



**South Northamptonshire VCS Forum  
26<sup>th</sup> March 2009 at Bugbrooke Community Centre**

Sixteen people attended the meeting. See appendix 1.

**Welcome and Introductions**

Barron Walton (Chairman) welcomed everyone to the forum and explained that he was sitting in for the usual chair (Phil Drage). He reminded those present of the dual purpose of the meeting:

- i) to help groups at 'grassroots' level by putting them in touch with one another, to exchange ideas and share ideas/good practice
- ii) as a consultation body with statutory agencies.

and introduced Calvin Bell, SNC Director of Policy and Nicola Capewell, SNC Head of Community Engagement. They were to provide further information regarding South Northamptonshire Councils' Community Engagement strategy.

**South Northamptonshire Council Community Engagement Strategy**

Calvin Bell explained that he was responsible for all district council policies including community and transport. He would be happy to take any question or issues following his presentation.

Calvin stated that the council are currently in the early stages of drafting a 'Community Engagement Development' strategy with a few ideas of what it may contain. The Forum would provide a useful opportunity for people within the voluntary and community sector to feed into this process.,

Nicola informed the group that the council's first step was to consider 'how to get people involved' and gave a definition of 'Community Engagement', which meant the process of involving people in decisions that affect them. Government are introducing, with effect April 2009, a new Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) scheme. The CAA framework will provide a snapshot of how effectively local partnerships are working together to deliver local people's priorities. Further information was available from the following government website-

<http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk/caa/>

The Audit Commission has a local body inspection framework, known as a Key Line Enquiry (KLO). There are several KLO elements eg access to services, environment and community safety. Further information was available at the following web address:-

<http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk/kloe/>

## Question / Answer Session re SNC presentation

John Nash, Syresham questioned whether SNC had looked at what people in villages wanted to achieve and how they are striving to help the local community. John explained that as a village group member, he felt a certain frustration as, from the 'outside' statutory bodies such as SNC and NCC were like 'impenetrable shells'.

Nicola responded by stating that she had visited Syresham to engage with the local community and listen to their frustrations and determine how SNC can do things better. Nicola added that she would like to think that SNC was accessible to the public and from her experiences to date she noted that people rarely understand the differences between SNC and NCC.

Calvin informed the group that this recent discussion would be helpful in framing one part of the strategy ie communication and had triggered some ideas eg self help through SNC website, which would in turn also benefit SNC which would then not require so many people to staff customer service telephones.

Bob Williams, SNVB, suggested that from Calvin's and Nicola's outline so far, SNC are getting community engagement right. The question was that, as community engagement is important if it makes a difference to a person as a customer, what would the impact measures be on the community that SNC is serving? What difference has it made so far to the local community eg better transport services to help people shop?

Paul Battye suggested that it would be like creating a district 'Compact' to include the expectations of Voluntary Community Sector (VCS) groups.. (Established in 1998, the Compact is an agreement between Government and the voluntary and community sector in England, recognising shared values, principles and commitments and sets out guidelines how both parties should work together) Paul added that both Calvin and Nicola had 'opened the door' with both sides having expectations and it would be an evolving project.

Nick King, SNVB, asked Nicola if anything had come out of the 'place survey'. Calvin replied that from the 3,000 surveys issued, there had been 1,800 respondents. However, for responses were not yet known to SNC. (The place survey deals with issues such as reducing the fear of crime. Two questions on survey include:-

- a) 5 things people think are most important in relation to where they live (usually crime, education, health and housing mentioned)
- b) 5 things people think are most important to improve where they live.)

Calvin commented that he did know 'crime' had not been listed for question b) above.

Nick King, SNVB suggested that the local Joint Action Groups (JAG's) may be having a positive impact. Calvin stated that the JAG's are a good example of community engagement and are valuable. Bob Williams, SNVB added that duty of other statutory bodies e.g. NCC, health and police to involve people. VCS sector understands that these statutory bodies may each have a different set of questions so it is important that this Forum has a voice in developing mechanisms for statutory bodies to engage with them.

Paul Battye, endorsed Bob's comments, adding that it would be a concern to people in the VCS sector, if there was not a joined up approach, as people in the sector would be 'run ragged' by the calls on their time by the different statutory bodies.

Nicola Capewell suggested that the draft 'Community Engagement' strategy might be taken to the Local Strategic Partnership'. Paul Battye added that perhaps it would be worthwhile to send a report from this Forum to the LSP, or for this Forum to become more relevant by inviting authorities such as the police.

Mike Freeman, YMCA informed the group that in the past he has set up a LSP in a district council and it is important that a LSP builds relationships with local organisations and undertakes a skills audit, as community cohesion is a strong asset. Additionally, build in partnerships so what services the VCS are offering can be seen and SNC can signpost enquirers to them.

Nick King, advised the group that a weakness with JAG's is that the group is not chaired independently, which if this were so, it would develop a robust accountability with regard to what communities contribute and what statutory bodies want to action.

John Nash commented that what has come out of discussions so far is that engagement/consultation means something different to statutory bodies and to 'grassroots' groups. It would appear SNC are satisfying central government by collating statistical data, whereas 'grassroots' groups are trying to establish where resources can be found to help them.

Nicola Capewell, SNC explained that 'face to face' contact with community would be ideal, but resourcing and cost implications are barriers. Calvin Bell, SNC, added that feedback from community on 'how engagement could occur' and 'what the communities' expectations are' were important but how could these become outcomes with measures? The Crime and Reduction Partnership (CDRP) is a fair model where community feedback is given.

Calvin commented that the Forum had given him and Nicola a broad perspective of the VCS and was a useful 'sounding board'. Barron Walton added that the e-forum may be an interesting way for SNC and Forum attendees to engage with each other following the meeting.

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### **Information Exchange and discussions**

Mike Freeman, YMCA advised group that a 'green light' had been given in the county for a project, mentioned at last forum, to produce a database of all children and young people in each county, with the aim of promoting joined up working. This project is the first in country and a worker, Tiffany' has recently been appointed. Tiffany's role will be to identify every voluntary organization in South Northants which works with 0-19 age group and assess each, based on national criteria.

John Nash asked what information would be on the database. Mike Freeman referred to a guidelines book and Calvin Bell added that this proposal for a national database arose from the Victoria Climbié inquiry.

Kara Luck, SNC explained that she is currently approaching parish councils in the district regarding the 'mobile play project', a three year initiative to provide free open access to play provision. Currently, fifteen villages were interested, with an associated volunteering opportunity.

Kara added that there was 'Playbuilder' funding available to voluntary groups, village halls and playing field associations to purchase play equipment.

Julie Buckingham, advised the group that Victim Support uses volunteers who offer support to victims of crime eg burglary and more serious offences such as domestic abuse. Currently, they were recruiting additional volunteers with a new training intake at the end of April. Initially, all volunteers support victims of low level crime and can then undertake further training to specialize in hate crime or domestic violence etc.

Nicola Capewell, SNC brought to the forum several 'New Ways to Pay' council tax leaflets, as with effect from 1<sup>st</sup> April, cash would no longer be accepted as a payment method. The leaflets provide information on all the types of pay cards accepted and where all the pay points are in the district. Nicola added that you can pay council tax at any post office in country.

### **South Northants e-forum and Information Bulletin**

SNVB receives a lot of relevant information for the voluntary and community sector, which will be circulated via the fortnightly e-bulletin

### **Topics for future meetings**

Barron asked members for ideas for meeting topics that might attract people from local community groups to the Forum. He suggested 'Transport', as he was aware of David Allen, newly appointed lead officer for transport policy (including walking and cycling) at SNC.

Julie Buckingham, Victim Support, suggested 'Volunteering' and the different ways to reach out to people to volunteer and the whole process of being a volunteer..

Mike Freeman, YMCA, suggested 'Social Enterprises' and Paul Batty suggested 'Sustainability', skilling people up so voluntary groups remain sustainable through economic downturn.

### **A.O.B.**

Bob Wi, SNVB, advised members that with immediate effect 'South Northants Volunteer Bureau' was to be known as SNVB and although traditionally associated with volunteering only, it now offered a range of support services to the sector e.g. local infrastructure development, volunteering, the Safe 'n Sound project and a voluntary car service. Additionally, SNVB was introducing a free membership scheme, where members can vote at the AGM, influence shape, direction and development of SNBV. A further benefit is that members will receive e-mail alerts concerning the sector. Bob Wi stressed that members contact information will not be passed onto anyone else.

Barron promoted the next two Trustee training courses, which SNVB has organised at Greens Norton Community Centre on 18<sup>th</sup> May 7.00 pm and Croughton Village Hall 10<sup>th</sup> June 7.00 pm.

### **Dates of future meetings**

30<sup>th</sup> June 2.00 pm at Deanshanger Community Centre.