

# WORCESTERSHIRE VOICES

Supporting an independent and influential  
Voluntary and Community Sector

## **Report and Recommendations Following the Volunteering Workshop**

Held on  
Friday 31 January 2014

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For the use of, and distribution by, Worcestershire Voices

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## 1. Definitions

For the purposes of this report, the following definitions apply:

- *Recipient*: an organisation, group, individual or community towards which an activity or service being delivered through volunteering is directed.
- *Voices*: the organisation Worcestershire Voices.
- *July Report*: the report published in July 2013 detailing the findings of the Worcestershire Volunteering Research project.
- *Panel Group*: the group established in accordance with the recommendations of the July Report.
- *Sector*: specific commissioning areas, and areas that use, and benefit from, the activity of volunteers, such as mental health, education, older people, homelessness and sport, for example.

## 2. Executive Summary

The purpose of this report is to provide collated feedback from the discussions at the facilitated session held on 31 January 2014, and to put forward proposals for the strategic priorities and objectives that will underpin the Volunteering Strategy for Worcestershire. Key recommendations and proposed next steps are also provided.

It should be noted that the report does not present a Volunteering Strategy, but rather a framework and outline within which a final strategy can be developed.

The report considers: a definition for 'volunteering' and 'volunteer'; opportunities and challenges with volunteering; a vision for volunteering in Worcestershire; a roadmap for achieving the vision; strategic priorities; and strategic objectives.

### ***Definition of 'volunteering' and 'volunteer'***

Four key principles were identified for consideration when formulating definitions of 'volunteering' and 'volunteer': the impact of volunteering on individuals, communities and organisations; the focus of volunteering activities; the motivation of both volunteers and those receiving volunteering activities; and the emotional effect of volunteering on volunteers and those receiving volunteering activities.

From those principles, the following draft definitions have been put forward for consideration and development:

Draft definition of 'volunteering':

*"Volunteering offers opportunities to engage in activities that are fun, enjoyable, rewarding and provide a great sense of well-being, without any financial gain for the individual. Such activities may be formal and organised or more spontaneous and informal, meeting specific needs within organisations, communities and community groups, and among neighbours."*

Draft definition of 'volunteer':

*"A volunteer is an individual who gives their time freely, without personal financial gain, to meet an external need that exists within their community, among their neighbours or in charities and not-for-profit organisations and groups."*

A full analysis of the feedback from the discussions at the facilitated session is given at Section 5.

### **Challenges and Opportunities**

The facilitated session discussions highlighted a number of challenges and opportunities that will face organisations, communities and individuals seeking to engage with volunteering.

As well as general challenges arising from volunteering, a number of specific challenges were identified. Those specific challenges fell into the following categories:

- The perception of volunteering
- The management of volunteers
- The management of risk

A number of opportunities were identified through the facilitated discussions, which fell into the following areas:

- The use of technology
- Effective management of resources
- Training
- Branding and marketing

A full analysis of the challenges and opportunities identified and discussed is given at Section 6.

### **A vision for volunteering across Worcestershire**

For the final Volunteering Strategy to achieve its potential, it is essential that it points directly towards a clear and compelling vision.

The facilitated session discussions identified the key elements that would, ideally, be present in a Worcestershire where volunteering was working well and the Volunteering Strategy was effective. It was also recognised that a vision for volunteering across the county would have many layers, with individual towns and even businesses, communities and organisations, developing their own visions to work towards creating the Worcestershire described in the over-arching, county-wide vision.

Based on the discussions, an outline vision statement for consideration and further development is proposed as follows:

*“A vibrant, happy, colourful, exciting and richly diverse place to live where passionate people are committed to a common purpose, and play their part in creating a compassionate, generous and inclusive community that values every individual, celebrates diversity, is focused on helping those in need, and supports each person to truly fulfil their potential.”*

A full analysis of the discussions around the vision is given at Section 7.

### **A roadmap for achieving the vision**

Discussions were held around developing a roadmap to achieve the vision, of which a finalised and deliverable Volunteering Strategy is a key element. In order to develop an agreed Volunteering Strategy, it was identified that a number of specific areas of work would be required to be undertaken.

- Review of the existing skills, resources and outcomes across services and the volunteer base, compared with anticipated future requirements in order to identify gaps.
- Communication to raise awareness and promote knowledge sharing.
- Establishment of relationships across organisations and sectors, and identification of potential partnership working opportunities.
- Education to ensure that organisations and community groups are focused on delivering value for money, and are able to measure their effectiveness.
- Alignment with existing initiatives such as Next Generation, where appropriate.

A full analysis of the discussions around the vision is given at Section 8.

### **Strategic Priorities**

Based on the outputs of the facilitated discussions, and a review of existing volunteering strategies from other areas, five strategic priorities have been proposed for consideration and development.

- *Priority 1:* Develop a volunteering infrastructure that fosters and supports a commitment to helping and supporting others.
- *Priority 2:* Encourage and support the development of sustainable and meaningful volunteering opportunities at both a formal and informal level.
- *Priority 3:* Build a strong and effective Voluntary and Community Sector across Worcestershire that delivers high quality services and offers unsurpassed value for money.
- *Priority 4:* Build strong, resilient and positive communities where social and economic inclusion is a reality for everyone.
- *Priority 5:* Build meaningful and purposeful partnerships across communities, businesses, public services and VCS organisations that promote and build a vibrant, dynamic, sustainable and compassionate Worcestershire.

A detailed explanation of each priority is given at Section 9.

## **Strategic Objectives**

For each proposed strategic priority, key strategic objectives have been identified. These objectives directly relate to the achievement of the relevant priority.

The objectives have been developed using the feedback from each of the discussion areas from the facilitated sessions and, where appropriate, the work already carried out by other initiatives, in particular Next Generation.

A full analysis of each proposed strategic objective is given at Section 10.

## **Where next?**

The facilitated discussions revealed a number of key areas where further work is required in order to be able to develop a robust, sustainable and deliverable Volunteering Strategy.

Key recommendations are given at Section 2, and include the establishment of sector-specific sub groups to ensure that full consideration is given to the opportunities, challenges and requirements of each sector.

In addition, it is recommended that a working group that is representative of both formal and informal volunteering is established to implement the next steps (outlined at Section 12) and develop and finalise the definition of volunteering, the vision, and strategic priorities and objectives for consideration and agreement by Voices.

## **3. Key Recommendations**

Based on the Panel Group discussions from the facilitated discussions, the following key recommendations have been identified:

- Follow the actions identified as 'Next Steps' (see Section 11) and avoid making the development of a finalised Volunteering Strategy a deadline-driven exercise. The focus must be on 'getting it right' not simply 'getting it done'. It is essential that the vision for volunteering across Worcestershire is well formed, clearly communicated and aligned to an achievable Delivery Roadmap.
- Establish the sub groups identified in the 'Next Steps'.
- Develop an agreed Vision and definition of 'volunteer' and 'volunteering'.
- Establish sector specific sub-groups to design messages and programmes to extend informal volunteering (at least to national average) and to promote formal volunteering to the required level.
- Establish a 'Volunteering Charter' that organisations sign up to, demonstrating a commitment to following the Volunteering Strategy and working towards a shared vision for volunteering. This will provide consistency in approach, help to raise and maintain standards and quality, and give volunteers and recipients of volunteering services greater confidence.

- Identify key performance measures and establish mechanisms for the on-going review of effectiveness, including skill levels, resource usage, outcomes, and growth in volunteering. These measures and the review process should be aligned with the Volunteering Charter, if adopted.
- Produce a ‘technology plan’ to build on existing resources and develop communication channels such as through social media to promote the message of volunteering and available opportunities to volunteer, as well as offering opportunities for organisations and individuals to engage in active discussions around volunteering.
- Develop informal on-line ‘training’ opportunities for individuals, providing fun and interactive ‘how to be a volunteer’ type courses that are free and offer guidance on volunteering to ensure consistency and give people confidence to volunteer. It may even be possible to find local phone and tablet app developers who would be willing to develop an app for this purpose.
- Introduce an ‘opt-in’ text service to alert potential volunteers of needs and opportunities.
- Consider the requirements for a communications strategy to raise awareness of the volunteering strategy across organisations, as well as across existing and potential volunteers; and to ensure that there is coordinated and timely awareness raising of volunteering across the county.

## 4. Background

The July Report recommended that Voices should “create a high-level county-wide joined up approach linking the voluntary and community, public and business sectors”.

To progress that recommendation, Voices agreed to form a high-level Task and Finish Panel Group, drawing members from a range of sectors, and representative of the existing and potential volunteering landscape.

In addition, it was agreed that a wider invitation to engage and consult should be made to provide opportunities for non-panel members to have their say.

The Panel Group was tasked with identifying available information and research, with a view to making clear recommendations for the agreement and implementation of a coherent volunteering strategy across all sectors and across the whole of Worcestershire.

In order to discharge its responsibilities, the Panel Group met for a facilitated half-day workshop to explore the following areas:

- Definitions of ‘volunteering’ and ‘volunteer’
- Sector/organisation challenges and opportunities
- A Unified Vision for Volunteering Across Worcestershire
- An Outline Roadmap for Achieving the Vision

The outputs of the facilitated workshop form the basis of this report and inform the proposed strategic aims and objectives outlined in Sections 8 and 9.

Once agreed, Voices will be responsible for working with the voluntary and community sector, and the public and business sectors, to ensure that the recommendations and approved Volunteering Strategy are taken forward.

## 5. Definitions of Volunteering

In order to be able to develop an agreed strategy for volunteering across Worcestershire, it is necessary to have a common starting point.

Although the July Report proposed definitions of formal volunteering ('giving unpaid help through groups, clubs or organisations') and informal volunteering ('giving help as an individual to people who are not relatives'), there was no formally agreed definition upon which to base the development of a vision and strategy for volunteering.

Therefore, the initial workshop session required the Panel Group to identify key components of volunteering, and of what it means to be a volunteer, so that a clear and agreed definition could be developed.

Key principles of volunteering to emerge from the session fell into four discrete areas: impact, focus, motivation and emotion.

### ***Impact***

A number of the principles identified by the Panel Group surrounded the impact of volunteering activity on both the volunteer and the Recipient.

The principles are summarised as follows:

- ***Mutual benefit***

Volunteering is a two-way investment between the volunteer and the Recipient. The investment from both sides is one of time and effort, and a benefit arises to both the volunteer and the Recipient. The benefits were identified as both tangible and intangible, but did *not* include monetary reward.

Other terms put forward that fit with the principle of mutual benefit included 'enrichment', 'investment' and 'added value'.

- ***Time freely given***

There was a general consensus that, at the heart of volunteering was the principle that time is 'freely given'. Time freely given refers to a person taking part in an activity for reasons other than financial reward. This principle fell into two distinct categories: reward and motivation.



Reward: there was no personal *financial* profit arising to the volunteer from participation in volunteering activity. The distinction must be drawn between the reimbursement of expenses incurred in the fulfilment of volunteering activities and payment that causes financial gain (profit) to arise.

Motivation: it was identified that if there is coercion or pressure involved in the recruitment of volunteers, then time is not being given freely. It was suggested that such exchanges couldn't legitimately be seen as genuine volunteering.

## **Focus**

Volunteering opportunities span a range of sectors and situations. However, two principles were identified, which concern the focus of the volunteering activity.

- *Organised and Adhoc*

It was acknowledged that there was a wide range of activities and opportunities into which volunteering could fit. These activities and opportunities could be both formal and organised, as well as adhoc or spontaneous.

Adhoc or spontaneous volunteering: this will include, for example, community-based activity to meet needs as and when they arise, neighbours attending to each other's needs, and individuals stepping in to meet an immediate need in a VCS organisation.

Organised volunteering: this will more typically occur within VCS organisations, and is likely to relate to recurring activities and specific roles. This type of volunteering includes, for example, driving for an organisation, coaching a local sports team, or fulfilling a specific role within an organisation, club or society (such as Secretary or Treasurer).

- *Directed at the Not for Profit Sector*

A clear distinction was drawn between volunteering in the VCS and work-without-pay in the commercial sector. A consensus was reached that volunteering requires engagement with the not-for-profit sector and so-called 'volunteering opportunities' in the commercial sector were not volunteering in the true sense.

## **Motivation**

Several of the key elements of volunteering, and what it means to be a volunteer, surrounded the concept of motivation. Questions arose concerning the motivation of both the volunteer and the Recipient, and the discussions around those questions gave rise to the following principles being identified:

- *Outward Focused*

A volunteer is someone who has an 'outward focus', and is motivated by the ability to use their skills, gifts and talents to create an external impact. That focus may be directed towards organisations, causes, communities or groups that a volunteer chooses to engage with, or towards specific individuals where a particular need exists, such as a neighbour.

Organisations and groups offering formal volunteering opportunities do so in order to further the work they do that, again, has an external, or outward, focus.

- *Commitment*

Volunteers need to be able to be relied upon to carry out the volunteering activities they have undertaken. However, terms such as 'committed' and 'commitment' when referring to volunteers could be misunderstood and make volunteering appear onerous.

However, there was a consensus that, particularly in formal volunteering situations, a level of commitment is vital in order for organisations and groups to be able to plan and deliver services effectively.

- *Independent*

Both volunteers and organisations offering volunteering opportunities must act independently of personal or political agendas. There should be no external influences that shape either the actions of the volunteer or the scope and nature of the volunteering opportunity.

## ***Emotion***

Several Panel Group members raised concerns that there was a danger that a definition of volunteering could easily become overly intellectual. It was felt that, should this be the case, it could have a potentially detrimental effect on promoting and encouraging volunteering across the county.

Therefore, there was discussion around the emotional aspects of volunteering, particularly for the volunteer. Three key components for volunteering were identified through those discussions.

- *Fun / Enjoyable*

Volunteering should be fun for the volunteer. It was recognised that Recipients would be unlikely to retain volunteers into the medium-to-long-term if volunteering activities were perceived as onerous or uninspiring.

- *Happiness*

Volunteering should create a sense of happiness within both the volunteer and the Recipient. Organisations, communities, groups and volunteers should feel happy through their engagement with volunteering activities.

- *Rewarding*

Volunteering should be rewarding for both the volunteer and the Recipient. Both parties should have general well-being through engagement with volunteering activities and opportunities.

## ***Forming a definition***

Without an agreed definition of 'volunteering' and what constitutes a 'volunteer', it will be difficult to reach an agreed set of strategic aims and objectives and successfully implement a coherent volunteering strategy.

An initial definition for 'volunteering', capturing the feedback from the Panel Group discussions, and to be used as a basis for developing a final definition, is presented as follows:

*Volunteering offers opportunities to engage in activities that are fun, enjoyable, rewarding and provide a great sense of well-being, without any financial gain for the individual. Such activities may be formal and organised or more spontaneous and informal, meeting specific needs within not-for-profit organisations, communities and community groups, and among neighbours.*

An initial definition of a 'volunteer', again capturing the feedback from the Panel Group discussions, is presented as follows:

*A volunteer is an individual who gives their time freely, without personal financial gain, to meet an external need that exists within their community, among their neighbours or in charities and not-for-profit organisations and groups.*

A final definition will need to be agreed by the Panel Group and Voices. It is likely that several versions of the final definitions will be required to serve different purposes, and appeal to different opportunities and markets.

## **6. Challenges and Opportunities**

The Panel Group identified a range of opportunities and challenges with volunteering that included both sector-specific considerations, as well as factors relevant to volunteering in more general terms.

In formulating the Volunteering Strategy, it is important that the identified challenges are recognised, and addressed, and that opportunities are pursued and maximised.

The challenges and opportunities identified during the Panel Group session are set out below.

### **Challenges:**

The challenges identified by the Panel Group can be grouped into the following categories: general challenges, the perception of volunteering, the management of volunteers, and the management of risk.

#### ***General challenges***

The Panel Group identified two fundamental challenges. These challenges are with volunteering in general and concern a protectionist attitude towards volunteers and the risk that a 'volunteering industry' could be created.

- *Protectionism*

Some organisations are protective of their volunteer base, which closes opportunities across both the Recipient and volunteer base. A spirit of openness and collaboration with the available volunteer pool will be vital if available resources are to be used effectively and efficiently.

- *Risk of perpetuating a volunteer industry*

There is a real danger that organisations engaged in 'formal' volunteering opportunities could create a volunteer industry, actively recruiting volunteers without maximising the impact of existing volunteers, potentially recruiting unnecessarily, or directing the resource to areas where it will be under-utilised or is not really needed.

### ***Perception of volunteering***

A significant challenge that must be overcome, if the Volunteering Strategy for Worcestershire is to be successfully implemented, is the perception of volunteering among both Recipients and potential volunteers.

In particular, perceptions around the affordability of volunteering, the roles and responsibilities of volunteers, and what the term 'volunteer' actually means must be addressed.

- *Affordability*

Volunteering is often misperceived as being only possible for those who are time-rich and have sufficient financial resources to be able to 'afford' to volunteer. A significant challenge lies in dismantling that view and ensuring that the message is clear: volunteering does not necessarily require significant amounts of time; nor does it generally require volunteers to be out-of-pocket financially.

The range of opportunities to act as a volunteer must be made clearer, with demarcation between those that require significant time and/or financial investment from the volunteer, and those that do not.

Organisations which benefit from volunteering activities, and are able to reimburse out-of-pocket expenses incurred by the volunteer, such as with car running costs, should clearly advertise that expenses are payable, in order to open those opportunities to a wider range of potential volunteers.

In addition, where volunteering opportunities are flexible, the organisations or groups offering them should make it clear that the time commitment from volunteers can be whatever they can 'afford'. By doing so, those people who would like to take up such opportunities, but do not feel they have sufficient time available, may be more inclined to explore volunteering in those areas.

- *Roles and responsibilities of organisations and volunteers*

Many organisations and groups (particularly those engaged in formal volunteering activities) as well as individuals, see volunteering in rigid terms. This can result in a disconnect between the perception and the reality of both the need, and the opportunity to meet that need.

Problems can arise where volunteers and Recipients have different interpretations and expectations of a particular voluntary function or role, with either party, potentially, expecting too much, or too little, and, as a result, being left disappointed or disillusioned.

There is, therefore, a danger that the value a volunteer can bring to an organisation, and the value that an opportunity to volunteer can offer an individual, will, where the expectations and interpretations of the role and responsibilities of the volunteer and Recipient are not clearly understood or are at odds, be lost.

There needs to be a recognition that there must be consistency in how Recipients and volunteers perceive their value, usefulness, role and responsibilities in order to ensure that the perception of volunteers and volunteering is positive and realistic.

- *Perception of the term 'volunteer'*

Many people who currently act in a voluntary capacity, especially in 'informal' or spontaneous volunteering situations, do not see themselves as volunteers. Often, what is essentially volunteering is viewed as 'being neighbourly' or simply 'doing what anyone would do in that situation'. This is also a typically held view of family members who 'help out' in sports teams or societies that other family members are involved in, for example.

Such involvement *is* volunteering and it is vital that people engaged in those activities recognise that they are, in fact, volunteering. Creating a link between such informal and spontaneous acts and the term 'volunteer' will be a key component in broadening the reach and appeal of volunteering across Worcestershire, as it will raise awareness of the breadth of volunteering and may encourage people to pursue wider volunteering opportunities.

## ***Management of volunteers***

The management of volunteers was identified as a challenge that could result in significant time, effort and resource being expended. Such resource consumption could potentially result in the cost (both financial and time) of using volunteers outweighing the benefits.

The challenges identified surrounding the management of volunteers mostly concern 'formal' volunteering and relate, in the main, to organisations. The challenges fell into the following categories: conflict between paid staff and volunteers; sustainability; quality and consistency; and reliability and commitment.

- *Conflict between volunteers and paid roles*

A number of Panel Group members had experienced first-hand, or were aware of situations where there had been, conflict between paid staff and volunteers. Conflict may arise through a feeling of insecurity (for example being replaced by a volunteer) or a belief that a volunteer would not be able to adequately perform the required duties.

There is also a danger that paid staff may feel devalued if volunteers are performing similar duties. However, such a feeling is likely to arise out of a misperception of the role and value of a volunteer. Therefore, as the use of volunteers across not-for-profit organisations increases, there will need to be specific work undertaken to manage and remove potential areas of conflict.

- *Achieving sustainability*

A significant challenge facing organisations is achieving a sustainable volunteer base. Where volunteers are brought into an organisation to perform specific roles, the volunteering model must be consistent and sustainable if the organisation is to be able to maintain its services and operations. However, the very nature of volunteering – that it is time given freely and by choice – can make sustainability hard to achieve.

- *Achieving quality and consistency*

Where volunteers form an integral part of an organisation's human-resource base, it is vital that what those volunteers produce is of the same quality as, and consistent with, what is produced across the whole organisation.

Training, clear roles and responsibilities, and appropriate use of volunteers can all help to address this challenge.

- *Achieving reliability and commitment*

Concern was expressed that commitment from, and the reliability of, volunteers *can* present significant challenges. These challenges may arise through erratic engagement by volunteers, as well as, in some cases, volunteers being perhaps *too* committed.

The 'definition' exercise identified that a volunteer's time is freely given, and volunteers *choose* to engage in opportunities. Therefore, it can be difficult to place the same structures around volunteers that an organisation may have in place to facilitate the management of paid staff.

However, reliability and commitment is vital where volunteers are performing clearly defined roles in an organisation. Where volunteers in such roles are unable or unwilling to commit the time and effort the role requires, or have circumstances that make it difficult for them to be able to give time predictably and regularly, the organisation's services and, ultimately, its reputation, may potentially suffer.

Equally, some volunteers are fiercely loyal to organisations and causes they support, and are extremely committed to performing their volunteer function. While this is, undoubtedly, helpful for the organisations with which those individuals are volunteering, it can also present problems. Through such a high level of commitment, those volunteers may feel unable to take time off for vacations or due to illness, and may be reluctant to express concerns, should they have any, in respect of their role, treatment or other aspects of their engagement with the organisation.

There is, therefore, a responsibility on both sides of the volunteering equation to ensure that the relationship is effective, healthy and fulfilling to all parties. Volunteers and Recipients must ensure that expectations, both in terms of the requirements of a role and what support and conditions a volunteer can expect to receive, are clear, properly communicated and fully understood.

Volunteer agreements, which should contain not only the expectations an organisation has of a volunteer, but also what a volunteer may expect from the organisation, can help to address this challenge. However, creating a rigid structure around volunteering can, in itself, present challenges and, if not implemented sensitively and carefully, undermine the value that volunteers can bring.

## ***Management of risk***

The appropriate management and mitigation of risk is vital in order to ensure that organisations, groups, projects and initiatives are able to deliver their services safely.

Where risk is poorly or inappropriately managed, the consequences may be severe, with reputational damage as a possible outcome, as well as, in extreme circumstances, a cessation of operations.

Two specific risks with volunteering, both of which apply to informal *and* formal volunteering situations were identified: safeguarding and health and safety.

- ***Safeguarding***

A number of Panel Group members identified challenges around safeguarding. Much of the challenges arising in this area relate to 'control'.

Panel Group members stated that they often felt unable to exercise the same levels of control over volunteers as they can over paid staff. This in turn presents potential risks for organisations delivering services to vulnerable people (as well as community groups, sports teams, neighbourhood schemes etc. that work with children and vulnerable adults).

Where organisations, groups and schemes work with vulnerable individuals, it is advisable that appropriate safeguarding measures are in place, while acknowledging the restrictions that the Freedoms Act imposes in terms of performing some formal checks, such as DBS checks. Where formal safeguarding measures are not possible, or are inappropriate, suitable steps should be taken to ensure that it is possible to perform activities in a manner that is safe for all parties.

However, it must be noted that the nature of volunteering often makes consistent and robust implementation of safeguarding policies and procedures difficult.

- ***Health and safety***

Robust and appropriate health and safety policies and procedures are essential in order to ensure that the organisation, group or initiative delivering a service, does so safely.

The nature of volunteering can make it difficult to consistently apply and monitor the use of health and safety measures. In addition, where an organisation has a frequently changing volunteer base, the requirement to train new volunteers in health and safety procedures may place a significant strain on its resources.

## **Opportunities:**

While volunteering and the use of volunteers, presents a number of significant challenges, it also offers a range of exciting and valuable opportunities. The Panel Group identified a number of opportunities, which fall into the following areas: technology, resource management, training, and branding.

## **Technology**

As technology becomes more and more integrated into daily life, it is important that organisations and groups looking to attract and utilise volunteers implement appropriate technology to maximise the potential opportunities available to them.

Specific opportunities to use technology lie in the existing infrastructure, phone and tablet apps, and developing capabilities to allow volunteers to work from home.

- *Existing infrastructure*

Technology offers a range of opportunities to attract and utilise volunteers across a broad range of volunteering opportunities. In Worcestershire, there is an existing infrastructure that could readily be put to better use and would provide a head-start in developing the use of technology as part of the Volunteering Strategy.

The existing infrastructure includes the 'Do It' website and the Worcestershire Voices website. There are developments planned for the 'Do It' website that will increase its effectiveness, with the aim of making it the 'go-to' place for volunteering.

In addition, many VCS organisations, community groups, and other projects and initiatives have an existing internet presence, both through their own websites and through social media platforms such as Facebook.

The opportunity with the existing infrastructure lies in developing a consistent approach to gathering, publicising and fulfilling volunteering opportunities in one place, and the cross-promotion of opportunities between organisations.

However, it was acknowledged that there are currently no budgets in place to properly develop and maximise the existing infrastructure.

- *Phone and tablet apps*

Reference was made during the Panel Group sessions to a phone app that identifies volunteering opportunities and allows individuals to volunteer slices of time as they have them. The example given was of waiting to go into a meeting and using that waiting time to do some technology-based volunteering through the app.

With the growing popularity of Smart Phones, and the relative ease and low cost of production of apps, individual organisations and groups could potentially develop their own apps, alongside a centralised Worcestershire volunteering app.

- *Enabling volunteering from home*

There was a recognition that, in today's society, many people are busy and have less and less time available to give away at set times or in large chunks. Therefore, using technology to allow people to volunteer from home would, potentially, broaden the appeal and reach of volunteering among people in those circumstances.

Such opportunities could include managing social media pages, fundraising, administrative support and research, for example.



## ***Resource management***

Developing practices to ensure that both the volunteer resource and the pool of volunteering opportunities are managed well, so that the potential within each can be maximised, is essential.

The following areas were identified as presenting significant opportunities to develop and enhance the Volunteering capability across Worcestershire: creating a mutuality, cross-organisational linkages, pooling volunteers, accessing the business sector, and reducing the formalisation of volunteering.

- ***Creating a mutuality***

Volunteers and Recipients have a tendency to see themselves as separate from each other. If this perception could be eroded so that those people receiving the benefits of services delivered by volunteers, whether formally through organisations or through more informal routes, saw themselves as potential volunteers as well as Recipients, the potential volunteer base within the County could be increased.

In addition, engaging Recipients to also be volunteers will establish a motivated, empathetic group of volunteers that will, having been recipients of volunteer services, fully understand the value volunteers bring. This, in turn, will strengthen the message of volunteering across Worcestershire.

- ***Establishing cross-organisational linkages***

It was suggested that opportunities are lost through 'silo-working' across the VCS. While effective linkages exist across *some* organisations, these are the exception rather than the rule. By establishing linkages across the entire VCS in Worcestershire there would be much greater understanding of the requirements of individual organisations and groups, as well as a more co-ordinated and consistent approach to identifying and dealing with challenges and maximising opportunities.

As resources become scarcer, budgetary pressures increase, and the need for volunteers becomes ever more pressing, strong linkages across the VCS, and wider communities, will help to ensure that services remain viable and fit for purpose. The use of volunteers is a key element of that on-going viability.

- ***Pooling of volunteers across organisations***

Once strong, cross-organisational, linkages have been established, there will be the opportunity to pool volunteers. However, in order for this to work effectively, protectionism (identified as one of the challenges) will need to be addressed, as established linkages alone will not be sufficient.

Pooling volunteers presents a huge opportunity to both volunteers and Recipients. Volunteers will benefit from being able to easily engage with a wider range of volunteering opportunities to broaden their experience, knowledge, and skills, and provide even greater opportunities for fulfilment. Recipients will benefit from being able to draw from a wider pool of volunteers that will offer more skills, experience and availability than if they were only drawing from their own, dedicated, volunteers.

It should be recognised, however, that as well as offering an opportunity, pooling volunteers potentially increases the complexity of training and managing volunteers. However, with appropriate procedures and systems in place, the potential challenges will be able to be addressed.

- *Accessing the business sector*

Commercial businesses possess a wealth of skills and talent that could significantly enrich the volunteer resources available across Worcestershire.

Whether through direct engagement, such as in mentoring roles, through the provision of specialist training (such as accountancy, financial management, fundraising, human resources or legal matters), or through active participation in structured volunteering schemes (such as with larger organisations such as Royal Bank of Scotland and British Telecom, as well as South Worcestershire CCG, which has recently introduced a scheme to encourage staff volunteering), both business and voluntary sector organisations and voluntary schemes could benefit.

This is an as yet under-utilised opportunity and offers real potential to boost the capabilities of volunteers and Recipients.

- *Reducing the formalisation of volunteering*

The value of adhoc and spontaneous volunteering must not be overlooked as it offers a significant opportunity to both meet needs in communities (and organisations) and grow the volunteer base across Worcestershire.

There is a danger that the focus is placed too heavily on formal volunteering and, in particular, volunteering across VCS organisations. Therefore, attention must be given to exploring and promoting informal volunteering in order to ensure that this opportunity is not missed.

## ***Training***

The requirement to train volunteers can present significant challenges to organisations and groups seeking to integrate volunteers into their operations. However, the requirement to train volunteers also offers significant opportunities, if approached differently from the more typical approaches currently adopted by many VCS organisations and other groups.

The opportunities identified through training were: shared training, improving skills and knowledge, and maximising benefits to Recipients and volunteers.

- *Specific and shared training of volunteers*

While some training requirements will be specific to the services delivered by particular organisations, there will be a range of training requirements that will be common across multiple organisations and groups.

Shared training requirements provide organisations and groups with an opportunity to pool resources, generating efficiencies and, possibly, economies of scale in terms of accessing and delivering training. Shared training also provides an opportunity for consistent standards to be achieved in those areas, providing greater confidence for both Recipients and volunteers.

In addition, shared training will result in a better-equipped volunteer base that will provide greater flexibility and responsiveness.

- *Improving skills and knowledge*

It was stated that it was vital to give both volunteers and paid staff the tools they need. A key element to this is the provision of the appropriate training to the appropriate people.

While training often requires a financial investment, where that training results in enhanced skills and abilities (whether among volunteers or paid staff), the benefit to the organisation generally outweighs the cost.

Providing better training has the potential to improve quality, efficiency and outcomes, strengthening the position of those organisations and groups, and helping to secure on-going viability in an increasingly competitive and challenging marketplace.

- *Better training to maximise the benefits to both Recipient and volunteer*

There is an opportunity to train volunteers and Recipients to be better equipped to identify, and take advantage of volunteering opportunities. This has the potential to develop a proactive volunteer base that works with Recipients to develop the breadth of volunteering across the County.

This will involve education in respect of what volunteering covers, the range of services offered across Worcestershire, activities taking place in communities, and areas where specific needs exist.

As volunteers, in particular, become more aware of the volunteering landscape, they will be able to identify both formal and spontaneous volunteering opportunities, creating a 'volunteering partnership' with VCS organisations, community groups and other projects and initiatives that will be more responsive, and reach further and wider than the current approach to volunteering is able to achieve.

## ***Branding***

With the changing landscape for charities and voluntary organisations, and the pressure on core council services that will have direct impact on communities, there is a significant opportunity to redefine volunteering through a targeted and consistent branding exercise and marketing campaign.

- *Breaking stereotypes*

A commonly held view of volunteering is that it is the domain of affluent middle class individuals who are time-rich and have sufficient financial resources to support their volunteering activities. There is an opportunity to break that stereotype and 'rebrand' volunteering as an inclusive activity that is not limited by class, wealth, or any other demographic measure.

- *Marketing volunteer opportunities*

As the stereotypes around volunteering are broken, there must be a co-ordinated marketing campaign that raises awareness of what 'volunteering' and a 'volunteer' are, and where the volunteering opportunities exist.

If the campaign is able to capture the rich variety of ways in which people can volunteer, the inclusive nature of volunteering, and all of the identified benefits to the

volunteer, a significant opportunity exists to motivate people to engage with volunteering activities.

Therefore, it will be vital that, once mobilised, those volunteers are able to easily access information about where opportunities exist for them to become actively involved in the delivery of Worcestershire's volunteering strategy.

## **7. A Unified Vision for Volunteering Across Worcestershire**

In order to establish an agreed Volunteering Strategy for Worcestershire, it is first necessary to develop a unified vision for volunteering for the County. A vision for volunteering must paint a picture of a Worcestershire where the Volunteering Strategy is working, and providing aspiration, a sense of purpose, and direction. The question of how the vision is delivered does not form part of the vision itself.

The Panel Group was encouraged to visualise a Worcestershire where volunteering was effective, and to describe the impact of that on commerce, education, health, community, families, town and city centres, leisure time, sport and all other aspects of life. Feedback was then gathered to create a picture of a 'Better, Brighter Worcestershire'.

### ***Key elements in a Better, Brighter Worcestershire***

There was a high level of consistency in the Panel Group's responses. Key elements of a county where the volunteering strategy is working and underpinning a Better, Brighter Worcestershire were identified as follows:

- ***Connected***  
A county that is linked into, and maximising the potential of, technology and communication, and recognises that, in a world that is constantly changing, there are always new possibilities to explore and develop.
- ***Community-focused***  
A county filled with multiple layers of communities – geographic communities and communities of interest, for example – which overlay each other, increasing connectedness and inclusion.
- ***Compassionate***  
A county that has an outward focus and where a 'what's in it for me' mentality is seldom evident. A county filled with people who actively look for opportunities to help others.
- ***Cohesive***  
A county with a common purpose and strong sense of togetherness leading to a sense that *everyone* is involved in creating a Better, Brighter Future for Worcestershire.

- *Flexible and responsive*  
A county with enough resilience to cope with an ever-changing landscape, able to meet new and existing needs, and explore and capitalise on new opportunities.
- *Passionate*  
A county that is filled with people who have rediscovered a passion for living and believe that more is possible. A county where future generations do not need to rediscover their passion, because they were born into passionate communities and have not lost the passion they were born with.
- *Interconnected*  
A county where there are strong and purposeful links across sectors, interests and geographical areas, with no 'silo' working or thinking hindering relationships. A county without lines of demarcation or value judgements, benefitting from multiple inputs across all sectors.
- *Generous*  
A county that has at its core a spirit of generosity that is evident in the lives of individuals, business, health and welfare, education, faith groups, voluntary organisations, and communities throughout the area.
- *Resilient*  
A county that is united in purpose and focused on building a future that will endure, creating a legacy that is passed from generation to generation.
- *Dynamic*  
A county that is proactive and constantly moving forward, meeting needs in innovative ways and pioneering new ways of living and working.
- *Vibrant*  
A county filled with energy and enthusiasm, where there is a positivity and momentum that ignites and builds passionate, active people.
- *Valued*  
A county filled with people who possess a strong sense of self-worth and feel valued in their families, communities and workplaces.
- *Inclusive*  
A county where a spirit of volunteering is at the heart of everything that takes place – not limited to specific demographics or always aimed at VCS organisations or specific projects but within families, neighbourhoods, communities, schools, hospitals, commerce – every conceivable activity benefitting from a widespread *attitude* of volunteering.

### ***A picture of a 'Better, Brighter Worcestershire'***

Through the discussions, the Panel Group created a picture of a Worcestershire where volunteering was at its heart and those key elements were present.

In that picture, Worcestershire was described as a mosaic, created from the rich diversity that the County has to offer, where everyone was able to find their place.

Overall, Worcestershire was described as a 'happy place', where active citizenship was a pervasive theme, with everyone giving what they were able in the pursuit of helping others and building the better, brighter Worcestershire that they had bought into.

Worcestershire residents were fulfilling their potential and living full and rewarding lives. There was vibrancy and energy, and a sense of togetherness and common purpose that drove activity and innovation in all walks of life – business, education, health, welfare, employment, communities, for example.

The vibrancy, energy and happiness was underpinned by a deep-rooted compassion. Worcestershire was a county where no-one went unnoticed and loneliness was no longer something anyone had to face.

### **Considerations**

Ultimately, the vision for volunteering across Worcestershire will be multi-level. While there will be an overarching vision for the whole county, there will need to be smaller, narrower visions flowing into the county-wide vision.

Those smaller, narrower visions will cascade down through the levels of Worcestershire society. Individual towns and cities in the county will create a vision for their own space. Within those visions for towns and cities will be other visions created by communities, businesses, organisations and services. Individual families may even create visions for themselves.

Each smaller vision must flow from, and point back to, the county-wide vision in order to achieve the common purpose. This will add complexity to the process, but will improve buy-in and commitment, and will be essential if the county-wide vision is to be fulfilled.

### **An Initial Outline Vision**

As identified in Next Steps (section 11), a working group must be established to create a final vision. However, capturing the points from the Panel Group discussions, an initial outline vision is suggested below, which may act as the basis for the working group's discussions.

*A vibrant, happy, colourful, exciting and richly diverse place to live where passionate people are committed to a common purpose, and play their part in creating a compassionate, generous and inclusive community that values every individual, celebrates diversity, is focused on helping those in need, and supports each person to truly fulfil their potential.*

Once the outline vision is agreed, it will be necessary to provide a full vision document and, as a minimum, two distilled versions: a single vision statement and an abbreviated version suitable for use on websites and in publicity material.

## 8. An Outline Roadmap to Achieve the Vision

Having discussed the definitions of 'volunteer' and 'volunteering', assessed the opportunities and challenges that exist, and considered the key elements that would shape a unified vision for volunteering across Worcestershire, the Panel Group were asked to consider outlining a roadmap to achieve the vision.

### *Establishing the elements of the Roadmap*

Until a unified vision is agreed, it is impossible to provide a firm roadmap, but a number of principles were identified that are likely to apply irrespective of the content of the final vision. Those principles are as follows:

- *Skills Review*

A successful volunteering strategy will rely on a suitably skilled volunteer base. In order to determine whether or not the volunteer base is suitably skilled it will be necessary to carry out a skills review.

The skills review must take into account the requirement that Recipients have for specific and general skills, and the skills currently present among volunteers. From this, it will be possible to identify gaps and surpluses, which will enable appropriate objectives to be set to ensure that the supply of, and demand for, skills is in balance.

- *Resource Review*

For volunteering to become an integral part of the delivery of services across the county (whether through formal or informal volunteering, or at a organisational or community level), both volunteers and Recipients must be suitably resourced.

A review of available resources (such as training and equipment, as well as the availability of suitable volunteers and volunteering opportunities) must be undertaken to identify surpluses and gaps in the available resources. This will allow appropriate objectives to be set to ensure that the supply of, and demand for, resources is in balance.

- *Outcomes Review*

In the changing landscape, particularly in respect of funding, it is more important than ever that services provided are of high quality and meeting real needs. Therefore, a review of the outcomes that services are delivering will be essential to identify those services that are underperforming and those that are performing well.

While this will be of particular concern for VCS organisations, it will be important for more informal services (such as clubs and community initiatives, for example) to recognise the importance of delivering quality services, not only in terms of securing funding but also in attracting volunteers and wider support.

By understanding the nature and standard of the outcomes achieved across the voluntary sector, Voices will be able to identify areas where improvement is required and ensure that there is a consistency to the standards of service delivery across Worcestershire.

- *Communication*

A key principle and requirement of the review process, and the development and implementation of plans following the reviews, will be communication.

There must be clear and comprehensive communication across all sectors and organisations, with a willingness to share knowledge and information in order to address shortcomings and challenges, and maximise best practice and identified opportunities.

As the volunteering strategy is implemented, it is vital that good communication is an enduring feature to ensure that the vision can be fulfilled.

- *Raising Awareness*

There must be a co-ordinated awareness-raising exercise across the County to promote the vision for volunteering to those groups and organisations that do, or could, offer volunteering opportunities, as well as across all Worcestershire residents.

Unless awareness is raised of what volunteering is, what it means to be a volunteer, and the vision to create a Worcestershire that is fully benefiting from all that volunteering can offer, it will potentially be impossible to successfully implement the volunteering strategy and fulfil the vision.

- *Building Momentum*

The successful implementation of the volunteering strategy will require a steady momentum to be built that balances the supply of volunteers with the requirement for volunteer support and the availability of opportunities.

It is vital that the supply of volunteers does not exceed demand for their support. Therefore, careful consideration must be given to the awareness raising strategy in order to ensure that momentum does not build too quickly, which could potentially jeopardise the credibility and success of both the vision and the strategy, if people expressing interest in volunteering are not able to pursue that interest without delay.

- *Relationship Building*

Existing relationships across community groups and voluntary sector organisations must be fully examined to identify where there are synergies across services, opportunities for knowledge and resource sharing, and the potential for collaboration in service development and delivery.

Opportunities to develop new relationships must be identified. This will be facilitated by the outputs from the skills, resource and outcomes reviews, and will be further aided by a clearly defined and compelling vision, supported by a robust and achievable strategy.

Identifying and building new relationships is not dependent on a finalised vision and strategy, but the messages communicated as part of the relationship building process must be consistent. There should, therefore, be an agreed approach before work in this area is commenced.

In addition, opportunities for partnership working between organisations and groups across the county must be identified and explored. An appropriate partnership approach will improve the potential for successful implementation of the strategy and fulfilment of the vision.



- *Focus on Value for Money*

As the landscape within which VCS organisations and community groups operate continues to become increasingly challenging, it is vital that organisations and groups develop a focus on ensuring that the services they provide represent value for money.

While some organisations and groups are aware of this requirement and design their delivery accordingly, many do not. Therefore, there will be a requirement to educate across the sector, and develop measures by which organisations and groups can measure themselves to assess their effectiveness. There will inevitably be a range of measures required, and a review of tools already in existence (such as the County Council's SROI Calculator, for example) should be undertaken to avoid duplication.

- *Linking with Next Generation*

Several Panel Group members identified the work currently being done by the Next Generation initiative as potentially aligning with the core aims of Voices' work with volunteering.

A review of the Next Generation commitments shows a number of areas where there may be strong synergies:

- Ensuring that everyone is working in the same direction.
- Maximising the central location that the County enjoys.
- Enabling stronger communities.
- Encouraging the contribution of the individual.
- Developing town centres so they become social centres.
- Actively developing opportunities for older people.
- Encouraging the question "How can I contribute?" to be asked.

In order to avoid duplication of effort and potential confusion, the roadmap should include an exercise to explore opportunities to align with Next Generation in those areas where there is a common purpose.

## ***Following the Roadmap***

The roadmap will require individual work strands to be carried out concurrently rather than sequentially. It is recommended that a traditional programme/project management approach be adopted, establishing 'swim lanes' for each work strand, and ensuring that clear milestones are identified to make sure that progress is measured and controlled.

The work strands, based on the factors identified in the Panel Group discussions, are as follows:

### **1. Reviews**

Work to include: a comprehensive review of the skills, resources and outcomes across existing services and the volunteer base. A review process should be an on-going feature of the implementation of the Volunteering Strategy.

## 2. Communication

Work to include: raising awareness of volunteering across organisations and the wider population of Worcestershire; and ensuring that there is effective communication across all sectors and organisations / groups engaged in volunteering activities.

## 3. Establishing relationships

Work to include: identifying existing and potential relationships and exploring potential partnership working opportunities.

## 4. Education

Work to include: a co-ordinated programme of education to ensure that organisations and community groups, in particular, are focused on delivering value for money and understand how to measure their effectiveness.

## 5. Aligning with existing initiatives

Work to include: identify initiatives where there may be some common purpose, and explore opportunities to work together.

These work strands will need to be started at the same time. However, there are dependencies within and across some work strands – for example, those that require outputs from the reviews – which will require careful sequencing of the work within each work strand.

Therefore, the delivery of the Roadmap will need to be carefully project managed to ensure that the sequencing of milestones is appropriate and allows fluid progress to be made.

## 9. Strategic Priorities

The purpose of the Volunteering Strategy for Worcestershire will be to build on the existing volunteer base that exists in the County in an effective and planned way to deliver the unified vision for volunteering in Worcestershire.

An effective volunteering strategy will result in a rich and diverse culture of volunteering at both a formal and informal level. That culture of volunteering will flow out of achieving an agreed set of strategic priorities.

Voices have identified the Camden Partnership Volunteering Strategy as one that captures many aspects of what Worcestershire will require from an effective Volunteering Strategy.

Building on the discussions held by the Panel Group and the findings of the initial report commissioned by Voices, and drawing from the Camden Partnership Volunteering Strategy, the following are suggested as possible strategic priorities for consideration and further development:

***Priority 1: Develop a volunteering infrastructure that fosters and supports a commitment to helping and supporting others.***

While many people engage in both formal and informal volunteering activities across the County, for the Volunteering Strategy to succeed, engagement in all forms of volunteering must be significantly increased.

However, many people do not perceive that they have the time, skills or resources to volunteer, or realise how to access volunteering opportunities. Some people volunteer informally – perhaps helping a neighbour, for example – without realising that what they are doing is volunteering. Therefore, the message of what volunteering is must be better communicated to generate interest and enthusiasm.

The interest and enthusiasm for volunteering that is generated must be underpinned by a commitment across individuals, communities and organisations to help and support others, meeting identified and newly arising needs through voluntary activity. This commitment must be fostered and supported by an effective volunteering infrastructure that is flexible, responsive and robust.

***Priority 2: Encourage and support the development of sustainable and meaningful volunteering opportunities at both a formal and informal level.***

Volunteering takes place across a multitude of situations, both in formal, organised settings, and on a more spontaneous level, often between neighbours or in communities where an immediate need arises and is met by individuals without reward.

Both formal and informal volunteering are vital if the full potential that volunteering can offer Worcestershire is to be delivered, and the need that Worcestershire has for volunteering is to be met. In order to ensure that volunteering delivers what is required, it will be necessary to ensure that meaningful and sustainable formal and informal volunteering opportunities are created.

Opportunities must be meaningful in order to ensure that there is mutual benefit – that both the volunteer and the Recipient feel fulfilled. Volunteering, while it meets a need without financial reward for the volunteer, rarely comes without a cost, and Recipients will be unlikely to persevere with developing and maintaining volunteering opportunities if there is no perceived worth or benefit to the activity. Equally, volunteers, while not acting for financial reward, will need to feel that the effort they are committing freely has value and purpose, or they will be unlikely to commit to volunteering in the long-term.

Opportunities must be sustainable or it will be difficult to achieve a co-ordinated and focused volunteering approach, which will result in needs going unmet and potential being unfulfilled. In addition, where opportunities are seen as unsustainable, commitment from both Recipients and volunteers will, inevitably, eventually fall away, damaging the long-term effectiveness of volunteering across the County.

***Priority 3: Build a strong and effective Voluntary and Community Sector across Worcestershire that delivers high quality services and offers unsurpassed value for money.***

With the inevitable pressure arising from the redesign of service delivery across the County following the austerity measures implemented by Worcestershire County Council, the requirement for VCS organisations operating across the County to provide more and better services will become more evident and increasingly pressing.

However, with reduced levels of funding from central sources, as well as greater competition for grant funding, the need to deliver services that represent value for money is greater than ever.

Volunteering will be an integral part of delivering high quality, value for money services, but it is essential that the VCS as a whole is structured to be able to deliver to consistently high standards, and is focused on demonstrating an on-going commitment to value for money. Unless standards are high and value for money is evident, revenue streams, whether through grant-based funding, service delivery contracts or other trading activities will be difficult to secure.

***Priority 4: Build strong, resilient and positive communities where social and economic inclusion is a reality for everyone.***

Informal volunteering – volunteering that takes place outside of formal organisational structures and often involves individuals acting as a volunteer without considering themselves as such – will be at the heart of a successful volunteering strategy for Worcestershire.

It is informal volunteering that will grow out of, and help to continue to build, a commitment to helping others and a strong outward focus. For informal volunteering to become a part of everyday life, however, there must be a focus on building strong, resilient and positive communities to support it.

Building strong, resilient, positive communities will require a co-ordinated programme to develop volunteering opportunities and ‘sell’ the message of volunteering to the individuals living in those communities. As a sense of community is established through engagement in community projects, neighbourliness and a commitment to helping others, volunteering will become a way of life that is underpinned by a naturally occurring outward focus.

Through a community-wide outward focus, those people who had previously faced social or financial exclusion will be brought into the community, enjoying a sense of inclusion through active engagement in the activities and opportunities within their community.

***Priority 5: Build meaningful and purposeful partnerships across communities, businesses, public services and VCS organisations that promote and build a vibrant, dynamic, sustainable and compassionate Worcestershire.***

The vision of Worcestershire, towards which the Volunteering Strategy points, relies on a meaningful and purposeful partnership across all the elements that make up the fabric of

the County – individuals, communities, businesses, public services, health, welfare, education, and the VCS – if it is to be achieved.

A key strategic priority is, therefore, to establish opportunities to develop partnerships across sectors, initiatives and organisations that are working towards the achievement of the vision, and promoting a vibrant and dynamic environment that supports sustainable growth and opportunity across the board.

These partnerships must be underpinned by compassion, drawing every individual, community and organisation into the fulfilment of the vision and, in so doing, take significant strides towards creating the better, brighter Worcestershire set out in the vision.

## **10. Strategic Objectives**

The agreed strategic priorities will be met through achieving specific strategic objectives.

Based on the proposed strategic priorities and the Panel Group discussions during the facilitated session, the following strategic objectives are provided as a basis for further development and discussion.

### ***Priority 1: Strategic Objectives***

The proposed priority to which the following objectives relate is: “Develop a volunteering infrastructure that fosters and supports a commitment to helping and supporting others.”

- *To inspire an outward focused attitude*

Central to achieving this strategic priority is the requirement to engender an outward focus. There will be a need to publicise a clear message that brings together the need that exists across the County, the ways that need can be met, and the part each individual can play in meeting it.

The idea of mutual benefit will be crucial to overcoming the ‘what’s in it for me’ viewpoint and drawing people towards a realisation that, by helping others, they will be improving their own lives.

- *To establish a sense of common purpose among individuals, communities, VCS organisations, public services and businesses.*

For a volunteering strategy to succeed, individuals, groups and organisations across the County must all be working towards the same goal, and a unity of purpose is, therefore, essential.

Such a unity will be fostered through communication of the vision, securing buy-in, a sense of ownership and a common desire to see the vision fulfilled – to create the better, brighter Worcestershire it aspires to create.

- *To establish volunteer groups and forums to help shape and promote volunteering across Worcestershire.*

An effective volunteering infrastructure will require active participation from volunteers, not only in terms of actually engaging with volunteering opportunities, but also in respect of influencing its design and implementation. Therefore, to support this strategic priority, volunteer forums will be established.

These forums will be multi-level - both sector-specific and more general - and will provide volunteers with a clear route to influence the development of volunteering across the County. Forums will be both physical and virtual, utilising available technology to improve engagement.

- *To actively develop and extend the existing volunteering infrastructure.*

The existing volunteering infrastructure in Worcestershire provides a foundation from which to develop an infrastructure that is capable of dealing with the changing requirements for volunteering in the coming years.

In order to retain the knowledge, capabilities and awareness that has already been achieved through facilities such as the 'Do It' website, there is a commitment to build on what already exists rather than replace it.

- *To create an environment that facilitates volunteering both for volunteers and Recipients, and provides a balanced supply and demand model for volunteering.*

Volunteering must be made as easy as possible, with barriers to engagement removed or reduced. In addition, volunteer opportunities must be matched with demand from both Volunteers and Recipients for the activities those opportunities provide, as well as ensuring that there are always sufficient opportunities with which available volunteers can engage.

If supply and demand in any of these areas is not in balance, there is a danger that interest and engagement will wane, both among volunteers and Recipients.

## ***Priority 2: Strategic Objectives***

The proposed priority to which the following objectives relate is: "Encourage and support the development of sustainable and meaningful volunteering opportunities at both a formal and informal level."

- *To build both volunteer and volunteering opportunity capacity across the county through effective communication of the volunteer message.*

In order to initiate and build wider engagement in volunteering activities across the County, there must be communication of an effective and consistent message that clearly promotes the concept of mutual benefit. Such a message will help to address the 'what's in it for me' resistance.

In addition, communicating a message that promotes mutual benefit will also help to break down the concept that volunteering is either/or – that people can only be either volunteer or Recipient - and demonstrate that it is possible to be both the giver and receiver of voluntary activity. This will help to broaden the base of volunteers by drawing in those people who have received direct benefit from volunteers and are, therefore, able to understand and further promote the benefits of volunteering.

- *To actively develop volunteering opportunities across all sectors, which are open to all generations and demographics.*

It will be vital to ensure that volunteering is inclusive and accessible across the County and it will, therefore, be necessary to continually develop a wide range of meaningful volunteering opportunities to attract volunteers from all walks of life, and of all skills and abilities.

### **Priority 3: Strategic Objectives**

The proposed priority to which the following objectives relate is: “Build a strong and effective Voluntary and Community Sector across Worcestershire that delivers high quality services and offers unsurpassed value for money.”

- *To provide high quality, effective services by developing a skilled volunteer base*

It is vital that the services delivered by volunteers are high quality, effective and meet actual need. In order to achieve this, there must be a firm commitment to raising, to an appropriate level, the skills of volunteers, and of organisations using volunteers, and then to continual improvement. This will not only ensure that services are fit-for-purpose and of a suitable quality in the short-term, but build in resilience and flexibility for service development into the medium-to-long-term.

- *To improve the quality, appropriateness and effectiveness of services and volunteering across Worcestershire through active knowledge sharing.*

There is a significant volume of relevant knowledge, experience and information among individuals and organisations engaged in volunteering activities. However, much of this knowledge, experience and information is not widely accessible, being retained within organisations and groups.

Therefore, in order to maximise the opportunities available, and improve the quality and effectiveness of volunteering and service delivery across Worcestershire, there must be a commitment to openness and the sharing of appropriate knowledge and information across all organisations, groups and individuals engaged in volunteering.

- *To ensure that volunteering represents good value for money and produces meaningful outcomes by ensuring that resources are used efficiently and effectively.*

It is widely accepted that pressure on services and funding will increase. Therefore, a commitment to providing value for money services and tangible, meaningful outcomes will be key to successfully implementing and achieving the Volunteering Strategy.

As part of this, there must be a commitment to developing processes and systems that ensure that available resources are used effectively and efficiently to maximise what can be achieved with what is available, and eliminate wasteful practices.

### **Priority 4: Strategic Objectives**

The proposed priority to which the following objectives relate is: “Build strong, resilient and positive communities where social and economic inclusion is a reality for everyone.”

- *To promote and develop active community schemes with both semi-formal and informal volunteering elements, actively encouraging the contribution of the individual to the fabric of their local community and the wider Worcestershire society.*

Strong and positive communities will be an essential building block of effective formal and informal volunteering. To build such communities, there must be commitment to developing schemes and initiatives that engage all sections of a community, empowering them and inspiring them to take ownership of their own environment, through active participation in voluntary activity focused on community improvement.

- *To increase engagement and a sense of ownership and belonging by developing community and town centres as social centres.*

Next Generation has a commitment to establishing town centres as social centres. Such a commitment aligns with Strategic Priority 4. By establishing community and town centres as ‘social hubs’ – places people feel drawn to and actively engage with - there will be a greater sense of ownership and inclusion which will, in turn, promote healthy, positive communities.

- *To actively promote physical, mental and emotional well-being by supporting wildlife, green spaces and biodiversity across the County.*

Worcestershire is rich in countryside and natural beauty. The environment offers great scope for volunteering activity to maintain and develop it and, through both the volunteering activities themselves, and access to outdoor spaces for leisure and other purposes, promote health and well-being among Worcestershire residents.

In addition, by encouraging and facilitating active participation in the surrounding environment, the development of cross-generational, cross-cultural and cross-community opportunities for engagement will be possible. Such engagement will help to build strong, resilient and positive communities as new and healthy relationships are formed.

This objective aligns with a Next Generation commitment and offers a potential opportunity to work with that initiative towards achieving this aim.

### ***Priority 5: Strategic Objectives***

The proposed priority to which the following objectives relate is: “Build meaningful and purposeful partnerships across communities, businesses, public services and VCS organisations that promote and build a vibrant, dynamic, sustainable and compassionate Worcestershire.”

- *To ensure that volunteering solutions provide the best opportunity for achieving the desired outcomes by promoting partnership working and collaboration across all sectors and across both informal and formal situations.*

Worcestershire has a rich mix of commercial and voluntary organisations and, in order to build a vibrant and dynamic Worcestershire that sees the vision come to fruition, it is vital that purposeful links are made across the different sectors in the County. These links will offer opportunities for partnership working, as well as less formal collaboration, that will ensure that volunteering opportunities are not missed and that needs are met.



- *To ensure that everyone benefits from volunteering by identifying and developing synergies and removing the demarcations that exist between voluntary, public and commercial sectors.*

To maximise the benefits that the Volunteering Strategy can deliver, and to ensure that the creation of a vibrant, dynamic, sustainable and compassionate Worcestershire remains a viable objective, voluntary, public and commercial sectors must move away from seeing themselves as distinct from one another and, instead, develop an attitude of togetherness, each offering its own unique strengths to create a whole that is much greater than the sum of its constituent parts.

Businesses can be encouraged to actively engage in volunteering, whether formal or informal, following the lead of large organisations such as British Telecom, where staff are actively encouraged to undertake voluntary activities. VCS organisations can be encouraged to support commercial enterprise, partnering in projects that allow them to bring their skills to the fore.

If the existing lines that demarcate the different sectors can be removed there is significant potential for benefit to each, as well as a huge opportunity to have a substantial impact on the effectiveness of volunteering across the County.

- *To ensure that the volunteering strategy supports, where appropriate, local and national priorities through active cross-sector relationship building.*

A number of initiatives operating at both a local and national level currently exist. While it is not the intention that the Volunteering Strategy should be in response to, or support, any particular agenda or external initiative, it must recognise, and be sensitive to, what is already taking place.

With this in mind, there will be a commitment to an on-going assessment of the local and national picture and working with, not against, organisations and initiatives where there is clear alignment. This will include engagement with the Local Enterprise and Local Strategic Partnerships.

- *To ensure that opportunities for growth and development are maximised by capitalising on the central location of Worcestershire.*

Worcestershire enjoys a central location, which offers significant opportunity to attract investment and engagement from both commercial and voluntary sectors. The potential that this geographic location offers must be harnessed to attract growth and on-going development not only for business, but also for the voluntary sector, communities and volunteers.

This objective aligns with a Next Generation commitment and offers a potential opportunity to work with that initiative towards achieving this aim.

## **11. Post-Workshop Feedback for Consideration**

Following the Panel Group discussions, the following feedback was provided:

### ***Governance***

There must be recognition of the legal status and independence that makes the sector what it is. There must also be recognition that the variations in legal forms are not just notional, for example Community Interest Companies are not charities, and regulations relating to each legal status are important. It should also be remembered that WCC is not a regulator of the sector.

### ***External influence and involvement***

Worcestershire County Council's input in the implementation and delivery of the Volunteering Strategy as a stakeholder must not result in micro management of the sector.

### ***Management***

The journey from grants and service level agreements to tenders and contracts needs careful management and separation of the strategic and commissioning aspects. In addition, there was no mention of the Compact, and that the system was not as effective as it aspired to be is a bigger issue that remains relevant today.

As the VCS plays a greater role in delivering public services and receiving grant funding to 'backfill', it needs to become more professional and increase the business skills present within the sector in order to increase value for money from any grants, income or contracts.

### ***Sector and local considerations***

It is important to understand not just the breadth of the sector membership but the diversity too, from strong national brands with substantial business support to small local organisations with deep community roots and values. Each can tick different boxes.

There is also a need for a strong and distinct local identity; not exclusion of a County perspective but recognition of the District parameters; implicitly any infrastructure investment should recognise this local dimension and the local District Council should be engaged in the process and investment.

The language used suggests 'volunteering' has been professionalised, creating an industry of VCSO who know best and must be there to manage process. This is needed, but not in every case. There is a need to recognise the importance of facilitating 'active citizenship', enabling people to give time to help others, improve their environment, and for networks to support each other.

### ***Commissioner expectations***

No information was made available by commissioners who were present at the Panel Group discussions as to how they expect VCS to behave if they are to invest in volunteering. Without this, there is a danger that the work being undertaken will become an exercise to 'defend the status-quo'.

## 12. Next Steps

While there is a strong desire, and requirement, to produce an achievable and appropriate Volunteering Strategy without delay, it is more important to 'get it right' than simply to 'get it done'.

Therefore, there is a requirement for further work to be carried out in respect of: finalising a definition for 'volunteering' and 'volunteer'; agreeing a vision for volunteering in Worcestershire; identifying and addressing key challenges; and identifying and maximising key opportunities.

Steps to complete this work are set out below and should be followed *before* agreeing a final Volunteering Strategy for Worcestershire.

Suggested next steps are listed as follows:

1. Create a small (no more than eight members) working group that is representative of both formal and informal volunteering and drawn from a range of sectors, and includes representation from Voices, which will be tasked with finalising the definitions of 'volunteering' and 'volunteer' and the vision for volunteering across Worcestershire.
2. Create two small (no more than eight members each) working groups, one drawn from representatives of informal volunteering opportunities and the other drawn from across a range of sectors and representative in its composition of formal volunteering opportunities. These groups will be tasked with identifying and presenting plans to address key challenges, and identifying and presenting plans to capitalise on opportunities (using both the feedback from the Panel Group discussions and the findings of the July Report, summarised in pages 86 – 92).

*Note: it is vital that the working groups identified in (1) and (2) are kept small in order to ensure that they are able to produce outputs effectively and efficiently.*

3. Voices to assess, develop as required, and agree the Strategic Priorities and Strategic Objectives.
4. Voices to incorporate the outputs from the working groups and the finalised Strategic Aims and Priorities into a finalised Volunteering Strategy for Worcestershire, which will include a Delivery Roadmap.
5. Final Volunteering Strategy and Delivery Roadmap to be agreed and published.

Steps (1) to (3) can be carried out concurrently, with steps (4) and (5) following completion of steps (1) to (3). In addition to these specific tasks, it is recommended that a media campaign is in place to ensure that the volunteering message is communicated widely and in advance of the formal strategy being published.

It may be considered beneficial to have an independent facilitator engaged throughout this process, but this is not seen as a requirement to achieve the desired outcome.

### **13. Contact Information**

To provide feedback, or to find out more information regarding the Volunteering Strategy for Worcestershire, please contact:

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