

ANNUAL REPORT AND REVIEW THE BRADFORD AND DISTRICT VCS ASSEMBLY 2011/12

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INTRODUCTION

The VCS Assembly was launched in February 2010 and has successfully developed its objective to be an effective and influential voice within the local authority and other public sector bodies. CNet hold a contract with the council to develop and co-ordinate the Assembly, and to support its members and representatives.

In this second year of operation the Assembly has become embedded in the structures and partnerships of the Bradford district and is recognised as an important means of communication and engagement.

The Assembly is open to any not-for-profit voluntary or community organisation in the district, and its structure ensures that they can take part in an area of particular interest or concern by joining forums, attending events and exchanging information.

This structure enables organisations to work together to influence and develop local policy and services, and increases mutual understanding within the voluntary sector and with a range of other agencies and partners. Representatives are elected or selected (according to particular circumstances) to participate in partnership meetings, task groups and other opportunities to present a voluntary sector perspective.

The Assembly website contains information about how the organisation works, who is involved, reports from meetings and representatives, updates on important policy developments or consultations, and the latest decisions that affect our district's communities.

HOW THE ASSEMBLY WORKS

The Assembly comprises seven **thematic forums**, all of which have open membership for people involved in their communities and voluntary/community organisations. The forums meet regularly and are independent but work under the Assembly umbrella. They provide a vital means of accountability for the Assembly and enable more co-ordinated responses to situations and consultations. Forums work with public sector colleagues to represent the needs of communities and the VCS, tackle inequalities, and find solutions to the growing challenges for service provision.

- Health & Wellbeing VCS Forum
- Regeneration & Prosperity VCS Forum
- Young Lives Bradford
- Bradford Environment Forum
- Equalities Forum
- Safer Communities Forum
- Cultural Forum (formally launched at the Assembly conference 16 February 2012)

The Assembly Steering Group (ASG) has representatives from each of the thematic forums plus other VCS partners. Its role is to filter views, issues and information from the forums and use in negotiations carried out on behalf of the Assembly as a whole. ASG focuses mainly on how to make the Assembly most effective and inclusive, and how it can enable wider understanding and information about key issues that affect the district and its large voluntary and community sector.

ASG members meet representatives from the council on a regular basis, at meetings called the **Relationship Management Group (RMG)** which is chaired by the Deputy Leader of the Council and Portfolio holder for Safer and Stronger Communities. This provides an opportunity for honest and open debate and problem solving, using information from the forums and elsewhere. The RMG has been meeting since January 2011 and has played a key role in influencing and informing strategic decisions.

For further information and details of how to get involved, contact the Assembly coordinator, Janet Ford janet@cnet.org.uk 01274 305045 or visit the website www.bradfordassembly.org.uk.

Also on the website:

- A directory of assembly representatives and officers
- Minutes of meetings
- Dates of meetings and events
- Reports from representatives
- Links to other websites and information (such as Council papers and reports)

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS IN 2011- 12

1. ASSEMBLY STEERING GROUP

- Following a suggestion at the last annual conference a new Cultural Forum is launched
- The Equalities Forum launched in February 2011 has become a significant driver of reform around Equalities Impact Assessments and addressing inequalities
- Members of RMG have developed an influential role and effective and often challenging dialogue with the council, particularly in relation to council budgets, consultation and commissioning processes
- Oversaw elections for an Assembly rep to join the Shadow Health & Wellbeing Board
- Increased the range of VCS representatives across partnerships and task groups, such as Community Based Budgeting Working Group

2. ASSEMBLY FORUMS

Regeneration and Prosperity (RAP) Forum

Co-chairs: David Wilford & Tony Dylak

The forum has met 7 times and held 5 task group meetings so far this year. They hosted the *Wealthy Bradford Economic Summit* at Carlisle Business Centre in November of last year. The conference brought professionals from the private, public and VCSE sectors together to “*work in collaboration for success*”. The event was a huge success and one of the key outcomes was participants pledging a wide range of actions to take forward. Details of the event can be found on the website.

Forum membership is currently 97, a mix of service providers, social enterprises, infrastructure organisations, community groups and centres.

Forum priorities are:

- Contribute to improving economic equality in our communities and helping to tackle poverty, social exclusion and debt

- Ensure commissioning processes are fair and equitable for the sector, and that organisations are supported to develop the evidence base for their work

The forum has representatives on the Economy and Skills Partnership, the Economy and Skills Board and the Chair's Group. The representatives have effectively contributed to decision making and are involved in discussions at all levels. The Forum Chairs raised the profile of the sector by delivering a presentation to the partnership board and the BDP (Bradford District Partnership), available to download on the assembly website.

The Bradford District Partnership structure has recently been reviewed and although the Prosperity and Regeneration Partnership is not a core requirement, the RAP Forum will continue to work within the new structure.

Health & Wellbeing Forum

Chair: Natasha Thomas

Vice Chair: Helen Speight

The Forum has held 7 meetings and 4 task group/planning sessions. 3 events have taken place this year, 2 around the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment and one Mental Health Consultation event. The JSNA events were well attended and participants found them useful and informative. The Mental Health Consultation report is on the website - the outcomes were sent to the commissioners for consideration in the new Mental Health Strategy for the district.

Membership of the Forum is currently 143, a mix of service providers, community and thematic groups.

Forum priorities are:

- Ensuring that the personalisation agenda is effectively introduced
- Tackling health inequalities
- Mental Health
- Older People
- Infant Mortality

Themed open Meetings are hosted by members who have a specialist interest in the above issues. The forum has recently elected representatives to join the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment Working Group, the NHS Equality Group and the Health & Wellbeing Overview and Scrutiny Committee. 3 forum representatives sit on the Health & Wellbeing Partnership Board. The representatives and other forum members meet to discuss the partnership board agenda and agree issues to take forward. The reps have developed good working relationships within the partnership and have been involved in additional work in various sub-groups. The reps produce a joint feedback report which is put on the assembly website and discussed at the forum meetings.

The Assembly recently held elections for a Forum representative to join the Shadow Health & Wellbeing Board. Over 100 VCS groups voted - Natasha Thomas, the Forum Chair, was elected.

Members agreed to collect case studies of good practice from third sector intervention around health and wellbeing needs. In addition to demonstrating the impact and value of our work, the case studies also aim to highlight possible gaps / pressure on third sector services as a result of cuts to statutory services. The study template is available on the website, together with completed case study examples

Equalities Forum

Chair: Judy Peltier

Vice Chair: Ranjit Arora / interim Rebecca Hewitt

The forum was launched at last years Assembly conference and has built a membership of 57 representatives from a diverse range of groups and organisations. They forum has agreed the following priorities:

- Highlight the disproportionate impact of cuts on certain communities
- Representation of under represented groups
- Progressing Equality Impact Assessments
- Equalities Training

Forum representatives attend a range of meetings including the Equalities Delivery Group, the Stronger Communities Partnership Board and the Equalities Relations Group. The Forum supported the Bradford Inquiry Group's event last September and more recently their consultation event about the council budget proposals.

Members are currently working with partners to develop an equalities training programme.

Safer Communities VCS Forum

Chair: Peter Bloom

The Forum held 7 meetings this year. Membership of the Forum is currently 90 groups ranging from small resident and community groups to larger organisations and service providers.

The forum priorities are:

- Develop the prevention and intervention agenda and the VCS role within it
- Increase VCS representation and engagement at the strategic level
- Prevention and tackling of hate crime
- Safeguarding and child protection, monitoring the impact of cuts

Representation was increased from 1 to 6 last year. Forum representatives have recently been invited to sit on the new partnership board and strategy groups as follows:

- Community Safety Partnership Board
- Crime and re-offending strategy group

- Neighbourhood and resources strategy group
- Drug and alcohol strategy group

Bradford Environment Forum (BEF)

Co-ordinator: Julia Pearson

The forum has a rolling chair. Between April 2011 and March 2012 Bradford Environment Forum held 5 meetings. Discussion topics and presentations have included BMDC Draft Woodland Strategy, Environmental Needs analysis and commissioning process; Climate Change adaptation; Environmental Performance indicators; Environment and Waste Management Overview and Scrutiny work plan input.

BEF currently has 25 member organisations and 4 individual members. Of these 15 are full members and 14 are associate members. Over the past year 8 new members have joined BEF: 3 full members and 5 associate members.

BEF currently has 2 representatives who, until it was disbanded, sat on the Environment Partnership. The BEF representatives now attend the Regeneration and Prosperity Forum and communicate feedback through BEF meetings and on the BEF website. A representative also attends Assembly Steering Group meetings. Two BEF members are coopted onto the Environment and Waste Management and Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

BEF website lists over 40 member organisations ranging from small community groups and including the voluntary sector groups with paid staff. The website seeks to share news, list events and document strategic discussion.

Young Lives Bradford

Chair: Kerr Kennedy

Young Lives Bradford hosted a range of strategic and thematic forums in 2011-12 for its 360 member organisations. There were 9 strategic forums plus several themed events around youth services, family support services and child poverty. YLB convenes a bi-monthly Safeguarding Steering Group that is now officially recognised as a part of the new structure of the Bradford Safeguarding Children Board.

We held our third annual networking event and conference in December 2011 on the theme “**Cuts, Challenges and Opportunities**” that examined more collaborative ways forward for the children & young people’s voluntary sector in Bradford. Network members gave a measured mandate for YLB to explore potential models for a future local delivery consortium as well as approving changes to the way we engage with statutory agencies and grassroots organisations.

YLB has wider links to regional networking bodies such as the Children England Regional Group and the Voluntary Youth Organisations Network for Yorkshire and the Humber together with an affiliation with the National Council for Voluntary Youth Services (NCVYS). Network staff provided regular weekly information bulletins to member groups and facilitated workforce development initiatives including training courses and workshops.

Meaningful partnership contributions to the Bradford Children's Trust Board and other emerging stakeholder bodies such as the Confederation of Training providers (schools, colleges etc) and the NHS Children's Network is managed through a number of representatives who are accountable to the YLB network. Regular, constructive meetings are held between the Chair, senior YLB representatives and the Director of Children's Services and other Senior Management at Bradford Council Children's Services. Our collective contribution to a wide range of strategic issues is positively received by our statutory partners who welcome our more pro-active stance and creative approach to finding solutions for maintaining services.

Kerr Kennedy
Chair, Young Lives Bradford

THE ASSEMBLY CONFERENCE, FEBRUARY 2012

Over 80 people attended the 4th VCS Assembly conference including colleagues from community groups, large and small service providers, council and PCT officers. Participants heard about the Assembly's progress and learnt more about potential opportunities and challenges emerging from the Localism Act.

The conference was opened by Dr Mohammed Salam, Chair of CNet, the organisation commissioned by the council to develop, co-ordinate and facilitate the Assembly. He paid tribute to the hard work of all those involved in the Assembly for making it the successful and influential body that it is now. Caroline Schwaller, elected Assembly Chair, then gave an over view of the Assembly's role and structure, and main achievements in the last 12 months.

While the Assembly's profile and influence have increased, it has struck a balance, and generally has a collaborative approach to working with the public sector; but this becomes more assertive and challenging when necessary. For example there have been persistent and insistent calls for transparent and accountable processes in relation to Equalities Impact Assessments, and in relation to consultation and timing for public sector cuts and budget announcements.

The importance of the forums was stressed once again - as this is where the more detailed work goes on, and provide vital information and feedback about issues for the ASG to use in its work with the Relationship Management Group [6 weekly meetings with the Deputy Leader and senior council officers]. ASG members are keen to offer solutions and ideas but are also assertive on matters of principle, which often relate to process, transparency and communication. The forums are open to any VCS organisation with an interest in the subject.

Cllr Imran Hussain, Deputy Leader, then spoke passionately about his commitment to the VCS and the important work of the Assembly. He reassured everyone that the council values enormously what the VCS does and brings to the district, and that the council has listened to feedback to consultation on the draft budget. Some earlier decisions have been reversed or changed as a result. The Assembly representatives who attend the RMG meetings (Relationship Management Group) are assertive and often challenging advocates for the VCS, and he thinks these discussions are very important and valuable, giving an opportunity to develop a stronger relationship and better understanding of the issues we all face.

Suggestions to develop a Cultural Forum were made at last year's conference. In response to this, Suzy Russell introduced and launched the new Cultural Forum and invited interested parties to join.

Mike Quiggin gave feedback and some thoughts on a recent event held by BIG (Bradford Inquiry Group), and the evidence they are starting to gather about the impact of public sector cuts.

Round table discussions about the Assembly's work and future priorities produced some useful pointers for the Forums and the ASG to consider in this year's action planning (*appendix 1*).

After the break Robert Beard, NAVCA Policy Officer gave a lively introduction to the Localism Act and once again was applauded for his ability to get across a very complicated policy in a clear and accessible way.

Following that, people joined workshops on 4 key themes in the Localism Act and information from these will be used to plan future work and support for groups and communities (*appendix 2*).

Appendix 1

Themed forum discussions: Challenges, Opportunities and Priorities for the year ahead

Equalities Forum

Priorities

- Equality rep from each forum - improve communication across forums
- Equality - cross cutting issue across all forums
- Vehicle for community voice into forums - influencing forum agendas and steering group

Opportunities

- EIAs / consultations
- Training for Forum members

Challenges

- Who, how, to follow up - involve VCS at development stage of process and provide follow up of outcome of EIA process
- Accountability

Regeneration and Prosperity Forum (RAP)

Priorities

- Employability - particularly in under-served communities - mentoring support is vital
- Positive Bradford - useful networking

- Fabrication Lab Keighley
- Important to network, share and work together
- Enterprise - not just lifestyle, businesses grassroots support - way of thinking - distinction between 'enterprising' and 'entrepreneurial'

Opportunities

- Work with large employers to create jobs
- Support to small businesses to help them employ people
- Mentoring / supporting (large to small)
- Apprenticeship Agency
- Treat Employment as a cross cutting theme
- Employment and enterprise
- Support consortium to join up what is available

Challenges

- Still too much exclusion from employment - prejudice
- Roma
- Work Programme
- Work experience opportunities needed

Safer Forum

Priorities

- Develop intervention and prevention agenda
- Increase meaningful engagement at operational / strategic level
- Prevention of hate crime
- Neighbourhood planning / strategy / development

Opportunities

- Neighbourhood planning
- Localism agenda
- Community budgets

Challenges

- Involvement in Localism agenda
- Impact reporting - VFM. VCS data gathering to ensure funding
- Strategy over all activities

Cultural Forum

Priorities

- Influencing policy
- Raising profile of forum / bringing people together

Opportunities

- Definition of culture and inclusion of all
- Making it meaningful for all
- Prove its impact on all areas not just focus on cultural hotspots
- DIVA website - profile, marketing, online forum being set up
- Networking
- Develop cultural events

Health and Wellbeing Forum

Over 30 people attended this discussion with only a third having attended the Health and Wellbeing Forum. We therefore informed people as to what the Forum's activities had been over the last year - the key highlights being: mental health event and report to feed into NHS mental Health strategy review; 2 JSNA events; GP presentations

Forum Priorities

- To continue with our existing priorities -
- Personalisation
- JSNA
- Older People

Additionally is suggested that we should look to include an Integration of services and co-production / community development.

Opportunities

- The Forum recognized that there was a real opportunity to now make more of the links and contextual changes to raise their profile.
- That there are greater opportunities to make links with medical professionals as they now have to think about delivering health differently.
- Integrated Care is now high on the agenda with pilots taking place in Airedale, that will again provide opportunities for third sector to be involved.
- That we have set up a system to capture case studies that demonstrate our impact and effectiveness and as well as the gaps.
- That there really is going to have to be a shift in power and this is important for patients / carers / third sector to be informed about how they do this.

Challenges

- There will be more need and this will more likely be complex needs
- The cuts (particularly benefit and welfare cuts) and recession will have a significant impact on people's health and wellbeing
- Ensuring people are informed about their choices and able to actually to act
- That people are bored with the same issues being discussed such as 'who can access / write in records in the home', for the communication to be joined up - especially when there are fewer people doing more work.

Young Lives Bradford Forum

Priorities for 2012

- Encourage partnership working through more networking events. The VCS are having to fight for the same funding and partnership working will be the key to provide better services and outcomes.
- Encourage improved partnership working using Consortia/Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV)
- Map services currently available so we are clear re Who does what in the district, if we are to promote our services to our partners and bid for funding
- Improve awareness to the network around issues raised by organisations/what is coming up from the grass roots level. Organisations can then identify what they can contribute to.
- Encourage larger groups to support smaller groups as we get more involved in strategy speak and dealing with the local council

Opportunities

- The VCS have a lot of expertise in supporting vulnerable groups and can contribute to emerging planning and delivery around child poverty initiatives; troubled families.
- As the major deliverer of youth services and play services within the District the sector can play an influential role in re-shaping these services in the light of cutbacks in Council delivery.
- Co-location of building to reduce costs to groups

Bradford Environment Forum

The forum was unable to facilitate a workshop at the conference so incorporated it into their AGM.

Priorities for 2012

- **BEF Meetings.** Agreed that BEF would have quarterly themed meetings with guest speakers. Meetings will be scheduled for 90mins, with an additional 30 mins for informal networking. Additional networking and information sharing will happen at Green Drinks.
Additional meetings will be called in response to demand, and if email communication is not deemed sufficient.
- **Revitalise Strategic Rep role.** Discuss with Chair of Regeneration and Prosperity Partnership how environmental issues can be included on the Agenda. Ensure clear feedback from Partnership and Assembly meetings. Continue to select Cooptees to Overview and Scrutiny in new municipal year, if invited to by Chair of Committee,
- **Review Communication Tools:** Task group to explore whether BEF needs to update use of different communication methods, e.g. ning, facebook etc. The general feeling at the AGM was that the focus should be on revitalising the website and email group, but that some exploration of alternatives needs to be explored.
- **Review membership:** BEF membership needs streamlining. Currently people/organisations may be BEF members or may just be members of the website or email group. This needs delayering and a request that all to join BEF as a minimum. Membership management will need resources.
- **Review Website listings:** linked to the above priority but with the main aim to ensure that organisational info on the website is up to date.
- **Formalise links with Environment and Climate Change Unit.** ECCU offer a key link into the Council. Clarify who is our link officer and how we will work together.

Appendix 2

Localism Workshops

1. Neighbourhood Planning

- Resource intensive
- Long time
- Will communities have stamina / skill base for this?

- Who will fund it? It costs a lot
- Masterplans are outside this planning system - not statutory
- Skewed process in favouring new build
- Any area can create one its part of councils duty to encourage this
- Need to enable people to make informed choices
- Cuts in Council officers means less support for communities (e.g. forums)
- Can be many LDFs for one area - Council will choose
- May be divisive - loudest voices are heard!
- LDF needs consultation - but this has not been working
- Once LDF in place, will be difficult to change
- Beware nimbyism

Comment about Localism: Resource is the main issue

2. Housing

Opportunities

- Discretionary housing payments - use wisely
- Influencing definitions of vulnerability re direct payments
- Influencing district tenancy strategy - holding landlords to account (e.g. repairs)
- Mentoring / accrediting private landlords - applying higher standards where duty discharged to private sector

Challenges

- Creating accessible information to vulnerable people
- Ghettoising
- Helping statutory services to reach hard to reach groups
- Changes in tenure / lack of security will hit vulnerable people hardest
- Recovering drug users etc if short term tenancy
- Housing benefit changes affect thousands
- Balancing needs of victims and perpetrators of problems on estates / in communities

Comment about Localism: Assembly needs to be aware of the issues and challenges, map the issues and work to mitigate the impact. Use the detailed information held by e.g. housing benefit to map emerging problems.

3. Right to Bid

Opportunities

- Be pro-active in identifying properties that could be transferred (bought) and put on register of Community Assets rather than rely on published list
- Work with Chamber re private ownership
- Get to know Asset Management etc. better

Challenges

- Questions to clarify with council on procedures for registering properties/land as Community Assets
- Confidentiality

4. Right to Challenge

- Localism or privatisation?
- Communities - how much must they be involved?
- Must consult
- Must honour local compacts
- Social value bill (if passed)
- Economic multiples argument
- Public sector equality duty must be followed by any VCS / private sector who take on services - challenge can be made through council
- Very local service challenges - can be scaled up to wider area for economic reasons; can be challenged e.g. on social impact etc.
- Threat of act might be a lever to force consultation
- Right to challenge last resort? - cost, complexity
- Does not apply to national services even if delivered locally
- Localism - not a coalition only idea - labour support for localism in principle e.g. Total place became community budgeting
- Can challenge be about providing a different service or does it have to be just on the existing service - not in the guidance at the moment
- What's good about it - it might lead to mote CSOs delivering services - threat might change thinking
- Does Government have a definition of social value? Still being discussed
- Compact - link to Best Value guidance, time to review Bradford Compact

Report by Janet Ford, Assembly Co-ordinator with contributions from the Assembly and Forum Chairs.