

AGENDA MANAGEMENT SHEET

Name of Committee **The Cabinet**

Date of Committee **8 September 2005**

Report Title **Working with the Voluntary and
Community Sector**

Summary This report updates Cabinet on the development of a
strategy to guide the Council’s working relationships
with the Voluntary and Community Sector

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**Would the recommended
decision be contrary to the
Budget and Policy
Framework?** No.

Background papers Review of Working Relationships with the VCS – July
2004

 The Warwickshire Compact 2005

CONSULTATION ALREADY UNDERTAKEN:- Details to be specified

- Other Committees Adult and Community Services OSC – 26 July
2005
- Local Member(s)
- Other Elected Members
- Cabinet Members Cllr Hayfield, Cllr Saint and Cllr Stevens –
comments requested
- Chief Executive
- Legal David Carter – Chief Officer
- Finance
- Other Chief Officers Marion Davis – re link with SSD contracting
review and efficiency savings
Dave Clarke – re efficiency savings



District Councils

Health Authority

Police

Other Bodies/Individuals

FINAL DECISION YES

SUGGESTED NEXT STEPS:

Details to be specified

Further consideration by
this Committee

To Council

To Cabinet

To an O & S Committee

To an Area Committee

Further Consultation

The Cabinet - 8 September 2005.

Working with the Voluntary and Community Sector

Recommendations

1. That Cabinet Note progress on developing the Voluntary and Community Sector Strategy
2. That Cabinet agree wider consultation based on the recommendations made in appendices 1-3 with a view to producing a joint strategy with the voluntary and community sector
3. That Cabinet request Leaders' Liaison Group, in its capacity as the budget working group, to consider the policy in relation to requiring efficiency savings on core grants to Voluntary and Community Sector organisations, as raised in paragraph 3.5

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This report is similar to one considered by the Adult and Community Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee (OSC) on 26 July. The OSC members were supportive of the work that has been done so far in developing the Voluntary and Community Sector Strategy and recommend Cabinet to support this work. OSC members made a number of comments on the draft recommendations contained within the appendices, in particular the need to provide more guidance to them on the role they are expected to fulfil when asked to represent the Council on the management committees voluntary organisations and that there should be a more considered approach to the circumstances in which nominations are made.
- 1.2 Cabinet is asked to note progress on developing the Voluntary and Community Sector Strategy, to agree the suggestions in the report.

2. Background

- 2.1 In October 2004, Cabinet considered a report on the Council's relationship with the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS). Cabinet agreed the following specific recommendations:
 - 1) That the Council should continue the principle of core funding key infrastructure organisations and working with the VCS in reviewing the scope and structure of this, in line with the Government's proposals in ChangeUp [see later]
 - 2) That the Council should adopt a consistent approach to involving the VCS in the planning, commissioning and contracting of services, through the Procurement Strategy and Contract Standing orders.

- 3) That the Council should widen its relationship with the VCS, to facilitate more direct contact with the community generally, through the sort of measures suggested in the report, in particular: developing more effective communications; involving Area Committees more closely and; ensuring that one-to one relationships are compatible with partnership arrangements.
- 4) That a Strategy be produced to implement this overall approach, the detailed actions needed to change existing arrangements and to promote and market our relationship more effectively.

3. Process

3.1 In order to take these recommendations forward, I established a short term Implementation Group, chaired by me and comprising representatives from the VCS and officers from Council departments. The terms of reference of the group were to produce the Strategy, to include the following components:

- A framework to ensure that all work with the VCS is developed within a corporate approach
- This framework to guide the Councils' one-to one relationship with the VCS, but in the context of our Partnership working through the Warwickshire Compact and Local Strategic Partnerships
- An action plan to implement the 37 detailed recommendations contained within the report produced last year and to consider the relevant forums, meetings, events and other communication channels needed to support the relationship
- A clear and robust performance management framework to support the relationship

3.2 The Implementation Group decided to set up three sub-groups to undertake this work, involving a wider group of staff and VCS representatives. The three groups focused on the following areas:

- Funding
- Governance
- Communications

3.3 The process of bringing together VCS representatives and a group of Council officers, who have regular involvement with them, proved to be extremely effective and has enabled us to engage with the sector in a way that has not been possible in the past. One of the outcomes we are recommending is that a permanent joint forum is established to build on the work done so far and to manage ongoing relationships.

3.4 The recommendations of the three sub-groups are attached as appendices 1-3. As with the report produced last year they contain a long list of recommendations, some of which are non-controversial and can be implemented quite easily. Others will require further work and wider consultation with the VCS and will require specific Cabinet approval. For now, Cabinet is asked to approve the reports of the three groups as the basis for

this wider consultation and the production of a Strategy, to be jointly agreed by Cabinet and the VCS before the end of the year.

- 3.5 There is one recommendation that I would like Cabinet to refer to Leaders' Liaison Group, in its capacity as the budget working group. This is the suggestion in Appendix 1 that core grants to infrastructure organisations (such as CVS, Volunteer Bureaux and Warwickshire Rural Community Council) should not be subject to the Council's annual efficiency savings. The majority of such grants (totalling around £700,000 pa) are administered through the Chief Executive's Department and have a savings target attached to them. For the current year this is 2%. This means the Council expects the voluntary organisations to make cumulative savings, year on year. I have chosen not to pass this savings target on to them, but to absorb it in other services, which cannot be sustained much longer.

4. Context

- 4.1 The decision to review the Council's relationship with the VCS was undertaken for a number of reasons, including concerns expressed in the Council's first CPA assessment that it was inconsistent – a criticism that was repeated in the second assessment. I believe that the development of the Strategy will address this concern.
- 4.2 Government is seeking to undertake a similar exercise at national level. This is to maximise the opportunity for the VCS to be involved in supporting public bodies in providing direct services and in modernising the infrastructure support for community groups. It recognises that services traditionally provided by local organisations (such as Councils for Voluntary Service) do not have the capacity to do all that is needed, particularly in key areas such as financial advice and IT support. The Government has introduced a project called ChangeUP to address this and it will be sensible to coordinate any local changes with the outcomes of ChangeUp.
- 4.3 An update on progress with the Social Services Department's audit of adult community and voluntary sector service provision is reported elsewhere on this Agenda. The corporate review has been undertaken in tandem with this and it is clear that the development of good practice with the VCS needs to be driven through Social Services, which is the largest contracting department with the sector.
- 4.4 In 2002, Cabinet agreed to sign up to the Warwickshire Compact. A Compact is a document that sets out the principles by which public bodies and the VCS should relate to one another. The Compact has recently been updated and at its next meeting Cabinet will be asked to confirm its continuing support for the principles contained within it. The Council's VCS strategy will, in effect, be the way we seek to operationalise the Compact.

DAVID CARTER
County Solicitor and Assistant Chief Executive
August 2005

Funding Sub-Group – Recommendations

- 1 The following summarises the discussions of the Funding sub-group. Key recommendations are made at the end. We feel that these are in line with Compact guidelines on procurement. Membership of the Group was:

Tim Willis – SSD (Chair), Alistair Rigby – Chief Executive’s (Secretary), Nicholas Wharton – Rugby CVS, Sue Palaganda – Nuneaton & Bedworth VC, Mark Pearce – Age Concern, – Nick Darwen – WCC, Frankie Williams Leamington Afro-Caribbean Society, David Beck – Guide Post Trust, John Lyons - WCC

Procurement

- 2 The procurement flow-chart produced for last year’s review report is supported as a basic framework for deciding how to involve the VCS in contracting. It is felt that the “preferred option” box is the key to it, as this is the point at which we decide the route to go. The choice of provider might be influenced by factors such as, the supply market, locality, specialist skills, size of the contract, and relationship with existing providers etc. and we will have to comply with EU regulations.
- 3 We accept that the VCS cannot be treated as a special case in the market place, but we should acknowledge the contribution/added value it provides and try and develop this in the context of our competition rules.
- 4 We acknowledge that the Council needs to both “play” and manage the market to achieve both short-term and long-term objectives. In doing so we should be mindful that there is a risk that tendering, if applied bluntly, might drive out partnership and we need to have a view about whether the excessive use of large outside providers, with the capacity to tender competitively (and undercut or bear loss-leads on the local price) puts at risk the capacity and activity of local communities.
- 5 Government guidance on achieving Best Value can appear to be at odds with their message about the need to promote and expand the role of the VCS in service delivery. We need processes spanning all departments that ensure we consider the potential use of the VCS in a consistent and positive way and a KPI to track our performance on business placed with the sector. We also need to develop some mechanism to involve the VCS in influencing what we do (see paragraph 12). This won’t happen on its own.
- 6 We should invest more in enabling the VCS to compete, both within the sector itself and with the private sector. “Meet the buyer events” and training provided by our procurement staff are two of the ways we can help. However, if resources allow we think that the employment of a new procurement officer (probably based in the VCS) would be a very positive step. Such a post could act in a brokerage role and work between the sectors in exploring the scope for VCS provision and developing the capacity of the sector to meet it. If effective, it could pay for itself.
- 7 There are strong criticisms about the complexity of our tendering arrangements that sometimes puts potential providers off, particularly those that are not used to this environment. If we are going to attract more organisations to bid to deliver

services we need to do more to encourage them to do so. There were also criticisms about our processes for paying for services, arbitrary changes in payment arrangements, coupled with frequent changes in staff responsibilities, that leaves VCS colleagues confused. It is understood that County Procurement is already active on some of this work in relation to other sectors and we suggest that further work be done to look at standardizing and simplifying contracts/SLAs and tender specifications as far as possible. This would need to be proportionate to the value of contracts. We also recommend that a Compact compliant protocol should be developed for managing payments.

Contracting Practice

- 8 We agree with Compact guidance that the VCS should have the right to charge full cost recovery of overheads when contracting for service delivery. Compact suggests it is for the VCS to determine its level of overheads and that generally, public bodies should avoid seeking information about how they are compiled.
- 9 In the context of tendering, the overheads would be included in any bid and contracts will be awarded on the basis of value for money. Experience, suggests that this detached view could be problematic. Unrealistic overheads (high or low) can cause problems in service delivery. Low overheads might be attractive but could result in what appeared to be a good price turning out to be unsustainable over the life of the contract or loss leaders damaging the capacity of the sector. Double counting might occur where organisations provide a range of services, resulting in unnecessarily high overheads. We feel there has to be a sensible level of dialogue on what is acceptable. Overheads in the context of core funding, are considered later.
- 10 We favour the use of medium term, as opposed to short-term (one year) contracts. Three to five year agreements are the Compact norm. More than three years might be appropriate in some cases depending on the nature and size of the contract, but the longer the contract the greater the need for effective review processes
- 11 Effective termination/review arrangements need to apply to both parties. The Council needs to keep providers informed of its thinking as needs change and the VCS needs to give proper notice about its capacity to continue providing services. Risk needs to be shared appropriately and effective review arrangements need to be in place to ensure that services can be fine-tuned and service failures avoided
- 12 We acknowledge that many of the difficulties faced by the VCS in continuing to provide services relates to the ending of fixed term funding from various sources such as the Lottery, Coalfields Regeneration Trust etc. The Council is unlikely to be in a position to be able to pick up the costs. A positive approach would be for VCS and Council representatives to discuss temporary funding projects at the outset, to consider capacity to support as partners (cash or morally) and the prospect of continuation funding. This will enable agreed exit strategies to be developed at the start and reduce the incidence of recrimination at the end. We recommend that a standing joint group be established to do this and to provide a forum on contracting/procurement issues as suggested in paragraph 5.

- 13 We also think there is a strong case for establishing a countywide forum at which VCS representatives could meet on an annual basis. There were a number of views about how you might do this, but given the numbers involved we favour splitting the Forum into sectors (children, adult, BME) to build on what is already in existence or is planned, linking with LSPs and Warwickshire Strategic partnership etc. This needs further thought but we believe the idea is a good one and would give us the opportunity to demonstrate the strength and contribution of the VCS and our relationship with it.

Core funding

- 14 The special nature of “core funding” raised a lot of questions, including whether there is a case for treating it differently to any other funding provided under contract or SLA. Some organisations clearly have a strategic importance to the Council, which might justify ongoing partnership rather than competitive bidding arrangements, but there was general agreement that as currently organised core funding is not operating in the interests of the Council or the VCS. From the Council’s point of view we were not clear what we are getting for our money. From the VCS point of view it treats some organisations differently to others, it is historical in the way it is allocated and even for those that get it, it is hard to make argue the case for more.
- 15 Therefore, we feel that we need to change the current arrangements, so that the Council becomes more specific about the outcomes what it wants and that we develop in line with ChangeUp principles
- 16 There are issues about definition. We regard core funding as being a resource provided to infrastructure organisations to enable them to support community activity in a stable way. Historically it has been provided to pay a manager’s salary or to provide a range of activities. Infrastructure organisations are defined in ChangeUp and are second line organisations which support front line organisations
- 17 Some infrastructure organisations have both front line and second line roles, which we feel is incompatible with any special relationship as core funding should not be available to subsidise contract funding or vice versa.
- 18 The capacity of infrastructure organisations, as currently configured, to support front line organisations is questioned. Larger organisations tend to do things for themselves or use national resources. Smaller organisations complain that there is lack of capacity in infrastructure organisations. This is an issue that ChangeUp seeks to deal with and the Coventry and Warwickshire Infrastructure Consortium is trying to address it locally
- 19 Core funding does not lend itself to charging overheads. It tends to be a fixed sum, which is a contribution to running costs. Core funding from the County Council might be supplemented by similar funding from the District Council and or others. The full costs of infrastructure support and whether these can be met by core funding can only be resolved though a joint approach by these funders, possibly through LSPs.
- 20 Funding inflation is a particular issue for core funding, as it is long term. The practice has been to pay inflation at RPI although with no guarantee. In practice

wage inflation is the biggest cost and this runs ahead of RPI. The position is complicated by the Council's internal rules which require a 2% efficiency saving on all budgets, This has not, so far, been passed on. If core funding is more related to outputs, inflation pressures could be considered more effectively against service levels required and accommodations reached. Therefore the issue needs to be considered carefully, with full discussion and implemented over time in line with ChangeUp

- 21 Any change in the way core funding is provided cannot assume that more money is available to meet inflation or overhead costs. Negotiation will need to take place about what can be delivered with the resources available. The aim should be, how best to maximise support for people, not how to sustain certain organisations. This could result in the sector itself seeking radical solutions - joint bidding, mergers, consortia, specialisation, charging policies, tiered levels of support etc
- 22 Our conclusion is that we should move away from the concept of core funding. Instead we move towards full cost recovery for infrastructure support services, defining the work and outcomes we require in relation to training, information, representation etc. Existing infrastructure organisations and other potential providers would be eligible to bid for the work. Whilst this would make things more competitive for infrastructure organisations it would also enable them to develop their business in less restrictive way. This is a radical solution and it will not be without potential problems, i.e. the stability of the infrastructure, the need for all infrastructure funders to agree on who pays for what and how any work that does not lend itself to outcome measurement would be funded.
- 23 In order to build initial capacity one option would be to make more general funding available for a time limited period (say three years). It could then be moved to more specific outcome focused funding.
- 24 For "low level" support an option could be to cut out the middle-man, by giving grants to community groups, which they would use to buy support from the infrastructure organisation of their choice.

Main Recommendations

1. We should invest more in enabling the VCS to compete, both within the sector itself and with the private sector. If resources allow we think that the employment of a new procurement officer (probably based in the VCS) would be a very positive step.
2. We suggest that further work needs to be done to look at standardising and simplifying as far as possible standard contracts/SLAs and tender specifications, for use by all departments and that a Compact compliant protocol should be developed for managing payments.
3. We recommend that a standing joint group be established to provide a forum on contracting/procurement issues
4. We also think there is a strong case for establishing a countywide forum at which VCS representatives could meet on an annual basis.

5. We suggest that Cabinet be asked to consider removing efficiency savings targets from VCS grants, where this applies, in order to facilitate the appropriate management arrangements for grants.
6. We should move away from the concept of core funding towards the provision of infrastructure support on the basis of full cost recovery, defining the work and outcomes we require. Given that this is a complicated issue it needs to be considered carefully with full discussion and implemented over time in line with ChangeUp.

Communication and Consultation Sub Group

The Communications sub-group comprised the following membership: Alan Bartlett – Stratford CVS (Chair), Chris Lancaster – Warwick Volunteer Centre, Ellie King WCC (Communications), John Lyons – WCC, Andrea Buckley - WCC (Secretary), Desmond Heaps.

The Group took a pragmatic approach to reviewing communications and consultation within the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) by breaking the task into four sections: to consider the:

- The County Council's community web page
- The County Council's Community Information Database (CID)
- The County Council's consultation process and the Consultation Database
- Newsletters and other WCC Publications aimed at the VCS

The group then received presentations from officers leading on the above items. These presentations were interactive and members of the sub-group were able to explore the infrastructure's strengths, limitations and then have a practical debate to suggest areas for improvements. The Recommendations, which follow are considered and presented in long term and 'quick wins'.

Recommendations

Warwickshire County Council Web Page

Improve WCC Communities www.warwickshire.gov.uk/communities page:

- Links on this page to VCS Infrastructure Agencies – CVS, Volunteer Centres/Bureaux, Warwickshire Rural Community Council, Warwickshire Assoc of Youth Clubs, Warwickshire Council for Youth Service.
- Link to the national online volunteering database "Do It"
- Restructure the page so that all VCS information is present, for example: the Warwickshire Communities Web Design Page; Community Information Database; Community Profiles and the events page.

Improve the promotion of WCC/Communities page

- Create a leaflet detailing the services which can be accessed by the VCS from the page.
- Press release once the improvements have been undertaken.

Quick Win

- Better promotion of the WCC/communities page to the VCS by the local development agencies

Community Information Database (CID)

Increase the uptake and use of CID

- Create and distribute a flyer, informing VCS groups of the benefits and the ease of registering
- Contact existing registered groups to encourage greater information to be added to their entry, as well as encouraging groups to take up other services on offer, such as free web page design and a community profile.

Quick Win

VCS infrastructure agencies to actively promote CID

Investigate the following:

- Relationship to databases such as “Up2date” for young people in Coventry and Warwickshire
- Explore CID being the only VCS database needed for the County, with the existing Borough/District and CVS bases incorporated.
- Examine possibility of using CID to inform a ‘who to consult’ database linking with the consultation database. Groups registered on CID would elect to be consulted on whichever themes they chose, which would be linked to the service they provide.
- Consider whether a corporate policy is needed around prevention of additional databases in favour of increased resources to CID.

Consultation

Improve the Consultation database:

- Under the target audience section, which includes groups such as the older peoples forum, create one for the VCS – which could contain representatives from the VCS infrastructure agencies and other groups from the ‘Who to consult list’ below.
- VCS involvement (possible from this group) on the Audit of the Consultation database scheduled for completion mid July 2005.
- Explore the possibility of linking with CID as above

Improve the consultation process generally

- Create a Compact compliant leaflet on ‘How to consult with the VCS’ to complement the leaflets for other target audiences.
- Develop a ‘who to consult’ list of VCS groups as above, for officers to consult with regarding services but also for help immediately with any improvements to how we consult.
- The External Consultation Group, which meets 4 times a year, could include a representative from the VCS. The LDA could be the reference group for this.
- To move towards consultation online as part of the e-government agenda.

Newsletters/Publications

- Undertake a survey of all the newsletters, leaflets and publications, which go to the VCS from WCC.
- Review these newsletters etc considering e-government principles to consider the use of e-mail newsletters and e-mail alerts to the WCC/Communities web page instead.
- Investigate the continued need for 5 CVS newsletters - consider rationalising these to one for the county with local inserts.

Quick win

Warwickshire View to have a space in each issue for VCS related information.

Governance and Relationships sub-group recommendations

Membership of the Governance and Relationships sub-group

The core members of the group comprised: Eva Aldridge – Rugby Volunteer Centre, Nick Gower-Johnson – WCC Education, John Lyons - WCC Chief Executive's Department, Kate Nash – WCC Chief Executive's Department, Stephen Nightingale – Warwick District CVS (Chair of subgroup), Helene Toogood – WCC Chief Executive's Department (Secretariat to group)

Additional attendees included: Jacqui Aucott – North Warwickshire CVS, Mike Bunn – WCVYS, Liz Stuart – Nuneaton & Bedworth CVS

Terms of Reference

As the VCS Strategy is based on the report Working with the VCS, the Governance and Relationships sub-group focussed mainly on section of the review report dealing with the Council's wider relationship with the VCS. The key areas for discussion were

- The key relationship between WCC, CVS and the community;
- The shape of the infrastructure, how it should be defined, the case for countywide/local provision;
- County: Area dimension – the role of Area Committees and support staff;
- Partnership working;
- The role of individual elected members and arrangements for nomination to outside bodies;
- Support other than direct funding (including accommodation, services, and training);
- How WCC ensures consistency and coherence across a range of community services including Community Development and Capacity Building;
- Volunteering.

The group identified key principles and suggested actions pertaining to these areas during a series of five meetings, and feedback to the overall Implementation group.

Main Recommendations

1. Any support other than direct funding (e.g. rent and back-office services) normally needs to be justified as a grant, although there may be some scope for providing facilities without charge.
2. The development of an Employee Volunteering Policy for WCC, and to consider the scope for extending placements and secondments etc to the VCS as a two-way process.
3. Improve consistency and coherence in the way in which WCC operates, and support partnership working to this end, thereby working to improve the VCS

and build vibrant and cohesive communities. This would include making best use of resources by partners.

4. Review the basis on which Members should be appointed to outside bodies, clarify the expectations of all involved, and the process for reporting to Council.
5. Consult as a matter of routine with the VCS during service reviews, the development of all area based strategies, and the local impact of county strategies.
6. Consider further the shape of the infrastructure, exploring options for how this might be delivered in future.

Main Discussion and Detailed Recommendations

Support other than direct funding

It was agreed that there was no such thing as a “free lunch” and generally, WCC services have to be costed and paid for. Therefore, any support other than direct funding needs to be justified as a supplementary grant. Notwithstanding this general point, in circumstances where council services are not specifically costed, then there may be some scope for providing facilities free of charge, for example meeting rooms where no cost is incurred (e.g. during normal working hours). However, this should not be the basis of our relationship. More specific arrangements are suggested below. In several cases implementation will require the development of a more detailed protocol:

Accommodation

1. Rent – it was acknowledged that WCC has to obtain market rate on all property sales and rent. It was felt that VCS organisations should not receive subsidies simply because they occupy council rather than other accommodation. The emphasis should be on the eligibility for and purpose of a grant or contract, not the accommodation occupied. Where a grant or contract is given, the use of accommodation should be reflected in the price.
2. Use of meeting rooms – both WCC and the VCS should publicise the availability of meeting rooms, and these should normally be let according to normal arrangements, whether costed or not.
3. WCC should look positively on the use of VCS accommodation with regard to the holding of Area Committees, and similar events to help facilitate public involvement.

Training

1. Raising awareness - WCC should make VCS organisations aware of its training programmes, to gauge potential interest.
2. Planning for courses – to investigate the involvement in the planning of courses, which may be of mutual benefit.
3. Places on training courses - the Council should consider making a number of places available on courses that are particularly relevant to the VCS, or where joint training would be appropriate. Consideration to be given to the basis of charging for VCS attendees, e.g. full or subsidised rate. (Protocol required).

4. Staff development/mentoring – to consider pro-bono advice and training e.g. WCC staff offering to assist as facilitators at VCS events, or providing particular expertise as appropriate.

Services

1. That WCC investigates the possibility of adding the VCS organisations onto its main contracts for procurement and utilities in order to enable the VCS to gain the advantage of discounts.
2. As with training, the council should consider the potential for VCS to access the council's support services, e.g. Legal, Payroll, IT, HR, Communications, Printing etc, although it was recognised that other than a limited amount of pro-bono support, these services are zero-budgeted and have to cover costs.

Volunteering

1. Develop an employee volunteering policy for WCC as part of the Work-Life Balance strategy, to include an allocation of time for any member of staff who is willing to provide volunteer support to the VCS (e.g. Kent County Council provide two days per annum for their staff to volunteer in the community).
2. Chief Officers be asked to consider how volunteering is promoted within departments, and to have champions to promote this.
3. To consider the scope for extending placements, secondments, project based research, mentoring and buddying, to improve the understanding of the work of the sector. This should be a two-way process.

Community development and capacity building

1. We are mindful that there is a lack of coherence in the way staff posts are established and described in both the Public and Voluntary and Community Sectors – the objective must be to improve community well-being, and therefore duplication and incoherent resourcing should be avoided. WCC and the VCS should undertake to be mindful of the consequences where resources are invested. We support the principle that partners should work together, to be better aware as to what is planned in order to avoid potential overlap.
2. We recommend the concept of local community workers groups be adopted in each area, to ensure joined up working. Terms of Reference need to be established, but the aim should be to rationalise existing arrangements as far as possible, e.g. to include local funding groups.
3. Raising the game – the VCS is keen to ensure that organisations should raise their standards and capacity appropriately. It might be helpful that where VCS organisations have dealings with WCC, they should have some sort of quality process (e.g. Quality First for small groups, or PQASSO for others) so that organisations are encouraged to be ultimately more sustainable. WCC is not just interested in supporting the VCS, but in working in partnership to improve it and build vibrant and cohesive communities. (Protocol needed.)

4. The group supports the recommendation that common community development standards are developed. The LDAF is already looking at this.

Role of individual members and arrangements for nominations to outside bodies

1. Guidance has been produced as to the responsibilities of members on voluntary bodies, and an audit undertaken of current membership. However, no review has been made of the basis on which members should be appointed to outside bodies, the expectations of individual representatives and the organisations involved, and how members should report to the Council. This role has great potential for the development of individual members' roles, but under present arrangements there are no coherent arrangements.
2. Consideration should be given to circumstances where member or officer representation would be most appropriate (this links with the Employee Volunteering strategy).

Relationship with the VCS

1. Concern was expressed about the development of separate and complex arrangements for children's services and the group were keen that these should be integrated with the generic arrangements. Local involvement of the VCS is required in the case of the Children Act.
2. Where WCC undertakes reviews of its services, it should consult with the VCS as a matter of routine, concerning their views and potential impact on the sector, e.g. ACECs, Area Committees.
3. WCC should consult the VCS on the development of all area based strategies, and the local impact of county strategies, e.g. Area Business Plans, Community Development Fund, local Learning Strategies. Particularly with regard to CDF and other grant funds aimed at supporting the community, it is important that the VCS is involved in setting priorities.
4. WCC should exert its community leadership role in promoting wider/more equitable support in addressing the funding of infrastructure organisations. That funding should wherever possible be joined up between WCC and the district/borough councils, to ensure best use of resources, and effective performance management.
5. It was felt that relationships tend to be focussed on contracts and grants but WCC needs to develop a broader relationship within the community, both in relation to its own business, and the wider partnership and governance agendas.
6. There should be a stronger link between the LDA infrastructure consortium and WCC. Notwithstanding this, WCC should not restrict its involvement with the community through this route. (Protocol to be established.)
7. The VCS is keen to see a clear relationship develop between it and the Area Committees, in order to improve community engagement with the Committees, and that any review of Area Committee roles should take this into account.
8. WCC should act as one entity in its dealings with the VCS, and investigate the best mechanism for achieving this.

Shape of the infrastructure

1. It was accepted that the over-riding principle for supporting infrastructure organisations, is that [as defined in ChangeUp] they exist to support front line organisations.
2. It was agreed that further consideration be given to the shape of the infrastructure, exploring options for how this might be delivered in future, taking into account strategic co-ordination and local service delivery.
3. The need to develop specialisms is acknowledged, at whatever level is appropriate, building on the initial steps that have already been taken. Specialist functions have to be accessible and appropriate at a local level, and recognise diversity.
4. Infrastructure organisations need to have the critical mass to be sustainable.
5. In addition to point 2 under 'Services', the organisation of support services needs to take into account efficiency and avoidance of duplication as well as cost of provision.

