



ISLE OF WIGHT  
**Voluntary &  
Community Sector  
Strategy**

**ecoIsland**

# **A Strategy for Creating the Environment for a Thriving Voluntary and Community Sector on the Isle of Wight.**

April 2009

**A strategy developed by the Isle of Wight Compact Strategy Group.  
Members: Isle of Wight Council, Isle of Wight NHS, Isle of Wight Rural  
Community Council, The Voluntary Sector Cabinet.**

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## 1. Introduction

The Isle of Wight Council and the Isle of Wight NHS, together with the Isle of Wight Rural Community Council and the Voluntary Sector Cabinet, have asked Island residents, including our voluntary and community organisations (VCOs), how we can create a thriving third sector on the Isle of Wight.

This strategy reflects what people have told us. It sets out what we want to achieve and a way of meeting the many national and local objectives for our community including Eco Island, our Sustainable Community Strategy.

The voluntary and community sector includes many groups and organisations that invest their time and resources in furthering social, environmental or cultural objectives. Sometimes called the third sector, we include in our strategy all voluntary and community organisations, charities, social enterprises, cooperatives and mutual bodies. What they have in common is that they are driven by a desire to improve our society, our communities and are not motivated by profit.

The VCO sector is enriched by its diversity. The sector can provide an independent voice for communities and under represented groups; campaign for change, and help to create strong, active and connected communities by involving people at all levels. It can be innovative, enterprising and resilient. It can involve communities in designing and delivering public and community services that meet locally identified needs and aspirations.

### **Box 1. The Voluntary and Community Sector on the Isle of Wight**

On the Island, the VCO sector includes over 1,500 organisations as diverse as UKSA, South Wight Housing, Not Just Enterprise, Families First, Angel Radio, Ryde Saints Football Club and 1<sup>st</sup> Binstead Guides.

There are over 180 agreements between Island voluntary and community organisations and commissioners at IW Council and the IW NHS, for the provision of some form of service through grants or partnering agreements. Added to this are many other working and non-financial relationships where expertise, knowledge or help in kind is exchanged. The total amount spent by the Council and NHS in 2008-09 will be more than £11m, a commitment expected to grow with greater public service delivery through the voluntary and community sector.

Given this huge range of organisations, this strategy will be more relevant to some of these groups than others but the intention is that the aspirations and intentions identified for the sector as a whole will make a positive impact on a great number of local voluntary groups.

The strategy deals with issues such as public funding of VCOs. It also aims to create an environment in which many cultural, social and environmental organisations of all sizes and aims that are not reliant on public funding can also thrive. The strategy commits us to helping us all to achieve our aims.

## **2. A strategy we agree on**

The Island Strategic Partnership (ISP) regards the VCO sector as having a major part to play in achieving the social, economic, environmental and cultural goals of the Eco Island Sustainable Community Strategy (2008). To underline this, a target for improving the environment for the sector has been agreed with the government and included in the Isle of Wight Local Area Agreement (2008).

A public consultation on this strategy was begun in June 2008. In the autumn and winter of 2008 the Compact Strategy Group (CSG) drew the collected views, needs and aspirations together into this strategy. This Group brings together senior public and voluntary sector representatives, and is sponsored by the ISP to bring this strategy and the Island's Local Compact to life.

The CSG and its members will ensure that a plan for action for the strategy will be agreed and properly managed. CSG's Terms of Reference are attached as Annexe 1.

## **3. Direction and objectives**

The IW Council and IW NHS, together with partners in the Island's voluntary and community sector have agreed a number of aims:

"We value and will achieve:

- A thriving and sustainable voluntary and community sector,
- Involvement in the planning and delivery of local public services by the voluntary and community sector in partnership with local communities,
- The encouragement of social enterprise.
- Public services that harness the understanding, creativity and experience of voluntary organisations and the community,
- A campaigning and independent VCO sector that speaks for excluded, unheard or disengaged communities.
- Investment in the VCO sector and its infrastructure".

The aims and objectives of the strategy are based on the national and local agenda for public services and communities, together with the values of the wider VCO sector (see Box 2 below). Together with public and private service providers, the VCO sector can make a unique contribution to achieving the Eco Island vision for a sustainable Island community.

Partners in the strategy recognise that good public services and investment in sustainable communities will be enhanced by communities that have a voice in what needs to be commissioned and how best to deliver it. The VCO sector has a key role to play in developing our communities.

### **Box 2. Voluntary and Community Sector Values**

*Independence:* embodying people's right to associate and organise to help themselves and others, independently of the state.

*Social justice:* making a difference and promoting lasting social, environmental and economic change; giving people a voice.

*Diversity, dignity and respect:* recognising and celebrating diversity, promoting social inclusion and equality of opportunity.

*Participation and empowerment:* enabling people to participate in their community; have a greater say in the decisions that affect their lives, and greater control over their local economy.

*Collective wealth creation and social entrepreneurship:* using surpluses to further social objectives; investing in human and social capital.

*Responsiveness:* providing quality goods and services (including support and advocacy) in response to peoples needs.

*Accountability:* achieving our mission; being transparent and accountable to our users, members and/or beneficiaries.

*Sustainability:* working towards sustainable economic and community development.

*Source: National Council of Voluntary Organisations 2009*

There are a number of opportunities for change in public services; the personalisation of services, higher standards in education and health; new opportunities for community empowerment; involvement in the commissioning and delivery of public services by local communities. The strategy will also create challenges for partners including new opportunities and changes that will affect many long-standing funding and working arrangements. We must also deal with limits on public funding and a number of economic and legal pressures introducing uncertainty over the future.

The main practical outcomes of the strategy will include:

- a) 'A Compact way of working'; Partners will treat each other on a day to day basis with trust; respect; mutual understanding of priorities and needs; transparency and fairness. This will be supported by investment in governance and an effective Local Compact.
- b) Public commissioning and infrastructure investment that make the best of the value and creativity of VCOs to our communities.
- c) Inclusive access by VCOs to procurement opportunities; competitive and transparent funding agreements of three year or more duration.
- d) Transitional arrangements that will support the introduction of new ways of working and building capacity within the sector.

The strategy has been put together under the general headings of *engagement, funding, volunteering* and *infrastructure*, which together give us an agreed direction and framework for change.

## **4. Engagement**

Partners in the strategy will work together on a basis of trust, transparency and mutual understanding. There will be respect for differences of opinion. This will be our 'Compact way of working'.

We require a consistent and long term approach to inclusive governance arrangements, working relationships, knowledge and skills.

### **Governance**

The Voluntary Sector will be represented on the Island Strategic Partnership's Partnership Boards (ISP) and other partnership sponsored bodies by the IW Rural Community Council.

The Island Strategic Partnership will sponsor the cross sector Compact Strategy Group (CSG) to lead and promote this strategy.

We will work together through the CSG to find new ways of engaging with each other to promote good relationships and the Eco Island vision. The CSG will work together to ensure the right environment for a thriving third sector. It will promote the ability of the sector to empower and develop communities; regenerate neighbourhoods; encourage citizenship, learning, volunteering and other activities that strengthen communities.

To make change happen, the CSG will create a Compact Delivery Group (CDG) comprised of public sector and VCO representatives who will actively deliver the day to day actions that arise from this strategy.

We will make continuous improvements to day to day working relationships between the public sector and VCOs to ensure they are effective and well governed.

Change will be supported by an updated Local Compact that will clarify and promote the 'Compact way of working'. The Compact will set out partnership governance, consultation and mediation arrangements. Reliable and accessible mediation arrangements between partners will be very important and actively promoted to VCOs in order to quicken change.

### **Working relationships**

The Voluntary Sector Cabinet will develop the role of formal Networks as a framework for engaging with the public sector, particularly as a way of ensuring that the VCO sector is aware of commissioning activities and opportunities for collaboration between organisations.

VCO Networks will also be key strategic links between sectors that can help inform public policy development and commissioning.

The VCO sector has a unique diversity and a role in the life of Island communities that can enable it to play a major part in locality based planning and commissioning. VCOs can help public sector organisations identify public commissioning needs. VCOs will play a valuable role in helping commissioners tap into the views and experience of the community, which will improve the identification of need and the possibility of innovative and creative commissioning solutions.

Island VCOs will be encouraged and when relevant funded to help represent and campaign for communities and service users, especially those communities and service users less able to represent themselves.

When working together in partnership, those involved will be subject to appropriate and proportional performance management. We will make sure that all activities, agreements and grants have a clearly identified contact points with responsibility for their management.

We will implement good practice guidance for working arrangements. This will include room for mutual encouragement to make continuing improvements in services and outcomes for communities and service users.

### **Knowledge, training and skills**

Partners in the strategy will promote awareness of the presence, capacity and opportunities provided by the VCO sector.

The partners will use a wide range of media for communicating with each other and the wider community. This will include making use of the RCC newsletter and VCO Networks to communicate with the wider sector. CSG will regularly review opportunities for improving communication.

All partners are committed to greater sharing of useful information where this will benefit service users and communities. This will be managed through a framework of legally compliant information-sharing protocols.

Partners in the strategy will agree standards for handling and responding to communication between sectors; enhancing a 'Compact way of working'.

Partners will consider and where possible set up a work shadowing and volunteering scheme between the public and voluntary sectors to increase mutual awareness.

Access to shared training opportunities will be encouraged. This will improve engagement and raise skills between the sectors.

A number of engagement protocols and guides will be produced:

- Commissioning and Procurement Codes.
- Updated Local Compact (detailing our 'Compact Way of Working').

- An Equality and Diversity Code for cross sector working.
- An Action Plan for the strategy will include:
  - *Opportunities for shared training opportunities,*
  - *An advance schedule of Commissioning and Procurement activities,*
  - *A Community Asset Transfer Strategy for building infrastructure,*
  - *A Performance management guide that reduces burdens on partners,*
  - *Information sharing protocols that help partners deliver services,*
  - *Employee volunteering schemes that widen volunteering opportunities,*
  - *Work shadowing schemes that will develop skills between partners.*

In addition, the 'Compact way of working' will be embedded in these guides.

## **5. Funding and Procurement**

The third sector plays an important and growing part in delivering many community services; with and without public funding. The sector also generates significant resources through bids to the lottery and charitable trusts; fund raising; legacies, donations, and direct sales. However, despite many community organisations having no funding relationship with the IW Council or the IW NHS, public sector funding is often the dominant issue in relationships between the public and third sectors.

This part of the strategy relates to how the Council will fund services from the Third Sector, through the making of grant payments that will be linked to the delivery of specific public and community services. This new grant-making process is called the 'Commissioning Prospectus Approach' and is at the heart of this part of the strategy.

This grant-making process will ensure that funding relationships between the Council and VCOs will be based on knowledge, fairness and proportionality.

The IW Council will lead the transition to this new process. The IW NHS will work within the NHS commissioning framework to ensure that the values of the strategy will be implemented, and that the benefits of the VCO sector are considered when commissioning decisions are made.

Transition to what is a new approach to commissioning and grant funding will be managed over time. It will provide a balance between the value sought by commissioners of services, with the benefits of a diversity and range of local provision that a thriving third sector can offer.

Grant funding will be the principle mechanism for funding the third sector. However, it is also intended that access to all commissioning and public procurement opportunities will be as open as possible to third sector organisations.

### **Commissioning and Funding**

Public sector Commissioners will involve VCOs and other interested people in identifying local community needs at an early stage in the commissioning

process. This will share knowledge and help those deciding what needs to be commissioned to recognise the differences and likely benefits of seeking to meet needs through VCOs or through the wider provider market.

The IW Council will incorporate all Commissioning opportunities suited to the involvement of VCOs into a range of Prospectuses. This will provide a transparent decision-making process that will replace the mixed arrangements for funding currently offered to the VCO sector

Prospectuses will clearly set out the outcomes that commissioners are seeking and invite potential providers of services to make creative and enterprising proposals that will help the commissioner to deliver their planned outcomes and projects. Their focus on intended outcomes will also mean reducing or eliminating detailed service specification.

### **Box 3. Commissioning Prospectus Approach - Isle of Wight Council**

The Commissioning prospectus will be at the heart of the commissioning cycle.

1. When deciding how to provide local services, the commissioners of public services will look for the best way to fund and provide the service. If they judge that the third sector can deliver greater value and community benefit than a comparable private organisation, the Commissioner can procure the service by grant-funding a third sector organisation. They will add the commission and the grant funding to their annual Commissioning Prospectus.

3. Grant funding can be used for community care and advice services; support for families; cultural services; sport and many other locally provided community services. All grant funding programmes that deliver services in the short and long term will become part of the Commissioning Prospectus programme.

4. Annual Commissioning Prospectuses set out a portfolio of grant-funded commissioning opportunities that third sector organisations can bid to take on. Groups and organisations are invited to submit imaginative and competitive proposals for delivering the commissioning outcomes in the Prospectus in return for grant-funding. Commissioners will not specify the means of providing services, this is left to the groups and organisations who bid for grant funding,

5. Bidders for grant-funding will become part of a transparent and competitive selection process, based on pre-published criteria and timescales. A panel of interested people including independent third sector representatives and service users will assess which are the best bids, which are then sent for approval to the Council or PCT.

5. Successful bidders will become delivery partners with a fair funding agreement.

*The Commissioning Prospectus model has been pioneered across sectors in Birmingham, who have shared their experience with the Isle of Wight.*

New guidance will encourage those involved in commissioning to consider the benefits of making all commissioning opportunities Prospectus-based

wherever possible. In the short term this will be mainly grant funding, but in the longer term will include mainstream public funding.

The IW Council and IW NHS will still need to competitively tender in the open market. Commissioning through a Prospectus or by global competitive tender must continue to ensure compliance with public procurement rules and law. Partners will also ensure that these often complex and detailed open-market procurement processes are as accessible as possible to VCOs

All funding awarded through a Commissioning Prospectus will be regarded as grant funding and subject to a funding agreement that will reflect the scale or complexity of the service or project that has been agreed.

People using services that may be affected by changes in funding arrangements should not be irrevocably disadvantaged by this process. Commissioners will assess the impact of changes in funding and where needed will arrange for transition to new services.

### **Funding and Procurement conduct**

We will ensure the use of national best practice in procurement and funding. The EU/National/Local competition requirements and public procurement processes will be monitored for impact on VCOs.

Partners involved in commissioning and funding will have knowledge of national VCO issues, commissioning strategies and the Island context.

Other commissioning and fair funding commitments to VCOs include:

- Payment in advance of expenditure in the majority of instances will be agreed, taking into account the size and capacity of the VCO.
- Communication channels and procurement processes will give VCOs a minimum of 12 weeks to apply for Commissioning opportunities.
- Legitimate inclusion by VCOs of the relevant element of overhead cost in their estimate for providing services, often described as 'full cost recovery'.
- Consortia of VCOs will be encouraged, as will bids that share public and VCO infrastructure and support in imaginative and efficient ways.
- Funding agreements will normally be for a minimum of 3 years. When a 3 year contract is not possible a clear rationale will be made public. Where a strong rationale can be made longer terms will be available.

## **6. Volunteering**

The extent of volunteering and unpaid involvement in community life is regarded as a measure of its strength and vitality. The Eco Island vision of a

strong and sustainable community will be supported by a partnership approach to increasing participation in quality volunteering opportunities.

Volunteering is the bedrock of the VCO sector; it is the unique and distinguishing factor that supports the value base and capacity of the sector. The majority of VCOs on the Island are 100% reliant on volunteers and the evolution of the sector has seen the number of people employed within the sector grow. This has been made possible by hardworking volunteer trustees.

### **Enabling and promotion**

The IWRCC is committed to promoting and supporting inclusive volunteering through its Volunteer Centre service. Public sector commissioners will continue to financially support this service in recognition of the contribution that the sector makes to ensuring active and sustainable communities.

We will collaborate to ensure that training and skills needs are identified and addressed collectively; critical VCO sector roles such as Trustees should be given support to act effectively and responsibly.

We are committed to the creation of Employers Supported Volunteering Schemes and encouragement for public and private organisations to develop such schemes.

Public sector partners will pay reasonable expenses for volunteers, including travel and subsistence, within public sector funding agreements of all types. The partners will also pay reasonable expenses for volunteer attendance at meetings of the Island Strategic Partnership and others as appropriate.

All partners will address volunteer training and engagement needs within their wider training and skills plans.

The IWRCC will lead the development of best practice in recruitment and retention of volunteers, producing guides for organisations who wish to use or place volunteers. Guides will highlight best practice, including designing opportunities, recruitment of volunteers, CRB checks, induction, health and safety, payment of expenses, supervision, involvement and recognition.

We will commit to supporting future Volunteering Awards schemes.

## **7. Infrastructure**

In this strategy Infrastructure development refers to:

- buildings and their management,
- back office functions,
- workforce development,
- skills and technical/specialist support needs,
- information.

Increasing collaboration between the partners and with and between VCOs will result in better use of investment; shared VCO infrastructure; stronger organisations at all levels and a greater share of their resources being focussed on achieving their outcomes and goals.

While many VCOs are not engaged with the delivery of public services, they still play an important part in the life of the community. Their activities and interests can be enhanced by being involved in the development and sharing of infrastructure, whether it be through large developments or the simple sharing of skills and ideas.

### **Support and collaboration**

The IWRCC is committed to delivering an effective Council for Voluntary Service role that will provide support and advice on funding, governance, charity law, organisational development and other challenges facing VCOs.

The Commissioning partners are committed to the development of joint working and collaboration at the community level. The sharing of infrastructure will include a focus on assets, skills, administration and procurement.

During and after the period of transition to the new commissioning arrangements set out in this strategy, partners will continue to collaborate on building voluntary sector capacity, be it bricks and mortar or people and skills.

All of the partners in the strategy will work together to ensure that infrastructure investment and capacity building opportunities are made widely known and fully exploited.

Public sector partners will investigate how future management of their property portfolio can best benefit VCOs. For example, an IW Council Community Asset Transfer Policy will be implemented during 2009.

All of the partners in the strategy are committed to ensuring the availability of shared and joint training and learning as well as sharing skills. This will be made possible through subsidised training places on training courses, and skills transfer programmes.

## **8. Turning the Strategy into Action**

We, The IW Council, IW NHS and the IWRCC, will commit our efforts to making the strategy a success.

The Compact Strategy Group will act on this commitment by using its membership to inspire, lead, develop and manage an action plan for delivering the strategy.

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For further information about this Strategy, please contact either:

The Economic Development, Tourism and Partnership Team.  
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Telephone 01983 823825. email [martin.johnson@iow.gov.uk](mailto:martin.johnson@iow.gov.uk)

The Isle of Wight Rural Community Council.  
3 Langley Court, Pyle Street, Newport, Isle of Wight, PO30 1LA  
Telephone 01983 524058. email: [mail@iwrcc.org.uk](mailto:mail@iwrcc.org.uk)

## Isle of Wight Compact Strategy Group

### Terms of Reference

1. To facilitate and promote joint working between the public sector, IW NHS Primary Care Trust and the Voluntary Sector.
2. To act as a consultative forum where the Voluntary Sector, IW NHS PCT and the Public Sector may develop policies that promote effective partnership working between the sectors.
3. To lead the development and implementation of the Isle of Wight Compact.
4. Assist the Public Sector, IW NHS PCT and the Voluntary Sector in developing a strategy for the Voluntary Sector; to participate in the monitoring and evaluation of that strategy.
5. To refer reports to the decision making bodies of all the parties as appropriate.
6. The Chair and Deputy Chair to be confirmed by the core members of the Group.

## Glossary

Back office functions	The routine internal and administrative functions of an organisation.
Capacity building	Building the potential for voluntary organisations to respond to the needs of the community they serve
Compact Implementation Group (CIG)	The CIG will be a forum for those managers and representatives who oversee the roll-out of the action plan that will deliver the voluntary sector strategy.
Compact Strategy Group	The CSG is the lead joint body with responsibility for making sure that the strategy is followed. The CSG is sponsored by the Island Strategic Partnership; its members are senior representatives of the partners in the strategy.
Compact way of working	Partners will treat each other on a day to day basis with trust, mutual understanding of priorities and needs; transparency, fairness and good communication. This will be supported by investment in governance and an effective Local Compact.
Commissioning	The process of identifying needs in the community and making arrangements to meet them with services. This often means that commissioners will procure goods and services.
Commissioning Prospectuses'	The Commissioning prospectus is an invitation to the voluntary and community sector to bid to deliver goods and services. Any bid won by a group is regarded as grant funding.
Community Asset Transfer Strategy	The IW Council will have a strategy for transferring the ownership of buildings and other assets to the sector where there is a proven benefit to the community by doing so.
Community empowerment	Helping members of a community to exercise their rights and powers as citizens in order to achieve their personal goals and those of the community.
Community development	Help for and by people in communities who will benefit from identifying their needs and subsequently to create change, exert more influence in the decisions which affect their lives. They work to improve the quality of their lives and the communities in which they live.
Consortiums	An association or collaboration for some definite purpose. Organisations may join together to pool resources, skills and knowledge.
Council for Voluntary Service	An organisation that assists voluntary sector organisations with technical advice, information and training, to assist with the delivery of their services to a wider public. It also represents the views of the voluntary sector and campaigns on behalf of the sector locally, regionally and nationally.
Eco Island	The name of the Isle of Wight's Sustainable Community Strategy.
Engagement	Working together in a joint and collaborative way.
Employers Supported Volunteering Scheme	Employers make arrangements for staff to contribute their time and skills to local groups and communities in an organised way.
Funding	Resources are available to the voluntary sector in grant form and in return for undertaking pre-arranged tasks. This might be through contracts, service level agreements and grants. Funding may come from large organisations such as the lottery fund, or from local Councils.
Governance	The arrangements for democratic or legitimate oversight and management of a project, institution or strategy etc.
Grant Funding	Grant funding will increasingly be used for relatively short term or time limited projects.

Infrastructure	This covers -buildings and their management, -back office functions, -workforce development, -skills, technical/specialist -information.
Island Infrastructure Group	An IWRCC group that maximises opportunities for investment in the Island's voluntary and community sector.
Island Strategic Partnership (ISP)	The main partnership on the Isle of Wight for the private, public and voluntary sectors; responsible for creating and implementing the Eco Island Sustainable Community Strategy.
Isle of Wight Council (IW Council)	The Island's top tier level of local government.
Isle of Wight NHS (IW NHS)	The Island's Primary Care Trust and NHS healthcare provider
Isle of Wight Rural Community Council (IWRCC)	Support the 1,500 or more voluntary and community organisations that work so hard for the benefit of the Island and its residents. It also directly supports communities themselves and has a strong focus on the concerns of rural communities.
Knowledge transfer	Passing skills from one organisation to another, including IT, marketing and training.
Local Compact	An agreement on the relationship and conduct of business between the voluntary and community sector and the Isle of Wight Council. An update will give an opportunity to other public sector organisations to join the compact
NCVO	The National Council for Voluntary Organisations is a national body that represents the voluntary sector.
Neighbourhood regeneration	Improving the quality of life of communities by using social and economic investment and development, as well as building the communities' capacity to develop and take a role in change.
Networks	The Voluntary Sector has established a number of forums or networks that will represent communicate and share the interests of the forums. I.e. the culture and heritage form.
Partnership Boards also known as KDPs	The ISP has four Partnership Boards that are responsible for delivering the Eco Island strategy on the ISPs behalf.
Procurement	The process for purchasing goods and services. Public procurement has many rules and procedures that act as a deterrent to small organisations.
Public sector	Public institutions that are funded through taxation i.e. The IW Council and the NHS.
Social enterprises	Not for profit organisations that reinvest their surplus income into non-commercial causes (social, cultural and environmental) or back into the enterprise.
Sustainable Community Strategy	A plan for an area that sets out how people and organisations will make their area and community a socially, environmentally and culturally sustainable and successful place.
Trustees	The people or institutions responsible for the governance and administration of a trust or non-commercial organisation governed as a trust.
Voluntary and community organisations	Value driven not for profit organisations that have non-commercial objectives. This can include social enterprises but also normally includes the many organisations that exist to promote or deliver benefits to local communities through voluntary not for profit activities.
VCO	See voluntary and community organisations above.
Voluntary Sector Cabinet	A leadership body elected by the Island's voluntary and community organisations, appointed to represent the sector in its dealing with the wider public sector and community.
Volunteer Centre	See Council for Voluntary Service above.

Volunteering	Giving time and the resources needed to take part in activities that benefit the community.
Work shadowing	An opportunity for people from different organisations and backgrounds to experience the role of someone from another organisation or background.