



Annual Report

2009/10



SHROPSHIRE
Voluntary & Community Sector Assembly

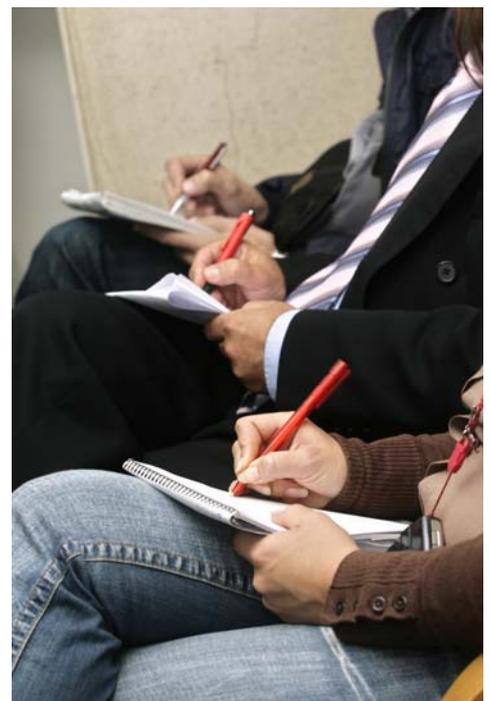
Summary

This report covers the progress made by Shropshire VCS Assembly over the period 2009/10. It also includes some of the work currently being established and considered as part of the Action Plan for 2010/11.

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.

During 2009/10 the VCS Assembly:

- Increased its membership from under 250 to 300 members.
- Worked to improve information and the membership process for new members by developing a members' information pack (including a simplified application form).
- Improved the frequency and quality of its regular communications with a quarterly newsletter, fortnightly email bulletin and improvements to the VCS Assembly website.
- Focused on providing strong representation and leadership by offering more support and advice to representatives, and making use of the national 'Skilling Up for Stronger Voices' programme.
- Supported the development of new Forums of Interest such as the Supported People Providers Forum and Shropshire Heritage Forum.
- Worked to tackle key sector wide issues such as the impact of the recession by developing a Local Resilience Action Plan and working more closely with local partners and regional and national bodies.
- Supported the development and implementation of the Shropshire Compact via the Compact Implementation Group and Compact Champions Network.
- Worked to further strengthen communication and joint work with partners via regular email updates and stronger representational arrangements.



Introduction

The Shropshire Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) Assembly is a group of VCS organisations that come together to voice shared issues, tackle common problems and pool energy, ideas and resources. By working together Assembly members feel they are better able to work in partnership with others and meet the needs of local communities. Any VCS organisation can become a member and can choose to participate in the Assembly as much or as little as suits their organisation. The Assembly enables groups and organisations to:

- meet and exchange information, ideas and good practice
- discuss common issues and support each other in delivering services
- develop shared plans
- work more closely with public sector bodies such as Shropshire Council

General Membership

All members are kept up to date with the latest developments through the website, information bulletins and a regular newsletter. Members are also invited to join in with activities such as consortia projects and themed workshops. Becoming a member is free of charge and benefits for members include:

- Being first to hear of networking and funding opportunities
- Having a say through consultations
- Receiving regular newsletters
- Accessing reports and information
- Joining in at the annual event
- Having a forum to voice issues and concerns
- Finding out more about, and joining, a Forum of Interest

Forums of Interest

These 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 include:

- Disability Forum
 - Disability Forum
 - Disability Network
 - Visual Impairment Forum
 - Deaf and Hard of Hearing Forum
- The Health and Social Care Forum
- Voluntary Sector Mental Health 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
- Supporting People Providers Forum
- Shropshire Heritage Forum

The Board

The Assembly is led by a Board which meets at least four times a year. The Board is formed of representatives from the different Forums of Interest. Through its meetings, the VCS Assembly Board works to deliver an annual work programme. You can find out more about current projects on our website.

Progress Report

The tables below summarises some of the work that has taken place since the last VCS Annual Assembly. The key issues raised for consideration by the Board are highlighted along with a brief description of the work that has taken place to try and address those issues and concerns.

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...
Information sharing and communication was a priority. You wanted to be kept up to date with developments both within the VCS and public sector.	Increasing the scope of its communication and the number of information sharing tools used. Ensuring that information and communication was a key feature of the 2009/10 Action Plan. Establishing a 'friends of the VCSA network' to build communication channels with the public sector.
You wanted VCS Assembly Board meeting minutes to be available to all. You wanted to be kept up to date with the work of the Board.	We now publish minutes and Board papers on the VCS Assembly website. We distribute a quarterly newsletter to keep you up to date with all projects and key issues discussed by the Board.
Opportunities to network were important so that you could meet up with groups and organisations with similar interests.	Alongside networking opportunities provided through Forum of Interest meetings and events we now arrange additional events and meetings on issues not covered by Forums. An example includes the Community Prosecutor Approach session organised to communicate opportunities for partnership between the VCS and Crown Prosecution Service.
You wanted to see greater clarity concerning representation and accountability.	We reviewed all representation arrangements and updated the Terms of Reference to include how representatives are elected.
It was necessary to increase VCS representation on Council and partnership groups. There were gaps in representation that needed to be addressed by the VCS Assembly Board.	We ensured that a VCS representative was elected to all the groups/meetings forming the Shropshire Partnership structure and worked to provide VCSA reps for other Council and PCT groups. Representation information sheets have been produced to help partners understand the work of the Assembly and VCSA Board members have undertaken representation training.
It wasn't clear how the Board and Forums of Interest work together.	One representative from each Forum of Interest sits on the VCS Assembly Board. The Board receives reports from the Forums of Interest at each meeting and communicates key issues and activities through these representatives.

You said...	The VCS Assembly responded by...
You wanted the VCSA Board to identify and handle cross cutting issues from forums of interest.	The quarterly reports presented by Forum of Interest representatives are used to highlight common issues and interests. Representatives are also encouraged to highlight any issues they would like the Assembly Board to prioritise.
It was important to continue to support Forums of Interest and local VCS networks.	A number of new Forums of Interest have been developed over the last year including the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Forum, Supporting People Providers Group and Shropshire Heritage Forum.
You wanted more information about where to go for support.	We now regularly publish information from the Shropshire Infrastructure Partnership in our email news and have links to the Shropshire Infrastructure Partnership website on the VCS Assembly website.
You needed more information concerning the availability of training.	The fortnightly email news now includes training opportunities both in Shropshire and beyond and copies of local training programmes are included in email news updates and on the VCS Assembly website.
More information about funding and commissioning opportunities would be helpful.	Meetings have taken place with all local Commissioners and budget holders to raise the profile of the VCS Assembly and encourage information sharing. The email news now includes a section on funding. Information from Shropshire Council's External Funding Team is regularly included.
Tendering opportunities should be included in the VCS newsletter.	Tendering opportunities are included in the fortnightly email news and are also sent out to all VCS Assembly in a separate mailing in order to draw attention to this important information. There are concerns that member organisations without email addresses and access to web pages may not receive details.
Future funding of VCS infrastructure support was a concern.	A project group has been established to look at the future development of VCS infrastructure support in Shropshire. More details are included in the report below.
You were interested in the work of the Council's Community Working Division and its Community Regeneration Officers.	The Assembly Board has worked closely with the Council's Community Working division over the last year. Presentations have been organised at the Assembly Board meetings, information is circulated through the email news and joint networking opportunities have been put in place.
You wanted more information on the Independent Safeguarding Authority and the implications of its work on the VCS.	The Community Council held an event on ISA and widely publicised it through the VCS Assembly and its newsletter to charity trustees.

You said...	The VCS Assembly responded by...
You were concerned about the future of support available around volunteering.	The Shropshire Infrastructure Partnership established a volunteering team to offer advice and information. Volunteer forums are now in place in central and southern Shropshire and another is planned in the north. Volunteer road shows were held earlier in the year followed by a programme of activities during volunteers week (1 week of June). All have been promoted through the VCS Assembly.
Information for non- members concerning the benefits of joining the VCS Assembly.	An information sheet, joining letter and simplified member application form have been produced. These highlight the benefits of membership.
You wanted a clear link to the Council's elected members.	Councillor Martin Bennett is the Council's portfolio holder/ Champion for the Third Sector. Cllr Bennett takes an active role in the work of the Assembly and its different forums/partnership groups.
The Assembly needs to reach out to smaller groups and organisations.	The engagement of small groups was included as a priority area within the Board's annual action plan. A great deal of work has taken place to promote the Assembly via networks and organisations in contact with small groups. This has resulted in a growing membership for the Assembly (see report below) but the Board recognises that this issue requires continued commitment.
Information on the impact of emerging Health and Social Care policy.	The Transformation of Adult Social Care, personalised budgets and the local My Life My Choice programme have featured strongly in the VCSA email news over the last 6 months. Workshops have been organised specifically for the VCS and organisations elected via the Assembly to sit on local partnership groups.
You were concerned about the impact of the recession on the VCS in Shropshire.	The Board undertook a recession survey and developed a local resilience action plan. This work has now been incorporated into the VCSA Board's action plan. The Assembly recently promoted the opportunity to take part in a recession workshop facilitated by Resources for Change.
You asked that Compact information was sent out via Forums of Interest and to all Assembly members.	The Compact is now included in the fortnightly email news. Each Forum of Interest has been asked to appoint a Compact Champion and more Compact Champions are being sought. Contact the Assembly Coordinator for more information!
You wanted to ensure Council Managers were familiar with the work of the VCS Assembly.	A report covering the Assembly's work, functions and detailing how the Assembly and Council can support each other was taken to all Shropshire Council Directorate Management Team Meetings.

Assembly Membership

There are now over 300 VCS Assembly Members with numbers growing steadily. A number of new members have recently joined via the Forums of Interest described below. The VCS Assembly Board receives a report of new members at each meeting and has been working to consider how it may support the needs of non-members and small groups.

VCS Assembly Forums of Interest

All Assembly members may choose to join one of the Assembly's Forums of Interest. There are now a wider range of Forums of Interest in place. The Disability Forum represents multiple forums on the VCS Assembly Board and they work in partnership under a new model of an Associate Forum of Interest. The latest groups to join as Forums of Interest are the Shropshire Heritage Forum and Supporting People Providers Group. Other groups are also under development and look set to emerge as future Forums of Interest. Strong communication with Forum of Interest members is a top priority for the VCS Assembly Board.

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:

Leadership and Representation

The VCS Assembly Board is formed of representatives from Forums of Interest and Shropshire's Area Partnerships. All members of the Board work hard to provide representation on behalf of their groups and networks and all VCS Assembly Members. During May 2010 a training day was held for the Assembly Board based on the NAVCA programme named 'Skilling Up for Stronger Voices'. Part of the day included a mapping exercise of both formal and informal representation and the results highlighted the extent to which the elected Board are working to reach out to others both within the VCS, to local partner organisations and at regional and national levels.

The Board has facilitated VCS representation on partnership groups including the LSP Leadership Board, 4 Blocks of the LAA, three Area Partnerships and a range of other key groups such as the Compact Implementation Group, My Life My Choice Board and Stronger Communities Project Group, other Council groups and partnership groups led by the PCT.

Working with Our Partners

The VCS Assembly offers considerable benefits for Shropshire Council, Shropshire County PCT and other Partners. Via the Assembly others may:

- Obtain collective VCS views to influence strategic planning and policy decisions.
- Improve and facilitate partnership working with the VCS.
- Better manage funding relationships
- Improve and expand service delivery options for local residents.



- 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, the 'duty to involve' and commitment to partnership working.

The VCS Assembly works with its partners at the strategic level through the Shropshire Partnership Leadership Board.



Compact Working

Implementation of the Shropshire Compact is 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 Compact includes four codes of practice: funding, consultation, volunteering and equalities and diversity. Checklists have recently been produced to support the Compact: these are designed to assist VCS organisations and Council officers in working to deliver the commitments set out in the Compact.

Implementation of the Compact is led by the Compact Implementation Group and its sub groups. A Compact Champions Network is also in place. Compact Champions act as advocates for the Shropshire Compact. Their primary role is to support and promote the Compact and its partnership principles as the best way of working. Champions also signpost individuals to additional information and support. There are now just under 50 Compact Champions and numbers are growing steadily. A 'Champion of Champions' represents the Compact Champions Network on the Compact Implementation Group.

VCS Collaboration and Partnership

Over the past year there have been many examples of collaboration and partnership between VCS groups and organisations. One example is Connections to Opportunities for Shropshire. The aim of the project is to develop a collaborative approach between third sector organisations in Shropshire to provide tailor made support to enable individual progression towards employment for those furthest from the employment market. The application for the Connections to Opportunities project for Shropshire is currently under review by Advantage West Midlands following the recent election and budget announcements and a decision is awaited. Shropshire Council has worked with 20 VCS organisations and key agencies to identify options to deliver support interventions which will complement existing provision. The draft paperwork and processes have been developed following a series of meetings and events which will be presented on the 8th July to those third sector organisations that have been involved to date.

Communication and Information Sharing

The Voluntary and Community Sector Assembly's core work programme includes a focus on communication and information sharing. The management of the VCS contacts database (this includes key characteristics of each organisation such as communities served, service type, organisation type, volunteering information, how funded etc) supports this work. Ongoing communication work includes:

- Fortnightly email updates to all members covering funding opportunities, consultations, events and sector news.
- The distribution of a quarterly newsletter with news from the Assembly Board.
- Maintenance and development of the VCS Assembly website (<http://www.2shrop.net/shropvcsassembly>).
- Provision of membership packs for individuals, new forums of interest and Assembly representatives.

Ongoing Project Work

Current project work is summarised briefly below and will be reflected in the Annual Action Plan for 2010/11.

- **Local Resilience and Recession**

The VCS Assembly Board worked closely with National Association for Voluntary and Community Action (NAVCA) in June 2009 to work to understand the impact of the recession on Shropshire's VCS. The Assembly Board conducted a recession survey and used the results to develop a Local Resilience Action Plan which fed into, and featured in, a national report. The survey was repeated in June 2010 in order to obtain an up to date understanding of issues and how they have changed over time. Work will continue in partnership with others at the local, regional and national levels so that wherever possible the Assembly may help influence the development of solutions to local concerns. At a community level, members of the VCS Assembly continue to support Shropshire's Neighbourhood Employment and Skills Plans (NESP's).



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- **Commissioning**

A Funding and Commissioning sub group will work to the Compact Implementation Group and will link to the VCS Assembly Board. The group will take forward work that has been undertaken to research national guidance for VCS commissioning and will work to develop a funding toolkit to support the Compact.

- **VCS Evidence Base**

Detailed analysis of the VCS Assembly database has taken place to allow the Board to better understand its membership (service type, geographical spread, funding sources etc.) Local case studies and statistics are being collated to support this work and will be brought together to highlight the value of the VCS and to communicate the difference local services make to the people and communities of Shropshire.

- **VCS Strategy**

The Council is developing a VCS Strategy to inform its partners in the sector of the strategic direction of Shropshire Council, in the wider context of national Government requirements

and local community needs. The Council is committed to working with representatives from the VCS Assembly to ensure the resulting Strategy is based on strong partnership working and fits with the principles of the Compact.

- **Infrastructure Support Project**

The Infrastructure Support Project was established to explore current provision of VCS infrastructure support in Shropshire, to assess gaps and develop a model for the future. The project group has been reporting to the VCS Assembly Board and is made up of representatives from Shropshire Infrastructure Partnership, Training Providers Consortium, VCS Assembly and Shropshire Council. The project group will report to the VCS Annual Assembly in order to provide a progress report and to encourage views and feedback from Assembly members.

Looking Forward

The VCS is central to the new Government's vision of creating a 'Big Society', a strong and cohesive society with community involvement in delivering services. The new Government is emphasising the importance of social responsibility. It is focusing on the value it sees in small, grassroots, community and volunteer-led groups, as well as faith-based organisations as the means of tackling social problems and reducing poverty. Key messages highlighted by the new Government include:

- Giving communities the power to run their own services.
- Focusing on supporting neighbourhood groups as a means of tackling issues in the most deprived neighbourhoods.
- Encouraging volunteering.
- Promoting charitable giving.
- Supporting the development and growth of charities, social enterprises, mutual societies and co-operatives.
- Further developing information sharing between Government and community bodies.

Shropshire's VCS Assembly is one of the key mechanisms that can support implementation of these objectives at a local level.

Over recent months the VCS Assembly has seen:

- Many examples of work to manage change in partnership between the sectors rather than in isolation. For example there is strong VCS involvement in taking forward the transformation of Adult Social Care through the My Life My Choice programme.
- A rapid increase in the number of public sector workers seeking VCS representation and involvement in consultation processes across all areas of work/service.
- The removal of the Area Partnership Officers and Executive groups. This means other structures and partnership forums such as the Assembly are even more vital in order to maintain strong partnership and communication.
- A number of positive opportunities have also been developing. For example the Marches Sub Regional Group has been granted European Social Fund (ESF) Technical Assistance to underpin and enhance partnership working amongst local authorities at a sub-regional level. In response to the proposed commissioning of work by the Skills Funding Agency, events/workshops will be held for VCS organisations interested in being part of an ESF funded bid.

A strong VCS, working in partnership with others, will be essential if we are to continue to deliver quality services to Shropshire's citizens during a time of ongoing financial instability.

Priorities 2010/11

The VCS Assembly Board has considered a detailed Action Plan for 2010/11 and at the Annual Assembly will highlight the following priorities whilst also encouraging the wider membership to feed in their views and suggestions for future activity.

- Strengthening working relationships with the statutory partners
- Sustaining strategic representation
- Progressing cross-cutting issues on behalf of the Sector
- Developing and publishing a robust evidence base
- Ensuring the future of infrastructure support



VCS Assembly Board Members

Julia Baron	Chair
Sonia Roberts	Vice Chair
Gill Green	Shropshire Training Providers Consortium
Dee Plozsay	Shropshire Infrastructure Partnership
Geoff Forgie	Shropshire Disability Forum
Bob Morgan	VCS Mental Health Forum
Marion Youens	Health and Social Care Forum
Linda Cox	Shropshire Community Transport Consortium
Elaine Griffiths	Children's Summit
Carola Fielden	Visual Arts Network
Rosemary Collie	Shropshire Community Recycling Network
Mark Hignetts	Shropshire Heritage Forum
Hilary Paddock	Supporting People Providers Forum
Laurel Roberts	Northern Area Partnership
Anne Seymour	Central Area Partnership
Nicola McPherson	Southern Area Partnership
Heather Osbourne	Co-opted Member, Older People

Contact Details

For further information contact the VCS Assembly Coordinator via:

Post:

Shropshire Partnership Team,
Shirehall, Abbey Foregate,
Shrewsbury, Shropshire, SY2 6ND

Telephone: 01743 252269

Email: shropshire.partnership@shropshire.gov.uk

Website: <http://www.shrop.net/shropvcsassembly>

