

Update on the VSA from Susan Black, VSA Coordinator

I would like to thank all concerned for making the **Fit for the Future** such a great success. We were surprisingly for this year, very lucky with the weather.

The Kindle Centre basked in the warm February sunshine as the delegates turned up in force. The main hall thronged with stall holders, workshop leaders and delegates, including our guest of honour, The Mayor of Hereford, as Cllr Stone made his opening remarks. Cllr Stone has a long association with the Voluntary Sector and regularly volunteers in his own constituency. His welcoming remarks showed an impressive grasp of the valuable contribution that the voluntary and community sector makes to life in Herefordshire.

Fitting four workshops and a break into two and a half hours is quite a tall order. To repeat the whole thing in the evening is a huge undertaking. The evening session was opened by Mr Chris Bull, Chief Executive of Herefordshire Council and Primary Health Care Trust. Chris, who chaired the 'Stronger Communities' forum when he worked in Southwark, spoke about the added value that the Voluntary and Community Sector brings, about the need to forge strong partnerships and the growing recognition that the statutory service providers could not do it all.

Your VSA Reps have been very busy working on the new **Local Area Agreement and the 'Story of Place'**, which sets out what makes Herefordshire special. There have been some tough negotiations about what indicators should be included in Local Area Agreement. Since there was so much pressure on the indicators, the Voluntary and Community Sector has been strongly featured in the Story of Place, and we managed to get Volunteering included in the 'Stronger Communities' section of the LAA.

Work will now begin on the target which will be used to measure progress (or lack of it) towards achieving the Herefordshire Local Area Agreement. You may ask, why does all this matter? Though there is no new money to achieve the outcomes of the LAA, the idea is that budgets can be combined and duplication avoided, under-spends redirected; and so if the sector is not part of this process, then we cannot easily take part in delivering the solutions.

All of which leads me on to the **Compact**. The Compact is about developing good partnership working and shared understanding between the statutory and voluntary sectors. Some of you might be sceptical about the benefits of this, but once adopted the Compact carries the some weight and if processes are not observed then they can be challenged. In Herefordshire, we have just signed off the Local Compact and work has now begun on the Volunteering Code. If you are involved in recruiting or supporting volunteers, or if you volunteer yourself, why not come along on 9 May to Three Counties Hotel, join us for a coffee and a 'Danish' and help shape what we want to see in Herefordshire.

Visit www.thevsa.org.uk for more information about the VSA or contact Sue Black by email sue@herefordshireva.org or at HVA 01432 343932