

# Social value in action

## WHAT'S THE VALUE OF SOCIAL VALUE?

Three years since a pilot project was launched with local voluntary organisations, Worcestershire County Council is discovering the true value of social value.



Social Return on Investment (SROI) measures change in ways that are relevant to the people or organisations that experience or contribute to it. It enables people to capture the full picture of how change is being created by measuring social, environmental and economic outcomes and uses monetary values to represent them.

Worcestershire County Council champions social value and recognises the added value voluntary organisations and small community groups yield, often with very small grants, as well as through larger contractual arrangements.

Many of these additional outcomes are the softer ones and also the secondary benefits to family and carers. Measuring these outcomes can be a challenge and, therefore, remain anecdotal.

However, in these challenging economic times, it is increasingly important to understand the true value of investment and the difference it makes – effectively the 'so what' question.

Three years ago, the council undertook a pilot project in partnership with a small number of voluntary organisations. The aim was to develop a user friendly way of measuring Social Return on Investment. The project focused on developing a toolkit that would be accessible to all VCSE organisations in Worcestershire, irrespective of size and resource - quite a challenge given the complexity of the subject!

The project evolved over two phases and provided key learning around the following points:

- A shared language is essential between commissioners, funders and providers.
- Understanding outcomes versus outputs is required prior to engaging in SROI.
- Proxy values are hard to identify!
- Organisations who engage with it have increased confidence in reporting their worth in funding applications.

A toolkit is now available to VCSE organisations in Worcestershire and many are able to undertake a measurement simply by following the step by step guide which accompanies it.

Additional support is available via the Changing Futures Fund which provides a range of support packages including one devoted to this.

Currently, the toolkit is applied by commissioners to some contracts as a monitoring requirement. Training has been provided to the Joint Commissioning Unit and guidance developed to support staff in how to apply social value to the commissioning process. More and more organisations are measuring the value of social value.

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