

Shropshire's Voluntary Sector Holds Annual Assembly

Shropshire's Voluntary and Community Sector Assembly held its annual event today (Thursday 3rd April). Attending the event as the key speaker was Caroline Slocock, the author, of *Independence Undervalued: the Voluntary Sector in 2014*. The publication has been written on behalf of the Panel on the Independence of the Voluntary Sector. The Independence Panel consists of eight charity experts and was initiated in 2011 by the Baring Foundation to report annually on independence and make recommendations about how it could be strengthened. Caroline is the founding Director of Civil Exchange, a think tank set up to help government and civil society work better together. The event marks an important opportunity for Shropshire's voluntary sector organisations to influence the work of this important and influential Panel.

Chairing the event was Jackie Jeffrey, Chair of the VCS Assembly (and Chief Executive of Citizen's Advice Shropshire). Jackie spoke about the contribution the voluntary and community sector makes in Shropshire, both as providers of services (Shropshire is home to 1,184 registered voluntary organisations) and leading Shropshire's diversity of community groups (an estimated 1,127) in total. Jackie commented:

"I feel proud to represent the diversity of voluntary sector organisations and community groups that form the Shropshire VCS Assembly. As managers, volunteers and individuals you all show dedication and commitment to supporting local people and making Shropshire a great place to live".

One of the achievements celebrated at the event is the new close working relationship Shropshire's voluntary sector organisations have developed with the Marches Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP). The Marches LEP aims to create the conditions for economic vitality and sustainable employment across Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin and Herefordshire. The event saw the signing of a new Memorandum of Understanding designed to cement the new partnership arrangements.

Attendees at the event also heard from Shropshire Providers Consortium: a group of organisations working collaboratively to win contracts and funding opportunities <http://www.shropshireprovidersconsortium.co.uk/> and

ShropShare: a new organisation designed to support joint work between the voluntary sector and private sector organisations in Shropshire <http://shropshare.org/>

Councillor Gwilym Butler also spoke at the event as the Council's lead for the voluntary sector (Portfolio holder for Leisure, Libraries and Culture). He said:

"We are all working through challenging times, with significant changes affecting us all. However, with Shropshire's public and voluntary sector organisations all share a common purpose and by working together we can ensure Shropshire has a brighter future".

Any voluntary organisation or community group operating in Shropshire can join Shropshire's Voluntary and Community Sector Assembly free of charge. To find out more about email: VCSAssembly@shropshire.gov.uk, telephone: 01743 252740, or visit: <http://vcsvoice.org/>