

VCSE Strategic Partnership Open Meeting

Monday 7 April 2025 2.30-4.30pm

Barnwood Trust, Overton House, Overton Road, Cheltenham GL50 3BN

In Attendance:

Tom Beasley (TB) – Active Gloucestershire
Sally Byng (SB) – Barnwood Trust
Matt Lennard (ML) – Gloucestershire VCSE Alliance
Lucy Moriarty (LM) – Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust
Vicci Livingstone-Thompson (VL-T) – Inclusion Gloucestershire
Pippa Jones (PJ) – Create Gloucestershire
Indigo Redfern (IR) – GL11 (online)

Guests:

Jill Parker (JP/Chair) – Gloucestershire VCSE Alliance
Lettie Tongue – Clean Slate Ltd
Michelle Di Lella – Swindon & Gloucestershire Mind
Ann Price – James Hopkins Trust
Anita Pope – GL Communities
Jade Craswell - PATA
Lisa Wilson – GL11 Community Hub
Anka Jablonska – Alliance for Equality
Sarah Bourne – The Churn Project
Paul Heming - Headspace
Suzie Patton – The Ernest Cook
Michelle Vaughan – Caring for Communities and People
Clare Knapman – N&W Gloucestershire Citizens Advice
Erin Murray – GL11 Community Hub
Zeb Nawaz – Horses Helping People with Depression and Anxiety
Bren McInerney

Notes by:

Charlotte Ludbrook (CL) – Gloucestershire VCSE Alliance

Introduction to Gloucestershire VCSE Strategic Partnership

The Gloucestershire VCSE Strategic Partnership had been in operation for two and a half years. It was established in the wake of significant changes to health regulation in 2022 which led to the introduction of forty-two Integrated Care Systems (ICSs) and Integrated Care Boards (ICBs). The new regulations mandated the ICSs to work more closely with the VCSE sector through a representative structure.

Different approaches had been taken across the country. In Gloucestershire a decision was made to elect the Strategic Partnership. The current members were elected in 2022 to serve

a three-year term. There were now several members stepping down and so there were vacancies to elect to.

The purpose of the meeting would be for attendees to get a feel of what it was to be a member, to consider whether this would be something they could do and how they felt about what the Partnership aimed to achieve.

What is our purpose/what do we do?

The group had come into being due to a statutory requirement, but it had taken time to work out how the members would best represent the sector. Individual members were asked what they saw as the purpose of the VCSE Strategic Partnership and gave the following answers:

- To work collaboratively and have a unified voice
- Support public sector leaders to understand the VCSE contribution
- Support the creation of fair and equitable structures that enable others working in the VCSE sector to have a representative role in specific workstreams or at a locality level
- Build relationships with the NHS and understand challenges faced by those working within it
- Create the circumstances that enable VCSE organisations to contribute to a coherent health and care system for Gloucestershire

Coming Soon: Gloucestershire VCSE Strategic Partnership elections

There would be six places up for election on to the Strategic Partnership. Nominations would open on 30th April.

There would be -

- 2 places available for members from 'Grassroots' organisations
- 3 places for members from an organisation with a turnover of £.5 million or less
- 1 place for a member from an organisation with a turnover of £.5 million or more

Nominees would have to be from an organisation that is a charity or is legally constituted as a VCSE organisation (such as a Community Interest Company) or is a small community organisation with a turnover below £10K. Governance criteria will be published. Provided the organisation met the criteria, anyone within it (employee, volunteer or trustee), could nominate themselves.

Each nominee would be invited to provide a statement of up to 200 words. Gloucestershire VCSE Alliance could help with writing the statement or it could initially be submitted as a video and then turned into a written statement.

There would be a 3-week voting period during which, the nominees' statements etc. would be available to view on the Gloucestershire VCSE Alliance website. Organisations in Gloucestershire were entitled to one vote; the 1st vote cast would be accepted.

Gloucestershire VCSE Alliance would be advertising for nominees at the end of April and the election of members would take place in June. New members would be announced in July 2025.

Guests were urged to contact Gloucestershire VCSE Alliance if they were interested or had queries about becoming a member and should look out for upcoming communications about the elections.

A short Q&A followed this part of the meeting:

Q: How would members be recompensed for their time?

A: The organisation the member belongs to would be paid for the member's time.

Q: What would the time commitment be?

A: Members were required to attend one 'big' meeting per month (in person, 2 hours plus travel time) and one smaller meeting (usually online and taking less time).

Q: Are all meetings open?

A: This was the first time the Strategic Partnership had held an open meeting. Feedback would be collected after this meeting and consideration given to whether to hold more. Meetings were usually for members only. A lot of what the Partnership did was around building relationships and trust and it was felt that this was easier to achieve in closed meetings.

The chair added that sometimes the Partnership would invite someone in for a section of the meeting; this had previously been someone within the system who was invited to discuss a strategic issue or workstream.

Q: How does the Strategic Partnership communicate with the ICS?

A: Some members of the Partnership also sat on other boards, Gloucestershire Health and Wellbeing Partnership, for example. There were also informal routes. The Strategic Partnership was in place to make sure that the sector's needs were being advocated for at a strategic level.

ACTION: Gloucestershire VCSE Alliance to provide a diagram to explain the SP's relationships with other boards etc.

Developing Resilience

Strategic Partnership member, Indigo Redfern was joined by her colleague from GL11, Lisa Wilson to deliver a presentation on Stroud Hubs, this was followed by a discussion on 'How can the VCSE sector stay strong and support communities in the face of financial pressures?'

The following points were raised:

There had been a huge increase, since the covid pandemic, in people with complex needs requiring support. The NHS had been directing people to many different organisations. Smaller organisations had struggled to cope with this, some had felt pressured to address every need experienced by those approaching them for support, regardless of whether they had the capacity and capability to do this. Smaller organisations didn't have the time to reach out to other organisations for help. The group suggested that building connections and supporting organisations to form relationships would be the best way to support them in this instance. They would then be able to share knowledge and in some cases, responsibility. The group were in agreement that peer support worked.

Diverse needs required a diverse response; grassroots organisations were able to reach communities that were not usually accessed.

It was important to build networks that helped people access the support they needed.

It was suggested that a triage model was useful and helped smaller organisations to avoid saying 'yes' to everyone.

The Citizens Advice First Aid Project had been successful so far in providing training to frontline workers in other local partner organisations to become Advice First Aiders.

There was a discussion around models of partnership and support; it was suggested that trust and consistency were important factors. Increased access to unrestricted funding for organisations within the sector would be helpful.

To summarise, the Chair explained that this discussion had been very much like those that took place during Strategic Partnership meetings. This discussion could usefully feed into a piece of work that some people in the meeting were doing on training for frontline workers; it could also feed into a piece of work the ICB will be doing later this year about the future of VCSE infrastructure in Gloucestershire. ML added that the conversations could feel nebulous and circular but that things could come out of these that could then be taken forward and influence decision making.

Closing remarks

There had been around 200 votes received during the last election, and it was hoped there would be a similar response this time. If places were not filled or there were gaps in terms of representation, the Strategic Partnership could look at co-opting into those gaps. This could be based on geography or type of organisation, for example. It would be about looking at what voices were missing.

The Strategic Partnership members thanked Indigo Redfern for her time and commitment and wished her a fond farewell. Indigo shared her thoughts about the past 3 years as a member of the Strategic Partnership –

“Being on the Strategic Partnership board has been the most significant personal development I’ve done whilst at GL11.”