



theForum

Annual Report 2011



Introduction

This has been a challenging but nevertheless rewarding year with extremely good work done throughout.

The year began with the question 'How do we ensure that the valuable work done by 130 delegates at the Vision & Voice Conference' in March 2010 is converted into real strategic plans for Reading'. The strong and clear message you all gave was that 'People' must come first and the VCS was not alone in supporting that view. Since then the Sustainable Community Strategy has been developed with our ongoing involvement and is being presented for ratification at the Annual General Meeting.

By March 2011 we had moved to a more action focused 'Beyond Boundaries' Conference which helped to open up discussion on local cross sector partnership working. This has had beneficial effects in creating opportunities and in getting all sectors to think laterally about how services can be run. There remains a way to go but the general environment continues to improve.

The environment too has seen positive progress with the appointment of our VCS representative to the Reading Climate Change Partnership. However, greater levels of consultation in developing the Feed-in Tariff project would have resulted in better outcomes than might now be achieved.

Strengthening of the Forum Voice team has included representation on the Community Safety Partnership where the previous resistance has now been superseded by recognition of the value of their input and communications improved.

I would like to take this opportunity to record my thanks to voluntary, community and faith groups who have contributed to and worked with The Forum throughout the year and particularly to the Forum Voices / Representatives who have taken the VCS Voice into strategic meetings, helping to grow knowledge and share understanding.

Steve Masters

Chair The Forum & Chair of BOLGAF

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Review of the Year

Key activities:

- Electing accountable representatives (Forum Voices) to strategic partnerships
- Producing a Vision and Voice Outcomes document as a tool for the Representatives on the themed partnerships, as well as through the LSP Away day events, to influence the future priorities identified within the Sustainable Community Strategy under People, Places, Prosperity
- Feedback from the 'A Whole New Ball Game' event indicated that the VCS were appreciative of the opportunity to engage as a sector with Councillors, particularly as these represented a new era when there is considerable expectation on the VCS as deliverers of significant services for the future
- Over 200 VCS groups engaged at events in the year. A number of these were first time contacts who were interested in understanding how the Independent Safeguarding Authority Vetting & Barring Scheme would affect their service
- A manual was developed and provided for each participant and although the legislation was halted by the incoming Coalition Government, nevertheless the work remains hugely valuable because it addressed the concerns of so many groups and provided a strong core of necessary information
- The South Reading Survey provided an information contact sharing tool for partnerships undertaking community services in South Reading
- Engagement with the Drugs and Alcohol Team has encouraged statutory agencies to work with VCS when designing the commissioning of work in reaching out to culturally diverse groups. Previously this had been rigidly inward looking but the wider benefits of engaging at different levels of people's lives has now a greater value
- The Beyond Boundaries Conference in Feb 2011 was the highlight of the year and was held at the Salvation Army Centre with 130 participants and key speakers from Be Birmingham & Alok Sharma MP, as well as local speakers for the VCS. This cross-sector conference brought together the local VCS and their statutory partners to investigate and work on practical ways to increase referrals between agencies in some very key areas of work in local communities

And lots more.....

Local Strategic Partnership

Local Strategic Partnership (LSP)

The work of the LSP relates closely to the work of The Forum and is discussed throughout this report. This section will concentrate on changes to the structure and how this will affect the voluntary and community sector ongoing.

The change of Government in 2010 saw the ending of Local Area Agreements under which the LAA targets had provided a key driver for the LSP in building partnership work. Nevertheless, the LSP Board recognised the value of those partnerships and agreed to continue to maintain the LSP to act as a catalyst to stimulate best practice in bringing agencies and groups together within a structure.

To fulfil this role changes were proposed that would reduce the LAA business element, reflecting the reduced responsibility, reallocating the time to workshops that would bring statutory and voluntary, as well as expertise from wider agencies, together to encourage an extensive debate of issues. The Sustainable Community Strategy, with its building blocks, would provide the focus to explore how, without new funding, partners could work together to deliver services for Reading people.

The LSP VCS Representatives, Tim and Hazel for most of the period with Richard picking up the baton as Hazel stood down, have had a very busy year. That pressure continues with key issues around expenditure on the Performance Reward Grant, both revenue on family and support work, and capital on a Feed-in Tariff Green Energy project, to ensure that opportunities continue for local VCS groups to take part in delivery of these on-going proposals. The Representatives are supported by other volunteers who give their time at a VCS LSP PreMeet group that widens the expertise and knowledge which the Reps are able to call on from our sector.

Anne Laing MBE

Partnership Manager, Stronger Together, RVA

The Compact

The Reading Compact Group has been in existence for 10 years and decided early in 2010 to review how it works and how it could re-energise its activities. New terms of reference were agreed in June 2010. At national level, the Compact was also being reviewed and refreshed, and a revised Compact was issued in December 2010.

At national level the new streamlined Compact aims “to work effectively in partnership to achieve common goals and outcomes for the benefits of communities and citizens in England.” The national Compact sets out a series of outcomes, with undertakings for both the government and for civil society organisations.

The new Reading Compact is about promoting understanding and cooperation between the town’s numerous voluntary & community groups, and the statutory agencies and partnership bodies. A new structure for the Reading Compact provided a tighter and more representative structure, with a close link to the Local Strategic Partnership and their work programme.

The role and remit of the Compact Group includes:

- critical friend
- scrutiny, quality assurance and compliance
- guidance
- communication, buy-in and profile
- dealing with issues that arise / dispute resolution
- ownership of targets such as NI7 – a thriving environment for the Third Sector

The Compact Group was chaired by Richard Corbett, Director of Reading Voluntary Action in 2010-11, who has steered the new group through challenging times.

RCVYS

Some of the key highlights from the year include:

Reading Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB)

RCVYS has made progress in its campaign to ensure that VCF groups can access appropriate safeguarding training outside of normal working hours, to be equitable with the provision available in both Wokingham and West Berkshire. Working with RBC we have:

Developed a Designated Persons Training Programme

Opened up the opportunity for individuals from VCF groups to become Universal Safeguarding Trainers.

RCVYS has been working closely with RVA to ensure that the implications of the forthcoming changes to the CRB and ISA VBS systems remain high on the agenda for the LSCB and Reading Children's Trust.

RCVYS Projects

RCVYS Members Meetings this year have focussed on ensuring that the views of RCVYS Members are reflected in the new Commissioning Framework

RCVYS has been a part of the national Innovations Project in Reading to develop 'radical efficiencies in early years settings', which is effectively looking at remodelling Children's Centre delivery. Our involvement is ensuring that community-based early years providers will be better linked in and supported by statutory providers

RCVYS has been a key member of the project group implementing the new e-CAF system in Reading

RCVYS has brought over £33,000 worth of accredited youth work training to Reading, up-skilling 43 members or staff and volunteers, with 32 studying towards the new QCF Qualifications



Supporting Groups Working with Children & Young People

RCVYS Development Worker Ben Cross at a safeguarding workshop

Ben Cross - RCVYS Development Worker

Reading Faith Forum

We have been greatly helped as usual by Jan Hearn as Forum Coordinator and Tom Hudson as Development Worker with less involved groups. Jan's post ends in September. We are looking for volunteers to help with admin and organisation.

In September, Tom organised an interfaith football contest together with IMAD. 16 teams took part and raised nearly £1000 for charity.

Faith Forum helped the Interfaith Group with this year's successful Friendship Walk.

In November the Faith Forum ran a conference for young people (sixth formers) on Faith and Identity, with the help of the Oxford Diocese and others. We are looking at how this might be repeated more cheaply.

We participated as usual in Holocaust Day on 27 January.

On 27 January the Faith Forum lead a voluntary sector conference entitled "Tackling Redundancy: A Different Opportunity". This was an event for community groups and agencies in support of those made redundant. Working parties were set up to coordinate work. This includes the production of a list of resources and liaising with the Job Centre.



Tackling Redundancy

Susan van Beveren of the WELL Centre and keynote speaker Lord Andrew Mawson at the Tackling Redundancy event in Jan 2011

The Faith Forum has taken part in a wide range of consultation on ways forward in the new climate. The best of these were probably "Beyond Boundaries" run by Stronger Together and "Unlocking Opportunities" run by the churches

Jan has updated the faith organisations on the RVA directory, produced a new paper directory and is updating information on the work faith organisation do for the community.

Nigel Hardcastle, Secretary, Reading Faith Forum

SAKOMA

SAKOMA is an independent organisation within Greater Reading which supports existing and emerging BME community groups by providing networking, training, events, advice and information. The following are the developments that have been happening within Sakoma:

As part of the Building For Strength programme, SAKOMA appointed a new Development Worker, George Mathew who is based at Reading Council of Racial Equality (RCRE). George has completed a mapping report which profiles the new immigrant communities in Reading;

In April 2010 SAKOMA held a visioning event 'SAKOMA, Your Vision'. This exercise helped members to contribute to the Vision for Reading 2030;

The Stronger Partnership Programme was a series of free events and workshops held in November and December 2010. The aim was to provide opportunities for smaller groups to network and exchange ideas and to introduce smaller groups to partnership working. The events were well attended and many attendees were Sakoma members and from the wider Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) groups;

Sakoma's membership continues to grow with 41 members currently;

The SAKOMA Annual General Meeting (AGM) was held on the 21st October 2010 with the theme "Influencing Change". The guest speaker, Lanre Sulola, a REACH national Role model, spoke about taking a pro-active role in changing society and influencing young people. The Chair presented the Outstanding Group Award to the Association of Sri Lankan Muslims (ASLAM) and the Individual Awards to two exceptional volunteers from the Reading Zimbabwean Community Group and Utulivu.

Yasmin Bador, Multi-Forum Co-ordinator



Collaborative Working

SAKOMA members work together at a Stronger Partnership workshop

Climate Change Partnership



Joanna Laynesmith

Forum Voice on the Climate Change
Partnership and Reading Christian Ecology
[Link](#)

When I joined the RCCP last autumn their principal focus was providing a response to the Council's Sustainable Community Strategy. They were also planning a response to the latest Local Transport Plan and I joined the working group on this. Unfortunately the report writer was so busy that this was less effective than it might have been (a lesson for me not to feel too junior to volunteer to write it myself).

Since then we've been working on an action plan and decided to focus on responding to local strategy plans/consultations and on acting as a catalyst for programmes. The latter include a proposal put forward by the GREN - Greater Reading Environmental Network (voluntary sector) rep for using the investment opportunity of the current high Feed in Tariff for solar panels to help tackle fuel poverty and this has been taken forward to the LSP board. The RCCP is trying to help promote the online Reading Green Business Network and connecting with the work of Climate Berkshire. There is a sub-group working on understanding behaviour change and now another for those representing public sector organisations (attempting to join up work/achievements in the sector).

Joanna Laynesmith, Forum Voice on the Climate

Drug and Alcohol Action Team

First of all a big THANKYOU to Eddie Winship who was the VCS Representative on this group for the earlier period of the year and played an active role in responding knowledgeably to the issues that arise in this specialised arena.

Longer term involvement as part of this group is resulting in a greater trust and engagement with officers of the Drug & Alcohol Action Team (DAAT) to develop service opportunities that have a VCS user focus. One proposal aims to establish a broad base of volunteers from within the voluntary and community BME sector who will understand the drug treatment process and be able to advise and signpost drug users and their families. We are certainly looking to work together in the future to ensure that VCS groups across the board can play a more active role in contributing to holistic solutions.

One way of identifying cross sector working is through positive VCS involvement in the working group looking at how The Bradley Report (Lord Bradley's review of people with mental health problems or learning disabilities in the criminal justice system) can be implemented locally to lead to better treatment and safer communities. This will undoubtedly bring joint working with statutory agencies in the future.

The VCS has been learning about the newly refocused 'Recovery' agenda for services that enable a broader, more holistic delivery of services to drug users to underpin their longer term recovery, i.e. befriending and engagement in social activities which help them make a fresh start on a new journey whilst completing their treatment.

Anne Laing

"Longer term involvement as part of this group is resulting in a greater trust and engagement with officers of the Drug & Alcohol Action Team to develop service opportunities that have a VCS user focus".

Reading's Children's Trust

Recent Developments

- Following the change of government Reading Children's Trust has now ceased to be a statutory body, but remains as a key partnership for the VCF sector. Ben Cross (RCVYS Development Worker) was also re-elected by the Board as the Vice-Chair.
- The Children and Young People's Plan has been completely revised to reflect the changing financial circumstances facing all agencies. There are now only 7 Priorities over 3 Thematic Areas. The Trust is also undergoing a re-structuring to better address these key priorities.
- Reading Borough Council is engaging with the VCS, through RCVYS, to explore the future of youth services in Reading, and how the two sectors can work more effectively together into the future, including the wider use and management of youth centres.
- There have been two Reading Borough Council Budget Consultations on proposed changes to local services.
- A new Commissioning framework for Reading is being developed, including the commissioning of a Domestic Abuse Prevention Service and a new Youth Counselling Service and Community Family Support Service.

"The Children and Young People's Plan has been completely revised to reflect the changing financial circumstances facing all agencies."

Ben Cross

Community Safety Partnership

The March 2011 meeting of the Community Safety Partnership discussed a number of issues, including:

- The Ministry of Justice's Green Paper *Breaking the Cycle: effective punishment, rehabilitation & sentencing of offenders*
- The Home Office's consultation: *More Effective Responses to Anti-Social Behaviour*

Structural changes have also occurred to Thames Valley Police – BCUs (Base Command Units) were scrapped this April (with 16-20% savings over 4 years). Instead there are local services, comprising of neighbourhood policing and patrol officers.

As per the December 2010 meeting decision, CSP now leads the Domestic Homicide Review Board, an opportunity for agencies to improve practice when dealing with domestic abuse and helping prevent homicides. DHR Board is responsible for deciding if reviews are necessary, and conducting serious case reviews.

The CSP's current priorities are:

- Reducing serious acquisitive crime
- Improving effectiveness of drug / alcohol treatment
- Reducing reoffending
- Reducing alcohol related violent crime
- Improving life within priority neighbourhoods
- Reducing the impact of hidden / hate crime.

To reach targets in these areas, CSP engages with numerous groups: the LSP, Cultural Partnership Board, NAGs Chairs Forum, Learning Disability Partnership and the Think Family Steering Group. It is also encouraging that, with voluntary sector representation on the CSP itself, Reading's third sector's contributions will be recognised and utilised.



Lorraine Joslin

Forum Voice for the Community Safety Partnership and Rahab

Lorraine Joslin, Forum Voice for the Community Safety Partnership and Rahab

Forum Voice Report Highlights

“The LSP board approved £15k of the performance related grant to be used to develop the business plans for the proposed project to install PV panels on houses, flats, community buildings and SMEs and the feasibility of development of delivery models for the longer term”.

27.5.11, Reading Climate Change Partnership

“There is now additional money to support outreach work in Children’s Centres.”

5.5.11, Early Years

“Connect Reading will take into the consideration the ‘Vision for Reading 2030’ 8 priorities in their strategy planning and their work with CR members.”

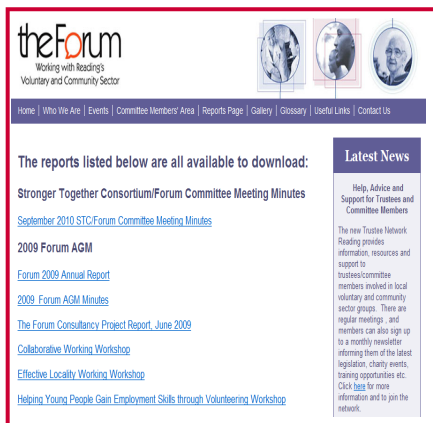
30.3.11, Connect Reading

“Many members are concerned about all the impending benefit changes – there may be a separate conference to address these issues when the government have finalised decisions based on all the consultations.”

9.3.11, Physical Disabilities and Sensory Needs group

“There was a discussion on the ‘Good News Stories’ from Statutory Services and utilising existing networks (i.e. RVA, CTR, Stronger Together etc.) to disseminate positive stories.”

1.12.10, Community Safety Partnership



www.rvsforum.co.uk

Forum Voice reports are available online

**All Forum Voice reports are available from
www.rvsforum.co.uk**

Beyond Boundaries

'Beyond Boundaries - Stronger Together for Reading People' was a major cross-sector conference that took place in February 2011. Organised by Stronger Together, the event brought together the local voluntary and community sector and their statutory partners to investigate how to increase referrals between agencies. With challenges including public sector cuts and the opportunities presented by the Big Society, the conference aimed to strengthen the local voluntary and community sector to meet the coming demand.

The conference included presentations from both statutory and voluntary sector speakers. Keynote speaker was Jayne Bench of Birmingham's Local Strategic Partnership, who spoke on developing best practice. Alok Sharma, MP for Reading West, spoke on the Big Society in a local context.

Real-life anonymous scenarios were used to provoke discussion. A plenary session led by Tim Clewer, VCS LSP representative and Director of the Mustard Tree Foundation, invited delegates to inform their peers about their current offering and how they could respond.

Smaller workshops of up to 20 delegates were asked to focus on one of the three scenarios to discuss wider prevention, provision and partnership issues.

The conference also provided an opportunity to network and build relationships. Displays invited groups to leave their contact details and areas of interest under different cluster groups.

“A thought-provoking day”

Event attendee



A United Front

Our panel answering questions on partnership at 'Beyond Boundaries'

Beyond Boundaries - Outcomes

“Good to hear the challenges that statutory sector face from their perspective.”

Event attendee

At Stronger Together’s ‘Beyond Boundaries’ event in February 2011, we asked attendees if they would like to form cluster groups with other organisations working in their specialist field.

Our first cluster group meeting was on 5th May 2011, and was based around Drug and Alcohol Issues. Attendees shared information on their current service provision and their plans for the future. Discussions were directed around complementary services and partnership working.

The meeting ended with a plenary session discussing where to go next with the cluster group. Suggestions included:

- Establishment of a helpline
- Information sheet with tendering and commissioning opportunities
- The Drug and Alcohol Action Team would work to support a collective to look at complementary activity that could lead to tendering opportunities
- Development of Consortium delivery – linked to the VCS, strong links into statutory sector services



Cluster Groups

Cluster Groups were generated at the Beyond Boundaries conference

It was established that there should be a second Drugs and Alcohol Issues Cluster Group meeting and that other organisations should be invited. Suggestions for its theme included how will benefits changes affect users?; should organisations join together to become social enterprises and supporting young offenders when they leave prison.

Please visit www.rvsforum.co.uk for information on cluster groups.



Sustainable Community Strategy

Reading’s Voluntary and Community Sector has played a key role in the development of the Sustainable Community Strategy (SCS). A series of consultation events run by both Stronger Together, beginning with Vision and Voice in March 2010, and Reading Borough Council, at the LSP Forum in November 2010, was reinforced by work done by The Forum Voices, using the Vision and Voice outcomes and their experience and expertise to input into the vision for Reading’s future.

The Sustainable Community Strategy signals a “long term-vision and overall strategic direction for the social, economic and environmental well-being” of Reading. VCS participation has helped to provide the evidence and analysis needed to identify the achievable, medium term priorities at the heart of the SCS and the Vision for Reading 2030.

The Vision for Reading 2030 aims to focus on developments that benefit local communities through People, Place and Prosperity. The Sustainable Community Strategy expresses the priority needs in greater detail where partnership can make a difference to resolving problems. Eight building blocks have been developed within the main focused areas to enable streams of work to be identified. Currently action plans are being developed through these streams.

People:

- Breaking the Cycle of Poverty
- Capable Communities
- Celebrating Diversity

Place:

- High speed broadband & IT
- Cultural Life
- Renewable Energy

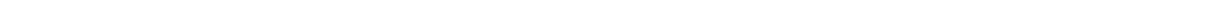
Prosperity:

- Skills for All
- Fasttrack 2020



Reading’s Future

‘Place’ is one of the Sustainable Community Strategy’s Building Blocks



A consultation process identified the most important of these building blocks, and prioritisation of the streams of work within these areas means that the following delivery work is developing:

Breaking the cycle of poverty - a systemic change in delivery priorities to focus resources on early intervention (in this context for 0 to 5 year olds) to support a radical improvement in the Early Years Foundation Stage for children across Reading, particularly those in poverty who have much poorer current outcomes.

Capable communities - increasing personalisation of services so that service users have greater choice and control over the services they receive and greater influence over what and how these are provided.

Skills for all - raising participation in learning (not necessarily qualifications) leading to increased economic activity opportunities and the continued expansion of apprenticeships

Renewable Energy – a capital investment programme into solar panels

Reading's Voluntary and Community Sector will be asked to ratify the Sustainable Community Strategy at the **Forum AGM on 5th July 2011**.

The Sustainable Community Strategy is available from

<http://reading2020.org.uk/library/public/file88/>

Who are the Forum?

Forum Voices

The Forum Voices are a group of around 30 elected representatives who work in partnership with statutory agencies on strategic decision making. Specialists in their field, they represent the sector's views, and are responsible for reporting back developments and opportunities to the wider VCS.

A full list of Forum Voices is available from the 'Who We Are' page on www.rvsforum.co.uk. Forum Voice reports can also be found on the Forum website.

Use your Forum Voices to raise concerns, suggest improvements, share ideas and keep up-to-date on the issues affecting you.

Forum Committee

The Forum Committee are part of the Stronger Together Consortium and provide strategic direction for Forum and Stronger Together activity.

Forum activity after the Stronger Together Project ends in September 2011 will depend upon VCS decisions made about the future of The Forum. If you would like to be join the Forum Committee, please use the contact details on www.rvsforum.co.uk

Contact details on www.rvsforum.co.uk

The Forum Statement of Financial Activities for the Year Ended
31st March 2011

	Unrestricted Funds	Restricted Funds	Total 2011	Total 2010
INCOME				
Membership	-	-	-	-
Donations	-	-	-	-
Consultancy	550	-	550	1,200
Prior Year Adjustment	-	-	-	-
TOTAL INCOME	550	-	550	1,200
EXPENSES				
Web-site development	-	-	-	-
RVSF meetings	-	-	-	-
Other Expenses	-	-	-	-
TOTAL EXPENSES	0	-	0	0
Net movement in funds	550	-	550	1,200
Total funds b/fwd	5,242	-	5,242	4,042
Total funds c/fwd	5,792	-	5,792	5,242

Balance Sheet as at 31 March 2011

	31 March 2011		31 March 2010	
	£	£	£	£
<i>Current assets</i>				
Balance at bank and in hand	5,242		5,242	
Debtors				
Creditors				
Net assets		5,242		5,242
Represented by:				
FUNDS				
Restricted		-		-
Unrestricted		5,242		5,242
		5,792		5,242

Note:

Transactions for the year to 31st March 2011 in respect of support services to The Forum formed a part of the Stronger Together Restricted Fund within the accounts of Reading Voluntary Action. It is estimated that both income and expenditure in respect of the Forum Co-ordinator and training for Forum Representatives may be valued £20,000 pa for the purpose of financial reporting.

theForum



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