



**Feasibility Study for the Development of
Bedfordshire Health and Social Care Networks**

Commissioned by The VoluntaryWorks Consortium

**Produced by Peach Consultancy
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1. Project Brief and Introduction

Local government reorganisation is an opportunity for the voluntary and community sector to refresh its relationship with local government and for it to use its experience, knowledge, skills and links with communities and users to ensure that services tackle the most deep-rooted and intractable problems in ways that will work on the ground. To do so, it must become more organised in how it discusses the key issues, and how it decides who will represent it.

Until comparatively recently there were few formal structures in Bedford Borough and Central Bedfordshire for bringing together voluntary and community sector organisations to consider the wide range of public policy issues that the sector, as a whole, needs to engage with. With the recommitment to the Local Strategic Partnership structure, and the successful introduction of a separate Voluntary Sector Assembly for both Bedford Borough and Central Bedfordshire, there is now a more coordinated approach to representation for the whole voluntary and community sector. This means that:

- public sector bodies are clearer on how they can ensure representation at meetings and events, and rely on personal contacts to ensure some degree of sector involvement;
- voluntary and community sector organisations attending key meetings are more clear on whose interests they are representing;
- there is a formal mechanism for exchanging information between voluntary and community sector representatives and the wider sector;
- there is a mechanism for the voluntary and community sector to agree (rather than the public body deciding) whom it wants to represent them at meetings;
- there is training, support and terms of reference for those representing the sector;

However it was strongly perceived by all the major infrastructure agencies operating in Bedfordshire as a whole that there remained a significant gap in the largest and one of the most important areas of voluntary and community sector service delivery: that of Health and Social Care, and that representation at some key meetings and partnerships needed to be significantly improved.

The VoluntaryWorks Consortium of infrastructure bodies commissioned Peach Consultancy to research the need and feasibility for new voluntary and community sector Adult Health and Social Care Networks for Bedford and Central Bedfordshire.

The primary purpose of the Networks would be to provide a robust mechanism for statutory and voluntary and community sector communication and engagement in relation to adult health and social care provision (including housing).

The Feasibility Study

- The first phase of the project consisted of background research into the establishment and operations of comparable networks across England.
- The second phase consisted of wide consultation with all the main statutory and voluntary sector stakeholders working in health and social care, through individual meetings and existing fora.
- The third phase consisted of the production of the Feasibility Study identifying best practice and presenting strategic options.

The main working contacts were:

Marcus Ward, Partner – Peach Consultancy

Helen Nottingham, Partnerships Officer - Voluntary and Community Action,

John Gelder, Director, Voluntary and Community Action

Martin Trinder, Director, Community and Voluntary Service

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2. Executive Summary and Options

2.1 Background

The Local Strategic Partnership structure has been operating reasonably effectively for some time in Bedford Borough and Central Bedfordshire, and the work of the Partnership Boards and delivery groups has been bolstered recently by the successful introduction of a discrete voluntary and community sector Assembly for each of both Bedford Borough and Central Bedfordshire.

However the move to Unitary status is causally linked to both an inherited position in terms of the previous poor performance of the County Council, and to some extent a lack of detailed voluntary sector knowledge or planning framework. It has also been noted by all the major infrastructure agencies operating in Bedfordshire as a whole that there remains a significant gap in representation and engagement for the largest and perhaps most important area of voluntary and community sector service delivery, i.e. Health and Social Care; and that both overall representation and engagement, and specific involvement at some key meetings and partnerships, need to be significantly improved.

The VoluntaryWorks Consortium of infrastructure bodies therefore commissioned Peach Consultancy to research the need and feasibility for new voluntary and community sector Adult Health and Social Care Networks for Bedford and Central Bedfordshire.

2.2 Existing Challenges

Firstly, any study of the voluntary and community sector (“Sector”) such as this needs to recognise that the Sector is comparatively diverse, independent and not consistently homogenous. It does not automatically work in partnership, and is latterly fearful of losing its independence, and the funding to deliver soft outcomes through highly specified EEC tendering mechanisms. The Sector fulfils a wide range of different functions including service delivery, representation, and advocacy, across the complete range of public service delivery areas, and hence the representational and engagement needs and objectives of different organisations within the voluntary and community sector can be competitive and can vary considerably between themselves, and over time.

Secondly, the statutory sector is facing a range of complex challenges, which include not just meeting Comprehensive Performance, Transformation of Services, the Personalisation of Budgets, World Class Commissioning and Wellbeing assessments amongst many major policy drivers, but also include what will be a number of years of changed political direction, and spartan Public Spending Rounds for 2011/2015.

Thirdly, the definition of the term ‘Network’ itself is equivocal and open to interpretation. It was recognised (implicitly if not explicitly) by almost all stakeholders in this study that a network is defined by what it does and achieves, rather than how it is incidentally structured.

Many participants in our study were therefore keen to identify and focus on a significant range of work yet to be undertaken in relation to co-ordinating and facilitating effective collaborative working both within the voluntary and community sector, and engagement with the statutory sector. This is particularly significant in relation to Health and Social Care, since there is also a renewed national convergence of health and social care at the strategic level, with recent Government policy increasingly focussing on joined up working wherever possible.

2.3 Representation and Engagement Needs, and Collaboration

The voluntary and community sector exists to serve its beneficiaries. This cannot be achieved without adopting a pluralistic approach to achieving change, which recognises the need for effective partnership working and for engagement with many diverse stakeholders. Part of the role of co-ordination and facilitation of collaborative working is fulfilled by local infrastructure agencies and Councils for Voluntary Action, however our study identified some clear gaps in the capacity of both individual voluntary and community sector, and overarching infrastructure agencies to fulfil these needs.

In addition to the national policy agendas, statutory agencies clearly also have responsibilities for engagement and consultation. Under National Indicator 7¹ there is a responsibility to create an “Environment for a Thriving Third Sector”. Under World Class Commissioning Competency 3² there is a responsibility to “Proactively seek and build continuous and meaningful engagement with public and patients, to shape services and improve health”. In practice statutory agencies are also required therefore to ensure effective safeguarding of their constituents, and in terms of public service delivery, (whoever is delivering it), ensure that there are robust quality assurance mechanisms, effective performance management and appropriate market and workforce development. In this sense statutory agencies have a marketplace management and ongoing capacity building role. However, again from the evidence supplied by study participants, it is clear that there are some significant areas for improvement:

The first key gap or rather theme is **‘lack of mutual understanding’**: the perception on the statutory side that some voluntary and community sector organisations did not make sufficient effort to understand statutory priorities and targets, and on the voluntary and community sector side that some statutory sector staff simply did not understand either parts or the sum of the whole of the voluntary and community sector. There is consequently something very important here about having exposure and access to shared information, and mutual appreciation of roles, responsibilities, and work.

Many respondents from both sectors also raised the question during consultation of whose agenda is being addressed. In reality effective relationships require a mutual agenda that works for all stakeholders.

¹ http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/media/346047/301480_14049_nstsouserguide_acc.pdf

² http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH_080958

The ultimate risk of having one dominant agenda, whether it's Local Strategic Partnerships, Local Area Agreement targets, or the interests of either large or small voluntary and community sector organisations, is that an imbalance of power is created, which then most probably leads to a high degree of disengagement in processes.

The second key theme is therefore in regard to **'representation and engagement'**. Despite the definitional challenges in relation to what representation means, and the fact that it is not possible to expect any one mechanism to provide on its own an effective single point of contact, it is clear *au fond* that all stakeholders do recognise the crucial value of working in partnership and across boundaries, and that **all** statutory and voluntary and community sector agencies want to be more involved with each other. The challenge quintessentially here therefore is not conceptual, but rather more architectural and systematic in terms of how one achieves having the right people (in regard to knowledge/experience), at the right place, for the right issue, at the right time.

The third key theme arising from the study is the lack of clear appreciation for **the role of smaller voluntary and community sector organisations**. These fulfil *inter alia* an embryonic and local targeting function and consequently have a vital role to play in effective service delivery. It is therefore crucial that their views are represented at the strategic level, and that they are efficiently supported by both voluntary sector infrastructure and statutory agencies to engage effectively.

A fourth key theme arising particularly from voluntary and community sector organisations is that there are a wide number of other areas where voluntary and community sector organisations working in Health and Social Care would welcome **additional capacity building support**, particularly those smaller agencies lacking core resources. These support areas include:

Communication, information dissemination, consultation, partnership working, performance improvement, training, organisational development, quality improvement, research and gathering evidence

2.4 Developing Options

Given the key themes identified above, the development options identified below therefore reflect the need to provide:

- **effective access to and dissemination of information about both the statutory and voluntary and community sector in order to improve mutual understanding, and provide better working practices and more streamlined processes**
- **facilitation and co-ordination of flexible engagement between the most appropriate persons with the right knowledge at the right time**
- **the development of a mutual agenda for representation, that also meets the needs of both statutory and voluntary and community sector capacity building**

- **a flexible and moveable approach to communication, and a range of complementary communication strategies, with different mechanisms at different times**

It is fair to say that at present there exists a strong reliance on arguably static structures and usually permanently fixed representation, which do not currently appear to meet the entire needs of either the statutory or voluntary and community sectors. It is believed that the creation of a specialist voluntary and community sector Health and Social Care Network could however proactively operate as a efficient conduit for information and representation between sectors, as well as more effectively co-ordinate and channel its own information and knowledge for dissemination both within and outside the sector.

It could also undertake a wider range of important place shaping work and projects in a broader way than just for shorter term Local Strategic Partnership target delivery. More specifically for example, the Network could also undertake a championing of Transformation within the voluntary and community sector, and possibly also perhaps in time for the Total Place Initiative.

2.5 Benefits for the Statutory Sector

The benefits of adopting these approaches for the statutory sector will be:

- a) much better and quicker access to specific groups, clients, and communities of interest
- b) more context-specific and tailored input from the voluntary and community sector
- c) better engagement with those smaller agencies who most often represent the most socially excluded and the highest need
- d) added value to existing communication and consultation processes that are already in place
- e) more effective input at each discrete stage of the commissioning cycle include the earlier stages of policy development and service design
- f) more regular and consistent partnership working between and with voluntary and community sector providers of health, social care and housing, leading to higher service delivery quality

Option 1 – Options for Change

In recognition of budgetary constraints and for comparison, the following models have been constructed on total costs broadly equivalent to the simple costs of a generic co-ordinator post plus administrative support and organisational overhead costs.

The indicative annual costs are approximately:

£26K salary for a co-ordinator post
£4K national insurance and pension
£4K administrative support
£3K network meeting costs and printed/online materials
£5K host organisation oncosts
Total £42K per annum

Option 1 – Stand Alone Network(s)

This core model suggests a full time co-ordinator post for a Health and Social Care Network only, and initially assumes that it is hosted and line-managed by an infrastructure agency, in a separate new organisation, with independent governance provided by a Board of voluntary and community sector members.

Option 2 – Network(s) run as Sub-Group of Co-ordinated Assembly

This model suggests a full time co-ordinator post for the overarching Assemblies, probably hosted and line-managed by an infrastructure agency, in a separate new organisation, again with independent governance provided by a Board of voluntary and community sector members.

However this model reinforces the existing Assembly as being very clearly at the centre of the representative and engagement model, with the Health and Social Care Network as a major sub-network, in tandem perhaps with the Voluntary Organisations for Children Young People and Families Forum .

(It is also noted here in relation either Option 1 or Option 2, that one interesting suggestion was that in order to maintain independence, the Chair of the Board could possibly come from outside the Health & Social Care sector or even from the private sector).

Option 3 –“Mutual Agenda” for Representation, Information and Engagement

External research and analysis suggests that with continuing technological advances, political and theoretical paradigm shifts, and improving understanding of the mechanisms and benefits of pluralist approaches, there will be continuing flux in the future delivery of both health and social care. Service delivery mechanisms are likely to be required to continue to change rapidly, and will consequently require flexible responses by all organisations working in these fields. A key result of this local study is to confirm that there is an immediate and ongoing need to embed flexibility and responsiveness in both communication/information methods and in terms of representative mechanisms.

This option therefore assumes a much wider, variable and adaptable offering or Agenda, focussing more on outcomes rather than a single co-ordinator structure per se. This Agenda could assume responsibility for delivering a wider range of activities covering several ideas highlighted in this study. This could still be a discrete time-limited programme of information sharing, representation and engagement; but one not perhaps over-focussed on fixed discrete structures and posts, Rather it could be a programme where a commissioned infrastructure body appointed to deliver the Agenda was purposely given a high degree of latitude to deliver flexible solutions that meet the needs of stakeholders; with the work allocated across a range of different staff at different stages in order to embed and share the work (thereby also reducing the risk of key person loss)..

These flexible solutions might for example include:

- A widely-publicised Knowledgebase or Directory role proactively seeking out, collating and providing targeted and accessible information on voluntary and community sector services, specialisms and contacts, for the benefit of both statutory and other voluntary and community sector staff.
- Undertaking Research projects on new topics of mutual interest or concern, for example how the voluntary and community sector can respond to Transformation and Personalisation.
- A direct Brokerage service for collaborative working, partnerships, mergers, and LSP representation and engagement.

A Knowledgebase or Directory for example might also enable further more detailed consideration of where the gaps in services are, and address a major statutory concern, regarding unnecessary duplication [and funding] of organisations and services.

The Mutual Agenda would reflect the changing environment over time, and although the costs would be likely to be comparable to options 1 and 2, the lead agency would have increased flexibility on how to use and allocate those resources.

It is also believed that such a Network could utilise a moveable and developing basket of communication mechanisms and channels, including new media such as real-time web based interactions, teleconferencing, podcasts, blogs and even perhaps online voting.

It is important to note here that Option 3 is to some extent overarching in its aspirations, and could arguably be delivered under Options 1 and 2, but it is the researchers' opinion that given the anticipated external environmental changes it is more likely to be effective delivered under a more flexible contract arrangement such as Option3.

3. Broad Summary Findings

3.1 Methodology

Peach Consultancy met with a wide range of voluntary and community sector organisations in both Bedford Borough and Central Bedfordshire. These included organisations both small and large, service delivery and infrastructure bodies, and organisations covering both local areas and the wider Bedfordshire area. We also met individually with Bedfordshire NHS, and both Central Bedfordshire and Bedford Borough authorities. The majority of these meetings were confidential face to face interviews with individuals, and utilised a Stakeholder Interview Template.

(See [Appendix 4](#) for full list and contact names, and for Stakeholder Interview Template).

The interviews were focussed not so much on whether a Health and Social Care Forum was necessary, as without a firm proposal this would have been pre-emptive, but rather on the challenges of existing representation and partnership work, and possible solutions to those challenges.

Peach Consultancy also cast a wide net in terms of background research on best practice in relation to networks. This is contained in [section 5](#).

3.2 Relationships with and within the Statutory and voluntary and community sector

Staff in both Local Authorities are comparatively new to post. Both start from a weak inherited position in terms of the previous poor performance of the County Council and a lack of detailed voluntary sector knowledge. Whilst it is fair to say that the statutory and voluntary and community sectors have more in common with each other, than with the private sector, as their primary purpose is to put service users at the centre of their operations, rather than follow the profit motive; interviewees from both sectors noted that there needed to be much better communications and importantly **understanding** between the two sectors.

Perhaps inevitably the Local Authorities are focussing and targeting CPA weak areas, and this gives a strong flavour to their partnership working, and in particular the Local Strategic Partnership Structures (LSPs).

It is also crucial here to note the impact on some of the Local Area Agreement Targets (LAA) of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007; with its stated aims to pass power into the hands of local communities giving real control over local decisions and services to a wider pool of active citizens. It introduced a new 'duty to promote democracy' to help councils promote involvement, extended the existing 'duty to involve' local people in key decisions, and extended the Comprehensive Area Assessment to include evaluation of the quality of public engagement.

The voluntary and community sector is also endeavouring to modernise and to address a wide range of change including best-value procurement, as well as seeking to meet the needs of the public sector, which nationally it now relies on for up to 40% of its income. (It was very concerned for example when the previous health secretary espoused NHS preferred supplier status).

It is also worth noting here the evaluation of the Department for Communities and Local Government's ("CLG") National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal (c.f. [Appendix 1](#)), which notes that the voluntary and community sector is considered to have had generally a limited impact on Local Strategic Partnership decision-making. There remains a concern that it remains stretched and under-resourced – and that new and expanding remits for Local Strategic Partnerships, such as their responsibilities for Local (and Multi-) Area Agreements, have sometimes marginalised the role of the sector.

Similar issues were identified by interviewees in our findings, in addition to the voluntary and community sector noting capacity problems and a disparity in quality between different Local Strategic Partnership themes and meetings, the statutory sector noted issues regarding attendance and the quality of voluntary and community sector representation.

One issue that became quickly apparent was that smaller groups have a particular lack of awareness/engagement with Local Strategic Partnership structures and work, and the lack of understanding in several interviewees who do reportedly attend Local Strategic Partnership meetings regarding which groups they were members of and what their status was.

3.3 Partnership Working

Some of the findings in this feasibility study could be drawn or inferred from the Darlington Case Study showed under [section 5.92](#) later. This highlights not just the value of genuine partnership working, but also the value of spending time focussing on partnership development itself (as opposed to merely assuming that it will automatically follow from establishing groups, i.e. thinking about how partnerships work rather than on day to day business operations of those partnerships).

Suffice it to say that collaborative working of any kind presents a range of challenges, and requires commitment and a range of skills being brought to bear. There are a range of 'risks' for participants, evidenced by interviewees in our study, partly around the frustrations of working with multiple agendas and partly regarding commercial advantage.

3.4 Personalisation and Transformation

In addition to legislative changes noted above, Personalisation of Budgets and Transformation of services are major policy drivers. There is a significant unresolved question mark for all stakeholders in relation to their existing roles, traditional services and the future roles of Local Strategic Partnerships and Local Area Agreements in relation to these drivers.

Both Bedford Borough and Central Bedfordshire note that they are starting from a low base, but have at least begun work and established Transformation working groups. In addition Central Bedfordshire (with Luton) have agreed to be one of the 13 pilot areas in the Total Place Initiative ([Appendix 3](#)), an interesting not-unrelated policy initiative which is influencing its view on community development and networks.

Two of the voluntary and community sector strategies advocated for addressing Transformation and Personalisation are specialisation and particularly partnership, and Communities and Local Government has put significant funding through the Modernisation Fund into supporting potential voluntary and community sector mergers and collaborative working. Whilst partnership working is not a panacea, with 160,000 charities still on the Charity Commission Register promoting merger is probably an overdue initiative. It is important however not just to cull the register, but more importantly to foster a true commitment to effective partnership working because of its intrinsic value in service delivery.

We note two additional points in relation to Bedfordshire. Firstly the number of voluntary sector organisations that are engaged with the Local Authorities Transformation Groups is very low, which lead to a perception of the work being somewhat exclusive. Secondly we note that the voluntary and community sector has adopted a somewhat passive approach to Transformation and Personalisation, and seems to be engaged in waiting to see what the statutory sector does.

3.5 Health and Social Care Together?

A number of respondents questioned whether Health and Social Care can be banded together for the purposes of collaborative working.

A small number of voluntary sector organisations and one statutory sector agency thought it may be too broad a category, and cover too many areas.

NHS Bedfordshire's view is certainly that Health and Social Care are inexorably linked in terms of cause and effect, and need to be strategically managed in unison.

The distinction between pure health and pure social care has always been to some extent an artificial construct, and an endeavour to overlap shape and form on human activity. It is however entirely necessary for organisations to work together across boundaries on an operational level for effective signposting and delivery. Indeed many voluntary and community sector groups do not classify themselves or consider their clients needs with a distinction between health and social care.

It is interesting to note that the Communities and Local Government's Local Strategic Partnership Unit collect no data on Local Strategic Partnership categorisation and names, but it seems clear on an experiential level that most Local Strategic Partnerships are happy with a combined Health & Wellbeing partnership.

There is also a renewed national convergence of health and social care at the strategic level. Recent Government policy has increasingly focused on joining up health and social care services. Policy developments, combined with public spending cuts, are probably likely to accelerate that development. There are also significant opportunities for more joined up services due to the creation of a National Care Service, and joint regulation by the Care Quality Commission.

The Health & Wellbeing Forum for LB Lambeth certainly noted that they felt that there are many shared values and voluntary and community sector working practices that apply to all organisations providing different services with their Health and Wellbeing Forum (see [section 5.6](#)).

One interview respondent also noted that with a changing framework of statutory organisations in which the trend again seems to be enlargement, e.g. Primary Care Trusts now merging, it is important to have a larger voluntary and community sector structure which meets that framework, and enables voluntary and community sector organisations to influence the agenda.

It is clear that some voluntary and community sector groups interviewed were already members of more specialist networks, e.g. Bedford Advice Forum, the local Advocacy Network and the local Mental Health Forum. A broad overarching classification does not necessarily however pre-empt the existence of the sub-networks that clearly several respondents greatly value.

Whilst a voluntary and community sector network does not necessarily need to match an Local Strategic Partnership structure, our view is that as Health & Social Care are increasingly strategically managed together, there are advantages to the respective voluntary and community sector being 'represented' and informed together. Managing scale is after all often simply a management question.

3.6 Purpose of Network

Interviewees were presented with a listed range of possible aspirational purposes for an H&SC network including:

support, communication, representation, dissemination, consultation, partnership working, performance, training, capacity building, organisational development, quality, research, feedback, experience, evidence

Some of the doubts expressed in relation to a 'network' related to how it might operate rather than necessarily questioning its purpose. There is great concern, and many comments regarding capacity to engage, and of the variable quality and value of meetings, and as one respondent noted, with senior management in attendance, meetings are then an expensive occupation.

Respondents clearly recognised a need for some proactive joint voluntary and community sector activity and co-ordination; they recognised a need and purposes for some activity, but not a 'meeting' per se. We therefore felt it necessary to re-iterate during interviews that a network does not necessarily mean or equate to meeting attendance.

There was also quite detailed discussion of the listed purposes, with some respondents noting that some of the purposes, such as capacity building, were they felt, the exclusive remit of the infrastructure agencies.

There were however two constants. **The first constant was access to and dissemination of information.** It is clear that both statutory and voluntary and community sector organisations want to both give and receive information regarding a whole range of issues, both strategic and operational, and at different levels and times. Essentially all groups agree that they want the relevant information for them at the right time. The question remains what are the most effective mechanisms for achieving that, and as discussed below and in [sections 4.3 & 4.81](#), this essentially revolves perhaps around a commitment to using a variety or basket of communication channels and techniques, rather than over-relying on one strategy.

It has to be said that it was not always the case that organisations seemed to fully appreciate the benefits to their users of the seamless movement of information between organisations, and that there often seemed to be a high degree of self-dependence.

3.7 Representation (and Engagement)

The second constant identified by respondents was representation. However it was noted that there were a number of problems and several diverging views in relation to defining and/or agreeing representation.

Views of representation also differed to some extent between the statutory and voluntary and community sector, with definitions partly coloured by own priorities; and indeed within sectors, for example it is notable that the vast majority of Voluntary Organisations for Children Young People and Families Local Strategic Partnership representatives are from commissioned organisations.

The voluntary and community sector is complex, and is not endemically a homogenous grouping. Organisations can specialise in campaigning, information, public service delivery, social gap filling, or be involved in all of these, even at the same time.

Simultaneously, statutory agencies may want voluntary and community sector organisations to be engaged at different levels in strategic service design, strategic and market management, user consultation and feedback, service delivery, and scrutiny. Again individual organisations may be involved in all of these. This can create a tension in terms of which hat or role an organisation is (re-)presenting on which occasion.

This tension can also be expressed in the way that some voluntary and community sector organisations were clear that a network should not be for “what is the voice of the voluntary sector”, whilst statutory agencies were conversely looking on occasion for a single point of contact with the voluntary sector.

One of the residual difficulties here is how ‘much’ experience does a representative bring to bear? Who are they representing: a user, themselves, their organisation, a specialist cluster, or the whole of the voluntary and community sector?

To some extent this definition challenge becomes marginally clearer where there has been prior focus on partnership development (e.g. the Darlington example), and where terms of reference have been clearly negotiated. But as with most potential conflicts of interest, this is ongoing and simply needs to be managed.

The useful Communities and Local Government / NAVCA Principles of Representation³ (see [Appendix 2](#)) do also address some of these tensions:

“There may be occasions when it is appropriate for people from the voluntary and community sector to be involved in partnerships or other forums, but not to be representing the sector [or indeed sub-groups], for example:

- where they are invited as a provider with expertise in a particular area of service delivery;
- where there is a need to get the views of under-represented groups whose voices often go unheard; or
- where a voluntary and community sector view is needed. This is similar to the role of a parent governor in a school, where there is no requirement to represent the views of all parents, but simply to put forward a parent’s perspective.

The above principles suggest that in these circumstances it is important to clarify the difference by referring to voluntary and community sector ‘participants’, rather than representatives.

It perhaps also needs to be remembered that membership of, and representation by a network does not necessarily remove or impinge organisations or individuals right to engage directly one to one, whether for financial or other purposes including to influence service design and delivery.

³ Principles of representation: A framework for effective Voluntary and Community Sector representation in Local Strategic Partnerships – NAVCA and Communities and Local Government - 2007

There is however something very important in all this which is a separate question to conflict of interest, something more about time, place and opportunity; **perhaps best expressed as having the right people (in regard to knowledge/experience), at the right meeting, for the right issue, at the right time. This strongly suggests the need for a flexible approach and a range of strategies, and the use of different mechanisms at different times, rather than sole reliance on static structures and permanently fixed representation.**

3.8 Lack of understanding

A key theme from respondents concerned mutual understanding (which is also a prerequisite to effective partnership working discussed earlier).

One voluntary and community sector respondent noted that “commissioners don’t understand us, they don’t realise quite how much the statutory sector is being buoyed up by voluntary sector delivery”.

On the other hand, Statutory respondents noted that they felt some voluntary and community sector agencies engaged in “banging a drum” (re funding), without understanding the target pressures statutory managers were under.

Another voluntary and community sector respondent noted that an insufficient range of statutory staff are aware of what their organisation can do, but the organisation does not have the resources to make its services better known. This is a point mirrored by statutory agencies; that they don’t know what services are out there. This is a crucial point for commissioners, as expectations on commissioners to managing their local marketplace are increasing, which is almost impossible without accurate market information.

There is an important potential role here either for infrastructure agencies, or for generic broad networks such as a Health and Social Care Network, that instead of relying on the Local Strategic Partnership structure, with its focus on Local Area Agreement targets, the voluntary sector proactively channels its own information and knowledge both ways, (whilst also managing the commensurate representation role). This could include regular mapping exercises, providing a Directory Service, and brokering representation and engagement in a much broader way than just for Local Strategic Partnership target delivery.

To some extent the Statutory sector is saying that it needs a brokering service for a range of different purposes; not the same people or usual suspects, but rather again the right people, right place, right time, right issue.

This is something the voluntary and community sector also aspires to. No-one wants to spend time on unnecessary meetings. Developing collective ‘whole’ voluntary and community sector views seems to be a minor subset issue and probably something of a chimera, the Voluntary and Community also wants flexible engagement.

For the last 25 years or so the voluntary sector has been demanding a seat at the table of service design, that is now very much on offer provided the voluntary and community sector can manage its capacity. So a mapping and brokerage service could be as much for the voluntary and community sector's benefit as it is for the statutory sector.

Fulfilling this function does however require ongoing commitment, excellent data management systems and databases, networking and knowledge management. It may not be 'mainstreaming' in financial terms but it is certainly in the other sense 'mainstreaming the voluntary and community sector's experience'.

3.9 The Role and Support of Smaller voluntary and community sector

One of the areas perhaps indicative of commissioners' lack of knowledge of the voluntary sector is in the area of smaller voluntary and community sector organisations. With a focus on public service delivery at a modicum scale of contract, the statutory agencies may be interested in "micro-providers" and "user-led groups", but are not perhaps aware of their real delivery rather than consultative value.

The Voluntary Organisations for Children and Young People Forum's ("VOCyfp") co-ordinator also notes that small charity engagement in the VOC network can be low, particularly where there is a lack of capacity. The VOC network is acknowledged by her to be most effective at engaging with medium and large organisations, and less effective with small groups and faith groups.

Support for smaller organisations is certainly an area of infrastructure focus, but it is probably an area of need that has not been articulated very well and where the business case has not been made. Again here there is a potential role for an Health and Social Care Network to nurture, publicise and broker the role of smaller voluntary and community sector organisations, i.e. that :

- They contribute immensely to local health and wellbeing
- They have unique local knowledge and see things that larger organisations don't
- They have an ability to reach "hard to reach" targets through "informality" and perceived independence
- Large charities need them for partnership at the local level
- They are the contractors (or subcontractors) of the future
- They represent and provide evidence of diversity.
- They find it easier to innovate because they are not restricted by the more complex organisational mechanisms in larger organisations.
- They provide local jobs for local people
- They very often provide pathways into employment through volunteering (often for longer-term unemployed)
- Often rely on voluntary income and not contract income, so 'cost effective'

In a way this also goes to the heart of engagement and representation. One statutory agency noted that they were sensitive to some of the larger providers and struggle with the notion of a large 'bundle' of voluntary and community sector 'suppliers' coming together. The use of the word suppliers is interesting, as it implies an understanding of a Forum as predominantly for current public sector contractors or Local Strategic Partnership representatives. It is interesting to note contextually here that whilst that the majority of VOCypf members are not commissioned agencies, almost all their LSP representatives are from commissioned agencies.

There is an existing real dynamic of competition within the voluntary and community sector rarely fully appreciated by the statutory sector, and that sometimes the larger organisations overpower the smaller agencies who don't have the capacity to either compete for resources or 'compete as a representative'. The representation then becomes one-sized and self-fulfilling, which unfortunately does not benefit the statutory sector in terms of understanding local provision and achieving genuine diversity.

This also ties in with Community Development Expert, Alison Gilchrist's notion of the risk of "fossilising" representation, when in essence representation perhaps needs to remain a fluid activity. She notes that in her research on Community Empowerment Networks ([section 5.8](#)) there was evidence of "Power Problems", particularly in relation to dealing with 'elite' organisations displaying exclusive behaviour. It is also consequently not surprising that small organisations ability to influence is limited unless concerted.

It is also the case that quite apart from competitive concerns, large voluntary and community sector organisations also sometimes do not value the role of smaller organisations, (which in the current climate is likely to include being very useful sub-contractors under Transformation and Personalisation).

Conversely the Housing Associations were however very keen to know what the voluntary and community sector does, but found it hard to access concise accurate information. This potential voluntary and community sector internal infrastructure brokerage role is another element that could be fulfilled more proactively either by infrastructure agencies or an H&SC Network.

3.91 Role of Infrastructure Bodies – A New Agenda

Clearly there are some very important longer-term ramifications for infrastructure agencies to consider. The issues appear rather more complicated than earmarking a "co-ordinator" post to address the challenges.

When the needs of small organisations were raised for example, some statutory sector respondents thought it was the role of infrastructure bodies and the CVSs to foster small charities, but they confirmed in reality that it was unlikely to be an explicit contractual part of their service level agreements with CVSs.

Infrastructure bodies may want to rethink their overall 'offer' and design a more sophisticated agenda of communication and representation, and embed this within their existing work with the statutory and voluntary and community sectors. Providing a 'flexible agenda' of representation and information, responsive to a range of changes over the coming years may be a more attractive offer to potential funders than a simple network, as it would arguably address outcomes more clearly than structures.

3.92 Joined Up Working

It is clear that almost all the voluntary and community sector respondents would prefer a Pan-Bedfordshire Network. This would reduce duplication of meetings, deliver economies of scale, and reflect the nature of NHS Beds and many cross-boundary voluntary and community sector organisation.

However it is clear that there is little appetite amongst statutory colleagues for a Pan-Bedfordshire network, as each local authority has its own priorities and development plans.

One statutory agency noted that the Adult Safeguarding Board does in fact cover Bedfordshire, but while they might still commission some services jointly, these will be the exception. They have a practical sympathy with those organisations having to replicate attendance, but are very clear that they need to focus on their own area, with their own demographics and different directions.

3.93 Communication

Given the issues that respondents raised in relation to meetings, communication, and reaching the right groups, it seems evident that there is a need for a multiplicity of communication channels to make progress in any of these spheres.

To have specialised knowledge available at the right place at the right time is vital for both voluntary and community sector and statutory sector interests.

It is therefore considered advisable for any programme to focus on using a basket of communication mechanisms and channels including face to face activity, standard electronic means such as emails and newsletters, the possibility of undertaking electronic surveys and possibly voting on major or minor issues, pod cast (by the Chair/co-ordinator), and information flows tailored to the recipients actual interests (preferences) in the way that commercial websites often do. (However it should always be remembered that there are limitations to virtual electronic networks, in being more difficult to be owned by members and stakeholders.)

OPTIONS

In recognition of budgetary constraints and for comparison, the models have been constructed on total costs broadly equivalent to the simple costs of a generic co-ordinator post plus administrative support and organisational overhead costs.

The indicative annual costs are approximately:

£26K salary for a co-ordinator post
£4K national insurance and pension
£4K administrative support
£3K network meeting costs and printed/online materials
£5K host organisation oncosts
Total £42K per annum

It should be recognised that at present the potential funding picture is not clear, and that three separate statutory agencies may be involved in funding one or more networks or models to different degrees.

It should also be recognised that the Governance arrangement for each of these options could be varied ranging from entirely independent new organisations (whether hosted or not for line-management purposes), through to programmes entirely hosted and owned by one or more infrastructure bodies (perhaps with independent advisory or scrutiny boards).

Option 1 – Stand Alone Network(s)

This core model calls for a full time co-ordinator post for a H&SC Network only, and initially assumes that it is hosted and line-managed by an infrastructure agency, in a separate new organisation, with independent governance provided by a Board of voluntary and community sector trustees, and an independent Chair (possibly from outside the Health & Social Care sector or from the private sector).

This role would primarily focus on co-ordinating representation on the relevant Local Strategic Partnership boards and groups, in addition to being responsible for orchestrating the collection and dissemination of all relevant information relating to these Boards. This option provides a very clear and discrete focus on Health & Social Care issues in relation to the Local Strategic Partnerships.

For an example of a “stand alone representative H&SC network model”, see the examples of **Hertfordshire Forward** and **Lambeth Health & Wellbeing Forum** in [sections 5.6 and 5.7](#).

Please also see attached the comparable job description and person specification for the **Voluntary Organisations for Children Young People and Families Forum co-ordinator** post, [Appendix 5](#).

Option 2 – Network(s) run as Sub-Group of Co-ordinated Assembly

This model calls for a full time co-ordinator post for the overarching Assemblies, probably hosted and line-managed by an infrastructure agency, in a separate new organisation, with independent governance provided by a Board of voluntary and community sector trustees, and an independent Chair (possibly from outside the Health and Social Care sector or from the private sector).

This model places the Assembly very clearly at the centre of the representative model with the Health and Social Care Network as a sub-network.

This model could also incorporate the Voluntary Organisations Children Young People and Families Forum (“VOCypf”) as a second major sub-network. This is relevant because of the ‘Think Families’ Agenda, (see [Appendix 3](#)), which stresses the major role that families play in almost every area of CYP development and provision, and confirms that the discrete relationship between childrens’ and adult services is now being revisited. (The VOCypf co-ordinator’s opinion is therefore that the VOCypf and a Health and Social Care Network should be very closely, if not structurally linked). In addition it is fair to recognise that the representation and information mechanisms, and the co-ordinator skills base and experience for running either a VOCypf or an Health and Social Care Network are likely to be very similar.

In addition to common activities and skills base, given that each CVS is already committed to delivering an Assembly, there would be likely to be economies of scale in co-ordinated activity across all Local Strategic Partnership streams

However this would provide a much wider focus of activity to Option 1, in which limited resources were stretched across many Local Strategic Partnership areas of service delivery, and Health and Social Care issues would be likely to be a more limited sub-set. Unless there were a reallocation or sharing of existing VOCypf resources, this could be a more expensive model.

For an example of a comprehensive “overarching representative model” see the example of **Reading Stronger Together** in [section 5.91](#).

Option 3 –“Mutual Agenda” for Representation, Information and Engagement

External analysis suggests that the future in health and social care is inherently uncertain, needs and service delivery are likely to continue to change rapidly, and will require flexible responses by organisations working in these fields.

This study reflects this analysis in its key theme that for both the voluntary and community sector and the statutory sector there is a need to embed flexibility and responsiveness in both communication/information methods and in terms of representative need. NHS Bedfordshire for example noted that they wanted continuous and varied engagement, and as broad a swathe of people to input as necessary and possible.

This option therefore assumes a much wider, variable and adaptable offering, focussing more on outcomes rather than a co-ordinator post.

Many stakeholders from both sectors also raised the question during consultation of whose agenda is being addressed. In reality it probably needs to be a mutual agenda that works for all stakeholders. The ultimate risk of having one dominant agenda, whether it's Local Strategic Partnerships, Local Area Agreement targets, or the interests of either large or small organisations, is that there is an imbalance of power and then most probably a high degree of disengagement in processes.

However putting time into focussing on and regular re-assessments of a Mutual Agenda is considered to be likely to lead to more effective partnership work overall, greater inclusion and more successful and relevant engagement with Local Strategic Partnerships.

The idea of a Mutual Agenda programme also potentially mitigates the risk of all information residing in one key person.

This Agenda could assume responsibility for delivering a wider range of activities covering several ideas highlighted earlier in this study. This would be a discrete programme of representation, information and engagement; not primarily based on fixed discrete structures and posts, but rather where the appointed infrastructure body appointed to deliver the programme was purposely given a high degree of latitude to deliver flexible solutions that meet the needs of stakeholders, and the work was allocated across a range of different staff at different stages in order to embed and share the work.

This might for example include:

- A Directory role providing targeted information on voluntary and community sector delivery and contacts for the benefit of both statutory and other voluntary and community sector staff.
- Research or campaign projects on new topics, for example how the voluntary and community sector is responding to Transformation and Personalisation.
- Brokerage service for collaborative working, partnerships and mergers.

It would reflect the changing environment over time, and although the costs would be comparable to options 1 and 2, the lead agency would have flexibility on how to use and allocate those resources.

This could be tied in with a commitment to using a wide and changing range of flexible communication channels as discussed earlier: as we don't know what next years "tweet" will be, this might be the most flexible option.

For a tangential example of a "more fluid representative model" see the example of **The Care Forum** in the [section 5.5](#). The Care Forum uniquely manages a flexible range of different health and social care networks for voluntary and community groups in different authority areas in the Bristol area in addition to undertaken a range of social enterprise activities.

4. Stakeholder Interview Findings

4.1 Communications and Relationship Between the Statutory and voluntary and community sectors

Several interviewees from both sectors note that there needed to be better communications and empathy between the two sectors.

For example, Central Bedfordshire noted that prior to the unitary split, there was no planning framework for working with the voluntary and community sector, and no real history of collaboration or engagement either within or between the statutory and voluntary and community sectors. There is now a very new relationship since January last year, but very little information has been inherited regarding the voluntary and community sector from the previous County Council. They are aware that Voluntary and Community Action have undertaken some voluntary and community sector mapping which they would be pleased to see. They describe their relationship with the voluntary and community sector as being on a journey together, but they suspect strongly that the structures currently in existence won't survive. They have for example largely disinvested from the VOCyfp.

One or two organisations also noted that the working relationship between the Local Authorities and NHS Bedfordshire could be greatly improved. One statutory sector respondent noted relationships within the statutory sector are mixed; while they are improving in relation to partnership, commissioning and delivery, in relation to communication and engagement they are still weak.

The statutory sector was sometimes perceived to be unresponsive to identified need, overly-bureaucratic and process orientated. They could have 'tunnel vision' or "they simply don't realise that we [voluntary and community sector] do anything the statutory sector can't or won't do" and working with them could be like "walking through sludge".

Additional problems cited include key statutory personnel moving, the extensive use of interim staff, and changing structures. In addition some voluntary and community sector organisations perceive (not entirely incorrectly) that they may be regarded as being unprofessional by the statutory sector.

It was stated that political "infighting" by politicians wanting control of decision-making made life difficult for statutory staff to the extent where it could be difficult for them to operate.

Several voluntary and community sector respondents felt that they had good robust relationships with the statutory sector, even if one or two thought these may have been diluted by the unitary split.

Others thought that there was greater awareness of the needs of the voluntary and community sector since the split. "It takes 2 to tango in communications", cited one interviewee, noting that a meeting arranged to discuss more relaxed eligibility for social care assessment, was only attended by two voluntary and community sector organisations.

He anticipates that if eligibility criteria had been raised, the attendance would probably have been significantly higher. This raises the important point that effective communications and relationships are two-way interactions, that rely on talking, listening, understanding, trust and action; and of course realistic expectations. **Communications based just on one way traffic are always likely to fail.**

There is mutuality here, as one interviewee noted, “the voluntary and community sector needs commitment from the statutory sector that it will listen, and the quid pro quo is that the voluntary and community sector will avoid batting for its own interest”.

A key theme was 'understanding': the perception on the statutory side that some voluntary and community sector organisations did not make sufficient effort to understand statutory priorities and targets, and that some statutory sector staff simply did not understand either parts or the whole voluntary sector. Linked to this were the mirrored struggles firstly for the voluntary and community sector to understand what are perceived sometimes to be monolithic statutory structures, and for the statutory sector to be able to fulfil its desire to communicate effectively with a diverse voluntary sector.

One interviewee noted that it was proving difficult to persuade the statutory sector that the voluntary and community sector is actually listening. It was recognised that the statutory sector has its own specific pressures and agenda, and that sometimes these meet with the voluntary and community sector' agenda, but as one respondent noted “it's the difference in SCALE that gets in the way” [of understanding].

The housing associations felt that they were effectively both in and out of the voluntary and community sector because they were statutorily funded by Housing Grant, but are also independent of the statutory sector, whilst also constitutionally being much larger Industrial and Provident societies rather than most charities. They are often part of regional housing networks and attend some Local Strategic Partnerships as well as the separate the Housing Partnership Board which they perceive to be more development focussed than the Local Strategic Partnerships.

4.2 Local Strategic Partnerships

Many of the groups interviewed had places on and regularly attended either Thematic Boards or Delivery Partnerships. Several attended partnership meetings for both Bedford Borough and Central Bedfordshire.

It was widely recognised that many of the partnerships are in their infancy, and are still developing. There was recognition by the statutory sector that some operate more effectively than others.

The statutory intention is clearly for the Boards to be decision making forums, with clear workplans, and thereby valuable to attend. Some, particularly the delivery groups, were cited as being very good sources of information. One statutory respondent noted they found the thematic delivery boards more effective than the Local Strategic Partnerships, partly because the Local Strategic Partnerships were perhaps too focussed on more global social care targets.

However there were criticisms that they could be talking shops, or opportunities for statutory agencies to merely detail their own work, and describe their pre-worked plans, rather than genuine forums for discussion and improvement in policy and delivery. This was not uniform, and some respondents felt that they had a definite opportunity to input into strategy. (Although one organisation noted that whilst it was happy to be dictated to on policy, it was not happy to be dictated to on delivery where it felt that it had greater client knowledge than the statutory sector). More than one respondent commented that partnership boards could be very targets driven, with much technical statutory language that could make it difficult or even “daunting” to contribute or challenge.

It was sometimes commented that the partnerships often have the “usual suspects”, rather than the right organisations present. **The challenge to have the correct organisations present at the right meeting is a key theme.** It was also noted that the quality and continuity of statutory staff attending could be variable.

For those organisations which work cross-boundary, there is the frustration of an increased number of meetings to attend, that they may hear the same things at different Local Strategic Partnerships meetings, and that they have to (re-)present their own information several times, but nonetheless they did have the definite opportunity to input into strategy. Central Bedfordshire also noted for context that there were originally three Local Strategic Partnerships at district level plus the main Local Strategic Partnership!

4.3 Communication and Relationship within the voluntary and community sector

Representation and communication was identified as a major issue for the voluntary and community sector to address.

This is partly again about understanding, the voluntary and community sector is diverse and to be forthright many voluntary and community sector organisations do not know what most other voluntary and community sector organisations deliver. Other comments included that the voluntary and community sector is too passive and dormant in its communication strategies, and that its communication strategy is generally very weak.

Some larger organisations felt that communication from the CVSs needed to be improved, was not targeted enough, and that their own organisation received superior information directly from senior council staff. **The role of the infrastructure and the CVS is a key theme.** (One organisation also commented that the infrastructure agencies don't like being challenged on the effectiveness of their equality and inclusion).

Many groups are very keen to avoid duplication, whether in services or indeed in their communications and networking, and it was noted that Bedford CVS has an excellent chief officers' group.

Smaller organisations struggle for capacity around engagement, and interestingly one former federated local charity, which was now a local branch of a single combined national organisation noted how this had both had an adverse effect on their resources, and that the national operation had lost some local focus.

Some groups noted that the voluntary and community sector can be overly protective in relation to boundaries, and that relationships often depend on individual personalities. Some organisations would in effect benefit from working less exclusively, downwards and across as well as upwards, **a kind of “cats cradle” networking strategy.**

The Housing Associations in particular would like more contact with Health and Social Care Providers given the range of their work. One said that they may be prepared to contribute to a network if they saw value in the proposal.

4.4 Current Challenges & Priorities

4.4.1 Statutory Sector

It was noted that when Bedfordshire County Council existed, there was a distinct absence of a statutory performance management culture, poor safeguarding practice, weak data recording and poor reporting, and a lack of competence and confidence.

Both unitaries are beginning to address Transformation and Personalisation, through Transformation Boards with some voluntary and community sector representation, but believe they are probably behind overall national progress. [Although it should be noted that there is merit in taking a gradual approach as the earliest adopters may not necessarily be delivering good practice results].

For Bedford Borough, Local Area Agreement 130 (Social care clients receiving Self Directed Support per 100000 population) and 135 (Carers receiving needs assessment or review and a specific carer's service, or advice and information) are key targets.

Central Bedfordshire note that they inherited a low start regarding Personalisation: they do not yet have their own RAS (Resource Allocation System), and so are using an existing unit costing system. The vision Central Bedfordshire will be asking people to sign up to is not just personalisation, it's the wider transformation of services and people's lives. They are currently running a pilot for personal health budgets. Whilst they are behind other authorities, they are also learning from what other authorities have experienced, e.g. the involvement of user groups such as the Disability Rights Centre.

They calculate that 50% of people in Central Bedfordshire are potential self-funders, so access to information and advice will be key. They note that Disability Resources Centre and Age Concern have excellent information services. The authority needs to manage the market, but this is difficult when they don't know what individuals will choose.

In addition it is recognised that overall funding and the Public Spending Round 2011/2012 will be extremely challenging.

Statutory agencies note a mixed relationship with the voluntary and community sector, with the perception that some voluntary and community sector organisations are hanging on to historic ways of working, and there is an over-reliance sometimes on 'banging the drum' with a critical message about what the statutory sector has failed to do. Under the County Council there was no clear strategy for voluntary and community sector funding, with at least 5 different Local Authority funding streams which did not interrelate with each other. In addition the contract management element of this funding was poor.

NHS Bedfordshire freely acknowledged that it has limited engagement with voluntary and community sector organisations. It does use the LINKs, which it regards (apart from their scrutiny role) as often being effective for engaging with individuals rather than organisations (which the Local Strategic Partnerships are better designed for). It feels that the CVSs and infrastructure bodies could perhaps be more of a gateway than they are.

Bedford Borough is now adopting the voluntary and community sector contract standards proposed by ADASS. Adult Services holds the adult services grants programme. These will henceforth be for specific and identifiable purposes under Service Level Agreements, with clear project management. This means that the Borough will benefit from being clear what it is funding and purchasing and why. For the voluntary and community sector the benefit will be that the process will be more transparent, and voluntary and community sector organisations will be clearer about what and how they are being measured. This will essentially be focussed on national service frameworks, and the objectives of the Local Strategic Partnership and Local Area Agreement.

Due to anticipated budgetary constraints, the Borough will be looking for efficiencies, evidence of benefit and for identifiable outcomes.

Bedford Borough has a 100% commitment to partnership. They are committed to promoting local providers, and now for example have a Provider Forum.

There initial view is that the CVSs should probably support smaller charities, [but this is not defined contractually].

Bedford Borough would like a greater awareness in the voluntary and community sector that the Local Authority is being measured by outcomes, and to understand how they fit into the boards and partnerships, and how these work together.

Their interest in a Health & Social Care Network centres on improving communication, co-ordination, and information sharing. They believe however that the voluntary and community sector could also use its existing capacity more effectively.

4.4.2 Voluntary and Community Sector

The voluntary and community sector interviewees identified a number of issues facing the voluntary sector.

Chief amongst these were the challenge presented in reconfiguring services for personalised budgets. It was also noted that the public sector spending round in 2011/12 would impact significantly on the voluntary sector, as had the recession which precedes it.

A number of organisations also noted their concerns regarding procurement and tendering, and more recently in relation to the debate regarding NHS Preferred providers and the favouring of larger suppliers in some central government programmes. Many voluntary and community sector organisations value their independence and were fearful of becoming sub-contractors.

Another challenge identified is that the voluntary and community sector has not historically been uniformly good at articulating outcomes. This is clearly a key issue under World Class Commissioning, but nonetheless one that can be hard to quantify for soft outcomes and for either universal or preventative work.

It was also noted that larger organisations have the infrastructure capacity to take a more strategic approach to new developments and engagement. Smaller organisations tend to focus on their more immediate issues, sometimes to their strategic detriment. **This difference between small and large organisation is a key theme.** For example small local groups tend to favour face to face contact, and often don't operate in a global world.

In addition it was noted that elements of the voluntary and community sector could be quite "silo'd" with agencies defending their niche, but also that now was likely to be a "poor time to be selfish". ConsortiCo was noted as an interesting development, but of course it was also noted that many of the small groups who need it most are not able to join it because of the entry criteria on turnover.

In all of this, again the message was re-iterated that groups want to avoid duplication in their networks and information sources, whilst also maintaining good links with commissioners at the strategic level and statutory staff at operational levels.

4.5 Partnerships

The response of interviewees to partnership working was somewhat mixed. Whilst all engage in collaborative working at either a strategic or operational level or both, there was clear recognition that partnership working is challenging, and not a panacea for the majority of challenges faced by an organisation.

Some organisations thought that partnership working was paramount to their operations, effective service delivery and the success of their client groups; although this was not a universal recognition: as noted above we saw a surprisingly high element of self-reliance.

Some interviewees placed more importance on individual relationships, "we don't do partnerships for partnerships sake" or believe that "real successes come from people at the top saying lets do this, sometimes in spite of co-ordinator posts".

As Central Bedfordshire noted, the definition of what different parts of the sector mean by partnership is challenging and open to interpretation.

4.6 Identified Need for a Network in Health & Social Care

The identified need for a network varied considerably. It is clear that most infrastructure organisations and some voluntary and community sector organisations thought that having a network was important. It is also clear that Bedford Borough and NHS Bedfordshire broadly supported a network. However some of the larger voluntary and community sector organisations and Central Bedfordshire expressed doubt as to the purpose of a network.

Two challenges here were therefore identifying a common purpose or purposes, and the second was the definition of the word network, which for some implied simply (and adversely) another meeting.

Interviewees were given a list of possible purposes that a network could fulfil and were asked to identify where they thought there was most need. The list was aspirational and very broad: *support, communication, representation, dissemination, consultation, partnership working, performance, training, capacity building, organisational development, quality, research, feedback, experience, evidence.*

Some thought all the listed purposes would be useful, but were unclear on an appropriate structure or architecture. Some groups thought that a network could help to deliver core minimum standards e.g. Criminal Records Board checks, safeguarding and signposting, even for organisations that don't want to engage in contracting. A wider agenda could still allow for training on how to influence policy and share good practice.

There was a degree of variation but the real constants were **representation**, dissemination (of information) and also to some extent a wider sense of engagement/involvement/influence, incorporating words like communication, consultation, and feedback. However many interviewees also had concerns regarding the definition of the word representation. **These were all key themes.**

4.6.1 A Meeting

Comments such as “we need another meeting like a hole in the head” were fairly common, and some objected to the possible concept that talking and communication could be equated with effective action. There were concerns regarding adding another layer or level of meeting that may confuse people or that it might be bolted on to an already heavy meeting structure.

It was also noted that most such meetings are an expensive activity for everyone, because they invariably involve senior managers' time.

4.6.2 Joined up Working/Avoiding Duplication

An important factor for many was the desire to work more closely with other voluntary and community sector organisations, for a whole host of reasons including efficiency, effectiveness and avoiding duplication. “The voluntary and community sector needs to be sure it is not filling the gaps already provided by other voluntary and community sector organisation through greater awareness of what is on offer”.

This is closely linked with the desire to find out more about where there are statutory sector gaps in knowledge, and work to fill these gaps in intelligence and potentially delivery. There is a traditional model of the voluntary and community sector which argues that this was and remains the primary function of the voluntary and community sector, i.e. to fill the gaps in statutory services, although most commentators agree that this somewhat simplistic view does not recognise the complexity of need, or the effectiveness of multi faceted approaches to addressing that need. However it is probably fair to say that it is one of the most important roles of voluntary to support service users to have a voice.

There was also some discussion regarding how a network might fit with the new Assemblies and with the VOCyph.

4.6.3 Representation

It was noted that different organisation in the voluntary and community sector can have very different cultures, ethos, and *modus operandii*. Another respondent questioned whether one person could in reality represent 6000 others, or 60 others or even 6 others. The question here becomes what are they representing, a homogenous voluntary and community sector overarching view, a collective view of specialists' organisations working in a particular field, a majority view of these, or individual concerns and interests?

One respondent noted that it was a "big ask" for 2 or 3 people to go into a Local Strategic Partnership and represent disability, even within the disability sector. One statutory agency also noted that they wanted to work with a wide range of user-led groups, and that they don't necessarily favour super-representation, and would prefer a wider engagement.

Hence it is very difficult, except in circumstances where a proposal clearly affected the whole of the voluntary and community sector, e.g. a global funding formula, to formulate the "voice of the voluntary sector".

For the same reasons it is not possible to expect any one mechanism to provide a single point of contact for the statutory sector. In reality we know that any new development and change varies in its potential scope and effect, and can impact on an individual, a group, a community, and all in different ways.

It was also noted that "representation is only useful if someone was listening", but also that strength in numbers was also an important negotiatory factor in relation to representation.

Central Bedfordshire is mindful of the needs of large providers and feel that the notion of a large 'bundle' of voluntary and community sector suppliers coming together may be problematic. A representative model such as a network may not work. Given the Transformation agenda, Central Bedfordshire is therefore not sure that a generalist Health and Social Care network approach is right for now. They perceive that there is no single voluntary and community sector voice, and that there are some tensions within the voluntary and community sector re geographical territory. They note that one or two large voluntary and community sector organisations have voiced concern regarding the Assembly, and Central Bedfordshire does not want to disenfranchise them, and needs to be seen to be even-handed.

In addition they are thinking about the involvement of user-led organisations, e.g. community groups; and how they can draw the sector as a whole together. They note that small voluntary and community sector organisations can provide innovation, e.g. Transformation and Personalisation, and are interested in micro-providers. In this context a Health and Social Care Network seems potentially an old construct.

For service design the authority wants experienced users, critical friends. The notion of 'representation' is challenging, because every person brings in their own experiences.

4.6.4 Large/Small Organisations

Unsurprisingly, and related to the challenges of representation, were comments to the effect that a Network might play different roles for small and large organisations. Part of this also recognised that the needs of new organisations, and those organisations experiencing rapid growth, may be very specific rather than generic.

This led some to question, despite the national policy convergence of health and social care, whether the notion of a Health & Social Care Network was practical or too broad, or not possible to model. They cited networks in for example Mental Health as having a smaller area of focus. Some however alternatively felt that joined up working in voluntary and community sector health and social care was now a necessity, however broad, to address this national policy agenda. (It is also entirely necessary anyway on a practical level for effective signposting, referrals and delivery.)

A related theme is that the voluntary and community sector often prides itself on providing holistic services which attempt to address a client's wider range of needs, and therefore the services often cross a range of traditional boundaries and definitions.

From the researchers' perspective the distinction between health and social care is a human construct and an endeavour to overlap shape and form on human activity, and as such no more or less valid than other human constructs. It is what people feel comfortable using and working within that matters, and these are often being refined and re-defined contextually. However, it is not always the case that attempting to provide a wide range of holistic services is necessarily effective, and this is one of the major ancillary questions posed by the Transformation and Personalisation agendas.

Central Bedfordshire are thinking about how well equipped the voluntary and community sector is, but are also particularly interested in how the voluntary and community sector can help itself. They do not want to be accepting of poor quality, and think that this is not always a question of size but sometimes of attitude. Related to this Central Bedfordshire believe that competition may be unduly limited within the voluntary and community sector.

4.6.5 Independence

For some respondents the idea of an independent voluntary and community sector forum was attractive, because they sometimes felt constrained by existing groups run by statutory agencies. There is less "worry about appearances or that a comment may affect funding".

Two respondents felt very strongly that a Network would need to be independent in order to be credible, and that the most effective forums are formed by their members, and not by other sectors.

4.6.6 Other Purposes

There were a range of interesting comments on some of the other highlighted purposes for a network. These included that one of the biggest challenges is to understand the policy and delivery landscape. Some noted that a network endeavouring to focus on performance might need to prove how it was better than some types of national support services. One interviewee noted that a network should not address performance or partnership working “because this doesn’t happen because of a network, we go to partners or commissioners directly, not to a network”.

Another respondent felt that a network would primarily need to prove its contribution to competitive advantage.

4.6.7 Outcomes

There was general recognition of the importance of delivering outcomes, i.e. real identifiable longer-term benefits for clients. A member of Consortico felt that this model had driven up delivery and organisational standards to the extent that members were perceived to be more professional and so were taken more seriously by the statutory sector.

It was noted that Consortico’s reported success may have been because it has a simple objective and outcome, and by inference that a general network which attempts to deliver on too many outcomes and purposes would be too vague and unfocussed.

It was suggested that a network could be commissioned to undertake discrete pieces of work. Bedfordshire Advice Forum was cited as a good example, where a temporary premises committee was established and then disbanded when the work was completed, and that retaining flexibility was a keystone.

One outcome mentioned by some was that a network could enable the voluntary and community sector to be better dialled into decision making. Given the challenges identified above in relation to Local Strategic Partnerships, the co-ordination of representation could be an important role, the network could sit off the side of the thematic partnerships, have a mainly strategic focus on the Local Strategic Partnership agenda, to reinforce groups already in at the top table. Some felt that a network would only be supported and therefore useful if it had “bite” and influence.

It is certainly the case that the statutory sector would also like the voluntary sector to be dialled into engagement, information sharing and to some extent decision making; however they also struggle to identify the correct architecture.

There is however something very important in all this about time, place and opportunity; or alternatively having the right people/knowledge/experience, at the right meeting, for the right issue, at the right time. This strongly suggests the need for a flexible approach and range of strategies, and the use of different mechanisms at different times, rather than sole reliance on static structures and permanently fixed representation.

4.7 Comments on Existing Forums & Networks

It is interesting to briefly consider peoples' response to existing networks.

The Advocacy Network was cited as useful because the members have common work and themes and can share resources, and provides a good link to other sectors.

It was also noted interestingly that Bedfordshire Advice Forum ("BAF") has set up a trading company controlled by BAF, to provide joint bidding and training courses, research reports and provide online advice.

There is also a Bedfordshire voluntary and community sector Mental Health Forum, members of which receive Local Strategic Partnership feedback from a named 'representative'.

Other reasons cited to value existing networks included that they provide support, additional specialised learning, affirmation and confidence building, and local group support (as distinct from voluntary and community sector generalist support or possibly unreliable national voluntary and community sector organisation support).

There were some criticisms of existing networks including they can sometimes be inward-looking, partly because some members are local branches of national organisations who have limited decision making powers. The feedback from representatives is also not always perceived to be independent, and may be too business-orientated.

Also interestingly, one of the housing associations commented that they thought that housing associations might prove more beneficial partners to a Health and Social Care Network than vice versa.

One important point here is that **networks generally need not be mutually exclusive**. As one respondent noted, a Health and Social Care Network could be complementary, particularly from a representative and information standpoint.

4.8 Network Operations

Whether they agreed with the creation of a network or not, interviewees were asked to think about how a network might operate.

4.8.1 Communications

Many groups felt that groups would not want to attend a frequent (monthly) meeting. A suggestion here included that any meetings could be roving in terms of location. They also noted any network would be likely to have different priorities at different phases in its existence.

Many groups did not want a network to move into "information overload" or be a sink for a plethora of information. This was a minor criticism of the VOCyph. There was a preference for concise information, and the development of a knowledge base – perhaps serviced by weekly or bi-weekly summaries of issues.

Inevitably several respondents thought it was very important for a network to coordinate representatives at partnership meetings.

Some respondents focussed particularly on communication methods. One talked about creating a Virtual Network. Another respondent wanted a network to be “creative with fluid boundaries”. Suggestions here included real-time web based interactions and teleconferences, pod casts with key issues from the co-ordinator or Chair, use of SMS text messaging, blogs and tweets, and downloadable case studies and exemplars. Preference here was that any emails should highlight key points and allow point and click to articles of specific interest.

However it was also noted that some groups use technology sparsely, and that electronic communication does not allow for the important (and often informal) human interaction and rapport that many people value.

4.8.2 Development

There was some particular disparity here. Some respondents thought a network needed to be highly proactive and prove itself very quickly, whilst some thought networks are about people, and that trust develops slowly, and that it shouldn't be too ambitious, and should begin with some simple achievable targets for example to hold 3 well-attended successful meetings or produce 4 quarterly newsletters, i.e. allow it to 'grow' rather than be given a big initial agenda.

4.9 Role of an H&SCN Co-ordinator

The position of co-ordinator for such a network is potentially a challenging role, requiring a wide skill set to balance several interests in tension.

Key skills and experience included:

- A generalist knowledge of the voluntary sector as a whole
- A knowledge and experience of voluntary and community sector health and social care delivery
- A good intellect and the ability to rapidly interpret strategy and policy
- Both highly effective management and administrative skills
- A knowledge of local geography and politics
- A collaborative and inclusive mindset
- An ability to develop and maintain trust
- Patience, diplomacy and to be an excellent influencer
- Have the ability to motivate others to contribute
- To be technologically literate in a range of existing and new media communication channels

It was also felt important that the role needed clear line management and was well supported in this respect.

It was also noted that if the network were not hosted by an existing organisation, then it would *de facto* be a more senior management role (and selection criteria).

For information only, the JD of the existing VOCyfp co-ordinator is included as a [Appendix 5](#).

4.9.1 Role of Representatives

There was agreement that representatives needed to be able to represent a range of interests wider than their own organisation. Realistically however it must be noted that the breadth of these interests would necessarily change depending on the issues arising.

Some felt that representatives should be elected, (rather than being appointed by say an Assembly, co-ordinator or CVS) although experience suggests that this is not always possible if there is insufficient interest. Motivating sufficient numbers of representatives suitable for all positions can be challenging. Motivation can however be improved (never guaranteed) by clearly identifying and articulating the benefits for representatives.

There are many examples of networks where representatives are expected to provide formal feedback to their constituencies. This is however a challenging area, and much research (including the VOCyfp) suggests that apart from informal verbal feedback, it is very often those responsible for co-ordinating such representatives that actually provide the feedback.

As discussed earlier one of the difficulties here is how much experience a representative can bring to bear. One suggestion was to clearly identify representative specialisms in advance, for example say in advocacy, and these “specialists” are consequently less likely to miss important detail, which sometimes could have huge ramifications. However this to some extent presupposes a commitment by all sectors for a degree of flexible representation for specific issues not yet agreed.

It is also clearly important for representatives to develop the trust of other people and organisations whose views they may be representing. One VOCyfp member noted that the VOCyfp had taken considerable time to achieve this.

4.9.2 Network Structure

Most respondents agree that it was important that a network dovetail with other existing partnerships, networks and Assemblies; without being clear on the architecture for achieving this.

It was noted that a network needs effective governance, it therefore needs an independent and strategic executive and Chair (separate to hosting arrangements) to prevent self-interest or financial/contract issues dominating it, or the risk of it being seen as elitist. It also needs to be seen to be inclusive and transparent. It was even suggested that a “truly independent” Chair could be sought from the private sector.

Central Bedfordshire's view was that network representatives need to be elected (rather than being dominated by a few of the most vocal organisations/personalities).

On a more human level, one respondent noted that a network needs an attitude of goodwill, a common mindset, trust, and a will to work together.

4.9.3 Hosting

Generally apart from recognising that a role of Co-ordinator would need line management and support, there were few strong feelings regarding who should host such a post, with the modal answer being the local CVS.

Practical suggestions included that the host should have good public transport links and be near a station! It was also noted that their office geographical location was less important provided the co-ordinator was mobile and both able and seen to travel around the whole geographical area.

There was a suggestion that the voluntary and community sector could be further canvassed on who should host it. If there was statutory funding, two respondents thought that the hosting work should be put out to tender.

It was also suggested as important that the Host should be perceived to be neutral and focussed primarily on just line management.

5. Background Research and Case Studies

5.1 Voluntary Organisation for Children Young People and Families

The Voluntary Organisations Children Young People and Families Forum's ("VOCypf") role is as a Bedfordshire network to ensure an effective flow of information to the voluntary and community sector children and young peoples sector in a format the sector can understand. The VOCypf provides local, regional and national information.

The VOCypf has approximately 10 active representatives who share joint attendance with the co-ordinator. The Co-ordinator is the strategic link, whilst generally, the representatives have more detailed service knowledge and can explore more detailed areas with statutory staff, and pick up on issues that the co-ordinator may miss due to lack of knowledge.

The co-ordinator attends almost every relevant Local Strategic Partnership meeting for both Authority areas. The co-ordinator spends approximately 60% of her time in meetings.

The VOCypf is reportedly a network well embedded with both Local Authorities. As regards disseminating information, the VOCypf has a largely online electronic strategy. It provides summaries of large quantities of the data it receives. It notes however that it estimates that the information it receives has doubled in the last 2 years. The VOCypf sends out a comprehensive update once per month and a weekly report mainly consisting of new items.

The VOCypf can find it difficult to recruit representatives, and the Co-ordinator relies on the strength of personal relationships and approaches. The VOCypf has c.140 members and c.30 groups are commissioned organisations. The majority of representatives are from commissioned organisations.

It was noted that the **actual feedback from representatives is minimal**. They sometimes ring or email to let her know about discrete issues, but the Co-ordinator predominantly relies on the minutes for information about meetings she hasn't personally attended.

Despite the recent unitary split, the VOCypf have decided that they will remain one cross Bedfordshire entity.

The co-ordinator notes that voluntary and community sector engagement can be quite low, particularly where there is a lack of capacity. The VOCypf is most effective at engaging with medium and large organisations, but less effective with small groups and faith groups.

The VOCypf has two Vice Chairs with complementary skills. One of the co-chairs sits on the Childrens Trust Board and the Commissioning Executive meeting.

The co-ordinator notes that the post requires someone who is comfortable with building relationships, and acknowledges that it can sometimes be a lonely role as an interface between the statutory and voluntary and community sectors.

The Co-ordinator also notes that with the 'Think Families' Agenda, stressing the major role that families play in almost every area of Children Young People and Families development and provision, there is now a new paradigm being revisited between childrens and adult services. The co-ordinator's opinion is therefore that the VOCypf and a Health and Social Care Network would need to be closely linked.

<http://www.voluntaryworks.org.uk/VOCypf/Index.asp>

5.2 VOUCH

It is of note that Bedfordshire used to have a health and social care network. This organisation, VOUCH, Voluntary Organisations Unite for Care and Health, was hosted by Bedford Rural Community Council.

Mixed feelings were expressed regarding this network. Some organisations noted disappointment when it was disbanded. Others noted that it may have been too large, wasn't sufficiently strategic in approach, "didn't seem relevant", and certain interest groups may have held undue influence.

Interestingly the voluntary and community sector Mental Health network was borne out of VOUCH. Although one of the reported success factors members in this is that they fought to keep the network small in order to ensure focus. Also interestingly the network was not originally funded, and then, presumably based on its effectiveness, Bedfordshire NHS provided funding.

5.3 ConsortiCo

Several respondents were member of ConsortiCo.

Consortico was formed by nine charities responding to tackle the changing circumstances in public service commissioning, by creating a consortium for voluntary and community sector organisations tendering for public service delivery.

ConsortiCo Ltd is a company limited by guarantee and social enterprise. It is wholly owned by its member organisations and its Directors are elected from nominees put forward by its full members. Any profits made by ConsortiCo Ltd are dispersed back to its member organisations or used to further develop the ConsortiCo 'hub' (for the benefit of its members and the communities it serves).

ConsortiCo acts as a 'Super Contractor' by first identifying public service contract opportunities and then developing tender proposals in consortia with its member organisations. Once secured Consortico is the lead contractor and delivers financial and contract compliance services on behalf of the whole consortia and liaises with the commissioners.

Part of the rationale for this is the belief that medium sized charities would not be able to thrive under contracting, so their choices were to become smaller and non-reliant on statutory income, merge or be absorbed by larger organisations, or be part of hub and spoke bidding mechanisms.

It is interesting to note that Consortico is intending to set up its own thematic groups.

<http://www.consortico.com/>

5.4 CIBA

Another interesting development is CIBA, the Charity in Bedford Association.

This new organisation, established with support from Community and Voluntary Services Mid and North Bedfordshire (CVS), aims to provide sustainable funding support for Bedford charities.

Sustainable funding was regularly highlighted by the county's frontline organisations as the main challenge. The Bedford Funding Partnership (BFP) was established, a multi-disciplinary collaboration involving a range of members: Bedford Guild House, Advocacy Alliance, Bedfordshire Sight Concern, Bedford Concern for the Homeless and Rootless, Bedford Creative Arts, Bedford Community Rights Centre, Bedford Furniture Link, Bedford Advocacy for Older People, Family Groups, Bedfordshire Garden Carers, and Volunteer Centre Bedford.

The first major project of CIBA has been to produce a joint legacy strategy to encourage members of the public to make a will in favour of individual partner charities or to the partnership as a whole. Under the new 'CIBA' brand, packs are distributed via local solicitors, accountants, undertakers, financial advisors and community networks. As well as the legacy pack, the partnership runs joint fundraising activities such as quiz nights and a charity ball, and is exploring a CIBA trading arm to secure partners' futures. By developing sustainable funding options together, the group believes that whilst they would otherwise struggle alone, they are more likely to succeed as charities. Together we are greater than the sum of our parts!" he says.

<http://www.bassac.org.uk/node/268/>

5.5 The Care Forum

The Care Forum is an innovative multi-purpose independent voluntary organisation providing care services across Bath and North East Somerset, Bristol, North Somerset and South Gloucestershire, and from whom it receives funding at local authority level.

It produces regular newsletters and information sheets for voluntary and statutory sector contacts across its geographical area. It also publishes a variety of ebulletins. It also undertakes research projects in the area of health and social care, and a number of publications including Spot On, a web-based directory of services for people with learning difficulties and their carers in South Gloucestershire.

It also manages a range of different health and social care networks for voluntary and community groups in **different** authority areas. These support information sharing and promote joint working. The networks provide a chance to get together, exchange information and voice a voluntary sector point of view. They provide a forum for talking to the statutory sector. They are a means of sending out targeted information where needed, and meetings provide the chance to present and discuss current issues and developments.

The Care Forum also has an event management arm, and trained staff acting as independent facilitators in a range of settings for both voluntary and statutory sector activities and meetings.

Further The Care Forum is committed to ensuring effective engagement between local statutory and voluntary organisations, and advises on and promotes good practice, from ways to ensure meaningful consultation to inclusive patient and public participation to independent reporting at NHS consultations.

It also advises on how voluntary sector representation should be organised. It elects representatives from its networks to health and social care multi-agency groups, and provides them with support and induction. Network members find out about new developments from their representatives. In addition they provide training to public agencies about how best to work with the health and social care voluntary sector, as well as a programme of training for volunteer advocates.

It also hosts the local LINK and manages **Room 102**, a frequently updated database of national and local groups, services and organisations.

The Care Forum runs the following regular networks:

Health and Social Care Networks - The Health and Social Care Networks bring together groups working on health and social care in each local authority area. There are Health and Social Care Networks for Bath and North East Somerset, Bristol and South Gloucestershire.

Mental Health Networks - The Mental Health Networks are open to all voluntary and community sector organisations working in mental health. Each Mental Health Network elects representatives to the local Mental Health Local Implementation Team. There are Mental Health Networks for Bath and North East Somerset, Bristol, North Somerset and South Gloucestershire.

Voluntary Sector Older People's Network - The Older People's Network is open to all voluntary and community sector organisations working on older people's services. This Network is open to all organisations working in Bristol, North Somerset and South Gloucestershire.

Children and Young People's Voluntary Sector Network - These Networks bring together voluntary sector agencies working with children and young people. Bristol and South Gloucestershire

<http://www.thecareforum.org/>

5.6 Lambeth Health & Wellbeing Forum

The Health & Social Care Officer at Lambeth Voluntary Action Council is part funded by Bedford Adult Social Services and Lambeth Primary Care Trust.

Lambeth's Health & Wellbeing voluntary and community sector Forum meets quarterly and is open to all organisations working in Lambeth who provide health and social care services. The Forum is run and facilitated by Lambeth Council, although co-chaired by two voluntary and community sector organisations. However its agenda is set by a Council-led working group, which does include The Health & Social Care Officer.

Most London boroughs have a Health & Wellbeing Forum in a similar format, although many are hosted and run by the local CVS.

From the post-holders perspective there are challenges: including that the Forum is more focussed on providing information than sharing influence. There is also a general feeling that the Forum mainly focusses on the strategic issues of the statutory sector, whilst many voluntary and community sector groups are more concerned with income and contracting.

It is challenging because health & social care is so broad, however there are many shared values and voluntary and community sector working practices that cross over organisations providing different services.

With a changing framework of statutory organisations where the trend seems to be enlargement, e.g. Primary Care Trusts now merging, it is important to have a larger structure which meets that framework, and enables voluntary and community sector organisations to influence the agenda.

The two voluntary and community sector Co-Chairs of the Forum also sit on the Local Strategic Partnership Thematic Partnership Board, with the CEO of Lambeth Voluntary Action Council. However it is difficult to obtain feedback from the co-chairs.

It is also difficult to disentangle what really matters at both the Forum and the Local Strategic Partnerships, and much more detailed work is achieved in the Local Strategic Partnership delivery groups. The Forum itself does not really have clear inputs and outputs, there is little evidence of change, and organisations attend often in order to be seen by commissioners.

The Health & Wellbeing Officer believes that her role should be to facilitate representation and involvement, but not to 'represent' the voluntary sector. Her information is generally disseminated through email and newsletters.

She also notes that there are some effective specialist cross-borough voluntary and community sector forums operating across London Boroughs of Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham for Mental Health and for Physical and Sensory Impairment. These have strong ownership and influence. [However it is very important to note that there is also a commensurately high degree of collaborative commissioning of community health services by Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham Primary Care Trusts.

<http://www.lambeth.gov.uk/Services/CommunityLiving/InformationForCareProviders/SupportForVoluntaryandCommunityOrganisations/SocialCareVoluntary.htm>

5.7 Hertfordshire Forward - Local Area Agreement creation of a joint post

Hertfordshire Forward, the local strategic partnership (LSP), wanted to strengthen the role of the voluntary sector. It wanted the voluntary and community sector to participate in decision making and delivery as effectively as possible.

So the LSP decided to fund a liaison officer post for the Local Area Agreement and voluntary sector, employed by Stevenage Council for Voluntary Services (CVS). The post is partly-based at their offices and partly Hertfordshire County Council's.

What is it doing?

Hertfordshire CVS Group is a coalition of the nine CVSs in the county. It was working with all LSP partners on strategic leadership, and came to realise a dedicated post was needed.

Questions about promoting inclusion led to greater understanding about partners' contributions and levels of influence. It was clear the voluntary sector was already an active partner in delivering the Sustainable Community Strategy. But more work was needed to maximise its contribution to the Local Area Agreement. The new liaison post was the result.

"The local area agreement has helped us to develop a shared understanding of the unique role that all partners can bring to delivering better public services...We hope that the development of this unique cross-sector post will help take the Compact vision one step further, by involving the voluntary and community sector in all aspects of the local area agreement."

The post will have a particular impact on achieving Hertfordshire's volunteering stretch, or reward, target.

Key tasks include:

- securing better voluntary sector engagement
- building capacity
- mapping of volunteer activity
- enhancing communication with the voluntary and other sectors

How well have we done so far?

"The Local Area Agreement is a very dry and cumbersome initiative, but having the Local Area Agreement liaison officer...is a brilliant idea. We now have a better idea of what a Local Area Agreement should look and feel like. It has become a more tangible concept to promote to colleagues."

The initiative has brought the Local Area Agreement to life. Collins has enthused people with his level of understanding. This includes a presentation illustrating how Local Area Agreement targets affect an individual, 'Ken'. Collins has delivered this to organisations around the county, including district council LSPs, partner organisations and communities.

There is no doubt that having a dedicated officer to promote the voluntary sector has made a real difference. He has demonstrated how it, and partnership working overall, can improve services.

Mapping volunteer activity, services and agencies across the county has already resulted in the volunteer centres coming closer together. It has broken down some of the territorial barriers that inevitably existed in a more segregated service.

What have we learned?

The main learning has been about the significance of dedicated resources for developing the Local Area Agreement. More is being achieved with the voluntary sector-local authority post in place.

<http://www.idea.gov.uk/idk/core/page.do?pagelId=5581014>

5.8 Alison Gilchrist – Community Development and Representation Expert (Formerly of the Community Development Foundation)

Alison noted that Community Empowerment Networks had been evaluated, under the Communities and Local Government Department's research and evaluation of the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund and Local Strategic Partnerships.

She notes that there was some evidence of "Power Problems", particularly in relation to deals with 'elite' organisations displaying exclusive behaviour.

For her "network" implies informality, an organic approach, but she believes that they're not necessarily good at co-ordination and staffing or having one voice. From her research Alison believes that networks with over 40 members certainly need to formalise, and from her experience of the networks she works with, this is a problem cusp cross-over point. However she also notes that when they formalise, they sometimes lose their lateral connections, which wither away.

Personally she is keen to avoid the notion of fossilising representation, and in this respect she argues that networks may be better orchestrated with facilitation rather than co-ordination.

Gilchrist, A. (2009) *The well-connected community: a networking approach to community development* (2nd edition), Bristol: The Policy Press

5.9 LINK (Luton)

Local Involvement Networks (LINKs) aim to give citizens a stronger voice in how their health and social care services are delivered. Run by local individuals and groups and independently supported - the role of LINKs is to find out what people want, monitor local services and to use their powers to hold them to account (by recruiting individual representatives who *inter alia* can do Enter & View assessments).

In Luton's case, the LINKs have approximately 90 individual members, c.25-30 representatives, (and 17 organisational members who are predominantly cross borough).

Representative members receive induction in social care and health.

Their work however is primarily geared to establishing and highlighting trends, rather than individual cases.

LINKs are primarily looking at service improvements rather than addressing wider areas such as funding, capacity etc.

5.91 Reading Stronger Together Forum

Reading Stronger Together Consortium consists of the original representative forum members, The Forum (main voluntary sector assembly group), SAKOMA, Faith, RYCVYS, plus new members Greater Reading Environmental Network and Reading Voluntary sector Tenants and Residents Association.

It is 18 months into a 3 year lottery-funded development programme to co-ordinate the whole of Reading's voluntary sector, including and particularly in relation to statutory engagement including Local Strategic Partnership representation.

Healthier Reading Partnership is the relevant Local Strategic Partnership thematic partnership, and this covers Health, Older People and Social Care, and has specialist sub-themes and delivery partnerships.

Each of the forums has its own part-time share of 2 co-ordinator posts, plus the Stronger Together Programme shares an overall co-ordinator and admin support.

All voluntary and community sector groups working in Reading are automatically members of The Forum.

Co-ordinators go to thematic boards, but elected representatives go to delivery partnerships.

It is usually easy to recruit representatives **BUT** most representatives won't complete reports, even when payment is offered!

There is no Health & Social Care Network in Reading.

What does Stronger Together do?

- helps in the election of representatives from the local voluntary and community sector (voluntary and community sector) to work with strategic partnerships
- provides information, support and training for voluntary and community sector representatives
- works with statutory bodies on matters relating to the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) and the Local Area Agreements
- links diverse groups to work together, share ideas and access learning
- works on social inclusion
- supports four forums that make up Stronger Together and development of The Forum, the voice of Reading's voluntary and community sector
- engages with smaller organizations and supports their representation

What is the benefit for voluntary sector organisations?

- as part of a bigger force enables groups voices to be heard by decision makers in Reading
- free access to special voluntary and community sector events to raise, discuss and action key issues that concern the community

- being part of the recognized database of voluntary and community sector groups in Reading means that groups do not miss out on voluntary and community sector knowledge – www.rvadirectory.org.uk
- a regular LSP Newsletter to inform voluntary and community sector news
- gain easier and more timely access to information and consultations by statutory agencies
- the Stronger Together team organizes a programme of events to develop wide engagement of the voluntary and community sector to ensure that its **voice** is heard at a strategic level by statutory agencies

Stronger Together supports the voluntary and community sector (voluntary and community sector) representatives on the Local Strategic Partnership by:

- organising pre meetings of voluntary and community sector Representatives, their deputies and other network links a few days before the LSP to discuss the agenda
- enabling consultation, in manageable chunks, on key documents such as the Sustainable Community Strategy
- discussing the links between voluntary and community sector needs expressed at events held by the 4 fora and engagement with the LSP agenda
- playing an active role in the LSP Management Group to ensure that voluntary and community sector concerns can be raised
- making a voluntary and community sector contribution to the background work of the partnership
- enabling voluntary and community sector involvement in Local Area Agreement planning and monitoring
- negotiating representation to partnership in key areas of activity
- keeping the sector informed through the Stronger Together Newsletter
- organising the Social Inclusion Advisory Group which enables voluntary and community sector involvement in a scrutiny role within partnership programmes

Forum Voice (Representative) Reports

Stronger Together Consortium member, The Forum, elect voluntary and community sector representatives to sit on statutory partnerships, communicate voluntary and community sector concerns, report developments back to the sector and influence strategy in order to instigate positive change

<http://www.strongertogether.org.uk/reports.aspx>

http://www.strongertogether.org.uk/CMS/FILES/Person_Specification_for_Reading_LSP_Board_Members.pdf

5.92 Darlington Partnership Improvement Programme

Introduction

The IDeA and the Institute for Voluntary Action Research (IVAR) have been running a Partnership Improvement Programme (PIP). Darlington was one of five areas in the North East region of England to take part.

Starting point

Over four workshops, senior officers from the borough council and the local voluntary and community sector (voluntary and community sector) met to identify and overcome barriers to cross-sector partnership working. The starting point was a shared acknowledgement that partnership working is often challenging and difficult. However, they believed that the potential benefits of working together justified concerted efforts to overcome those difficulties. Working together would achieve real improvements.

Local partnership profile

The journey to partnership improvement began by deliberately putting to one side the minutiae of day-to-day dealings with each other. The group agreed that, to come up with an action plan that could be jointly owned and implemented, it would be necessary to build up a joint picture of partnership working. This partnership profile comprised four dimensions:

Local drivers of cross-sector partnership working

The PIP group identified three key drivers of local cross-sector partnership working:

- national policy initiatives, such as the Local Government White Paper 'Strong and Prosperous Communities'
- a shared recognition that both sectors need each other to meet common objectives and to ensure effective and high-quality delivery
- the opportunity to access a broader range of funding sources.

Local benefits of cross-sector partnership working

The two most positive aspects of partnership working between the borough council and the voluntary and community sector were:

- the opportunity for learning and innovation – “thinking outside the box”
- the potential to achieve better results – “we can achieve greater flexibility if we get it right”.

Partnership working was viewed as an exchange. Each sector should contribute what it was most able to provide in return for tangible benefits, both to itself and the local community. This could include for example, resources from the council in exchange for local contacts and services from the voluntary and community sector.

Difficult aspects of cross-sector partnership working

Working in partnership is not an easy process and several difficult aspects of cross-sector partnership working were highlighted:

- partnership models: “top down structures and terms of reference”, “public sector trapped by government targets”
- partnership participants: “partisan attitudes and resistance to change”, “lack of commitment from senior decision makers”
- partnership process: “bureaucratic talking shops which lack direction”, “lack of adequate resources to pull it off”.

Obstacles and barriers to effective cross-sector partnership working

The four main obstacles and barriers to effective cross-sector partnership working in Darlington were identified:

- lack of resources to participate
- insufficient skills and confidence
- inadequate structures for communication
- low levels of awareness, understanding and information – for example, resources from the council in exchange for local contacts and services from the voluntary and community sector – of the council, the voluntary and community sector and of current public policy.

Partnership improvement objectives

Having built up this picture of partnership working in Darlington, the group was able to start identifying the steps that should be taken, together, to bring about improvements. To tackle both concerns and aspirations, three specific partnership improvement objectives were agreed:

- to develop a shared approach to build sustainability and maximise resources within all sectors
- to develop new and improved approaches to support better communication, involvement and partnership working
- to develop a shared cross-sector understanding of sustainability and support issues, governance structures, and key elements of partnership working.

Partnership improvement action plan

To meet these objectives, a number of action points were identified:

Objective

- To develop a shared approach to build sustainability and maximise resources within all sectors.

Preliminary actions

- Cross-sector audit and development of a database of service provision, resource needs and skills availability.
- Development of a local authority employee volunteering strategy.

Objective

- To develop new and improved approaches to support better communication, involvement and partnership working.

Preliminary actions

- Inclusion of PIP action plan in joint council/voluntary and community sector voluntary and community sector strategy.
- Development of a cross-sector training strategy.
- Development of a cross-sector induction strategy for new staff.
- Establishment of joint terms of reference for individual cross-sector partnerships.

Objective

- To develop a shared cross-sector understanding of sustainability and support issues, governance structures, and key elements of partnership working.

Preliminary actions

- Production of joint fact sheets on governance and operational issues.
- Formalisation of policy on LA participation and representation on voluntary and community sector boards.

For each of these, responsibility for coordination was allocated to one council and one voluntary and community sector member of the PIP group. Timescales were agreed, alongside a commitment to a joint review after six months.

Vision for improvement

The PIP group agreed that the borough council and the local voluntary and community sector should regard partnership working as a long-term commitment. It is not an approach which can be put into place for a specific project or outcome and discarded when it is completed.

Partnership working requires a culture of working together which is open and transparent. It is based on trust and an ability to listen and value what each partner has to say. This approach allows a loosening of controls and fixed ways of working, leading to relationships between different sectors which are supportive and empowering.

Where this kind of partnership environment exists, there is likely to be much more willingness to take risks and experiment with new forms of service delivery and engagement, and to tolerate mistakes.

Key learnings

Three things helped to improve partnership working in Darlington:

- A willingness to take risks and to accept that “we are different, for very good reasons, and that is okay because it can act as a strength and mean that we can get more done by combining what each of us has to offer.”
- High-level commitment to change in both sectors: “By placing the partnership improvement action plan within the borough-wide voluntary and community sector strategy, we ensured that there would be corporate buy-in, scrutiny of implementation and a high profile for both the vision and the action.”
- An understanding that improvement is a process and not a unique event: “We have only just started really, but whereas before we all had hidden agendas and were suspicious of each other, now our agendas are out on the table and we can listen, argue, disagree but still get things done together.”

APPENDICES

Appendix 1

EXTRACT - Evaluation of the National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal

Communities and Local Government - March 2010

Final report

6.2.1 Local Strategic Partnership

The NSNR was the key catalyst in the establishment of Local Strategic Partnerships which have become a crucial element in the planning and delivery of neighbourhood renewal as well as, over time, assuming a central strategic role in coordinating activities at a local authority level. They are non-statutory, non-executive and non-elected organisations, working alongside local representative democracy.

Government was keen to ensure that there was a level playing field for voluntary and community sector representation on Local Strategic Partnerships. As a result funding was provided for the establishment of Community Empowerment Networks (CENs), which supported networking between voluntary and community sector organisations and helped to strengthen their role within service delivery.

However, the voluntary and community sector is considered to have had generally a limited impact on Local Strategic Partnership decision-making. There remains a concern that it remains stretched and under-resourced – and that new and expanding remits for Local Strategic Partnerships, such as their responsibilities for Local (and Multi-) Area Agreements, have sometimes marginalised the role of the sector. The CENs in the LRP case study districts were found to have been particularly affected since the end of NRF (and of ring-fenced funding for their costs). Some had their funding withdrawn and were forced to close, whilst others, despite receiving interim funding for 2008-09 (through the LAA) faced an uncertain future. This may have further limited voluntary and community sector involvement.

Local Strategic Partnerships are generally seen to have acted as successful vehicles for encouraging greater partnership working, although this has varied between domains as has the willingness or ability of relevant partners to engage. Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships are seen as being particularly effective – possibly due to their having predated Local Strategic Partnerships and having had effective working arrangements already in place, but also because of the often highly-localised nature of the issues that they are seeking to address.

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/localgovernment/lspssurvey2008report>

Appendix 2

EXTRACTS from Principles of representation: A framework for effective voluntary and community sector representation in Local Strategic Partnerships

Published 20 November 2007

Site NAVCA and Department Communities & Local Government
<http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/communities/principlesofrepresentation>

The voluntary and community sector makes a vital contribution to strong and cohesive communities and should be a key and respected partner of the local authority and other local public bodies and the private sector. The voluntary and community sector is particularly important in ensuring that the voices of the most excluded people are heard.

It is in everyone's interest for effective partnership working between the sector and local government to be the norm. In *Strong and prosperous communities*, the Local Government White Paper, the Government set out a "clear expectation that the local voluntary and community sector will be actively involved with all LSPs in helping to shape the local area"⁴.

Meaningful voluntary and community sector participation is a crucial element of an effective LSP, helping it to agree the local vision, set priorities and deliver services to reflect the needs and aspirations of local communities.

There may be occasions when it is appropriate for people from the voluntary and community sector to be involved in partnerships or other forums, but not to be representing the sector, for example:

- where they are invited as a provider with expertise in a particular area of service delivery;
- where there is a need to get the views of under-represented groups whose voices often go unheard; or
- where a voluntary and community sector *view* is needed. This is similar to the role of a parent governor in a school, where there is no requirement to represent the views of all parents, but simply to put forward a parent's perspective.

In these circumstances it is important to clarify the difference by referring to voluntary and community sector 'participants', rather than representatives.

The principles in this document are not meant to be an exhaustive list and we would

⁴ Strong and prosperous communities – The Local Government White Paper, Communities and Local Government volume II, October 2006 p58

caution against simply copying them without some analysis of how they fit local circumstances. Context is important, so find a solution that works for your area.

Successful voluntary and community sector representation requires a well networked and co-ordinated sector that has the skills and capacity to participate. Some areas have invested in the capacity of the voluntary and community sector, its infrastructure and networks to support representation and wider participation.

Section 10. The Principles of Representation

The following principles offer a framework that the voluntary and community sector might use to organise effective representation on LSPs. They might be used to develop terms of reference or other clear statements that describe the nature of any networks or collective body, its representatives and what might be expected of them.

The framework should not be seen as exhaustive or prescriptive, but as a reference point from which to start a discussion between the voluntary and community sector about how they might be better represented in their own area. Indeed, you may decide to develop your own principles with your own headings and your own understanding of what they mean and how they can be applied. The principles are essentially good practice in partnership working.

1. Accountability

Those who represent the voluntary and community sector or speak on its behalf ought to be responsible to the local sector. Clear lines of accountability also allow the sector's representatives to speak with real authority. This does not mean that all decisions are subject to a consensus, but representatives should be prepared and able to explain decisions and actions. The voluntary and community sector should:

- a) make sure voluntary and community sector representatives on LSPs and its theme groups understand their roles and responsibilities;
- b) ensure the wider voluntary and community sector understands its responsibilities to its representatives;
- c) put into place reporting mechanisms that support the flow of information without creating unnecessary burdens;
- d) make arrangements that enable all voluntary and community sector groups to participate as fully as possible;
- e) ensure there is clarity about when voluntary and community sector representatives on the LSP have a clear mandate and when they do not, and
- f) clearly define roles for any officers that might support the sector's representation work;

2. Equality

Reducing inequality should be at the heart of the voluntary and community sector's work. It should work to eliminate discrimination, promote equality of opportunity and empower people to make their voices heard. The voluntary and community sector should:

- a) be open to all voluntary and community sector groups in the area, regardless of size, that accept the basic principles of equality for other groups;
- b) engage communities and individuals from under-represented groups directly where they are newly arrived and/or do not have the necessary infrastructure and groups to articulate and promote their interests;
- c) ensure that the partnership represents and reflects the community it serves, proactively reaching out to engage the most excluded groups. For example, it may be relevant, for the partnership, to consult in depth those service users who have historically been disproportionately failed by public services. It may also be necessary to take 'positive action' measures in order to target historically excluded groups to ensure that such groups can also benefit from local services;
- d) work with all faith⁵ and equalities groups, forums and organisations, taking steps to be accessible and in doing so seek to widen participation;
- e) take into account the voices of people who are not able to participate in groups or do not feel as though they belong to one;
- f) accept that in some areas groups may wish to organise separate mechanisms for representing their interests and concerns on the LSP;
- g) make sure that involvement aids cohesion and local relations rather than damaging it; and
- h) remember that real progress will take time, particularly in engaging those who are "hard to reach" and disengaged. People need to be given time to develop expertise and relationships, and to find the most appropriate approaches to participation.

3. Leadership

Those representing the local sector will be dealing with experienced senior public officials. This will require strong leadership skills: negotiation; mediation; assertiveness; dispute resolution; political and influencing skills. However, leadership is not about telling others what to do; rather it is the ability to represent the wider sector and not simply your own organisation or sectional interests. This links strongly to the principles of accountability and transparency. The voluntary and community sector should:

- a) be prepared to tackle difficult issues;
- b) share and celebrate success;
- c) work within the network's defined structures;

⁵ Two reports on faith-based representation have recently been published: *Faithful Representation* (Church Urban Fund – Sept 2006) and *Faith in LSPs?* (Churches Regional Network – Dec 2006). Insofar as they relate to faith communities as a distinctive part of the wider Voluntary and Community Sector, the recommendations of these reports are incorporated into the generic principles set out in this paper.

- d) develop and utilise the skills and experience of its members;
- e) challenge the network to reflect changing contexts and needs;
- f) include all its members and conduct wider consultation in assessing needs and priorities and in developing its future direction and purpose;
- g) recognise and involve its external stakeholders in its development, building inter-dependence and mutual understanding; and
- h) not always taking the majority view when trying to resolve and represent conflicting interests. The voices of a legitimate minority deserve to be equally heard.

4. Purpose

Establish a clear sense of purpose about what you want to achieve, expressed in whatever terms are appropriate. Do not simply deal with the day to day issues; think ahead beyond the immediate horizon. Be clear about the issues that the network will deal with and what will be dealt with by specific voluntary and community sector bodies. The voluntary and community sector should:

- a) establish a broad consensus of shared values from which to develop common goals and aims;
- b) plan for the long-term as well as the short-term;
- c) clearly define the stakeholders you wish to work with, including but not limited to LSP and LAA structures;
- d) reach agreement on who should sit on the decision making bodies in your area including but not limited to the relevant LSP boards;
- e) be responsive to change, anticipating the need for developing and supporting new groups that arise from demographic changes, aiding integration; and
- f) embrace demographic and cultural changes that might be required to deliver the wider aims of the network whilst staying true to its values.

5. Sustainability

It is important for the voluntary and community sector to understand fully the costs involved in starting and then maintaining an effective network for voluntary and community sector groups and organisations in an area. In particular it may be necessary to consider investment in capacity building to ensure that representation is inclusive. Once identified, priorities should be agreed and future resource requirements explored fully as part of the future planning process. The voluntary and community sector should:

- a) build relationships and interdependencies that strengthen the position of the local sector and enhance its capacity to develop and innovate;
- b) seek and secure resources to support the expression and dissemination of its collective voice;

- c) look to develop the skills and capacity of members and examine the potential for sharing costs and capacity that might arise from working more closely together;
- d) work in ways that make the minimum use of all non-renewable resources, and explore ways of using renewable resources sourced from within the organisation's geographic boundaries wherever possible;
- e) be flexible enough to take advantage of new opportunities that might arise;
- f) make the most of the talents already at the network's disposal;
- g) identify the skills, experience, and competencies required of members and representatives and invest in their development;
- h) put in place simple and robust arrangements that enable reflection, learning and continuous improvement and
- i) build the sector's capacity to engage with all stakeholders, in particular LSP partners and local communities.

6. Openness

The network should conduct its business as openly as possible. This is vital for its credibility both with its own members but also with its external stakeholders. The voluntary and community sector should:

- a) ensure that all discussions and decisions are recorded and open to all. Do not conduct meetings behind closed doors. Where, in exceptional circumstances, this is not possible, the reasons should be explained clearly;
- b) have an agreed and well publicised process for selecting voluntary and community sector representatives on the LSP and its theme groups;
- c) communicate clearly and promptly with all stakeholders, using the appropriate mediums;
- d) welcome challenge as an opportunity to learn and improve;
- e) deal positively with failings by acknowledging and addressing them;
- f) ensure that it shares 'credit where credit is due' in its dealings with the media, network members and external stakeholders and ensure the form and content of communications is agreed between the relevant stakeholders; and
- g) establish clear and consistent lines of communication:
 - Between network members.
 - With the wider voluntary and community sector.
 - With the wider community.
 - With the LSP and LAA theme groups.
 - With any potential stakeholder – locally, regionally and nationally.

7. Values

In dealing with the practical realities of building and maintaining a network it is essential to keep in mind the valuable traditions and values of the sector. Building a network will mean change and some of the effects might be predictable whilst others might be unexpected and challenging. For many in the sector, working more closely with the statutory sector might be a culturally difficult task and this should be recognised, as should be the benefits that can result. The voluntary and community sector should:

- a) recognise and preserve the independence of the voluntary and community sector from statutory bodies, but be pragmatic about building respectful relationships between the sectors;
- b) recognise and value the diversity of its membership and the different strengths they bring to the wider network;
- c) recognise and act upon opportunities for mutual development with internal and external stakeholders;
- d) recognise the mutual inter-dependence of all internal and external relationships, and the benefits that can be enjoyed by all the stakeholders;
- e) recognise the legitimate roles of members and avoid duplication by building upon their work;
- f) think about who it involves and when and be open and honest about the extent of that involvement. Consider how to target those individuals and groups to whom the issue is most relevant. This approach will help to avoid consultation and participation fatigue. It is also more likely to ensure greater diversity and quality of involvement; and
- g) develop the sector's capacity to provide evidence to support its views.

Appendix 3

Total Place Initiative

<http://www.localleadership.gov.uk/totalplace/about/>

Total Place is a new initiative that looks at how a ‘whole area’ approach to public services can lead to better services at less cost. It seeks to identify and avoid overlap and duplication between organisations – delivering a step change in both service improvement and efficiency at the local level, as well as across Whitehall.

There are 13 pilot areas participating in the scheme, each area ensuring a diverse mix of economic, geographical and demographic profiles. These pilots have a real opportunity to rip up the text book and redesign the way public services are planned and delivered.

The impact of the economic downturn means all of the public sector needs to find radical new solutions to not only deliver better value for money, but also better local services more tailored to local needs.

Aims of Total Place

- > Make changes to services that can improve the lives of local residents and deliver better value
- > Deliver early savings to validate the work
- > Develop a body of knowledge and learning about how more effective cross-agency working can deliver the above.
- > The work weaves together three complementary strands: ‘counting’, ‘culture’ and ‘customer needs’

The counting process

This process will map money flowing through the place (from central and local bodies) and make links between services, to identify where public money can be spent more effectively. This forms part of Sir Michael Bichard’s work on the Operational Efficiency Programme, which is looking at where efficiency savings can be made in the public sector.

[Operational Efficiency Programme](#) – on the HM Treasury website

The culture process

This process looks at the way existing cultures (the way we do things at the moment) actually helps or hinders the process.

Together, these strands aim to identify potential efficiencies and help people and organisations work together to achieve them.

Customer needs

This process will provide additional support around customer insight to help pilots better understand customer need and identify opportunities for collaboration between agencies on service redesign and use of resources. It will also capture and share with pilot agencies wider learning about customer insight from other sectors and places. The findings will help the pilots realise the potential benefits of customer insight work, particularly the opportunities to join up and exploit data about shared customers in their themed work

Where we are now?

Politicians and senior managers in 13 areas have volunteered to act as 'pilots' and implement this new way of working, which will draw in colleagues from other local and national organisations and Whitehall.

Each pilot has chosen a theme that reflects its local priorities and the learning and developments from these pilots will be captured in this web resource.

The pilots are engaged in their high-level counting exercise and will report their findings shortly.

The 13 will examine the totality of public spending in a range of different service areas with a view to cutting duplication, saving money and improving service delivery.

The Central Bedfordshire and Luton pilot will look at guidance and support for those affected by critical life events such as becoming disabled or unemployed or victims of crime.

[Think Family Initiative](#)

Think Family is a cross-departmental programme jointly funded by DCSF, the Home Office, Ministry of Justice and the Department of Health, and supported by the Department of Communities and local government.

Since April 2009 all LAs have received increased funding to support the introduction of:

- Think Family practice - making sure that the support provided by children's, adults' and family services is coordinated and takes account of how individual problems affect the whole family
- targeted support for parents and families - such as Family Intervention Projects and Parenting Early Intervention programmes designed to provide evidence-based support to families experiencing problems.

<http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/everychildmatters/strategy/parents/ID91askclient/thinkfamily/tf/>

Appendix 4

Stakeholder Interview Summaries

Organisation	Contact Names	Postholder	Interview Date	Geographical Cover	Annual Turnover
Bedford Borough Council	Frank Toner George Hunt	Director, Adult Social Services Assistant Director for Commissioning	15/2/10	BB	Large
Central Bedfordshire Council	Cllr Carole Hegley Julie Ogley Patricia Coker Mark Janes	Portfolio Holder Director of Social Care, Health and Housing Head of Partnerships Social Care, Health and Housing Assistant Director for Commissioning	16/2/10	CB	Large
Bedford CVS	Martin Trinder Rebecca Baber	Director Volunteer Centre Manager	27/1/10	BB and North Central Beds	£480K
VOCypf	Linda Bulled	VOCypf Officer	27/1/10	Beds	Small
Bedfordshire Advice Forum	Len Simkins	Secretary	27/1/10	Beds	Small
Sight Concern	Nick Gibson and Angela	CEO	28/1/10	Beds	£356K
Advocacy Alliance	Gerrardine Meola	Deputy CEO	28/1/10	Beds & Luton	£653K
Bedfordshire Rural Communities Charity	John Boswell	Head of Stronger Communities	18/2/10	Beds & Luton	£1.1m
Bedford Advocacy Service for Older People	Gail Shanahan	Service Manager	19/2/10	BB	£103K
Bedford Concern for the homeless and rootless	Ryan Flecknell	Manager	28/1/10	BB	£163k
Bedfordshire and Luton Mind	Alison Fisher	CEO	28/1/10	Beds and Luton	£1.2m
Alcohol Services for the Community	Breege Begley	CE	4/2/10	BB & CB	£800K
Voluntary Action Luton	Charlotte Bonser	Bedfordshire Link Co-ordinator	4/2/10	Beds & Luton	£537K
Bedford Citizens Housing Association	Vanessa Connolly	CEO	5/2/10	BB	£2.2m
Victim Support	Murisa Mujkanovic	Shire Community Manager	5/2/10	Beds not Luton	Small

Age Concern Beds	Karen Perry	CEO	5/2/10	BB & CB	£793K
Rethink	Ellie Goodman	Service Manager	8/2/10	Beds and Luton	£150K
Disability Resource Centre	Carl Davies	Head of Disabilities Services	8/2/10	Beds & Luton & Milton Keynes	£877K
Sorted Youth Counselling Service	Liz Gillespie		10/2/10	CB	£66K
Aragon Housing	Aileen Evans	Managing Director		BB & CB	£30m
Bedford Race Equality Council	Wendy Anderson-Welsh	CEO	16/2/10	BB & CB	£223K
NHS Bedfordshire	Nicola Bell David Levitt	Director for Health System Management and DCEO Assistant Director of Public Engagement	4/3/10	Beds	Large
Voluntary and Community Action	John Gelder	Director	12/1/10	CB	£657K

Additional Interviews

Justin Vetter – Dept. Communities & Local Government - LSP Policy Unit

Gary Underhill – The Care Forum (Bristol) - Advocacy Services Manager

Fiona Shiel – Lambeth Voluntary Action Council – Health & Social Care Officer

Anne Laing – Reading Stronger Together - Co-ordinator

Alison Gilchrist – Community development Consultant (formerly of Community Development Foundation)

Appendix 5 - VOCyfp Officer – Job Description

- Job Title:** VOCyfp Officer
- Reports to:** CVS Chief Officer and Chair or Vice Chair of VOCyfp
- Responsible for:** Marketing & Communications Officer
- Working hours:** 35hrs. Contracted hours will be worked between the core hours of 9am and 5.30pm, Monday to Friday, with occasional evening/weekend work required
- Geographic area:** Bedford Borough and Central Bedfordshire geographic areas

This post is funded by Bedford Borough Council and Central Bedfordshire on behalf of the VOCyfp, which is a network of organisations working with children, young people and their families, across the whole of Bedfordshire. The post holder will be supported and guided by a Strategy group consisting of VOCyfp members. The post-holder will meet on a regular basis with the chair to review and plan workload. The post is hosted by CVS on behalf of VOCyfp

Main Purpose of the Job

- To represent and voice the views of the voluntary and community sector working with young people and families at a strategic level, especially at the Children's Trusts, its sub groups and the Local Safeguarding Children's Board
- To enable the sector to be 'contract ready' by communicating and interpreting the requirements of current and emerging local and national policy.
- To enable the voluntary and community sector to play an effective and appropriate role in the overall planning, development and delivery of children's, young people and family services in Bedfordshire.
- To improve the communication and liaison between voluntary and community sector organisations.
- To improve the communication between voluntary and community sector organisations and statutory agencies working with children, young people and families.

Duties and Key Responsibilities

1. Representation

- 1.1. To represent and advocate the views, issues and concerns relevant to the voluntary and community sector working with young people and families in Bedfordshire.
- 1.2. To attend key strategic meetings where the voluntary and community sector working with children, young people and families needs to be represented, including the Children's Trusts, the commissioning group and the other ECM outcomes.

- 1.3. To act as a 'critical friend' to relevant statutory agencies and partnerships and to work with them to ensure that relevant policies, plans and strategies consider the voluntary and community sector.
- 1.4. To support other voluntary and community sector representatives who attend strategic meetings so that they can effectively contribute and voice the views of the sector.
- 1.5. To co-ordinate and manage the representation of the voluntary and community sector working with children, young people and families at key meetings and events.
- 1.6. To act as a conduit for information between the voluntary and community sector working with children, young people and families and the relevant statutory agencies and partnerships.
- 1.7. To represent and liaise at a regional level the interests and views of the voluntary and community sector working with children, young people and families in Bedfordshire.
- 1.8. To provide a channel of communication to ensure the voices of children, young people and families are heard.
- 1.9. To support the consultation and involvement of voluntary and community sector organisations working with children, young people and families.

2. Development

- 2.1. To play a lead role in organising, networking, information and consultation sessions for the benefit of the voluntary and community sector organisations working with children, young people and families.
- 2.2. To identify any need for appropriate multi-agency training and specific networking opportunities.
- 2.3. To participate in and contribute to training programmes, seminars and conferences, and disseminate good practice.
- 2.4. To act as a 'critical friend' and to encourage voluntary and community sector organisations working with children and young people to consider the quality of their provision, to encourage good practice, and where necessary signpost them towards any appropriate support.

3. Other duties

- 3.1. To complement the work of, and liaise with the local voluntary and community sector infrastructure organisations across Bedfordshire.
- 3.2. All such other tasks as may reasonably be requested by the Chief Officer or the Trustees through the Chair or Vice Chair

VOCypf Officer – Person Specification

	Essential/ Desirable	
	Degree, professional qualification or equivalent experience in work relevant to the post	E
	Literacy and numeracy skills sufficient to prepare reports and to collect, collate and analyse data	E
	A full driving licence	E
Experience and Knowledge		
	At least two years experience in an organisation working with children/young people	D
	Experience of working within the Voluntary or Community sector	E
	Experience of representing the views of the voluntary and community sector	D
	Knowledge of the change agenda for the children, young people and family services	D
	Experience of working in partnership with statutory organisations	D
	Experience of team working, including delivery of services through multi-agency and multi-disciplinary teams	E
	Experience of using email, internet and word processing packages. Experience of using Microsoft Word, Outlook and other Microsoft Office packages is desirable	E
	Experience of providing line management	D
Skills and Abilities		
	Ability to communicate effectively with people from all backgrounds	E
	Proven organisational and time management skills	E
	Proven listening and negotiation skills	E
	An ability to think strategically, set priorities and carry them out	E
Other		
	Ability to demonstrate professionalism	E
	Able to work occasional evenings and weekends when required	E
	A commitment to Equal Opportunities	E
	Understanding of issues around confidentiality and Data Protection	E
	Access to a car	E

Appendix 6 - Interview Template - Feasibility for H&SC Network

Organisation Name	
Respondent Name & Role	
Interview Date	
Interviewed By	Marcus Ward – Partner – Peach Consultancy

Please note that we anticipate that each stakeholder will want to focus on different elements of and questions in this template.

1. Brief Description of Organisation & Personal Role
i.e. what type service? which geographical areas? which demographic? who is your community? unique? what issues and challenges does the organisation currently face or anticipate?
2. How effectively does your organisation work collaboratively together or engage with other agencies in networks or partnerships?
i.e. within your own sector, and outside it? how involved in local initiatives and policy development & effective? existing grants or contracts? existing partnerships? what works well/less well and why? CYP VOCypf? weaknesses in overall relationship between voluntary and community sector and statutory sector, within statutory sector and within voluntary and community sector? ramifications?
3. What do you think the main purpose should be for a voluntary and community sector Health & Social Care Network?
i.e. objectives - support, communication, representation, dissemination, consultation, partnership working, performance, training, capacity building, organisational development, quality, research, feedback, experience, evidence?
4. Who should be members and what activities should the network undertake?
different needs? criteria?
5. What do you think the main success factors would be?
i.e. outcomes, benefits (for whom)?
6. What do you think the Network parameters and organisation structure should be?

Governance/decision-making, management, decision making, structure, staffing, hosting, location? training and development?
7. How best do you think the roles of sector representatives should be and how should they operate?
i.e. responsibility, accountability, communication tools and channels?
8. What do you think are the requisite skills for and the role of Network Co-ordinator?
9. What are your thoughts on how a network should be resourced?
10. Any other Comments?

Thank you very much for taking part in this Feasibility Study.

The resulting Feasibility Study report will be circulated to all participants.

Please note that if you have any thoughts following this interview we would be delighted to hear from you at any time either by telephone, email or by adding notes to this template.

The main contact for this study is Marcus Ward, Peach Consultancy who can be contacted:

Telephone: 020 8679 2810
 Mobile: 07940 535 259
 Email: marcusw@peachconsultancy.com

The lead contact for commissioning this study is Helen Nottingham, Partnerships Officer, Voluntary and Community Action, on behalf of **The VoluntaryWorks Consortium**:

Telephone: 01525 850559
 Email: partnership@action-centralbeds.org.uk



Appendix 7 - About Peach Consultancy

“We like what you’ve done. We like the way you’ve done it. We made the best choice of consultant”

Royal Borough Kensington & Chelsea – Children’s Strategic Commissioning Manager
(Mapping and Evaluation of voluntary and community sector capacity to tender for delivery of the Borough’s ECM outcomes)

Peach Consultancy’s work has two closely-linked strands:

We provide strategic management support, business planning, organisational development, capacity building, fundraising, training, programme development, partnership building, contracting and research & evaluation services directly for Voluntary and Community Organisations. We work in almost every area of the voluntary sector including areas such as children’s services, adult services, health and social care, regeneration, trading and enterprise, community safety and cohesion.

We work in partnership with statutory and representative bodies including Local and Health Authorities, Primary Care Trusts, CVAs and national umbrella groups to establish, support, develop, monitor and evaluate voluntary and community programmes and partnerships. We focus on issues such as service planning and commissioning, capacity and organisational development, community and voluntary and community sector engagement, and effective governance and performance monitoring.

Peach Consultancy is quality assured under the **ISO 9001** international quality assurance mark.

Peach Consultancy has extensive experience of delivering multi-faceted, complex research and evaluation projects to tight deadlines. Peach Consultancy is a member of **ARVAC**, the voluntary sector research association, and **LARIA**, the local authority research association. In addition the Consultants deliver prescribed capacity building and organisational development support for voluntary and community sector organisations through approved consultancy work for organisations such as the Adventure Capital Fund, ACEVO, Community Development Foundation, Futurebuilders, Charities Aid Foundation, and the Evelyn Oldfield Unit; including extensive experience of brokering, establishing and supporting collaborative working within the voluntary and community sectors.

Senior Partners: Catherine Pearson (MBA, MInstF) & Marcus Ward (LIB.,IBC) • Website: www.peachconsultancy.com

33 Arragon Gardens London SW16 5LY • Telephone & Facsimile: 020 8679 2810 • Email: admin@peachconsultancy.com