



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

Year Four Report 2018- 2019

Supported by:-



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Introduction

This is the 4th Annual Report for the Somerset Strategic Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) Forum, reporting on activity from April 2018 to March 2019.

The Strategic Forum brings together representatives from a significant section of the VCSE sector, with senior staff from the local authority, health and other key county-wide services to enable an exchange of information and views for the benefit of the people of Somerset.

The Forum's website can be found at www.somersetvcse.org.uk

The Advisory Group consists of representatives from Somerset County Council, Somerset Community Foundation, Community Council for Somerset (CCS), Spark Somerset and Engage. Although Somerset County Council provide the largest share of the funding, all members of the Advisory Group also contribute financially towards the VCSE Forum.

Somerset Community Foundation is responsible for appointing and managing the VCSE Co-ordinator who is employed on a consultancy basis. Liz Simmons carried out this work until December 2018 and Alison Baker took over in early 2019. Significant pieces of work such as the State of the Sector report and the Leader's Conference are now delivered by members of the Advisory Group.

Key Achievements for the Year

Strategic Forum

A decision was made in 2018/19 to reduce the number of Forum meetings from 4 to 3 per year. This was to allow scope for one off single topic events, as well as accommodating other events such as the Leaders' Conference.

The Forum met in June and October 2018 and March 2019. At each meeting there were opportunities for the VCSE sector to learn more about Somerset County Council's commissioning objectives, as well as the Council receiving feedback and insights from leading VCSE sector organisations.

Each meeting was attended by 35 – 40 organisations providing a cross section of the Somerset VCSE community as well as key representatives of the County Council, Health, local and regional funders, Police and Office of Civil Society.

Feedback collected in our annual evaluation, alongside direct contact with contributors to the Forum, suggest that the Forum provides an invaluable role in influencing strategic relationships and activities by providing a point of contact for the public sector colleagues and commissioners.

'The Forum is always a useful and productive meeting, enabling sector leaders to network, share thinking and learn from each other.'

'The dialogue between the VCSE sector and Public Authorities is useful and has been enhanced because of the Forum.'

'As a result of presenting at the Forum, I have had a number of follow up meetings with VCSE agencies. The aim was to strengthen links with VCSE agencies - so this was the desired outcome.'

'The Forum is a really useful network to get your message across. I can't think of any platform where you get such an amazing cross section of organisations attending.'

'If you want to know what is happening on a particular topic this is the place to be. The theme approach to each meeting means that you don't have to attend them all.'

'Yes – I really value the forum as a way of having a discussion with a wide range of VCSE organisations, as opposed to just a few separately.'

'It is a massively valuable forum. Having the opportunity to see colleagues is invaluable – both within our sector and with statutory partners in attendance.'

Leaders' Conference

Our Leaders' Conference in 2018 had the theme of 'The Future of Social Action' and offered an opportunity for a number of organisations to showcase a variety of approaches from new initiatives in volunteering, to developing social enterprise and attracting new trustees.

The response from the conference was positive and seen as a chance to reflect away from day to day pressures. 50 people attended the event with 60% rating it as excellent and 10% good.

Social Media

We have continued to extend our reach and influence via our social media channels- which are managed on the Forum's behalf by Spark Somerset. During 18 / 19 our website had 6400 page views and our Twitter account had 2207 profile visits. Our Twitter (@somersestvcse) followers have increased from 95 in March 2018 to 322 in March 2019.

Richmond Group

In 2018 we teamed up with the Richmond Group (www.richmondgroupofcharities.org.uk) which brought a welcome capacity and a different strategic perspective to VCSE. The aim of the work with the Richmond Group mirrored that of the VCSE Strategic Forum - to improve collaboration between the County (and particularly Commissioners) and the VCSE.

Via the Richmond Group we were commissioned to carry out research across the County into Social Prescribing with a number of consultation events. The VCSE forum hosted a webinar - www.somersestvcse.org.uk/social-prescribing-webinar and a subsequent report was produced. 'Tapping The Potential' www.richmondgroupofcharities.org.uk/news/tapping-potential

The Richmond group also facilitated work around the STP (Sustainability and Transformation Plans) as it adapted over time as well as facilitating a number of collaboration workshops which has led to a legacy action plan for the County – including looking into the development of a SPOC (single point of contract).

The links with the Richmond Group provided really useful national links and gave a profile to Somerset. The story from start to finish is an interesting one of how much time and investment is required both by the VCSE and the public sector to make true collaboration work.

Stronger Communities Group

The Strategic Forum became involved in this work at the time of the original Somerset STP and continued attending as the group changed its membership and role. The group is an important link in to the Health and Wellbeing Board with work being done on developing the vision for Stronger Communities in Somerset.

Through our involvement with the Stronger Communities Group we have helped to develop the Life Chances Project and strengthened our links with Somerset Commissioning Academy work.

VCSE Advocacy and Representation on Strategic Groups

During 2018 we began developing a new element of the relationship between the public sector and the VCSE through sector advocate roles, with the aim of increasing transparency, strengthening the voice of the sector and improving two-way communications.

Further information can be found here: www.somersestvcse.org.uk/vcse-advocates

Urgent Care / Winter Pressures - throughout 2018

The Somerset VCSE Strategic Forum was involved in a number of meetings to pull together the different strands of VCSE work. We helped to develop the conversation to ensure that the VCSE are included in future work.

Re-Commissioning of Victim Support Services Avon & Somerset

We worked with Voscur to hold a number of workshops for potential bidders for the recommissioning of this service as well as meeting with the PCC (Police and Crime Commissioners Office) who led the commissioning process.

Fit For My Future

The VCSE Forum Co-ordinator attended monthly meetings of the Comms and Engagement Group for Fit for My Future – a new Health and Social Care strategy for Somerset. We ensured that VCSE views were represented. We also organised a consultation workshop with the Clinical Commissioning Group, Somerset County Council and the VCSE.

Priorities for 2019-20

The Somerset VCSE Strategic Forum has identified a number of priorities for 2019/20. However, capacity is retained to pick up appropriate additional work at short notice.

Review of membership

We intend to carry out a full review of the current membership of the forum to ensure that it remains strategic and county wide and, as far as is possible, provides a good cross section of the VCSE community in Somerset.

(VCSE)Strategic Forums

We will host 2 Strategic Forum meetings during 2019/20, with the next forum planned for October 2019. We will continue to ensure that these forums are attended by a cross section of the VCSE community and will continue to provide a vital link between the sector and County Commissioners.

Safer Communities Forum

Following an approach to the Forum, we will be holding a dedicated workshop event in July with a Safer Communities / Community Safety theme. The aim of the event will be to inform The Police and those responsible for Community Safety within the County Council, of the depth and breadth of relevant skills and experience within the VCSE sector, as well as the sector hearing of commissioning possibilities.

Adult Social Care Forum

Due to the increased interest in this subject both nationally and locally, we will be hosting a forum in July specifically looking at Adult Social Care issues across the County. The event will give the opportunity for the VCSE sector to hear directly from the County Council's Director of Social Care and other members of his Senior Team. The event will explore how the VCSE sector and the County can collaborate more effectively to respond to growing need.

Review of Advocacy Roles and Representation on Strategic Groups

As part of the review of membership of the VCSE Forum, we will also be reviewing the Advocacy roles on various strategic groups across the County. We need to ensure that the sector have a voice at an appropriate level and that there is a mechanism for information to be disseminated to the wider VCSE community.

Leaders' Conference

This year's Leaders' conference will be held on 21st June at Monks Yard, Ilminster. Spark Somerset have been commissioned to organise this event. A number of high-level keynote speakers will be attending the event including the Chief Executive of the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) – Peter Wanless.

Richmond Group follow up – Collaboration Workshops / Development of SPOC

In 2019/20 The VCSE Forum will co-ordinate and facilitate the follow up work on these areas where required. We will support research into a SPOC for Somerset and will facilitate discussions with Commissioners on the subject -as required.

State of the Sector Report

The VCSE Strategic Forum produced a State of the Sector Report in 2016. Entitled 'Share, Celebrate, Grow', this was the first in-depth review of the state of the VCSE sector in Somerset. It was an opportunity to celebrate the great work taking place across the County, but also to explore the key issues facing the sector. Spark Somerset have been commissioned to undertake a new research project for 2019. Feedback will be sought from VCSE organisations in the Autumn, with the report due to be published in early 2020.

Website and Social Media @somersetvcse

During 2019/ 20 we will continue to promote the Somerset Strategic VCSE Forum via our [website](#) and various social media channels in order to continue to extend our reach and influence.