

Working with VCSE representatives Shropshire Compact Briefing



**Shropshire
Compact**

How to gain and retain effective Voluntary and Community Sector Representation

Why is VCS representation important?

- The VCS shares the same overall objectives as public sector organisations: working to best serve and support local people and the communities of Shropshire.
- The VCS Assembly Board and Forums of Interest are able to coordinate communication and consultation mechanisms where evidence is required to support local decision making.
- VCS bodies are often able to provide:
 - Information concerning local action, projects and services
 - Knowledge of community groups and demographics
 - An understanding of neighbourhood characteristics
 - Awareness of community issues and concerns
- VCS involvement in partnership working to tackle common issues can help to generate more holistic solutions to local problems and avoid duplication.
- VCS bodies are often able to demonstrate greater flexibility and speed of response in the design of new local services or initiatives.
- The VCS has experience of working to address the most deep rooted problems often experienced by people whose circumstances make them most vulnerable.
- The VCS is well placed to attract additional resources to an area building on knowledge and experience of external funding, local and national networks and using volunteers.

Why should I choose VCS Assembly Representatives?

Having recognised the value of VCS representation in principle, how do you go about obtaining representatives? Although the simplest option is to invite a single organisation to the table, with approximately 1,184 registered charities in Shropshire, and many more informal voluntary groups, this kind of approach means only those already 'in the know' get to know. Choosing a VCS Assembly Representative solves this issue.

The Shropshire VCS Assembly is **independent**, **free to join** and **open to all** VCS organisations in Shropshire. It has the overall aim of providing a fair and effective mechanism for representation of the VCS. It uses established and extensive networks and communication links.

- Our Assembly representatives regard it as part of their role to communicate with, and represent, the wider voluntary sector.
- The infrastructure of the Assembly facilitates communication with specific interest groups and the wider voluntary sector. Individual Reps can access support to help them engage more widely.
- There are currently just short of 300 organisations directly registered with the Assembly and they receive our weekly e-bulletin.
- The Assembly recruits its representatives through a democratic process that is open to all Assembly members.
- Assembly representatives understand the difference between representation of the sector and single issue campaigns. They are briefed on how to deal with conflicts of interest.

Further information about the Assembly, including briefing sheets issued to representatives can be obtained from the VCS Coordinator.

What if I already have VCS Representation but not from the Assembly?

Some of you may already have established VCS representatives on your groups, and while appreciating the value of a VCS Assembly Representative, do not want to upset established relationships. In these circumstances:

- Talk to your existing Representative and ask them to get in touch with the VCS Assembly Coordinator to explore what it means to be an Assembly representative. Assembly membership is open to all and it is possible that your existing rep is willing to become a VCS Assembly representative.
- Consider introducing a VCS Assembly rep as an additional group member at your next Terms of Reference Review.

How do I obtain VCS Assembly representation?

The VCS Assembly Coordinator can help to arrange for an appropriate VCS Assembly Representative to work with you. Be prepared to provide:

- The purpose of the group, aims, objectives and what you are working to achieve.
- Whether the group is permanent or time-limited.
- What meetings you would like the representative to attend. Where meetings take place, how frequent they are and how many hours they last on average.
- The characteristics of the group you are arranging such as the size of the meeting and the roles of the other members.
- Whether you require any specialist knowledge or someone with a particular focus.

Top tips

- Be clear about your expectations and what support you need from the VCS Assembly and its representative.
- Support your VCS Assembly representative by providing any background information about the meeting you are holding.
- Remember that information will flow two ways, and that your representative will need to report back to the Assembly (providing clear minutes of meetings will support this process).
- Don't expect your VCS representative to know all the answers. They may need time and support to carry out some consultation work with the Assembly before they can fully represent the views of the wider sector.
- Bear in mind that there will not always be a consensus of opinion within the VCS and that it may be necessary to consider a range of views and suggestions.
- Make sure your VCS Assembly representative feels able to contribute to meetings. Offer space on your agenda and create opportunities for involvement.
- Try and send meeting dates and papers out in plenty of time.
- Not all of our Representatives are paid employees, so be aware of your organisation's policy and procedures to reimburse volunteers.
- Get hold of a copy of the Compact. This is an agreement between Shropshire Council and the voluntary and community sector. It recognises shared values, principles and commitments and sets out guidelines for how both parties should work together. The Compact is a useful document to reference before working with the VCS even if you do not work for Shropshire Council. You can find a copy of the Compact on the VCS Assembly website and the Shropshire Council website.

How do I find out more?

Contact Shropshire VCS Assembly:

 **Email:** VCSAssembly@shropshire.gov.uk  **Telephone:** 01743 252740

For more information about the Shropshire Compact use the details above and below:

 **Website:** <http://vcsvoice.org/the-compact/>

