

## **Voluntary Action Merthyr Tydfil Strategic Plan 2010 – 2013**

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## **Voluntary Action Merthyr Tydfil Strategic Plan 2010 - 2013**

### **Introduction and Context**

Voluntary Action Merthyr Tydfil (VAMT) is the County Voluntary Council (CVC) for the County Borough of Merthyr Tydfil. VAMT became operational in 1997 following the reorganisation of County Voluntary Councils within Wales. VAMT has a membership of over 180 third sector organisations and has contact with over 440.

In 2005 VAMT along with the other CVC's in Wales, Wales Council for Voluntary Action (WCVA) and the Welsh Assembly Government signed the Third Sector Infrastructure Partnership Agreement. During 2008 an extension to the Agreement was signed, guaranteeing VAMT core funding from WAG until at least 2013.

VAMT currently employs 40 staff (staff structure is attached as Appendix 1), and has a board of 10 Trustees, elected annually from amongst its membership. It is a Company Limited by Guarantee and a Registered Charity. In 2001, VAMT opened the Voluntary Action Centre in the town. The Centre is managed by VAMT and provides office space for VAMT and five other voluntary organisations and a large meeting space. In 2006, VAMT purchased the neighbouring building which provides further office accommodation for two third sector projects.

VAMT receives core funding from the Welsh Assembly Government, Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council, and Cwm Taf Health Board. It also receives Big Lottery Funding for its 3-2-3 Project, and is currently the only CVC in Wales to receive revenue funding of this kind.

VAMT is the Grant Recipient Body and Host Employer for 3 Communities First projects and has its own social enterprise, VITAL, which provides affordable ICT solutions for third sector organisations. VITAL was shortlisted for the Social Enterprise Excellence Award at the MTCBC Business Excellence Awards 2010.

VAMT has held the Investors in People award since 2001, while Evolve, its volunteering project also holds the Investing in Volunteers award. In 2008, VAMT outsourced its Human Resources and Health and Safety functions to a large national company, which gives both VAMT's trustees and line managers greater confidence and security when dealing with legal matters and has resulted in a complete overhaul of employment policies.

A Staff Representatives Group and a Staff Employer Forum have been developed, which allows elected staff and nominated trustees to discuss issues which directly affect staff.

VAMT has had its own small grants scheme since 2001 and has allocated over £784,000 to 274 third sector projects in the Borough.

VAMT first agreed a Compact with Merthyr Council in 1999. In 2008 a new tripartite Compact was agreed which also includes Cwm Taf Health Board. Such a Compact was one of the first of its type in the UK.

Each year since 2003, VAMT has held a Volunteering Awards event, unique of its type in the county borough, which recognises the outstanding achievements of volunteers.

### **Strategic Plan 2010-2013**

This plan focuses on the period 2010 – 2013, the review date of the Infrastructure Agreement. It has been developed with significant input from VAMT's Board of Trustees as part of a programme of trustee professional development, together with input from staff. It should be read alongside Appendix 2, VAMT's Annual Delivery Plan which acts as its operational plan regarding the requirements of the Infrastructure Partnership Agreement.

This strategic plan aims to be aspirational and focuses on developments which will provide added value to VAMT's core services, and will allow VAMT to meet the needs of its stakeholders at a local level. It is not prescriptive in that it is meant to allow the organisation to also pursue emergent strategic developments.

VAMT also recognises that during turbulent times the external environment can impact heavily on activities and progress. With changes at central government level, and with further political change likely in the medium term VAMT needs to have flexibility to pursue previously unidentified opportunities.

### **Further consultation and development**

Within the plan strategic objectives identify the need to source funding to carry out a full stakeholder consultation, together with a survey into the needs of our membership – this information can then be fed in to the strategic plan to further inform our key strategic objectives and allow the plan be used as an organic document, running alongside our delivery plan.

Review by Board will be bi-annually. This will enable the Board to monitor progress and evaluate success, and ensure that the Plan remains an organic document.

## MISSION STATEMENT

To support, represent and assist the development of high quality Third Sector organisations and volunteering in the County Borough of Merthyr Tydfil.

## VISION

- To be the centre of excellence in Merthyr Tydfil for the provision of services to organisations and individuals involved with the Third Sector and volunteering.
- To create a healthy civil society by helping to develop organisations to meet their needs, maximizing volunteering opportunities and sharing our mission with all external stakeholders.

## VALUES

- Openness, honesty and Integrity
- Partnership working
- Community and citizen focus
- Equity

## PRINCIPLES

In addition to adhering to the Nolan Seven Principles of Public Life (Selflessness, Integrity, Objectivity, Accountability, Openness, Honesty and Leadership attached as Appendix 4), VAMT is committed to achieving the Charity Commission's Hallmarks of a Good Charity:

**Hallmark 1 Clear about its purposes and direction** An effective charity is clear about its purposes, mission and values and uses them to direct all aspects of its work

**Hallmark 2 A Strong Board** An effective charity is run by a clearly identifiable board or trustee body that has the right balance of skills and experience, acts in the best interests of the charity and its beneficiaries, understands its responsibilities and has systems in place to exercise them properly.

**Hallmark 3 Fit for Purpose** The structure, policies and procedures of an effective charity enable it to achieve its purposes and mission and deliver its services efficiently.

**Hallmark 4 Learning and Improving** An effective charity is always seeking to improve its performance and efficiency, and to learn new and better ways of delivering its purposes. A charity's assessment of its performance, and of the impact and outcomes of its work, will feed into its planning processes and will influence its future direction.

**Hallmark 5 Financially Sound and Prudent** An effective charity has the financial and other resources needed to deliver its purposes and mission, and controls and uses them so as to achieve its potential.

**Hallmark 6 Accountable and Transparent** An effective charity is accountable to the public and to others with an interest in the charity in a way that is transparent and understandable.

## **SWOT AND PEST ANALYSES**

Both Board and staff members have undertaken a SWOT and PEST Analysis. The findings of these have been used to underpin our strategic aims.

## **EXTERNAL DRIVERS / GIVENS**

### **The Infrastructure Partnership Agreement**

Since 2005 VAMT has received core funding from WAG as part of the Infrastructure Partnership Agreement between the Assembly Government, Wales Council for Voluntary Action and County Voluntary Councils. This agreement provides formal recognition of the role of CVC's, volunteer centres and WCVA as the three parts of the voluntary sector infrastructure. This commitment is in place until 2013.

### **Service Specifications**

Derived from the above Agreement are joint service specifications which are underpinned by comprehensive training and information frameworks and identify who does what to meet the needs of the sector at national, regional and local levels.

In November 2009, as a result of streamlining, WAG have agreed to delete the reference to trustee mentoring from the service specification, and to amalgamate the policy and public service specifications into a single and more straightforward specification. At WAG's request, the Community Regeneration and New Initiatives specifications into a single and simpler New Initiatives and Community Development specification. The revised service specifications are attached at Appendix 5.

### **Delivery Plan**

In an annual Delivery Plan VAMT set out how to deliver our contribution towards meeting the service specifications and set targets for the forthcoming year. The Delivery Plan must include details of current arrangement and any planned developments in the year ahead. The required elements of the Delivery Plan are attached at Appendix 2.

## KEY STRATEGIC AIMS

**From our Vision and Mission Statements we have identified seven key strategic aims:**

1. Supporting Organisations
2. Representing Organisations
3. Promoting Volunteering
4. Better Governance
5. Developing People
6. Delivering Performance
7. Maintaining Robust Internal Standards

### **Strategic Aim 1 Supporting organisations**

We will:

- **Provide a bespoke service of support, information and advice to support organisations in the third sector**

We will do this by:

- Maintaining the standards set within the Infrastructure Core Agreement
- Participating in the Infrastructure Core Group and Service Operational Networks
- Contributing to and supporting a joint CVC proposal to BIG for utilising infrastructure support funding from 2012
- Carrying out market research to identify and understand unmet needs amongst our membership
- Carrying out a stakeholder analysis clarifying needs, wants and perceptions of VAMT
- Identifying budgetary requirements necessary to implement meeting those needs
- Carrying out a comprehensive review of potential funding sources to provide any additional resources
- Actively seeking to increase our membership
- Undertaking research into any emergent activities which may provide VAMT with additional resources.

We will

- **Re-establish a strong funding advice service subject to anticipated funding being received**

We will do this by:

- Being part of any prospective WCVA/CVC consortium proposals under Convergence
- Identifying feasible match funding for the post

We will

- **Provide additional support to organisations as a result of pressures arising from government spending cuts**

We will do this by:

- Contributing to and supporting a joint CVC proposal to BIG for utilising interim infrastructure support funding for 2010 – 2012
- Implementing the proposal should it be supported

We will

- **Expand the ICT support available to the sector**

We will do this by:

- Seeking to expand VITAL's client base
- Seeking to expand VITAL's capacity by recruiting volunteers and accessing training
- Exploring funding options open to social enterprises
- Exploring the potential for VITAL as a separate trading arm.

We will

- **Provide a comprehensive programme of trustee training and information**

We will do this by:

- Identifying direct trustee contacts amongst member organisations
- Develop a quarterly trustee bulletin
- Utilising WCVA resources to carry regular trustee-related articles in Inform and e-briefings
- Carrying out a comprehensive funding search to identify any additional funding to further develop specific trustee provision

We will

- **Seek to maximise VAMT involvement in a new WAG community development programme that may continue or replace Communities First post April 2012**

We will do this by:

- Ensuring that VAMT is involved in influencing any joint proposals to WAG emanating from WCVA/CVC's
- Playing a central role in the establishment of a new programmes and making bids as necessary and appropriate in conjunction with existing community based organisations
- Making the necessary arrangements for transfer of the existing Communities First programme to a new programme should this be necessary.

## **Key Strategic Aim 2 Representing organisations**

We will

- **Influence development of citizen engagement, consultation and participation**

We will do this by:

- Leading on a process to identify a range of options to increase citizen engagement via representation on the Local Service Board
- Press for adoption of new Citizen Engagement model e.g. “Ask Merthyr Tydfil”
- Investigate other potential models of citizen engagement where VAMT could take a lead e.g. social media centres, community reporting.

We will

- **Influence the implementation of new scrutiny arrangements in the county borough**

We will do this by:

- Seeking agreement about third sector involvement utilising LSB and /or Compact arrangements
- Establishing arrangements for supporting new third sector representatives

We will

- **Seek to improve third sectors influence in local policy development**

We will do this by:

- Finalising and securing full implementation of all the proposed Compact Codes of Practice
- Developing a “Third Sector Strategic Leaders Group”
- Produce a map of existing partnerships and working groups and publish this including listing the contact details of the third sector representatives
- Produce a map of existing groups and forums that need to be involved in engagement / consultation activities and publish this

We will

- **Seek to improve third sectors influence in service development**

We will do this by:

- Develop a directory of services available from within the third sector in order to promote these to private and public bodies
- Develop and implement a mapping process of specialist areas e.g., health and social care to identify gaps

### **Key Strategic Aim 3 Promoting Volunteering**

We will

- **Increase the numbers of volunteers through better promotion**

We will do this by:

- Implementing a strategy to promote both the volunteer centre and the role of the volunteer in society
- Implementing new ways of engaging potential new volunteers through social networking, Facebook, Twitter etc

We will

- **Provide support and mentoring for individual volunteers to improve their volunteering experience and raise the chances of their volunteering being sustained and / or gaining paid employment**

We will do this by:

- Developing a proposal for potential funding from the Engagement Gateway
- Discussing the possibility of a collaborative project with the CVC's in the Heads of the Valleys region

### **Key Strategic Aim 4 Better Governance**

We will

- **Continue to strengthen VAMT's Board and its effectiveness in carrying out its governance role**

We will do this by:

- Redesigning and further developing a trustee handbook, which clearly refers to the Nolan Principles as well as roles and responsibilities.
- Development of a staged induction process for new trustees, including meeting with staff team.
- The board holding regular trustee-led development events and regular non-business meetings
- Developing a code of conduct for Trustees which covers standards of behaviour and propriety, confidentiality, conflicts of interest and reference to the Nolan Principles.

We will

- **Promote the role of a VAMT Trustee and associated opportunities e.g., co-options**

We will do this by

- Carrying out a clear skills audit of trustees annually and identify clear gaps in skills and expertise
- Developing trustee role descriptions
- Marketing trustee election via Inform and other media prior to the AGM

We will

- **Develop both champion and advocacy roles of board members across each area of the Delivery Plan**

We will do this by:

- Identifying via an annual skills audit, areas of special interest and expertise amongst board members
- Building closer communication and contact between VAMT staff and Board members
- Regular group presentations from staff to Board members about their area of work
- Creating an outline of the responsibilities needed for the champion role and identifying the scope of the role.

## **Key Strategic Aim 5**

### **Developing People**

We will

- **Maintain the standards required by Investors in People, particularly with regard to an organisational training plan.**

We will do this by:

- Redesigning the development review process into an appraisal process in line with the revised Competencies Framework
- Identifying training needs amongst Board members and seeking to meet those needs
- Review and revise the VAMT Volunteering Policy
- Ensuring that all volunteers receive a comprehensive induction
- Development of a Supervision and Support policy which ensures parity across all areas of the organisation
- Implementing a system of supervision and support for the Chief Officer which includes an annual appraisal.

## **Key Strategic Aim 6**

### **Delivering performance**

We will

- **Meet the ambitions outlined in the annual Delivery Plan**

We will do this by:

- Submitting the annual Delivery Plan and bi-annual Monitoring Reports on time
- Monitoring staff performance through individual action plans. Recording quantitative performance measures using Evol database and qualitative measures through internal database system

We will

- **Develop and implement an appropriate quality assurance framework across the organisation**

We will do this by:

- Undertaking training as required in order to implement the agreed framework
- Carrying out a comprehensive review of potential funding sources to identify any additional resources required
- Seek external accreditation of the framework to validate our performance

We will

- **Utilise the National Hub of Expertise in Governance's Good Governance Code and National Occupational Standards for Trustees to quality assure the performance of VAMT's Board.**

We will do this by:

- Ensuring that all trustees are familiar with the Code and the Occupational standards.
- Enabling trustees to regularly meet to undertake peer-led development sessions
- Developing a self-assessment tool for Board members to assess Board performance against the Code and Standards

## **Key Strategic Aim 7 Maintaining Robust Internal Organisational Standards**

We will

- **Ensure a working environment which is fit for purpose**

We will do this by:

- Analysing technical improvements which will improve VAMT's performance and services to members
- Ensuring that Health and Safety procedures are adhered to and any recommendations for improvement implemented
- Holding bi-annual tenants meetings to address issues of concern

We will

- **Ensure that VAMT has sufficient and efficient internal resources to deliver high quality services to its stakeholders**

We will do this by:

- Identifying any additional internal staff resources which are required
- Undertaking a comprehensive search of funding sources to identify any additional resources required
- Collaborating with other CVC's and / or WCVA in developing joint services in line with published recommendations
- Identifying and maximising opportunities for tendering to deliver services

We will

- **Ensure a clear understanding by Trustees and staff of the roles and responsibilities of others within the organisation to facilitate more effective communication**

We will do this by:

- Facilitating regular staff group presentations to the Board
- Facilitating group presentations at staff meetings
- Organising an annual staff-board event

## **Reporting and Review**

Progress on the Strategic Plan will be reviewed on a six monthly basis by Board. A reporting mechanism, working on a red, amber, green "traffic light" system (attached as Appendix 6) will be used to easily and clearly identify progress under each heading.

The format, purpose and usefulness of the Strategic Plan will be reviewed annually by Board.