

Notes from fifth Reference Group meeting held on Monday 23rd May 2016 at Onside Café, Worcester

Present: Michael Hunter (Chair - Voices), Roger Britton (Worcestershire Community Foundation), Doug Chaplin (Diocese of Worcester), Cat Illingworth (Young Solutions), Mark Jackson (St Richard's Hospice), Derek Markie (Voices), Jim Smith (Worcestershire Carers) and Jonathan Sutton (St Paul's Hostel)

Apologies: Philip Talbot (AgeUK H&W), Gary Roskell (Barn), Lindsay Peniston (Worcester Volunteer Centre), Richard Quallington (Voices), John Taylor (Community First), Kate Walton (Persore Volunteer Centre), Karen Edwards (South Worcestershire CAB), Tonia Enderbury (Droitwich CVS), Carole Cumino (Worcestershire Carers), Lorraine Preece (YSS), Kate Harvey (Onside)

Setting the scene Michael used the prompt sheet on the next page to set the context:

(A rough and incomplete picture)

1. The VCS and the public sector have the same focus - Worcestershire and its people.
2. The people who contribute include the people themselves, etc,
3. Much happens in a very ad hoc way and is not structured or organised. There are almost 2000 registered charities in Worcestershire and probably a similar number of unregistered groups. Numerically the small (micro) charities or community groups do most for people and communities across Worcestershire.
4. The groups undertake various activities – the 'benefits' are secondary.
5. Funding is diverse – many run with no formal fundraising; through to those with contracts.

We all need to play our part in this – in particular supporting / encouraging the ad hoc activity.

Initial reactions

- Private Sector – Supply and Demand – focus on end user.
- Contrast – large organisations can 'do anything' (for a price) but small organisations do basically what they always do.
- Public Sector – purchasers as an intermediary – skews the market to do what they want
- Public and VCS should be on the same page – individuals' needs. Public and VCS to 'co-commission' working together to plan from the start rather than later when little opportunity to influence.
- Impact of less money for public sector means we need to consider how best to support our beneficiaries – can no longer rely on public funding.
- Meeting with Clare Marchant, Chief Executive of WCC
- WCC seeking support of VCS
- Public sector not clear on the role of Voices – we need to explain
- We need to promote value of people / communities
- Language / vocabulary can get in the way – VCS takes holistic view – public sector 'services', 'outcomes', 'targets', etc

Worcestershire – A Picture

Public Sector	Worcestershire people	Worcestershire people		No finance
	Worcestershire people	Families Carers Friends Neighbours Community Social groups Clubs Charities Organisations Volunteers Service providers Public sector - Universal (schools, leisure, health visitors, library, ...) Police, fire, GPs - specialist (hospital, social services) private sector	Social Exercise Mental stimulation Mutual support Social inclusion Prevention Early help Support services intervention	Self finance Subscription Fund raising Grants Contracts Commissioning Co production

Key points from discussions (brief highlights only)

- Want to be involved with public sector in commissioning from the start of the process
- Seed corn money (small sums) to fund smaller local initiatives – possible link with Councillors Divisional Funds.
- Two approaches
 - Top down – commissioning for outcomes
 - Bottom up – empowering / enabling community – social good
- Voices can help bridge the gap –
- WCC may be under pressure to commission more services
- Social Value Act – need to make this a practical reality
- Investment to grow from the bottom up (cf Investment by the LEP in SMEs)
- VCS service providers help others and community groups
- Need to break down silos – these are public sector or funding stream only – VCS takes holistic view
- Want to solve problems – VCS naturally works from bottom up
- Look for solutions with public sector – but the ‘power relationship’ needs to be right – volunteering is not free – and it is not about us ‘taking over services’ a no cost – but looking at different ‘models’.
- The VCS is not constrained in the same way as public sector – work in communities – ‘Prevention’ is often a natural spin off from what we do.
- Public sector is open to innovation (Joint Property Vehicle) and may invest if they see a case to save money in the longer term.
- There are examples we (VCS and WCC) could build on – Opportunity Vale of Evesham – small things achieved with very small financial input.

Meeting with Clare Marchant

- First of a series of conversations – need to build relationships
- Start with understanding each other – WCC and VCS
- Conversation
 - Not about the Past
 - Not about more Money
- WCC is open to change - Connecting Families – is taking a holistic approach; also New Models of Care
- Considered need for a facilitator but not thought necessary (for this first meeting).
- Michael would speak to those attending the meeting – want to get the most from it.

Conference in Autumn

There was strong support for the conference to provide an opportunity to engage with the whole sector – in particular smaller groups who don’t have the capacity to engage with the Reference Group.

Agenda – not finalised – but there is much to do around this new people centred approach and how the VCS and work together and with partners to have positive benefits for Worcestershire people.

Cat, Jonathan and Roger and others present agreed to contribute to the conference and Derek agreed to coordinate. But keen also to include some who were not present in the planning.