



## **Statement to Council Cabinet - 11<sup>th</sup> Feb. 2015**

### **“The importance of keeping a Volunteer Centre in Bath & NE Somerset”**

**The Volunteer Centre will close in the second quarter of this year without financial help.**

I represent the board of Trustees for this community charity. We cannot continue without sufficient funds. So I am here to raise your awareness of our situation and ask for your partnership support to secure our future.

#### Who we are and what we do

We give a “matchmaking” service for volunteers, charities and businesses to guide potential volunteers to the best volunteering opportunities and we help businesses to work on charity projects with their employees. Our charity's cause is the whole community and the ‘frontline’ charities within it.

Last year, our volunteers gave over £1,000,000 worth of time to voluntary organisations for a running cost of about £60,000. We employ just 2 remarkable people, who are highly regarded and often consulted for advice by Council officials, individuals and companies. Our manager, Mike Plows, was recognised with a special Chairman's award at the recent Community Awards.

Behind Bath & NE Somerset's vibrant volunteering community is the Volunteer Centre.

## The benefits we bring to the Council and community

We have found volunteers for

- the Roman Baths, the Victoria Art Gallery and Mayor's Corps of Guides,
- the Library service, 86 people, from the home library for the housebound to the volunteer-run Paulton library,
- the Friends of our various parks - 80 last year in Alexandra Park alone.

These and many other volunteers have made a real contribution to the Council's efficiency and have helped to keep expenditure down. In the wider community, we have sourced many more volunteers for our 350 local charities.

We support the charitable work of socially responsible businesses – including the 33 "Community Challenge" projects we organised last summer.

## Why we need funds from the Council

Our operating costs are £5,000/month. In the last few years we have been operating on reserves, sporadic grants and small fees from businesses. The Council has supported us, mainly indirectly via a sub-contract - due to end next month. Even if it continues, we still need to find £3,500 every month.

The board of trustees was refreshed last autumn and we have been working hard to raise funds to keep the Centre going.

Our recent bid for core funding from the St John's Hospital Fund was praised for its quality, but lost out to front-line charities. A promised central government support fund has been postponed by the Treasury.

“What would life be like without us?” Charities, businesses and the Council would need to spend more time, resource and money on finding volunteers. The professional “vetting” we do to ensure the best fit of volunteer with opportunity would be difficult or not happen at all.

Two years ago in Plymouth the Volunteer Centre was closed for lack of funds. The impact on the council and community was so bad it is now being re-established with council funding. Re-building the knowledge and expertise is proving expensive – we want to avoid that here.

Our community needs the Volunteer Centre service. We need 9 months to bring our funding plans to fruition. Our funds will run out in 4 months.

#### What we are doing and what we need

A profile raising campaign has been started with the balloon launch in the autumn and bold plans for the AGM Meeting, bringing food-related charities together. The revenue from our new membership scheme is already more than the national average for VCs.

We need £60,000 each year to operate - we are not asking you for all of this. In fact our long term aim is to rely less on Council funding.

Encouraged by recent meetings with MPs and community stakeholders, we are optimistic of success with other grants and initiatives, including potential matched funding with Council support.

So we are asking for partnership support in two ways.

Firstly financially, to 'tide us over' while we secure other sources of funding and plan how to deliver the best volunteering service in 2016 and beyond. The Institute for Volunteering reported the average local government contribution to volunteer centres was £30,000 or £2,500/month. With the Council providing half of what we need for this year, we believe we can raise the rest. Finding a way to increase your contribution by £10,000 would enable us to do this.

Receiving it, we would want to report back to you in the Autumn.

Secondly with venues.

You already support us with office and Helpdesk space in the library. Using other Council venues for Trustee Network and other fundraising meetings free of charge would enable us to generate income.

Both these investments would be vital and responsible for our community. They would not only keep our support of your objectives but also deliver the Council vision of wanting "citizens who actively engage" and endorse your value of being a Council "that empowers communities".

The Volunteer Centre was established 27 years ago. We are making Bath and North East Somerset an even better place to live, work and visit. We want to carry on with this important work and live beyond our 28<sup>th</sup> birthday, so please help us.

Thank you

Fiona Bell

Chair of Trustees, Volunteer Centre, Bath and NE Somerset