

THE BRADFORD AND DISTRICT VCS ASSEMBLY ANNUAL REPORT 2012/13

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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 for the voluntary and community organisations in Bradford district within the local authority and other public sector bodies. CNet is commissioned by the council to develop and co-ordinate the Assembly, and to support its members and representatives.

In this third year of operation the Assembly has become further 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 eight **thematic forums** plus a range of associated equality networks, 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)
- Religion and Belief Forum (new, 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

ACTIVITIES AND ACHIEVEMENTS 2012-13

1. ASSEMBLY STEERING GROUP (ASG)

Chair: Caroline Schwaller

Vice Chair: David Wilford

ASG's role is to bring together key themes and issues from the various forums, and use its discretion to prioritise the year's work plan, and the agendas of the Relationship Management Group (RMG). Members report back at each meeting and share information about strategic issues that affect the VCS, and issues that require discussion and action.

The RMG meetings are a very important and documented opportunity to have a more open and honest debate, and to look for solutions to the (often common) issues that the council and the VCS face. They involve most members of the ASG, plus the Deputy Leader Cllr Imran Hussain, and are usually attended by several Strategic Directors and Assistant Directors.

Throughout the year the continuous major topics at ASG and RMG have been the review of commissioning, the ongoing reduction in available funding, the importance of communication and consultation methods and planning further ahead, and the processes for Equality Impact Assessments. The general view is that the council *is* listening to us much more than it did before the Assembly was set up, and that it does make some changes as a result. However, amongst other important points we continue to press for quicker action on the review of commissioning, and a return to three year contracts. We believe that despite the uncertainty of future resources and demands, the council must

still enter into three year agreements (in compliance with the Compact) and if necessary make adjustments along the way.

Besides having contracts to deliver services there are many VCS organisations that rely on small grants and service level agreements, and we also continue to press for a mixed method of funding that allows for flexibility and innovation. Meanwhile we are also working hard behind the scenes to ensure that procurement processes are fair and accessible to the VCS, and avoid unnecessary competition with organisations outside the district. ASG is also very keen to pursue the importance of looking at different ways of working with and funding the VCS, and we stress the opportunities for more creative solutions to agreeing commissioning priorities, and the processes that follow.

VCS representatives are widely dispersed through the many boards, task groups, networks and forums – the places where the real planning goes on and where we can get down to the detail. There is a steady flow of requests for new reps, as the various institutions and organisations realise that the Assembly is the place to come! For example Bradford District Care Trust, Adult Protection Board and the Health and Wellbeing Board.

This is just a snapshot of another busy year, when people are giving their commitment to the Assembly's vital work for the district and to their own jobs and voluntary activities. Harnessing the huge range of views is still – and always will be – a challenge. Let's hope that this coming year brings more involvement from BME communities, those who feel less noticed and listened to and from the voice of communities in general giving the opportunity to have wider debates about major issues facing the district as a whole.

We are constantly frustrated by what we don't manage to achieve, and about what worries us, but overall it is clear that the Assembly is recognised as a force to be listened to. Unlike many other local authorities, in this district the Council recognises the value of investing in this Assembly, and we are envied elsewhere. The strength of our effectiveness relies on the input of everyone involved in the forums.

Caroline Schwaller, Chair

2. ASSEMBLY FORUMS

i. Regeneration and Prosperity (RAP) Forum **Co-chairs: David Wilford and Tony Dylak**

We have had a busy schedule derived from feedback from last year's priority setting at annual conference. This year with guest presentations from the lead contractor responsible for delivering "The Work Programme", Michelle Manson MD of Best came and explained what it was supposed to achieve. Michelle got a quite hostile reception following the voluntary sector being used as "bid candy" for the larger, national prime contractors with little evidence of any meaningful sub-contracting.

Our focus around welfare reforms highlighted the dramatic effect on lower or non-waged clients served by RAP forum members in deprived communities. This led us to push for an event with BMDC, NHS Voluntary Sector and DWP to air concerns and communicate the gravity of the changes and the issues this would bring to the district. ANTP and the Financial Inclusion Partnership helped to organise this event.

The aim was to raise awareness and encourage inter-agency cooperation and communication to ensure people did not fall through the net of support available.

Welfare reform is high profile and featured as one of two topics in the first Bradford District Partnership AGM. This led us to invite Martin Stubbs the Assistant Director BMDC, to discuss how the voluntary sector can help with these serious issues.

Diana Towler from Job Centre Plus gave a presentation of the employment offer to inform members of what support DWP and the “Journey to Work” and “Get Britain Working” measures entailed.

The debate around prime contractors and the gaps around “The Work Programme” continued and members were concerned that not enough was being done to create jobs. This led members around the table to look at ways of looking at ventures to make real employment opportunities.

Tony and David presented to the Employment Skills Board (ESB) and it was noted that NEETS (young people not in employment, education or training) were at risk of becoming a major issue for the Bradford economy and something needed to happen to resolve this. It gave food for thought for the ESB and initiatives have since come forward under the “Get Bradford Working” agenda.

We are in the midst of developing a work plan for the next year and should anyone have suggestions to guide our important work please contact the forum through Janet at CNet.

David Wilford and Tony Dylak, Co Chairs

ii. Health & Wellbeing Forum

Co-chairs: Natasha Thomas and Helen Speight

Vice Chair: Julie Lintern

This last year we have seen significant changes to the health service with the developments of the Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCG’s) the transfer of Public Health to the local authority, the Integrated Care Agenda, and the establishment of the Shadow Health and Wellbeing Board – to name a few.

The Health and Wellbeing Forum now has representatives on the Shadow Health and Wellbeing Board, the Integrated Care Groups, and Patient Engagement groups set up by the CCG’s. Additionally we have had some involvement with the 5 Health and Wellbeing Hubs, which link local activities at a constituency level with all service providers (statutory and VCS).

The Health and Wellbeing Forum has been well represented on the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) Working Group. Forum members have organised and facilitated two consultation events to

ensure that third sector organisations can reflect the needs and gaps that they know exist but may be missed at a strategic level.

The Forum has also held a number of events around the growing needs of Alcohol and Older People, Integrated Care, plus a consultation on the key areas to be considered for the Strategy of the Health and Wellbeing Board. A presentation to the Shadow Board was made on behalf of the third sector to highlight some of our concerns and suggestions for the Board to consider.

The decision to elect 2 Co-chairs and a Vice Chair was made in response to the ever increasing work load necessary to make the Forum viable. The Forum is very grateful for the ongoing support and advice from Jen White from the local authority and from the Health Partnership Project team who provide regular reports to the Forum.

Natasha Thomas, Co-chair

iii. Equalities Forum

Chair: Judy Peltier

Vice Chair: Ash Alom

The forum has built a membership of 65 representatives from a diverse range of groups and organisations district wide. Members have 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. Members support the work of the Bradford Inquiry Group who recently hosted an event about the impact of the council budget proposals.

The Forum worked with partners from the Bradford Infrastructure Support Organisation Network (BISON) to deliver equalities training to the membership, One of the outcomes is to elect an Equality Champion from each of the Assembly Forums to ensure the equality agenda and related issues and concerns are considered at all levels.

Other activities include involvement in the Council's Equality Objective action plan and support the Bradford Inquiry Group (BIG). A task group will meet next month to look at BME workforce representation.

Ash Alom, Vice-Chair

iv. Safer Communities VCS Forum

Chair: Peter Bloom

The principal priority of the Forum for 2012/13 was to increase the influence of the Forum at decision making and planning stages to ensure the voice of the Voluntary Sector was heard.

We have made two major steps towards meeting this priority. The Forum now has fully recognised members on the Bradford Community Safety Partnership Board and its three major delivery sub-groups as well as members on specific specialised delivery groups. Additionally, the Forum has been asked to provide representatives to attend the Community Safety Partnership planning meeting which will agree the priorities and subsidiary actions to be included in the 2013-14 Community Safety Plan.

We are pleased that the Council has recognised the input that the voluntary sector can provide and welcome their increasingly positive attitude towards the sector. A Council Officer now attends Forum meetings and forms a very useful conduit whereby the Forum's position on current topics is communicated to the Council.

The message for 2013 is that the Forum is very active and can influence public sector thinking and planning. We hope that many more organisations will attend our meetings and enable the Forum to be more fully representative of the voluntary sector voice across the Bradford District.

Peter Bloom, Chair

v. Bradford Environment Forum (BEF)

Chair: Carlton Smith

The Forum has continued steady growth principally via the BEF website www.bradfordenvironment.org.uk and the ever popular Greens Drinks evening meetings. 50 members offer a vast array of environmental services, engaging hundreds of volunteers and benefiting tens of thousands of Bradford residents. Increasing the diversity of members remains a priority for the forum and the sector.

Significant strides have been made at the strategic level with substantial input from Forum members in to the districts Food Strategy, Allotments Strategy, Cycle Strategy and Woodlands Strategy. The forum is actively engaged in strategy development and scrutiny, with members providing detailed local knowledge and detailed technical input.

BEF members cover a wide spectrum of environmental issues and activities, including food, renewal energy, transport, conservation, green space improvements, forest schools, environmental education, environmental awareness, environmental play, recycling, cycling, woodlands, wetlands, parks, bugs and bats. The last year has seen a flourishing of specialist networks within the forum supporting training, sharing best practice, coordination and support.

The year ahead remains challenging for BEF to keep local focus, attention and progress on long term environmental issues during a time of limited resources and conflicting demands.

Carlton Smith, Chair

vi. Cultural Forum

Chair: Suzy Russell

The forum was launched at last years Assembly conference in response to requests from the sector. A wide and diverse range of groups and organisations have joined and attended meetings and events throughout the year. Key impacts and achievements so far include:

- Starting the forum and building the membership
- Holding some excellent events which brought people together and started a joint conversation about culture in Bradford
- Beginning to be seen as a useful place to go for information and involvement with culture

Members have agreed the following priorities:

- Influencing policy
- Raising the profile of the forum and of culture throughout the district
- Bringing people together
- Work to improve marketing of cultural activity across the district
- Influence Strategic decision making
- Ensure commissioning processes are fair and equitable for the sector
- Promote equalities and embed the equality agenda
- Jointly Create Festivals
- Increase work and volunteering opportunities within culture

Suzy Russell, Chair

vii. Young Lives Bradford

Chair: Kerr Kennedy

The past year has seen the Young Lives Bradford network continue to grow and provide support to over 360 groups throughout Bradford District working with children, young people and families.

Our key achievements over the last year include:

1. A continued, meaningful contribution to the governance and operations of the Bradford Children's Trust and the Bradford Safeguarding Children Board. We manage a range of forum representatives who contribute to both these Boards and relevant sub-groups;
2. Provision of regular, weekly information bulletins using a range of media – e-mail, web, Twitter and Facebook – together with frequent networking forums around young people, play, alternative education for children with behavioural support needs, disabled children and welfare reform. Our recent successful network conference attracted over sixty delegates around the theme of 'New solutions in Hard Times' and focused on how and what the VCS can contribute to the planning and delivery of services to children, young people and families throughout the district, including the achievement of the three Children & Young People's Plan priorities;

3. Becoming a trusted, key partner of choice of Bradford Council to assist in a range of initiatives for C&YP such as administering a grant fund for the Youth Contract programme to support 16-17 year olds not in employment education or training; acting as co-ordinating lead VCS agency for the BLF's 'Talent Match' programme to support 18-25s into employment; and a strategic partner in the District's bid for long term funding (10 years £20-30m) under the BLF's Fulfilling Lives: a Better Start programme.

Current initiatives include the development of a VCS delivery consortium for services to CYP and Families.

Kerr Kennedy, Chair

3. The Bradford Assembly Conference 2013

“What's the Value of “Social Value”, is it just an ACT?”

The conference presentations are available on www.bradfordassembly.org.uk

INTRODUCTION

The theme of 'social value' was agreed by Assembly Steering Group members because of the potential opportunities and implication for the sector arising from the Public Services Social Value Act of March 2012. The basic principles outlined in the Act aim to improve the social, economic and environmental wellbeing of each local authority area across the country and will form the basis of future commissioning and procurement arrangements in the district. The overall purpose of conference was as follows:

- *Bring people together to hear about Assembly work and achievements.*
- *Help to prioritise future Assembly work*
- *Learn about Social Value and implications/opportunities for the sector*
- *Create recommendations for the council and other commissioners regarding measuring social impact, and what is stated in the procurement process*
- *Establish how working in partnership could improve our chances of demonstrating social impact as individual organisations and as the VCS as a whole*
- *Encourage VCS organisations to develop processes for measuring social impact*

The conference began with introductions by Mohammed Salam (CNet Chair), followed by a review of progress and achievements over the past 12 months by Caroline Schwaller, the Assembly Chair. Councillor Dave Green, Leader of the Council spoke passionately about his vision for Bradford and the council's imminent plans to regenerate the city centre.

Imran Rathore gave an overview of the council's approach to Social Value, see website. In summary, the Social Value is a key feature of the Council's recently approved Strategic Commissioning Framework 2013 – 2016 as follows:

“We will use the tools provided by the Social Value and Localism Acts to include in contract specifications requirements to employ people locally, to advertise recruitment opportunities locally, and to support vulnerable adults to take training or development opportunities to improve skills”.

The Assembly Vice Chair (David Wilford) introduced the next part of the programme which began with a presentation from Bernadette Speight, Social Accountant and Auditor. Bernie gave a brief overview of the Act and explained about the Social Audit Network (SAN), an accredited and widely used business improvement tool. She also explained about other tools and techniques including Social Return on Investment (SROI), Local Multiplier 3, SIMPLE and Balance Scorecard.

Carlton Smith from Bradford Environment Project gave a presentation about his organisations experience of measuring the social value of their work and producing social accounts as evidence. Carlton’s presentation included a balance scorecard showing both the financial and social return value of their work.

1. Participant feedback about the conference

- 109 people attended, 42 people completed a feedback form.
- The theme of the conference was very positively received. Comments included ‘very timely’, ‘the theme was an excellent choice’, ‘interesting topic’, ‘thought provoking throughout’.
- Overall people found the information pack useful: ‘information was good, well planned and professional’; ‘copies of presentations would have been beneficial to have in the packs’. They are available to download from www.bradfordassembly.org.uk/assembly-activities/assembly-conference-2013/

People were very positive about the presentations and comments included:

- ‘Bernadette and Carlton spoke with useful detail’
- ‘Bernie Speight was excellent – passionate, informed and plain speaking’
- ‘I learnt a lot from Bernie, I wish she had been given more time’
- ‘Very good presentations ‘very timely – the theme was an excellent choice’; ‘interesting topic’
- ‘Good introduction and overview of Assembly activities from the Chair’
- ‘Great to see BMDC officers at the conference, thanks to Imran for standing in at late notice’
- Despite the Imran’s explanation of the council’s commitment to social value, someone felt that money will still be the main consideration. They felt that the VCS, particularly smaller organisations will be heavily disadvantaged throughout the procurement process.

Other observations include:

- ‘Thanks for inviting Councillor Green. He spoke clearly and gave a positive message for the future’.
- ‘Incorporating community value is an important long term approach, but political ideology changes very few years’

- 'I hope ASG continues to work on this and provides guidance to VCS providers on how to understand and incorporate social accounting' A number of people reflected this
- Delegates welcomed the chance to network with colleagues; they also enjoyed the food provided by Carlisle Café.

2. The Workshops

The purpose and aim of the workshops was to discuss the overall concept of social value in terms of:

- *Opportunities / implications*
- *Barriers to social accounting such as support needs for the VCS (toolkits, training etc.)*
- *Developing solutions by working together*

In summary, the key points raised were as follows:

Support is required for smaller VCS organisations that may not have the capacity to develop partnerships and work collaboratively. There is a demand for training in social accounting, particularly for smaller orgs, and people would like the council to agree a standardised method for use across all future contracts.

VCS partners feel they should be involved in the initial planning of commissioning and procurement arrangements, as well as being integral to shaping future plans for local service delivery. There are suggestions that a commissioning consortia be developed to enable co-design of tenders.

With demand for some services increasing, and resources stretched, the VCS feel they can offer solutions and proposals in addition to adding "social value" and should be the partner of choice in many instances.

The notion of large, national competitors scooping up local contracts could be a short term fix, with long term implications such as loss of local skills and knowledge.

OPPORTUNITIES

- Develop partnerships with VCS orgs and other sectors / agencies; share resources and skills
- Learning and development opportunities for the sector
- Look longer term / monitor clients' journeys
- Chance to promote values and work of the sector / telling real stories, examples of added value
- Chance to compete with private/public sector
- Mandate to create dialogue especially at early stage with commissioners / shape service specs / influence procurement process
- Use of social investment bonds

BARRIERS

- Reduced resources – time, money, commitment
- Not a priority on a day to day basis.
- Financial focus / income generation takes precedence / price beats all
- All competing for the same pot - lack of will to share in current economic climate
- Insufficient resources to be competitive against large prime / national contractors
- Making relationships with stakeholders - the connection between the VCS and local authority is not as good as it could be
- Deciding which method of Social accounting. Agreed proportionality
- Major competition from larger prime contractors
- A potential minefield / a number of hoops to jump in order to get a tender - have grassroots groups got the capacity and skills? If not how do they get them and what support is there?
- Smaller orgs having to compromise what they do
- Forced into partnerships / consortia – could be good or bad,
- Danger of formation of mega consortia, unequal playing field
- Education needed for procurers on what social value really is
- It is difficult to put a value on the work we do, for example helping improve school/college attendance could be due to various interventions. Difficult to measure - they will hopefully do better in their education, might live healthier lives, might not get involved in anti-social behaviour, could take responsibility for their lives
- Lack of political will to sustain the VCS nationally
- Talk of consortia building but in supported housing – council have said they don't want them and prefer mergers – 1 contract, 1 organisation

SOLUTIONS

- Work together with commissioners at an early stage to ensure a joined up approach and sharing of information
- Co-design of tenders, create consortia, Assembly members could get involved in designing of tenders / or be consulted
- Transparent commissioning process and consultation with partners
- All work together to share resources and skills around social value - carry on to use the Assembly / develop networks, be proactive
- Assembly should co-ordinate some joint training for the sector, Local Authority to standardise social accounting
- Build on the work of the Assembly
- Signposting to good practice – NCVO / ACEVO 6 principles of good reporting
- Look at what works well – example of reduced winter deaths use SROI tools eg winter warmth campaigns
- Local Authority to standardise social accounting

- Incorporate Localism and Social Value Acts into Commissioning Framework
- The local authority has to make cuts. They should consider the added value (in monetary as well as volunteer time) the VCS brings to the district. For example, the Young Lives Bradford survey demonstrated that the 61 groups who responded brought approx. £10 million per year (through funding from other grants, non-LA funding & volunteer hours) into the district. This is very significant given the total local authority budget for children and young people's services this year is approx. £75 million.
- Every tender should be weighted in terms of social value / local provision.

Other comments from the workshops

- We build relationships with council officers and then they change roles – need for continuity.
- This shouldn't be the case – council officers should treat organisations equally, maybe council officers need training on this
- On behalf of the sector, ASG should reach an agreement with the council about which form of social accounting will be used to evaluate tenders so VCS orgs know which one to use. ASG involvement with council over the next 3-6 months needs to be on securing this agreement and working on social value and tender accessibility
- Things like having experience of TUPE as a tender requirement mean that some orgs can't tender – and how will you ever get experience if you can't tender? For one very well know and established Bradford org this meant they didn't tender and the work has now gone to an org on other side of Lancashire
- Comment from councillor – there isn't enough money to manage lots of small contracts so there will only be large contracts. But we need to remove barriers which make it hard for consortia to apply
- ASG should work on how we collaborate and develop consortia
- Project 6: Concept of "Ethical collaboration" – this means a small VCS organisation feels OK working with a larger one and that they won't have to compromise values – mutual trust
- Could council have as principle that collaboration is good? Could this be embedded in points system somehow for larger contracts?
- Threat to VCS in change from yearly grants to tenders
- Assembly is great because it provides a more cohesive VCS but now we need to push back a bit and argue for the maintenance of small grants/non procurement
- Our resources tend to be at the coalface so we have less time for strategic thinking and influence
- We have to report in different formats to everyone which uses valuable time!
- One tender had 150 word limit on describing how you would get someone into work. Tenderer wrote 149 words and the feedback was that they hadn't been detailed enough in describing how they would get someone into work!
- Trying to make services sustainable – increased demand on services, reduced funding

- As resources get limited – client group comes with increased needs eg Age UK – more and more about benefits. From April CAB funding reduced for complex debt cases
- Private sector posing as social enterprises, supported by KPMG – will play this game
- Difficult to evidence value of preventative work
- Specialist BME domestic violence services closed
- Engage with local businesses
- The 6 week apprenticeship needs to be looked at the young person needs support after this
- How do you link minority groups into the early stages of commissioning and procurement
- Smaller groups need to be supported to be ready to be able to tender, insufficient resources, staffing capacity
- Social auditing tools need to be more user friendly – groups to do their own in plain language
- Education needs to be about working together in partnership forming alliances to provide services – change culture around competing
- Cheaper doesn't not necessarily mean better – added value

Points raised at the Plenary:

- Lack of BME representation at the conference
- Fit the service to the people, not the people to the service

Report available to download at bradfordassembly.org.uk

Other formats available on request

Written and compiled by Janet Ford, Assembly co-ordinator and Polly Mellor, CNet administrator.
Contributions from the Bradford Assembly and Forum Chairs and Vice Chairs.

