

Wednesday 27th January 4 to 7pm St Richard's Hospice, Wildwood Drive, Worcester, WR5 2QT

NOTES DRAFT

Derek Markie and Mark Jackson of St Richards welcomed the following:

Cat Illingworth; Philip Talbot; John Taylor; Richard Quallington; Jim Smith; Jonathan Sutton; Roger Britton;

Late apologies had been received from Kate Walton and Helen Gray. Vanessa Turner had also been expected.

The rest of those listed as the Reference Group had all expressed support and many had sent formal apologies including:

Tonia Enderbury; Lindsay Peniston; Kate Harvey; Gary Roskell; Carole Cumino; Doug Chaplin; Steve Brewster; Andrew Herbert; and Richard Levett

Kate and Helen in particular had been earmarked to represent the Volunteer Centre Group and arrangements were in hand for Derek to meet the whole group soon as well as with Andrew and Steve of the Sports Partnership and Richard of CALC.

Introduction and back ground – Role of the Reference Group and its Members

Derek/Roger

Roger introduced our time with a resume of his Think Piece paper (attached) and encouraged us to see ourselves as leaders with a responsibility to find new ways to navigate in uncharted waters.

There was considerable debate as to the precise role of Voices and a desire for clarity. However as this was seen as central to the challenges Roger had summarised we agreed to move on to how we could progress.

Discussion continued in the whole group and all confirmed their commitment to a process which would seek to strengthen the role of the sector as the Reference Group with the following summary statements:

The Reference Group is:

- Voluntary and Community Sector leaders who agree to personally engage with our work, communicating with each other, the sector and others to assist in the development of ideas and then sharing in the thinking process and the promotion of agreed concepts and approaches.

- Any others who are willing and (with the agreement of the VCS members of the Reference Group) can regularly offer relevant advice and insights. Existing roles

Dependant on commitment, personal judgement and integrity and

- the willingness of our own organisations to support and respect this wider role
- engagement with other members of the Reference Group in an open and inclusive way
- using every opportunity and WV channels to communicate our thinking to stakeholders

On this basis all agreed to a mutual commitment

- to turn those objectives into reality and focus on aiding our stakeholders
- to lead the sector and influence public sector and other partners
- to see our ability to achieve that as the measure of our success

All agreed that the exercise is primarily about communication, not kraaling. Our role is to influence those around us on the basis of our knowledge and understanding of the sector which was decreasingly understood and trusted as it once was. The group compared notes on recent cases where the public sector had shown an inability to listen or work with the sector on its own terms (Connecting Families, Adult Social Care, Economic Social Inclusion etc)

Voices Conference

Derek had proposed that we work towards a Spring Conference as evidence of this and the discussion moved on to that under the following headings:

The Purpose

- Evidencing the overall purpose of Voices: given our own lack of clarity it was argued that we need to meet more before defining a conference and that would therefore be in Autumn at the earliest. Some felt that a process of working lunches with invitations to wider groups could progressively build a wider stake holding group. The size of our constituency was queried given that around 300 organisations receive the bulletin while there are over 2000 charities in the county and many unregistered voluntary groups. Others argued that for both reasons of commitment to our funders and the necessity that our journey must be **with** the stakeholders, there early engagement was key to the credibility of the exercise. It would be arrogant to presume we could resolve the design of a paradigm shift, as this would evolve rather than be conceived and delivered.

Many unregistered groups were neither motivated nor able to contribute to such a debate however and the shaping of policy would still impact upon them.

- Getting the sector talking about key challenges and opportunities was agreed as highly desirable and the design of the opportunity(ies) was therefore key

The People – all or some of our Stakeholders (see box)

- A wide cross-section of the VCS and Social Enterprise?.....was largely taken as read
- A timely emphasis on Community focused groups?....again to the extent that they would engage as above
- Our partners and funders in the public sector?.....this point led to a challenge of the nature and significance of our relationship with the public sector. Many of those around the table had moved entirely away from grants and were simply “trading” with the public sector in the provision of essential services.

While this was recognised, as well as the need for others to face the key challenge of a world where the VCS had no expectation of government led funding, it was also important to work from where we are (some continuing support) and perhaps more importantly to sustain the case for our role as the spokesperson for ordinary, and especially, needy people. If we vacate the field of policy formation it will be left to private, economic and political influences only which would be a major loss to our society.

The conclusion was that public sector stakeholders should be engaged including political leaders but we should not allow the numbers from the public sector to dominate either the floor or the agenda. They should be there to listen and engage.

- Civil Society “players” and Private Sector organisations who wish to attend? – again significant representation without domination was to be welcomed. The Private Sectors view of civil society and such issues as Corporate Social Responsibility was a key factor in the changing world and a local industrialist such as the Chief Executive of Worcester-Bosch would be a source of challenge

Stakeholders (as defined in Structure)

- **Every organisation in the sector** including those social enterprises who see themselves as akin to VCS, plus
- **Members of the Worcestershire Partnership** especially those who are contributing and also any related statutory bodies and agencies (e.g. Criminal Justice structures like Probation and CRC), and
- **Civil society partners** such as Chamber of Commerce with whom we might ally for common cause “for the benefit of Worcestershire’s people”, and (potentially)
- **Private sector organisations** who wish to avail themselves of our existence to better understand and/or work with the VCS

Timing & Format

- Calendar limitations – the reporting sheets (attached) were not used in the discussion but were distributed and could well guide part of the feedback on these issues amongst those there and not there.

- There was a debate about the profile of the conference. Some argued for a high profile event with a range of high profile speakers who would attract an audience. Others were inclined to say that this could restrict engagement and - especially if political leaders were invited – could lead to a fruitless rehearsal of fixed positions or particular aspirations rather than the joint search for the way through which we preferred. A range of workshops around “pieces of the jig-saw” with some high level input from perhaps think tank speakers may be more fruitful.

Feedback, ratify and establish working group(s): All recognised that we need a route towards the event as discussed and it was generally agreed that each of those present would be prepared to take on a section of the work, alone or in limited groups. At this stage however a brief reflection, sharing of individual ideas and topic areas and mutual criticism was probably the best approach. A timescale of 1 month to a further meeting was agreed.

A brainstorm of topic areas suggested by Roger and led to a very useful set of ideas, perhaps closer to defining the task than we had reached earlier. We had already noted the possibility of a scene setter – two contrasting (utopian and dystopian) views of our society as it might be in 15 years and then Voices task of discovering a route through unknown territory for the VCS over this period. The attached diagram is offered as an attempt to capture that discussion.

Derek agreed to minute this meeting and gratefully accepted Rogers’ first review of his notes before circulation within one week.

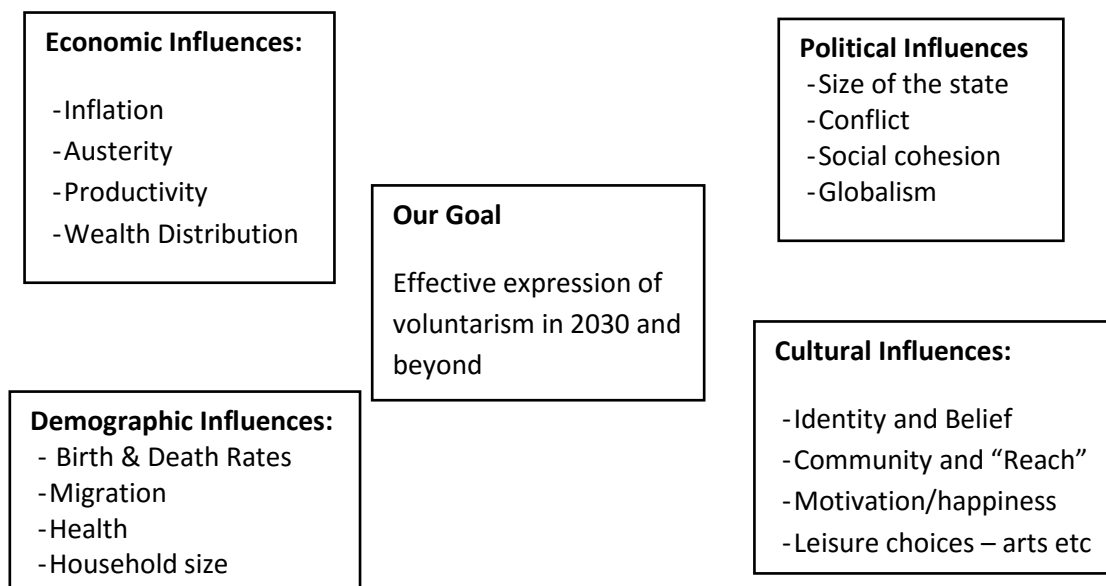
All would prepare papers in response of ways they believed they could contribute to the next stage and these “one side of A4” contributions would be circulated to the entire Reference Group with comments invited.

Date of Next meeting:

We would seek a convenient date when the largest possible number could meet again for **2 hours** (see grid) and offers of hospitality – already mooted around the table, would be most welcome. If at all possible a suitable time on the **February** dates should be chosen.

Date	/Time	0800-1000	1000-1200	1200-1400	1400-1600	1600-1800	1800-2000
Fri 26th February							
Mon 29th February							
Thurs 3rd March							
Fri 4th March							

The Task of Voices and the Focus for a Conference



The suggested "route" to the conference is for each member of the Reference Group:

- to identify a key trend or possible area of activity which is or will impact on the sector over the next 15 years
- to locate that within one of the 4 key influence areas (Economic, Political, Demographic or Cultural)
- to analyse the drivers and shapers of this trend – how could it be ameliorated or enhanced to maximise the **Effective Expression of Voluntarism Beyond 2030**

The phrase **Effective Expression of Voluntarism Beyond 2030** is designed to recognise that the set of values and virtues we hold in common are deep within our human DNA and have been expressed in many different ways over the centuries (beyond the diversity in Roger's analysis of the last 70 years). "Good neighbours" preceded philanthropy, voluntary organisations, charities and formalised socialism. Philanthropy itself would seem to be a product of extreme divergence in wealth and the guilt of old age (Victorian Britain and the dot com wealth of the US). Paternalism and Patronage could similarly derive from an extreme divergence of education and power. Each of these spreading to a wider "powerful" or "wealthy" class as voluntary effort or financial contribution. Community spirit and communitarianism, by contrast grow strongest amongst relative equals, currently expressed in self-help groups as well as radical life-style.

youth theatre option

shenstone in april

scmoozing mps

ask the sector - if not involved are you comfortable that the debate is taking place

community foundation - the funding discussion - see Seb Ellsworth