

Building Safer, Stronger Communities in Avon and Somerset

A guide to Avon and Somerset's voluntary
and community sector for Police Crime
Commissioners.



Introduction

This guide has been produced as part of the Safer Future Communities project to help inform the new Police and Crime Commissioner and partners about the nature, value and scope of the local voluntary and community sector and how it can support their role in reducing crime and promoting community safety. For more details about the Avon and Somerset Safer Future Communities network contact Voscur or the local support and development organisations listed on page 5 of this guide.

What is the voluntary and community sector, or VCS?

The voluntary and community sector (VCS) is sometimes known as the Third Sector, Social Purpose Sector or Civil Society. It comprises non-statutory and not for profit organisations set up for community or public benefit. Voluntary and community sector organisations include charities, companies limited by guarantee and community interest companies. There are also many non-constituted and informal groups. The VCS is funded through grants from charitable trusts, and the statutory sector, which also commissions services from the Sector. VCS organisations fundraise from individuals, run fundraising activities and raise income from trading. In recent years contracts awarded to the sector have increased while grants have reduced.

The VCS and the criminal justice system

The VCS working in criminal justice is large and wide ranging. It includes small voluntary and community groups and local and large national organisations employing hundreds of people. Within this diverse group are: campaigning organisations; self help groups; and service providers running a wide range of services, including arts projects, counselling services and drug and alcohol rehabilitation, to name just a few. For more details of VCS organisations working in the criminal justice system visit: www.clinks.org.

Volunteers and the voluntary sector

The VCS does involve many volunteers but also includes organisations with paid and professionally qualified staff. Volunteering takes many forms, for example volunteer trustees play an important role in the governance of VCS organisations. Volunteers can help to deliver services and raise income through fundraising. In addition to the people who volunteer with VCS organisations, thousands of people volunteer with public sector organisations; for example as magistrates, school governors or Police Special Constables.

The VCS in Avon and Somerset

There are at least 5,500 VCS and social enterprise organisations based in Avon and Somerset (1), many made up of numerous branches or projects. Nationally the VCS is a major employer. An estimated 765,000 people work in voluntary sector organisations. This is 2.7% of UK workforce (4). In Avon and Somerset there are estimated to be at least 43,511 full time equivalent employees in the VCS (1).

Of the VCS Organisations in Avon and Somerset:

- 43% have paid staff
- 56% are run entirely by volunteers
- 55% have an income of under £30,000
- 32% receive grant funding from local public sector bodies.

Nationally the VCS contributes £11.7 billion to UK gross value added (GVA), equivalent to 0.8% of the whole of the UK GVA.

The value of the VCS to the public sector, the economy and civil society.

Many VCS organisations are involved in direct service delivery to some of the most vulnerable people in our communities – for example, they provide childcare, health promotion, drug and alcohol treatment and advice services. However, the VCS has a far wider contribution to make to the delivery of public services and addressing local priorities.

Nationally the VCS contributes £11.7 billion to UK gross value added (GVA), equivalent to 0.8% of the whole of the UK GVA. The voluntary and community sector makes a contribution to the UK economy comparable to other sectors: for example, the GVA of agriculture is £8.3 billion (4).

The VCS also:

Contributes towards sustainable economic regeneration by helping to reduce unemployment, poverty and social exclusion.

Many VCS organisations in Avon and Somerset are committed to reducing and eliminating disadvantage, rather than simply treating the effects. Involving local people in the governance of VCS organisations ensures that decisions made by groups about the services they provide are informed by people from the communities who need them. VCS organisations run Advice Centres across Avon and Somerset which each year help people access millions of pounds of welfare benefits, without which many people would be living in poverty.

Helps to provide jobs and routes back to work for local people through training and volunteering opportunities.

Throughout Avon and Somerset there are volunteer centres that run brokerage services to match people with volunteering opportunities. Volunteering can often be a first step back to employment for those who have been out of work. Many organisations provide community based learning opportunities that help to get people into more formal education and work.

Enhances the economy by attracting inward investment - from the private sector to European funding.

Somerset Community Foundation and Quartet Community Foundation are grant giving charities covering Avon and Somerset that are dedicated to strengthening local communities, creating opportunities and tackling issues of disadvantage and exclusion. They help attract private sector and independent funding that local charities and VCS groups can access. Since 2000, England has benefited from more than €5bn of funding from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF); VCS groups play an important part in helping to secure and prioritise how such funding is spent. For example, between 2000-2008 local residents and representatives of local voluntary and community groups in Bristol worked with other partners to develop an action plan to decide how over £10 million of European Objective 2 funding should be spent.

Helps to promote community cohesion and tackle discrimination.

Support Against Racist Incidents (SARI) is a VCS organisation that works across the West of England local authority areas with the aim of eliminating racial discrimination and promoting equality of opportunity and good relations between people from different racial groups. SARI has delivered training to local councils, housing providers, youth offending teams, charities providing support to service users with mental health issues, supported housing providers, hate crime reporting centres and the police and the prison service. These services help promote community cohesion and tackle discrimination.

Helps to increase local democracy and participation.

Involvement in community groups helps to empower local communities and service users. Groups help to channel people's concerns in a positive and constructive direction, leading to social change and innovation. The sector facilitates greater participation in local democracy. For example, Voscur's Voice and Influence service and Somerset Rural Community Council's Village Agents project promote civic engagement and community action.

Supports Communities across both rural and urban areas.

Working in partnership and through individual contacts, the sector is able to have a broad reach and ensure that all members of society have equal opportunity to participate in activities in their local area.

The Compact

The Compact is the agreement between the government and the VCS which outlines a way of working that improves their relationship for mutual advantage. All the local authorities, including those in Avon and Somerset, have signed up to the Compact. The Compact is an

The VCS is a Key Strategic Partner

Voluntary and community sector organisations contribute knowledge and expertise to the development and delivery of services through local partnerships. Organisations provide grassroots evidence and intelligence which can be used to inform local needs analyses, and to support the design and delivery of local services. For example CVS South Gloucestershire's Chief Officer is Vice Chair of the South Gloucestershire Safer and Stronger Partnership and Voscur's Chief Executive is a member of the Bristol Partnership Board.

important tool that describes best practice in the relationships – it helps the sectors work positively together. For more information on the Compact in Avon and Somerset visit: goo.gl/pqfZB.

The Scope of VCS Activities

The largest groups of beneficiaries of VCS activity in Avon and Somerset are Children (aged under 15), Young People (16-24) and older people. However, the range and breadth of voluntary and community sector activity is enormous. Examples of activities and services provided by the sector include:

Social housing - including housing associations, women's refuges, and specialist supported accommodation for people with special needs, for example Second Step.

Community transport such as Bristol Community Transport, Accessible Transport West Somerset (ATWEST), Kingswood Community Transport and Weston and District Community Transport.

Organisations providing specialist care such as hospices and those supporting people who experience poor health or long-term conditions such as cancer or HIV, for example St Peter's Hospice and the Brigstowe Project.

Environment and conservation organisations such as the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers, the Centre for Sustainable Energy and Avon Wildlife Trust.

Sports Clubs such as the Bristol Indoor Bowls Club and Avon Riding Centre for the Disabled.

Organisations concerned with culture, heritage and the arts ranging from community theatre and choirs to art galleries and museums such as the Tobacco Factory Theatre in Bristol and the Brewhouse Theatre and Arts Centre in Taunton.

Organisations promoting community cohesion, supporting victims of crime, and helping to reduce incidents of crime and anti social behaviour such as Community Resolve in Bristol, the Somerset Black Development Agency and Victim Support.

Organisations providing advice services such as the Citizens Advice Bureau and Avon and Bristol Law Centre.

Organisations supporting community action through Localism and Community Rights.

Resident and community associations.

Representing and supporting the VCS

The VCS in Avon and Somerset is represented by support and development organisations in each unitary, county or district council area. The main organisations in Avon and Somerset are;

Voscur (Bristol City Council area) www.voscur.org

Develop (Bath and North East Somerset Council area) www.developbanes.org.uk

Community Council for Somerset (Somerset County Council area) www.somersetccc.org.uk/splash.php

CVS South Gloucestershire (South Gloucestershire Council area) www.cvs-sg.org.uk/

Engage West Somerset (West Somerset District Council area) www.engagews.org.uk/

Mendip Community Support (Mendip District Council area) www.mendipcommunitysupport.org.uk/

South Somerset Voluntary Action (South Somerset District Council area) www.ssvca.org.uk/

Taunton Voluntary Action (Taunton Deane Borough Council) www.tauntonva.org.uk/

Vista (Somerset County Council area) www.vistaproject.org.uk/

Voluntary Action North Somerset (North Somerset Council area) www.voluntaryactionnorthsomerset.wordpress.com/

West of England Rural Network (covering Bristol City Council, South Gloucestershire Council, Bath and North East Somerset and North Somerset) www.wern.org.uk/

About this guide

This guide has been produced by Voscur with support from the Safer Future Communities project. For more information contact Voscur.

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The figures in this guide have been drawn from the following sources:

- (1) National Survey of Charities and Social Enterprises 2010 (<http://www.nscsesurvey.com/>)
- (2) The Charity Commission (<http://www.charity-commission.gov.uk/>)
- (3) The annual population survey (<https://www.nomisweb.co.uk>)
- (4) National Council of Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) Civil Society Almanac (<http://data.ncvo-vol.org.uk/almanac/voluntary-sector/finance-the-big-picture/how-big-is-the-voluntary-sector-compared-to-the-rest-of-the-economy/>)