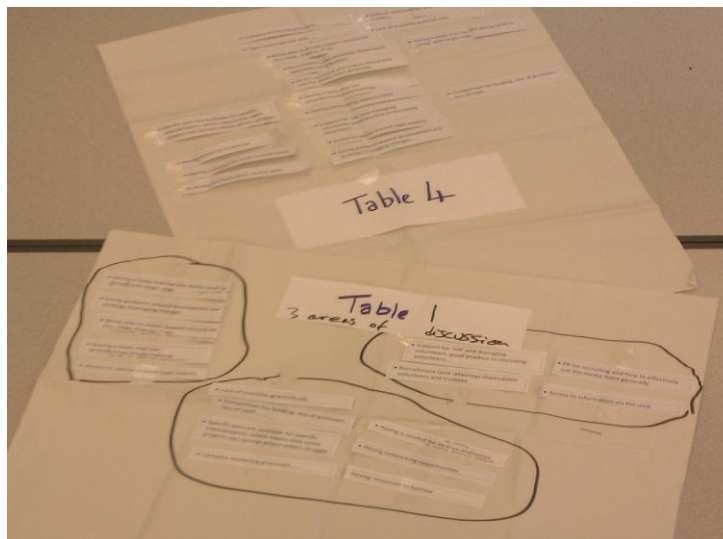


# Voluntary Sector Review: Workshops Report

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## 1. Summary

Councils of Voluntary Service (CVS) are valued overall by the sector in a variety of roles that they play in supporting the sector through advising, facilitating and guiding. Through an on-line survey held in 2012 the Hampshire local authorities identified that key areas the sector felt it needed most support in were:

- Funding
- Networking
- Managing volunteers
- Training

Following the on-line survey period, three workshops, with representatives from across the voluntary and community sector, were held in September 2012. A key theme from these workshops were that the role of CVS' in Hampshire was valued by the voluntary and community sector for a number of reasons that included; their ability to represent the sector in strategic terms; help with strategic development and support for the voluntary sector in shaping themselves to face the future.

The CVS' are able to help organisations overcome some of the issues they face in the current economic and political context. One significant issue was that the sector is finding it harder to recruit volunteers in sufficient numbers, and finding volunteers with the right skills, especially for key roles such as trustees and managing 'human resource' (HR) issues.

CVS' were also valued in their networking role and their ability to facilitate forums where organisations can get together to share experience, knowledge and expertise. Inevitably the voluntary and community sector expressed many concerns about the changing nature of funding for the sector. Organisations felt that the CVS' were able to provide support in terms of navigating tendering and bid processes and in finding new and strategic ways of meeting their funding needs, as well as being a voice for organisations where they face barriers to funding through their size or through their location.

Although community organisations recognise the current agenda for merging and collaboration there were some concern that this might need to loss of autonomy, and that smaller and infrastructure organisations might get lost in terms of meeting local needs.

The sector felt it needed to be a significant voice in strategic decision making and planning, so should be much more involved at each step of decision making processes, supported by CVS'.

An additional theme from the workshops was that organisations understand the need to be better at measuring their impact, and felt that CVS' would be able to provide support and training to understand how to measure impact or social value.

## **2. Introduction**

This report represents a summary of feedback given by a number of participants from the voluntary sector who attended a series of workshops held in September 2012. These were run as part of an ongoing review of support given by the local authorities in Hampshire to the voluntary and community sector.

The County and local councils in Hampshire are working together in 2012 to better understand what voluntary and community organisations need, so that they can ensure future public funding is directed to providing appropriate and effective assistance. As a result of the review Hampshire County Council will be developing its proposals for future support and sharing these with co-funders.

The workshops were facilitated by Alan Grattan and David Raper, from the University of Winchester. The remit for the workshops was to design a 'listening exercise' with the aim of eliciting more detail further to comments derived from an online survey of the sector, coordinated via Hampshire County Council, and to report on 'what was heard'.

Further information about the review process is available at: <http://www3.hants.gov.uk/voluntarysector/cvs-financial-support.htm>

### **2.1 Themes emerging from the online survey**

The workshops were driven by feedback received through an online survey run between April 30th 2012 and July 20th 2012. The survey had been made available for voluntary and community sector organisations to inform the overall review process. The data from the survey was analysed by the workshop facilitators in order to develop a series of themes to explore in the workshops.

The online survey received 720 responses from across the sector. 19 potential areas of support were offered in the survey, and respondents were asked to select up to five key support needs. From the feedback given by respondents to the survey, four key areas were significantly selected more than the others:

1. Grants, fundraising, submitting bids;
2. Recruiting volunteers;
3. Networking opportunities;
4. Training and staff development.

The survey also contained open questions which allowed qualitative comments to be captured. These comments gave a real sense of frustration and sadness at current changes, losses and pressure on the sector, but also a passion and desire to find solutions and adapt to the changes.

Two quotes that seem to encapsulate the overall feeling within the sector were:

“We are finding it harder and harder to recruit volunteers, and also grants seem to be running dry. We are really struggling to keep our services going at the moment.”

“CVS’ are essential, and never more so at times of change and crisis where there is more pressure than ever on the voluntary and community sector. The reduction of funding means that local CVS’ are even more critical in interpreting and facilitating the understanding of voluntary organisation’s governance.”

A ‘thematic analysis’ of the qualitative statements generated the following insights into the sectors current experience of issues and pressures:

### **2.1.1 Funding:**

There were a series of comments relating to ‘living within our means’, and trying to adapt to new levels of funding. Key themes that emerge from the survey that impact on sector organisations included aspects relating to:

- Grants/funds;
- Competition for funding;
- Complex tendering processes;
- Tight timescales for bids;
- Difficult relationships at times with funders.

### **2.1.2 Volunteering:**

- Recruitment (and retaining) dependable volunteers and trustees;
- PR for recruiting;
- Support for ‘HR’ and managing volunteers;
- There were comments made that specific skills/interests were hard to find.

### **2.1.3 Networking:**

The role of the local CVS, and their ongoing support for organisations, seemed to be critical to many respondents. CVS’ appear highly valued where organisations feel they are proactive, responsive and are able to provide guidance, access to networks or resources. The majority of feedback indicated that CVS’ (including county wide agencies like Community Action Hampshire) are particularly valued in their role of:

- Providing a point for local co-ordination;
- Networking opportunities;
- Advice around legal aspects ;
- The ability (and willingness in places) to ‘scrap’ with larger organisations (voluntary and public);

- Support around human resource issues (inc. CRB), finance, IT etc.;
- Having resources to borrow;
- Providing/coordinating training;
- Giving guidance around development and strategy (managing change);
- Web sites seem to be an important resource/point of support – comments suggest these could be more joined up/co-ordinated (databases), or offer guides/best practice resources.

#### **2.1.4 Training:**

Issues around training really fell into much of the previous three themes – This would seem to be an area that is as varied in needs as the range of organisations that make up the voluntary and community sector in Hampshire. However specific comments include:

- Recruiting volunteers;
- Legal/Governance aspects.

### **3. The workshops (Methodology)**

The themes identified in section 2.1 were taken forward to three workshops held in September 2012:

1. 19<sup>th</sup> September 2012 – Basingstoke
2. 26<sup>th</sup> September 2012 – Wickham
3. 26<sup>th</sup> September 2012 – Chandlers Ford

In all 97 representatives from a range of organisations attended (see appendix 1 for the participating organisations).

Each meeting was two hours in length, which consisted of a brief introduction and overview of the feedback from the online survey followed by table activities. Each session was divided into 4 tables with approximately 12 participants on each. The key themes drawn from the online survey were given to each table group in the form of cards (see appendix 2) that were used to generate a discussion about the priorities, and to discuss in more depth what the significant issues, barriers and concerns were for the participants.

The discussion concerning priorities and significant issues was driven by the participants representing sector organisations. Participants who were Members or Officers from the councils were restricted to clarifying feedback, or asking specific questions related to what the sector reps were saying. This was to ensure that the voice of the sector was leading the discussions. The role of the facilitators was to listen and record the discussions at the tables. The facilitators reported what they heard from the participant's discussion and feedback, which was then used to collate the following findings.

### **3.1 Findings from the workshops**

The feedback obtained from the workshops is presented here under themes. These themes overlap in places.

#### **3.1.1 Understandings of the broader agenda**

- Organisations felt they would like to have greater understandings of the broader political agendas that are affecting them (e.g. What does Big Society mean in terms of its philosophy or application)
- Organisations were uncertain about the impacts of new agendas on their own structures, or what they should be doing in order to respond to them.

#### **3.1.2 Role of the CVS**

- Overall the role of the CVS was consistently discussed as being important.
- CVS' are good at supporting 'back office' functions through guidelines, good practice, and training. Some organisations reported they sought additional support from outside the CVS structure (e.g. through national organisations) where these could bring specialist expertise to problems.
- There was some lack of awareness reported amongst some smaller sector organisations about who co-ordinates or gives advice for voluntary sector organisations at the local level. However they tended to report that once they had found, or been referred to a local CVS, they find the support highly useful.
- The role of the CVS' was seen to be important in strategic terms, supporting organisations own strategic development, and representing the sector in County to Hampshire County Council/Local Authorities/Housing Associations etc.
- Participants felt that support is needed by the sector in shaping themselves to 'face the future'. They also felt that CVS' were able to take a lead, or be a conduit organisation, that can be the representative voice for the sector, especially for smaller organisations.
- CVS' have an important role in liaising with local elected representatives and local authority employees to develop better understanding and knowledge of functions and purposes of both CVS's and the sector more broadly.
- The CVS' are important for 'horizon searching' for funding opportunities and for developing a wider understanding of the national context and direction facing the sector.

- HR support provided by CVS' is important for avoiding the legal risks from poor HR practice. Some organisations reported using ACAS around HR issues in addition to local networks.
- Concerns were expressed that as CVS' grew in their role they may have conflicts in interest between their role as advocate and support for the sector, and their role as fundraiser/business unit.

### **3.1.3 Volunteers and volunteering**

- Participants said that volunteers have become increasingly crucial for both the delivery of services and survival of many sector agencies, but that finding volunteers has become increasingly difficult. In part this was felt to be because the 'contract' for volunteering has changed where people are not available for volunteering in the 'traditional' manner (i.e.: a regular, consistent contact).
- Furthermore organisations said that they needed to be able to plan for 'growth' and capability in the current environment. There is a threat to organisational sustainability felt by participants, where there is uncertainty over being able to recruit volunteers.
- Therefore support in recruiting and retaining volunteers was important to organisations. Many participants said they valued the CVS' role in this area.
- Additionally getting volunteers with the right skills can be difficult (e.g. able-bodied helpers for a disability access group, people with the skills to work proactively with young people) and support in this area was important.
- Good trustees are key to organisations success, but can be difficult to recruit. CVS networks were deemed to be important to engage and recruit volunteers with the necessary skills for key roles within organisations.
- Support in recruiting and retaining volunteers was felt to be important where sector organisations face barriers to volunteering (e.g. gaining volunteers in rural areas is difficult due to transport issues).
- Over and above recruiting sufficient volunteers, participants valued CVS support and guidance in relation to coping with the 'add-on' aspects to volunteering such as the array of legal and HR responsibilities and obligations.
- A further issue experienced by participants was that it is difficult for organisations to be able to give enough supervision and support for new or inexperienced volunteers, where volunteer numbers are low and staffing is stretched by delivery obligations.

### **3.1.4 Networking**

- Networking through forums managed by the CVS was felt to be an essential part of the CVS 'offer'.
- Networking was cited as being much more than 'tea and a chat' as it was crucial and important for sharing knowledge, experiences and expertise.

### **3.1.5 Funding**

- Inevitably many participants expressed concerns and issues about the changing nature of funding for voluntary sector organisations.
- Some sector organisations are unsure about alternative funding streams (eg moving to fee paying) so support for different ways of fund raising is valuable.
- Ongoing support is needed from CVS' around the processes of applying for funds, as much as where the funds are located.
- Tendering systems are seen as being increasingly bureaucratic, with rules and regulations changing frequently. Support is needed to keep up to date with these changes and processes.
- Concerns were raised about the increasing incidence of 'on line' bid processes. These were seen as being difficult to administer as they tended to need to be completed in 'one go', and cannot be shared for comments prior to submission. CVS support is valued in supporting and critiquing bids.
- CVS' can be a voice for organisations facing barriers to funding (e.g. participants commented that geographical boundaries for fund givers may not reflect the boundaries for their organisation).
- Support for organisations would be valued in light of new clinical commissioning groups, and uncertainty about how this agenda will roll out.
- Participants commented on a concern that a two-tier system is emerging with funding going through larger organisations, leaving smaller organisations more vulnerable.
- Smaller organisations say they need more support in relation to increasing competition for funds if they are to succeed and survive.
- CVS' may be able help co-ordinate effective fundraising through targeting organisations that can fulfill bid criteria and helping to network/coordinate this.

- Support is valued by for organisations who are currently ‘running-out’ existing funding arrangements, and who are not sure what will be available to replace these funding arrangements.

### **3.1.6 Merging and collaboration**

- Organisations reported a feeling that merging agencies and their work creates a sense of loss of autonomy.
- Organisations felt that local authorities should be wary of agendas around encouraging organisations to merge, because of the fear that if contracts begin to be ‘pushed’ to larger agencies, infrastructural and smaller organisations, as well as local needs, may be lost in the process.
- CVS’ may be able to support a range of smaller ‘struggling’ organisations through networking and collaborative approaches.
- The sector should be a significant voice in any strategic decision making and planning, so should be involved at each step of decision making processes, supported by CVS’.

### **3.1.7 Measurement and impact**

- Organisations said that not being able to effectively evaluate and promote their service through information and data disadvantaged them in the more competitive environment. Therefore support and training to understand how to effectively measure their impact was seen as important.
- It was felt that CVS’ can facilitate collaborative working to identify, measure and report impact/value of organisations activities through sharing resources/skills.

### **3.1.8 Training**

- While this was one of the identified key themes from the on-line survey, on the whole the training needs expressed at the workshops were implicit in the support needs discussed across the other key themes below.

## 4. Appendices

### 4.1 Workshop Attendees

<b>Organisations at Basingstoke</b>
HCC Corporate Services
HCC Children's Services
Hampshire Customer Insight Partnership
Basingstoke District Borough Council
Havant and East Hampshire Councils
Basingstoke Neighbourcare
Relate North and East Hants Borders
Kingsley Organisation
Basingstoke Counselling Service
Hatch Warren Community Centre
Headway Basingstoke
Tadley and District CAB
Rushmoor Healthy Living Centre
Sentinel
Whitchurch Youth Project
Hampshire LINK
Oakley Community Care
Winchester District CAB
South View Conservation Group
Parkside (Aldershot and District Mencap)
Hartley and Witney Over 55s Forum
Clear Stone Trust
Community First East Hampshire
Princes Royal Trust for Carers
Yateley Cricket and Hockey association

<b>Organisations at Wickham</b>
HCC CCBS
HCC Adult Services
Havant Borough Council
Test Valley Borough Council
Winchester City Council
Fareham Borough Council
HCC Corporate Services
HCC ETE
Gosport Children's Contact Centre
Off the Record
Green Insight
South Downs National Park
Home-Start Havant
Fareham + Gosport Multicultural Society.
Havant Area Disability Access Group
Solent Diabetes Association
Accommodation Resource centre (ARC) Two Saints
Submarine museum, Gosport
Hayling Voluntary Services
Gosport Compact Steering Group
Winchester Area Community Action
CVS – Havant

The Diocese of Winchester
ARK Eastleigh
Homestart

<b>Organisations at Eastleigh</b>
HCC Sir Harold Hillier Gardens
HCC Corporate Services
HCC Children's Services
Hampshire Customer Insight Partnership
Hart District Council
NHS Community Health Unit
Eastleigh Borough Council
Youth Clubs Hants and IOW
No Limits
Colden Common Community Centre
Colden Common Community Association
SCA Group
Alzheimers Society
Enham
Children's Society
North Baddesley Community Library
Moving on Project
Bursledon Village Hall Charitable Trust
Solent Youth Action
Jumbulance Trust
Knightwood Youth Club
Home-Start Winchester & Districts
New Forest Mencap E
St. Thomas' Church, Fair Oak
First Wessex
Meon valley Carers Group
The Princess Royal Trust for Carers in Hampshire
Centrestage Productions Youth Theatre
Romsey Young Carers Project
Age Concern Eastleigh
Eastleigh British Legion
Hampshire Neurological Alliance
Alzheimers Society
Pennington Community Action Group
HCH Southern Health
Scouts
It's Your Choice
CVS -Test Valley
One Community
Wessex Cancer Trust
Carers

## Appendices

### 4.2 Activity cards

- Lack of available grants/funds

- Competition for funding, loss of provision, loss of staff.....

- Complex tendering processes.....

- Tight timescales for bids.....

- Specific pots are available for specific roles/projects, which means that some projects can survive where others struggle

- Difficult relationships at times with funders.

- Recruitment (and retaining) dependable volunteers and trustees

- PR for recruiting and how to effectively use the media more generally.

- Support for 'HR' and managing volunteers, good practice in recruiting volunteers.....

- Having a conduit for local co-ordination

- Having networking opportunities

- Access to advice around legal aspects

- Having a body that has the ability (and) to 'scrap' with larger orgs

- Being able to access support around HR (inc. CRB), finance, IT etc

- Having resources to borrow

- Having a body that can provide/coordinate training

- Giving guidance around development and strategy (managing change).

- Access to information via the web