



# Bedfordshire and Luton Voluntary and Community Sector Infrastructure Consortium

## Consultation Newsletter

## November 2007



### What is the Consortium?

Funded by the Government's **ChangeUp** programme, a Consortium of the voluntary and community sector infrastructure organisations in Bedfordshire and Luton has been working together to sustain and improve the overall provision of infrastructure supporting the diverse needs of the local voluntary and community sector.

### Why we need your views

The Consortium, under Capacitybuilders' direction, is currently working to produce a Strategic Plan for 2008 - 2014 and Business Plan for 2008 - 2011. Over the last few years research from over 2000 local organisations has helped shape the Consortium's work. To enhance these plans, we are asking for your views on the suggested objectives and projects through a survey and/or at a series of consultation events listed on page four. Please take a few minutes to read this newsletter and complete and return the survey by **10 December 2007**. Alternatively you can complete the survey online by visiting [www.voluntaryworks.org.uk](http://www.voluntaryworks.org.uk)



## Vision, Mission and Objectives 2008-2014

### Consortium Vision

A vibrant, effective, sustainable and inclusive third sector where all individuals and communities are empowered to play a full part in local voluntary and community action.

### Consortium Mission

To provide effective infrastructure support to third sector organisations; enabling them to develop their capacity to deliver quality services that meet the needs of their communities.

### The Consortium's Objectives are:

**Volunteering** - Recruit more volunteers, develop more volunteering opportunities and increase the capacity of organisations to support volunteers.

**Capacity Building** - Fulfil needs by developing skills, knowledge, structures and resources.

**Voice** - Support the sector to have a stronger voice.

**Partnerships** - Enable and encourage partnership working.

**Community Cohesion** - Build cohesion by responding to the needs of existing, new and growing communities.

**Profile** - Raise awareness of what the Consortium is and what it does with its stakeholders.

**Strategic Approach to Delivery** - Work strategically and in collaboration with one another and the public sector on policy and services.



## Consortium Projects 2008-2011

Listed below are the projects the Consortium believes meet the greatest needs of the voluntary and community sector in Bedfordshire and Luton.

### Representation and the Impact of Local Government Reorganisation

Two-tier local government in Bedfordshire is being reorganised into two unitary authorities covering Bedford Borough and 'Central Bedfordshire' (the area of the current Mid and South Bedfordshire District Councils).

Over the next two years, while planning and transformation takes place, the project will enable the third sector to become involved within the whole process of local government reorganisation. It will provide opportunities for the sector to become involved in new third sector fora; the formulation of new strategies; and in the formation of, and representation on, a range of new Partnerships.

### IT Support and Advice

The provision of IT support and advice to third sector organisations in Bedfordshire and Luton. The project would:

- offer advice on IT to all third sector organisations through newsletters, information sheets, online advice guides, training courses and workshops
- provide one-to-one support and consultancy to 50 third sector organisations to help them develop and implement a strategy that meets their IT needs and improve their overall effectiveness.

The project would consist of a full-time 'Circuit Rider' providing technical advice and support together with a part-time Project Co-ordinator who would support the 'Circuit Rider' to run and promote the project.

### Social Enterprise

Within the voluntary and community sector there are significant numbers of organisations that are looking to develop greater financial sustainability. These organisations need to understand how they can adopt a social enterprise approach to their work, the issues they need to address and the development needs they may have. We will seek to increase social enterprise awareness using a variety of media and events; and offer intensive one-to-one information, advice and guidance, training and networking opportunities to organisations.

### Modernising Volunteering

The need for a constant stream of volunteers has been established through a number of surveys of **frontline** voluntary, community and public sector organisations as one of their primary requirements.

The purpose of this project is to develop a properly funded and structured Volunteer Centre network across Bedfordshire and Luton designed to deliver:

- a substantial increase in the number of volunteers available to organisations
- organisations that are better equipped to recruit and retain volunteers.

### Marketing and Communications

The value of a strong brand lies in the impression left with anyone who comes into contact with the branded product. Today, it is imperative that the voluntary and community sector must be aware of its brand image; this is how its customers view their organisation. The project will enable the sector to develop its communication and marketing strategies and skills, through training courses, one-to-one sessions and mentoring.



## Consortium Projects 2008-2011

### General Advice, Information and Development

The project will seek to provide generalist advice, information and development services to **frontline** voluntary and community organisations in order to help them become better equipped to seek funding and stronger service providers for their beneficiaries.

### Procurement

The project will provide training and support to enable local voluntary and community organisations to compete for public service contracts. The project would also encourage consortia working where appropriate.

### Community Accountancy

Community Accountancy is becoming increasingly established as a means by which organisations can acquire the skills needed to run their financial affairs. This project, based on the success of the service already offered by Voluntary Action Luton, will provide free financial advice, information and training to the trustees and officers of voluntary and community organisations. It will also offer low-cost payroll services, preparation of final accounts, and independent examination of accounts.

### Improving Quality

Funders are increasingly expecting applicants to demonstrate that they are providing services that are of a high quality, through the use of PQASSO and other standards. The project will provide support, guidance and advice to local organisations that want to work towards an appropriate quality standard or framework.

### Community Empowerment

Government policy has identified a need to empower and build the capacity of third sector organisations to represent local people and communities in the place-shaping agenda. Voluntary and community sector organisations can act as a key conduit between local authorities and their citizens that is generally overlooked. This project aims to develop the role of local voluntary and community organisations in community empowerment in Bedfordshire, enabling citizens to have more influence on what happens in their area.

### Partnership Working Skills

Work undertaken by the local authorities, other statutory agencies and partnerships will engage more with the voluntary and community sector and there is a general consensus that all agencies can improve their collaborative and partnership working skills. The project will enable voluntary organisations and community groups to develop and engage in partnership working. It will promote the concept of working collaboratively, enabling the sector to make informed decisions about whether and how to work collaboratively. Local third sector organisations will gain the skills, knowledge and resources to develop their collaborative and partnership working arrangements.

### Consortium Development and Management

The project will seek to employ a Strategic Development Officer to manage the work of the Consortium, including delivery of the projects set out in the Strategic and Business Plans. It will also provide for fund management arrangements, staff training and development, increased stakeholder engagement, the mainstreaming of equality and diversity issues and the widening of Consortium membership.



## WIN a £25 Gift Voucher!

Your views on the future activities of the Consortium are very important. There are a number of ways in which you can give your views. All surveys received (by post or online) by **10 December 2007** will be entered into a prize draw to **WIN a £25 High Street Voucher** of your choice and the winner will be notified by post or email by 8 January 2008.

You can either:

- complete and return the enclosed survey in the FREEPOST envelope so that it reaches us by 10 December 2007
- complete the online survey by visiting [www.voluntaryworks.org.uk](http://www.voluntaryworks.org.uk) by 10 December 2007
- attend one of our Consultation lunch events to share your views. An invitation is enclosed.

### Consultation Events

6 December 2007	11.00am - 12.45pm	Voluntary and Community Action South Bedfordshire
6 December 2007	12.30pm - 2.30pm	Voluntary Action Luton
6 December 2007	12.00pm - 2.00pm	Bedford Racial Equality Council
7 December 2007	12.00pm - 2.00pm	Community and Voluntary Service Mid and North Bedfordshire

For more information on these events visit [www.voluntaryworks.org.uk](http://www.voluntaryworks.org.uk)

## The Consortium Members

**Bedford Race Equality Council**

**Bedfordshire Rural Communities Charity**

**CVS Mid and North Beds**

**Voluntary Action Luton**

**Voluntary and Community Action South Bedfordshire**

**Volunteer Centre Bedford**

**The Consortium is advised by MENTER and ChangeUp East**

Contact details for all these agencies can be found on the Consortium's website  
[www.voluntaryworks.org.uk](http://www.voluntaryworks.org.uk)