Staffordshire
County Council

**Voluntary and Community Sector Support Needs Survey
within Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent**

Summary of Findings - January 2012

No. of responses received: 252   **Consultation period:** 29/08/11 – 20/11/11

1.   ABOUT YOUR ORGANISATION

- The majority of responses were received from a combination of registered charities or constituted community/voluntary organisations.

- In terms of how long they had been in existence, (162) respondents had been operating for more than 10 years.

2.   RESOURCES

a) Paid Staff: In terms of how many paid staff were employed by these organisations, (122) respondents had no paid staff and (83) organisations employed between 1-5 staff.

b) Volunteers: In terms of how many volunteers being regularly involved in the running of organisations; the majority of organisations (66) had between 11-20 volunteers and (58) utilised between 6-10 volunteers. Notably, (35) organisations used more than 50 volunteers in running their organisation.

c) Income: In relation to 2010/11 the majority of organisations (72) had an income of up to £5,000, with (60) organisations falling in the £5,000 -£20,000 income bracket.

3.   BENEFICIARIES

- In terms of people benefiting from the organisations services; the majority of respondents (74) highlighted all/no specific group, followed by (23) organisations focussing on older people aged 55+ and (23) on Young people aged 12-19.

- Notably, (143) respondents highlight their beneficiaries include people who have a disability with (79) respondents highlighting they work with beneficiaries whereby English is not their first language.

4.   SUPPORT USED

A. SOURCE OF SUPPORT

Voluntary Sector Infrastructure: In this category, the two sources of support used most often included:
- Community Council of Staffordshire (36)
- Staffordshire Council for Voluntary Youth Services (29)

Other Infrastructure Support: In this category, the two sources of support used most often included:
- Professional services e.g. solicitors and accountants (28)
- National Umbrella organisations e.g. NCVO (25)

B. INFORMATION AND ADVICE RECEIVED

The three most popular areas where organisations had received IAG support were:

- Funding - sourcing and/or securing (150) of which (87) stated this was the most effective
- Volunteering support   (85)
- Developing your organisation   (74)

C. TRAINING RECEIVED

Similarly the three most popular areas where organisations had received training were:

- Funding - sourcing and/or securing (55) of which (30) stated this was the most effective
- Volunteering support   (51)
- Developing your organisation   (41)

D. BARRIERS OR PROBLEMS ACCESSING

Comments were grouped into the following themes

Funding (34 comments) • Increased competition for limited resources • Having to find large amounts of match funding • Need basic day to day funding	**Capacity to engage (7 comments)** • Volunteers often work and can't attend meetings or training in the day • Lack of adequate resources within Infrastructure Organisations to provide required level of support • Not enough manpower to communicate with all groups in the community
Volunteering (9 comments) • Need more volunteers in the future • Issue getting suitable volunteers • Limited spaces on training courses = difficult to get volunteers trained	**Lack of Support (19 comments)** • It can be difficult to know the best place to go to get the help and support needed • Need expert specialist advice and support over and above a start-up • Lack of consistent information, one forum is saying one thing and another forum stating the opposite
Skills and Training (8 comments) • Limited spaces on training courses • Very little free or low cost training available to support small organisations in their work • Getting access to skills and training required for the organisation at a price we can afford. The training needs of community groups is not the same as those who employ staff	**Other (12 comments)** • Difficult to get interpreters for certain services • Changes in structures and uncertainty about the future also make it difficult to know the best way forward. • Need for confidence in the professionalism of the advice and the capacity for the infrastructure organisation to continue to provide the advice in hard times.
No or very few barriers. Receive good support (15 comments) • No barriers • We have been extremely pleased with the support and advice offered and received	**Other Council specific (5 comments)** • Difficulties engaging openly with a local authority where their 'in-house' staff are potential competitors • Hard to know here to go to access information about opportunities

4. SUPPORT NEEDED

A. FUNDING. The two most important areas for support were:

- Applying for small grants (63/202)
- Identifying and applying for funding opportunities, from other sources outside of the public sector e.g. Lottery (62/202)

B. MANAGING FINANCES. The most important area for support was:

- Financial Sustainability e.g. planning your funding/income over future years (52/107)

C. VOLUNTEERS. The two most important areas for support were:

- Finding volunteers (93/160)
- CRB checks for volunteers (24/160)

D. STAFFING. The two most important areas for support were:

- Advice when things go wrong (30/77)
- Updates on Employment Law (22/77)

E. FACILITIES AND SERVICES. The two most important areas for support were:

- Cheap photocopying, printing etc (40/91)
- Access to meeting rooms (32/91)

F. PUBLICITY. The two most important areas for support were:

- Publicising our organisation and services (68/127)
- Using new media – internet, social networking etc (34/127)

G. DEVELOPING YOUR ORGANISATION. The two most important areas for support were:

- Developing a business and/or project plan (21/104)
- Finding new trustees (19/104)

H. IMPROVING PERFORMANCE. The two most important areas for support were:

- Understanding and meeting funders monitoring and evaluation requirements (30/95)
- Demonstrating the impact of our services (28/95)

I. INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY. The two most important areas for support were:

- Website development advice (25/83)
- Skills development (25/83)

J. INFORMATION SERVICES. The two most important areas for support were:

- Regular information about developments relevant to the VCS (59/132)
- Linking with other organisations working in the same field/area (48/132)

K. DEVELOPING PARTNERSHIPS. The two most important areas for support were:

- Identifying partners to collaborate with (40/100)
- Participation in local partnerships and forums (32/100)

Of all of the categories highlighted above, respondents felt the **THREE** most important areas they required support with were:

1. Funding   (178)
2. Volunteers   (104)
3. Publicity   (70)

5. DELIVERY OF SUPPORT

A. FEATURES OF EFFECTIVE SUPPORT. The three features rated highest as being **Very/Quite important** were:

- Convenient and easy to access (193)
- Well networked with local groups, agencies and partnerships (190)
- Expertise in Voluntary and Community Sector issues (183)
- Open and transparent (183)
- Proactive and forward looking (183)

The three features rated highest as being **Very/Quite unimportant** were:

- Has a recognised quality standard (21)
- Good knowledge of Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent – local context and geography (19)
- Accountable to the Voluntary and Community Sector (14)

Other comments included:
1. Excellent commitment to equal opportunities and minorities
2 .Maximises resources available to its members and not using them all to support itself
3. Professional, expert and up to date knowledge, able to challenge the status quo, forward thinking and proactive (not reactive), clearly understands its role and is structured to deliver against those.

B. METHOD FOR DELIVERING SUPPORT. The three methods rated highest as being **Very/Quite important** were:

- Face to face advice and help (182)
- Telephone advice and help (164)
- On-line advice and help (162)

The three methods rated highest as being **Very/Quite unimportant** were:
- Peer support/skills sharing (19)
- Briefings and consultation meetings (16)
- Newsletters and mailings (14)

6. REPRESENTATION

Organisations were asked if they wanted an infrastructure body to represent their service, of those responding **100 stated YES / 128 stated NO.**

Of those who said YES the most important method of representation was to "Raise awareness of their service with the Public Sector, Service Users and Other VCS organisations."

7. FINAL COMMENTS

All final comments and suggestions that were made in relation to infrastructure support have been categorised, a sample of the comments are shown below:

Merge/rationalise (3)	Already have good infrastructure (19)
• It maybe worthwhile that some are merged in order to provide a modern accessible service hub to support shared back office functions would be useful - particularly high cost areas such as HR & IT support that small & medium sized organisations need	• Some excellent Infrastructure organisations and some more disjointed ones • I believe we have good infrastructure organisations in Staffordshire • Very happy with it the provision of facilities, it is the most important thing to our group, without it we would not be able to run • We feel well served at present.
Equalities Issues(1) • I am concerned that minorities and groups within the protected characteristics are often seldom heard or marginalised it maybe that a forum or mechanism for minorities is needed to have actual engagement	**Disappointed with/don't use support (8)** • Most are not applicable to our organisation as we are a large established charity and have everything in place. • Advice given to new and developing groups and organisations seem to focus more on ticking boxes for paperwork - rather than on the group development itself.
Cost (1) • They have all just significantly increased their costs – this makes it highly likely that we will no longer use their services	**Volunteering (2)** • Should be a Hub for volunteer training - some training is necessary for all orgs e.g. "what is a volunteer"
Funding (3) • We need a simple and straight forward system for accessing grants and finance for core services rather than having to find projects to get funding	**Training (1)** • Getting more difficult to access suitable training

What the service should be like (10)
- It should definitely be manned by knowledgeable independent people.
- Any infrastructure support should be easy to access and easy to understand.
- Named contacts for specific areas would be good with a central phone number to get you started.
- Support needed to engage with potential private sector purchasers of our service.