



## Latest News on VCS Assembly Business

**Caroline Schwaller**  
**Chair, VCS Assembly, Bradford District**

The current situation regarding VCS funding is extremely fluid and by the time you read this your situation may have changed, for the better or for the worse, and this statement may be out of date in some respects. It is particularly difficult to give a clear, reliable statement about funding, as the situation is evolving rapidly. There has been development in some areas and these are reported below.

### **The Assembly Conference**

Thank you to everyone who attended the recent conference on 17<sup>th</sup> February; nearly 150 people attended the event at the Hilton Hotel. We promised to arrange a follow up conference to give more space to discuss a number of issues that include the role of the Assembly in its relationship with statutory bodies. **A date has been fixed : 11th MAY, approximately 9.30 – 1.00pm, venue to be decided. Please watch out for more details.**

### **Meetings with the Council**

The Assembly Steering Group (ASG) has scheduled a series of meetings with Cllr. Imran Hussain and senior officers - these at approximately 6 weekly intervals until March 2012. **ASG members** who are involved in the regular meetings with the council include:

*David Wilford, RAP Forum; Matthew Band, Young Lives Forum; Paul Anderson, Health & Wellbeing Forum; Judy Peltier, CNet Board of Trustees; Anthony Clipsom, Infrastructure Organisations rep and Strategic Commissioning Forum rep for ASG; John Hill, Assembly rep on Stronger Communities Partnership; Caroline Schwaller, Assembly Chair and Bradford District Partnership rep.*

Two of the scheduled meetings have been held so far since January, plus an extra one in February to discuss the funding cuts, etc. (a meeting that included party leaders and the Chief Executive of the Council). We have at early meetings shared the statements made at the VCS consultation event on 10 December 2010, including the demand for continuation funding in 2011-12 at the same levels, and a ring-fenced budget for the VCS.

At the last meeting on 8 March - that included some council commissioning managers - the ASG called for clarity and immediate communication from the council about funding decisions in all areas for 2011-12, because of the extreme pressure that organisations are facing due to uncertainty. We also stressed the potential loss of good projects and organisations as people and work-streams are lost because of late notice, noting that the question of Compact compliance has been raised on previous occasions. We also stressed concerns about Equality Impact Assessments, in relation to their importance, timing and the involvement of the VCS in process. Our protests about the late decisions are acknowledged and explanations about legal constraints were provided.

The following main points emerged from this meeting:

- 2011-12 is a transition year that will involve a full review of VCS commissioning, including priorities, processes and improving consistency across all areas. There is a strong possibility that services will be commissioned at a reduced rate during 2011-12 but this cannot be

guaranteed at this point. Commissioners are meeting with portfolio holders now, to finalise budgets and commissioning for the next 12 months.

- VCS funding (through the Community Funding Unit) will be cut by 8.8% in 2011-12 but we expect further cuts in following years, *possibly* amounting to 25% over 3 years. Other departments/services are difficult to comment on at this point. The intention is to inform all commissioned VCS organisations before the end of March through individual letters.
- Assembly forums and Assembly reps will work with commissioners (as above) and help to ensure that inequalities and Equality Impact Assessment outcomes are addressed in the short and longer term. Forums will be invited to meetings soon to take this forward.
- The Assembly is regarded as an important partner. ASG members have agreed to provide summaries of our discussion points after each meeting, just as we expect reports back from the council representatives. The regular meetings will help to maintain an overview of progress around the relationship between the setting of priorities, council commissioning processes, and the Equality Impact Assessment issues. And therefore provide an open opportunity to challenge or raise concerns about any issues and agree a way forward.

### **Bradford District Partnership Governance Review**

The ASG is concerned about some aspects of the review that is currently taking place in BDP. The importance of the VCS is fully acknowledged now, and the year's programme of meetings with the council's portfolio holder (and deputy leader) helps to illustrate this. However we do have concerns that strategic partnerships are being abolished because they are no longer required by government. We know that the council and others appreciate having a more organised structure and relationship with the VCS, and we want to ensure that VCS forums that WE feel are important continue to have influence even if the official strategic partnerships are disbanded. The intention is to create "task and finish" groups around specific issues, and this will mean we need to be able to react quickly and find VCS reps who have the right expertise, time and experience to get involved. This is a high priority for ASG in the next 6 months, while the BDP Review continues.

### **Getting involved**

Please feed into the forum that covers your area of interest, or contact Janet Ford at CNet if you want to get involved or get more information in general about the Assembly ([janet@cnet.org.uk](mailto:janet@cnet.org.uk) and copy in [caroline@kivca.org.uk](mailto:caroline@kivca.org.uk))

Please keep an eye on the Assembly website : [www.bradfordassembly.org.uk](http://www.bradfordassembly.org.uk) for information and updates, including the Conference on 11<sup>th</sup> May, and please help us by passing on information to others.

Caroline Schwaller  
VCS Assembly Chair  
17<sup>th</sup> March, 2011