

**Gloucestershire VCS Alliance
Operational Board
Tuesday 2 October 2018 2.00-4.00pm
Cheltenham West Community Fire Station, Tewkesbury Road, Uckington**

MINUTES

Present:

Jan Burn	Kingfisher Treasure Seekers	(JB)
Norman Gardner	Citizens Advice Gloucester	(NG)
Emma Griffiths	Gloucestershire Counselling Service	(EG)
Peter Guns	Cheltenham Street Pastors	(PG)
Maz Jennings (Chair)	YMCA Cheltenham	(MJ)
Catherine Kevis	Gloucestershire Community Foundation	(CK)
Elin Tattersall	GRCC	(ET)

Apologies:

Bridget Davies	Gloucestershire Care Services
Simon Gillings	Youth and Community Services

In attendance:

Mike Brain	(MB)
Susan West	(SW)

1. Introduction

MJ welcomed everyone. MB explained that Matt Lennard (ML) and Jem Sweet (JS) will attend future meetings when appropriate. It had been agreed that not all Alliance staff would attend every meeting to make best use of the team's time.

Following the Board's concerns on communication and links with the Strategic Board, MJ, Cordell Ray (Chair of Trustees) and MB had met, and MJ had circulated information from that meeting. MJ and MB have agreed to meet between each Operational Board meeting to discuss progress.

2. Setting the scene and priorities

MB set out the priorities he has focused on since taking up his appointment.

1. Dealing with internal systems, this is the highest priority for the Trustees. MB has been looking at HR, employment issues, financial systems, project systems, trustee recruitment and staff development.
2. Ensuring financial stability. The aim is to hold six months' running costs in reserves and have a healthy balance for operational costs.
3. Developing and enhancing strategic partnerships.

Current activities

The Alliance has a Service Level Agreement with the CCG and Gloucestershire County Council. There is a three year engagement strategy and action plan. The plan is divided into six sections with action points, identified from the consultation in 2017.

JS is running monthly District level drop-in surgeries to engage with Alliance members. These started in August and as planned, are starting slowly. They offer quality face to face engagement. CK has expressed interest in Gloucestershire Community Foundation joining some of the sessions. It has been agreed to look at running thematic surgeries in future. The Alliance will be running a membership engagement survey to gauge perceptions of organisational security. MB is targeting at 50% response.

ACTION: SW to circulate the engagement survey to Board members.

The Alliance is working with Barnwood Trust and a PhD student from Exeter University to finalise a specification for a taxonomy of the VCS. This is essentially a scientific study of what the VCS is like across the county. The aim is for completion by April 2019 and will help us make informed decisions in the future. MB aims to publish the research focused on what is important to the Alliance.

ACTION: MB to speak to CK when the specification is finalised as Gloucestershire Community Foundation can help with organisational records, using publically available information shared within GDPR regulations

The Gloucestershire Talks Mental Health event is taking place at Forest Green Rovers on 10 October. The main audience is likely to be public sector front line workers. CK said that Helen Taylor, former CEO at Forest Green, is likely to attend.

ACTION SW to circulate speaker and exhibitor lists. This has been done.

Public sector volunteering. MB explained that most public sector organisations have a volunteering policy but it is not always well promoted or delivered. The objective is to use the skills of public sector staff to support VCS organisations to help them become more robust, and resilient, for example with finance, IT, or marketing. The intention is to identify what exists now, conduct a skills analysis and establish a pilot programme. The aim is to develop impactful case studies and report back on financial basis.

It was agreed there is cross over with the work of Involve Gloucestershire (IG). The Alliance is in discussion with Cordell Ray and IG. There needs to be clarity over the difference between these proposals and what IG offers.

ACTION: ET suggested MB talk to Janice Banks to make sure the plans align with similar GRCC work.

MB said he did not intend the Alliance own this work if would sit better elsewhere. However public sector volunteering is not working well now and this is an attempt to make improvements. CK highlighted the platform on the Local Business Awards website, <https://www.localbusinesscharityawards.co.uk/support-a-local-charity-in-gloucestershire.html> MB is already in discussion with Louise from the Local Business Charity Awards.

MB said the Alliance has secured funding from the OPCC to cover five core stands of work.

1. Support the delivery of the Commissioners' Fund. The OPCC wants to see more applications of lower value and an increase in partnerships. They want successful applicants to become more sustainable. They also want to provide more support to rejected applications with suggestions for alternative sources of funding.

ACTION: MB to speak to GRCC and Gloucestershire Community Foundation about how this might happen.

2. Further professionalisation of the VCS. MB emphasised that the VCS is not unprofessional! This is about providing support and back office activity. For example how can we enable VCS organisations to bid for funding and complete pre tender questionnaires which require a quality management system. MB is working with Barry Wyatt to make access to PQASSO easier and more affordable. ET highlighted that PQASSO is a lot of work for small organisations and recommended MB speak to Janice Banks about a simpler system that GRCC is developing.
3. Keep Safe initiative. The OPCC has highlighted that the Police are dealing with calls that could be better handled in the community. Keep Safe is about setting up safe spaces, eg in retail premises. The OPCC wants increase the number of cardholders and businesses signed up to the scheme.

ACTION: MB is meeting Teresa Hemingway next week to start the conversation. MB to discuss Cheltenham Street Pastors' Safe Space vehicle with PG. ET encourage MB to engage with the community wellbeing co-ordinators.

4. The OPCC is keen to be involved in the public sector volunteering work.
5. Attend Safer Gloucestershire meetings. MB will be presenting the work of the Alliance at the next Safer Gloucestershire meeting later this month.

MB reported that a new suite of HR policies has been developed for ratification by the Strategic Board. MB is discussing new employment contracts with team members. The aim is to transfer employment from GFirst to the Alliance on 1 January 2019. MB has created a new financial system that breaks down expenditure in more detail based on projects. The team now has a shared Gdrive to make it easier to share documents.

Trustee recruitment. The Operational Board had given feedback on the advertisement for new Trustees. Applications are not restricted to the VCS, but the majority of trustees need to be in the VCS. MB hopes that up to five trustees will be recruited. The priority is to get the right people in place. He explained that Cordell Ray doesn't want to be Chair of Trustees indefinitely and the hope is that a suitable candidate will come forward. MB asked the Board to promote the need for trustees to suitable candidates. Interviews will be held on 29 October.

ACTION: SW to send the Board links to the final vacancy notice. This has been done.

MB presented an award at the recent Gloucestershire NHS 70 awards. He is involved with Enabling Active Communities, Safer Gloucestershire, the Housing with Care Strategy and the Health and Wellbeing Strategy.

Future plans

The formal consultation to develop the three year business strategy will start in December. The strategy will be finalised in March and run for three years from April with a 12 month business plan. The Operational Board will have the opportunity to input to the strategy.

The Alliance will take on work for what is needed by its members. He wants the Alliance to be recognised for truly representing its members. The Alliance is not a delivery organisation but can be innovative, prepared to do what others can't or won't. He wants the Alliance to challenge the public sector and look at how best to deliver public sector priorities through what the VCS is doing.

ET asked MB to remember existing VCS forums and channels and involve them more with communication and engagement.

The Operational Board agreed to make MB aware of opportunities, their views and concerns.

MJ requested an indepth look at children and young people's services at a future meeting

MJ thanked MB for his presentation and what he had achieved so far.

3. Discussion

The Board is still seeking clarity on its purpose and function and the role of individual members. The Board understands the governance role of the Strategic Board but apart from that, are still not clear on differences between the two Boards. It was felt the Operational Board may become more of a steering group.

The Board would like input into shaping the content of the business plan and not simply be given it to approve. They feel the plan should be driven by the needs of the VCS. They asked how grass roots community organisations would have their voice heard in the planning process.

ACTION: MB to provide the Board with more detail on the consultation, process and how they will be involved.

The Board feels the Alliance should be lobbying the public sector more on behalf of the VCS. As an independent voice, we should be promoting the sector, highlighting issues and giving difficult messages to the public sector. As an example, there is concern on the amount of money that goes out of county to national and regional organisations. The Board recommends that one strand in the business plan should be on advocacy and engagement.

CK highlighted an example from Torbay where public funding appeared to have little impact. She commented that the VCS needs to be more innovative, work differently and start asking different questions.

The Board recommended that research should include looking back at previous work to see what's changed and what should be asked in future. For example GAVCA produced a state of the sector report about 10 years ago and Gloucestershire Community Foundation produced Vital Signs last year. Several organisations have funding through Know your Patch to find out what is taking place in their area and their knowledge should be sought. These are thought to be GRCC, FVAF, CCP, GL Communities and Kingfisher Treasure Seekers.

The Board is concerned about the OPCC's drive for sustainability and whether that means statutory funding will be cut further. CK commented that the VCS landscape is changing and she thinks there will be an opportunity for smaller, more entrepreneurial organisations. The Board queried where quality assurance will fit in future.

ET is keen for funding application forms to be standardised as far as possible.

The Board asked where the resources for developing the VCS will come from. They commented on the seemingly onerous monitoring requirements attached to some funding. They would prefer the public sector to be less obsessed with quick results and innovation.

The Board raised concerns on the Keep Safe initiative. This reflected wider concerns about minimising public sector involvement to save costs and increasing VCS responsibilities without giving any resources to cope with higher demands

4. Minutes of last meeting

The minutes of the meeting on 12 June were taken as read.

5. Next meeting

Monday 17 December, **9am-12pm**, Kingfisher Treasure Seekers, Westgate Street, Gloucester. Please note revised start time and length of meeting, based on preferences of those at the October meeting.

As agreed this meeting will focus on sharing information. Each person is invited to speak for 10 minutes about their knowledge and current issues. The aim is to bring individual perspectives and understand more about the knowledge of Board members.

Please send other agenda items for future meetings to Maz.