

Voluntary and Community Action South Bedfordshire

Information Sheet

ChangeUp – The Capacity Building and Infrastructure Framework for the Voluntary and Community Sector

In June 2004 the Home Office published *ChangeUp – The Capacity Building and Infrastructure Framework for the Voluntary and Community Sector*, the Government's ten-year plan to improve the activity and reach of support services delivered by local infrastructure organisations. It will help to review, develop and modernise services to better meet the needs of frontline organisations, including small organisations and marginalised communities.

This paper reviews some of the key conclusions and actions set out in the Framework and outlines how Voluntary and Community Action South Bedfordshire plans to respond to these.

The Framework states that local generalist infrastructure is a critically important foundation for the development of the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS). It can strengthen skills and advocacy at local level, provide a collective voice for the VCS and ensure the sector is represented in policy making.

Definitions

Infrastructure is defined as the physical facilities, structures, systems, relationships, people, knowledge, skills that exist to support and develop, coordinate, represent and promote frontline organisations thus enabling them to deliver their missions more effectively.

Capacity building is defined as empowering activity that strengthens the ability of voluntary and community organisations to build their structures, systems, people and skills so that they are better able to:

- define and achieve their objectives
- engage in consultation and planning
- manage projects
- take part in partnerships, social enterprise and service delivery.

The functions of infrastructure organisations are defined as:

- **Pre start-up** – community development, confidence building, idea development
- **Start-up** how to start up an organisation, legal requirements, business planning
- **Secure access to facilities** – meeting rooms, offices etc.
- **Income generation** – information/advice on funding sources, procurement and enterprise
- **Volunteers** – recruitment, management and retention
- **Personnel** – how to recruit and manage staff and comply with legislation
- **Organisational development** – performance improvement, governance, management, leadership, business planning, marketing, financial management
- **Technical support in specialist areas** – e.g. meeting professional standards
- **ICT** – ICT strategies and access to low cost equipment, software and support
- **Skills** – developing organisational and professional skills of the workforce
- **Partnership building/brokerage** – bringing together organisations for joint policy making, planning and service delivery
- **Policy and Research** – collecting/providing evidence to influence policy, planning and service delivery
- **Advocacy/representation** – providing a voice for frontline organisations.

National Hubs

The Framework recommends the creation of five national centres of expertise or 'hubs' to promote and support best practice in the priority areas of:

- Performance Improvement
- Workforce Development
- ICT
- Governance
- Financing VCS Activity

Voluntary and Community Action will

- *monitor the work of the National Hubs of Expertise.*

Local Hubs

There should be local hubs of infrastructure activity delivering generalist and specialist infrastructure functions and services in every local area (defined as primarily local or unitary authority, borough or district level). Specialist infrastructure should be integral to the development of hubs of activity. High quality infrastructure services and activities need to be delivered as close to the point of need as possible, as is economically viable.

Local infrastructure must improve access to support for small voluntary and community organisations operating at neighbourhood level, for organisations working in disadvantaged communities, and in rural communities.

It is envisaged that infrastructure at local level should gradually coalesce into geographic hubs of activity with services sharing premises, back office facilities or merging. Local hubs could also provide incubation support to newer organisations by, for example, offering office and meeting space or effective outreach.

Voluntary and Community Action will

- *continue to work as an integrated infrastructure organisation and act as the 'local hub' providing infrastructure support within South Bedfordshire;*
- *continue to plan for the development of a VCS Resource Centre.*

Offering Excellent Infrastructure Provision to All

Infrastructure organisations need to embed performance improvement in order to demonstrate that they offer excellent, outcome-focussed services and are as clear as they can be about their impact.

Infrastructure organisations need to view themselves as knowledge organisations and adopt a more strategic approach to creating, packaging and making available quality information that is accessible and valuable to users.

There must be a step change in the commitment and practice of generalist infrastructure in increasing the reach and impact of their services in meeting the needs of disadvantaged communities, promoting good practice, reaching beyond the mainstream and tackling in equality.

Voluntary and Community Action will

- *continue to develop our capacity to increase the reach and impact of our services;*
- *continue to create, produce and make available quality information resources;*
- *increase its library resources on the priority areas for development (excluding ICT);*
- *continue with the work of the Quality Assurance Working Group in developing and improving the performance of Voluntary and Community Action;*
- *monitor the development of accredited standards for local infrastructure organisations;*
- *monitor the development of core competencies for people who deliver infrastructure support and a basic course for new infrastructure workers.*

Funding VCS Infrastructure

The Framework recognises the unique role of VCS infrastructure. Government, other policy makers and users rely on infrastructure to represent and consult communities and frontline organisations, alongside building their capacity.

The Framework recognises that investment in effective infrastructure should add significant value to investment in frontline organisations. It highlights the need for VCS Infrastructure to be funded on a more stable basis and suggests a two pronged approach to driving up sustainability:

- improving income generation, including charging where appropriate and feasible; and
- strengthening and stabilising public funding.

The public sector has a key role in maintaining the existence of strong and robust infrastructure. Public sector funding should be long term, strategic and focussed on clear objectives which infrastructure bodies should deliver to agreed standards.

Performance Improvement

Frontline organisations should be better able to improve the performance of their organisations, make choices about which [Quality Assurance] tools [and systems] are right for them and to easily access support and advice, which enables them to assess, in a structured and systematic way, the strengths and weaknesses of their organisation and the obstacles they need to overcome.

Voluntary and Community Action will

- *enable voluntary and community organisations to improve the performance of their organisation and select QA tools and systems that are right for them;*
- *increase the provision of face-to-face assistance and easily accessible support and advice;*
- *set up a pro-help group of experienced managers and appropriately trained consultants to assist organisations with performance improvement;*
- *facilitate the sharing of skills and good practice through training workshops, mentoring, & peer support;*
- *train staff in helping organisations to diagnose organisational strengths and weaknesses, and overcome obstacles to performance improvement efforts.*

Workforce Development

There should be a greater range of accessible development opportunities with increased take-up of learning opportunities by VCS workers. Employers should have improved access to support and advice on Human Resource issues. Developing the skills of paid and volunteer workforces and recruiting and retaining the right people is key to improving an organisation's impact.

Voluntary and Community Action will

- *continue to provide a comprehensive programme of training workshops and courses;*
- *enhance the provision of advice on employment law and practice for trustees, managers and all staff;*
- *designate a Development Officer to lead on Human Resource issues.*

ICT

There needs to be increased awareness of the benefits of using ICT with affordable and reliable support. VCS infrastructure should provide accessible, high quality support and assistance on ICT.

Voluntary and Community Action will

- *in the long term (5-8 years), develop a project to promote use of ICT as part of the VCS Resource Centre OR support proposals to develop a project at sub-regional level.*

Governance

Board members should be aware of their responsibilities and good practice with access to information and development. Being a trustee should be more attractive.

Voluntary and Community Action will

- *promote board membership as a key volunteering opportunity;*
- *enhance the provision of governance support, including opportunities for advice and information (including legal, financial and employment issues) and a range of practical, targeted initiatives for boards and board members that build on best practice;*
- *monitor the development of a set of competencies and standards in VCS governance;*
- *designate a Development Officer to lead on governance issues.*

Recruiting and Developing Volunteers

There should be high quality volunteering infrastructure reaching, recruiting and placing a greater number and diversity of individuals, along with improved volunteer management.

The Government aims to increase levels of volunteering in all communities and in particular from young people, socially excluded groups, those aged over 75 and from certain ethnic minority groups. Employee volunteering should also be encouraged locally. More needs to be done to promote volunteering, including campaigns to encourage people to volunteer. The general public require accessible and high quality routes into volunteering opportunities. The provision of information and brokerage services to the public needs to be rooted in local delivery.

Local infrastructure has a key role to play in helping to increase the numbers of volunteers. Where it is well resourced, there is evidence to show subsequent high levels of volunteers recruited for local organisations, as well as the effective promotion of good practice in volunteer management. Local volunteering infrastructure has clearly demonstrated that it can be particularly effective in reaching and placing a diverse range of individuals.

Recruiting, training and managing volunteers successfully requires skills and organisational capacity within organisations which must be supported by effective infrastructure. Poor management of volunteers continues to be a major cause of volunteer drop out. There is a need to develop high quality programmes to enhance the skills of paid and voluntary managers of volunteers, along with training and support for organisations that involve volunteers.

Voluntary and Community Action will

- *continue to secure funding so that our Volunteering Services can be well resourced;*
- *increase the diversity of local volunteering opportunities;*
- *instigate campaigns to target and promote volunteering and encourage people to volunteer;*
- *develop a programme of volunteer management training for managers of volunteers;*
- *designate a Development Officer to lead on volunteer management issues.*

Financing VCS Activity

There is a need to increase expertise of fundraising, procurement and social enterprise so that frontline organisations are better able to generate income. Developing more effective fundraising skills is amongst the highest priority skill needs for the sector.

Voluntary and Community Action will

- *continue to secure funding so that our Funding Advice Service can be well resourced;*
- *continue to develop a programme of fundraising skills training for trustees and fundraisers.*

Further Information

To obtain a copy of the *ChangeUp* report or the Executive Summary visit the Home Office website: www.homeoffice.gov.uk/comrace/active/developing. If you would like to know more about Voluntary and Community Action's plans contact John Gelder by email to john@action-southbeds.org.uk.