

Results of the VHS survey on CHP Committee Members Support Network

Introduction

Over the summer of 2008 VHS invited responses from the voluntary sector members of CHP committees in Scotland (committee members) to a questionnaire designed to find the future support needs and wishes of the committee members.

It sought clarification on whether VHS should continue to be an information hub, sending out information and organising regular events, whether the committee members would like to see developed their own network over which they could feel ownership or if it was felt a mixture of the two was the best way forward.

Out of the 50 committee members who were contacted 25 started the survey with 21 completing it. An overall completion rate of 42%

Summary of results

From the returns given the vast majority of committee members appear to find the support from VHS beneficial and wish for it to continue. When it came to the issue of how this was best done twice as many would like this to be through developing a physical presence, rather than just an electronic one. This is also reflected somewhat in the usage of the electronic discussion forum where only one person used it and also in the wish for more national events.

However 95% of people also wished to receive a regular e-news from VHS and a sizeable majority did feel able to contribute in some way to its content.

Over three quarters of the respondents would find a formal network of CHP committee members useful with the majority wishing the opportunity to share knowledge and experiences. Most committee members who responded wished a combination of regional networks with the ability to call national meetings if required. It was also suggested that a good fit could be made with the regional CVS networks.

Two thirds of those responding felt they could be involved in the development and running of the network with the main reason for people not becoming involved being resource implications.

Conclusions and recommendations

It would appear that there is sufficient interest in the development of a formal support network for voluntary sector committee members of CHPs to take it forward and also to continue to develop the current supports VHS gives centrally.

VHS should convene and chair a steering group to develop a network which can deliver on the following.

- Provide a focus to promote the profile of the role of the third sector in contributing to the overall CHP agenda.
- Support the development of related CHP policy at a national level from a third sector perspective.
- Establish links with the Scottish Governments Health and Wellbeing Directorates and other key stakeholders with an interest and involvement in CHPs.
- Contribute expertise and experience to policy issues and consultations on related issues.
- Identify training, learning and support needs for members.
- Provide opportunities for sharing good practice and information.
- Foster links with other related networks.

Full results from the survey

After first giving their name the respondents were asked if they thought VHS should continue to act as a central information hub, supporting CHP committee members remotely through its contact list.

24 people answered this question with 22 responding yes, a response of over 90% wishing VHS to continue as a central information providing support.

When asked how communication could be improved between VHS and the committee members 15 replies were given. Of these replies more than twice as many respondents favoured VHS having a more physical local presence as those wishing more electronic communication. Among the suggestions were for VHS to give presentations to CHPs, attend local health fairs and provide individual meetings and briefings. Strengthening the links to allow CVS to support committee members at local level was also suggested by 3 respondents.

As one committee member put it, *"Personal contact is the best possible way of spreading information and gathering responses and ideas"*

When asked about the electronic discussion forum VHS has on its website over 95% of committee members who responded said they did not make use of it. This accounted for 21 out of 22 responses. When asked to comment on the forum two people stated that they did not know of its existence and the rest were split roughly equally between making an active choice not to use the forum for differing reasons and citing time constraints.

Only one person gave an idea of how the forum could be improved which was by giving e-mail alerts when there was a new topic or update, which would remind people to check.

On the topic of national events for committee members, over 95% of the 22 who responded felt that VHS should continue to host regular events at national level for voluntary sector members of CHP committees.

18 people felt that VHS should host events once or twice a year, with this being split equally between one and two per year. Five people commented further with one person asking for *"more than twice per year"* with another suggesting *"every three months"*. Other suggestions included assessing if there was a need for events and having them *"in Highland occasionally"*.

When asked if a regular electronic newsletter would be of benefit there was again over 95% support for this and of the 19 people who answered the question regarding contributions around two thirds felt able to input to the newsletter in some form, although most did say that it would not be regular contributions due to other commitments or to being *"a new member"*.

The rest of the questionnaire focused on what might be expected from a more formal and structured network for committee members.

Of the 22 people who answered the question "Would you find it useful to have an independent support network, led by voluntary sector committee members of CHPs?" 17 (over 75%) answered yes with only 5 answering no.

Over 90% of those who responded wished the opportunity to share knowledge and experiences from a network with over 80% wishing "*learning opportunities*" or "*networking opportunities*"

Other wishes were for "*better communication*", "*developing a better interface with statutory colleagues...*" and "*support to face local challenges*". One respondent also suggested "*influencing of local (and national) policy, practice and interpretation of guidance.*"

When asked about the structure of such a network seventeen people answered and of those only two (12%) wished to see one national network of committee members, six people (35%) wished to see regional networks and 9 (53%) felt that a combination of local and national would be best. Two people gave further comment which called for regional groupings to give best resource usage and also suggested any network should aim for a good fit with the four regional CVS networks.

Two thirds of the 15 people who replied stated that they were willing to be a part of the development and running of any network and among those who stated they would be unable, time commitments and pressure of work were cited as the main reasons. However it was also mooted later in the questionnaire that the cost implications of travelling to meetings etc, "*should be met by the CHP and not the organisation.*" A valid point if the ultimate beneficiary of the meeting is the CHP.

Among the networks which any CHP committee member's network could potentially work with included the CVS network, CHEX, Community Care Providers Scotland (CCPS), Scottish Care and any relevant local networks.

The final part of the survey allowed participants to input their own comments and from these it was apparent that resources, in respect of time and travel costs, were an impediment to their full participation in proposed network activities, and in some cases to their role as CHP committee members.

The very final comment from the survey appears to sum up most of the feelings around enhancing the supports available for voluntary sector CHP committee members.

"Good to see VHS being proactive in seeking ways to support committee members. This can only enhance the contribution of the voluntary and community sectors to the work of CHPs"

Bill Weir
Voluntary Health Scotland
September 2008