

Establishing a Voluntary Sector Forum in Moray

Why? How?

March 2009



30-32 High Street, Elgin, IV30 1BU
A Company Limited by Guarantee and not
having a share capital
Company No SC175015
Scottish Charity SC 021985



15 High Street, Elgin, IV30 1EQ
Company No SC 247825
Scottish Charity SC 034369

Establishing a Voluntary Sector Forum in Moray

Reason for this Paper

The purpose of this document is to let stakeholders know the activity to date in relation to a proposed Voluntary Sector Forum in Moray. We are also anxious to get further feedback from you. At the end of this paper we pose several questions which need your response.

Background

In October 2006 Moray Community Planning Partnership (MCP) published an agreement between partners and the voluntary sector, known as the Moray Compact. The Compact sets out how they will all work in partnership for the benefit of the wider public good. Since the Moray Compact's publication, understanding of the voluntary sector's role has developed, with the sector seeing itself represented within various strategic partnerships.

The two main bodies representing the sector at a strategic level to date are Moray Voluntary Service Organisation (MVS) and Volunteer Centre Moray (VCM). MVS are acknowledged, by partners, organisations and service users, to be the primary focal point for general voluntary sector issues. VCM exists as an enabling service for volunteering to take place throughout Moray. There is a perceived expectation that MVS and VCM are the authoritative voice of the sector. However, both organisations are only two voices which are not always best placed to represent the whole sector on every issue. The weakness in the current arrangements therefore stems from the fact that there exists a wide range of voluntary sector viewpoints that are not adequately expressed. A huge majority of current arrangements are ad-hoc and do not best represent the sector. Conscious of this, early 2008 saw MVS and VCM developing in-house ideas for forums involving a wide range of stakeholder representatives.

Establishing a Voluntary Sector Forum in Moray

What is a Voluntary Sector Forum?

A Voluntary Sector Forum (VSF) is an independent support network of community and voluntary sector organisations which exists to strengthen the Voluntary Sector by facilitating networking between its members so that they share experience, expertise, resources and good practice. To achieve this, it will operate both within and out with Community Planning structures. This increase in partnership working produces opportunities to respond collectively to issues affecting Moray. The VSF concept is nothing new, with existing ventures being developed and run throughout the UK. Three examples of VSF practice are provided in appendix 1.

Following some early development of this work, the two organisations decided to consolidate their activities to enable the expansion of what is currently termed a Voluntary Sector Forum.

Where we've got to so far –

- ❖ **June 2008:** Voluntary Sector Forum questionnaire sent to 629 voluntary and community groups with a 12% (approx) response rate.
- ❖ **August 2008:** Analysis of questionnaire results. 77% of the responses received were in favour of setting up a Voluntary Sector Forum in Moray.
- ❖ **22 October 2008:** Voluntary Sector Forum meeting at MVSO to discuss the next steps with 9 organisations present:
 - MVSO
 - VCM
 - Lhanbryde Community Challenge
 - INSO
 - Action for Children
 - Moray Anchor Projects
 - The Fochaberian
 - Moray Carers Project
 - Moray Women's Aid

Establishing a Voluntary Sector Forum in Moray

There was a willingness to drive the idea forward and consensus on the following points:-

A VSF in Moray is needed for several reasons, for example:

- a VSF is needed in the current climate of competitive tendering
- to look at wider national issues as well as local issues
- to link into the longer term consultation process/SOA
- to provide a strong collective voice in order to feed in at the Scottish Government level
- voluntary groups who regularly speak out won't be as easy to dismiss
- minimise the risk of smaller/vulnerable groups disappearing
- campaigning/influencing role

We will also have to ensure that:

- a VSF would not duplicate the work/responsibilities of the Area Forums and Joint Community Councils.
- a VSF needs to be inclusive with an "open door". Important to engage with the smaller community and voluntary groups.
- the VSF needs be run as a service primarily for the benefit of the people of Moray. For example: assist the CPP to deliver it's priorities under SOA
- it is outward looking
- any VSF would have to be 'fluid' in order to accommodate all the different levels and layers of voluntary and community groups

We want a Forum that:

- can share resources
- addresses issues of funding
- reduces our isolation as individual organisations
- works effectively together
- works in better partnership with external agencies
- gets right to the heart of community planning – link into consultation process
- gives us a collective voice

Establishing a Voluntary Sector Forum in Moray

- tells others how valuable we are as a sector
- pulls together the collective evidence that demonstrates the impact made by the sector

It is essential that the remit of a VSF be clear from the very start. Clarity will help the voluntary sector, statutory agencies and local authorities be aware of where to go and for what. It is important to ensure that there is no duplication with other structures already in place. A VSF may not mirror the statutory duties of The Moray Council, yet it is important that it sits within the MCPP structure.

Outcome: MVSO to progress the idea in partnership with the VCM.

- ❖ **1 December 2008:** MVSO and Alastair Kennedy (Joint Community Council) attended The Moray Forum. The aim was to ensure that the VSF has a clear remit from the start and to avoid any duplication with the Area Forums and Joint Community Council. It also explored the value of a potential VSF, discussed the role and purpose of a VSF and its integration with the MCPP structure, and to get clarity on the remit of Local Area Forums and Joint Community Council. There was agreement in general that a VSF would strengthen the voluntary sector in Moray by providing a united platform and that although the Area Forums and a VSF may have areas of overlap this could be a positive thing. Other benefits could be reducing isolation and sharing information within the voluntary sector.

Outcome: a general mandate to explore the issue further.

- ❖ **9 December 2008:** MVSO met with The Moray Council Chief Executive to brief him on VSF concept, of which he was very supportive. His view is was that a VSF would fill a gap and that it would be a good thing if the Voluntary Sector in Moray were able to be organised in a more formal way.

Establishing a Voluntary Sector Forum in Moray

Establishing a VSF in Moray

It can be seen that a wide support base has already been established in favour of setting up a VSF. Please see Appendix 2 and 3 for diagrams of how a VSF in Moray might fit in with existing community structures.

Here are some questions that need to be answered by you. We have provided some thoughts and suggestions; however, your comments and feedback are vital. We also need to know if there are other questions that need to be asked.

What do you think a VSF should do? Should it for example include:-

- Addressing policy issues and respond as a collective voice
- Building on existing partnerships with external agencies
- Contributing more effectively to Community Planning
- Demonstrating the value of the work of voluntary organisations to regional services and the regional economy
- Reducing the isolation which may be experienced by individual voluntary organisations
- Having a lobbying function

Who should get involved? Should it be open and inclusive with membership generic (everybody and anybody)? Should there be sub-groups for areas/themed networks?

How will local priorities and needs be addressed? Should the VSF work within the aims of the Moray Compact? Would Single Outcome Agreements be used as guiding principles for service delivery?

How should a VSF be resourced? There is no funding at present. MVSO and VCM are working on this project with their current staff and resources but this is not sustainable in the long term.

Establishing a Voluntary Sector Forum in Moray

What should the relationship between the VSF and the MCPP be? Do you think that it should be independent but with joint working in full partnership? Do you agree that a VSF should not operate in isolation but that it should have an open two-way relationship with the MCPP?

What should the relationship between the VSF and the Elected Members be? Would a link between the VSF and councillors be seen as an important element towards building a greater understanding of the voluntary sector's contribution across the whole of Moray? Should Moray Council elected representatives have a seat on the VSF at a strategic level?

Some more questions for you to consider?

- How do we keep overlap to a minimum with certain community structures such as the Community Councils, the Area Forums, themed networks already in place, and other voluntary interest groups?
- How do you see a VSF being managed in the future? Do you want MVSO and the VCM to continue to operate in same way?
- How are we going to get from where we are to where we want to be?

Please send your response to:



Email – Alison.Proudfoot@mvso.org.uk

Or mail to - MVSO, 30-32 High Street, Elgin IV30 1BU



Establishing a Voluntary Sector Forum in Moray

APPENDIX 1

Examples of Existing VSF Practice

North Lanarkshire

In 2008 CVS North Lanarkshire and the Volunteer Centre North Lanarkshire received £150,000 from the Supporting Voluntary Action Fund to assist with the setting up a series of networks of voluntary organisations. There will be locality networks and 8 thematic networks: health, employability, advice and advocacy, older people, environmental, childcare, community transport and the social economy. The purpose of the various networks is to make certain that the Third Sector has a more active strategic role in decisions made by the public sector and Community Planning Partnerships. It plans to achieve this is by creating more communication and structure amongst voluntary and community organisations working in the area thereby ensuring that their experience feeds into community decisions.

Dumfries and Galloway

Dumfries and Galloway have established a Third Sector Forum to enable voluntary organisations to work together in many ways including: addressing policy issues and responding as a collective voice, and reducing the isolation which may be experienced by individual voluntary groups. The Forum meets quarterly and membership is open to all national and regional voluntary organisations providing services in Dumfries and Galloway. The Third Sector Forum works within the aims and aspirations of the Dumfries and Galloway Compact which is a partnership agreement between voluntary, community and public sector bodies. The Forum is working on a partnership protocol, a representation protocol and a mechanism to share good practice and feedback.

The Highlands

The Highland Voluntary Sector Forum Manifesto was published in 2007. The Forum is a collaboration of more than 1000 voluntary organisations which provides a venue for discussion and a common voice for its members. The Highland Voluntary Sector Forum also exists to give the voluntary and community sector an opportunity to be involved in the development and implementation of new policies and service changes. The Forum provides updates on funding issues and encourages smaller organisations to get more involved in service delivery. The Forum is open to representatives who are paid workers, volunteers or management committee members as well as statutory organisations involved with the Third Sector.