

Commissioning and the VCS



Current concerns around commissioning and the relationship between the VCS and Shropshire Council

The key issues currently (January 2014) being raised through the VCS Assembly as areas of concern are briefly summarised below.

- A request for Shropshire Council to look more strategically at all commissioning opportunities, bringing together budgets from different department into one, commissioning intentions plan. Concerns with the current approach are that Directorate budgets create artificial silos and lead to an approach in which the VCS can only access budgets already allocated to the VCS, but at reduced levels.
- The VCS welcome Shropshire Council's support of the Shropshire Compact and its commitment to provide 6 months notice on financial relationships changing or ending. However, 6 months is a relatively short period of organisational planning especially if changes in money awarded leads to implications for the use of staff and buildings. A longer term commissioning intentions plan would help VCS organisational planning.
- A key question is how the locality commissioning approach fits with strategic commissioning. In particular whether the Locality Commissioning approach will raise costs for providers (e.g. having to attend 18 Governance Boards, applying for work 18 times etc.).
- VCS representatives are committed to working in partnership with Shropshire Council. However, the VCS Assembly Members (particularly the Board) commit a considerable amount of time (usually on an unpaid, voluntary basis) to joint working. There are recent examples of joint projects doing well doing policy and design stages but failing to achieve agreed outcomes due Shropshire Council changing its approach and not committing to implementation and action.
- Need opportunity to clarify role of the VCS Assembly in relation to commissioning. The VCS Assembly Board Members represent Forums of Interest not individual organisations. Commissioning changes where they impact on a contract/grant/SLA between Shropshire Council and a VCS organisation need to be communicated directly. It is not the Assembly's role to act on behalf of the commissioner.
- The VCSA would welcome Commissioners taking a flexible approach and considering different approaches to commissioning (in the way that positive conversations have been taking place in relation to the commissioning of Information, Advice and Advocacy Services).
- The VCSA welcomes the joint work taking place under the Social Value Group and wishes to continue to build social value considerations into commissioning policy and implementation.
- Volunteers play a huge financial contribution and the impact on volunteers of changes in commissioning and service delivery should be explored and understood by both commissioner and provider.
- The VCSA would welcome discussions between commissioners at Shropshire Council and individual providers concerning how Council moneys are used in relation to other forms of income (for example sometimes acting as match to external funding). Impact assessment may be recommended before decisions to withdraw funds are made.