

To: Herefordshire Council (by email)

20 December 2013

## Voluntary and Community Sector Response to Herefordshire Council Budget Consultation 2014/17

hvoss is an infrastructure organisation supporting the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) in Herefordshire. The budget consultation has been regularly promoted to over **250 hvoss members** and our wider network of **1,100 people and groups**. 31 organisations attended two workshops to discuss the proposals (Appendix 1 and 2). Organisations within our sector are value based, not for profit and act in the interests of public benefit. The local VCS support individuals and communities, including many which the Council aims to prioritise for support in the future.

### 1. The process of consultation

- Of concern is the lack of evidence that comprehensive **Equality Impact Assessments** have been undertaken to inform this process. These will need to be undertaken prior to any final decisions on service reduction to avoid potential legal challenges to the process.
- Effective engagement with **vulnerable individuals and older people** was identified as potentially **under-represented** in the consultation. It is also felt that the reliance on a web based response excludes various groups and individuals in the county.
- A fundamental concern is **insufficient detail about proposed cuts in specific service areas**. This has had a significant impact on the sectors ability to meaningfully respond.
- There is little evidence of a **co-productive approach** to proposed reductions, with services being cut without collaborative discussion. There are significant opportunities for the **sector to support intended outcomes and innovative solutions** when co-production is undertaken.

### 2. Coherence

- A significant emphasis has been placed on **communities doing more for themselves, including increased volunteering and self help**. We strongly challenge whether this aspiration is deliverable and achievable. Demographics, (such as age of many in current volunteer sector), welfare benefit changes, increased responsibility and assumed accountability for services provide **fundamental challenges to achieve this desired outcome**. This strategy needs significant **long term planning**.
- **Volunteers make a remarkable contribution in this county** but **paid/employed staff** play an equally valuable role. Neither comes free and resources are required. **Financial assistance** from the local authority, enables the sector to provide significant **added value** in skills,

**external funding resources, capacity and new ways of working as well as significant economic benefits** (circa 50,000 volunteers and c3,000 paid staff comprise the local VCS).

- There is **little mention of resources, mechanisms and strategies** required to specifically support communities, volunteers and the wider VCS to be able to meet future challenges.
- The Local Authority has an important **leadership role in engaging with the voluntary sector**. There is absence of strategic vision and detailed understanding of this. This will need to be a priority moving forward.

### 3. Double disadvantage:

- The impact of service reductions will be felt most keenly by the **poorest and the most vulnerable**. This was a recurring theme particularly amongst providers supporting carers, those with disabilities, mental health needs, and those on low income.
- Reductions in services have a **cumulative affect on the ability of individuals to cope**. In the **long term this makes them more likely to need further support**. Participants specifically **challenged whether any long term savings** will be delivered for **the tax payer** unless greater emphasis is placed on **preventative and other forms of support and assistance**.
- The document stated that those on low incomes should pay more for their council tax with pensioners unaffected. This does not reflect the increased burden this would place on individuals, in particularly those **hardest hit by welfare changes**.
- Reductions in statutory service provision, reducing available resources, expertise and capacity are already **placing significantly higher demands on VCS providers**. More **complex cases** are also more prevalent and will continue to grow. Our evidence suggests resilience, capacity and capabilities (funding reductions already keenly felt) are already having a considerable impact. There is **fragility amongst the VCS** to meet new demands.

### 4. Re-investment:

- The proposed and current service reductions outlined **impact on communities as a whole**, with the potential to **reduce local resilience**. Engagement actions are now required to discuss innovative solutions and co-productive methods to strengthen community cohesion.
- Little reference is made to how volunteer and community self help, in particular **investment and commitment of resources** will be supported.

- Specific consideration should be given to **direct potential savings** to support communities through savings made elsewhere, e.g. capital projects saving challenges and business sector engagement.
- Any reduction in **discretionary rate relief** with effect from April 2015 would have a significant financial impact and destabilising effect on eligible charities.

#### 5. Longer term effects:

- We anticipate these service reductions will push a greater number of individuals into crisis. As services for those at low to medium need are cut, and the cumulative impact of **loss of preventative work**, changes to social care, welfare reform, transport and community facilities takes effect, people will be forced into **greater dependency on more expensive interventions**.
- There is a complex interconnectedness between a thriving cultural and communal life, an active physical and social life, wellbeing, prevention of unhealthy behaviours, and support for rehabilitation and integration.

#### Summary

Given the lack of detailed proposals regarding the impact of these reductions on individuals and communities it was difficult for organisations to develop innovative approaches to problem solving at these sessions. There was an overriding concern that there are huge expectations on communities and voluntary organisations to replace statutory service provision. There is little evidence that communities and voluntary organisations have any additional capacity, resources or new energy to manage the expectations. The view of volunteers and paid professionals in the sector was that they were already overstretched due to increased demand and reduced resources, and to expect them to replace local authority provision even further was unrealistic.

We look forward to contributing to future proposals and strategies recognising the unique contribution made by the local VCS and unprecedented challenges faced by all in Herefordshire.

On behalf of the local VCS.

Yours sincerely,



**Will Lindesay**

**Chief Executive, hvoss**

**Enc.**

## Appendix 1 - Attendees at the workshops

Name	Organisation
Nick Gray	Shaw Trust
Marion Tweed-Rycroft	Services for Independent Living
Jane Longmore	Age UK Herefordshire & Worcestershire
Steve Kerry	Hereford City Council
Richard Johnston	Newton Farm Community Association
Dawn Killeen	Newton Farm Community Association
Joan Thwaites	
Fiona Richie	ECHO
Richard Kelly	Herefordshire Mind
Cllr Patricia Morgan	Frome Ward
Robert Widdowson	Third Sector Board
Rosemary Wooderson	Affinity Trust
Liz Overstall	
Joanne Gibbon	Diocese of Hereford
Joanna Dainty	Herefordshire Nature Trust
Sheenagh Davis	HOPE for Children and their Families
Aisling Hurney	HOPE for Children and their Families
Maiya Lyons	
Andy Thomas	
George Rice	
Martin Kibble-White	
Sarah Jenkins	Age UK (Hereford & Localities)
Annette Castro-Griffiths	Aspire Living
Claire Keetch	Herefordshire Citizens Advice Bureaux
Michaela da Cunha	Yventure
Carole Protherough	Clehonger Village Hall
Arthur Lee	Herefordshire Ramblers
Richard Bollard	Herefordshire Ramblers
Robert Owens	Route 46 Group Coordinator-Sustrans
Tony Geeson	CPRE
Tina Harris	Phoenix Bereavement
Will Lindesay	Chief Executive, hvoss
Julian Reeves	hvoss
Richard Betterton	hvoss
Sarah Bateman	hvoss

## **Appendix 2 - Notes from meeting at Starlite Rooms, Hereford 10/12/13.**

### **Consultation- Section 1 Children & Young People**

**Considering our proposals in the area of keeping children and young people safe and giving them the best start in life we can and the savings we plan to make:**

#### **Q1.1 Are there particular groups that will be impacted by these proposals?**

i) - HC will only support at Level 3 and 4, universal provision and early intervention will cease. This reduces support for people with developing issues and needs and increases likelihood of no support until reaches critical level. Increased risk of people 'tipping over the edge'.

Also makes it harder for people to make full rehabilitation with sufficient levels of tapering support through recovery. Wider impact on support providers who will be challenged to do more at increasingly complex levels.

(ii) Larger sized commissions will favour Regional/National providers. Results in lack/loss of local knowledge, context, history and less smarter/ joined up/collaborative localised responses. Beneficiaries will be telling their story more frequently and be less understood. Less likelihood of beneficiaries knowing support providers and developing trusting relationships. Providers will have to build local/community credibility.

iii) Children in school facing difficulties are more likely to face disruption and exclusion.

(iv) Vulnerable young people. Keeping people safe is a complex business as well as everyone's business. Loss of expert and experienced people working at Level 2 and 3 increases risk of not being able to prevent and intervene as soon as possible.

(v) Less facilitated networking and relationship building for providers lessens the chances of cooperative and collaborative working. Means beneficiaries will lose diversity of provision, interventions will be more disjointed and information sharing will be lost.

#### **Q1.2 Can you suggest ways we could reduce the impact on particular groups while still making the significant budget reductions we need?**

(i) Extend initial six week limit on intervention that falls at moment when just starting to make an impact. Need to do things properly to make permanent change and improvement.

(ii) Ensure access to support is affordable, and people aren't excluded by transport issues.

(iii) Maintain commitment to contract funding and length over whole life of projects so that providers can keep to their delivery plans.

**Q1.3** Give us specific ideas and suggestions about what we or others could do differently to meet our priorities?

(i) Have holistic projects at local level that include the whole community and that they can collectively take responsibility for.

(ii) Have pooling of resources and coordination of usage at local level.

(iii) Ensure there is universal provision that those that can pay for and subsidise those that cannot afford.

(iv) Invest in volunteers through paid coordination and support.

## **Sections 4 and 5: Communities delivering more, Herefordshire Council supporting less**

### **Q4/5.1 Are there particular groups that will be impacted by these proposals?**

(i) Local voluntary community organisations are seeing greater levels of poverty, greater demand on what they offer/trying to do.

(ii) Increase for placements by those who have to undertake volunteering

(iii) Community volunteers are at capacity, do not have extra capacity or capability to take on more complex demands.

(iv) Changes in potential funding streams need support to change business models.

### **Q4/5.2 Can you suggest ways we could reduce the impact on particular groups while still making the significant budget reductions we need?**

(i) Work in partnership whilst maintaining own identity and local presence and credibility, reputation.

(ii) Invest in a medium term strategy to enable communities to grow the willingness and ability to do things for themselves.

(iii) Help individual organisations to see bigger picture. Help them to make links and contribute to each others agendas.

(iv) Re-think accountability requirements. Local delivery by a local organisation is very open/accessible to local scrutiny and requires less monitoring and reporting.

(v) Reduce some of minor legal, administrative burdens and restrictions, and speed up bureaucracy so that much quicker response to innovation.

(vi) Recognise businesses are part of community and involve them in offering support and development.

### **Questions from final Plenary**

1. What will happen to the information collected? Everyone was encouraged to make their individual responses. hvoss will collate a collective response in draft form for 17/12/13 for circulation and submitted in amended form on 20/12/13.

hvoss was encouraged to make a robust response as some organisations will not survive if the proposals go ahead.

2. What is the position of contract holders who are currently being asked to agree reductions for coming year, prior to this consultation.

3. Are there currently organisations who agree seeking partners for collaborative, cross sector bids.

4. Where are the impact assessments that should legally be accompanying the proposals in this consultation.

5. Can hvoss take a lead in proactively helping the sector work through the coming changes, remodelling, re-shaping and adapting to the new circumstances?

## Consultation 10/12/13 - Workshop 2 (evening session) Kindle Centre

### Q.1- Are there particular groups that will be impacted by these proposals?

(i) Reductions will see increased reliance and expectations on Volunteers. However, volunteers should be the icing on cake not replacement workforce. Later retirement will decrease numbers of 55-70 year olds volunteering, and in particular the skill base, experience and expertise they offer.

(ii) Isolated people. Cuts to transport and centralisation of service provision will be a double hit for those on lower incomes and isolated.

(iii) Low income users of services and facilities. There is an interrelationship between culture, active life styles and physical and mental health and wellbeing. Softer cuts to libraries, arts and sports will impact on peoples' ability to maintain and develop healthy lifestyles.

(iv) Mental health. If support for quality of life factors is cut, it will affect those needing to and reliant on access to motivational support and activity.

(v) Road users. Cuts to public transport will most heavily penalise those on lowest incomes but also impact universally as congestion rises and journeys are costing more for schooling, visits to health centres, etc.

(vi) Safeguarding. There is currently not enough support for responding to emergency safeguarding needs at higher levels. This will worsen as organisations have less resources to respond and cope.

(vii) CAB users. Increasing need for advice with reduced resources to respond.

(viii) Community life. Communities need access to resources, facilities, and activities to thrive and develop and look after their members. With families, they are the starting point for preventative and early intervention work, but need to be linked/networked, able to refer to and receive support from more specialist agencies.

### Q.2 - Can you suggest ways we could reduce the impact on particular groups while still making the significant budget reductions we need?

(i) Have greater understanding of the connectedness and interrelatedness of support and social activity and see both as part of the solution to individuals needs. EG Walking/ramblers club and cycling activities.

(ii) Asset transfer. Ensure assets are in fit state for organisations to take on responsibility for.

(iii) Don't retrench the delivery of support into a centralised Hereford model but use all market towns as base for outreach.



**Q.3 Give us specific ideas and suggestions about what we or others could do differently to meet our priorities?**

(i) Invest in volunteers so that they have the ability to respond to new expectations. Average age of Parish Councillors is 60+. Inform and encourage younger generations to be involved and take up responsibilities.

(ii) Learn from other areas and use infrastructure support organisations to help organisations to change.

(iii) Resource facilitation of self help networks, linked to geographic communities, Parish Councils, communities of interest.

(iv) Change behaviours to more healthy lifestyles e.g. increased cycling/reduced car usage funded from transport improvement budget.

(v) Keep encouraging and supporting partnership/collaborative working. More effective if joined up.

(vi) Use national organisations with local branches to help us lobby at national level for a fairer settlement.

## Comments from Health and Social Care consultation discussion (Workshop 1 – Starlight Rooms)

### Section 2

1. Have impact assessments been completed for the proposed changes to social care eligibility criteria?
2. The introduction of the Care Bill means that support for those with a critical need must be funded.
3. Community support is not cost neutral and need resourcing otherwise it may disappear.
4. Social Care assessments take the form of a tick box sheet which narrows options. If a blank sheet was used, people would more likely come up with their own solutions which would save money.
5. Involving community organisations in the assessment process may deliver innovative solutions.
6. The overall lack of strategic vision in Herefordshire Council is apparent from this document.
7. What will the impact of the Care Funding Calculator?
8. Those with low to medium needs will be most impacted by the cuts so will become at greater need eventually. Two years' on we would expect to see the costs of their care increase dramatically.
9. Rather than just 'wishing' for individuals to help themselves, mechanisms must be created that enable it to happen.
10. The transfer of the social care team back to the local authority has not been successful. Overall the service has worsened and referrals to providers have reduced. Have costs really reduced?
11. Short term reduction in costs now may not lead to the desired outcomes, with costs rising in the future.
12. This consultation has not allowed for real engagement or co-production. Particularly from those most vulnerable. Complete absence of co-production.
13. Older people have been underrepresented in the consultation process.
14. The costs for homecare have been affected by the recent appeals tribunal. This may mean costs will not be reduced.
15. There is still huge demand for single bedroom housing particularly for those with learning disability, older people or disadvantaged.

## Section 4,5,6

1. Over formalising 'goodwill' could risk losing it.
2. The council are unlikely to have the resources to engage effectively with communities. There is a huge role here for hvoss and the sector to lead this process.
3. The sector has never made unified offer to the community but this is needed now- we need to work collectively to lead/co-ordinate/facilitate. The fragmentation of the sector makes it harder to offer this unified approach.
4. Vital that the needs of communities are communicated effectively to potential volunteers. To tap unused resources.
5. Reductions in transport will impact much more on the poor and already disadvantaged. Rural life will become much more difficult.
6. Transport reductions have a huge impact on those with disabilities.
7. Community toilets are often unsuitable for disabled people. 'Changing Places' toilets are required, not more facilities in cafes etc.
8. Increasing car park charging at council owned facilities will again impact most severely on the poorest.
9. Interested to see how the council intends to reduce costs for those with complex needs accessing day opportunities.
10. Changes to the discretionary rate relief will have huge impact on some charities.
11. Why should it be people on low incomes paying more for their council tax with pensioners not affected. There are many wealthy pensioners in the county who could afford this. Surely people on higher incomes should be paying more?
12. Section 6 is very discriminatory.
13. It is the cumulative reductions in so many services that will have such a profound impact on the resilience of communities and individuals.
14. The sector has the autonomy and flexibility to take more of a leading role.

## Comments from Section 3 Investing in Projects

1. Voluntary section included within 'Investing in Projects'; How would anyone know to look in this section?
2. The document refers to volunteers but resources are needed to support volunteering, there is a disconnect between strategy and reality.
3. Equality Impact Assessments must be completed and available before the consultation process ends.
4. What about the revenue costs of expensive capital projects.
5. There is an assumption the all volunteers have skills, training and investment is needed to enable volunteers to deliver services. This will help contribute to a sustainable sector.
6. Marches LEP; why is there no link to council infrastructure document.

**Impact cycle on disadvantaged individuals – visual representation of Children and Young People’s Group activity (afternoon Workshop – Starlight Rooms)**

