

BEDFORDSHIRE & LUTON VCS INFRASTRUCTURE CONSORTIUM

Voluntary and Community Sector
Infrastructure Investment Plan

Delivery Plan 1
2005-2006

Agreed June 2005

**BEDFORDSHIRE & LUTON VCS INFRASTRUCTURE CONSORTIUM
Voluntary and Community Sector Infrastructure Investment Plan 2004-2006**

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BEDFORDSHIRE & LUTON VCS INFRASTRUCTURE CONSORTIUM

Voluntary and Community Sector Infrastructure Investment Plan 2004-2006

INTRODUCTION

This Delivery Plan supplements the Infrastructure Investment Plan 2004-2006 prepared in June 2004. It has been put together by members of the Consortium – a diverse group of Local Infrastructure Organisations serving equally diverse communities within Bedfordshire and Luton. The Consortium offers core services within key areas of activity namely;

- a voice for the interests of local groups and the promotion of the sector
- the facilitation of links between organisations and with other stakeholders
- the promotion and supporting of best practice
- the provision of leadership
- technical support (ICT, human resources, marketing, finance etc.)
- the recruitment of volunteers

The Infrastructure Investment Plan included a description of the **key challenges** facing the Consortium and set out a **vision** for the Consortium and for the voluntary and community sector (VCS) as a whole; a **strategic aim** and a set of **strategic objectives**. These are set out below for ease of reference and form the basis for this Delivery Plan.

Key Challenges

An analysis of the context in which the Consortium operates and the needs of front line VCS organisations provides a diverse picture of local needs. Key challenges facing the Consortium and its constituent members are:

- continuing to map local VCS organisations, identify their needs and getting feedback from the sector;
- improving its communication with front line VCS organisations and extending the reach of infrastructure services to non-users;
- improving the skills, knowledge and attitudes of front line VCS organisations, particularly in respect of community development, funding and volunteering;
- enabling VCS organisations to increase their capacity by promoting the benefits of, and opportunities for, volunteering to the public at large and recruiting additional volunteers;
- enabling VCS organisations to have an effective voice;
- developing collaboration and strategic working as a VCS Infrastructure Consortium;
- embedding quality through benchmarking and meeting quality standards;
- securing the resources needed to sustain, develop and improve local infrastructure services.

Vision

Our long-term vision for the VCS Infrastructure Consortium is:

A VCS Infrastructure Consortium able to develop effective joint working that enables Local Infrastructure Organisations to support the diverse needs of the voluntary and community sector in Bedfordshire & Luton.

Our long-term vision of the voluntary and community sector is:

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

- identify and make planned responses to community needs through effective voluntary and community action;
- have the skills, knowledge, structures and resources to fulfil their potential;
- develop and implement good practice in governance, service delivery, volunteering and as an employer (where appropriate) and are committed to continuous improvement of quality in all aspects of their work;
- recognise diversity, provide equality of opportunity and enable participation from all sections of the community;
- respect and value volunteers for who they are and what they contribute;
- have a high profile within local communities and with local opinion formers;
- feel supported by local VCS Infrastructure Organisations as effective local development agencies able to meet their needs and represent their interests.

Strategic Aim

To sustain and improve the overall provision of infrastructure supporting the diverse needs of the voluntary and community sector in Bedfordshire & Luton and provide effective mechanisms for the delivery of generic and specialist infrastructure services.

Strategic Objectives

- To increase collaboration and strategic working between VCS Infrastructure Organisations on policy, information and services.
- To promote awareness and understanding of the roles and services of the Consortium and its constituent members amongst all rural and urban voluntary organisations and community groups so that they can better connect with our services.
- To strengthen our targeting of hard to reach groups to ensure equal access to information and services.
- To increase the capacity of local communities by improving people's community development, volunteering and fundraising skills.
- To increase access to, and the take-up of, a known and diverse range of sustainable volunteering opportunities.
- To enable local voluntary organisations and community groups to establish an effective voice in response to the needs and interests of local communities.

The Consortium's vision will not be achieved in one or two years. It will require a determined effort over a period of around ten years on the part of members of the Consortium, the local voluntary and community sector, funders and others. The activities outlined in this Delivery Plan are about taking the first steps towards achieving this vision.

MANAGEMENT AND DELIVERY ARRANGEMENTS

Membership

The Consortium has formalised its working arrangements through a **Partnership Agreement**, a copy of which is to be found on pages 47 to 49. Appendix 1 to this agreement sets out the current membership of the Consortium and includes some changes in personnel and organisational information (to that previously advised).

Bedford Race Equality Council (BREC) were encouraged to join the Consortium at an early stage and have been kept informed at all stages of the infrastructure planning process. Consortium members and others have also briefed and encouraged the organisation to participate. BREC's contributions, views, investment priorities and knowledge of the sector have been sought. Unfortunately, BREC has consistently failed to attend meetings, provide information requested of it, meet deadlines or to communicate with members of the Consortium. Efforts are continuing to try and include the organisation and to highlight specific areas of work for future delivery plans.

Fund Holder

The Consortium has agreed that Voluntary and Community Action South Bedfordshire will continue to act as the main contact for the Consortium and to hold funds paid to the Consortium by, or on behalf of, the Government Office for the East of England. Contact details remain as follows:

Name of Contact: John Gelder
Address: Voluntary and Community Action South Bedfordshire
Bossard House
West Street
Leighton Buzzard
Bedfordshire
LU7 1DA
Telephone: 01525 850559
Email: john@action-southbeds.org.uk

The Fund Holder confirms that it is not able to recover Value Added Tax from HM Customs & Excise for capital equipment (or other) expenditure.

Delivery Plans

In summary, there are seven separate Delivery Plans addressing:

Capacity Building the Consortium – To enable the Consortium to undertake further planning in relation to the implementation, management and evaluation of the Infrastructure Investment Plan and these Delivery Plans for modernising VCS Infrastructure across Bedfordshire & Luton.

Web Portal and Website Development – To improve access to VCS infrastructure services by developing a portal website and associated organisational websites. These websites will provide gateways through which voluntary organisations and community groups can more effectively access support, information and services in order to meet the diverse needs of the VCS in Bedfordshire & Luton.

Improving Reach and Targeting Hard to Reach Groups – To strengthen our knowledge management of local voluntary and community sector organisations through the use of a common database program; the capture of information and contacts relating to previously unknown and

hard to reach voluntary organisations and community groups; and there by ensuring equal access to information and services.

Sustainable Volunteering – To increase access to and the take-up of, a known and diverse range of sustainable volunteering opportunities across Bedfordshire & Luton.

Sustainable Funding through Social Enterprise and Procurement – To develop the underpinning skills that enable VCS Infrastructure Organisations, voluntary organisations, community groups and other not-for-profit organisations to establish more sustainable services and funding and to research current approaches to procurement within the voluntary and public sectors.

Building Rural Community Capacity – To investigate and develop resources and activities that support and strengthen the skills, abilities and confidence of people to take effective action and leading roles in the development of their communities.

Back Office Services Feasibility Study – To research and analyse the current methods and approaches to the provision and use of Back Office Services and establish the potential benefits of developing an integrated range of such services within the wider voluntary and community sector in Bedfordshire & Luton.

Additional Delivery Plans will be developed when the proposed additional spend is known. These are expected to include:

- work to identify the strategic business case for Investing in Communities funding to support the delivery of a comprehensive funding advice service across Bedfordshire & Luton;
- a feasibility study to investigate the need for voluntary sector resource centres across Bedfordshire & Luton; develop a draft Business Plan and costs, and consider the long-term sustainability of such resource centres;
- further work to embed quality and improve reach.

Each Delivery Plan sets out the current situation; shows it's relationship to each of the Strategic Objectives and the earlier ICT exemplar project; describes the key activities to be undertaken; addresses specific management and delivery issues (including milestones and outline timetable) and sets out the associated costs.

Proposals included in the Delivery Plan have been agreed by the governance structures of our respective organisations and have been developed in line with local Compact commitments. They take account of consultation with the sector and will be the subject of further consultation shortly.

Investment

Each of the Delivery Plans sets out detailed costs for the activities to be undertaken. The total investment required is as follows:

Composite Investment	Revenue	Capital
Capacity Building the Consortium	19169	0
Web Portal and Website Development	27338	19362
Improving Reach and Targeting Hard to Reach Groups	80598	32200
Sustainable Volunteering	98543	18600
Sustainable Funding through Social Enterprise and Procurement	48601	0
Building Rural Community Capacity	36265	1000
Back Office Services Feasibility Study	7500	0
Total Investment Required	£318014	£71162

CAPACITY BUILDING THE CONSORTIUM

Strategic Goal

To enable the Consortium to undertake further planning in relation to the implementation, management and evaluation of the Infrastructure Investment Plan and these Delivery Plans for modernising VCS Infrastructure across Bedfordshire & Luton.

Current Situation

The Consortium was formed in February 2004 and undertook intensive work up to June 2004 to prepare the Infrastructure Investment Plan. This was undertaken with the support of an external facilitator and funded through the joint ACU/DEFRA early Spend Programme. Since then members of the Consortium have worked to develop these Delivery Plans, often at a 'cost' to other work, and are committed to seeing through their implementation.

There is a need for continued support and investment if the Consortium is to undertake further planning in relation to the implementation, management and evaluation of the Infrastructure Investment Plan and its associated Delivery Plans.

Bedfordshire County Council VCS Infrastructure Review

At the time of preparing this Delivery Plan the County Council's review was being undertaken by COVER. Consortium members' discussions with COVER reflected the contents of the IIP and the emerging Delivery Plan but these did not seem to be reflected in the report of this work, which was presented at a joint meeting on 14 January 2005.

Proposals setting out strategic objectives, delivery functions and future investment (based on our IIP submission) were put to the County Council, which is still considering the information along with other matters such as the structure for delivering infrastructure services and how savings can be made.

The Consortium had developed a proposal for a Change Manager for Mid Bedfordshire but decided not to proceed with this as it pre-empted discussions, and possible outcomes, with the County Council. We are planning to include this or revised proposals in our next submission once we have a clearer view on the likely way ahead and how the additional infrastructure funding can be spent.

We have taken account of the Review in all our deliberations and in formulating this Delivery Plan; all the proposed activity will enhance whatever arises from the Review and we have put on hold proposals where there needs to be clearer thinking on what is expected for the future.

We recognise that Bedfordshire County Council and the District/Borough Councils are critical to the future development and funding of VCS infrastructure and we are continuing to ensure that there are close linkages between these discussions and the development of IIP Delivery Plans.

Consultation

The Consortium has taken account of *ChangeUp* from its early drafts and responded to the emphasis that it should respond to the needs of frontline organisations; thus as infrastructure organisations we are taking on our co-ordinating and capacity building roles.

Members have made links with the wider voluntary and community sector on the *ChangeUp* agenda through newsletters, user surveys, training needs surveys and consultations on their Strategic Plans.

The *ChangeUp* agenda is very broad and needs a multi-dimensional approach when being discussed with local partners. Context is very important and this differs greatly from one agency to another. Consortium members have had discussions with their respective local authorities to consider the priorities for action and the work outlined in the Delivery Plan. Regular meetings keep them informed of developments and progress.

Consortium members are also part of the LSC Bedfordshire & Luton Working Together Strategy Group, which is considering the LSC's strategy for working with the voluntary and community sector. *ChangeUp* is an important element of these discussions and relevant links are being made/taken forward. There is a commitment to produce a Workforce Development Strategy and to consider future funding arrangements. Members of the Consortium have had effective working relationships with the LSC for some time and the CVSs are represented on the Council of LSC Bedfordshire & Luton.

The IIP and this Delivery Plan also take account of local Community Plans and our discussions with Local Strategic Partnerships build on and take forward much of what is contained in *ChangeUp*. These will also need to influence the development of local Investing in Communities plans and discussions in this respect have been ongoing for some time.

The SEEER Partnership for Bedfordshire & Luton has also been involved in discussions on, and has endorsed the actions within, the Social Enterprise Delivery Plan as a development towards the Partnership's sub-regional Strategic Plan.

The Luton Assembly has not specifically been involved in the development of the Delivery Plan, although its work on *Volbase* and extending reach has informed the thinking around development across the remainder of the county.

The Consortium is preparing a Summary of the Delivery Plan and a consultation paper on the priority actions within the current Delivery Plan. We will also consult on priorities for future Delivery Plans and the additional spend. We see this as vital for the long term development of the vision set out in our plan. We have identified a small budget (£1,800) that will contribute towards the costs of members' undertaking this consultative work with stakeholders. The Summary and consultation paper will be used in discussions with local partners and widely circulated within the voluntary and community sector, to local authorities, statutory agencies and funders.

Building BME Involvement

North Bedfordshire CVS and Voluntary Action Luton have a demonstrable record of working with BME communities. In North Bedfordshire 40% of their board membership is from BME communities; their Development Officer meets regularly (every six weeks) with the BREC Development Workers: relationships are improving and greater co-ordination and information sharing has taken place as a result. During the last year NBCVS worked with 40 BME groups and helped to set up a local Diversity Forum. Voluntary Action Luton has 73% of its board membership – including its Chairperson – and its staff from BME communities. During the last year VAL has worked one-to-one with over 50 BME groups and this forms an integral and targeted part of its day-to-day work across the organisation. The 2003 Directory of Voluntary & Community Groups identified over 75 BME groups and the new 2005 edition will considerably raise that number. This work contributes to engagement work with Assembly where BME involvement is particularly strong.

The Learning and Skills Council Bedfordshire & Luton is working with NBVCS and VAL so that it can better access BME communities across the sub-region with funding directed at specific involvement and learning outcomes within the African-Caribbean and Asian communities.

Our Improving Reach Delivery Plan also seeks to identify additional BME organisations/groups and to address how we can extend our services to BME communities.

Working in Partnership as a Consortium

Members of the Consortium have been working together at a sub-regional level for some time and believe this has to continue well beyond *ChangeUp*. This partnership working approach shares out both the benefits and responsibilities involved, with different partners taking the lead responsibility for co-ordinating particular pieces of work, acting as fund manager and representing the sector on different outside bodies, as appropriate. This partnership approach includes, for example, work with the Bedfordshire Local Strategic Forum, Investing in Communities Interim Partnership Board, MKSM Social Infrastructure Group, Compact, LSC Working Together Strategy Group, LSC Group Skills Training Project, Global Grants Partnership and the Bedfordshire & Luton Funding Network. The Consortium will act as the vehicle for co-ordinating this work in the future.

The consortium has taken the view that its members needed to work together as a consortium, not just for the two years of *ChangeUp* funding but for the longer term. It took the view that these arrangements needed to be sustainable and that they should form part of our collective partnership working.

All the work involved in *ChangeUp* affects the day job, but the day job has had to evolve to take account of, and respond to, these and a whole host of other public policy issues in this time. All Consortium members would have to contribute time and energy to the work of the Consortium, be it preparing papers, planning and implementing the delivery plan, preparing and contributing to meetings etc. Employing a separate staff resource would still involve this work, as well as managing such a post and meetings with the post holder. In the longer term such a post would not be sustainable so the function has to be built into the day job. We have seen it as important to employ the staff resource in delivering the work set out in the Delivery Plan.

The consortium is developing mechanisms to enable it to manage the delivery of the strands included in this Delivery Plan. This includes implementation groups; meeting dates set until May 2006 and detailed arrangements for the reporting and claiming of expenditure. Each strand of the delivery plan has a consortium member leading it and an implementation group, consisting of those members involved in a particular strand, to drive forward the work set out in our delivery plan. The Consortium will meet regularly to provide oversight and leadership for the overall implementation of the plan, thus reinforcing the principles of partnership working and shared responsibility.

One member of the Consortium is convening and chairing meetings (6 hours) and another is taking and circulating the notes of meetings (12 hours). Another is responsible for hosting meetings. Thus the responsibility and work is shared out and members are not burdened with the whole task. The lead agency also has provision of 30 days for the time involved as Consortium fund manager.

Links to Strategic Objectives and ICT Exemplar Project

To increase collaboration and strategic working between VCS Infrastructure Organisations on policy, information and services.

- The work of the Consortium to-date has been achieved through increased collaboration and strategic working between its VCS Infrastructure Organisation members. This will continue as the Delivery Plans are implemented and as new investment opportunities arise.

To promote awareness and understanding of the roles and services of the Consortium and its constituent members amongst all rural and urban voluntary organisations and community groups so that they can better connect with our services.

- By meeting together as a Consortium, members will gain an increased awareness and understanding of the roles and services offered by its constituent members so that these can be better co-ordinated and promoted to frontline organisations.

To strengthen our targeting of hard to reach groups to ensure equal access to information and services.

- By meeting together as a Consortium, members will be able to further consider how their work will strengthen the targeting of hard to reach groups to ensure equal access.

To increase the capacity of local communities by improving people's community development, volunteering and fundraising skills.

- By meeting together as a Consortium, members will be able to further consider how their work will increase the capacity of local communities.

To increase access to, and the take-up of, a known and diverse range of sustainable volunteering opportunities.

- By meeting together as a Consortium, members will be able to further consider how their work will increase access to, and the take-up of, a diverse range of volunteering opportunities.

To enable local voluntary organisations and community groups to establish an effective voice in response to the needs and interests of local communities.

- By meeting together as a Consortium, members will be able to further consider how their work will enable local voluntary organisations and community groups to establish an effective voice in response to the needs and interests of local communities.

Building on the Broadband for Bedfordshire ICT exemplar project.

- The Consortium will continue to make effective use of Broadband and enhanced ICT facilities to develop and deliver its work.

Key Activities

1. *To oversee the management and delivery of the Infrastructure Investment Plan and its constituent Delivery Plans.*

This will require continued convening of Consortium meetings and provision of a secretariat, a function shared between Voluntary and Community Action South Bedfordshire and Bedfordshire Rural Communities Charity. In order to provide a central location for meetings venue costs and travel expenses also have to be covered. Regular meetings will be held; initially monthly and then moving to at least quarterly as implementation of the Delivery Plans takes effect.

2. *To establish Implementation Teams to co-ordinate and implement each of the Delivery Plans.*

Each Delivery Plan will have its own Implementation Team lead by a member of the Consortium. They will meet as required to co-ordinate and manage the delivery of each plan.

3. *To act as fund holder by managing the receipt of funds, monitoring the payment of expenses and meeting the funder's reporting requirements.*

This requires travel and attendance at the *ChangeUp* East Regional Advisory Group; liaise with GO-East and *ChangeUp* Fund Manager; dealing with grant income and expenditure; liaising with Implementation Team leads and Consortium members over payments and reporting requirements; and providing quarterly and final reports to the *ChangeUp* Fund Manager.

Management and Delivery

Voluntary and Community Action South Bedfordshire will continue to convene and chair Consortium meetings and Bedfordshire Rural Communities Charity will continue to produce notes of meetings. The Consortium will continue to meet as and when required until the investment is known and thereafter a timetable of meetings will be put together. Implementation Groups will be set up when the investment is confirmed. Each Delivery Plan will be managed by a member of the Consortium, working as lead partner in the Implementation Group.

Costs and Sustainability

Capacity Building the Consortium	Revenue	Capital
Travel and Attendance at Consortium Meetings	5178	0
Secretariat Services	360	0
Preparation of Documents/Attendance at BCC Review Meetings	2883	0
Travel and Attendance at Regional Advisory Group Meetings	1164	0
Administering and Reporting on Main Spend Programme Funding	6000	0
Consultation, Administration and Room Hire Costs	3584	0
TOTAL	£19169	£0

WEB PORTAL AND WEBSITE DEVELOPMENT

Strategic Goal

To improve access to VCS infrastructure services by developing a portal website and associated organisational websites. These websites will provide gateways through which voluntary organisations and community groups can more effectively access support, information and services in order to meet the diverse needs of the VCS in Bedfordshire & Luton.

Current Situation

Within the Consortium, only four infrastructure organisations have developed basic websites that are useable with the client base; these are:

- Bedfordshire Funding Advice Bureau;
- Bedfordshire Rural Communities Charity;
- Mid Bedfordshire CVS;
- North Bedfordshire CVS;

two infrastructure organisations currently have a simple single front page, neither of which provides 'user friendly' website access; these are:

- Voluntary Action Luton;
- Volunteer Centre Bedford;

and two infrastructure organisations have no website at all:

- Bedfordshire & Luton Council for Voluntary Youth Services;
- Voluntary and Community Action South Bedfordshire.

The Mid Bedfordshire CVS website is relatively unsophisticated and would gain greatly from being part of the common structure in order to develop its services.

The Bedfordshire Rural Communities Charity website is more sophisticated and needs to be linked with others through a common web portal for infrastructure organisations. However, BRCC does not currently have broadband access and this element needs to be facilitated to ensure common and efficient access in providing web based services.

The Consortium believes that a joint web portal, linked to websites for each of the VCS infrastructure organisations, would greatly help to increase access to local infrastructure services. It could direct visitors to the services provided by Consortium members and host details of the Consortium's joint endeavours. This is central to the Consortium's vision and makes a strong contribution to all the strategic objectives set out in the Investment Plan.

Links to Strategic Objectives and ICT Exemplar Project

To increase collaboration and strategic working between VCS Infrastructure Organisations on policy, information and services.

- Increased collaboration between the Information Officers of VCS infrastructure organisations in developing and maintaining websites.
- collaboration through joint development and upkeep of the websites.
- Increased communication through common usage and documentation held on the sites.

To promote awareness and understanding of the roles and services of the Consortium and its constituent members amongst all rural and urban voluntary organisations and community groups so that they can better connect with our services.

- Websites will promote and raise the profile of the Consortium and its members.
- Websites will lead to a greater understanding in the community of the services offered by VCS infrastructure organisations.
- The web portal will provide a focal point through which VCS infrastructure services can be accessed.
- The web portal will reduce confusion, emphasising local VCS infrastructure cohesion and will signpost users to local resources and providers, based on geography and service delivery in their area of interest.

To strengthen our targeting of hard to reach groups to ensure equal access to information and services

- The provision of web-based information and services will ensure more equitable access to support.
- Websites will enable more groups to access our services, in the case of those with access to a PC and to the web or via the open access sites (e.g. libraries).

To increase the capacity of local communities by improving people's community development, volunteering and fundraising skills.

- Websites will create wider cross-sector links and enable the exchange of information and skills.
- Websites will signpost groups to the services that can be provided to develop the capacity of local communities.
- Websites will provide access to small grant application forms and guidance (e.g. Global Grants) together with links to other appropriate sites.
- The web portal and individual VCS infrastructure organisation websites will provide details of the comprehensive development training offered by each infrastructure organisation.
- Websites will also contain details of the development services offered by each agency, along with contact details of the relevant staff members in those agencies.

To increase access to, and the take-up of, a known and diverse range of sustainable volunteering opportunities.

- Websites will increase awareness of the volunteering needs of local volunteer-involving organisations.
- The ability to better market and publicise volunteering opportunities.
- The promotion of volunteer management training and local volunteering opportunities will contribute to making organisations and groups more sustainable.
- The provision of clear links from the websites to the national volunteering database website (www.do-it.org.uk) and to Volunteering England's website.

To enable local voluntary organisations and community groups to establish an effective voice in response to the needs and interests of local communities.

- The websites will allow VCS infrastructure organisations to consult the local voluntary and community sector on key issues, through feedback forms and email links, which will allow views from the sector to be better heard and expressed at Local Strategic Partnership meetings.
- The local voluntary and community sector will, as a result, be better informed and represented, thus strengthening the voice of the sector.

Building on the Broadband for Bedfordshire ICT exemplar project.

- Broadband capability will enable us to build the proposed websites and further develop use of ICT through enabling web access.
- Will help with the promotion and networking of the sector and increase its knowledge of the breadth of services available from the agencies involved.
- Will enable database contacts for voluntary organisations and community groups to be incorporated in to the design and development of the websites (with appropriate safeguards).
- The web portal design will enable other agencies to be included at a later date.

Key Activities

1. *To design, construct and populate a common web portal.*

A common web portal will create links to the individual agencies that provide infrastructure services within Bedfordshire & Luton. The front page and initial pages are intended to map out what is available throughout the area. Using the common format an enquirer will be able to seek out and enter the websites of local VCS infrastructure organisations for the area and seek a particular service e.g. development services or volunteering. Alternatively, the user might seek general information and the site will contain many pages that will be useful in improving access to services.

It is proposed that the web portal will include the following pages:

Home/Frontpage – this will be attractive and easy to navigate, with links to the following pages.

Volunteering Page – directing potential volunteers or groups looking for volunteers to individual Consortium member websites and via other means of contact (i.e. telephone, e-mail etc.)

Services and Resources – listing the individual services that Consortium members provide (i.e. funding advice, development work etc.), together with links to Consortium member websites and via other means of contact (i.e. telephone, e-mail etc.)

Training – a combined training calendar for all training provided by Consortium members will be included on this page, together with links to Consortium member websites and via other means of contact (i.e. telephone, e-mail etc.)

Contacts/Consortium Members – this page would just give a brief description of the individual Consortium members, together with links to their respective websites and via other means of contact (i.e. telephone, e-mail etc.)

Compact – this page would briefly highlight the importance of the Compact to all our work, together with links to the Bedfordshire & Luton Compact website.

Links – this page would provide links to relevant local, regional and national websites.

2. *To design, construct and populate the websites for each VCS infrastructure organisation.*

Individual stand alone websites will be developed for Consortium member organisations and will be structured around the design of the web portal. This will save design costs through economies of scale. The development of the Consortium member websites will be done in consultation with each organisation so as to reflect their needs. Each site is likely to comprise up to 20 pages.

It is recognised that some of the Consortium members will wish to retain their existing websites; however it is proposed that assistance will be available to develop these sites further, with elements of corporate branding evident throughout all of the Consortium websites.

3. *To provide training that will enable the web portal and websites to be maintained.*

The web portal and associated Consortium member websites will need to be accessible for update through at least one trained member of staff, preferably more, at each agency. The consultants engaged for this work will provide training to ensure that the necessary skills are developed.

Management and Delivery

Voluntary Action Luton will be responsible for implementing this Delivery Plan and for:

- negotiations with the website developer;
- setting and monitoring the implementation timetable;
- ensuring consultation with Consortium members through joint design & development meetings;
- prompting the collation of appropriate data;
- organising the in-house training.

Consultants with a good track record for design will provide the development of a site with the visual impact and ease of use that will be key to navigating a complex site. They will also ensure that the site is open to future development where additional services are appropriate for website delivery.

Seven VCS infrastructure organisations will have new websites developed and Bedfordshire RCC will be linked to, and will benefit from, Broadband access. Each agency will be responsible for:

- identifying personnel to form the Website Development Group (see below);
- ensuring their representation at design planning meetings;
- collation of data in appropriate formats for population of the web portal and their own website;
- identifying the appropriate personnel to attend training for ongoing maintenance of the sites.

A Website Development Group of Information Officers from the Consortium members will be formed and will be responsible for the upkeep and development of the Bedfordshire & Luton web portal and for their individual organisation websites. The Group will ensure ongoing development and maintenance issues are addressed, including the upkeep of the web portal and organisation-based websites; arranging regular meetings; and the provision of website training to new staff.

The project will be delivered in accordance with the following timetable:

Discussions, planning and contracting with website developer	February – March 2005
Site development and design meetings for web portal and websites	March 2005
Collation of content	April 2005
Population of site	May 2005
Training for ongoing site maintenance	May 2005
Website testing and modifications	May 2005
Website launch – Going Live!	June 2005
Evaluation	March 2006

Costs and Sustainability

Web Portal and Website Development	Revenue	Capital
Consultancy/Website Developer	0	18000
Multi-Site Development, Staff Training, Site Population & Maintenance	24100	0
Broadband Installation	0	1362
Management, Monitoring and Evaluation	3238	0
TOTAL	£27338	£19362

Consortium members will undertake the on-going maintenance of the web portal and websites as part of their core activities and funding.

IMPROVING REACH AND TARGETING HARD TO REACH GROUPS

Strategic Goal

To strengthen our knowledge management of local voluntary and community sector organisations through the use of a common database program; the capture of information and contacts relating to previously unknown and hard to reach voluntary organisations and community groups; thereby ensuring equal access to information and services.

Current Situation

CVS and other infrastructure organisations maintain individual contact databases. These have varying degrees of sophistication and coverage within the geographic areas; the individual design and format of databases also varies. There is a need to complete the mapping of VCS organisations in some areas and to consider how other gaps in the infrastructure impact on the services available to client groups:

North Bedfordshire – currently has a database of some 350 organisations drawn largely from desk research undertaken some years ago. There is a need to get a more accurate and up-to-date picture of the sector, particularly in rural localities.

Mid Bedfordshire – has a database of less than 100 organisations drawn largely from old membership data collected some years ago. This is currently being ‘cleaned’ and updated. The lack of a comprehensive database of local VCS organisations severely limits the extent to which Mid Bedfordshire CVS can promote its services and extend its reach.

South Bedfordshire – has a database of some 720 organisations drawn largely from desk research undertaken during the last three years. There is a need to expand the database by capturing information on, and engaging with, voluntary organisations and community groups (including youth and hard to reach groups) within BME communities, urban neighbourhoods and rural localities.

Luton – has a database of some 650 organisations drawn largely from earlier desk research and recently updated. There is a need to expand the database by capturing information on, and engaging with, voluntary organisations and community groups in the field of arts, leisure and sport as these have been difficult to capture in the past.

Bedfordshire & Luton Council for Voluntary Youth Services – has a database of some 460 youth organisations drawn largely from desk research undertaken during the last eighteen months. There is a need to expand the database by capturing information on, and engaging with, voluntary youth organisations and youth projects across Bedfordshire & Luton.

Bedfordshire Rural Communities Charity – has several databases of rural-based organisations and individuals associated with specific areas of work within the organisation. This is well maintained but would benefit from being part of a compatible database in common with other infrastructure organisations.

Knowledge Management

The need to share information on organisations working across the sub-region and to promote coherent VCS infrastructure services lead to consideration of a common database as a tool for achieving this. It has therefore been agreed that all infrastructure organisations will use the *Volbase* program (Voluntary Action Luton already use this program). This will enable data to be cross referenced and for organisations at sub-regional level to receive single mailings when material is widely circulated (e.g. Compact). Using a common program will also enable data to be uploaded to our respective websites or the web portal.

Data will continue to be collected and managed by geographic areas as this allows for active contact with local VCS organisations and is the easiest way of keeping databases up to date. It provides a clear understanding of the local picture and is key to developing appropriate services for local VCS organisations.

The proposed software will also provide a superb knowledge management system for infrastructure organisations enabling them to make effective use of the data collected through the transfer and update of existing records and the collection of data on new organisations. It will provide a unified management environment that will allow us to incrementally introduce business solutions to address the challenges of delivering some fundamental improvements to the way in which infrastructure support is delivered, for example:

- managing all our contact records for organisations through unified records management;
- clustering organisations and contacts in themed networks, mailing lists, forums and directories;
- mapping and research through questionnaires to gather profile data;
- events management through bookings and tracking the status of participants;
- training course management, including participant registration and evaluation;
- library and resources classification and cataloguing;
- help-desk and enquiry management, client contact logging;
- data sharing;
- website integration.

Key to these business solutions will be how we make use of the knowledge obtained. Considerable use of the data collected on different organisations, through mapping and contact records, will be used during the work to be delivered through this strand of the delivery plan (previously described). In the longer term we envisage making increased use of the knowledge gained to enable us to, for example:

- advocate the work, and raise the profile, of frontline organisations and the sector as a whole;
- research and report on 'the state of the sector';
- highlight the diversity of the sector;
- provide specialist knowledge of the sector to partner organisations and stakeholders
- identify and analyse gaps in provision and organisational needs;
- undertake user surveys and feedback exercises;
- consultation exercises (in conjunction with partner organisations);
- producing a workforce development strategy;
- identifying VCS and social infrastructure needs within the growth areas.

This will provide longer term impact and investment beyond this initial delivery plan, providing considerable benefits to infrastructure organisations, frontline organisations and other stakeholders.

Research and Mapping

There is a need to expand our databases of voluntary organisations and community groups through further desk research (e.g. internet sites, directories, parish newsletters, local newspapers) and through the sharing of information. There are many hard to reach groups within BME communities, urban neighbourhoods and in rural localities that are not easily identified through desk research. Intensive networking and on-the-ground research is required to identify these groups so that they can be included in local mapping and databases, receive information and secure access to infrastructure services. Personal contact with representatives of newly identified organisations and groups will be essential to ensure the information gleaned is accurate and to build a relationship that facilitates their involvement in developing and accessing infrastructure services.

In terms of quantifying the research we don't really know how many organisations are out there until we do the research! We expect to spend in excess of 500 hours per month in desk research, field work and follow-up (administration, promotion and contact time). We know, from simple desk research, that there are 6.44 voluntary organisations per 1,000 head of population in South Bedfordshire and that the equivalent ratio, applied across North and Mid Bedfordshire, would result in a further 1,281 organisations being identified through desk research alone. If we assume that a figure of 9.66 voluntary organisations per 1,000 head of population is feasible we would expect a further 1,229 organisations to be identified. We therefore believe we could realistically identify and target something between 1,500 and 2,500 new organisations and possibly more. We have also identified the rural and urban wards in which we are going to work and their respective populations (see Appendix 2). *[NB: figures based on three key workers being appointed to work in North, Mid and South Bedfordshire; subsequently reduced to two key workers.]*

Modernising VCS Infrastructure

We recognise that this work will also have a much broader impact on other work, including the proposed web portal and websites, the sharing of information on the local VCS sector (e.g. through a directory), future consultation activity and our engagement with voluntary organisations, community groups and statutory sector partners.

We recognise that *ChangeUp* is also about making some fundamental improvements to the way infrastructure support is delivered. In other Counties infrastructure has often been developed in a piecemeal and fragmented way (e.g. separate agencies in separate buildings) to the extent that it now requires streamlining and modernisation. It must be realised that VCS infrastructure in Bedfordshire & Luton is already streamlined with integrated infrastructure services delivered in all four localities.

We believe this strand represents value for money and is a fundamental improvement to the way infrastructure support is delivered, particularly as it includes the majority of consortium members. *Volbase* is recognised as an effective tool for improving the way in which VCS infrastructure organisations work and ensuring all such organisations across Bedfordshire & Luton have the same software will enhance this further. The transfer of data from existing systems, the preparation, checking and addition of new data is staff intensive, as is the collection of new data for those groups we wish to seek out through research and by using a community development approach. Data is being collected from across the sub-region and will be for the benefit of all Consortium members.

These proposals for improving reach and targeting hard to reach groups are a real and genuine attempt to extend our current infrastructure services to the wider voluntary and community sector and to bring about fundamental improvements to the way infrastructure support is delivered. This has to be sustainable in the longer term.

The consortium fully recognises that database development and active outreach represents only two kinds of activity amongst many to deal with the hard to reach. We have had to identify specific activities that will make an initial impact given the limitations in the level of funding, its short term availability and the need to address a range of other infrastructure issues. Our Infrastructure Investment Plan clearly sets out to address the wider context and describes other activities that deal with hard to reach groups. The volunteering strand includes further examples of our work with hard to reach groups.

Fundamental to these proposals is the intention to conduct extensive desk research and field work to identify new organisations and use of a community development approach. It is intended to be a comprehensive and thorough search for new community groups, particularly those within rural and BME communities. Key to its success will be the direct follow up work with new groups in terms of marketing our services, accessibility to services and personal contact.

Links to Strategic Objectives and ICT Exemplar Project

To increase collaboration and strategic working between VCS Infrastructure Organisations on policy, information and services.

- Increase collaboration between the Information Officers of VCS Infrastructure Organisations in setting up and use of a common database program.
- The sharing of information on voluntary organisations and community groups that exist within the sub-region.
- Increased collaboration on the delivery of information and services to those voluntary organisations that work across the sub-region.

To promote awareness and understanding of the roles and services of the Consortium and its constituent members amongst all rural and urban voluntary organisations and community groups so that they can better connect with our services.

- By identifying new voluntary organisations and community groups we will be able to provide them with information about our services and include them in our regular mailings of newsletters and VCS information.

To strengthen our targeting of hard to reach groups to ensure equal access to information and services.

- The capture of data relating to voluntary organisations and community groups not previously known to us will enable Consortium members to make contact with, and promote their services to, hard to reach groups.

To increase the capacity of local communities by improving people's community development, volunteering and fundraising skills.

- New organisations added to the databases will receive information on the services offered by relevant Consortium members.
- Personal contact will be made where possible and clients encouraged to take up capacity building opportunities (development support, training events, funding advice etc).

To increase access to, and the take-up of, a known and diverse range of sustainable volunteering opportunities.

- By identifying new voluntary organisations and community groups we will be able to identify those that involve volunteers in their work.
- Including their volunteering opportunities in our separate volunteering databases will enable us to increase the known range of sustainable volunteering opportunities.

To enable local voluntary organisations and community groups to establish an effective voice in response to the needs and interests of local communities.

- An expanded database will provide greater opportunities for the voluntary and community sector, local authorities, public bodies and others to pass on information that empowers the sector to become actively engaged with forums and networks.
- The database will provide a larger sample for consultation and feedback exercises and enable organisations to have their voice heard.
- Potential partnership working opportunities can be more easily identified and developed.

Building on the Broadband for Bedfordshire ICT exemplar project.

- Broadband capability and enhanced ICT will facilitate increased use of ICT, both for the infrastructure organisations and the client base.

- The database will allow for the collection of email addresses so that information can be sent to organisations by email and enable the setting up of email groups for targeted information.
- It will also allow us to collect organisations' website addresses and to build these into links within the Consortium's proposed web portal.
- It will enable us to link our databases of voluntary organisations and community groups to the design and development of our websites (with appropriate safeguards).

Key Activities

1. To install and configure new database technology.

This will include:

- discussions with providers of *Volbase* to discuss specification requirements and agree Implementation Plan, Technical Specification and Agreement;
- database configuration, the design of pro-forma and the formatting of existing data;
- the installation and transfer of existing data to *Volbase* program;
- training for users and database managers;
- devising Data Protection Policies & Guidelines for the verification and updating of data records.

2. To capture information and contacts relating to previously unknown and hard to reach voluntary organisations and community groups.

This will include:

- sharing data on sub-regional VCS organisations between consortium members;
- undertaking desk research in order to identify voluntary organisations and community groups not on existing databases (e.g. internet, directories, parish newsletters, local newspapers);
- using a community development approach to visit each town centre, neighbourhood and village and seek out information on local groups by talking to key people in shops; pubs; schools; leisure, health and youth centres; places of worship and community buildings. We will also scour every notice board, shop window and look out for premises used by or advertising voluntary organisations and community groups.
- as much information as possible will be captured from these approaches on pro-forma record sheets and brought back to base ready for data preparation and entry;
- networking with key personnel who have contact with BME and other hard to reach communities to seek out contacts and information on local groups.

3. To prepare, enter and verify captured data on to the database and market VCS infrastructure services.

This will include:

- checking data obtained against existing records and add any relevant new information to existing data records;
- creating new data records for voluntary organisations and community groups not on existing databases;
- making contact with new data record organisations to provide information on our current services, verify the data held about their organisation, obtain additional information and seek their agreement to inclusion of information about their organisation in the database, on the website and on the mailing list;
- following up all outstanding requests for additional information by telephone, email or letter.
- up-dating data records following receipt of information, resolve queries and check data for accuracy.

Management and Delivery

Voluntary and Community Action South Bedfordshire will be responsible for implementing this Delivery Plan and for:

- initial negotiations with the database provider;
- setting and monitoring the implementation timetable;
- facilitating joint working and co-ordination with Consortium members through joint design & development meetings;
- prompting the collation of appropriate data;

The Consortium will employ two (rather than the previous proposal of three) key workers to cover the main data collection areas of North, Mid and South Bedfordshire. These workers will have the requisite ICT, research and/or outreach skills to fulfil the tasks described in the delivery plan. This work will be fully co-ordinated across the sub-region. We currently envisage one FTE worker(s) covering North and Mid Bedfordshire. There will also be a FTE worker(s) in South Bedfordshire that will take the lead on the installation, configuration etc of the database. South Bedfordshire will also cover research on County-wide organisations and undertake some field work research in North/Mid Bedfordshire. We are confident this arrangement will work well.

Part-time workers/administrative support will be provided in Luton (which already has *Volbase* and has identified the need to capture information on, and engage with, organisations in the field of arts, leisure and sport) and county-wide infrastructure organisations receiving and updating their own or new data collected on the ground in each locality by key workers.

Each agency will be responsible for:

- recruiting/appointing and line managing staff involved in the work and providing regular one-to-one supervision;
- identifying personnel to form the Database Development Group (see below);
- ensuring representation at planning and implementation meetings;
- undertaking research and community development to facilitate the collection of data (CVS only);
- the collation, entry and follow-up of data collected (CVS only);
- identifying the appropriate personnel to attend training for ongoing maintenance of the database.

A Database Development Group of Key Workers/Information Officers from the Consortium members will meet regularly to share practice, issues, solutions and relevant data; and to co-ordinate the configuration and collection of data.

The project will be delivered in accordance with the following (revised) timetable:

Discussions, planning and contracting with <i>Volbase</i> provider	May – July 2005
Recruitment and appointment Key Workers/Administrators	May – July 2005
Preparation of data recording methods, pro-forma & research areas	July – August 2005
Installation and transfer of existing data to <i>Volbase</i> program.	August 2005
Training for users and database managers	August 2005
Data capture, preparation and entry - Phase 1	July – September 2005
Data capture, preparation and entry - Phase 2	October – December 2005
Data capture, preparation and entry - Phase 3	January – March 2006
Data checking and follow-up	April – June 2006
Evaluation	June 2006

Costs and Sustainability

Improving Reach and Targeting Hard to Reach Groups	Revenue	Capital
Salaries, NI, Pension, Payroll Charges & Recruitment	60268	0
Directories, Newspapers etc	350	0
Telephone, Postage, Stationery and Photocopying	1400	0
Travel	3060	0
ICT Equipment (Laptops & Printer)	0	3200
<i>Volbase</i> Software	0	22500
<i>Volbase</i> Installation	0	6500
<i>Volbase</i> Training, Support and Maintenance	7300	0
Management, Monitoring and Evaluation	8220	0
TOTAL	£80598	£32200

Consortium members will undertake the on-going maintenance of knowledge management systems as part of their core activities through dedicated staff (e.g. Information Officers) and funding for this will be included in future funding applications.

An effective knowledge management system will also enable Consortium members to tender for or secure grants for research, which will contribute towards ongoing maintenance costs. We will also be able to attract funding from commercial, public and other agencies for mail-outs by promoting the fact we hold comprehensive databases of all voluntary and community sector organisations. This will also help contribute to the sustainable funding of our knowledge management systems.

SUSTAINABLE VOLUNTEERING

Strategic Goal

To increase access to, and the take-up of, a known and diverse range of sustainable volunteering opportunities across Bedfordshire & Luton.

Current Situation

The Consortium wishes to be an integral part of the *ChangeUp* vision for volunteering infrastructure in England, which will be:

- modern, dynamic, strategic, coordinated and sustainable;
- publicly recognised with a physically identifiable local presence.

The Government aims to increase levels of volunteering in all communities. Volunteering infrastructure uniquely has to engage the general public in marketing volunteering opportunities and in making known the needs of local communities, as well as enabling individuals to use their skills, knowledge and interests. *ChangeUp* recognises there is a growing need for a stronger delivery network to take advantage of government volunteering campaigns. More needs to be done to promote volunteering, including increased awareness of how volunteering benefits individuals who give their time, contributes more widely to social capital, can help strengthen local communities and make a contribution to better public services.

Volunteering England has developed a national strategy, called *Building on Success*, and is introducing a new dynamic single national *Volunteer Centre* brand to promote volunteering in a clear identifiable way. This re-branding will ensure volunteering services have a recognisable identity wherever they are offered; the Bedfordshire & Luton VCS infrastructure organisations need to take advantage of these developments to raise the profile and visibility of local volunteering services.

There are currently three Volunteer Development Agencies (VDA) operating within Bedford, Luton and South Bedfordshire; all of which have the VDA Quality Mark and are adopting the new Volunteer Centre brand. The three Volunteer Development Agencies work closely together as volunteering infrastructure and with other infrastructure bodies through integrated delivery of services. This enables good links to be made between the VDA functions and those of generalist infrastructure. Each of the Volunteer Centres has developed its own specialisms; for example, Luton has developed *The Toolkit* and employee volunteering; Bedford has developed youth volunteering and South Bedfordshire has developed a health-check list, accredited training for volunteers and workshops based on Investing in Volunteers.

The Volunteer Development Agencies wish to develop a consistent pattern of service across the sub-region and have worked together to produce a clear strategy for developing their work, based on that contained within Volunteering England's *Building on Success Strategy* and the Bedfordshire and Luton Infrastructure Investment Plan (previously submitted):

Strategic Objective: To increase access to, and the take-up of, a known and diverse range of sustainable volunteering opportunities across Bedfordshire & Luton.

Strategic Goals:

1. *To work with local volunteer-involving organisations to increase the number, range and quality of local volunteering opportunities.*
2. *To support local volunteer-involving organisations in their recruitment, retention and management of volunteers.*

3. *To market and increase awareness of the range and diversity of local volunteering opportunities and the benefits to be gained through volunteering and active community involvement.*
4. *To increase the numbers of potential volunteers seeking, choosing and taking up volunteering opportunities through local Volunteer Development Agencies.*
5. *To increase access to volunteering for groups and/or individuals that are under-represented in volunteering, are socially excluded, have extra support needs or unusual skills.*
6. *To use innovative, tried and tested outreach methods to engage with potential volunteers and bring about increased volunteering.*
7. *To facilitate the development of sustainable volunteering experiences that meet the needs of both the volunteers and local organisations and their clients.*
8. *To facilitate the development of good practice and quality standards within volunteer-involving organisations.*
9. *To develop employee volunteering initiatives with local employers.*

The work set out in this delivery plan will provide a step change to the way in which volunteering infrastructure is able to provide lasting change to volunteering infrastructure and frontline organisations. It will, in particular, demonstrate that we are:

- modern, dynamic, strategic, coordinated and sustainable;
- publicly recognised with a physically identifiable local presence;
- trusted and respected for our person-focused approach to volunteers and for our expertise, flexibility, campaigning, quality of service, effectiveness and efficiency;
- seen as indispensable by the general public and the public, voluntary and community sectors;
- responsive to the needs of volunteer-involving organisations;
- able to provide a clear understanding of the range and remit of local voluntary activity and hold information on a wide range of volunteering opportunities.

Links to Strategic Objectives and ICT Exemplar Project

To increase collaboration and strategic working between VCS Infrastructure Organisations on policy, information and services.

- The three Volunteer Development Agencies will use this work to increase their joint collaboration and strategic working.
- By working together they will be able to co-ordinate marketing opportunities across the sub-region and work more effectively to promote volunteering.

To promote awareness and understanding of the roles and services of the Consortium and its constituent members amongst all rural and urban voluntary organisations and community groups so that they can better connect with our services.

- The re-branding of local volunteering infrastructure will provide a recognisable, visible identity for local Volunteer Development Agencies.
- It will enable voluntary organisations and community groups to identify and recognise the brand and the service associated with the brand.
- The successful placement of volunteers with frontline organisations will demonstrate that infrastructure organisations are meeting their primary needs.
- Raising the profile of the Volunteer Centres will also raise the profile, awareness and understanding of other infrastructure services/organisations.

To strengthen our targeting of hard to reach groups to ensure equal access to information and services.

- Targeted outreach work will enable Volunteer Development Agencies to reach new, rural, BME and other hard to reach communities and/or individuals that are under-represented in volunteering.
- Increased outreach work will ensure wider access to volunteering information and services.

To increase the capacity of local communities by improving people's community development, volunteering and fundraising skills.

- Increased numbers of volunteers will enable local communities to increase their capacity and enable infrastructure organisations to increase the take up of learning and skills development.
- Volunteers will be offered induction and on-the-job training opportunities, such as the Certificate in Community Volunteering.

To increase access to, and the take-up of, a known and diverse range of sustainable volunteering opportunities.

- With re-branding, outreach work and increased promotion we will be able to increase access for local people and potential volunteers who will be attracted to, and encouraged to access the services of, the Volunteer Centres.
- This increased contact will enable Volunteer Centres to facilitate the brokering and take up of local volunteering opportunities.
- Volunteer Centres will become better known amongst local volunteer-involving organisations, thus enabling an increase in the range of sustainable volunteering opportunities.

To enable local voluntary organisations and community groups to establish an effective voice in response to the needs and interests of local communities.

- Promoting volunteering through local media and case study material will enable voluntary organisations and community groups to make known the needs and interests of their communities and to have their voice heard.

Building on the Broadband for Bedfordshire ICT exemplar project.

- Research and anecdotal evidence suggests that more and more people are using websites and email to access volunteering opportunities.
- Continued use of the V-Base ICT software will enable us to upload local volunteering opportunities to the national *do-it.org.uk* volunteering website.
- Information on volunteering and local volunteering opportunities can also be incorporated into the Consortium's proposed web portal and website developments.
- The upgraded ICT equipment will enable Consortium members to use a variety of creative ICT software (e.g. PowerPoint, Publisher etc) to create promotional material.

Key Activities

- 1. To work with local volunteer-involving organisations to increase the number, range and quality of local volunteering opportunities.***

Potential volunteers need to be provided with the best possible range of volunteering opportunities available to meet their individual needs and circumstances. We will work with local volunteer-involving organisations to ensure that they have fully identified the extent of their volunteering needs and prepared information that attracts new volunteers. Existing known volunteer-involving organisations, as well as new organisations identified through the proposed Improving Reach

strand of the Delivery Plan, will be contacted. Information about the organisations and each of the opportunities they have on offer will be included in a database, uploaded the national volunteering website (do.it.org.uk) and included in a local *Directory of Volunteering Opportunities*.

Specific work will be undertaken with volunteer-involving organisations best able to provide opportunities for people with extra support needs or those seeking short-term volunteering opportunities to enhance their employability. This will seek to 'take the fear' out of working with volunteers who have mental health, homelessness, language or disability needs; to develop effective equal opportunities practice (often organisations have an Equal Opportunities Policy but do not implement fair access to volunteering for those with extra support needs) and develop volunteering opportunities that take account of the needs of those with extra support needs. Help to adapt organisations' existing working practices and arrangements will be provided.

As a result of this work we will be able to identify new and innovative volunteering opportunities; with clearly defined roles, skill and knowledge requirements; from a wider range of volunteer-involving organisations so that potential volunteers can find volunteer placements that meet their individual needs and circumstances.

2. To use a re-branding exercise to re-position local Volunteer Development Agencies as more visible access points where the needs and interests of volunteers can be met.

While Volunteering England may provide some re-branding materials such as business stationery and window decals there is a need to incorporate the new *Volunteer Centre* brand into:

- new internal and external signage;
- new leaflets on the services offered;
- new advertisement features in the local press and other publications;
- new and updated *Directories of Volunteering Opportunities*;
- new promotional material, announcing the re-branded agencies, to local voluntary, community, public sector and other partner organisations.

Launch events and press packs will be produced to promote the 'opening' of the re-branded Volunteer Centres. Media releases and newspaper articles will outline the benefits, key motivating factors and *tell the story* of local volunteering, encouraging readers to access volunteering through the Volunteer Centres.

Volunteer Centre Bedford plan to relocate from their existing, poorly decorated and cramped, office to a larger ground floor, window fronted, office within their existing premises. This will require internal redecoration and upgrading of furniture to provide a modern, attractive and comfortable environment in which to offer their services. It will also provide volunteering with a much higher public profile.

3. To increase the numbers of potential volunteers seeking, choosing and taking up volunteering opportunities through local Volunteer Development Agencies.

Building on tried and tested methods of volunteer engagement we will develop new and innovative methods of interacting with potential/new volunteers. Local community involvement events will be used to get more people engaged in volunteering, including those who do not traditionally get involved or who are difficult to reach. Displays in community centres, supermarkets and libraries; street events, fetes and inter-active community activities will promote volunteering and motivate people to take up local opportunities.

This will be supported through display material and a small range of marketing materials – such as flyers and postcards – designed to encourage local people to access volunteering through the re-branded Volunteer Centres. This material will seek to promote the range of opportunities that exist, such as working with young people, mentoring, conservation, advocacy, trusteeship etc and appeal to different target groups, such as young people, older people, BME communities and people with disabilities and/or extra support needs.

People need to get the best out of their volunteering experience. One-to-one information, advice and guidance will be provided to individuals to enable them to identify their skills, knowledge, experience, interests, personal goals and expectations. With guidance from specialist staff; potential volunteers will be able to identify suitable volunteering opportunities appropriate to their needs. It may also enable individuals to identify how they can use their volunteering experience as a route to employment, lifelong learning and personal skills development. Potential volunteers will then be introduced to volunteer-involving organisations and enabled to take up suitable placements.

There is difficulty in filling specific volunteering opportunities that are challenging in nature, for example working with those with mental health issues or those affected by homelessness or drug addiction/dependency. Work will be undertaken to determine how these roles can be made more appealing to potential volunteers. Discussions with potential volunteers will seek to 'take the fear' out of working with, or in organisations that provide for, such clients and encourage those with appropriate skills and aptitude to take-up these challenging roles.

4. *To engage with potential volunteers from hard to reach, new and employer communities and bring about increased volunteering.*

The Volunteer Centres recognise that substantial volunteering and self help takes place within BME communities already. There is, however, a need to provide access to appropriate volunteering opportunities, within the wider voluntary, community and public sectors, for those from **BME communities, asylum seekers** and those whose first language is not English. The Volunteer Centres in Bedford and Luton will work to determine how best to reach and engage with these communities and develop volunteering amongst hard to reach groups; using networks, contacts and the experience of working with local BME communities on organisational development issues.

Within South Bedfordshire, approaches to **new housing development** sales centres will promote volunteering to new residents looking to integrate themselves into new or existing communities. This aspect of our work will be a valuable testing ground for identifying the interventions that are needed to engage new residents in volunteering and will contribute to the sustainable communities growth agenda within Bedfordshire. The lessons of this work will be used to develop similar activity in Luton and Bedford at a later date.

In Bedford the Volunteer Centre will develop **employee volunteering** and team challenges, using the experience of Voluntary Action Luton. [South Bedfordshire will develop this in the longer term as part of a wider initiative to engage with employers].

5. *To support local volunteer-involving organisations in their recruitment, retention and management of volunteers.*

The three Volunteer Centres will work with volunteer-involving organisations to address and develop good practice in the recruitment, retention and management of volunteers. This will include:

- one-to-one organisational health checks and development support on volunteer management;
- the development and delivery of training workshops for staff, trustees and volunteers from volunteer-involving organisations who have a responsibility for the recruitment, retention and management of volunteers; based on the Investing in Volunteers criteria;
- the provision of a Tool Kit (or similar material) for use within volunteer-involving organisations across the sub-region;
- networking opportunities and one to one support for volunteer coordinators, providing valuable opportunities for the development of effective policy and practice within volunteer-involving organisations.
- volunteers will also be enabled to develop their own volunteering skills through participation in the accredited ASDAN Certificate in Community Volunteering (Level 2) and other workshops provided by Consortium members.

Management and Delivery

Volunteer Centre Bedford will be responsible for implementing this Delivery Plan and for:

- setting and monitoring the implementation timetable;
- facilitating joint working and co-ordination with Consortium members through joint design & development meetings;

South Bedfordshire Volunteer Centre is planning to recruit a second full-time member of staff to add to their current 28 hours per week part-time member of staff. Existing duties will be re-configured to ensure current work is maintained and new work is undertaken. We have commenced recruitment process and identified a suitable candidate but can not offer an appointment (if confirmed as suitable) until we receive formal grant offer.

Bedford Volunteer Centre has one full-time post and one part-time post (25hpw). The plan is to increase the hours of the part-time worker to full-time. They also have a team of volunteers who undertake volunteer interviews and outreach; their time is likely to increase to take on some of the work set out in the delivery plan.

Luton Volunteer Centre have two full-time workers and one part-time (17½ hours per week) working on Volunteer Centre functions. The plan is to re-deploy these staff and back fill using increased hours added on to the existing part-time worker in order to make the best use of current skills and expertise. They also have two volunteers undertaking volunteer opportunities work and outreach work, their time is likely increase to take on some of the work set out in the delivery plan.

Across the three organisations, use will also be made of existing development workers who will provide contacts with hard to reach and BME groups, and undertake some of the work with volunteer -involving organisations to develop good practice. This is added value and has not been included in the costs.

Each agency will be responsible for:

- deploying and line managing staff, and providing regular one-to-one supervision;
- identifying personnel to form the Volunteer Centre Re-Branding Group (see below);
- ensuring representation at planning and implementation meetings;
- undertaking the activities (described above) within their locality;
- the provision of media training for staff (where required).

A Sustainable Volunteering Implementation Group of Volunteer Centre managers from the Consortium will meet regularly to share practice, issues and solutions, and to co-ordinate marketing and promotion opportunities across Bedfordshire & Luton, ensure delivery of the activities set out in the delivery plan and oversee the long term implementation of the strategy.

The work will be delivered in accordance with the following timetable:

Contracting with for the new Volunteer Centre Licence	February – June 2005
Planning of activities	June – July 2005
Supporting organisations to identify/develop volunteering opportunities	June 2005 onwards
Re-branding and promotion of new Volunteer Centres	June – July 2005
Enabling volunteers to identify & take up volunteering opportunities	July 2005 onwards
Outreach work through community involvement activities	July 2005 onwards
Outreach work with new and hard to reach communities	August 2005 onwards
Supporting volunteer-involving organisations to develop good practice	September 2005 onwards
Outreach work with employers/employees	October 2005 onwards
Evaluation	June 2006

Costs and Sustainability

Sustainable Volunteering	Revenue	Capital
Supporting organisations to identify/develop volunteering opportunities	17595	0
Re-branding and promotion of new volunteer centres	8800	4500
Enabling volunteers to identify & take up volunteering opportunities	15400	0
Outreach work (including new communities/BME/hard to reach/employers)	20846	0
Supporting volunteer-involving organisations to develop good practice	18742	0
Media Training	600	0
Telephone, Postage, Stationery and Photocopying	9000	0
Upgrading of Volunteer Centre Bedford	0	6400
Display Stands, Materials and Equipment	0	4700
ICT Equipment	0	3000
Management, Monitoring and Evaluation	7560	0
TOTAL	£98543	£18600

The above costs represent the additional costs needed to deliver the activities set out in the Delivery Plan; these will supplement existing funding already secured to deliver some of the existing activities (currently at a lower level).

Consortium members will seek to identify and apply to additional sources of funding to ensure that the whole strategy can be implemented over a sustained period. The Russell Commission on youth volunteering is likely to lead to new funding streams becoming available; these and others (such as The Big Lottery) will be used to develop new initiatives on youth volunteering, sports volunteering etc. ODPM Growth Area Funding could also be accessed to develop volunteering initiatives in new communities.

Bedford Volunteer Centre has been advised that one funder is interested in maintaining the current 25hpw post beyond July 2006. The additional hours will be sustained through approaches to funders interested in developing youth volunteering and other aspects. We are already working on funding applications to sustain this work, including a joint approach for future funding in relation to youth volunteering.

SUSTAINABLE FUNDING THROUGH SOCIAL ENTERPRISE AND PROCUREMENT

Strategic Goal

To develop the underpinning skills that enable VCS Infrastructure Organisations, voluntary organisations, community groups and other not-for-profit organisations to establish more sustainable services and funding and to research current approaches to procurement within the voluntary and public sectors.

Current Situation

Social Enterprise is defined as a business with primarily social objectives whose surpluses are principally reinvested for that purpose in the business or in the community, rather than being driven by the need to maximise profit for the shareholders and owners. In June 2003 the government outlined its vision for social enterprise (*A Strategy for Success*) where successful social enterprises can play an important role in helping to deliver on many of the Government's key policy objectives by:

- helping to drive up productivity and competitiveness;
- contributing to socially inclusive wealth creation;
- enabling individuals and communities to work towards regenerating their local neighbourhoods;
- showing new ways to deliver and reform public services; and
- helping to develop an inclusive society and active citizenship.

The Government believes that there is significant potential for more public services to be delivered by social enterprises. These might include:

- older peoples' health and social care services;
- correctional services;
- ethnic minority employment;
- homeless hostel provision;
- parenting support services.

ChangeUp is supportive of social enterprise activity as a means to generate ongoing funding for the voluntary and community sector. The sector has a considerable range of skills, services, etc that could be marketed.

Bedfordshire Rural Communities Charity, Mid Bedfordshire CVS, North Bedfordshire CVS, Voluntary Action Luton, and Voluntary and Community Action South Bedfordshire; along with local authorities, Chamber Business, Business Link and others; are sub-regional members of the Support for Social Enterprise in the Eastern Region (SSEER) Project. A sub-regional Steering Group is currently co-ordinating local activity, strategically planning new provision and linking to the regional SSEER structure.

Only Voluntary Action Luton currently provides support in this field of activity and this is limited until the end of February 2005. Bedfordshire Rural Communities Charity has also been involved in earlier research.

The Consortium recognises the need to further develop and enhance this work as part of a strategy to ensure the sustainability of the voluntary and community sector. There is a need to further develop work in Luton and provide for the development of similar services in the north of the sub-region. There is also a need to build the strategic capacity of the voluntary and community sector as part of its partnership with the statutory and other agencies within the Bedfordshire & Luton SSEER Steering Group. That Steering Group is currently developing longer term proposals that will link with Investing in Communities funding.

Links to Strategic Objectives and ICT Exemplar Project

To increase collaboration and strategic working between VCS Infrastructure Organisations on policy, information and services.

- Development of the social economy through partnership participation in the SSEER Bedfordshire & Luton sub-regional Steering Group.
- The development of strategically sited service delivery to meet countywide needs on social economic activity.
- Improved understanding of where services are needed and located to improve planning for provision to meet the gaps in services.
- The research will identify the procurement needs and barriers to service development.

To promote awareness and understanding of the roles and services of the Consortium and its constituent members amongst all rural and urban voluntary organisations and community groups so that they can better connect with our services.

- The services will be marketed to VCS organisations through the proposed websites, by leaflet distribution and worker recommendation.
- Through engagement in the research an opportunity arises to create other consortia to deliver new services from the VCS and to signpost needs to where current opportunity to build on services exists.

To strengthen our targeting of hard to reach groups to ensure equal access to information and services.

- Strategically sited provision of specialist developmental services will ensure access for even the smallest, the most deprived or the most rural groups.
- Information and fact sheets will become available on the proposed websites in due course.

To increase the capacity of local communities by improving people's community development, volunteering and fundraising skills.

- The work will develop and promote good management skills, particularly around finance and staffing issues.
- A wider understanding of the benefit of diverse funding will be developed.
- The financial value of volunteering and how this can become match funding, will be better understood.
- Increase scope and potential for service delivery agencies.
- Voluntary organisations and community groups will be signposted to the service that can provide the appropriate capacity building in whatever geographic location in the sub-region.

To increase access to, and the take-up of, a known and diverse range of sustainable volunteering opportunities.

- There may be an increase in volunteering opportunities as a result of volunteer-involving organisations securing service delivery contracts for services that are delivered by volunteers.

To enable local voluntary organisations and community groups to establish an effective voice in response to the needs and interests of local communities.

- Voluntary organisations and community groups will be able to demonstrate greater diversity of service provision and consistent service delivery, and to justify their reasons for delivering procurement contracts.

Building on the Broadband for Bedfordshire ICT exemplar project.

- Information and fact sheets will become available on the proposed websites in due course.

Key Activities

1. *To develop a partnership approach to the support of key social economic development services within Bedfordshire and Luton.*

As sub-regional members of the Support for Social Enterprise in the Eastern Region (SSEER) Project, relevant Consortium members will make an active contribution to the work of this project and develop specific activity that will:

- improve understanding of social enterprise;
- develop provision locally and within the sub-region;
- link SSEER activity to the social and economic development of the wider sector.

2. *To develop key social economic development services*

Skilled staff will be used to provide services aimed at enabling voluntary organisations, community groups and other not-for-profit organisations to be establish more sustainable finances and to grow their understanding of managing multi stream funding. These will include:

- financial support services – understanding the need for sound accounting information as the basis for the development of sustainable business;
- business action planning e.g. full cost accounting, service development, marketing and procurement and/or contracting;
- one-to-one support services;
- customised training sessions e.g.
 - research skills to provide baseline start points
 - development of output reporting systems
 - identifying measurable outcomes
 - staff management and development issues.

An improved understanding of managing finances will enable organisations to become less vulnerable and more able to develop the services that will best serve their community using trading as a means of sustainable funding development. Surplus (profit) must be seen as a positive way to remove dependency and target the development of appropriate service provision.

3. *To undertake research that identifies increased opportunities for procurement.*

The Consortium will undertake discussions with relevant statutory organisations to identify the potential for increasing procurement opportunities and developing more appropriate public sector procurement policies. Use will be made of the Government's *think smart...think voluntary sector!* report (published by the Home Office Active Community Unit and the Office of Government Commerce in June 2004) which sets out good practice guidance on the procurement of services from the voluntary and community sector.

The research will also explore current approaches to procurement within the voluntary and community sector and identify the sector's procurement capacity building needs (e.g tendering and contracting skills).

A researcher will establish the status of database information that might support knowledge of local service availability in geographic and ward areas. They will also work with the local SSEER partnership, statutory agencies and the voluntary and community sector to develop a compendium of opportunities for local service delivery procurement.

The findings of this research will be written up in a report that will be used to inform future activity within the SSEER sub-regional partnership and enable the voluntary and community sector to position itself for future procurement activity.

Management and Delivery

Voluntary Action Luton will be responsible for implementing this Delivery Plan and for:

- setting and monitoring the implementation timetable;
- ensuring consultation with Consortium members through joint meetings;
- co-ordinating the training programme.

In the light of the need to reduce expenditure in this first Delivery Plan the work will be undertaken in two phases. In the first phase one part-time member of staff will be appointed/redeployed within Voluntary Action Luton. In the second phase, a further part-time worker will be appointed within North Bedfordshire CVS. Each post will undertake the key activities described above and each organisation will act as a centre of advice and support on social enterprise. Bedfordshire Rural Communities Charity will undertake the research component. Each agency will be responsible for:

- deploying and line managing staff, and providing regular one-to-one supervision;
- ensuring representation at planning and implementation meetings;
- deliver the key social economic development services (Voluntary Action Luton and North Bedfordshire CVS only);
- identifying personnel to attend meetings of the SSEER sub-regional partnership;
- organising training workshops (as required).

Consortium members involved in this work will share practice, issues and solutions, and co-ordinate work across Bedfordshire & Luton, through their involvement in the SSEER sub-regional partnership (rather than through the setting up of a separate implementation group).

The work will be delivered in accordance with the following timetable:

Implementation planning	February – April 2005
Development of the partnership approach to the support of key social economic development services.	March 2005 and ongoing
Delivery of key social economic development services – Phase 1	March 2005 – March 2006
Delivery of key social economic development services – Phase 2	September 2005 – March 2006
Procurement discussions with statutory agencies	May – December 2005
Research that identifies increased opportunities for procurement	May 2005 – February 2006
Writing up of Research Findings	March 2006

Costs and Sustainability

Sustainable Funding through Social Enterprise and Procurement	Revenue	Capital
Salaries, NI, Pension, Payroll Charges & Recruitment	15951	0
Consultancy Fee	19000	0
Trainers for Social Economy Seminars/Workshops	3000	0
Telephone, Postage, Stationery and Photocopying	3050	0
Travel	1000	0
Office Rent and Utilities	3000	0
ICT - Computer	0	0
Management, Monitoring and Evaluation	3600	0
TOTAL	£48601	£0

The Consortium will work with the Bedfordshire & Luton SSEER Steering Group to develop longer term proposals that will feed into the Investing in Communities funding stream.

BUILDING RURAL COMMUNITY CAPACITY

Strategic Goal

To investigate and develop resources and activities that support and strengthen the skills, abilities and confidence of people to take effective action and leading roles in the development of their communities.

Current Situation

Whilst *ChangeUp* is the driving force behind the reform of voluntary and community sector infrastructure, there are also important drivers set out in the Government's recently published framework for Community Capacity Building *Firm Foundations* (published December 2004). These include:

- adopt a community development approach;
- recognise and build on what exists;
- take the long view;
- ensure that appropriate support is accessible at neighbourhood, parish or community level;
- accept that learning is a key to success for everyone involved;
- embrace diversity.

The Government is concerned with a comprehensive revitalisation of the ethos of democracy, the strength of civil society, the citizen-orientation of public services and the vibrancy of community life itself. The Government wishes to ensure that the support for community capacity building; which includes the development of social capital, necessary for the start up and on-going development of the voluntary and community sector (VCS); is effectively planned and efficiently used. The aim is to build strong, empowered and active communities, in which people increasingly do things for themselves and the state acts to facilitate, support and enable citizens to lead self-determined, fulfilled lives for the common good.

The operating environment for rural frontline organisations is significantly different from urban areas. Key issues that impact on them are:

- the dispersed nature of rural communities;
- poor transport links;
- small communities that lack a 'critical mass' of volunteers;
- low take up of training and ICT.

Within Bedfordshire, rural areas have three tiers of local government (county, district and parish/town councils) requiring VCS organisations to work with multiple statutory bodies as well as County and District Local Strategic Partnerships. Rural infrastructure also needs to deliver specialist support to parish/town councils and rural frontline organisations on housing, transport and community buildings/space.

ChangeUp anticipates that Local Delivery Plans should reflect and take account of *local action planning processes such as parish plans in rural areas*. Parish Plans are a holistic process that will set out a vision for how a community wants to develop and then to identify the actions needed to achieve it. Rural communities in the county are already involved in this initial process. **What is currently lacking is the ongoing support needed to achieve wider substantive results.**

In Bedfordshire there are local groupings of town and parish councils that have come together as Community Liaison Forums (CLFs). There are now 14 such forums established in the county, with another three at the planning stage. They have the potential to become a substantial focal point in the support activities that should follow the initial parish planning process.

Town/Parish Councils nominate two Councillors to represent them on their Community Liaison Forum. The CLF elects a Chairperson/Vice Chairperson to serve on an annual basis. They are also able to co-opt other individuals/local organisations as may be appropriate. The secretariat in respect of agenda preparation/minutes etc for CLF's is currently provided by the principal local authorities. CLF's function on democratic lines which seeks to ensure that equity is maintained.

Bedfordshire Rural Communities Charity (BRCC) provides the secretariat for the Bedfordshire Association of Town and Parish Councils. Linked to this, BRCC provides the:-

- (a) Accredited training (as part of the Quality Parish Councils Initiative) for clerks of Parish and Town Councils. BRCC is the lead organisation for the County Training Partnership for this particular activity.
- (b) Secretariat for the County Accreditation Panel. This Panel is responsible for assessing whether a Parish/Town Council has met the seven tests that will enable it to gain accreditation as a Quality Parish/Town Council.

The Quality Parish and Town Council Scheme is voluntary and is open to all individual local councils. In this context the proposed work with CLF's will seek to embody the concept of this Scheme, but CLF's are not, in themselves, eligible to participate.

Links to Strategic Objectives and ICT Exemplar Project

To increase collaboration and strategic working between VCS Infrastructure Organisations on policy, information and services.

- This work will enable VCS Infrastructure Organisations to co-ordinate their work associated with Community Strategies and Local Development Frameworks more effectively.

To promote awareness and understanding of the roles and services of the Consortium and its constituent members amongst all rural and urban voluntary organisations and community groups so that they can better connect with our services.

- Working through Community Liaison Forums will provide opportunities for raising awareness of the services that are available from VCS Infrastructure Organisations, particularly in rural areas.

To strengthen our targeting of hard to reach groups to ensure equal access to information and services.

- Working through Community Liaison Forums will provide further opportunities to promote our services to hard to reach groups.

To increase the capacity of local communities by improving people's community development, volunteering and fundraising skills.

- People's understanding of how Parish Plans, Community Strategies and Local Development Frameworks work will be improved.
- Community aspirations will identify local capacity building needs and provide opportunities for improving people's community development, volunteering and fundraising skills.

To increase access to, and the take-up of, a known and diverse range of sustainable volunteering opportunities.

- Community aspirations may lead to the new volunteering opportunities being developed.

To enable local voluntary organisations and community groups to establish an effective voice in response to the needs and interests of local communities.

- The parish planning and community strategy processes will enable voluntary organisations and community groups to be more effectively involved in, and have their say on, matters affecting their local communities.

Building on the Broadband for Bedfordshire ICT exemplar project.

- This work will seek to ensure that dispersed rural communities make effective use of Broadband connectivity and the enhanced ICT facilities that this brings.

Key Activities

- 1. To inspire and enable local people to make a positive difference to their communities and influence the policies and services that affect their lives.***

Substantive work will be undertaken with a number of Community Liaison Forums to enable:

- formal links to be developed/sustained between Local Strategic Partnerships, Community Strategies, Local Development Frameworks and the parish planning process;
 - decisions to be taken as to how this process can be sustained on an ongoing basis.
- 2. To engage with local communities to support them in managing the outcomes from the parish planning or similar process.***

This will include:

- providing advice and support for activities that the community wishes to undertake;
- engaging with and influencing the activities of other organisations including the relevant local authorities, Primary Care Trusts and other statutory agencies etc;
- support to enable the monitoring and evaluation of progress with specific activities.

- 3. To develop standards of good practice for wider dissemination.***

This will involve the identification of activities and processes that achieve the following outcomes;

- empowered, active and inclusive communities;
 - high standards of rural services;
 - vibrant local economies;
 - recreation opportunities for all;
 - sustainable countryside management activities;
- and the compilation and dissemination of identified standards of good practice for the benefit of other local communities.

Management and Delivery

Bedfordshire Rural Communities Charity will be responsible for implementing this Delivery Plan and for:

- setting and monitoring the implementation timetable;
- recruiting/redeploying and line managing staff, and providing regular one-to-one supervision;
- ensuring consultation with Consortium members through joint meetings;
- working with local Community Liaison Forums to deliver the proposed activity;

A full-time Field Officer (Community Support) will be employed by Bedfordshire Rural Communities Charity to work with Community Liaison Forums, Local Strategic Partnerships and Local Authorities across the county.

The work will be delivered in accordance with the following timetable:

Implementation Planning	February – April 2005
Recruitment of Field Officer	March – April 2005
Work with selected Community Liaison Forums - Phase 1	April – September 2005
Work with selected Community Liaison Forums - Phase 2	October 2005 – March 2006
Evaluation and Reporting	March 2006

Costs and Sustainability

Building Rural Community Capacity	Revenue	Capital
Salary, NI, Pension, Payroll Charges & Recruitment	25902	0
Telephone, Postage, Stationery and Photocopying	1000	0
Travel	3750	0
Office Rent and Utilities	1875	0
Staff Training and Development	350	0
ICT Equipment	0	1000
Management, Monitoring and Evaluation	3388	0
TOTAL	£36265	£1000

Currently CLF's receive limited (per capita) funding from the County Council and from two of the three District Councils. This provides the CLF with the opportunity to fund small local grant applications, etc.

The concept of CLF's is still fairly new although they do have representation on at least one of the Local Strategic Partnerships. There are early indications that this approach is enabling local communities (often because of their individual size) to work more closely together on issues of common concern; and that this will begin to influence both the content of Community Plans and the way in which services could be delivered more locally. Currently LSPs do not have budget provision.

There is evidence to suggest (from looking at CLF agendas/reports) that the principal local authorities are using the CLF as a conduit for consultation on such issues as proposed housing growth, transport infrastructure issues, etc.

The Bedfordshire and Luton Economic Development Partnership has an active and growing role in matters affecting the local economy. Again, the CLF's can be a useful conduit where matters affecting local communities can be discussed and commented on in a knowledgeable manner.

In addition, as the development of Local Public Service Agreements (LPSA) (stretch targets) evolves, it may be that funding for this work may be appropriate because recently the areas that might be included for LPSA purposes in this county include:

- Recycling waste
- Street Cleansing
- Empty/Unfit Homes
- Crime, particularly violent crime/burglary
- Condition of non principal roads
- Child Protection
- Childrens Services
- Health Inequalities

These are all areas of work that affect local communities and whilst the principal authorities (in particular the County Council) are the conduit through which additional funding will emerge, there will be a need to engage (and fund) the assistance of local communities to assist in the delivery of these stretch targets.

Funding for the continuation of this work will be identified through discussions with a range of potential funders and by exploring opportunities for it to become part of mainstream funding, for example, as an element of the Rural Social and Community Programme in 2006.

BACK OFFICE SERVICES FEASIBILITY STUDY

Strategic Goal

To research and analyse the current methods and approaches to the provision and use of Back Office Services and establish the potential benefits of developing an integrated range of such services within the wider voluntary and community sector in Bedfordshire & Luton.

Current Situation

Back Office Services are very necessary in terms of enabling an organisation to function effectively. However, the pressures to provide such services, both in terms of time and financial resources required, can have an effect on an organisation's frontline service delivery activities. The varying and often small size of VCS organisations may mean that expenditure on back office services can be a disproportionate financial overhead.

The picture of service availability across Bedfordshire & Luton is broadly unknown other than for a few specific services at the agencies within the Consortium itself. There is some limited use made by organisations which outsource such things as payroll and IT support. There may be the potential to save costs and improve quality through the sharing or out-sourcing of these services.

There is a need to assess the feasibility of providing the following Back Office Services:

- Accountancy support (e.g. bookkeeping, financial records, payroll, audit/financial review service);
- Human Resource Management support (including Criminal Records Bureau checks);
- ITC support.

Some research conducted at a regional level, has concluded that these services are more likely to be better delivered at a sub-regional level.

A secondary issue for research and debate is the way in which the potential sharing of office accommodation/premises/facilities management might be undertaken in the future, particularly by the main VCS infrastructure organisations.

Links to Strategic Objectives and ICT Exemplar Project

To increase collaboration and strategic working between VCS Infrastructure Organisations on policy, information and services.

- The research will improve the understanding of where services are needed and where they are located, thereby improving the planning of provision to meet gaps in services.

To promote awareness and understanding of the roles and services of the Consortium and its constituent members amongst all rural and urban voluntary organisations and community groups so that they can better connect with our services.

- The research will provide opportunities to introduce the provision of new services and to signpost where current services exist.

To strengthen our targeting of hard to reach groups to ensure equal access to information and services.

- The research may identify instances of where there is duplication of effort in the provision of back office services, which may release capacity for targeted work with hard to reach groups.

To increase the capacity of local communities by improving people's community development, volunteering and fundraising skills.

- The research may identify instances of where there is duplication of effort in the provision of back office services, which may release capacity for engaging more directly with clients to strengthen their community development, volunteering and fundraising skills.

To increase access to, and the take-up of, a known and diverse range of sustainable volunteering opportunities.

- The research may identify opportunities for some back office services to be undertaken by appropriate volunteers.

To enable local voluntary organisations and community groups to establish an effective voice in response to the needs and interests of local communities.

- The research may identify instances of where there is duplication of effort in the provision of back office services, which may release capacity for supporting voluntary organisations and community groups in having an effective voice in matters affecting their local community.

Building on the Broadband for Bedfordshire ICT exemplar project.

- The project will need to ensure that future potential VCS clients would be able to access suitable services through the proposed website.

Key Activities

1. *To research and analyse the current methods and approaches to the delivery and use of Back Office Services across the VCS in Bedfordshire & Luton.*

The research and analysis will expect to:

- audit existing arrangements for the provision of back office services in a wide range of VCS organisations;
- analyse the cost for the provision of these services by each organisation;
- assess the relative quality of their provision and identify opportunities for service improvements and developments.

The findings will be published in a preliminary report for consideration by the Consortium. However, it is important to note that some of the information will need to be treated as commercially confidential.

2. *Examine a variety of options for the future delivery of Back Office Services.*

The Feasibility Study will examine a variety of options for delivering accountancy support; human resource management support (including Criminal Records Bureau checks) and ITC support. It will:

- summarise the options for alternative models of delivering these services;
- estimate the implementation and running costs for each option;
- assess the complexity of implementation;
- quantify the cost-benefit of each option;
- identify the extent to which VCS organisations would take up an offer of providing back office services;
- prepare a final report setting out a draft plan for developing the provision of back office services, including options for sustainability.

Management and Delivery

In the light of the need to reduce expenditure in this first Delivery Plan the work will be undertaken in two phases. In the first phase we will undertake Key Activity 1 (research and analysis) as part of this Delivery Plan and defer Key Activity 2 (examination of models for future delivery) until our next Delivery Plan for the additional spend.

Bedfordshire Rural Communities Charity will be responsible for implementing this Delivery Plan and for:

- negotiations with, and appointing and monitoring the work of, the researcher;
- setting and monitoring the implementation timetable;
- ensuring consultation with Consortium members through joint meetings;
- undertaking the desk-top research, conducting surveys (questionnaires, etc) and face to face discussion;
- securing the assistance (paid for) of other VCS infrastructure organisations for promotion, mail-outs etc. connected with the study

Regular reports/updates will be provided at Consortium meetings, providing an opportunity for comments on the research and, where necessary, change the direction of the research.

The work will be delivered in accordance with the following timetable:

Implementation planning	February – April 2005
Appointment of Researcher	March 2005
Research and analysis of current methods and approaches	April – July 2005
Preparation and publication of preliminary report	September 2005
Examination of models for future delivery	October 2005
Preparation and publication of final report	November 2005

Costs and Sustainability

Back Office Services Feasibility Study	Revenue	Capital
Consultancy Fee	7143	0
Management, Monitoring and Evaluation	357	0
TOTAL	£7500	£0

The research will set out the business case for developing suitable back office services (if viable and required by the sector) and for identifying a sustainable approach to the future funding of any such provision.

PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT FOR THE BEDFORDSHIRE & LUTON VOLUNTARY AND COMMUNITY SECTOR INFRASTRUCTURE CONSORTIUM

Introduction

The Consortium has come together as the vehicle for developing and leading on sustainable infrastructure for the voluntary and community sector (VCS) in Bedfordshire & Luton.

Overall Vision

Voluntary organisations and community groups have a right to expect the same quality of infrastructure support regardless of where they live and operate.

To achieve this, the Consortium will develop a collaborative, sustainable and effective model for the provision of generic and specialist infrastructure services in Bedfordshire & Luton.

Overall Functions of the Consortium

In order to deliver this vision, the following functions have been identified:

- To promote awareness and understanding of the roles of the Consortium and its constituent members across the wider VCS and within other statutory, private and public agencies.
- To work collaboratively to make full and best use of the VCS infrastructure resources.
- By working in partnership, to seek to develop a stronger representational voice for the VCS, thereby increasing recognition by other sectors.
- To identify and respond to opportunities and threats facing the VCS.
- To seek to achieve best practice and continuously improve the quality of services delivered through the VCS, together with the selection and adoption of appropriate techniques to measure the quality of services.
- To identify gaps, shortfalls and insecurity in current structures and to reach agreement on ways of tackling them, whether by developing and transforming existing structures and/or by developing new solutions.
- To build partnerships with funders to secure stable solutions to fill those gaps and reduce insecurity in organisations that are working well.
- To establish protocols and mechanisms for joint working that will allow a 'holistic' approach to be taken and innovation nurtured.

Objectives for Infrastructure Investment

- To co-ordinate and prepare a needs-led Infrastructure Investment Plan (IIP) and action-based Delivery Plans.
- To define and agree a mechanism for developing an IIP that can be delivered through the Consortium and the wider VCS in Bedfordshire & Luton
- To have this IIP endorsed by the widest possible cross-section of voluntary and community sector bodies, support agencies, commissioning bodies and likely funders.

- To submit the IIP to the Government Office and provide follow-up support towards implementation of the IIP.
- To develop further investment proposals as required.

Membership of the Consortium

- The initial membership of the Consortium is shown in Appendix 1.
- Membership is restricted to VCS agencies whose primary function is to provide infrastructure services and support to voluntary organisations, community groups, volunteer-involving organisations and volunteers.
- Membership will be constantly reviewed in response to the priorities and work of the Consortium and any guidance received nationally or regionally.
- Members of the organisation may resign from the group by advising either the Consortium's secretariat or other Consortium members, in writing, of their wish to do so.

Members' Commitments

Consortium members will:

- Provide a named contact.
- Ensure that a representative regularly attends meetings whenever possible. Members will submit apologies if they are unable to attend a meeting.
- Provide any information agreed and requested by the Consortium within agreed time scales and meet any other commitments made to the wider VCS by the Consortium.
- Recognise the individuality of each member and the constraints within which they must work.
- Focus on the development of services and matters of relevance to the VCS as a whole/majority.
- Raise awareness of the VCS.
- Report progress and issues back to their individual Management Committees/Boards and their membership.
- Treat any information received with due sensitivity and respect any confidences.

Operating Principles

The Consortium will, at all times, seek to operate in an inclusive manner. It will:

- Work through an appointed steering group and appropriate sub-groups, working on specialist areas as appropriate, drawing some members from across the VCS.
- Meet regularly during the year and organise appropriate consultation events for wider stakeholders as may be necessary.
- Determine appropriate secretariat arrangements that support inclusivity, excellent communications and best practice in administration of the Consortium's business.

- Produce a schedule of meetings well in advance and strive to circulate agendas and other papers at least five working days in advance.
- Organise meetings in ways that allow all members to contribute to agenda setting, and ensure full accessibility to all its meetings etc.
- Support a process that allows continuous feedback from the grassroots up, promoting inclusivity, meaningful representation, flexibility and clarity of thought and presentation.
- Nominate an appropriate accountable body (as required) to manage Delivery Plans and funds on its behalf.
- Attempt to work by consensus, but recognise they do not have the power to commit an individual member organisation to a course of action which it does not wish to take.
- Review these Terms of Reference and Operating Principles within 12 months.

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IMPROVING REACH - URBAN NEIGHBOURHOODS AND RURAL LOCALITIES

Data will be collected from the following urban neighbourhoods and rural localities:

<i>Ward</i>	<i>Total Pop</i>	<i>Urban Pop</i>	<i>Rural Pop</i>
North Bedfordshire			
Brickhill	8678	8678	
Bromham	7388		7388
Carlton	2738		2738
Castle	8259	8259	
Cauldwell	8656	8656	
Clapham	5374		5374
De Parys	5369	5369	
Eastcotts	2747		2747
Goldington	8603	8603	
Great Barford	5183		5183
Harpur	8501	8501	
Harrold	2780		2780
Kempston East	6067	6067	
Kempston North	5654	5654	
Kempston South	7712	7712	
Kingsbrook	9134	9134	
Newnham	5510	5510	
Oakley	2438		2438
Putnoe	8593	8593	
Queen's Park	7688	7688	
Riseley	2785		2785
Roxton	2859		2859
Sharnbrook	2600		2600
Turvey	2767		2767
Wilshamstead	4386		4386
Wootton	5442		5442
Total Population	147911	98424	49487
Percentage Population	100	66.54	33.46
Mid Bedfordshire			
Ampthill	6897	6897	
Arlesey	4741		4741
Aspley Guise	2402		2402
Biggleswade Holme	4701	4701	
Biggleswade Ivel	6999	6999	
Biggleswade Stratton	3683	3683	
Clifton and Meppershall	4279	4279	
Cranfield	5438		5438
Flitton, Greenfield and Pulloxhill	2062		2062
Flitwick East	5383	5383	
Flitwick West	7550	7550	
Harlington	2322		2322
Houghton, Haynes, Southill and Old Warden	3837		3837
Langford and Henlow Village	4677	4677	
Marston	4829		4829

Maulden and Clophill	4602		4602
Northill and Blunham	4414		4414
Potton and Wensley	6842		6842
Sandy Ivel	4317	4317	
Sandy Pinnacle	6570	6570	
Shefford, Campton and Gravenhurst	6897	6897	
Shillington, Stondon and Henlow Camp	4941	4941	
Silsoe	1729		1729
Stotfold	6214		6214
Westoning and Tingrith	2150		2150
Woburn	2548		2548
Total Population	121024	66894	54130
Percentage Population	100	55.27	44.73

South Bedfordshire

All Saints	4648	4648	
Barton-le-Clay	4793		4793
Caddington, Hyde and Slip End	6051		6051
Chiltern	4514	4514	
Dunstable Central	4429	4429	
Eaton Bray	2591		2591
Grovebury	5760	5760	
Heath and Reach	2015		2015
Houghton Hall	6748	6748	
Icknield	6269	6269	
Kensworth and Totternhoe	4266		4266
Linslade	4488	4488	
Manshead	5103	5103	
Northfields	6832	6832	
Parkside	5179	5179	
Planets	4972	4972	
Plantation	5985	5985	
Southcott	6900	6900	
Stanbridge	2171		2171
Streatley	2214	2214	
Tithe Farm	5043	5043	
Toddington	5008		5008
Watling	6658	6658	
Total Population	112637	85742	26895
Percentage Population	100	76.12	23.88

Source: 2001 Census and 2004 Index of Deprivation.

All urban wards identified from Index of Deprivation as having population of >10K