

Independence Panel

Shropshire VCS Assembly 3 April 2014



Discussion session

1. Do you recognise these challenges?
2. What is distinctive and valuable about an independent voluntary sector? Are there any differences/conflicts within the sector?
3. What single change would you most like to see in any “new settlement”?

Group feedback

Group X

1. Yes challenges are recognised – more could be added
2. It is independent and voluntary
 - a. Ownership of place
 - b. Variety
 - c. VolunteersDifferences/conflicts
 - a. Areas of work/geographic
 - b. Management of control/risk
 - c. Finances

Group X

- Give longer contracts
- Contribution of volunteers/ impact on volunteers is positive
- Balance in speaking out – trust, respect, mature relationships
- Not enough time together to build trust
- Public bodies/ LA must treat VCS as a grown up partner
- Issue of support for delivery but less sure about advocacy/ campaigning role.
- Does chasing the money change organisations.
- Spin culture – don't listen to underlying organisations.
- Payment by results needs reserves and capacity and drive to consortia – fear of top slicing.
- Move to area and regional contracts.
- BIG change – need adult dialogue between Government, local government and VCS.

Group X

1. Contacts with local Council have changed – regular/trusted contacts have left – who now?
Consultation process too short – decision already made so why bother?
Mission drift due to funding conditions
2. Distinctive and valuable
 - a. Expert knowledge of our market
 - b. But the most disadvantaged do not pay
 - c. VCS is champion of the “no hopers” (most vulnerable and disadvantaged).

Conflicts in the sector

many small groups/organisations – there is a need for more collaboration.
Spend too much time on back office functions and unnecessary paper work/ form filling.

3. Contracts should be about outcomes not outputs
Flexibility needed to develop e.g. NHS targets – if ambulance takes 9 minutes not 8 but patient survives.
The majority of small organisations in Shropshire are not public funded but all meet a local need.

Group 2

1. Yes – key change = more bureaucracy and push towards the business model = mission drift.
2. Be creative
Fulfilling needs not diverted
Very often work with disadvantaged
Value for money – small to medium although some of larger national organisations have huge overheads.
3. Not so many ‘huge’ contracts that marginalise smaller more specialist organisations. Better recognition of value of VCS and what it delivers – give us a voice at local level.

Group 6

1. Yes
 - a. Inequality
 - b. No respect for VCS
 - c. Equal partners are not dictated to
 - d. Paid for services so self censorship is happening in Shropshire.
 - e. Fear for future of organisations in VCS – what will happen if not there?
 - f. No scrutiny panels/ options to discuss.
2. Distinctive and valued VCS
 - a. Local knowledge/ understand needs of communities we serve
 - b. Different purpose as we meet needs of local people
 - c. Clear outcomes from a positive purpose
 - d. Consortium work to meet LA requirements – some identify lost
 - e. Cost effective – do not waste money – staff give above and beyond – also volunteers.
 - f. Expertise/skills of VCS increased – HR, finance, IT – all in each charity – no back room teams.
3. Conflict
 - a. VCS are restricted by the Local Authority due to short term contracts and moving goal posts.
 - b. Unfair expectations as to the cost of service delivery – take it or leave it – not full cost recovery – so constantly underpaid for the service we provide.
Hence lack of respect and under-valued.
 - c. VCS is not free – volunteers cost.

Group 8

1. Yes we do!!
2. Value for money is huge. Still undervalued as volunteers/ voluntary.
The strain on Councils and Health will inevitably have an impact on the VCS.
New families moving in, demography etc.
3. We are seen as good but public sector don't really understand our uniqueness and value. Concerns we will lose yjay and break something very precious.
Stronger relationships and recognition of the value of VCS.

Issues that we are not being left enough time to make our own decisions due to delay and confusion within public sector decision making.

Group 9

1. Yes – tokenism in central government regarding localism.
2. Challenge perceived perception of Government withdrawing from social responsibility.
 - Commissioning can stifle independence
 - Commissioning not necessarily bad.

Group 10

1. Big yes – contractual relationships. Government thinking they can solve problems easily. Voluntary sector left with the difficult small percentage.
2. Conflict – big organisations no local knowledge – huge morale problems.
 - a. Accountability
 - b. Lack of funding – consortiums/ partnership
 - c. Having to fit into boxes
 - d. Undermined
 - e. Business with charitable objectives
 - f. Conflicts working in partnerships – different agendas and being left out.
3. Ending of global contracting.
Genuine application of social value – assessed correctly.
Social value tools.