

VCS Reps Meeting: Strategic Communication

Tuesday 14th June 2011. 1:30- 3:30pm

at Voluntary Action Camden

Minutes

1. Introductions and apologies

Present:

Asha Ki-Duale (*Voluntary Action Camden*)
Jan Knight (*Camden CAB*)
Pat Stack (*DISC*)
Sarah Elie (*Somerstown Community Centre*)
Jenny Alphonse (*Camden Crossroads*)
Peter Ward (*Camden Community and Police
Consultative Group*)

Lyn Davies (*Elfrida Rathbone*)
Jo Holloway (*Camden Age UK*)
Anju Bhatt (*Camden BME Alliance*)
Kevin Nunan (*Voluntary Action Camden*)
Mary Mason (*Solace Women's Aid*)
Donna Turnbull (*CamdenCEN*)
Alex Charles (*CamdenCEN*)

Apologies received from:

Renuka Jerarajah-Dent (*CORAM*)
Simone Hensby (*Voluntary Action Camden*)
Sharon Vickers (*CORAM*)

Monica Riveros (*Age Concern Camden*)
Lakhy Khan (*Hopscotch Asian Women's
Centre*)

Introductions: The current list for reps and the strategic boards they sit on needs to be updated to reflect staff changes.

2. Update- where we are now.

Donna explained the background behind today's meeting with reference to the previous VCS reps meeting held on 14th December (*'A Vision of the LSP', minutes provided*).

Updates for the following Boards were provided by the respective VCS rep:

- 2.1 **LSP (Donna):** There has been little development towards a new vision of the LSP since the last LSP meeting in December. The proposal developed by reps at the last meeting may not be relevant anymore as the future of the LSP is uncertain. LSP is still seen as the overarching body to oversee partnership work however no business meetings have been held since December and the current preferred format is instead to conduct seminars around specific topics of interest.

- 2.1.1 It appears that the new administration may have other priorities in light of the current climate. Previously the focus was towards the LAA/Audit Commission but this has shifted as other priorities take precedence.
- 2.1.2 LSP doesn't have a clearly defined role at present. Other councils have implemented changes to the LSP but as yet, Camden seems undecided. *Anju*: As the Health and Well-Being Board looks to obtain statutory footing it could potentially take over some of the responsibilities previously assigned to the LSP.
- 2.2 **Health & Well-Being Board (HWBB)** (*Anju/Jenny*): The Board will take on a commissioning role that can oversee services but will have no authoritative powers to recommend or implement change.
- 2.2.1 HWBB is likely to be put on a statutory footing. Reps expressed concern that the main exclusion of statutory footing appears to be the inclusion of the VCS. There are also concerns amongst the VCS that the sector may be 'squeezed-out' of strategic partnerships and that the voice of VCS at a strategic level is under threat.
- 2.3 **Adult Safeguarding Board (ASB)** (*Anju/Jenny*): Similar concerns as HWBB. It is unlikely that the ASB will be made a statutory requirement; however it is likely to be put on a statutory footing.
- 2.4 **Quality Assurance Board (QAB)** (*Lyn*): Lyn has just joined the QAB as a VCS rep and has yet to attend a meeting. At the previous meeting the future of VCS representation was discussed however minutes are yet to be circulated. Lyn believes she is the only VCS rep currently sitting on this board.
- 2.5 **Better Care Choices TASC Force** (*Pat/Jenny*): There are grave concerns about the functionality of this Board. The reality seems a long way off from the initial ideology of the Board's purpose. Concerns were expressed about transparency, choice, control, priorities and ultimately, whether much has changed for the service user.
- 2.6 **Community Safety Partnership (CSP)** (*Peter*): The CSP team have lost 40% of its staff and remaining staff have been restructured around working processes which have themselves been restructured into three distinct key areas:
- 1) Town centres/places
 - 2) Victims
 - 3) Offenders
- The management group that sits below the CSP has also shrunk, but despite both reductions the partnership will continue.
- 2.7 Solace Women's Aid (*Mary*): Forum and strategic partnership work to support domestic violence has been heavily slashed. This could be potentially damaging to previous work and relationships. Strategic group ended in March and there is now a gap for strategic planning and partnership work in this area. Current strategy doesn't include VCS and domestic violence organisations have no operational, strategic (or otherwise) link with Community Safety Partnerships. *Peter*: suggested he meet with Mary to address concerns in relation to the CSP.

- 2.8 **Sustainability Partnership** (*Sarah*): There is a drive to involve 'big-players' e.g. hospital/British Library in the partnership and for them to make more effort to reduce and offset emissions. It seems unclear how the VCS fits in with this strategy as most VCO's are limited in what they can do because of funding restrictions, lack of ownership etc and may require support if they are to fulfil sustainability obligations.

Summary of concerns

- Statutory duty to involve VCS in partnership work has been removed
- Voice of VCS at strategic level at risk of being squeezed-out with reduced ability to engage
- Reduced funding of VCO's means it is unlikely that the VCS will have the capacity or resources to fill the gap and provide services as outlined in the Big Society vision
- Suspicion that if a top-down approach is employed it may lead to the division of the sector beyond repair
- Reluctance of some council officers to work with VCS
- Some officers who previously supported and understood the VCS have lost their jobs
- Important links/relationships between statutory sector and VCS may weaken as key figures from the VCS have lost their jobs
- The loss of VAC networks (including Children and Families, Adult Health and Social Care and Health Inequalities Forum) looks set to have a devastating impact on the ability for VCS reps to receive support as they did previously
- Reps are themselves inundated with work and have reduced capacity to maintain involvement with one or multiple Boards without support
- Tight deadline between now and December to achieve changing working practices.

3. **'Next steps' proposal:**

The general consensus amongst reps was as follows:

- In reality there are no resources to fund networks now or in the immediate future and as such, the way in which reps were supported before cannot continue.
- Whilst cuts have had a devastating impact it is vitally important to maintain VCS presence at a strategic level.
- CamdenCEN can provide basic support to reps.

Points to take forward:

- Seek clarification from council about the position of VCS in future partnership work
- Strategically reposition the sector to fit in with the priorities and demands of statutory bodies i.e. *what is it they need the VCS for? How can we enter and engage at the points that they need us to? How do they envision strategic partnership working? How is the VCS represented?*
- Establish and/or develop successful relationships between VCS and statutory bodies
- Identify 'communities of interest' i.e. working in a particular service area and identify who sits on the relevant strategic partnerships to represent these needs

- Consider a 'position paper' for organisations to feed into. In turn this can be used to identify core themes of concern for the VCS i.e. the collective voice of the sector
- Investigate VAC's role as a lead body to present VCS voice to local authority.

4. Group Development

- 4.1 Important to maintain face-to face contact.
- 4.2 Groups should continue to be organised thematically and should host at least one forum meeting before December. The Chair of each forum can take responsibility for arranging agenda/minutes/papers etc.
- 4.3 Reps can collate information from the sector and send to CCEN. CCEN can disseminate this information through existing VAC mailing lists and via a link to VAC or CCEN website (and vice versa).
- 4.4 Reps will email CCEN details of the boards they sit on as well as dates of future strategic board meetings.
- 4.5 Meeting dates can be time-tabled and posted on the website. Rep meetings can be timetabled in advance of strategic board meetings
- 4.6 In future it would be useful for reps from across the sector to meet quarterly and discuss sector-wide issues.

5 Information and Communication

Several methods for future communication were identified and the pros and cons of each discussed:

Emails: similar to method previously utilized by VAC network coordinator however without a network coordinator it would be difficult to manage in the same way.

Yahoo Groups: most reps familiar with the notion of 'email groups' however they raised concern about the number of emails they may receive. *Kevin:* advised that notification settings can be changed to receive less/only relevant emails.

Huddle: is a separate entity altogether to Outlook or other Microsoft software. Emails are not sent to an Outlook/Hotmail account and all information on Huddle could only be accessed by the user logging-in to their account with a password. Multiple accounts/defined work-areas can be set up if an end-user sits on multiple boards, or has an express interest in a board other than their own.

The following points were noted:

- Email loops between reps, VCS and statutory bodies are vitally important
- As well as feedback from 'communities of interest', feedback from the sector as a whole is also important

- Needs to be a better mechanism for identifying policy concerns and informing the appropriate rep, ensuring that any concern is represented at the appropriate forum.
- To simplify it would be easier to have one source of information.

Website: A page could be created on either the VAC or CCEN website which provides basic information such as meeting dates, minutes, papers, contact info.

6 Actions

- Reps to email Alex with details of the boards they sit on and future meeting dates
- CCEN to timetable dates of strategic meetings and post on website.
- CCEN to develop mailing lists to enable communication between reps, statutory organisations and VCS members
- Donna to seek clarification from council about the position of VCS in future partnership work
- Explore ways to map and make sense of strategic partnerships
- Explore ways to strategically reposition the sector to fit in with the priorities and demands of statutory bodies i.e. *what is it they need the VCS for? How can we enter and engage at the points that they need us to? How do they envision strategic partnership working? How is the VSC represented?*
- Establish and/or develop successful relationships between VCS and statutory bodies
- Identify 'communities of interest' i.e. working in a particular service area and identify who sits on the relevant strategic partnerships to represent these needs
- Consider a 'position paper' for organisations to feed into. In turn this can be used to identify core themes of concern for the VCS i.e. the collective voice of the sector
- Investigate VAC's role as a lead body to present VCS voice to local authority.