



SOMERSET
**Voluntary, Community
& Social Enterprise**
STRATEGIC FORUM

YEAR 2 REPORT

Supported by



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Introduction and Background

1. The Somerset VCSE Strategic Coordination project was established with funding from Somerset County Council (SCC) in 2014/15 provided to Somerset Community Foundation (SCF). This report covers the second full year of its operation, 2016/17.
2. The terms of reference for the project are to:
 - a. Act as a vital communication link and improve information flow and understanding between the public sector and the wider VCSE by:
 - i. facilitating and supporting meetings, particularly of a Strategic Voluntary Sector Forum ;
 - ii. disseminating information from national developments and the local Public Sector to the VCSE and vice versa, particularly through existing geographical and/or thematic groups;
 - iii. keeping abreast of public sector commissioning intentions / arrangements and tendering opportunities and disseminate the information to the VCSE; and
 - iv. Developing a website and other communication channels to promote and celebrate work being carried out and obtain feedback.
 - b. Help build capacity within the local VCSE sector to work with the local Public Sector by:
 - i. Facilitating and signposting VCSE organisations to sources of help to build capacity to bid successfully for, and deliver, services. This may include governance, financial management, business planning, and impact reporting.
 - ii. Supporting the development of up to 3 new partnerships within the VCSE sector to deliver public sector priorities.
 - c. Advise the public sector on measures and opportunities to engage the local VCSE sector.
 - d. Maintain current and accurate records of all work carried out and provide monitoring and evaluation on the outcomes of activities for the public sector.
3. A financial statement is provided at Annex 1.
4. The formal governance of the project is provided through a quarterly steering group with representatives from SCC and Somerset Community Foundation (SCF) officers.
5. SCF is responsible for appointing and managing the VCSE Strategic Coordinator. Liz Simmons was appointed to the role by SCF in March 2015 on a self-

employed consultancy basis, based on time commitment averaging 2 days a week throughout the year.

6. Funding has been provided by SCC to support the project, with direct and in-kind contributions from other key infrastructure organisations. In addition, during the year, a significant contribution was received from the Somerset Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG).
7. Contributing partners meet quarterly as an 'Advisory Group' to help inform the activity and direction of the initiative. In addition to the steering group members, the Advisory Group includes:
 - a. Community Council for Somerset
 - b. Engage
 - c. Spark

Somerset VCSE Strategic Forum

8. The VCSE Strategic Forum is the cornerstone for delivering the aims of the initiative. The Forum brings together leading local VCSE organisations and public sector bodies to:
 - a. Improve communication and liaison between the sectors
 - b. Provide accountable representation of the VCSE sector to inform policy debate
 - c. Cascade information from the public sector to the wider VCSE sector, and vice versa.
9. There were four quarterly Forum meetings organised by the VCSE Strategic Coordinator attended by over 40 individual representatives of VCSE and public sector organisations. At the meetings there are presentations from internal and external speakers, opportunities for debate and information exchange.
10. The diversity of organisations participating has grown with attendance from Somerset Wildlife Trust, the Somerset Chamber of Commerce and CCG.
11. A wide range of topics have been discussed and debated at each Forum including:
 - Somerset Together
 - SCC Commissioning intentions
 - Social investment programmes
 - Mental Health Hub
 - Loneliness campaign
 - VCSE representation
 - PREVENT
 - Somerset Transformation and Sustainability Plan

- Office of Civil Society Initiatives
- Links with the corporate sector

Knowledge Transfer

12. The first VCSE Leaders Conference in March focussing on innovation and collaboration attracted impressive external speakers from NPC and Open University as well as creating opportunities for peer-learning and networking. The event attracted over 50 participants, 98% of whom rated the event as good or excellent:

“Really useful to take time out to think strategically. Working in a small organisation it was nice to hear others experience and give time for development and innovative thoughts.”

“It was very good opportunity for small organisations to attend strategic conference – it was free well organised informal and valuable thank you.”

“I understand that this is an introduction to more communication between each other & SCC therefore I hope to see this take more shape and build direction & establish shared goals for all to work towards.”

13. In addition the VCSE Strategic Coordinator continued to circulate vital information to networks for wider distribution.

Working with Infrastructure Organisations

14. The VCSE Strategic Coordinator has worked closely the local infrastructure organisations, supporting their development and coordination, and, in particular in response to external opportunities that have arisen.

15. In particular the project has played a supporting role in:

- a. Brokering engagement in Somerset’s Sustainability and Transformation Plan
- b. State of Sector survey

Working with the Public Sector

16. A substantial amount of time and effort has been placed on liaising with commissioners in SCC and in the Clinical Commissioning Group, representing the VCSE Forum and creating opportunities for better communication and engagement.

Evaluation

17. A second annual evaluation of Forum members was undertaken at the April 2017 Forum Meeting and has produced a very positive response in particular many people feeling:

- Better informed about the Somerset VCSE
- That the forum had improved collaboration and networking
- Helped to inform their members and networks

When asked what the Forum had achieved over the year, participants told us

'Awareness of VCSE organisations and what they offer and the leaders within them. Opportunities for promoting collaboration, chance for SCC to fully understand the challenges facing VCSE organisations'

'Allows the opportunity to connect with others- establish relationships'

'Acted as a voice for the sector influencing the influencers'

'Getting people talking, effective networking, more active engagement between the sectors'

'Working more collaboratively with VCS colleagues'

Future Plans

18. The project continues to be supported by Somerset County Council, and latterly the Somerset CCG have also made a significant investment. Priorities for the year ahead include:

- Promote the role of the VCSE in tackling loneliness in Somerset
- Continue to find opportunities to address the needs identified in the State of the Sector survey through information/intelligence sharing, supporting collaboration, and 'Masterclass' events
- Support development of sector leaders
- Establish a transparent and accountable system for VCSE Advocates on County-wide Boards and Committees
- Use Strategic Forum meetings to showcase Somerset VCSE innovation/new projects and initiatives and so encourage peer learning
- Prioritise raising awareness of social enterprises and organisations other than health and social care

- Pilot 'A Day in the Life – Job Shadowing' across sectors
- Support VCSE engagement in the development of Co-production opportunities and in the Somerset Commissioning Academy
- Improve the reach of the Strategic Forum through the use of a Forum website