

Voluntary and Community Sector
Infrastructure Investment Plan

Delivery Plan 2
2005-2006

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

CONTENTS	Page
INTRODUCTION	4
Consultation and Engagement.	4
Delivery Plan 1 – Outline of Proposals	5
Delivery Plan 1 Modifications	5
Delivery Plan 2 Proposals	6
Gap Analysis	7
Investment	8
MODERNISING VCS INFRASTRUCTURE	9
Strategic Goal	9
Current Situation	9
Links to Strategic Objectives and ICT Exemplar Project	13
Key Activities	15
Management and Delivery	18
Costs and Sustainability	19
SUSTAINABLE FUNDING THROUGH FUNDING ADVICE	21
Strategic Goal	21
Current Situation	21
Links to Strategic Objectives and ICT Exemplar Project	22
Key Activities	23
Management and Delivery	24
Costs and Sustainability	24
WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT	25
Strategic Goal	25
Current Situation	25
Links to Strategic Objectives and ICT Exemplar Project	26
Key Activities	27
Management and Delivery	28
Costs and Sustainability	29
BME VCS INFRASTRUCTURE SUPPORT	31
Strategic Goal	31
Current Situation	31
Links to Strategic Objectives and ICT Exemplar Project	32
Key Activities	33
Management and Delivery	33
Costs and Sustainability	34

BEDFORDSHIRE & LUTON VCS INFRASTRUCTURE CONSORTIUM

Voluntary and Community Sector Infrastructure Investment Plan 2004-2006

INTRODUCTION

This second Delivery Plan supplements the Infrastructure Investment Plan 2004-2006 prepared in June 2004 and the first Delivery Plan approved in June 2005. 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**.

Consultation and Engagement Strategy

A consultation document and questionnaire on the Consortium's investment and delivery plans was circulated to local stakeholders at the end of August/early September 2005; to allow sufficient time for stakeholders to consider and complete the documentation the return date for the questionnaire was set as the 30 September 2005. Analysis of the responses received will then be undertaken; this will inform the Consortium's current delivery plans and future investment proposals to *Capacity Builders*.

The additional funding made available to the Consortium for stakeholder consultation and engagement will be used to:

Activity	Approx. Cost
Prepare a report on the state of the voluntary and community sector in Bedfordshire & Luton (including economic impact) based on data collected through the Improving Reach and Targeting Hard to Reach Groups Delivery Plan. This will impact on a range of key strategic initiatives, including Local Area Agreements, Investing in Communities and MKSM Growth Area.	£10,000
Prepare an Evaluation Report of the activities undertaken during <i>ChangeUp</i> and the impact they have had on the sector locally.	£10,000
Organise two half-day briefing and consultation events on <i>ChangeUp</i> ; one focussing on local authorities and one on VCS organisations. These will provide an opportunity to raise awareness of the main themes and messages of <i>ChangeUp</i> , the Consortium's investment and delivery plans and the services offered by each of the Consortium's members; as well as enable the Consortium to gather evidence from stakeholders on future needs and consult on future plans.	£10,000

These activities will be undertaken in a planned way, through the Consortium's regular meetings. Due account will be taken of the capacity of Consortium members to organise and deliver this work and whether there is a need to engage consultants to undertake some aspects of these activities.

Delivery Plan 1 – Outline of Proposals

In summary, the first Delivery Plan set out seven separate strands of work 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.

Delivery Plan 1 Modifications

In the light of new circumstances there is a need to modify some of the activities being undertaken as part of Delivery Plan 1.

Capacity Building the Consortium – In order to meet the additional administration and reporting requirements of the additional projects set out in this Delivery Plan the lead agency will incur a further £6,000 to provide for this. There is also provision for additional consultation and engagement with stakeholders at £30,000, as provided for within the *ChangeUp* East programme.

Improving Reach and Targeting Hard to Reach Groups – The company providing the agreed software has, since providing the original quote, registered for VAT, which has had to be added to the price. Detailed consideration of partner organisations' technical specifications has also lead to variations to the original costs. However, contract negotiations and one-off discounts have brought the cost down to the point where there is a net increase in the cost of the project of £4,205. This has therefore been included in this Delivery Plan.

Sustainable Funding through Social Enterprise and Procurement – In the light of the proposed re-structuring of VCS Infrastructure Organisations in Bedfordshire (see page 9) the Consortium has

decided not to proceed with the appointment of a further part-time worker, in North Bedfordshire, specialising in social enterprise at this time. Such an appointment may be possible in the future as part of the SEEER programme. However, some of the activities, with a different emphasis, are included in new proposals for a Sustainable Funding through Funding Advice Delivery Plan (see page 19).

Back Office Services – Early analysis of the research questionnaire to determine local VCS back office service needs suggests that approximately 30% of respondents would like to investigate other approaches to the delivery of ICT and human resources support. There was insufficient funding available in the first main spend round of funding so it was decided that the examination of alternative models of delivery would be undertaken as a Phase 2 exercise funded by the second round of main spend funding. This has therefore been included in this Delivery Plan.

Delivery Plan 2 Proposals

In summary, this second Delivery Plan sets out four separate strands of work addressing:

Modernising VCS Infrastructure – To modernise, sustain and improve the overall provision of infrastructure services in Bedfordshire and Luton by

- the merger of three of the Consortium members to provide VCS infrastructure services in North and Mid Bedfordshire;
- extending the services of Bedford Volunteer Centre across the whole of North and Mid Bedfordshire;
- improving the delivery of infrastructure services in South Bedfordshire; and
- undertaking a number of building, office equipment and ICT improvements to VCS Infrastructure organisation premises in order to improve access and facilities for users.

Sustainable Funding through Funding Advice – To develop and strengthen the local VCS infrastructure by providing funding advice services accessible to all groups in Bedfordshire and Luton. These services will be strategically situated to ensure that the infrastructure organisations can effectively support groups through an office based service and/or as outreach, dependent on need.

Workforce Development – To develop and strengthen the support needs of frontline VCS organisations through the development of a Workforce Development Strategy, the development and delivery of accredited training and the development of appropriate learning materials.

BME VCS Infrastructure Support – To undertake a detailed analysis of the needs of existing BME infrastructure organisations and community groups and develop a strategy for the delivery of BME infrastructure support services across the County. The strategy will also identify structures and working arrangements for the longer term implementation of BME services across Bedfordshire, including rural areas and other isolated groups, which will increase and inform understanding of the needs of BME groups and others working with BME issues within the community.

Each of the proposals sets out the current situation; shows its relationship to each of the Strategic Objectives and the earlier projects; 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.

Gap Analysis

The Consortium's Infrastructure Investment Plan set out six strategic objectives; progress in meeting these objectives through the Consortium's first delivery plan and the proposals set out in this second delivery plan is as follows:

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

A considerable amount of collaboration and strategic working has already taken place; this is continuing, both through Consortium meetings and in the planning and delivering the activities set out in the delivery plans. The Modernising VCS Infrastructure and BME VCS Infrastructure Support delivery plans also address this objective.

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.

Both the Improving Reach and Targeting Hard to Reach Groups delivery plan and the Web Portal and Website delivery plan specifically address this objective. Further activity may be necessary after an evaluation of these two projects in June 2006.

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

Both the Improving Reach and Targeting Hard to Reach Groups delivery plan and the BME VCS Infrastructure Support delivery plan specifically address this objective. Further activity is likely to be necessary after completion of the mapping exercise (including analysis of the organisational needs) and an evaluation of these two projects in June 2006.

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

The Sustainable Volunteering delivery plan, the two Sustainable Funding delivery plans, the Building Rural Community Capacity delivery plan, the Workforce Development delivery plan and the BME VCS Infrastructure Support delivery plan all address this objective. Further activity is likely to be necessary after completion of the mapping exercise (including analysis of the organisational needs) and an evaluation of these projects in June 2006.

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

The Sustainable Volunteering delivery plan specifically addresses this objective. Further activity is likely to be necessary after completion of the mapping exercise (including analysis of the organisational needs) and an evaluation of the project in June 2006.

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

Both the Improving Reach and Targeting Hard to Reach Groups delivery plan and the Building Rural Community Capacity delivery plan specifically address this objective. We recognise that further work to increase organisations' partnership working skills, to encourage participation in local public policy issues and to further develop and implement the Compact locally is required. This would require an intensive piece of work to be carried out over a sustained period; there is insufficient time to implement this work in the current *ChangeUp* funding window but it could form the basis of a future *Capacity Builders* funded delivery plan.

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	6000	0
Consultation & Engagement	30000	0
Improving Reach and Targeting Hard to Reach Groups	(2560)	6765
Back Office Services (Phase 2)	7500	0
Modernising VCS Infrastructure	24996	144277*
Sustainable Funding through Funding Advice	56806	0
Workforce Development	42787	0
BME VCS Infrastructure Support	45019	0
Total Investment Required	£210548	£151042
Available	£254037	£107553
Revenue/Capital Exchange	£43489	(£43489)

** NOTE: The Fund Manager/Government Office have already approved expenditure of £30,078 for a lift replacement following earlier, urgent consideration of the work required (Ref Grant Offer letter CU:BEDS004).*

MODERNISING VCS INFRASTRUCTURE

Strategic Goal

To modernise, sustain and improve the overall provision of infrastructure services in Bedfordshire and Luton by:

- the merger of three of the Consortium members to provide VCS infrastructure services in North and Mid Bedfordshire;
- extending the services of Bedford Volunteer Centre across the whole of North and Mid Bedfordshire;
- improving the delivery of infrastructure services in South Bedfordshire; and
- undertaking a number of building, office equipment and ICT improvements to VCS Infrastructure organisation premises in order to improve access and modernise facilities for users.

Current Situation

Re-Configuration of VCS Infrastructure Organisations

A process of reviewing and discussing the existing voluntary and community sector infrastructure organisations in Bedfordshire has been ongoing since October 2004, when COVER (Community and Voluntary Sector in the Eastern Region) were commissioned by Bedfordshire County Council and three Borough/District Councils to undertake a review and develop a report on the work of the infrastructure organisations in Bedfordshire (excluding Luton). COVER was also asked to propose more cost-effective ways of delivering the services in the future.

In January 2005, the COVER report was discussed at a meeting of the infrastructure organisations, local authority officers and members. It was agreed that the Chief Officers of the infrastructure organisations and officers from each of the four councils would look further at the issues and proposals set out in the COVER report, and give recommendations at another meeting in June/July 2005.

The report concluded that *the likelihood of long term sustainability of all infrastructure bodies as they are currently operating [was] open to question*. During the discussions, detailed consideration was given to the type of services needed, the outcomes of these services and how best to facilitate access to services. The conclusion was that one infrastructure organisation serving North and Mid Bedfordshire (given that Bedford is centrally located within these two districts) and the existing organisation covering South Bedfordshire would provide the most effective way of delivering services with limited resources.

Proposals to merge some or all of the infrastructure organisations were considered at length. The proposal, to merge three of the infrastructure organisations (North Bedfordshire CVS, Mid Bedfordshire CVS and Bedfordshire Funding Advice Bureau) and to extend the services of Bedford Volunteer Centre, was strongly supported by all the infrastructure organisations and local authorities.

Funding is required to plan and implement the proposed re-structuring in a way that minimises the disruption to services in the short term and improves the delivery of services in the long term. It is also important that VCS infrastructure organisations take this opportunity to improve their effectiveness, attain relevant quality standards (e.g. PQASSO) and model good governance locally within the voluntary and community sector.

To facilitate the reconfiguration of VCS infrastructure organisations, improve access and modernise facilities for users it is necessary to undertake a number of building, office equipment and ICT improvements to VCS Infrastructure organisation premises, as set out below.

The Bedford Centre for Voluntary Services

To cater for the merger of North Bedfordshire CVS, Mid Bedfordshire CVS and the Bedfordshire Funding Advice Bureau some additional furniture is required to properly accommodate the staff team and meet room needs of the new organisation.

The new organisation intends to be based in the Bedford Centre for Voluntary Services, as it is centrally located to the new area of benefit, and has sufficient existing space to accommodate all the staff involved in the proposed merger and maintain some scope for any future expansion. Some of the desks and chairs are worn and/or damaged. Some of the telephones require replacing and alterations will be needed to the existing system to accommodate all the staff having their own telephone.

With the merger there is also a need to convert a small room into a meeting room, which requires furnishing, and there is a real need to replace the chairs in the main meeting/training room within the Centre. These chairs were donated to North Bedfordshire CVS in 1997 when a large hotel chain refurbished a local hotel; comments on their declining condition from delegates on training courses suggest that replacements are essential to maintain the friendly and comfortable nature of the training room.

These three organisations partially improved their IT infrastructure as a result of the ICT exemplar project, with software upgrades, a server, network improvements and broadband access. There is now a real need to upgrade some of the hardware, much of which is over five years old and is now beginning to fail and slow. Installing new PCs at the same time as the three organisations merge would allow the new organisation to start afresh with an up to date ICT system. A faster network router is also required to cope with more staff using the same network.

With the increased use of IT amongst staff, and the upgrading of the workstations, some of the staff who spend a great deal of their time at meetings, visiting groups and giving advice out of the office, would like to become more productive and organised by using a PDA (Portable Digitised Assistant). This would allow tasks, diary dates, and contacts to be electronically captured and available when out of the office, emails and notes to be written and read when on the move, and overall improve the quality of the service that we are able to give.

The provision of information through newsletters, leaflets, displays and a range of printed material is an essential part of any infrastructure organisations activities. There is a need for a new photocopier to enable the new infrastructure organisation in North and Mid Bedfordshire to communicate clearly and effectively with its members, partners and other agencies.

The Volunteer Centre Bedford also occupies offices within the premises and with the expansion of its services needs a small amount of additional ICT equipment to enable its growing team of volunteer advisers (themselves volunteers) and prospective volunteers to search the range of volunteering opportunities held on *V-Base*.

Bossard House

Voluntary and Community Action is now in cramped office accommodation and needs to expand if it is to provide a comfortable working environment for staff, volunteers and users. It is not possible to accommodate all existing staff so hot desking, working from home and planned absence have to be utilised. This has a detrimental impact on the delivery of services. Limited space is also preventing it from securing funding for new projects as there is not the space to accommodate new posts.

Bossard House is conveniently situated close to the centre of Leighton Buzzard and consideration of other premises in, and away from, the town centre has shown that these are unsuitable and/or too expensive and would lead to substantial revenue sums being required in future years; this is currently unsustainable.

Local authorities are developing plans for a one-stop shop at Bossard House. The District Council will extend (by 238.78 square meters) and re-configure the building at a cost of £200,000. Voluntary and Community Action requires 57.05 square meters (24 %) of this additional space. Building works are expected to take place between February 2006 (following closure of the District Council's Cash Office) and March 2007. This will provide a focal point for local residents wishing to access information and advice on a range of issues and from a range of statutory and voluntary sector agencies, including Voluntary and Community Action and the Citizens Advice Bureau, which already occupy premises at Bossard House.

In the meantime we need to try and make more efficient use of the existing space. A small amount of additional office furniture is therefore required, including secure filing cabinets to meet data protection legislation and alterations to telephone system.

The current photocopier needs replacing as it is now some eight years old. We also need it with networking capability as this will provide additional network printer capacity in the event of breakdown and heavy usage of existing equipment. This equipment is used to provide a valuable photocopying service to local community groups.

We are increasing our capacity to deliver training and need to make more effective use of PCs and other media to deliver training through *Powerpoint* projectors. Our current overhead transparency projector and flip chart stands are also need of replacement.

We are also increasing our capacity to develop promotional materials for the sector and could do this more effectively through the use of professional design software packages. A design and print service could be offered to the wider voluntary and community sector in the longer term.

All PCs are currently peer networked and this prevents us using certain applications, such as shared diaries and remote email access on Microsoft Outlook Exchange. The network has now exceeded its capacity and is very slow, it also prevents additional PCs from being added. A new Server and associated software are required, which will improve efficiency in the office.

Luton Voluntary Resource Centre

The Resource Centre is centrally based in Luton with access to people from all areas in a town with a population of over 184,000 and from a wide range of cultural backgrounds.

The premises are leased and managed by Voluntary Action Luton (VAL) and the Centre provides accommodation and service delivery site for a number of organisations at affordable rents:

- Voluntary Action Luton
- Volunteer Centre
- Luton Rights
- Family Matters
- African Caribbean Arena
- Aswad Arts
- Osagyefo
- African Development Centre
- St Kitts & Nevis Group
- Advocacy Alliance
- National Child Minders Association local branch.

In addition, Voluntary Action Luton provide training and meeting rooms, building maintenance, cleaning, security and single reception services for all.

Over 6,455 clients signed in and used the reception entrance in the last year in addition to those clients choosing the direct entry method for Luton Rights, an organisation which provides legal services to unemployed people. The services within the building are delivered by both BME led and non BME led organisations, the latter nevertheless have clients from all our communities.

The building is on four floors with a 30 year old lift which requires significant refurbishment (replacement is not feasible). It currently struggles to work at a bare minimum and is currently out of service awaiting another part. These temporary repairs are at the point of being money wasted, but non effective in staving off the day when the lift comes to a full-stop. The lift requires a great deal of patience to operate even when it is working and does not meet the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act. No toilets exist on the ground floor and this limits our capacity to facilitate people with disabilities even for a short period.

Voluntary Action Luton has a full repairing lease until September 2015 and a request for the landlord to fund the refurbishment would mean a large rise in the rental charge; a charge that would have to be passed on to the nine organisations sharing the accommodation. These organisations would struggle to meet significant rent rises.

With so many visitors each year we can no longer put off refurbishment, which can only be classed as very urgent.

Extensive research about lift companies has been undertaken and quotations obtained. All of this has been overseen by the Premises sub-Group and Trustee Board of Voluntary Action Luton, which has made a decision on the supplier.

During the preparation of this delivery plan and following the complete breakdown of the lift the Fund Manager/Government Office agreed to fund the refurbishment of the lift as an urgent expense.

In addition to the lift replacement there is a need to replace three PCs and monitors that are now some seven to eight years old and beginning to fail and slow.

Bedfordshire & Luton Council for Voluntary Youth Services

BLCVYS staff currently work from home and require a permanent office base within the County. Accommodation could be provided at the Rufus Centre in Flitwick, which is currently used as a mailing address for the organisation, or elsewhere within the County. The initial rent and office furniture for two people is required.

Bedfordshire Rural Communities Charity

BRCC currently employs 45 staff based at three office locations. The IT systems at each location have grown piecemeal with computers and the latest available software purchased as and when funding becomes available (usually initially financed by a particular project). Operating system versions vary from older Windows 98SE through to Windows XP. This can result in a mismatch with the older versions still in use, for example with *Access* databases and *Publisher* documents. This severely reduces the flexibility and capacity to share information within the organisation.

There are separate outsourced server maintenance contacts at two sites that allow for limited maintenance to be carried out remotely. Maintenance for individual computers is dealt with either in-house or on an ad-hoc bought in basis. As a result of an initial risk assessment, a range of security measures have been adopted at all sites, including a higher level of virus protection and installation of DAT tape systems for daily back-ups and UPS (uninterrupted power supply) units at two of the three sites.

The Cardington Office has a Microsoft Small Business Server which serves all computers on the site. Microsoft Exchange Server is incorporated in the server and allows e-mail to be collected and distributed to the Cardington office and collected for distribution at the Tebworth site.

The Tebworth Office has inherited an IT server previously used at Cardington, which acts as a file server for all computers on the site. A dedicated workstation computer acts as e-mail server for the site, on which a small e-mail distribution package operates. The confidentiality of the contents of the majority of files on this site relies on the integrity of staff in managing/handling any sensitive information.

The Old Warden Office is BRCC's most recent acquisition where it took over a small Project Team and inherited five computers (previously run as part of the County Council's mainframe network). These are currently operated using a peer-to-peer network with each PC having a dial-up e-mail account. The range of work undertaken by this Project Team has increased and changed, leading to more demands being made on the limited IT system. In addition, BRCC has taken on some new projects, employing an additional 15-20 staff, all requiring accommodation and IT services. The building has recently been developed to allow more staff to be based there and this in turn has led to an increased need for a more robust IT system that could not only benefit the Old Warden site, but also improve the communication and information exchange between the three sites.

Against this background BRCC has been taking technical advice from an IT consultant on possible solutions that would:

- (1) improve and enhance the current delivery of IT services to its staff
- (2) enable the services being provided both on behalf of funders and clients to be improved

An IT system that brings the following advantages, has now been recommended:

- unlimited users
- no geographical limitations on existing users – can log on with single login at any site
- compatible with almost any software package
- can replicate all files or just recently changed ones
- lower server support cost – only one contract required
- software licences less costly
- only one back up required
- shared diary/booking/reservation systems
- no duplicate emails

This proposal is based on a Terminal Services solution. This would essentially mean that a main server based at the Cardington office would run all main software applications for all BRCC current office locations.

Bedford Race Equality Council

BREC staff, volunteers and users currently have to share a limited number of PCs. There is a need to install three additional PCs and to network all PCs so as to enable all staff and users to have constant and ongoing access to ICT systems. There is also a need for a laptop, projector and associated software in order to deliver effective outreach work within local BME communities. There is also a need to install and extend the current telephone system in order to provide all staff, volunteers and users with sufficient telephones.

Links to Strategic Objective and ICT Exemplar Project

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

- Whilst the three organisations (to be merged) have worked closely together over the past few years, a merger will further simplify and improve the services to local voluntary organisations and community groups.
- Fewer infrastructure organisations across the county will reduce the potential risk of duplication of provision.
- Fewer, but stronger infrastructure organisations will help the Consortium to further develop collaboration and strategic working between each organisation.
- Improved premises and ICT systems for infrastructure organisations will improve and increase collaboration and strategic working.

To promote awareness and understanding of the role 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

- Fewer infrastructure organisations operating in North and Mid Bedfordshire will make promoting the services easier and less confusing to local voluntary and community organisations.
- New publicity and a distinctive brand will be developed and promoted as part of the launch of the new organisation, encouraging groups to link into the service.
- New and enhanced ICT systems and office equipment will enable services to be promoted more effectively.
- Unified and enhanced ICT systems will enable BRCC staff and service users to access relevant information from whichever office location is contacted.

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

- One main infrastructure organisation in North and Mid Bedfordshire will allow for a more strategic and planned response to the needs of the voluntary organisations and community groups identified by the Improving Reach project.
- The pooling of expertise and resources in North and Mid Bedfordshire will improve the ability of the new infrastructure organisation to meet the varying needs of the sector, without having to refer requests for support to different agencies.
- New and enhanced ICT systems and office equipment will improve opportunities for service users to have equal access to relevant information and services.
- New and enhanced ICT systems are an essential part of developing and maintaining contact with 'hard to reach' groups.

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

- The development of model policies will improve workers knowledge and understanding of policy development issues and enable infrastructure organisations to work more effectively with local groups.
- New and enhanced ICT systems will ensure that data and information held on user needs is more accessible, current and fit for immediate use.
- Staff will be able to make better use of enhanced ICT systems and office equipment when supporting local communities and developing appropriate skills.

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

- The re-configuration of infrastructure organisations in North and Mid Bedfordshire will increase access to, and the take-up of, of volunteering opportunities.
- Improved premises will lead to increased access to volunteering services.

- New and enhanced ICT systems will ensure that data and information held on volunteering opportunities and volunteer needs is more accessible, current and fit for immediate use.

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

- Improved ICT links between BRCC offices will improve the service provided to local communities in enabling an effective rural voice.
- Provision of a robust ICT system for the merged organisation in North and Mid Bedfordshire will enable the needs and interests of local communities to be better represented with clearer identity and voice for the sector.
- Improved presentation of printed materials will help the infrastructure organisations to make the views of local groups clearer than before.
- One infrastructure organisation rather than three will be supporting and speaking up for local voluntary organisations and community groups in North and Mid Bedfordshire, providing a clearer and louder voice.

Building on the Broadband for Bedfordshire ICT Exemplar Project.

- New and enhance ICT systems will enable organisations to utilise ICT more effectively, to build on the facilities provided by the Broadband connection and improve the efficiency.

Key Activities

1. ***To release the Chief Officers of Bedfordshire Funding Advice Bureau, North Bedfordshire CVS and Mid Bedfordshire CVS to spend part of their time planning and implementing the merger, and integrating three organisations into one.***

The Chief Officers will have to address a range of issues, including:

- Premises – Where to locate the new organisation and its staff. How can the existing premises be used and services delivered from a central location.
- Staffing – Transferring staff under TUPE regulations into the new organisation. Reorganising workload and duties, and revising job descriptions. Differing contracts of employment and terms and conditions.
- Legal implications – Negotiating with Charity Commission. Consideration of whether to merge into existing structure or establish and register new charity. Winding up of one or more existing charities.
- Transferring of assets and liabilities – All partners will need to carry out a ‘due diligence’ exercise before the merger proceeds. Differing terms and conditions for all contracts need identifying and novation agreements drawn up where possible.
- Structures/systems – Membership structures, governance structures and organisational policies and procedures need to be brought together in a manner acceptable to all.
- Name and publicity – Consultation on new name. Development of new publicity material and new signage. Re-configuration of website portal and organisational websites.
- Funding/Finance – different financial systems and procedures need amalgamating. Funders need to be consulted and permission given for transferring restricted funds.

The above is not an exhaustive list, but merely an indicator at the level of the work required in the short term to allow a successful merger to happen.

2. To release the Manager of Bedford Volunteer Centre to spend part of their time planning and implementing the expansion of the current service to cover North and Mid Bedfordshire.

The Manager will have to address a range of issues, including:

- Staffing – Reorganising workload and duties, and revising job descriptions. Negotiating revised terms and conditions of employment.
- Legal implications – Negotiating with Charity Commission. Amending the organisation's *area of benefit* and agreeing this with existing members.
- Structures/systems – Membership structures, governance structures and organisational policies and procedures need to be reviewed and revised to take account of the new *area of benefit*.
- Publicity – Development of new publicity material and promotion of services within the new *area of benefit*.
- Integrating the existing volunteering databases from Mid Bedfordshire CVS and Volunteer Centre Bedford.

The above is not an exhaustive list, but merely an indicator at the level of the work required in the short term to allow a successful merger to happen.

3. To develop internal policies and procedures of Voluntary and Community Action in order to meet the requirements of the PQASSO Level 1 quality assurance framework and the Charity Commission's Hallmarks of an Effective Charity.

This will include:

- developing new volunteer role descriptions; an Induction Check List and Volunteering Policy;
- revising the Health and Safety, Expenses, Grievance and Disciplinary policies;
- producing Redundancy, Pay, Sickness, Employee Involvement & Consultation policies;
- producing a Staff Supervision, Appraisal and Training policy and associated forms;
- producing a Confidentiality and Data Protection Policy with associated procedures and forms.

Model policies, resource material and training opportunities will be used to supplement information already held. Discussions and formal consultation with staff, volunteers and trustees will also inform the development of these policies.

These policies will also be made available to other Consortium members that wish to develop their own policies, where they are missing or need revision, and thus enable them to also meet the requirements of relevant quality assurance frameworks.

4. To enhance the facilities at The Bedford Centre for Voluntary Services

To cater for the merger of infrastructure organisations in North and Mid Bedfordshire by:

- providing some additional furniture to properly accommodate staff;
- providing new furniture for a small meeting room;
- providing replacement stackable chairs for an existing training room;
- making modifications to the existing telephone system;
- the replacement of existing and outdated PCs in the new infrastructure organisation;
- the purchase of Personal Digital Assistance (PDAs) to improve the efficiency of staff when out of the office;
- the purchase and installation of a colour photocopier to improve the quality and appearance of publications and leaflets.

5. To enhance the facilities at Bossard House for Voluntary and Community Action South Bedfordshire

To provide additional office accommodation for Voluntary and Community Action as part of extended premises at Bossard House with a financial contribution of £48,000 towards the cost of the building project. This represents 24% of the project budget and is commensurate with 24% of the floor space required. South Bedfordshire District Council will extend and make alterations to building, including additional accommodation as part of a first floor extension which will 'knock through' to our existing first floor offices. There will also be additional legal fees for the drawing up a new lease.

To undertake a number of office equipment and ICT improvements in order to improve access and modernise facilities for users, including:

- the purchase and installation of a replacement photocopier with networking capability;
- the purchase of a replacement overhead transparency projector and flip chart stands, and the purchase and installation of laptop and *PowerPoint* projector to improve delivery and learning;
- the purchase and installation of *Adobe Acrobat Professional* and *Quark Express* software to increase our capacity to develop website and other promotional materials for the sector;
- the purchase and installation of a new server and *Microsoft Outlook Exchange* to improve efficiency in the office.
- the purchase and installation of additional furniture, along with alterations to telephone system, to improve use of existing accommodation.

6. To enhance the facilities at Voluntary Action Luton

To place an order for, and undertake, the full refurbishment of the existing lift with the preferred supplier and thus guarantee access to all parts of the building by all service users and people with disabilities.

To purchase and install three replacement PCs and monitors.

7. To create an office for Bedfordshire & Luton Council for Voluntary Youth Services

To establish and equip an office for two staff with the provision of office furniture and payment of the initial rent.

8. To improve the ICT communications between the different office locations of Bedfordshire Rural Communities Charity and enable the sharing of common data and other relevant information.

To oversee the delivery, installation and implementation of a new integrated Terminal Services ICT system to create a Virtual Private Network (VPN) between all three BRCC office locations.

9. To enhance the facilities at the Bedford Race Equality Council

This will include:

- the installation of three additional PCs and the networking of all PCs so as to enable all staff and users to have constant and ongoing access to ICT systems;
- the purchase and installation of a laptop, projector and associated software in order to deliver effective outreach work within local BME communities;
- the extension of the current telephone system in order to provide all staff, volunteers and users with sufficient telephones.

Management and Delivery

Overall delivery and management of this Delivery Plan will be managed and monitored by the Consortium.

The Chief Officer of North Bedfordshire CVS will lead, and work closely with the Chief Officers of Mid Bedfordshire CVS, Bedfordshire Funding Advice Bureau and Volunteer Centre Bedford, in relation to Key Activities 1, 2 and 4, supported by the Shadow Board of the new North & Mid Bedfordshire CVS (consisting of trustees from the three organisations being merged) and the Board of Volunteer Centre Bedford. Additional administrative support will be provided and other staff will 'backfill' some of the work of the Chief Officers during this period.

The Director of Voluntary and Community Action South Bedfordshire will lead on Key Activity 3; fully involving the staff, volunteers and trustees of the organisation; and Key Activity 5. Other staff will 'backfill' some of the work of the Director during this period.

The Finance and Premises Manager at Voluntary Action Luton will lead on Key Activity 6.

The Development Officer at Bedfordshire & Luton CVYS will lead on Key Activity 7.

The Business Support Manager at Bedfordshire RCC will lead on Key Activity 8.

The Chief Officer at Bedford Race Equality Council will lead on Key Activity 9.

The merger of three organisations and improvement of The Bedford Centre for Voluntary Services will be delivered in accordance with the following timetable:

Support of funders established	September 2005
Agreement in principle of membership of each organisation to merge	October – November 2005
Establishment of a shadow board	October – November 2005
Permission of Charity Commission sought	October 2005 – January 2006
Due Diligence exercise	October – November 2005
Agreement of proposed staff structure	November – December 2005
Agreement on premises	November – December 2005
Consultation on new name	December 2005
Purchase and installation of furniture, ICT equipment and modification of telephone system	January 2006
Development of new publicity material	January – March 2006
Membership of new organisation established	February – March 2006
Financial systems established	February 2006
Policies and Procedures for merged organisation established	February 2006
Final agreement of membership to structural changes	February 2006
Preparation for transfer to new organisation	March 2006
Re-configuration of website portal and websites	March 2006
Transfer of staff, assets and liabilities to new organisation	1 st April 2006
Winding down of other organisations	April – July 2006

Other activity will be delivered in accordance with the following timetable:

Lift refurbishment at Luton Voluntary Resource Centre (VAL)	September – October 2005
Development of policies and procedures (VCASB)	September 2005 – June 2006
Purchase, delivery, installation and testing of ICT systems at BRCC	September – November 2005
Purchase and installation of furniture for new BLCVYS office	October – November 2005
Project development and building works for extension to Bossard House (VCASB)	October 2005 – March 2006
Purchase & installation of ICT and alterations to telephone system at BREC	October – November 2005

Costs and Sustainability

	Revenue	Capital
Salary costs	14446	0
Administrative Support	2000	0
Professional Advice and Legal Fees	3500	0
Training and Staff Development	1000	0
Consultation, awareness raising and keeping stakeholders informed etc	800	0
Re-branding (logo, signage, promotional material, business cards etc)	2000	0
Rent for new office accommodation	1250	0
Contribution to building of extension to current offices	0	48000
Lift refurbishment	0	30078*
Office and Meeting Room Furniture	0	9293
Alterations to telephone systems	0	4227
Replacement Overhead Projector and Flip Chart Stands	0	682
Servers, networking of PCs and associated operating software	0	20286
PCs and associated operating software	0	12250
2 x Laptop, projector and associated operating software	0	3052
Re-configure website portal and websites	0	1316
ICT Accessories and Software	0	2888
Network Photocopiers	0	12205
Project Management	0	0
TOTAL	£24996	£144277*

** NOTE: The Fund Manager/Government Office have already approved expenditure of £30,078 for a lift replacement following earlier, urgent consideration of the work required (Ref Grant Offer letter CU:BEDS004).*

When purchasing capital equipment, Consortium members will ensure they obtain value for money in their purchases and meet the conditions of grant in this respect. Where there are savings to be made the surplus funds will be used to obtain additional equipment, software or accessories, consistent with the tenure of this delivery plan, thus avoiding any under-spend at the end of the grant period.

SUSTAINABLE FUNDING THROUGH FUNDING ADVICE

Strategic Goal

To develop and strengthen the local VCS infrastructure by providing funding advice services accessible to all groups in Bedfordshire and Luton. These services will be strategically situated to ensure that the infrastructure organisations can effectively support groups through an office based service and/or as outreach, dependent on need.

Current Situation

Of the eight agencies involved just two have services developed earlier although these have reduced in the recent climate. Voluntary Action Luton (VAL) through its Community Funding Initiative (CFI) and Bedfordshire Funding Advice Bureau (BFAB) each has a single worker, although 60% of the VAL worker time is dedicated to stakeholder fund management. The result is that just 1.4 workers are providing funding advice and support to groups. Bedfordshire Rural Communities Charity provides funding advice as part of its integrated approach to community development support to individuals, groups and communities.

Demand would indicate a need for a far greater level of service as all agencies working with grassroots organisations quickly discover the significant and ongoing need for both funding and funding advice services.

In March 2005 funding conferences were held in both Luton and Bedford each of which had attendees of well over 100 delegates eager to understand and learn more about how to raise funds. The workshops were full to bursting but still the majority of workers in the sector quickly discover that funding advice and support is a major need of small and medium sized groups.

Demand within training programmes equally demonstrates the need for this provision and the nature of the work of infrastructure organisations makes them the natural focal point for these expectations and a key development and support service to the VCS.

Driving part of this need there is a fluid and flexible labour market and new people must be up skilled to enable them to create dynamic grassroots activity. The understanding for current and new trustees of the sector is important, as is how even small funding packages can be effective in stimulating activity but for this to be achieved fundraising skills must be built.

Financing VCS activity is a key element of the *ChangeUp* programme. It recognises that front-line organisations need to be able to take advantage of opportunities to diversify their funding sources and demonstrate increased skill and better standards in more effective fundraising. Fundraising skills were cited as amongst the highest priority skills for the sector.

Two Consortium members, Voluntary Action Luton, through its CFI, and Bedfordshire Rural Communities Charity (BRCC) have developed the capacity to administer and support direct access to local grant schemes. The current climate has seen the withdrawal of a number of funding sources used to support these schemes. In this situation it becomes ever more difficult to sustain, leaving groups with fewer local options and therefore a greater need for wider fundraising skills.

As part of a wider network the funding support officers currently meet on a quarterly basis with local government officers whose roles focus on Lottery support to share knowledge. This network should become a more strategically focussed group to act as a hub for the strategic delivery of funding advice services across Bedfordshire and Luton. The Consortium is proposing the development of the network's role and links with trusts and funders. The network will be the key partnership to oversee the strategic planning of future Funding Advice service needs.

In addition the partnership proposes to strengthen the provision of funding advice services at strategically accessible points around the county and in Luton to support groups with an office and outreach service to reflect the varying needs of the VCS. Additional part-time Funding Advice Workers will be engaged in Bedford, Luton and Leighton Buzzard to ensure that a quality service can be provided. This will create a more even distribution of support to the whole area by raising the current 1.4 support to the equivalent of three full-time posts.

BRCC also wishes to enhance the way in which it both administers access to local grants and provides funding advice to rural communities by increasing the hours of its current grants staff (two posts) and community development staff (three posts) (in total, the equivalent to one full-time post). These staff will also undertake research for a strategy that supports and enhances the provision of a locally accessed grant programme of funding for the wider voluntary and community sector.

All posts will participate in the funding network and contribute to the development of appropriate Fundraising Workshops as part of the training programme within CVS and made fully accessible to the voluntary and community sector.

Links to Strategic Objectives and ICT Exemplar Project

This proposal will support the Consortium Infrastructure Investment Plan by addressing the following strategic objectives:

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

- Increased collaboration between the funding advice officers of the VCS Infrastructure Organisations as well as the wider network including local authorities.
- Development of the network to ensure common understanding and consistent 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.

- Development of the network and the Consortium portal, now named *VoluntaryWorks* will facilitate promotion of the service across Bedfordshire & Luton.
- Production & distribution of leaflets will enable the funding advice service to be understood by all.

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

- The provision of outreach as well as office based services will ensure that equitable access to support is available to urban and rural, office based or home based groups, and regardless of an individual's ethnic or ability status.
- Use of a laptop PC 'funder finder' service will ensure that on the spot reports can take plans forward.

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

- People's fundraising skills will be developed.
- The Funding Advisers will provide access to funder information and in some instances grant application forms & guidance (e.g. Global Grants); ensure that broad funding advice is made available through local workshops and ensure that the appropriate funding pages of the website are maintained to aid easy access for VCS organisations.

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

- VCS organisations able to improve their funding, services and activities may offer new 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.

- Without funding the VCS as a whole is considerably weakened. It is therefore imperative that groups are supported in development of fundraising skills.

Building on the Broadband for Bedfordshire ICT Exemplar Project.

- This Delivery Plan will utilise broadband office based services to search for funding sites and as an outreach service using laptops to access the same information at a local group site.
- Information development of the website will also ensure that funding advice becomes a more integrated service both across agencies and interest areas.

Key Activities

- 1. To develop the Bedfordshire & Luton Funding Network as a more strategically focussed group to act as a hub for the strategic delivery of funding advice services across the sub-region.***

The Funding Network's information sharing role will be developed to include the development of the more effective links with trusts and funders. The network will be the key partnership to oversee the strategic planning of future Funding Advice service needs.

- 2. To strengthen the provision of funding advice services at strategically accessible points across Bedfordshire & Luton.***

Bedfordshire Funding Advice Bureau will increase the hours of its current Funding Adviser by approximately eleven hours per week (0.3 FTE).

Voluntary Action Luton has a Funding Adviser post on its staff establishment but this is currently vacant due to funding pressures for the overall service. Provision of 17½ hours per week (0.5 FTE) will be sought from current development staff and funding for the recruitment of a new post will continue to be sought.

Voluntary and Community Action South Bedfordshire currently has no Funding Adviser post and has the biggest gap in provision. A new post of approximately 30 hours per week will need to be recruited for on a permanent basis (0.8 FTE). An application for funding (for a three-year project) has now been approved by The Big Lottery Fund and this will sustain the post beyond this *ChangeUp* funding period.

The above posts will be engaged in Bedford, Luton and Leighton Buzzard to ensure that a quality service can be provided within easy access of local voluntary organisations and community groups, creating a more even distribution of support to the whole area by raising the current 1.4 FTE to three FTE posts. All posts are budgeted for on SCP 28.

BRCC will also increase the hours of its current grants staff (two posts) and community development staff (three posts) (in total, the equivalent to one full-time post) to enhance current funding advice work in rural localities, to improve access and administration of local grant schemes, and undertake research for a strategy that supports and enhances the provision of a locally accessed grant programme of funding for the wider voluntary and community sector.

3. Provide funding advice and support to 60 groups

Funding Advisers will work with a range of local voluntary organisations and community groups to develop their fundraising skills and knowledge. Groups will be encouraged to think about sustainable funding practices. VCS organisations will be directed to the most appropriate advice service and the website portal will enable these links to be developed.

The Funding Advisers will contribute to the development of three funding workshops as part of the training programme within CVS and made fully accessible to the VCS. This could include a workshop on the ACEVO model for Full Cost Recovery.

4. Participate in needs planning for a sustainable service

The Consortium will work with the Funding Network to develop plans for a sustainable service across the sub-region. Consortium members are currently working with the Bedfordshire and Luton Investing in Communities Partnership and are seeking to include sustainable funding of the sector as a key goal in the partnership's Business Plan.

Management and Delivery

Bedfordshire Funding Advice Bureau (which currently services the Funding Network) 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 joint recruitment of new posts.

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;
- delivery of the funding advice services and organising training workshops.

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

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

Appointment/Assignment of staff, planning and task assignment	September – October 2005
Delivery of Funding Advice services	September 2005 - June 2006
Support development and delivery of 3 funding workshops	by June 2006
Network development	ongoing
Planning for a sustainable Funding Advice Service	ongoing
Evaluation	June 2006

Costs and Sustainability

	Revenue	Capital
Salaries (SCP 28), NI, Pension, Payroll Charges etc	48556	0
Staff Training and Development	1200	0
Funding Advice Workshops	3800	0
Project Management	3250	0
TOTAL	£56806	£0

The Consortium will work towards the future sustainability of a strategic Funding Advice Service through Investing in Communities proposals linked to community and economic development.

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Strategic Goal

To develop and strengthen the support needs of frontline VCS organisations through the development of a Workforce Development Strategy, the development and delivery of accredited training and the development of appropriate learning materials.

Current Situation

ChangeUp identifies Workforce Development as one of the key planks for change, along with Performance Improvement, ICT, Governance, Developing and Recruiting Volunteers, and Financing VCS activity. All of these require learning and skills development opportunities to be provided within the sector locally.

The Learning and Skills Council has developed its own strategy for working with the voluntary and community sector, called *Working Together*, which recognises the role played by VCS infrastructure organisations in enabling the LSC to meet its aims, objectives and targets. Five members of the Consortium are working directly with the LSC Bedfordshire & Luton on a joint Working Together Strategy Group.

The Learning and Skills Council has recently announced its Agenda for Change prospectus, which will fundamentally restructure the LSC and its delivery. Proposals for reforming the way in which the LSC funds providers and for a quality-marked nationwide network of providers delivering workforce development and accredited training directed at the needs of employers/employees will impact on the voluntary and community sector considerably. The Consortium recognises this and wishes to position itself ready to meet these challenges.

Through our discussions with the LSC, and representation on the LSC Council for Bedfordshire & Luton, it has become clear that we need to develop a clear statement of workforce development needs for the sector in the form of a Workforce Development Strategy. The Improving Reach Delivery Plan will enable us to collect information on VCS needs and priorities through the mapping work that is being undertaken. The results of this work will also inform Local Area Agreement and Investing in Communities delivery programmes.

Five members of the Consortium have experience in running first step non-accredited training programmes for voluntary organisations and community groups; two members also have basic experience of running accredited courses. VCS training programmes take account of participants' need for informal learning styles, for flexibility and access in order to meet the time, funding or staffing constraints they face. Current training programmes are highly successful, however, non-accreditation leaves these vulnerable to short-term funding regimes. Eventually the programmes could be lost with current funding diverted to further and higher education where accredited courses are available. VCS workers, trustees and volunteers, including many who are new to learning, would therefore have their learning and skills development opportunities lost. There is also anecdotal evidence that some participants are looking for accreditation of short courses as 'currency' in their own personal development and progression.

We need to make more use of the National Occupational Standards for Community Development, the Management of Volunteers, Fundraising, and Governance (forthcoming) in the design of our workshops and courses so that participants who want to build up portfolio evidence for accreditation can do so. We also need to build a modular accredited programme, with proper assessment and portfolio building arrangements and support in place, so that participants can gain credits over extended periods and accredited certificates for their learning.

The National Federation of Community Work Trainers, the Open College Network, ASDAN and ASSET all have accreditation frameworks and courses that need to be explored so that easy routes to accreditation can be developed.

Voluntary and community sector organisations regularly use the PQASSO quality assurance system as a development tool but need help from Charity Evaluation Service (CES) qualified trainers to use it effectively. Development Workers within VCS infrastructure organisations need to gain the qualification in order to meet CES delivery requirements. The new Investing in Volunteers Standards also provide opportunities for enabling volunteer-involving organisations to gain quality assurance marks.

Whether delivering non accredited workshops, accredited courses, working with groups on quality assurance systems and standards or simply using organisational health checks with groups there is a need for quality learning materials and, in the case of some accredited training and QA systems, worksheets for portfolio evidence. Over the years Consortium members have variously developed a small range of learning materials, some of which is now out of date and in need of revision. There is also a considerable amount of material available within the sector nationally and this material needs to be reviewed and adapted (where necessary) for use locally. Resources, both published and available on the internet, that are suitable for use by VCS organisations also need to be identified, reviewed and promoted through resource listings. Much of this material could also be placed on our respective websites.

Course and workshop participants (and indeed others within the sector) need to be enabled to develop their own portfolios of reference documents and learning materials of interest and relevance to them, in the form of a loose leaf Resource Pack. This Pack would also be a tool for Development Workers to support groups and individuals in the sector.

Links to Strategic Objectives and ICT Exemplar Project

This proposal will support the Consortium Infrastructure Investment Plan by addressing the following strategic objectives:

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

- Shared costs and knowledge through provision of a range of accredited courses.
- Increased collaboration across the agencies.

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.

- Provide resources accessible to groups across the whole geographic area through website access to the learning materials.
- Ensure availability through the website to provide opportunity to gain future benefits of accredited training.

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

- Target hard to reach groups to ensure inclusion in the early leadership training.
- Develop the modular accredited training to meet the needs of excluded groups.
- Develop a programme that enables frontline agencies to engage with the most hard to reach individuals.

- Developing learning materials and the Resource Pack as a tool for Development Workers who advise and support the hard to reach groups; in addition to its availability on the website.

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

- Course modules to be developed would cover community development, volunteering and fundraising skills.

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

- Access to the knowledge around being effective community volunteers empowers individuals to be active in society.

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

- Provision of leadership skills training will enable individuals to gain the confidence to take forward issues of concern to their communities and groups.
- The Resource Pack will provide a strengthening tool to embed the knowledge provided by Development Workers and reinforce good practice models.
- The provision of leadership and team building for young people encourages community participation from an early stage.

Building on the Broadband for Bedfordshire ICT Exemplar Project.

- Utilise the ICT broadband when using the website to share knowledge both between partners in the development phase and making materials available on the web for VCS organisations.

Key Activities

- 1. To undertake research and analysis of the needs and priorities of local voluntary organisations and community groups and to prepare a VCS Workforce Development Strategy for Bedfordshire & Luton.***

This will include:

- use of *Volbase* for the mapping of local voluntary organisations and community groups (including hard to reach groups)
- analysis of the needs and priorities of local voluntary organisations and community groups
- research and analysis of other VCS Workforce Development Strategies
- discussion of research findings, LSC priorities and other factors affecting workforce development within the VCS at the joint VCS/LSC Working Together Strategy Group
- drafting and preparation of a VCS Workforce Development Strategy for Bedfordshire & Luton.

- 2. To undertake research and development of accredited training for voluntary and community sector organisations and personnel.***

This will include:

- research and analysis of relevant national occupational standards
- research and analysis of relevant accreditation routes, awarding bodies and courses in order to identify the necessary evidence base and provide a better understanding of the full resource implications in running successful accredited courses.
- development and field testing of some existing non-accredited training workshops as accredited courses.

- development and testing of learning support mechanisms for new learners not familiar with portfolio building and evidence based accreditation.

3. *To enable VCS Infrastructure workers to gain relevant qualifications that enable them to deliver accredited training and/or quality assurance training.*

Development Workers within VCS infrastructure organisations will attend relevant courses to enable them to design and deliver accredited courses; for example, training the trainer, health and safety, fundraising or community development courses.

Development Workers within VCS infrastructure organisations will attend Charity Evaluation Service courses in order to gain the qualification needed to meet CES delivery requirements for the PQASSO quality assurance system.

4. *To develop a range of learning materials for use on non-accredited training workshops, accredited courses and for use with frontline VCS organisations.*

This will include:

- revision of out of date material
- the review, provision and adapted (where necessary) of material available within the sector nationally for use locally
- the research, review and listing on suitable reference sources for VCS learning and skills development needs and the publication of resource lists
- placing newly developed learning material and resource lists on our respective websites.
- the design and production of a loose leaf resource pack to enable course and workshop participants (and indeed others within the sector) to develop their own portfolios of reference documents and learning materials.

Management and Delivery

Voluntary Action Luton will be responsible for overseeing the implementation of this Delivery Plan and for:

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

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;
- undertaking tasks and work assigned to them.

The four Consortium organisations involved in this work will each devote approximately 12 hours per week to delivering the activities set out above. Existing staff (Training Officers with support from Chief Officers) will undertake this work with additional administration support and 'back filling' being used to ensure delivery. They will also engage with awarding bodies, other local providers and similar projects within the region; some of the activities may be undertaken with these bodies if specialist expertise is identified.

A Workforce Development Implementation Group of Training Officers from the Consortium members will meet regularly to share practice, issues, solutions and relevant information; and to co-ordinate the research, preparation and delivery of this work. This will also link in with the work of the LSC Bedfordshire & Luton Working Together Strategy Group and the CVS Group Skills Project.

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

Assignment of staff, planning and task assignment	October 2005
Preparation of VCS Workforce Development Strategy	October 2005 – June 2006
Research and development of accredited training	October 2005 – June 2006
Training and professional development of VCS Infrastructure workers	October 2005 – June 2006
Development of a range of learning materials	October 2005 – June 2006
Research & analysis of the needs and priorities of VCS organisations	April – June 2006
Piloting of Accredited Training Courses and Workshops	April – June 2006

Costs and Sustainability

	Revenue	Capital
Salaries (SCP 28), NI, Pension, Payroll Charges etc	24228	0
Staff Training and Development	2700	0
Publications and Resource Material	1321	0
Production of Learning Materials	1415	0
Piloting of Accredited Training	10500	0
Project Management	2623	0
TOTAL	£42787	£0

These activities are designed to be completed by June 2006. They will provide VCS infrastructure organisations with an evidence base of VCS needs and priorities for use in securing additional funding opportunities through the Learning and Skills Council, ESF Co-Financing, Local Area Agreements and Investing in Communities. The development and future provision of accredited training is more likely to attract funding from these and other agencies. Learning materials produced through this work will have an ongoing benefit to learners, staff, trustees and volunteers within the sector.

BME VCS INFRASTRUCTURE SUPPORT

Strategic Goal

To undertake a detailed analysis of the needs of existing BME infrastructure organisations and community groups and develop a strategy for the delivery of BME infrastructure support services across the County. The strategy will also identify structures and working arrangements for the longer term implementation of BME services across Bedfordshire, including rural areas and other isolated groups, which will increase and inform understanding of the needs of BME groups and others working with BME issues within the community.

Current Situation

Bedford Race Equality Council (BREC) currently employs eight staff who work with regular Social Work placement and IT students and volunteers. Services are delivered from their offices located in Bedford and through outreach services provided across Bedfordshire (excluding Luton).

Bedford has the third highest percentage (11.9%) of BME groups within the Eastern Region and a mixture of diverse groups within different geographical areas of the County. The existing BME organisations and groups that exist have developed from community needs, interests and capacities.

Existing research shows that inequalities in some sectors are increasing and community needs are correspondingly more acute. The only county-based BME infrastructure support, which is targeted and specific for BME communities, is provided by BREC.

BREC works in partnership with MENTER, which allows for good linkage between local, regional and national levels. BREC is, however, under-resourced and therefore cannot offer comprehensive infrastructure support at all levels. It is also important to keep the diversity of provision that is offered to non-BME groups and so part of this project is enabling the development of work between mainstream providers and BME communities. Concerns regarding the amount of support currently offered occur with smaller groups, new arrivals and specialist areas of service such as provision for Refugees/Asylum Seekers. This is exacerbated by the lack of research data concerning the numbers and geographical spread of these groups.

More information is available regarding the larger groups, however the infrastructure of these groups is not comprehensive, as they do not have the capacity to deal with specific concerns within their communities in a sustainable way; nor do they have the capacity to manage larger funds as, on the whole, research shows access/uptake by BME groups is of smaller, one off funds, which is one of the main factors that contributes to their unsustainable future.

Therefore, the overall concern that has been identified is the working capacity of the existing BME groups. Newly identified groups have not been mapped or researched. Infrastructure services tailored to meet BME needs are clearly not adequate enough to make a proper impact, resulting in poor BME infrastructure in Bedfordshire amongst the BME communities.

The active members of BREC and partners who are committed to establishing County-wide capacity are aware that the BME communities are experiencing immense disadvantage. Research and past projects have shown the poor infrastructure support at County level is greater in certain geographical areas of Bedfordshire where there is a higher concentration of BME communities.

Links to Strategic Objectives and ICT Exemplar Project

This proposal will support the Consortium Infrastructure Investment Plan by addressing the following strategic objectives:

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

- Increased capacity to be able to deliver support and provide identified services to BME community organisations and groups leading to improved infrastructure in partnership with other infrastructure organisations.
- Improved communication, common understanding and collaboration between the BME communities and the voluntary, community and statutory sectors will lead to a cohesive and joined up response to identified needs.
- The existing BME infrastructure will be better supported and its strategic engagement increased at a county level and with local partnerships.

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.

- Improved partnership working and linkages will enable the services offered to BME organisations and groups to be better promoted as well as increase awareness of BME issues.
- Engagement with the Consortium website portal *VoluntaryWorks* and through the REC website, leaflets and periodical publications will increase awareness and understanding of the roles and services of the Consortium.
- Information regarding the work of the Consortium and all infrastructure organisations will be disseminated through the established networks and forums that have access to the wider community as well as newly identified users.

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

- Increased awareness and knowledge of resources and services available to BME groups.
- Appropriate capacity building for BME groups, through the provision of joined up services in partnership with appropriate agencies, will be identified.
- Knowledge from the needs analysis will inform the infrastructure bodies of the services required and capacity building needs of BME groups and disadvantaged groups traditionally called "hard to reach"

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

- A defined referral and signposting system will provide appropriate services, develop capacity and provide support and advocacy.
- Data from the Infrastructure Research will inform the Consortium of the capacity building needs of BME groups and the resultant strategy will address specific needs and skill gaps.

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

- Improved links with organisations, agencies and groups will identify new volunteering opportunities within BME communities.
- Promoting volunteering as a pathway to further education, training and employment through engaging in local organised activities, will increase the take up of volunteering opportunities within BME communities.

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

- Infrastructure bodies (particularly BME) can build on the capacity to advocate on behalf of the BME community and its voluntary and community organisations.
- An identified strategy for the future development and delivery of BME services across the County including engagement of individuals from the BME community to shape and define services.
- Ensure that proper and effective consultation is made with groups who are traditionally under-represented on forums and decision making bodies in order to communicate their needs and aspirations through the appropriate channels.
- The proposed BME infrastructure strategy will build effective capacity amongst BME groups in order to increase participation at several levels and provide an effective voice.

Building on the Broadband for Bedfordshire ICT Exemplar Project.

- The ICT capacity of BREC will be enhanced through the Modernising VCS Infrastructure Delivery Plan.

Key Activities

1. ***To develop a detailed infrastructure needs analysis of existing BME infrastructure bodies and community groups (including any new BME groups identified through the Improving Reach Delivery Plan).***

BREC will use its current reputation, good relations with, and the trust of, BME communities to undertake the research, which will include:

- collating existing research, identifying gaps and new research into the needs and geographical breakdown of BME groups and organisations across the County;
- developing and carrying out a detailed infrastructure needs analysis of existing and newly identified BME community groups through a questionnaire and focus groups;
- undertaking a skills audit of Bedfordshire BME infrastructure organisations and front line organisations that have BME specific projects.
- undertaking a knowledge requirement audit of generic infrastructure organisations.

2. ***To develop a strategy for the delivery of BME infrastructure support services across Bedfordshire in partnership with the Consortium and other voluntary, community and statutory sector partners.***

The strategy will take full account of the needs analysis to identify a capacity building framework for BME organisations and groups. It will also identify structures and working arrangements for the longer term implementation of BME services across Bedfordshire, including rural areas and other isolated groups, which will increase and inform understanding of the needs of BME groups and others working with BME issues within the community.

Management and Delivery

Bedford Race Equality Council, in partnership with MENTER, will be responsible for overseeing the implementation of this Delivery Plan and for:

- setting and monitoring the implementation timetable;
- deploying and line managing staff, and providing regular one-to-one supervision;
- undertaking tasks and work associated with the key activities identified above.

BREC will re-deploy an existing member of staff to undertake the activities described above. The Officer will be managed and supervised by the Chief Officer of BREC. Back filling will be used to ensure other work is undertaken and administrative support will also be provided by the Project Support Officer (whose hours will increase to full time).

A BME Infrastructure Implementation Group will be established with representatives from MENTER, Bedford REC Executive Committee and the Consortium to oversee the work; share practices, issues and solutions and co-ordinate work across Bedfordshire.

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

Assignment of staff, planning and task assignment	October 2005
Develop and carry out a detailed infrastructure needs audit	December 2005 – March 2005
Undertake a skills audit	December 2005 – March 2005
Collate and analyse research data	April – May 2006
Prepare Strategy and Recommendations	June 2006

Costs and Sustainability

	Revenue	Capital
Salaries, NI & Payroll Charges etc	28755	0
Staff Training and Development	1440	0
Travel	350	0
Insurance/Stationery/Postage/IT Support	5400	0
Telephone & Internet Access	780	0
Meeting room hire, focus groups and interviews	1350	0
Marketing and final report	4800	0
Project Management	2144	0
TOTAL	£45019	£0

The Consortium will work towards the future sustainability of BME Infrastructure services through Capacity Builders, Investing in Communities and proposals linked to Local Area Agreements working towards community and economic development.