



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

**Year 3 Report – 2017/2018**

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## **Introduction**

1. This is the third annual report for the Somerset Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) Strategic Forum reporting on activity from April 2017 to March 2018. The VCSE Strategic Forum Terms of Reference are given at Appendix 1.
2. The VCSE Strategic Forum aims to be a 'cross-section' of the range and diversity of the sector in Somerset and to illustrate this a sample list of the organisations who regularly attend Strategic Forum Meetings are to be found in Appendix 2. In 2017-2018 we worked to expand the reach of the Strategic Forum through widening the range of public sector agencies represented.

## **How the Project is run**

3. The budget for the project is managed by Somerset Community Foundation (SCF) who also manages the VCSE Strategic Advisor. The Strategic Advisor is employed on a consultancy basis based on a time commitment averaging two days a week throughout the year.
4. Formal governance of the project is provided through a quarterly steering group with representatives of Somerset Community Foundation (SCF) and Somerset County Council. An Advisory Group also provides support and guidance for the project and this includes representation from SCF, SCC, Somerset Clinical Commissioning Group, Spark, Engage and CCS and this meets twice a year.

## **Extending Reach**

5. A key task for the Forum this year was to improve the reach and breadth of membership. Somerset Clinical Commissioning group now send a representative to each Forum and we continued to have representation from all the District Councils as well as Somerset Partnership, Office of Police and Crime Commissioner and until recently the Somerset Chamber of Commerce.
6. There were four meetings of the Forum. The meetings continued to provide bite-size updates on key matters as well as an opportunity for individual organisation profiles (Taunton Association for the Homeless, Stand Against Racism and Inequality –SARI and Somerset Activity Sports Partnership) as well as presentations and discussions on topics including; Somerset STP, volunteering, GDPR, SCC Commissioning, Social Prescribing – Life Chances Fund, Youth Investment Fund, tackling loneliness, Think Family Strategy, Somerset Social Enterprise Fund, Enhance Social Enterprise, Somerset Health & Wellbeing Strategy, Naturally Healthy May and the West Somerset/Taunton Deane Lottery.

## Strategic Forum Meetings

7. The Strategic Forum met in April, July and October 2017 and in March 2018. At each meeting there were opportunities to network, learn more about the work of local VCS organisations and to find out about strategic initiatives. Meetings also included regional information as well as collaboration and funding opportunities.
8. Meetings were attended by 35 – 40 organisations providing a cross-section of the Somerset VCSE as well as key representatives of health, social care and depending on the agenda, regional funders, Office of Civil Society, Office of Police and Crime Commissioner, Somerset Chamber of Commerce, etc.

## Website and social media

9. One of the most important activities of 2017-18 was to develop the new [Strategic Forum website](#) and this has been a joint effort between the Forum and SCC. Kerry Willis (Spark) has done a great job continuing to shape the website, keeping it up to date and using Twitter to bring items of particular interest to the sector. The website now provides a countywide neutral platform for items of strategic interest to or about the voluntary, community and social enterprise sector. Links with commissioning intentions as well as opportunities for collaboration, engagement and representation will be the key focus in 2018-19.
10. In response to requests to cover specific topics in more depth than can be accommodated at a regular Forum meeting we used the option to extend the Forum into an additional specialist afternoon session and this has included topics such as:
  - a. A workshop on applications to Children in Need led by Richard King
  - b. Open meeting for potential partners in the Life Chances bid
  - c. Overview of Somerset Intelligence Network and its value to the VCSE
11. We also carried out an evaluation of Forum work in July 2017

## New networks

12. This year the Strategic Forum has developed links with the South West area of **CLINKS** (organisation which supports the voluntary sector working in the criminal justice system) which the Strategic Advisor attended and made a presentation at their December 2017 Regional event in Taunton.
13. Throughout this year the Strategic Forum also developed and maintained close links with the **Richmond Group** as they developed the Somerset strand of their 'Doing the Right Thing' Project. The Strategic Advisor and the Richmond Group Project Coordinator co-facilitated a number of workshops in particular around

social prescribing. The Strategic Advisor attended a Richmond Group Roundtable event in December 2017 and is a member of the National 'Doing the Right Thing' Steering Group to represent the wider Somerset VCSE.

## **Developing the sector – building information and knowledge**

### **First Leaders Conference – 16<sup>th</sup> March 2017 Innovation and Collaboration**

14. Our first conference was attended by over 50 CEOs, senior staff and Chairs from across the sector. There was a mix of presentations from local as well as national organisations including the Open University School of Voluntary Sector Management on Leading Collaboratively, national Think Tank NPC (New Philanthropy Capital) on Achieving Greater Impact in a Changing World' and grants/ trusts specialist (and blogger) Emma Beeson on 'A Funders Perspective'. The Conference also heard from Stephen Chandler Director of Adult Services, Somerset County Council, Phil Dolan of Age UK Somerset and Rhys Davies of Community Catalysts Micro-providers Project. Above all the conference was an opportunity for sector leaders to meet, network and hear cutting edge thinking from important national voluntary sector specialists. Some comments on the conference included:

'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'

'Great day very, very useful for our organisation and the crossroads/fork in the road that we are currently negotiating/exploring'

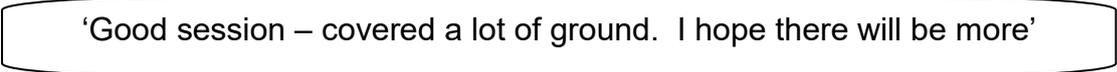
'Felt that the VCSE is now being viewed as an equal and important partner'

## **The Trustee Gathering - 14<sup>th</sup> November - National Trustee Week**

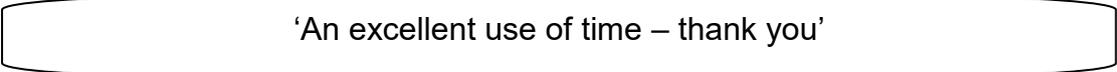
15. Trustees are a vital part of any voluntary organisation and in November 2017 the Strategic Forum held its first Trustee Gathering during National Trustee Week to celebrate the dedication and hard work of the many hundreds of Somerset people who are trustees. Thirty-five people came to Victoria Park Community Centre in Bridgwater for tea and cake, to hear a re-fresher session on Duties of Trustees, to take part in an interactive session on the new Governance Code of Practice and to feedback their ideas on recruitment of and development needs of trustees in Somerset. Following on from this event we During the year we have built a relationship with the Association of Chairs and Somerset has become one of the pilot areas for their Beacon Project providing training for trustees in the east and west of the county.

**80% of people attending said they had learnt something new**

**67% said they had make useful links and contacts**



'Good session – covered a lot of ground. I hope there will be more'



'An excellent use of time – thank you'

## **Wider Networking**

16. Justin Sargent and Liz Simmons attended a Big Lottery Ideas Lab in Exeter, a useful networking opportunity with other similar south west organisations and a chance to help feedback and shape forthcoming Big Lottery priorities. The Strategic Forum created opportunities throughout the year for groups to hear from and meet with some of the key funders including Big Lottery and Children in Need.

17. During 2017-18 the Strategic Advisor and Advisory Group Members took opportunities to meet with other south west VCSE Infrastructure organisations VOSCUR (Bristol) and DeVA (Devon Voluntary Action) to find out more about their work and to exchange information and ideas.

## Influence

- a. Collectively the Forum has continued to use its regular meetings to influence strategic relationships and activities by providing a point of contact for public sector colleagues and commissioners. Feedback collected in the annual Strategic Forum evaluation strongly suggests that the impact of this work is felt and comments included:

‘The Forum has brought the sector much closer together’

‘Started the process of providing a united VCSE voice to the public sector’

‘Building on the new-ish feeling of cross-sector solidarity: we’re in this together’

‘The website has really improved communication with the sector’

‘Allowing dialogue that would otherwise not happen’

‘This is new to me but from what I have seen, it looks like it is achieving a lot of joined up working’

‘It has supported voluntary sector leaders and chief officers’

## Stronger Communities Sub Group

18. Throughout the year the Strategic Forum was represented on the Health and Wellbeing Board Stronger Communities Sub-Group alongside representatives from Somerset County Council, Public Health, CCG and other voluntary sector agencies. A key piece of work was to support the whole Stronger Communities agenda, looking at community assets, gathering information, bringing key organisations together and assisting in developing the strands of work including social prescribing.

## **Somerset NHS System Transformation**

19. The Strategic Forum maintained links throughout the initial phases of Outcomes Based Commissioning (OBC) work in Somerset, later the STP which was then re-branded as Somerset Together. During the year a considerable amount of time was spent by the Strategic Advisor as well as Chief Officers of CCS, Spark and Engage in attending System Leaders meetings, taking part in workshops and commenting on draft documents. In addition we recruited an Advisory Group of four delivery VCSE organisations able to comment from a 'provider' perspective on system re-design proposals. We also supported the establishment of a People's Panel to consider proposed changes
20. The Strategic Advisor attended monthly STP Models of Care Steering Group meetings and the STP Communications and Engagement Group to assist with stakeholder mapping, etc. The Strategic Advisor linked other VCS organisations into the Complex Care and Out of Hospital Design Group.
21. The STP work was 'paused' in late summer 2017 and all groups were disbanded.

## **Responding to new opportunities and building collaboration**

22. We have taken opportunities to promote collaboration both within the VCSE as well as across sectors. The Strategic Advisor worked with CCS, Engage and Spark on the Make it Happen initiative and although this did not result in a formal partnership, the meetings between chief officers and chairs were helpful to improve knowledge and understanding. Some of the initial work was then used to build the new Strategic Forum website.

Engagement work with the NHS has already been described but this did represent a significant investment in time by the Strategic Forum throughout this year. Less formally there were discussions with many organisations including the Design Council, Red Cross, Mind, Westbank, Mental Health Hub, TDBC, West Somerset DC, South Somerset District Council, NCVO, Compass, etc.

## **Raising the profile of the sector**

23. The regular Strategic Forum meetings have helped to raise the profile of the sector and this has been recognised in the evaluation feedback from the Forum and the Leaders Conference.
24. Throughout the year we have worked with the Richmond Group and their Somerset Project Manager as part of the Stronger Communities work on aspects of their Doing the Right Thing Project and social prescribing initiatives in particular. The national profile of the Richmond Group has brought a new perspective to some of our work and has been a helpful additional resource and source of expertise. .

## **Other**

25. There have been a whole range of activities that have been undertaken during the year, from discussions with groups about recruiting new trustees, to ideas on potential partnerships, collaborative funding initiatives and other informal matters.

26. In early 2017 the Strategic Advisor completed and presented the Somerset Autism Community Services Directory to the countywide Autism Strategy Group chaired by the Clinical Commissioning Group.

## **Further Information**

27. For further information about the VCSE Strategic Forum visit [www.somersetvcse.org.uk](http://www.somersetvcse.org.uk)