

Cornwall Voluntary Sector Forum

Annual Review 2016

Introduction

It seems the only constant in the VCSE these days is uncertainty. A volatile political landscape and the prospect of an end to EU funding for Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly has increased the risk to our members considerably. It has been no surprise that after years of local government and NHS funding cuts, we now regularly receive the sad news that another charity has decided to call it a day.



Others are working hard – sometimes desperately – to stay afloat, and our role is increasingly to offer support and advice to find new ways of working and a path to sustainability. Both of our key events this year focused on this theme. ‘Brave New World’ looked at what ideas and experience we could share in Cornwall, while our VCSE Summit was full of practical advice, including crowdfunding, bid writing and working more closely with business.

I was also very proud to present the VSF Awards in October 2015 (pictured above, on the right) to some outstanding charities who have been incredibly creative and energised their communities. Our new quarterly surveys have also helped shine a light on the value the VCSE sector brings to the region as well as the pressures it is under. I was struck by how much optimism there is that charities still hope to support more people and increase volunteering.

However, there is no doubt that cash remains tight, particularly in the health and care sector that so many of our members operate in. VSF has been closely involved with the NHS and Cornwall Council’s Sustainability and Transformation Partnership and its aspirations to

find better and more cost-effective ways of supporting people. There is no doubt that with the right investment, the VCSE sector in Cornwall would rise to the challenge.

Cornwall Voluntary Sector Forum itself is not immune from these issues. Our ongoing funding from Cornwall Council ended in March 2017 and our long-term future is not guaranteed. We too are looking for different ways to operate in this difficult financial landscape. I hope you agree as you read through this report that the value we can add is clear, and that by acting as a champion for joint working and networking between public, private and VCSE organisations, we can help benefit and protect the future of the sector in the years to come.

Jonathan Adlington
Chair

About us

Cornwall Voluntary Sector Forum is the voice of voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) organisations in Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly. Our aim is to work with others to create a thriving and effective voluntary sector.

Key activities

Many organisations, voluntary and community groups benefit from our communications, services and events. They range from small, grass-roots organisations to larger, well-established charities, and increasingly community interest companies and social enterprises. From VSF research in 2013, we know that there are around 21,000 people employed in the VCSE sector in Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly, at the time around nine per cent of the total workforce. One in three adults engage in some kind of voluntary work, contributing an estimated £450m to the economy.

Promoting Change

This two-year project came to a close in 2016. The project formed part of the Lankelly Chase Promoting Change Network. The Lankelly Chase Foundation is focused on bringing about change that will transform the quality of life of people who face severe and multiple disadvantage (SMD), including homelessness, substance misuse, mental and physical illness, violence and abuse and extreme poverty.

In Cornwall, the project focused on two pilots for:

- Women With Complex Needs
- Young People in Transition from Youth to Adult Services

The legacy of the project is in influencing commissioners through the pilot's findings, for example the Together for Families programme managed by Cornwall Council. A full report and case studies were published here: <http://www.cornwallvsf.org/promoting-change-project>. Action learning sets were used extensively during the pilots and were well received by participants. They will form part of VSF's member services offer in future and action learning will be used as an evaluation tool for some EU-funded projects.

As part of the project, we commissioned a report with the Devon and Cornwall Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner on 'The Resettlement of Women Offenders: Learning the Lessons'. This research project focusing on the experience of the female offender was delivered WRSAC and the Criminology team in the School of Law, Criminology and Government at the University of Plymouth.

Theory of Change

Cornwall Voluntary Sector Forum worked with New Philanthropy Capital (NPC) to create our 'Theory of Change'. A Theory of Change outlines a long-term goal and works backwards to understand the outcomes and steps required to make it happen. For VSF, this sought to clarify our role in achieving an effective VCSE sector that successfully supports communities and drives change. The long-term goal suggested was: 'Sustainable, resilient and equitable Cornish communities where all are able to thrive.' The full Theory of Change is available at: <http://www.cornwallvsf.org/theory-of-change>.

Quarterly VCSE survey

In the summer of 2016, Cornwall VSF launched its new quarterly survey tracking the 'state of the sector'. We used this information in discussions with politicians, commissioners and funders. The first surveys showed an unsurprising, but worrying trend of continued, reduced funding to charities in Cornwall and increasing reliance on their reserves to keep going. However, there was optimism that volunteer numbers had increased along with the number of people organisations were able to support.

Headlines included:

- Respondents expected funding and staffing to reduce, and dependence on reserves to increase.
- On average, organisations supported 188 individuals and 22 volunteers per organisation gave 2.8 hours of their time per week.
- Charities' greatest risks were increasing pressure on funding as public sector spend and support reduces, and staff leaving.



(l to r): Andrew Green, The Learning Partnership ClO; Sir Stuart Etherington, Chief Executive of the National Council for Voluntary Organisations; Ian Smith, Cornwall VSF Chief Executive and Kate Kennally, Chief Executive of Cornwall Council speaking at the VCSE Summit 2016.

Safer Stronger Consortium

Cornwall VSF was instrumental in establishing the Safer Stronger Consortium, which brings together existing organisations to create one flexible and far-reaching organisation with the common goal of improving community safety and reducing reoffending.

We have been working with the partnership to cover recent changes in their senior management. Cornwall VSF has provided administrative and communications support for the partnership, maintaining the website and managing the regular e-newsletter to members. As well as making sure the partnership continued to operate smoothly, VSF has also advised on ways to develop and improve the website and marketing.

Local Sustainability Fund

CASS Plus provides advice and support to anyone attending court or tribunal hearings and their families. VSF supported them to bid for funding from the Local Sustainability Fund, delivered by the Big Lottery on behalf of the Cabinet Office.

We have worked on a governance review to check their existing policies and procedures, a business plan, funding strategy, and communications and marketing plan that will help the organisation grow and become sustainable through continued funding uncertainty. VSF's ability to co-ordinate and manage access to specialist expertise in these areas has been invaluable to deliver the project.

Transformation Challenge Award

Cornwall VSF was one of six voluntary sector signatories to the Cornwall Council-led £936k Transformation Challenge Award programme. In its second year, the programme worked on five areas:

- A business improvement programme for information and support, focusing initially on services for people with debt and welfare problems.
- A place-based pilot to demonstrate collective impact.
- Commissioning improvements, through a development programme for commissioners across Cornwall's public sector (the Cornwall Commissioning Academy) and the development of a commissioning toolkit.
- A new model of support for VCSE organisations, intended to be in place by October 2016.
- Short-term savings from an analysis of existing Council contracts.

Cornwall VSF supported the programme with representation on the board and various groups and with communications to the sector. Our VCSE Summit on 19th April 2016 updated the sector on the programme's progress and engaged with them on their support needs and what a new model of sector support could look like.

Events

Over 200 people attended a VSF event during the year.

Two events, 'Brave New World' in December 2015 and the VCSE Sector Summit in April 2016 looked at the issues in the sector from a Cornwall perspective, potential solutions and the support the sector might need in future.

How do we future proof the VCSE for the challenges ahead? This was the topic for Cornwall VSF's 'Brave New World' conference. Over 80 people attended the day to share ideas, create partnerships and get motivated. As part of the conference, there was plenty of discussion about emerging issues and potential solutions for the VCSE sector through 'Open Space' sessions and workshops.

The event also included the Cornwall VSF 2015 Awards, sponsored by Foot Anstey and the Tregothnan Estate, celebrating some amazing organisations and projects, who really made a difference in their communities. People involved in the voluntary, community and social enterprise sector in

Cornwall were asked to nominate organisations for the following categories, and these were the winners:

- Community Group Award: Work Skills South West CIC
- Health and Wellbeing Impact Award: Community Energy Plus
- Voice and Influence Award: Young People's SEND Board, facilitated by Active8
- Innovation, Partnership & Enterprise Award: Battling On CIC
- Highly Commended: Treverbyn Community Hall
- Outstanding Achievement: North Cornwall Hearing Voices

The VCSE Summit 2016 took place on 19th April 2016 at Royal Cornwall Showground, Wadebridge. This learning and networking event was attended by 120 people and explored potential for innovation, collaboration and sustainability in challenging times.

The event featured keynote speakers including Sir Stuart Etherington, Chief Executive of the National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO), and the recently appointed Chief Executive of Cornwall Council, Kate Kennally. There were workshops on innovation, co-production, working with the private sector and crowdfunding.

Attendees shared their experiences, ideas and wisdom, as the sector looks to build relationships, resource its work collectively, increase its reach, and better serve communities in need. There was also debate on what a new model of sector support could look like in Cornwall.

Communications

During the year, we increased our role as the 'voice of the sector' by working hard to highlight the pressures VCSE organisations are under in this time of cuts to funding. This included launching VSF's first ever quarterly 'state of the sector' survey, which showed charities increasingly living off their reserves.

Work started with Leap, a design agency based in St Austell, to create a new website for Cornwall VSF that would increase functionality and provide a better experience for members and other visitors. The new website will include a member directory, jobs pages, a Community Noticeboard, and member log-in area to access member benefits such as the 'Knowledge Bank' of advice and information.

The final issue of *The Signpost* was published in spring 2016, as there was no longer any funding to continue producing the magazine. *The Signpost* was started by East Cornwall CVS, which created it as a regular publication to share news and information in the voluntary and community sector in Cornwall. From 1999 to 2011, East Cornwall CVS produced over 50 issues of the magazine and when the organisation closed down in 2011, Cornwall VSF, CRCC and PCDT came together to continue to produce the magazine.

Every day VSF is in contact with over 480 members and has 280 visitors to its website. In addition, we reach 1,686 followers on Twitter and 425 on Facebook. This year, we also launched a channel on Instagram. From 1st Oct 2015 to 30th Sept 2016, we published 475 sector news stories. We gained 54 new members and 14 new associates.

Participation

Cornwall Voluntary Sector Forum is a member of various committees, panels and boards, ensuring VCSE sector input into their work. These include:

- **Brexit Futures Group:** looking at the impact of Brexit on Cornwall and ways to mitigate it, including the development of a Cornwall Social Fund.
- **Cornwall Executive Group:** the forum for leaders across Cornwall to look at joint working and challenges.
- **Headstart:** Big Lottery Fund programme supporting children’s emotional resilience.
- **Influencing Positive Social Change Group:** strategic meeting of voluntary sector chief executives.
- **ITI Board:** agreeing the funding calls for EU programmes.
- **Local Criminal Justice Board and Safer Cornwall Partnership:** representation on issues including offender management and community safety.
- **Localism Policy Advisory Committee:** we have attended meetings to discuss devolution to communities in Cornwall.
- **Sustainability and Transformation Partnership:** VSF has been involved in the consultation and its promotion, and a workstream on services for the frail and elderly.
- **Talent Match:** Big Lottery Fund project helping young people into employment.

Members of Cornwall VSF also sit on panels including:

- Children’s Trust
- Cornwall and Isles of Scilly Safeguarding Board committees
- Health and Wellbeing Board, Cornwall Council
- Safer Stronger Cornwall

Summary of accounts

Total income	£135,504		
Total expenditure		£187,372	
Balance			-£51,868
Brought forward from 2014/15	£159,418		
Carry forward to 2016/17			£107,550

2016 in numbers

Estimated daily contact with **500** members

280 website visitors each weekday

We published **475** sector news stories

1,686 followers on Twitter

54 new members and **14** associates joined VSF

More than **200** people attended our events



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