

Creating conditions for greater trust between VCSE, Health and Local Government

HCT Conversation – 22nd November 2022



Introduction

Following the successful VCSE Planning Day on the 7th October, The Healthy Communities Together Stewardship Group hosted a VCSE event to continue the conversation about how we create the conditions for greater trust between VCSE, Health and Local Government to deliver better outcomes and fairer health for people in Gloucestershire.

The conversation was convened on 22 November, 10-1pm at Churchdown Community Association. It was joined by 38 individuals.

The frame for today's conversation

We know that only by working together differently we will be able to deal with the pressures many organisations are experiencing at the moment. The impact of the pandemic has brought into sharp relief the need to build the capacity and maintain the wellbeing of people contributing in civil society, especially the VCSE sector, which provides services and has a vision for enhancing and adding value in those communities.

We think that building capacity in this context means developing and strengthening the skills, confidence, instincts, abilities, processes and resources that people in organisations and communities need to survive, adapt, create and thrive in a fast changing world. The event will be an opportunity to come together and explore these challenges head on and consider how the HCT programme can help build this capacity in the VCSE and Civil Society organisations



There were two workshop discussions:

How can we practically grow capacity within the VCSE?

- Infrastructure
- Training
- Partnership Development

How can we create governance that is agile, representative and purposeful?

- Trustee recruitment
- Learning and Development opportunities for Trustees
- Potential for collaboration or sharing between Trustee Boards
- Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

Summary points and areas for further consideration

How can we practically grow capacity within the VCSE?

The convening of open conversations was seen as an important enabler to creating trust and collaboration between individuals and organisations, a better understanding of who does

what and what is happening that can lead to various forms of collaboration. It was pointed out that trust needs to move from trust between individuals to trust between organisations. These conversations can be completely emergent or semi-structured. HCT could play an important role in convening them as it embodies 'neutral space'. They could also serve as an opportunity to showcase activity and act as a 'market place'. There should be an attendance fee as a matter of course. They could move around the county and could involve topics such as:

- How do we support people with the current cost of living crisis?
- What is happening in local government and how
- How do we support people with mental health issues, including social isolation, inclusion and anxiety?
- How can communities support each other?
- Meetings with funders to inform commissioning processes and policies

Participants commented on the lack of oversight of the sector. Know Your Patch networks provide some oversight. Could there be better communication events and meeting outputs? Does the sector need a 'Directory of organisations' so that organisations can connect more easily, for example around specific target groups, services or issues?

It was acknowledged that infrastructure organisations play an important role in building capacity, for example through financial hosting.

Full cost recovery is fundamental to VCSE/Civil Society organisations being able to develop capabilities and act strategically. Could there be a full-cost recovery formula for Gloucestershire that is consistently used?

More practically, can there be better support with back-office functions such as HR, Finance, Legal, IT, translation services, marketing – through dedicated resource (ie advice as well as policies/templates) or signpost to trusted practitioners.

There was limited reference to the need for additional capacity in training or organisational development. Rather there was a need to better coordinate training provision; and a way of larger organisations sharing training opportunities with organisations who perhaps can't afford them.

How can we create governance that is agile, representative and purposeful?

There was a general sense amongst all groups that current governance models are onerous and resource intensive. Is the sector over governed? – with governance becoming an 'end in itself' as opposed to a 'means to an end'. There were examples where Boards/Trustees felt to be not rooted in or accountable to the communities or users they serve, leading to poor decision making. Dominance of Board members and poor Board/CX relationships were referenced.

Areas for action or investment included:

- Need for a better understanding of governance requirements for different organisational forms and whether or what funding restrictions apply to CIC/CIO; this is particularly relevant for groups wishing to incorporate
- Better advice and signposting to infrastructure organisations who can do financial hosting so that small groups don't need to constitute at all
- Guidance and case studies on possible group structures; or community led governance approaches

- A mechanism (such as peer challenge) to test out and support improvement in governance practices
- Practical support and tools, templates etc for reporting, board reviews, trustee recruitment, training, appraisal etc
- Marketing campaign that encourages people who may not see themselves in a trustee role to consider taking on such a role.

There were several practical suggestions such as VCSE organisations encouraging (and releasing) staff to become trustees in other organisations, thereby increasing number of trustees as well as building skills and capabilities of staff.

Participants acknowledged how difficult it is to recruit trustees from ethnic minoritized groups. There were various assumptions why this might be the case. There was agreement that bespoke workshop recruitment tools are needed to attract communities of interest.

Notes from workshop discussions

How can we practically grow capacity within the VCSE?

Key points:

Orange Group

- GRCC – network of organisations also thinking about how they can work better together. Know who does what; who we are
- Get to know each other better to build relationships
- Lack of infrastructure of organisations in Gloucestershire – essential for an infrastructure organisation is not to get involved in service delivery. Need long-term secure infrastructure funding and organisations. This needs to take priority to project based funding.
- Set up shared services or shared posts across organisations.
- National membership organisations (ie GRCC) provide some of the support nationally.
- Encourage conversations in Gloucestershire – hubs.
- Need more infrastructure organisations who can act as fund-holding organisations. Share this out.
- Full cost recovery – requires a consistent and negotiated methodology or funding formular which his used by funders. VCSE needs to be more confident in asking for full cost recovery. It also requires a shift in mindsets amongst commissioners
- Different commissioning approaches; encourage much more collaboration and co-design. Make time and encourage collaboration.
- Support each other with the basics – shared back office functions; administration; bureaucracy; HR problems; staff sickness; funding bids; streamline funding. Language / translator.

What are we going to try?

- More events like this; alone but also with statutory sector partners
- Create a full-cost recovery formula for Gloucestershire – to be used in the Commissioning process
- Conversations lead to trust – move from trusting people to trusting organisations.
- Live example: ICS wants to create its own volunteering system.
- Stay independent – before being collaborative. Take power back as VCSE/Civil Society organisations.
- Support for leaders in organisations for collaboration
- Peer networks – geographical space
- Help with the bureaucracy
- Map the VCSE together – peer networks and taking up consortia. Open and inclusive. Events (Open Space)

Blue Group

- Conversations between organisations – these gatherings ideal place to break down barriers. Remind everyone of what's going on and forming links.
- Transparency – open and honest conversations needed.
- Big county – we need to move events around county to pick up all organisations.
- Getting events booked in and planned – regular conversations, and nice to do in person rather than virtually. Most work in isolation – when stepping out, inspiring and refreshing.
- Need to be people-centred – it's all about those we're supporting. Sometimes gets lost in between fundraising, etc.

- People falling through the cracks – need to continue partnership networking to meet their needs.
- Facilitation needed to create networks and partnerships.
- Directory of organisations? Your Circle a bit hit-and-miss. Local Offer – working with LA to identify organisations offering services for children and young people.
- Forum to showcase what individual orgs do so we can let others know what we're up to. Marketplace during breaks? Opportunity to showcase what going on? Can be aware of an organisation without knowing what they're currently up to.
- Need to follow-up after events – good to have events like this but need to set concrete plans.
- Know Your Patch etc – lots out there. Can lack focus, but we need a purpose for attending.
- Funding can be a trap – never ending spiral. Always having to think about funding, but the funding activities themselves aren't funded. Can be tiring and disheartening.
- Having to shoehorn activities to fit with funding bids – relationships about funding, not about trust. Can't have a conversation with funders that isn't about funding. Need to be able to ask for what we need. Don't tend to ask for our full worth.
- Need to keep integrity and funders will follow.
- Need a unified vision between VCSE and public sector – fine to have separate agendas, but an overall vision. Who could we share a vision with? Last HCT conversation brought lots of completely different groups together around a shared issue.
- Topics to discuss could be:
 - Cost of Living – temporary & current, but clouding everything.
 - What's going on at LG level? Understanding & making relationships with local government. Two-way conversations.
 - Mental health
 - Isolation & exclusion – social anxiety.
 - Fear of expressing opinions
 - How can communities support each other? Know Your Neighbour
 - Funders/decision makers meeting with people experiencing issues. Pay for attending – consulting role.
- Perhaps funding costs of attending events. Core funding.

Red Group

- **Volunteers** - How can we support them from a HR view, ensure they are supervised, and line managed effectively. Does there need to be an infrastructure organisation that can help to facilitate this? Like FVAF in the Forest.
- **Back-office support** can be provided by private companies. This support is sometimes free of charge because it's part of their CSR programme.
- In Bristol there are established organisations that will broker HR support, Governance, finance. Maybe this could be rolled out in Gloucestershire?
- Could we have a checklist/toolkit for back-office support. Templates for policies and procedure etc
- Could we have one HR agency to support the whole sector in different districts? Could they offer one contract bringing the price down for everyone.
- **Partnership development** is essential. Could this be planned into everyone's diary? Could infrastructure orgs organise training sessions to develop partnerships?
- **Know your patch** are invaluable for establishing real connections – simply not the same via email. However, attending networking sessions can be time consuming. County orgs maybe don't have the time to attend each one independently.
- **Communications is key** – For example, are all orgs aware of KYP sessions?

- A **Keep In Touch Network** has been developed in Cheltenham. Can we build this across each district? Invite funders to see what can be achieved through a partnership like this. However, this is paid by the council in Cheltenham – through part of their commissioning.

Partnership barriers in Gloucestershire

- Each district in Gloucestershire tends to stay in their own lane. Comms between the districts is quite poor, this can be improved.
- We almost need a 'village agent' in each area. The 'go to' person who can facilitate partnership work and have a good understanding of the services/orgs operating in that area.
- Larger orgs have had experience of some smaller orgs not being as engaging, simply because they might see them as a threat.
- Hardwicke, Coopers edge – How are these orgs identifying geographically? They cross districts and can sometimes feel quite isolated. Tewkesbury is Cheltenham/Gloucester.
- People agreed you're more likely to gravitate towards welcoming partnerships and the people who demonstrate they have energy and passion for your cause.
- It's a shame that the VCSE separate on geography rather than coming together on similar services and projects. Could partnership work look at 'themes' rather than districts.
- Lack of time is sometimes a barrier with partnership working.

However, everyone in the group recognises the need and value of partnership.

- In person networking is valuable for identifying partnership and identifying funding.
- Shared interests can generate passion and growth.
- There needs to be planned partnership opportunities in the calendar, not a last-minute rush to come together around funding.
- Infrastructure orgs could come together to identify training ops in the county. Does FVAF and the Glos VCS Alliance lead by example on partnership working?
- The group thought that the Cost of Living Crisis will propel partnership working and joint training opportunities.
- There are orgs in Stroud that demonstrate good partnership working – regular contact twice monthly meetings. This started in during the pandemic and now they actively look for opportunities to work together. Helping each other out. If there is a problem, they find a solution together.

Training

- Is training overlapping and being duplicated? For example, some orgs explained that they have spaces on their training courses such as, fire warden and first aid training. Every org in the sector needs this training and these spaces could have been offered up to the sector. Could there be a pool of spare training opportunities? This requires a good two-way communication system.
- Larger orgs tend to have 'in-house' training – Could spare a few spaces for smaller orgs covering the same work?

Summary - How can we practically grow capacity in the VCSE?

- Awareness, development of networking opportunities, planned time for partnership development and coordination from all districts.
- People coming together over topics rather than geography.

Yellow Group (plenary feedback only)

- Very similar topics discussed. Can articulate problems, but not so easy to come up with solutions. Lots of vision – good to have group come together – what next? To come together more often with some purpose, but to leave open to land where it's going to land.
- How could we streamline some of the things that matter least to orgs? Back office/streamline funding so not so many competing bids/collective bravery – FCR – maybe county-wide formula?

How can we create governance that is agile, representative, and purposeful?

Key points:

Orange Group

Do we maximise the talent that is available in Gloucestershire?

- For VCSE organisations to release staff to become trustees in different organisations within Gloucestershire. Would be a longer-term sustainable solution to lack of trustees; and also contribute to staff development
- Diversity – don't label – yet market and encourage greater diversity on Boards. Often driven by grant making organisations. Lots of views about people not wanting to be put into a box.
- Are we over-governed? Too many board members; reporting and reports; becomes self serving; organisations should be accountable to communities not their trustees.
- Reduce number of charities – group structures; infrastructure organisations.
- Expectations of funding organisation.
- Do sessions with Trustees who are the custodians of organisations and their values.
- Consortiums – bring organisations together – we will be fundholders for you.
- Training and support
- Young Trustee Movement – from AG – use info
- Advertising
- Networks
- Practical Governance
- Workshop board recruitment tools.

Blue Group

- Trusteeship onerous and carries a lot of responsibility.
- Boards can be complicated for organisation to work with. More charities need more trustees. Time compromised.
- Discussions within boards – where to find expertise and diversity – have used recruitment agencies – costs, and no guarantee they'll turn up.
- Decisions to register as CIO/CIC etc is to do with restrictions on holding funding – difficulty in paying for things – need to be under umbrella org, but then takes time and resource to go through procurement process.
- Lots of support needed from start-up group to wherever they may go. Not available – GRCC useful, but there's not enough availability.
- SLAs with bigger organisations for support services? Big gap since GAVCA went.
- Go Volunteer Glos – can advertise for trustees – LinkedIn very good for recruiting trustees.
- Resourcing for infrastructure organisations - difficult.
- Could boards be shared? Not necessarily a merger – often a good reason why different orgs exist – Infobuzz/Young Glos? Capacity to be on a board for more than one org? Two lots of reports etc to read.
- How to facilitate board development? Want service users to be involved and have a say, but takes a lot to build confidence. Language off-putting etc.
- Sector struggles with getting those outside of the sector to see the value – hard sell.
- Not always a positive experience being a trustee – no mentoring, processes etc. Baptism of fire.

- How to show trustees that they have value when it's not a paid role? What's the value of being on a board? Confusion around what role entails. The value is found in being able to use their voice to make a positive change.
- Support available to develop trustees – maybe over a couple of years until they're ready.
- Need a place to go to to find out about governance, get training – also support for staff when having difficulties with boards.
- Not many people know that you can pay trustees within CIOs – funding should be available through FCR.
- Pressure on CEOs to inform and manage board.
- Where is it working? – Previously used consultants for trustee training – trustees found it useful and consultants put together a handbook for new trustees. Useful.
- Risk that trustees can be well-meaning, but making bad decisions can completely destroy an organisation.
- Collective vision for organisations created between staff and service users – concern about getting trustees who don't share that vision. Powerful.
- Organisational culture – trustees dominate? Representation should be able to happen at every level – shouldn't have to be concerned about recruiting service users/resident groups etc, and them causing problems.
- How to develop VCSE staff who might want to be a trustee in future develop the skills? Same for local residents etc.
- Shadow boards – sensible idea and great way of training up new trustees, but another things for boards to have to think about.
- Timings – evening meetings etc to allow for family and work commitments?

Red Group

Trustee recruitment, Learning and development opportunities for Trustees, Potential for collaboration or sharing between trustees, Boards, EDI

Trustee recruitment

- There needs to be unconscious bias training for trustees
- Skills audit for trustees to see what is lacking.
- Invest sometime in looking for the right trustees, perhaps have a focused campaign to recruit an known candidate.
- Trustees should only be in post for a max of 7 years.
- A planned 'Away/Strategy Day' forces the trustees to look to the future and asses whether their skills can help to support the journey.
- It's crucial that trustees need to be engaged in the 'role' rather than 'underlying interests'
- Its good practice to set a minimum attendance for trustee. If they continually miss meetings does it prove their motivation?
- Task and finish groups can be really affective with trustees.
- Trustees should represent the community they wish to support through the charity.
- An informal group that sits below the board of trustees, can be a good start for volunteer who don't necessarily want the burden of responsibility.
- Most trustees like to feel as though they can make an impact, rather than sitting behind policies
- Could new trustees complete a required list of basic training that will be provided by the sector in Glos?
- Using trustee profiles etc on websites, can be really helpful.
- A universal template should be created to guide trustees through meetings – are all the basic needs/policies etc being met.

- In larger National charities, how do trustees gain a connection locally and understand local agendas?
- EDI – Glos VCS Alliance trustee training was really helpful and needed!
- Its hard to find the people in community who have the skills and are from an ethnic background to come forward for trustee roles.
- It's up to charities to find routes through different cultural opportunities and events to link with potential trustees. Go to them, rather than waiting for them to identify with you.
- For example, The Music Works attract diverse trustees this could be their geographical location and presence in central Gloucester, interests and the fact that there work is aimed at a younger community.
- Minority groups work in very different ways to each other.
- Young trustees – Trustee mentoring is really valuable from senior members of the board – could this be rolled out across county?
- Trusteeship needs to be meaningful to the individual.

Yellow Group

- Articulated challenges well – good conversations – felt learned a lot.
- Strength in doing things differently – costs associated. But could do collectively. Practical Governance etc – shared events?
- Support for orgs when deciding whether to constitute – need to do it? Would make better decisions with support.
- Need to make sure trustees represent themselves as well as their communities.

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