



Voluntary Sector Assembly News

September 2006

VSA Representatives' Elections

In June we ran our elections for new Voluntary Sector Assembly Representatives. The election results are:

VSA Topic	Name of Representative	Voluntary & Community Group:
Compact	Philip Dazeley	Churches Together, Ross
Funding	Brian Williams	Hereford Police Choir
Learning	Julie Wilson-Thomas	HELP
Economic Development	Geoff Tunstall	Workmatch
Herefordshire Partnership – Performance Management Group	Mary Simpson	Teme Valley Youth Project
Herefordshire Partnership Board	Richard Quallington	Community First H&W
Volunteering	Sarah Crowley	HELP

How to contact VSA representatives: If you wish to contact our reps, please phone 01432 343932 and ask for Sue Brazendale. We will then put you in contact with our VSA representatives. Alternatively e-mail Sue on admin@thevsa.org.uk

Thank you to all that took the time to vote, and to those who also stood for the posts of Compact, the Performance Management Group and Volunteering. It's a sign of a healthy and vibrant voluntary sector if we get several people interested. We had 31 enquiries to stand as representatives, many said they were interested but short of time to get involved. We had 3 people stand for the Compact post and two each for Volunteering and the Performance Management Group. We are particularly grateful to Joan Thwaites, Ruth Nice (Compact) and Anne Robinson (Volunteering) for standing as representatives and showing their support to the VSA.

Chris Bucknell was the successful PMG representative, but shortly after her appointment she stood down. Mary Simpson, from Teme Valley Youth Project also stood for this post and kindly agreed to take on the role.

PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT REPRESENTATIVE – a message from Chris Bucknell-
“It is with regret that I will not be able to take up the role of VSA Performance Management Representative as I have recently been offered a post with Herefordshire Partnership, working on the Herefordshire Community Strategy and it is felt that there will be too much overlap between the two roles for me to be effective in both. However, I would very much like to thank the people who voted for me in the recent elections for representatives and to stress that I am still extremely keen to be involved with the work of the VSA. If another opportunity comes up whereby I can usefully be of benefit to the sector I am more than happy to become involved. My work with the Community Strategy will bring me into contact with many voluntary and community organisations so hopefully I will be able to maintain links with the very valuable amount of work that is being carried out in the sector.”

.....**So, what is the Performance Management Group?** The Herefordshire Partnership Plan (now called the Community Strategy) sets out how to make Herefordshire- “a place where people, organisations and businesses working together within an outstanding natural environment will bring about sustainable prosperity and well being for all.”(Community Strategy Summary).

One of the main features of the Community Strategy is that it has an Action Plan that it will list 63 specific activities that could be said to demonstrate how this mission is being achieved. The new structure of the Herefordshire Partnership creates a Performance Management Group whose job it is to make sure that things are happening. They will monitor the 63 activities to see if they meet targets, and that they do demonstrate a contribution to improving life in Herefordshire. Many of the activities have still to be identified, and processes are being set in place to monitoring and managing performance.

The Action Plan is being re-named the Development Plan, as it’s still very much in a development stage. There are still many priority actions still to be identified. Whilst some voluntary sector activities are in the plan, we expect more in the future. The Herefordshire Exchange planned for the autumn is going to be vital in ensuring the voluntary sector is better represented in the plan. We’ll keep you all posted of that event.

Herefordshire Partnership Board - VSA Representative Richard Quallington

Richard replaces Philip Dazeley as our Voluntary Sector Assembly Representative on Herefordshire Partnership’s Board. Much of the work is signing off the Partnership work, and looking at updates on various new initiatives, such as P.A.C.T. (Police and Communities Together). The P.A.C.T initiative is a great idea – police working with local communities to solve local issues. As Richard identified at the Board meeting, the initiative will need to work closely with Parish Councils, Parish Planning activities and local community volunteers and workers. Discussions are now taking place to ensure this great initiative is well linked in to what’s already happening in Herefordshire.

Much of Richard’s work will be about sharing knowledge of the voluntary sector, spotting links, ensuring the views and needs of the sector are considered when planning new services.

The Assembly 14th June 2006 – 3 Counties Hotel

We ran 8 workshops on the day. The topics covered were:

ChangeUp- What is it?	Ethnicity	Social Enterprise
Local Area Agreement	Consultation	Funding
Links with Parish Councils	The Alliance Quality Assurance scheme.	

Attendance was slightly down from our previous meeting in November 2005 - perhaps the time of year was not so suitable. The feedback from the venue and workshop was excellent, the main comment being that we should run some of the workshops twice, so people didn’t miss out. We deliberately focused the event on workshops – practical training and discussion time - in view of the imminent launch of the Community Strategy at the end of June. We felt the timing wasn’t right for debates on the strategic stuff, with this important document about to be launched – one for the next assembly.

However, the discussions on Changeup and the Local Area Agreement were very much in the strategic arena, and those running the workshop have taken the many useful comments back for consideration. Due to funding issues, and the much improved consultation work planned by the Herefordshire Partnership, we plan to run one event a year; the next one is pencilled in for February 2007.

Transport and Access to Services - VSA Representative - Vacant post

The old Transport Ambition Group is not now due to meet until March 2007. It may come together to assist with forwarding the goals of the Community Strategy if called to do so. It has been difficult for the VSA to represent the interests of the voluntary & community sector in this field, as the focus of the group has been the Herefordshire Local Transport Plan (HLPT), the dominance of the Rotherwas Access Rd, and other large transport initiatives.

The VSA has a place on the new emerging Access to Services group. The initiative has 3 year funding from Advantage West Midlands and seeks to identify issues facing people who need to gain access to a range of statutory, voluntary, commercial and leisure services across the county. It will supersede and build on the success of the Herefordshire Rural Transport Partnership.

Access to Services has 4 themes:

- Taking people to services
- Taking services to people
- Providing access through technology/ICT solutions
- Infrastructure solutions

The Access to Services group will facilitate the delivery of the Accessibility Strategy, as expressed in the HLTP.

The VSA is seeking a person to act as our Access to Services Representative. Please contact us for more information on the role and an application pack – call 01432 343932 and ask for VSA Access to Services pack.

Closing date for applications is 1st November 2006

Volunteering Representative – VSA Representative Sarah Crowley

Sarah will attend the Volunteering Infrastructure Group (VIG) and Volunteer Co-ordinators meetings. The VIG will be looking at the recent Volunteering Strategy. Sarah will be helping to promote the work of both groups, and looking at the Action Plan of the Volunteering Strategy - seeing how in practice the Strategy address issues around volunteering in Herefordshire.

A message from Sarah....

"I would like to introduce myself. My name is Sarah Crowley and I have recently been elected as the volunteering rep for the VSA. This is a new post, set up in response to demand from the voluntary sector.

I hope I can be useful to your organisation as a link between what you are doing at the grass roots and what is happening at a strategic level in the county. I will be reporting to you, through this newsletter and the VSA website, on any issues that arise around volunteering at any meetings that I attend. I would also like to hear from you if there are issues about volunteering that you would like me to take forward on your behalf.

I will be reporting soon on the new Volunteering Strategy for Herefordshire 2006-2011 which has just been published and the Action Plan which will come out of it. If you would like a copy of the strategy you will find it on the VSA website, www.thevsa.org.uk or you can get a copy from Angela Legg at HVA (tel:01432 343932) or Rosemary Speck at CVALD (tel:01531 635339).

If you have anything you want to say about volunteering in Herefordshire you can contact me via the VSA on 01432 343932."

Economic Development - now called the Economic Development Strategy Group VSA Representative Geoff Tunstall

The Herefordshire Partnership's Economic Development Strategy is due to be published, and the group is working on its Action Plan. The group considered the main economic goals under the Herefordshire Partnership's Community Strategy, many of which are still to be identified, however, the priority goals identified so far are:

- Implementation of the Learning Village Project
- Implementation of the Edgar St grid development
- Implementation of the Rotherwas Access Road
- A Business Enterprise Framework to be developed
- Continue with the development of the Tourism development programme
- Establish a measurement for basic skills and work to an increase the basic skills of the workforce in Herefordshire.
- Tackle traffic congestion by focusing on methods of travel to work

Social Enterprise and sustainability for the voluntary & community sector has been recognised as important, although at present it is not likely to be a priority goal, as it probably represents about 5% of the economic activity in the county – significant but not sizeable.

However, we continue to raise the profile of the sector and its economic contribution to the county with this group and ensure the sector has a place in any strategic documents that affect Herefordshire.

Learning Partnership

VSA representative Julie Wilson Thomas

The Learning Partnership Board continues to meet. Learning has a large role within the new Community Strategy with more and better paid employment and a higher skilled workforce featuring in the Action Plan. Our rep attends not only the Partnership Board but several of the sub groups around learning.

The VSA has recently become involved in consultation with adult learning providers on plans to set up a new learning consortium. The Learning & Skills Council have recently announced their intention to contract only with consortia, rather than individual learning providers. This national stance has meant all parts of the country are now looking to see what sort of consortia will be suitable to bid not only into LSC but other funding sources. Consultation has taken place across Herefordshire and Worcestershire about a possible consortium model, but many groups in Herefordshire have not heard about the proposals.

We sent out letters and held 2 meetings to ensure groups in Herefordshire were aware of the plans. Our consultation showed that whilst many groups had no particular preference on consortium models (we had a return of about 10% on 250 letters sent), there was strong feedback that Herefordshire interests need to be protected within any consortium model working across more than one county.

Many groups liked the idea of a Herefordshire consortium. Julie has now been invited to join the steering group looking at a cross county consortium, either to see if local needs can be accommodated within the proposed structures, or investigating other ways Herefordshire groups could meet their needs. A full report of the last meeting is being sent to all groups who took part in the meetings and consultation.

Social Inclusion & Anti Poverty Ambition Group

VSA Representative Claire Keetch

This ambition group is not continuing. It has been difficult for to make headway in this area, as the group was attempting to cover the many issues that are covered by the term 'social inclusion' – for example, poverty, lack of a secure home, rural isolation, lack of access to information & services. It was felt the group was too generic and work needs to be more topic focused.

The new structure of the Herefordshire Partnership sees the issues of Social Inclusion as one of its five guiding principles – 'ensuring an equal and inclusive society.' There are many specific actions in the Action Plan (woops, sorry, Development Plan!) for example:

- ~ enhancing well being and community cohesion
- ~ people are active in their communities with fewer disadvantaged
- ~ a drive to more and better paid employment.

All are aimed at ensuring equality and inclusiveness, but they are not organised into a clear structure. To ensure that this important topic is not lost or relegated, the Herefordshire Council are looking at separate issues of social inclusion through a process called the Equality Impact Assessment Process, whereby services will be monitored and assessed to see if they really do tackle the issues. The Performance Management Group of the Herefordshire Partnership will also have the task of ensuring that this important issue is not overlooked.

A further idea has been floated - that the Partnership organise an Equalities Forum, to be held for all those involved with issues of equality so that:

- Services can be reviewed and developed
- Gaps identified
- Networking happens
- New solutions identified.

The VSA welcomes this initiative and feel it benefits all those who are working towards inclusiveness – whether they be employed by the Council, or in the voluntary & community sector.

Our thanks go to Clare Keetch for all her work over the years on Social Inclusion. Clare continues with her place on the Herefordshire Equalities Partnership Board (on behalf of the Herefordshire Citizens Advice Bureaux) and will keep the VSA posted on any news coming from them.

VSA web site – at last, a new web site. Much delayed, but finally here. Check out our new web site www.thevsa.org.uk The new database is on its way.....

Advertising through VSA News – We are planning to issue 3 newsletters a year. The deadline for copy is below. Would you like to write an article or put forward a view? Would you like us to distribute notice of events, activities or services useful to the sector?

If so contact Sue Brazendale on 01432 343932.

Copy deadline 8th January 2007, 7th May 2007 , 5th September 2007

We mail out to about 1,200 community groups, and the newsletter also goes on our web site. www.thevsa.org.uk

Funding

VSA Representative Brian Williams

This is going to be the most challenging role for the VSA this year, as funding for the sector is a very sensitive issue. Herefordshire Council have just launched their new strategy for supporting the sector. Within that is a commitment to 'a single gateway for small, mainly one off grants, which are easily accessible to local communities and groups.'

The VSA wants to see that that the voluntary & community sector are consulted and their views taken into account when developing that single gateway. The VSA is in discussion with Herefordshire Council about how the sector voice can be heard around this important topic. There's certainly going to be plenty to keep Brian busy over the coming year.

Funding for voluntary & community groups is getting more difficult – the number of organisations in the sector has increased by a massive 40% in the last 10 years alone, with the sources of funding not keeping pace with this growth.

However, there are also some signs of positive changes in statutory funding. In May the Treasury published guidance on funding for the sector, stating that longer term funding arrangements were better value for money than one year funding, and also stating that there is no reason why statutory funders should not implement full cost recovery for delivery of a project or service.

(See our news item page 8)

Compact - good relationships between the statutory and voluntary sector

VSA Representative Philip Dazeley

Philip has always been passionate about developing good relationships between statutory agencies and the voluntary & community sector. As VSA Board rep, (Philip stood down this June) he has seen how practical day to day things can affect the voluntary sector's ability to work well with statutory agencies – short notice of meetings, jargon, lack of payment of travel expenses can all be a barrier to working with statutory agencies. There's a great demand for the voluntary sector to get involved and help shape services, but little practical support to make this happen. The VSA is fortunate to be able to compensate organisations for the loss of staff or volunteer time spent in working on strategic matters, by paying groups bursary and travel expenses.

Most Local Authorities now have a Local Compact – a statement of commitment, developed in partnership by statutory agencies and the voluntary & community sector setting out basic principles for good working relationships. Herefordshire has a Compact document for the Health & Social Care groups. We want this extended to cover all the voluntary & community sector. We know this is an important issue for the sector – we had 3 people stand for this Rep's role and it was indicated as one of the key issues for the sector last year. Moves are now afoot to use the Alliance document as a starting point for adoption of a wider Local Compact. Herefordshire Council, The Primary Care Trust and other members of the Herefordshire Partnership are working with the Voluntary & Community sector to move things forward and we expect the process to get underway in the autumn. To help the process along Philip will be working with statutory partners and The Alliance and HINC to move the Compact agenda forward.

A 'Smoke Free Herefordshire' is the aspiration of newly formed group acting on behalf of the Herefordshire Partnership. The group comprises representatives from the Herefordshire Primary Care Trust (PCT), Herefordshire Council, local businesses and the voluntary and community sector. The group is Chaired by **John Chapman, Non-Executive Director of the PCT who said**, "This initiative offers a positive opportunity for agencies and organisations to work together with the common aim of making Herefordshire a healthier place to live and work. The first meeting proved very encouraging and there is a lot to achieve over the next 12 months. Over the coming months there will be lots of publicity particularly about changes in the law, but also about support for those people who want to give up smoking. We want to help people achieve this rather than impose regulations." For more information contact Chris Bucknell at Herefordshire Partnership on 01432 261792.

The Herefordshire Infrastructure Consortium (HIC) – what is it?

Age Concern, Community First, Community Voluntary Action Ledbury & District, Herefordshire Council for Voluntary Youth Service and Herefordshire Voluntary Action have always worked in closely with each other. They share a common mission to support voluntary & community groups in Herefordshire and have worked with hundreds of groups over the years. Between them they provide a wide variety of services designed to assist voluntary & community groups. In 2003 they formalised their close working relationships by forming the Herefordshire Infrastructure Consortium. The HIC also has a wider reference group of 17 other organisations.

Although the name's a bit of a mouthfull, it does reflect the aims of its members – to provide infrastructure (as opposed to front line services) to voluntary and community groups, to be a strong advocate for the sector, and to develop a strong leadership role for the sector. The aim of the group is to work collaboratively, to improve their services to the sector and avoid unnecessary duplication of services. Of course, many infrastructure services also provide valuable front line services as well, but their main objectives are to support the sector as a whole.

The HIC has been able to secure funds from the Government (via Changeup and Capacity Builders funding programmes) to pay for research on the sector, Parish Planning support, the VSA, investing in ICT capacity of the Infrastructure organisations, The Approved Provider Status) run by The Alliance and promotion of Social Enterprise and sustainability principles.

The HIC has also secured funding to update research carried out in 2000 'Valuing the Voluntary Sector.' This useful document set out key statistics on the sector in Herefordshire and Worcestershire, and has been widely used by many within the sector. During August and September you may be hearing from the consultants Sustain Consultancy who are conducting the research and they hope to be able to produce a map of the economic and social value of the sector. For more information on the project, contact Sue Fry at Community First at 01684 573334.

The HIC has a new web site, and has recently written a strategy about how it can support the sector; to find out more about its important work visit www.HIC.org.uk

The launch of the **Community Strategy** (formerly called the Herefordshire Plan), got a warm welcome by those attending the launch meetings. Whilst there was a lot of information to digest, the informal feedback has been that the document is readable, understandable and focused. Our thanks go to Philip Dazeley our ex Herefordshire Partnership Board Representative who worked to make the document readable to all, and to include the useful outline information on Herefordshire.

Use the **Community Strategy**. All voluntary & community groups can use the Community Strategy for 2 very good purposes:

1. To support any funding applications – if your work makes a good fit with the Community Strategy, then say so in any funding applications. Many funders (especially the Big Lottery Fund) will look to the Community Strategy to see if applications fit with its goals. Being able to identify your work within the context of the Community Strategy will strengthen any funding bids you make.
2. Planning services – new or existing, local, regional or national groups should use the Community Strategy to see if their plans fit. It can be used as a good indicator of whether you are focusing on the key issues for Herefordshire.

**To get a copy of the Community Strategy, in full or summary, contact
The Herefordshire Partnership Team on 01432 261792**

NEWS ITEMS

Government Agencies should pay on time.

In May, The HM Treasury a guide to all government agencies involved with funding voluntary & community groups. Amongst many good practice recommendations was a commitment to paying on time or within specified dates. A survey from NCVO in July identified that 41% of all those who took part did not get paid on time, and that 55% did not know how much funding they would be receiving this financial year. Let's hope government agencies read the guidance and pay funding commitments on time. For more information see HM Treasury 'Improving financial relationships with the third sector: Guidance to funders and purchasers'. The document can be downloaded from www.hm-treasury.gov.uk Go to 'recent publications' and download the document 'guidance to funders', dated 15th May 2006.

The Comprehensive Spending Review (supporting the Third Sector) comes to

Herefordshire. On the 27th September, Herefordshire gets a visit from The Treasury to hear our views on government support for the third sector. This is the biggest spending review for a decade and will look at spending in every government department. The review will examine how the sector and government can work together and what the government needs to do to enable the sector to thrive. The review will look not just at delivering public services but the role the sector plays in the social and economic regeneration, and how it works with the government. There are 6 themes:

- Cohesive communities and providing a voice for citizens
- Partnership working to deliver a shared agenda
- Promoting innovation and enterprise
- The future role of the sector in sharing and delivering public services
- Creating a sustainable resource base
- Volunteering, mentoring and youth services.

The event is being organised by Herefordshire Voluntary Action and will be held the Left Bank, Hereford, 12 -4pm. Places are limited on a first come first served basis, contact HVA 01432 343932 to book your place.

Older People's Voices, Age Concern have completed a survey into older people in Herefordshire, and how their views are heard. The research identified the main concerns for older people, how older people find out about what is going on and what prevents older people having their say. The report is available from Rebecca Cleeton, Age Concern H& W at 6 Sansome St, Worcester WR1 1LH. Send a large stamped addressed envelope with 55p postage on it.

Herefordshire Council held a consultation event in July on '**Growing Older in Herefordshire.**' The event was well attended and the Council thanks all those taking part. The strategy is now in its final draft stages.

Plans to charge for government information – the government are reviewing how it covers the cost of its web site which provides the sector with basic information on government funding. The popular web site www.governmentfundig.org.uk has been sending people e-mails, to find out what sort of charges they would pay for information. There is also a questionnaire on the web site. If you don't want to pay for basic information on government funding log onto the web site and let them know.

Changes in the Herefordshire Partnership structure – in line with Government guidance the Herefordshire Partnership is to have a new layer in its structure. As well as the Board of the Herefordshire Partnership (to be re-named the Chief Executives Group) there will also be a larger accountable board of about 20 people, to give a more democratic accountability to the work of the Partnership.