

# **‘Dorset’s voluntary sector on a knife edge – charting our way to a sustainable future’**

Conference Report

23<sup>rd</sup> December 2015



## CONFERENCE FINDINGS

**Thank you** for attending our recent conference. This short report contains a summary of the main findings from each workshop (blue boxes), full workshop notes, and the three presentations in separate files, including web links for further information.

The 80 people who attended the conference discussed the many challenges we face, including reductions in local authority investment in the Voluntary, Community, and Social Enterprise (VCSE) sector, Dorset's Community Partnership infrastructure under threat, loss of small grants etc., all driven by government policy change. Our biggest challenge is time, and our ability to move quickly enough to counter these challenges. During the 2016/17 financial year in which Dorset County Council (DCC) is continuing to support the sector, the Council is on a 12 month timetable to justify continuing investment in the sector from 2017/18 to DCC members, and to develop a commissioning framework that can provide opportunities for the sector in changing how public services are delivered. Now is the time for us to re-define our relationship with DCC, and also other statutory sector organisations e.g. the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) and we have limited time to do this in. Our proposed road map for the for the next 6-12 months therefore is:

- DCA will be convening a small VCSE sector working group to work alongside DCC's Chief Executives Office to address the issues raised by this conference, and to develop the investment case for 2017 onwards. We intend to start this work in Jan 2016.
- This group will report to the Dorset Communities Forum which will provide wider oversight and allow input from the wider VCSE sector. If you want to get involved then you can join the Forum by contacting Laura Cornette at DCC ([l.cornette@dorsetcc.gov.uk](mailto:l.cornette@dorsetcc.gov.uk));
- We will aim to have a basic framework in place by late summer 2016, with prioritisation of key tasks to make sure our plan is achievable.

The main issues to be considered from the conference are:

- How best to measure the VCSE sector's impact and value using a simple method that will be recognised by statutory sector partners;
- How best to map collaboration in the VCSE sector, better understand our strengths, capabilities, and make better use of its existing skills and resources;
- Start a commissioning conversation and develop a common outcomes framework with DCC, learning from best practice elsewhere;
- Work with DCC to develop a simple procurement process, and look at how best we can build VCSE capacity for contracting, including collaborative models;
- Consider the future for Community Partnerships and their role (if any) in supporting this process.

To do this we must also be realistic and prioritise. Above all we must be able to measure and communicate our impact and value as a sector. While we ask you for your support, we appreciate that this is a leap of faith, and we will likely be charting some choppy water. Nevertheless, we hope as many as possible will feel able to join us on this journey. For those that do, this conference represents DCC's public commitment to this process and we must now

hold them to this, and that means playing our part in continuing this conversation with DCC. Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for your ongoing support.

**Alex Picot, DCA Chief Executive.**

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## **WORKSHOP SUMMARIES**

### ***Workshop 1***

**How can the voluntary sector work with DCC to better align its objectives with DCC's Corporate Plan?**

#### **Main points/ACTIONS from workshop 1:**

##### **DCC**

- Develop proportional, accessible, achievable, and innovative commissioning, using VCSE sector learning and pre-visioning;
- Support Local Area Partnerships (LAPs) or community hubs/organisations, and get CCG and Police & Crime Commissioner (PCC) to contribute as they use the multi-faceted LAPs;
- Getting balance of risk right between sectors and being less risk adverse.

##### **VCSE**

- Utilise current VCSE experts with key skills to mentor new organisations;
- Mentoring and working to their strengths;
- Measuring Social impact.

##### **DCC and VCSE together:**

- Working together and using each other strengths, so DCC simplify social impact measurement and provide appropriate support, and allow VCSE to deliver;
- Develop a 'joint base' for sharing good practices between the two, using modern technology.

##### **Outcomes**

- Use joint intelligence, what's happening, capabilities, and gaps in VCSE services;
- Bottom up working with a focus on rural isolation, focus on best solutions, and preventative early intervention;
- Co-production around outcomes;
- Small pots of money to pump prime activity – simple procurement for smaller local third sector organisations.

### **Workshop 2**

**How can we better collaborate together?**

#### **Main points/ACTIONS from workshop 2:**

- We need to connect more across the VCSE sector, utilise existing mapping as much as possible to find out what organisations do. Provide access to tools. Possibly have a 'congress';
- We need to utilise the capacity we have (VCSE and statutory), share skills (e.g. bid writing) - it's not just about money;
- VCSE sector needs to be more consistent e.g. measuring outcomes;

- DCC will want to involve the sector during 2016/17 to understand how best to provide support in the future - grants? collaboration? supporting innovation? (16/17 is a transitional year).

### **Workshop 3**

#### **Strategic priorities for the voluntary sector?**

##### **Main points from workshop 3:**

Need a forum to provide a “voice”. Dorset Communities Forum is a good start, though if Forum is going to be the main strategic group, its needs to be represented by all stakeholders;

It is difficult for VCSE groups to understand the value and impact of what they do and how to reflect this in grant applications etc. We need to simplify language e.g. from outcomes to ‘what difference do you make?’;

There needs to be a cultural change across both sectors and we should work with officers/councillors who engage with the community and have local knowledge.

## **FULL WORKSHOP NOTES**

### **Workshop 1**

#### **How can the voluntary sector work with DCC to better align its objectives with DCC’s Corporate Plan?**

##### **Where are the gaps in the CP?**

Demographic imbalance and intergenerational equality.

Economic disparity in rural versus urban areas, needing to keep young people in Dorset , new business cannot grow with no young skilled people, e.g. rural skills.

Remember housing is vital so younger people can live and work in Dorset.

##### **What changes do DCC need to make e.g. data sharing, & commissioning?**

Leaders and senior managers get out in community. DCC needs to talk to actual stakeholders not officers. Outcome focussed example – Humility doing with, and not doing to.

Not lose sight of depth of knowledge and skills within VCSE.

More use of digital technology.

More awareness of common wealth.

Volunteers are not a free resource!.

Better understanding of impact of future services on direct delivery e.g. loss of youth services>future police costs>future young people and adults.

Better support for local communities delivering services in different areas e.g. vulnerable isolated – not just financial.

Better local intelligence as part of DCC commissioning.

Commissioning should be a learning experience to enhance knowledge base.

Proportionate, accessible, achievable commissioning.

Issue of shared risk with DCC very bad!!!! Innovative commissioning don’t reinvent what VCSE already doing so don’t stifle creativity.

Support Local Area Partnership. Change of culture to LAPs – that they are legitimate.

Approach CCG & PCC to support the LAPs too as all using.

Does council know what VCSE does?  
Too slow - DCC to show "talk to action".  
Procurement too slow.  
Letting go of power – reach out more to small VCSE.  
Communication needs to be better.  
Better financial support from districts.

**What is working well?**

Better communication developing with DCC.  
POPP, but needs to harness community interest and commitment.  
Community partnerships.  
Housing related support (Magna housing).

**What changes do the VCSE need to make e.g. capacity, and fragmentation?**

Be open to new suggestions & collaborative working.  
More use of digital technology.  
Data protection issues for multi-agency.  
Less duplication of good practice nationally into local orgs.  
Smaller VCSE needs to get better at measuring social impact – not to get tied up in this as takes away from delivery.  
Framework to fair and honest agreements , no duplicate bids.  
Overcoming silos.  
Evaluate outcomes appropriately.  
Simplified use of evidence e.g. arts and mental health, 50 yrs worth of evidence, e.g. is anyone better off as a result of intervention.  
Look at future need in communities rather than just delivery.

**How can we address the current delivery gap in the CP?**

Make more of the CP as making a difference together.  
Locally defined outcomes – communities.  
DCC common outcomes framework.  
POPP way of working scaled up.  
Release local potential.  
DCC give up power.  
Database of consultees, connections.  
Partnerships with each community.  
More focus on community and bottom up support.  
Focus on solutions for lonely and isolated people already happening.

**Workshop 2**

**How can we better collaborate together?**

**What are the opportunities & threats?**

**Opportunities**

Create knowledge database of groups.  
Potential funding.  
Increased reach.  
Wide skill base.  
Bringing those together with common interest Can make/enable us to provide better

services/outcomes.

VCSE know communities and we are a way to engage with all groups of the community. We can cover more areas – a lot of routes to the public.

Communication is key – we need to define what we do as organisations.

### **Threats**

Individual identity.

Data sharing.

Larger LA or CCG.

Overlook smaller groups.

Getting our ideas to LAs and the private sector.

We have ground level understanding of issues and how to solve them – however does this mean that we might exclude smaller organisations?

Working across sector there may be some issues with joint application of funding – want to go different ways may mean we lose all funding.

### **What other models can we use to address lack of sector capacity & fragmentation?**

Create a congress: 0-19 Forum exists, Dorset communities forum, partnership framework.

Conference papers could include a short biography of each attendee including hats worn.

Utilise DCA and their database, website.

Dorset arts together.

Early stages of BBO.

Working with You (Weymouth & Portland).

Community Partnerships already have procedures and structures in place to provide opportunities.

JV example with a partner in Germany?

Commissioned services.

No “one size fits all”.

Provide sector with a one stop shop of how we can work together.

Do a mapping exercise across county to find out how and where we currently work together as a sector.

### **How can we build long-term capacity?**

Is it possible/realistic to expect us to be able to have any certainty about being long term sustainable when everything always changes – no jobs for life?

Need to be able to reinvent/change as an organisations as long as beneficiaries still helped.

Can share resources between us which could sustain us better.

Somerset has provided funding/support, community catalyst company name, for small community projects – small funding creates big difference.

LA need to look at how they procure services – not only just big Dorset wide contracts.

Need to be better at collecting data to show how we are providing outcomes.

Can we have a single toolkit of how we collect this information in order to provides outcomes data.

We need to promote ourselves more.

### **What type of funding/income would allow us to collaborate better?**

Using each other’s resources – not always about new money.

Should offer choice.

Should allow for growth and development.

Funding is always led by the funder.  
More funding that can be used on core costs.  
Some form of funding to research how this will work.

### **Workshop 3**

#### **Strategic priorities for the voluntary sector?**

##### **How can we agree priorities as a VCSE sector?**

Need a forum to provide a “voice”.  
Dorset Communities Forum a good start.  
Need to ensure people attend.  
Crucial for local discussions.  
What is mechanism to work collaboratively.  
DCA host community lunches to facilitate.  
Need to map against demographics.  
Avoid duplication of services.  
What is our USP?  
Could Local Community Partnerships take the lead?  
Agreed the forum was a starting point but it needed “invigorating”, let’s SMASH it up!  
If forum is going to be main strategic group needs to be represented by all stakeholders.

##### **How can we collectively measure our impact?**

Simplify language i.e. what difference do you make?  
It is like learning a new language for groups i.e. understanding what is needed by Big Lottery – difficult for groups to understand the “value” of what they do and how to reflect this in applications etc.  
How can we understand/help local groups understand the “impact” of what they do?  
Agreed that the Corporate Plan 4 outcomes would be a good starting point but underneath these 4 outcomes there needs to be SMART objectives i.e. being healthy means different things to different people.  
Should rural and social isolation be a separate outcome?

##### **How can we understand DCC’s challenges to bring our solutions to the table?**

Needs to be a cultural change.  
Pick/select officers/councillors who engage with the community and have local knowledge.  
Should the voluntary sector take over statutory services? Is this where we are heading?  
Could be a challenge recruiting new Trustees in the future in light of Kids Company fallout.  
Do we need lots of Treasurers/Chairs/Vice-Chairs for so many “small” charities  
?collaboration ?mergers needed.

#### **CAR PARK NOTES**

##### **What have we missed?**

- Collaboration when we are really competing, cultural change takes time;
- Discussion on who should design outcomes measurement;
- A commitment is needed to map the sector and its needs – a paid post is essential;
- How could all organisations collect data to feed into mapping and outcomes?;
- The voice of the sector;

- Needs of community>changes that need to be achieved>service to achieve this
- Where is the CCG in this discussion?;
- Best placed delivery mechanism – forget traditional organisational structures;
- Private sector involvement and partnerships.