

**The VCS as a partner promoting prosperity
and regeneration in the district**

**Purpose: To inform the board on progress
and to identify future relationship
arrangements**

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1.0 REPORT SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report summarises the contribution of the Voluntary and Community Sector to the Prosperity and Regeneration agenda over the last few years, and demonstrates the added value the VCS brings to the economy and prosperity of the district.

2.0 DECISIONS REQUIRED FROM THE BOARD

- 2.1 The board is asked to note the contribution of the VCS as a partner, and to consider the procedures for ensuring continued partner involvement in the context of the changing LSP partnership structure.

3.0 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The voluntary and community sector has moved forward tremendously over the last two to three years in terms of its own organisation and of its partnership with the public and private sectors. The Bradford Partnership has enabled a series of complimentary VCS forums to be established, mirroring the LSP structure, and providing more accessible communication links between the sectors. In the last year this has led to the establishment of the VCS Bradford Assembly, which takes its lead from the individual forums, and which has increasingly worked strategically with the Bradford Partnership, political leadership, and partnership structures.

The Assembly structure has provided VCS representatives who are briefed and informed, to the various Partnership meetings. These representatives have accountable responsibilities to the VCS forums membership, ensuring that views expressed represent a wider view point than just the individuals. The Assembly and its forums crucially provide a single point of contact for the Bradford Partnership and for its members. This has been a goal for the Council and other partners for many years, which has finally been achieved.

The Prosperity and Regeneration Forum has provided its two co-chairs as alternate members of the Prosperity and Regeneration Partnership, with agendas discussed by VCS organisations involved in direct delivery of regeneration activity in the district. Other Forum members have played an active role on the Employment and Skills Board. There has been 100% attendance to date. This involvement has hopefully been a positive contribution to the strategic direction of the Partnership and its activity.

The VCS has contributed significantly to the delivery of prosperity and regeneration in the district over the last few years. As well as helping the Bradford Partnership to shape its plans, individual organisations have provided a range of support and services, often to the most economically

disadvantaged communities in the district. Services include employment and business start up support, advice and debt support, health and wellbeing support, and asset development to provide local services. Small local voluntary groups have been encouraged and supported to deliver key services, and volunteer development has been promoted.

The VCS has contributed to the physical regeneration of the district with new projects such as the Keighley and Ilkley Voluntary Community Action development of Central Hall in Keighley, and the start of the Newlands Enterprise Park in Eccleshill. Sector run business parks such as Carlisle Business Centre and Royds Enterprise Park have weathered the economic downturn successfully, continuing to support local businesses and local employment. Locally based physical assets reinvest capital into communities, and employees and tenants spend money locally which in turn helps to boost local business and the economy.

The VCS contributes to the social and community development of communities by giving individuals a greater opportunity to be active citizens, whether that is pre employment work, resolving debt, supporting local enterprise, or self help groups such as parent and toddlers or stroke support. We help existing or emerging groups to develop more sustainable business models. 60% of the district's children live in low income households, and this is expected to increase as the effects of the recessions and the cuts programme continue. There has been an almost 100% increase in debt between 2007 (£8.6 million) and 2009 (£17.5 million), with many caught in door step credit and sub prime repayments. CAB's and the independent advice network work to resolve debt, and to help residents to become financially independent once again. Debt is proven to create both physical and mental health issues, and the VCS deals with these health issues as well as the return to employment. The sector encourages volunteering. There are 10,000 local people serving on VCS boards and management committees, and 27,000 volunteers working with these groups and associations. Many volunteers move on to education or training, and last year 18% have been helped into employment.

The VCS contributes significantly to the economy of the district. The sector employs over 6,000 people, and has a combined turnover in excess of £100 million, with assets worth more than £30 million. The VCS employs mostly staff from within the district, and many organisations adopt a policy of procuring locally. The VCS is clearly a major employer in the district, and significantly reinvests in the prosperity of the district in its work, its employment, and its support of local business. The Big Society offers new opportunities to develop the sector's role in service delivery and as local drivers for regeneration and sustainable communities.

The VCS will be strained by the consequences of the Comprehensive Spending Review, but services and support will continue in one shape or form. The sector shares its annual funding issues now with the public sector, and new opportunities arise as a result. The Right to Bid to provide public services for example is an opportunity which could create more locally targeted services which in time create local employment and circulate local wealth. Key issues for the sector which need to be addressed in partnership are the financial issues created by TUPE and the need to follow procurement rules, but continuing our joint working makes this much more possible than even a few years ago.

The key issue now is the proposed change to the Partnership structure, with Prosperity and Regeneration ceasing to be a stand alone Partnership. The Forum has resolved to continue to meet and to attempt to influence strategy and delivery, and has always been open to doing this with public sector partners. Without the Partnership we need to identify new, formal links into the process. Partnership working is welcomed by the Prosperity and Regeneration Forum, and a huge amount of good work has already been achieved. This momentum cannot be lost now.

4.0 KEY ISSUES TO CONSIDER

- 4.1**
- What will be the formal link between the Prosperity and Regeneration Forum and the Bradford District Partnership?
 - How will the VCS involved in improving the health and prosperity of the district's communities continue to engage positively with public and private sector partners?
 - What will be the process for ensuring VCS representatives can be part of strategic debate and decision making, as full partners?
 - How can the strengths and resilience of the VCS be harnessed to support the development of the district, especially in these very difficult times?

5.0 OPTIONS

- 5.1** The new arrangements for the Bradford District Partnership will include the involvement of the Bradford Assembly. The achievements of the Prosperity and Regeneration Partnership, which includes the VCS Forum and its representatives, must not be lost in the new arrangements.

6.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 6.1** That the Partnership considers the report, recognising the achievements of the VCS as a partner in the prosperity and regeneration of the district, and considers the options for continuation of VCS representation in continuing to develop the future of the district.