

## **TERMS OF REFERENCE**

### **TELFORD AND WREKIN VOLUNTARY AND COMMUNITY SECTOR INFRASTRUCTURE CONSORTIUM**

#### **Introduction**

This document sets out the draft terms of reference for membership, participation in, and the prime functions of the Telford and Wrekin VCS Consortium.

Telford and Wrekin CVS plays the role of lead and accountable body as the primary infrastructure support agency within Telford and Wrekin and the organisation has striven to build an appropriate and workable consortium in response to the need to define a Compact and provide an Investment Plan as required through Capacity Builders.

This draft attempts to give a direction and shape to the need for agreed terms of reference for the Consortium's continuance and the proposal is made that a working draft is discussed at the Consortium meeting scheduled for 30th July 2007, using this document as its starting point to prompt discussion. Consideration should be given to the dissemination of a further agreed draft of the TOR to all sector groups, as it has direct implications for them as partners and service users.

The Consortium as it is configured currently has the support and involvement of a number of organisations having a degree of interest in, and providing a degree of infrastructure support to, VCS groups in Telford. For the purposes of brevity these are not detailed here. One significant difference however, exists between Telford and Wrekin and its comparators – i.e. Shropshire County, in that CVS has been considered the sole infrastructure agency and, as such, does not have access to a ready made network of groups with similar core functions and aspirations. This has proved somewhat of a challenge and has not been totally without its benefits, as evidenced perhaps by the clarity of the original Investment Plan through Change Up.

#### **Purpose and Functions of the Consortium**

In common arguably with all sections of the UK social economy, Telford and Wrekin needs a healthy, thriving and well resourced Third Sector. Whilst Telford already has significant numbers of VCS groups offering a plethora of services to its citizens, the area lacks a unified and coherent strategy to enable the sector to develop to become a greater and more effective deliverer of services in line with the Governmental drivers behind Change Up and the Third Sector Review. It is envisaged that the VCS Consortium as a “fit for purpose” structure, should adopt elements of this role through negotiation with its partner agencies. The following functions seem to flow directly from this potential and the Consortium should aim to:

- Provide a degree of leadership and strategic direction for sector groups falling into the category of SME size, i.e. small/medium sized groups. (Many larger voluntary organisations have significant and well defined infrastructures and are supported nationally).
- To undertake mapping and research of the Voluntary and Community Sector in Telford and Wrekin.
- To participate in helping to resource the sector through involvement in funding bids etc. This could take the form of securing the work of the Consortium and its partners but should also help support its constituent groups.
- To facilitate and act as conduit for the local sector's relationship with regional and national government and their related agencies.
- To act as independent broker/advocate with the above agencies adopting the role of conduit between Central Government and the local third sector economy.
- To enable effective relationships between sector groups, Telford and Wrekin Council and its partners. This work should incorporate a review of the local Compact and its driving principles. This role may indeed include a degree of arbitration and possible dispute resolution.
- To endeavour to inspire and encourage good practice within the work of the sector's groups and engage the sector in training and development to improve the resilience and social capital of the groups it serves.
- To provide information to groups on recent and potential developments within the Third Sector in ways which help to demystify the implications for and expectations on groups providing services. The Consortium should therefore have strong links with existing structures such as the Local Strategic Partnership and the Voluntary and Community Forum and use all the marketing tools reasonably available to it.

It is important to ensure that the above functions are pursued in ways which are fully inclusive, to ensure that the Consortium is given the "authority" as it were, of the groups it is already actively engaged with. The Consortium does not aim to be the fount of all local knowledge but should express its willingness to learn from its partners in addition to its aspiration to provide support and leadership.

## **Consortium Membership**

The Consortium is currently administered, convened and chaired by Telford and Wrekin CVS. The following membership proposals are suggested:

- Membership of the Consortium should be offered at two distinct levels. Core Membership should involve those groups currently providing high levels of measurable infrastructure support and services to groups as an explicit element of their operations.
- Associate Membership should be afforded to all VCS groups wishing to play a role in the development of the Consortium or having an active interest in its activities.
- Groups wishing to apply for Core Membership should make a written request to be considered by the Consortium Core Group and decisions reached accordingly. Individual/single membership will not be granted in either circumstance. Core Members must be able to demonstrate a high level of infrastructure support to VCS groups.
- Additional Core Group members can be co-opted in on a short term basis from any of the organisations represented on the group for the purposes of providing information/advice on specific issues.
- Membership of the Consortium should be reviewed each year – indeed the terms of reference of the group should be reviewed annually in line with the rapidly changing expectations placed on the sector by government and funding partners. The review of TOR should be managed through a specific Core Group meeting called for that purpose.
- Core Group members should be mindful of potential conflicts of interest given the structure and needs of their parent organisation. Any potential conflicts of interest should be declared and if necessary members could be asked to leave the Consortium for specific meetings, or indeed for an agreed period of time, to allow resolution or investigation of those issues.

## **Expectations of Members**

Members commit to the Consortium alongside the interests of their individual organisations, their geographical remit or individual preferences. In meetings members consider: ‘what is best for the voluntary and community sector in Telford and Wrekin. As part of this, members ensure that difficult decisions are addressed and resolved, not just the easy ones, and that these decisions do not represent the “lowest common denominator” but the best for the sector.

Members are expected to challenge and support each other, display consistency and respect confidentiality. They must be focused and strategic. Members should also declare potential conflicts of interest in their relationships with other agencies.

Members should refrain from behaviour which could bring the Consortium into any level of disrepute.

In addition, we expect members to commit to:

- ❖ regularly attending Partnership meetings;
- ❖ complete work agreed at these meetings;
- ❖ incorporate within their own development plans the Consortium areas of work agreed.
- ❖ represent the Partnership at other fora and networks as agreed;
- ❖ promote the Consortium brand and identity.

### **Structure of Core Group Consortium Meetings**

The following proposals are made regarding the meeting of the Core Consortium Group:

- Meetings of the Core Consortium Group should take place at 6 – 8 weekly intervals and can be more regular where required. Minimum requirement of 8 meetings per year where possible.
- Room hire and associated costs will be met through the use of the agreed budget for the Consortium administered by CVS.
- CVS will administer the minutes of the meetings and wherever possible these will be shared with partners in advance of meetings being held.
- Consensus rather than unanimity should be reached with regard to decisions made by the Consortium and individual members should agree to abide with majority/consensus views reached. Voting by a show of hands can be adopted when required.
- Potential disputes should wherever possible be resolved in house and only in the event of this clearly not being possible should disputes then be referred to Capacity Builders for arbitration.

### **Associate Group Meetings**

It is proposed that these are convened 2 or 3 times a year to brief the sector directly on the work of the Core Group. In addition, regular feedback will be provided through the Voluntary and Community Forum and mail shots/electronic means to engage the sector in the work of the Consortium. Separate and briefer terms of reference will be drawn up for the Associate Group of the Consortium. However, it is proposed that a copy of these full terms of reference is provided for all VCS groups in Telford for comment. Also, an observer from the Associate Members Group should be invited to attend the meetings of the full Consortium Group.

### **Relationship with Local Press and Media**

- Individual Core Group members should neither make overtures to the press or local media nor respond to questions regarding the work of the Consortium without first obtaining the consent of the Core Group Membership. In extremes this could be obtained via “a ring around” of members rather than a physical meeting.
- The Consortium should make efforts to publicise its work in a positive light, utilising local media. Formal press statements should be issued wherever practical after having been discussed at a Core Group meeting, or after receiving consent of the majority of its members.

### **Accountability of Consortium and Members**

The Consortium accepts that it is directly accountable to the Voluntary and Community Sector and its membership should reflect the engagement of infrastructure service providers within Telford and Wrekin. Individual Consortium members are in turn accountable to the governance structures of the organisations they represent within the sector with regard to resources they may receive or disperse on behalf of the Consortium.

### **Alteration to the Terms of Reference**

Any alteration to these terms of reference shall receive the consent of at least two thirds of the Core Group membership. Formal written application should be made to the Chair to enable a meeting to be convened to discuss any potential TOR alteration.

### **Dissolution of the Consortium**

The Consortium can only be dissolved after formal agreement is reached by at least two thirds of the Core Group. Any outstanding money or resources held by The Consortium would be returned to its donor organisation in this event.

ML/JH  
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