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An Lef News from Cornwall Voluntary Sector Forum

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The VCS Commissioning Board - what's it all about?

In late 2010, Cornwall Voluntary Sector Forum held three voluntary sector summits with Cornwall Council and many leading charities to establish a new Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) Commissioning Board. It now meets monthly to discuss how voluntary sector organisations can deliver public sector services. This question & answer piece is an introduction to the Board.

What is the VCS Commissioning Board trying to do?

The Board gives the voluntary sector an opportunity to meet regularly with key Cornwall Council directors and commissioners, enabling the sector to advise on the design of public services in Cornwall. The hope is that together we can find more effective and efficient ways to deliver public services, preserving and improving them for the people we serve. It makes strategic recommendations, and is completely separate to any procurement decisions, which remain entirely the responsibility of the public sector.

Why did it start?

The board emerged from a need to address two key issues arising in the current political and economic climate. The first was the decline in the amount of Cornwall Council money available to VCS organisations as grants. The second was the opportunity for VCS organisations to deliver more public sector services under the Big Society agenda.

Who sits on it?

The voluntary sector is represented on the board by ten 'theme leads', who are specialists in areas such as Environment, Community Development and Public Health. They were given an initial mandate by sector organisations at three summit meetings held in autumn 2010. They are joined by various Cornwall Council staff, including heads of service, commissioners, and Assistant Chief Executive Paul Masters. Representatives from other public sector agencies are set to join the board in future.

What does it discuss?

In the long-term, the board exists for theme leads to suggest ways the public sector can make services better and more cost-effective by involving the voluntary sector in delivery. In the initial meetings, it has also looked



Representatives at the first voluntary sector summit in September 2010

at short-term problems, such as the reduction in Cornwall Council grant funding to voluntary organisations following the emergency budget.

Who needs to engage with the Board?

If your organisation currently holds significant grants or contracts with the public sector, or hopes to do so in future, it is worth getting in touch with the theme lead in your field. If you are a smaller voluntary and community organisation, such as a community group, that is not in a position to receive public sector funding, you do need to worry about the board, although you may wish to contact the theme lead for Community Support, Peter Jefferson of Cornwall Rural Community Council, to discuss the support needs of your organisation.

How can I keep in touch?

Reports, minutes and agendas from the monthly meetings are on the Cornwall VSF website at www.cornwallvsf.org. You can also find full information about the different themes, theme leads, and their contact details.

See Page 2 for an update on each of the themes

www.cornwallvsf.org

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Theme update

Advice to Individuals

THEME LEAD - JOHN EDE (CITIZENS ADVICE BUREAU CORNWALL) john@eccabi.demon.co.uk

This theme is important if your organisation gives advice to individuals or families, for example about welfare and benefits.

To date, the Theme has been gathering the sector's views through a survey, which can be accessed at www.surveymonkey.com/s/LMVZSWP.

The Theme's prospectus is in development and will be submitted to the Board later this year. To get involved in this process, contact the Theme Lead, John Ede, on the above email address.

Community Support

THEME LEAD - PETER JEFFERSON (CORNWALL RURAL COMMUNITY COUNCIL) Contact through moira.nettle@cornwallrcc.org.uk. Deputy Lead - Sue Guard

Community Support is important for VCS organisations supporting individuals or groups in Cornwall's communities.

The theme has already produced a prospectus, outlining the wide range of support community groups and communities need to thrive. There have also been discussions at the Board about transferring some Cornwall Council buildings to VCS organisations (known as asset transfer), and making Cornwall Council's grant-making process more transparent.

Children & Young People

THEME LEAD - RICHARD MCKIE (CYWP) richard.mckie@cywp.org.uk

A reference group has been established to give organisations working with Children & Young People the opportunity to input into this theme.



The first meeting took place on Wednesday 20 July, starting the process of choosing a new theme lead to replace Steve Clark, the previous theme lead. The new lead is Richard McKie, CEO of CYWP.

The Theme has also discussed Children's Centres at the Board, and helped shape the local voluntary sector's bid to the BIG Lottery's Improving Futures fund.

The Children & Young People prospectus is due to go to the Board this Autumn. To become part of the reference group, email Richard McKie.

A reference group has been established to help interested groups get involved in the discussions. Typically this group meets virtually using Webex. To participate, email Moira Nettle (moira.nettle@cornwallrcc.org.uk) so that she can add you to the calling notices. All you need to participate is an email account, broadband and a headset/microphone. This group has also been working on a bid for the Transforming Local Infrastructure Fund.

Equality & Diversity

JOINT THEME LEADS - THEO BLACKMORE (DISABILITY CORNWALL) theo@disabilitycornwall.org.uk, DAVID SILLIFANT (DIVERSITY NETWORK FOR CORNWALL) David.Sillifant@victimsupport.org.uk and JUDITH COOK (VOLUNTEER CORNWALL) JudithC@volunteercornwall.org.uk

The Equality and Diversity Theme has been busy developing a five point plan for improving public and voluntary sector understanding of equality and diversity issues in Cornwall.

This plan entails: -

- Creating a standardised Equality Impact Assessment template to use across the public and voluntary sectors
- Creating staff handbooks explaining Equality & Diversity issues
- Monitoring Equality & Diversity issues for service users
- Developing Equality & Diversity training
- Sharing Equality & Diversity training between the public and voluntary sectors

A reference group has been established, which represents a range of protected characteristics. The theme leads would be interested to hear from you and your organisation if you feel you are not represented in this group.

Environment

THEME LEAD - IAN SMITH (COMMUNITY ENERGY PLUS) ian@cep.org.uk

If your organisation is a VCS organisation working with environmental issues, the Environment theme is relevant to you.

The Environment theme prospectus is due to go to the Board in September. In the meantime, if you would like to get involved in shaping this theme, contact the Theme Lead, Ian Smith, at ian@cep.org.uk.

P1 What is the Commissioning Board?**Health & Wellbeing**

THEME LEAD - TRACEY ROOSE (AGE CONCERN CORNWALL) -
tracey@ageconcerncornwall.org.uk

DEPUTY THEME LEAD - SCOTT BENNETT (VOLUNTEER CORNWALL) scott.bennett@brookward.co.uk

Health & Wellbeing has been one of the more active themes to date, and has set up a thriving Health & Wellbeing Reference Group, which first met in March.

The theme has been advocating Changing Lives, a holistic approach to health and wellbeing involving volunteers and voluntary sector organisations, and empowering communities to take control and responsibility for services. It has also inputted into the development of Cornwall's Health & Social Care Hubs, which intend to better integrate elements of NHS and Cornwall Council Adult Social Care provision.

Other important Health & Social Care activity includes pushing for the holistic development of Healthwatch for Cornwall and exploring the options for an engagement strategy involving a range of partners and functions including LINK in Cornwall. The theme is also inputting into ongoing discussions about the new local statutory Health & Wellbeing Board, which has been set up following the Government's health reforms.

The reference group submitted a prospectus to the board back in February. The Theme is strongly advocating Changing Lives, an approach that puts communities at the heart of health care provision, and made a detailed presentation on this issue at the May meeting. To get involved in the Health & Wellbeing Reference Group, contact the deputy theme lead Scott Bennett.

**VCS Skills for Workforce Reform**

THEME LEAD - ANDREW GREEN (LEARNING PARTNERSHIP FOR CORNWALL & THE ISLES OF SCILLY)

aspgreen@cornwall-learning-partnership.org

DEPUTY THEME LEAD - STEVE CLARK

steve@CN4C.org.uk

This theme works slightly differently to the other themes, as it explores the training and development needs of paid staff and volunteers in the voluntary sector.

P2 & 3 Theme Update**Social Enterprise**

THEME LEAD - JON ROLLS (REZOLVE KERNOW)

jon.rolls@rezolve.org.uk

Social Enterprise is the only theme to date working collaboratively on its prospectus with Cornwall Council. Theme Lead Jon Rolls has consulted Tom Flanagan, Cornwall Council's Corporate Director for Environment, Planning and the Economy, about a collaborative approach and this is in development.

The theme will explore how social enterprises already significantly contribute to the Cornish economy and how they can be supported to thrive and grow their innovative brand of business. There have been a number of informal meetings between social enterprise organisations in 2011 and Jon is looking to develop collaboration in the future. If you are interested, please contact Jon Rolls.

Volunteering

THEME LEAD - IAN JONES (VOLUNTEER CORNWALL)

ianj@volunteercornwall.org.uk

The Volunteering theme was one of the first to produce its prospectus, which went to the Board in June.

Theme Lead Ian Jones has also been working closely with the Health & Social Care and Public Health themes on the Changing Lives agenda.

One of the theme's key achievements to date has been its input into Cornwall Council's new Volunteering strategy, which was launched on June 29. This new policy will allow all Cornwall Council staff two days of paid leave per year for voluntary work.

Team volunteering days involving a number of staff can also be taken as paid leave as long as it is matched with a day of the teams own time. Also launched was Cornwall Council's policy to encourage local people to volunteer and support Council services.

Ian Jones has also been to visit Lord Wei and Nick Hurd, Minister for Civil Society, to discuss the Government's new Transforming Local Infrastructure Fund.

Its first task has been to discuss how to spend £102,000 remaining in the European Social Fund Capacity Building Works programme, which aims to build the skills of the VCS to contribute to the Convergence programme.

A proposal was being put to the VCS Commissioning Board in July outlining a diverse programme of training, including training around equality and diversity, the Cornwall Leadership Academy and the children's workforce.

Making the board

The VCS Commissioning Board emerged from three voluntary sector summits organised by Cornwall Voluntary Sector Forum in autumn 2010.

The first summit took place at the Eden Project on Thursday 30 September. It brought together 50 voluntary and public sector representatives, with equal representation from each sector, to discuss key issues facing both sectors in a difficult economic climate. Paul Masters, Assistant Chief Executive at Cornwall Council, gave a presentation advocating the development of a VCS Commissioning Board to help address these issues.

Following this summit, a task group of Cornwall VSF trustees, led by Jon Rolls, guided the work on the VCS Commissioning Board. Cornwall VSF staff regularly met with Cornwall Council to develop the plans.

On Thursday 28 October, a group of 20 key voluntary sector representatives met to firm up the voluntary sector's approach to the VCS Commissioning Board. At this meeting, the themes which now exist were agreed on, and the criteria for the role of the Theme Leads also developed.

A third summit at the Eden Project on Thursday 25 November brought together a broader range of voluntary sector and public sector representatives, with 38 attendees from the voluntary sector. Here the provisional theme leads were

Key terms

A quick guide to key terms and concepts around the VCS Commissioning Board

VCS Commissioning Board – A regular meeting between key public and voluntary sector representatives, giving the voluntary sector a chance to advise on the design of public services in Cornwall.

Commissioning - (*Cornwall Council definition*) "The process of specifying, securing and monitoring services to meet people's needs at a strategic level." The VCS Commissioning Board aims to influence this strategic process. Note: **Commissioning** is different to **Procurement**.

Cornwall VSF – Act as the voluntary sector secretariat for the board. We have a number of responsibilities, including supporting the theme leads, writing and publishing reports from the meetings, and shaping the Board's forward plan.

Procurement - The commercial aspect of the commissioning process, involving issuing tenders and evaluating bids from interesting providers. To ensure complete transparency, the VCS Commissioning Board has **no involvement** in the procurement process.

Public Sector – Currently, Cornwall Council is the only public sector body taking full part in the VCS Commissioning Board,



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chosen, and Cornwall Council commissioning and procurement staff explained the commissioning cycle, and where the VCS Commissioning Board might fit in.

The full VCS Commissioning Board now meets monthly. In addition, there are regular theme lead meetings for the different themes to discuss a joined up approach. A number of reference groups have also emerged as the theme leads look to involve the wider voluntary sector working in their field.

with the NHS and police acting as observers. Once the Board is fully established, it is anticipated the NHS, police and other public bodies will join as full members.

Reference Group – A group established by a Theme Lead, bringing together voluntary organisations working under his or her theme.

Reference Group Meeting – An opportunity for the wider voluntary sector to give their views to the Theme Lead. The Theme Lead then presents these views at full VCS Commissioning Board meetings.

Theme – An area of work discussed by the VCS Commissioning Board, such as Public Health and Volunteering. There are currently 10 themes. They roughly correspond to different areas that voluntary sector organisations deliver services in.

Theme Lead – A voluntary sector specialist responsible for driving a theme forward. They attend VCS Commissioning Board meetings and are tasked with gathering and feeding back the views of the wider voluntary sector working under their Theme. The Theme Leads were given a mandate by the voluntary sector at the third VCS Summit in November 2010.

Theme Leads Meeting – A regular meeting between the Theme Leads to discuss how the themes can work together.