example of Kid's Company earlier in 2016 and suggested a number of reasons for its collapse; one key point he focussed on was poor governance and how this can affect the rest of the sector; there needs to be more talk about governance and leadership.
- Funding for the sector has changed, much of it concentrated in larger organisations and there are challenges to be faced around earned income. NCVO reported in their Financial Sustainability Review (July 2015) that funding has become stagnated over the past five years.
- A lot more organisations are volunteer led or run which can cause other stresses and anxieties.
- Rob suggested a number of tools and opportunities which the VCSE could use such as diagnostic tools, health check tools.
- Challenge around the right pathway to choose for the VCSE;
 - "Adapt or die": a need for VCSE organisations to become more business-like, adapt to an austere environment, more entrepreneurial. The Government is promoting this pathway but they're not communicating it in the right way.
 - "To hell in a handcart": VCSE organisations are at risk of becoming too bureaucratic and losing the focus and mission of the sector and when working under a contract, distinctiveness and independence is compromised.
- VCSE organisations should be proud of what they do and be confident in delivery. VCSE organisations in Shropshire should collectively develop the story of what they do and how it works in Shropshire.
- VCSE cut across boundaries, they are fluid and honest brokers across different sectors. Rob reinforced Clive Wright's points of working with the local authority, the VCSE are needed to support vulnerable people.
- The VCSE should focus on the public and dependencies.

Dan Corry, New Philanthropy Capital (NPC)

Presentation Title: Developments in the sector and some implications for the VCSE

Dan Corry was the second guest speaker at the Annual Assembly; Dan is the Chief Executive of New Philanthropy Capital in 2011 and has previously had a career in public policy, economics and a Senior Adviser to the Prime Minister during 2007 and 2010.

Some of the key points in Dan's presentation included:

- NPC is an organisation that works with charities, funders and the sector as a whole. More specifically they look at how the sector can create more impact, focus on theories of change and how they can be measured.
- Amongst austerity and major cuts, the public have been good at giving to the VCSE but unfortunately this hasn't made up for the deficit. Mergers and collaborations between organisations or for funding and contracts are difficult but are sometimes the right way to go as there are a lot of smaller organisations or groups ceasing to exist.

- Austerity raises a lot of issues for the VCSE; the government are constantly changing policies including Welfare Reform, housing policies and changes, criminal justice change, schools to academies etc.
- Public sector funding has come through differently with fewer grants and more contracts; many VCSE organisations are finding that contracts are quite large.
- It's difficult for the VCSE to know if they should swim with the tide or against it; charities are nervous about campaigning.
- The voluntary sector is ageing although this can mean good news stories such as people are working longer and have the time to give more. Women are becoming stronger and more confident in the VCSE; in the past they would have been happy to take on tasks such as writing minutes or making tea, now they want to be involved in the running of organisations and take charities to new levels.
- Volunteering rates haven't changed in the UK for a while (except for during the 2012 Olympics). Younger people are being pushed in to volunteering in order to gain experience or enable employment.
- Technology is pushing new ways of working e.g. transforming advice services, face to face support online, internet based mentoring services but the VCSE still need to remember those who are not online when keeping up with digital trends.
- The sector has always been able to adapt, it sees the needs of people and the changing environment and tries to do something about it.

Chris Child – Shropshire VCSA Review

Chris explained to attendees that there have been a few changes for the VCSA and all members have been asked to help the Board in completing this work. The VCSA review has emerged as a result of funding cuts and that officer support for the VCSA, the Board and Forums of Interest has unfortunately been reduced due to internal changes at Shropshire Council. The review will focus on the VCSA being fit for purpose and sustainable in the future. The VCSA is the voice of the voluntary and community sector in Shropshire and there is a need to clearly reflect the diverse nature of the organisations. A small task group has started work including speaking to other VCSE assemblies from outside of the county, conducting a survey and meeting with public sector partners. The findings so far have presented the task group with the following proposals:

There is a responsibility that the review needs to ensure the vision and values of the VCSA are fit for purpose for the future – there must be a strong mission, diverse membership, good representation from across both themes and geographically. Promotion and a strong voice for the sector are key alongside cross sector collaboration and representation. There are 15 Forums of Interest under the VCSA umbrella and all have an opportunity to be represented at the Board meeting and there are frequent requests from partners seeking VCSE representation on working groups; one of the challenges is representing and feeding back to the whole sector on local groups. The task group will look to review the membership of the VCSA Board in order to retain diversity and ensure that the meetings result in progress and actions. It is critical that the VCSA Board have support from the Feedback and Insight Team at Shropshire Council in order to move forward and have the right steer. Further opportunities for the Board could be exploring income generation, reviewing infrastructure support and finding collaboration opportunities.

Attendees at the Annual Assembly were asked to take part in a discussion session. The feedback is attached as an appendices.

Rachel Wintle thanked all who attended the event and encouraged attendees to keep up the energy and enthusiasm they had shown throughout the morning.