



Compass Partnership



Working Towards an Infrastructure Strategy for the Voluntary and Community Sector

February 2004

Contents

Executive Summary	4
Acronyms	6
Key definitions	7
1. Introduction	9
1.1 Introducing the strategy	9
1.2 The context for this strategy	9
1.3 Links to related initiatives	10
1.4 Process for developing the strategy	11
2. Supporting the sector: the importance of infrastructure	12
2.1 The VCS's role in service delivery and civil renewal	12
2.2 The support needs of front line organisations	13
2.3 Responsibilities for strengthening the sector	14
2.4 The central role of infrastructure	15
3. What is infrastructure?	16
3.1 Definitions and distinctions	16
3.2 Infrastructure providers and the functions and services they provide	16
3.3 The scope of this strategy	19
4. Gaps and weaknesses in current provision	20
3.4 The current picture	20
3.5 Current patterns of funding	21
3.6 Key strengths and gaps in infrastructure	22
4. Principles for infrastructure development	24
5. A vision for the future	26
6. Achieving the vision: sector wide objectives for the next 5 years	27
Objective 1: Generalist and specialist infrastructure should be available nationwide	28
Objective 2: Infrastructure should support community capacity building	30
Objective 3: Infrastructure should be sustainably funded from diverse sources of income	32
Objective 4: Infrastructure should be structured for maximum efficiency and impact	34
Objective 5: Infrastructure should be better co-ordinated at a national level	37
Objective 6: Infrastructure should strive for excellence	38
Objective 7: Infrastructure needs to be accountable	40
Objective 8: Infrastructure should be accessible	41
Objective 9: Infrastructure should be highly skilled	42
Objective 10: Infrastructure should reflect and promote diversity	43
Objective 11: Infrastructure should champion the sector's engagement with ICT	45
Objective 12: Infrastructure and the public sector should work closely together	46
Objective 13: Infrastructure should support social enterprise	47
Objective 14: Infrastructure should provide high quality support to organisations in rural areas	48
Objective 15: Infrastructure should deliver a step change in volunteering activity	49
7. Responsibilities of key stakeholders	50

Appendix 1 Consultation reports commissioned _____ 56
Appendix 2 OPM and Compass Partnership _____ 57

Executive Summary

In recent years, there has been growing recognition of the vital role played by the voluntary and community sector (VCS) in England both in delivering high quality public services and in contributing to civil renewal. It has also become increasingly clear that the capacity of the sector to continue to fulfil these important functions into the future depends to a significant extent on the existence of strong and effective voluntary sector infrastructure.

All voluntary and community organisations are operating in a rapidly changing environment. The key aspects of this are:

- An increasingly complex policy environment, where some powers have been devolved and new government structures have been created
- A new focus on partnership and cross sector working
- The requirement to navigate an increasingly complex funding and procurement environment (including competitive tendering across sectors)
- Growing demands to provide high quality, professional, services and to demonstrate impact to donors and other stakeholders
- Growing demands to be responsive and accountable to users, clients, and communities and act ways that build public confidence and trust

Supporting voluntary and community organisations to operate successfully in this increasingly complex environment and to unleash their potential to contribute to both civil renewal and the delivery of public services requires:

- Capacity building work inside individual organisations – e.g. developing new organisational structures and processes
- Changes in the external environment that help to create a context in which VCOs can flourish – e.g. removal of barriers to volunteering, a level playing field for contracts with the public sector, building understanding of the sector amongst public and private stakeholders
- The development of new skills, knowledge, practices, and networks of support to enable and encourage these changes to occur and to be sustainable over time

A uniform approach will not work. The needs of front line organisations vary depending on the activities that they are engaged in, the groups they work with and for, the geographical location they operate in, and the age and size of the organisation.

Voluntary sector infrastructure has a uniquely important role to play in supporting voluntary and community organisations and the communities they serve.

Infrastructure both strengthens and supports the capacity building efforts of individual VCOs, provides a voice that can influence other stakeholders to create a more conducive environment

for VCS activity, and helps to build the knowledge, skills and resources required for both these things to happen.

Infrastructure is a highly efficient way to enhance the performance of the VCS because knowledge, skills and experience can be gathered from many organisations both inside and outside the VCS and disseminated as a public benefit – often free of charge or at low cost. At its best, infrastructure provides economies of scale that cannot be achieved by individual organisations acting alone.

This strategy has a vision for VCS infrastructure that is based on clear evidence of need, exists in every part of the country, is accessible, is robust and sustainable, provides high quality, trustworthy, efficient, and effective functions and services, supports the full range of voluntary and community organisations, strengthens partnership and collaboration within the sector and across sector boundaries, is led by the sector and accountable to it.

The strategy outlines 15 high level objectives by which the vision will be achieved. It sets out how infrastructure can:

- be developed more strategically to best meet the needs of front line organisations through generalist and specialist in all areas of the country
- support community capacity building
- be funded more sustainably from a diverse range of sources
- be structured for maximum efficiency and impact
- be better co-ordinated at a national level
- strive for excellence
- be more accountable
- be accessible
- monitor and report on its impact
- be highly skilled
- reflect and promote diversity
- champion the sector's engagement with ICT
- work more closely with the public sector
- support social enterprises to develop and flourish
- provide high quality support to organisations in rural areas
- deliver a step change in volunteering activity.

Acronyms

The following acronyms are used in this report:

VCS	Voluntary and Community Sector
VCO	Voluntary and Community Organisation
ACD	Active Community Directorate in the Home Office
ACU	Active Community Unit, part of the Active Community Directorate
CIT	The Capacity Implementation Team
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
LSP	Local Strategic Partnership

Key definitions

This is a complex field that is not yet well defined in academic literature or in practice. Crucially to this report, the distinctions between front line organisations and infrastructure organisations and between generic and specialist infrastructure organisations have not previously been clearly defined. We have developed the definitions below to provide a clear framework for discussing the issues in this document. We recognise that these terms are subject to debate.

Voluntary and community sector (VCS)	A sector that is wider in scope than general charities and the voluntary and community sector, including social enterprise, but narrower in scope than 'non-profit', 'third' sector or 'social economy'. (The definition used by the Cross Cutting Review ¹)
Front line voluntary and community organisations	Organisations that work directly with individuals and communities in order to provide services, offer support, and campaign for change
Voluntary and community sector infrastructure (VCS Infrastructure)	The physical facilities, structures, systems, relationships, people, knowledge and skills that exist to support and develop, co-ordinate, represent and promote front line organisations thus enabling them to deliver their missions more effectively.
Infrastructure organisations	Voluntary organisations whose primary purpose is the provision of infrastructure functions (support and development, co-ordination, representation, and promotion) to front line VCO's ² . They are sometimes called umbrella organisations, 2 nd tier organisations or intermediary organisations.

¹ The Role of the Voluntary and Community Sector in Service Delivery: A Cross Cutting Review (HM Treasury, 2002)

² We recognise that the distinction between infrastructure organisations and front line organisations is sometimes blurred at a neighbourhood or community level where some infrastructure organisations also deliver services direct to individuals or communities

Generalist infrastructure organisations	Infrastructure organisations whose primary purpose is the provision of a wide range of generic support to any type of front line VCO within a specified geographic boundary
Specialist infrastructure organisations	Infrastructure organisations whose primary purpose is the provision of specialist support to front line organisations that focus on a particular client group, policy or service area, or activity ³ .
Neighbourhood and community infrastructure	Infrastructure operating at highly localised sub district or Parish level
Local infrastructure	Infrastructure operating mainly at a district level
Sub regional infrastructure	Infrastructure operating at a county level or referring to groups of local authorities
Regional infrastructure	Infrastructure operating at the level of the nine English regions
National infrastructure	Infrastructure operating at a national level across England
Public services	Services that are publicly funded but may be delivered by public, voluntary and community, or private sector agencies
Civil renewal	A process of engaging people and communities in public life and decision making in order to build skills and confidence, shape services, and contribute to social, economic, and environmental development

³ We recognise that in some areas, what we describe in the text as a specialist provider e.g. a Rural Community Council or BME infrastructure organisation, may be the main source of generalist advice and support

1. Introduction

1.1 Introducing the strategy

In recent years, there has been growing recognition of the vital role played by the voluntary and community sector (VCS) in England both in delivering high quality public services and in contributing to civil renewal. It has also become increasingly clear that the capacity of the sector to continue to fulfil these important functions into the future depends to a significant extent on the existence of strong and effective voluntary sector infrastructure.

In this document, voluntary sector infrastructure is defined as the ‘the physical facilities, structures, systems, relationships, people, knowledge and skills that exist to support and develop, co-ordinate, represent or promote front line organisations and thus enable them to deliver their missions more effectively’.

Infrastructure constitutes the ‘backbone’ of the VCS and the interface between government, other agencies and the sector. As such, it provides a range of functions and services that are crucial to the sector and to Government. More broadly, the development and effective functioning of robust and sustainable infrastructure are an essential element of enhancing civil society and increasing social capital.

This document sets out a high level strategy for developing VCS infrastructure in England over the next 5 to 10 years. The strategy has been developed in close conjunction with the sector, its funders and other stakeholders. This second draft will be the subject of further consultation before it is agreed by the sector and by government.

1.2 The context for this strategy

This strategy has its immediate roots in the Treasury’s Cross Cutting Review (CCR)⁴. The CCR confirmed that a modern and dynamic VCS has a key role to play in delivering and influencing public services. The Review, and subsequent work by the Home Office, identified four important areas that would need to be strengthened if the sector’s involvement in service delivery is to be increased in the future. These areas were:

- Infrastructure
- Performance
- Skill development
- Governance

The Cross Cutting Review reported that:

⁴ The Role of the Voluntary and Community Sector in Service Delivery – A Cross Cutting Review, HM Treasury, September 2002

The current infrastructure has developed piecemeal and, while some parts of the sector are well served, overall the coverage is variable in quality and fragile. There are significant gaps in networks and further scope for collaborative working between existing organisations.

Central government supports VCS infrastructure by providing technical support for specific projects and building capacity within small community groups. But current practice across Whitehall is inconsistent. The value of this investment would be enhanced if it were brought together into one cross government strategy for VCS capacity building, with common purposes, resulting in more coherent and effective delivery.

The contribution of local government also varies considerably. While there is long established support for infrastructure in some areas, it is estimated that as many as 20% of authorities provide no support'.

The Cross Cutting Review recommended that government departments and local government participate actively in the ACU review of capacity building and infrastructure support leading to an integrated cross-Government strategic approach and that ACU should 'implement a plan to achieve a sustainable baseline of infrastructure support, in each local authority and Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) area, as well as regionally and nationally, including the role of government and VCS'.

In September 2003 the ACU published 'Voluntary and Community Sector Infrastructure – A Consultation Document'. At the same time, it commissioned OPM/Compass Partnership to seek the views of the VCS on this document and to develop a strategy to further develop and strengthen the sector's infrastructure. Other organisations were commissioned to develop separate strategies on governance, skills, and performance.

The Infrastructure Strategy is intended as broad, guiding document that will help to strengthen the strategic capacity of the voluntary and community sector into the future. Successful implementation of the strategy will require on-going and sustained action and investment by the VCS, central and local government, and other funders.

1.3 Links to related initiatives

Although the impetus for this infrastructure strategy came from the CCR, which focused on service delivery, this strategy and the final framework is intended to address the needs of the sector for strategic level assistance to support both service delivery and civil renewal.

There are a number of other important initiatives that are aimed at strengthening the capacity of the VCS in both of these respects. This strategy is intended to build on and complement these initiatives:

The FutureBuilders Fund – which will invest in the capacity of front line organisations to deliver more public services

The Community Capacity Building Review – which aims to strengthen the capacity of community and neighbourhood organisations⁵

The Compact – which aims to improve relationships between the VCS and the public sector in all policy fields and all areas of the country

Best Value Reviews and Comprehensive Performance Assessments – which will incentivise local authorities to establish longer term funding relationships

Treasury guidance on full cost recovery, payment schedules and work to create a more level playing field for VCOs contracting for service delivery

1.4 Process for developing the strategy

To develop this strategy, the OPM Compass Partnership team conducted the following activities:

A review of **374** written responses to the Consultation Document

Attendance at over **15** national, regional and local consultation events that were organised by the ACU, the VCS and OPM Compass Partnership

Commissioning of **9** specialist consultation exercises undertaken by representatives of the VCS that involved a total of **100** organisations (See appendix for details)

An analysis of private sector infrastructure in the UK and nonprofit sector infrastructure in the USA

Additional background research and extensive consultation with representatives from the sector and Government on particular themes and issues

The strategy proposed in this document was the subject of three workshops with ACU's Capacity Implementation Team and a Futures Event for a cross section of voluntary organisations.

⁵ The Community Capacity Building Review is being conducted by the Civil Renewal Unit, at the Active Community Directorate. At the time of writing, consultation is still on going.

2. Supporting the sector: the importance of infrastructure

2.1 The VCS's role in service delivery and civil renewal

The Government has embarked on a radical programme of public service investment and reform with the aim of creating world-class public services that extend opportunity, tackle poverty and improve the quality of life for all. Securing reform will take time, but the key principles are clear: services need to be more responsive to customer concerns and they need to be flexible enough to meet the needs of particular communities and groups. This means that there must be more discretion at the local level about how best to deliver services and more community involvement in helping to shape services, against a backdrop of national standards.

VCOs including social enterprises are seen by Government to have a key role to play in the transformation of public services. Over the last 10 years the value of public services delivered by the VCS has grown dramatically. The sector has demonstrated its ability to deliver significantly improved outcomes across a wide range of service areas and particularly for people facing multiple problems and those that are hardest to reach. At its best, the sector has also shown its ability to develop services in close co-operation with service users and deliver them in innovative and flexible ways.

The sector has also continued to play a vital role in fostering civil engagement and renewal by providing opportunities for people to articulate their views to Government and other agencies, shape the development of local services, and participate in community life thereby helping to combat social isolation, build skills and confidence, and contribute to social capital.⁶

Whilst some VCOs focus largely on service delivery and others focus on activities that promote civil engagement and renewal, many organisations do both. One of the key strengths of the sector is that service delivery often develops out of an advocacy role, where an organisation that has campaigned for more effective services for a particular group eventually moves into providing services itself.

⁶ This has been well documented in *In Search of Civil Society* (Deakin 2001), *Politics and Progress* (Blunkett 2001) and *Civil Society* (Edwards, 2004).

2.2 The support needs of front line organisations

All voluntary and community organisations are operating in a rapidly changing environment. The key aspects of this are:

- An increasingly complex policy environment, where some powers have been devolved and new government structures have been created
- A new focus on partnership and cross sector working
- The requirement to navigate an increasingly complex funding and procurement environment (including competitive tendering across sectors)
- Growing demands to provide high quality, professional, services and to demonstrate impact to donors and other stakeholders
- Growing demands to be responsive and accountable to users, clients, and communities and act ways that build public confidence and trust

Helping voluntary and community organisations to operate successfully in this increasingly complex environment and to unleash their potential to contribute to both civil renewal and the delivery of public services will involve:

- Capacity building work inside individual organisations – e.g. developing new organisational structures and processes
- Changes in the external environment that help to create a context in which VCOs can flourish – e.g removal of barriers to volunteering, a level playing field for contracts with the public sector, building understanding of the sector amongst public and private stakeholders
- The development of new skills, knowledge, practices, and networks of support to enable and encourage these changes to occur and to be sustainable over time

A uniform approach will not work. The needs of front line organisations at each of these levels vary depending on the activities that they are engaged in, the groups they work with and for, the geographical location the operate in, and the age and size of the organisation.

However, organisations engaged in service delivery tend to require, amongst other things:

- Improved skill levels, particularly in leadership, management, performance improvement, financial planning, human resources, and partnership working
- Stronger and more robust governance arrangements and skills
- Better diagnostic skills and tools, so organisations focus their resources on those investments that will catalyse the greatest enhancements in performance
- Easier access to information about different approaches to capacity building and evidence of which approaches work best
- Access to inexpensive advice to assist with capacity building
- Implementation of the compact across the country

Front line organisations whose activities contribute to civil renewal and engagement tend to require, amongst other things:

- Access to facilities (meeting rooms, membership systems)
- Greater support from volunteers
- Skill development to enable them to engage more effectively with local communities and public sector agencies
- Support from paid development workers
- Opportunities to network and share experiences with organisations engaged in similar activities
- Funding to invest in the development of their capacity

Younger organisations that reflect the needs of new groups of people and/or new issues tend to have different needs to those of more established organisations, most notably:

- Access to incubation facilities
- Basic support in establishing an organisation

2.3 Responsibilities for strengthening the sector

Front line organisations have worked hard to build their own capacity over recent years by investing in organisational development, physical facilities, skill development, partnership working and so on. Staff, managers and trustees of front line organisations will continue to have a central role to play in building the capacity of their own organisations. However, they also require support from other key stakeholders who can both assist them in their efforts and work to change the fundamental conditions in which VCOs operate.

Individual citizens can help to strengthen the capacity of the voluntary and community sector by giving their time as a volunteer, trustee or governor or regularly donating to a cause.

Front line VCS organisations that have a track record of success in service delivery or civil engagement and renewal activities have a valuable role to play in sharing their skills and experience with smaller or younger front line organisations.

Central government has an important role in creating an appropriate policy environment, establishing a modern legislative framework, ensuring proportionate regulation and funding innovative approaches.

The local public sector has a key role to play in strengthening the capacity of the sector by building compact compliant relationships with the sector, meeting the full costs of services delivered by the VCS, and creating a level playing field for contracts.

The private sector has an important role to play in strengthening the capacity of the sector by providing services – e.g sharing skills through pro bono consultancy or volunteering and offering ICT at appropriate costs.

2.4 The central role of infrastructure

Voluntary sector infrastructure has a uniquely important role to play in supporting voluntary and community organisations and the communities they serve.

Infrastructure both strengthens and supports the capacity building efforts of individual VCOs, provides a voice that can influence other stakeholders to create a more conducive environment for VCS activity, and helps to build the knowledge, skills and resources required for both these things to happen.

Established by the sector and reflecting its values, voluntary sector infrastructure is uniquely well placed to provide support and assistance to VCOs in a way that is appropriate to their needs.

At its best, infrastructure provides economies of scale in all its activities. It can be a highly efficient way to enhance the performance of the VCS because its position and reach enable it to gather knowledge, skills and experience from a wide range of organisations in the sector and disseminate it as a public benefit – often free of charge or at low cost.

As a coalition of interests, infrastructure is particularly well placed to foster links and dialogue and contribute to joint working and understanding between the VCS and the public and private sectors. It has an important role to play in translating learning and best practice from other sectors and making this available to VCOs.

So whilst direct support for, and investment in, individual VCOs and efforts to change the environment in which they operate are essential for the continuing vitality of the sector, investment in the permanent or semi-permanent structures, systems and networks of the sector's infrastructure is an important way of supporting this and ensuring that the capacity of the sector is strengthened and sustained over time.

3. What is infrastructure?

3.1 Definitions and distinctions

We have defined voluntary sector infrastructure to be the ‘the physical facilities, structures, systems, relationships, people, knowledge and skills that exist to support and develop, co-ordinate, represent or promote front line organisations and thus enable them to deliver their missions more effectively’.

In defining infrastructure in this way, we make a distinction between *infrastructure functions* and the *organisations* that provide infrastructure support. Infrastructure functions can be provided by a wide range of organisations – both within and outside the VCS.

We also distinguish infrastructure from capacity building efforts within individual VCOs. We assume that the provision of infrastructure support generally occurs *across organisational boundaries*. In other words, it usually involves the provision of *external assistance* to organisations that are not formally part of the same organisational structure. Crucially, infrastructure is a *collective* resource that is in principle available for use by many or all organisations for the benefit of the sector as a whole.

We recognise that some ‘front line’ organisations also make a significant contribution to voluntary sector infrastructure for example organisations that invest in the development of their regional and branch structures. At the margin, therefore, the distinction between infrastructure and capacity building within organisations is very fine. For the purposes of this strategy, however, we are concerned with VCOs whose primary purpose is to deliver infrastructure functions and front line organisations that currently and potentially could strengthen voluntary sector infrastructure.

We also distinguish infrastructure from funding provision. A whole range of organisations are involved in funding the development of the VCS – including local authorities, central Government departments and agencies, charitable trusts and foundations. Whilst funders are critical to the successful implementation of this strategy, we do not consider these organisations to be a core part of voluntary sector infrastructure themselves.

3.2 Infrastructure providers and the functions and services they provide

Our definition makes a distinction between *infrastructure functions* and the *organisations* that provide infrastructure support. Infrastructure functions can be provided by a wide range of organisations – both within and outside the VCS including:

Infrastructure organisations – voluntary sector bodies whose primary purpose is to support, develop, coordinate, or represent front line organisations to deliver their missions. These include generalist providers such as NCVO, Regional Voluntary Sector Networks, Councils for Voluntary Service and specialist providers such as Community Matters, the Development Trusts Association and the Association of Charitable

Foundations. This report recognises that as well as supporting front line organisations infrastructure organisations sometimes provide support for other infrastructure organisations.

Federal voluntary sector organisations – bodies that are federated into national organisations usually working under the same name. Many of these invest in infrastructure through the development of their national networks working to agreed standards and under the same name. Examples include Age Concern, Relate, Mind and the Red Cross.

Front line voluntary organisations – organisations that exist primarily to deliver services and contribute to civil society and also contribute to VCS infrastructure. These organisations contribute to infrastructure through their nationwide governance and management structures and through the support they provide to independent organisations. Examples include The Scouts and Guides, Mencap, Cancer UK, the Red Cross, WRVS, RNIB and RNID.

Front line neighbourhood and community organisations – organisations that provide generalist infrastructure support in neighbourhoods and communities such as community associations and social action centres. These organisations may also provide direct services to individuals.

Professional associations – organisations that exist to support individuals working in the VCS. They also contribute to infrastructure, for example through the provision of training, standard setting and policy work. Examples include ACEVO, Charity Finance Directors Group and the Institute of Fundraising.

Commercial organisations – for-profit organisations that provide a wide range of infrastructure services primarily through the provision of research, consultancy, training, financial advice and policy work.

Infrastructure organisations themselves tend to be divided into two groups:

Generalist bodies – organisations whose primary purpose is the provision of a wide range of generic support to any type of ‘front line’ VCO within a specified geographical boundary

Specialist bodies – organisations whose primary purpose is the provision of specialist support to ‘front line’ organisations that focuses on a particular client group, policy or service area or activity. This strategy document recognises that specialist infrastructure organisations may also provide support and advice to generalist infrastructure providers and to a wide range of front line VCOs. It also recognises that in some areas, what we describe in the text as specialist providers e.g. a Rural Community Council or BME infrastructure organisations, may be the main source of generalist advice and support.

Infrastructure organisations tend to exist at one of the following levels:

National – referring to England

Regional – referring mainly to the nine English regions

Sub-regional – referring mainly to counties, metropolitan authorities and groups of local authorities

Local – referring mainly to district Councils

Neighbourhood – referring mainly to highly localised sub district or Parish units

The functions of voluntary sector infrastructure encapsulated within our definition embrace:

Support and development including the provision of:

- Information and advice
- Consultancy
- Training
- Fund distribution
- Incubation facilities

Co-ordination including:

- Service coordination – coordinating the delivery of services and initiatives across the sector
- Brokerage of services – guiding groups to providers of relevant services, establishing special deals with providers
- Co-ordination of common interest groups – organising or providing support for VCOs wishing to work together to learn, develop policy and to campaign
- Cross sector working – coordinating public/voluntary and private/voluntary sector partnerships for the delivery of services and initiatives

Representation including:

- Consultation – consulting ‘front-line’ organisations on issues concerning the sector
- Lobbying – advocating on behalf of the sector to Government and the private sector

Sector promotion including:

- Research – undertaking and publishing research into the sector
- Policy – developing and promoting policy and policy positions
- Standards and best practice – developing standards and best practice and reviewing and benchmarking performance
- Sector development – identifying new needs and taking new initiatives

Some infrastructure organisations are membership based whilst others are independent and survive in the market.

3.3 The scope of this strategy

This strategy focuses on generalist and specialist infrastructure functions delivered by dedicated infrastructure organisations and federal and front line organisations that make a significant contribution to voluntary sector infrastructure at every geographical level in England.

This is a high level, overall, strategy for strengthening voluntary sector infrastructure. It does not contain detailed action plans for strengthening infrastructure support to VCOs that work with particular client groups – e.g. women’s groups, young people and it only covers a few of the most important areas of specialist infrastructure.

Much work has already been conducted and is currently underway to understand the support needs of different types of organisation, and develop strategies for meeting these. This strategy, therefore, sets out the key principles that should guide this work. It recognises that further work will be required to flesh out detailed strategies for strengthening specific elements of infrastructure in each geographical location.

4. Gaps and weaknesses in current provision

3.4 The current picture

At the national level recent work by OPM/Compass Partnership has identified over 300 dedicated infrastructure organisations whose primary purpose is to support other organisations across the UK. The top 100 of these organisations have a total income of over £100m and employ over 1,800 people.

At the Regional level there are Regional Voluntary Sector Networks and BME Networks covering the nine English Regions. Many front line voluntary organisations also have regional structures that provide infrastructure support for their field and branch operations.

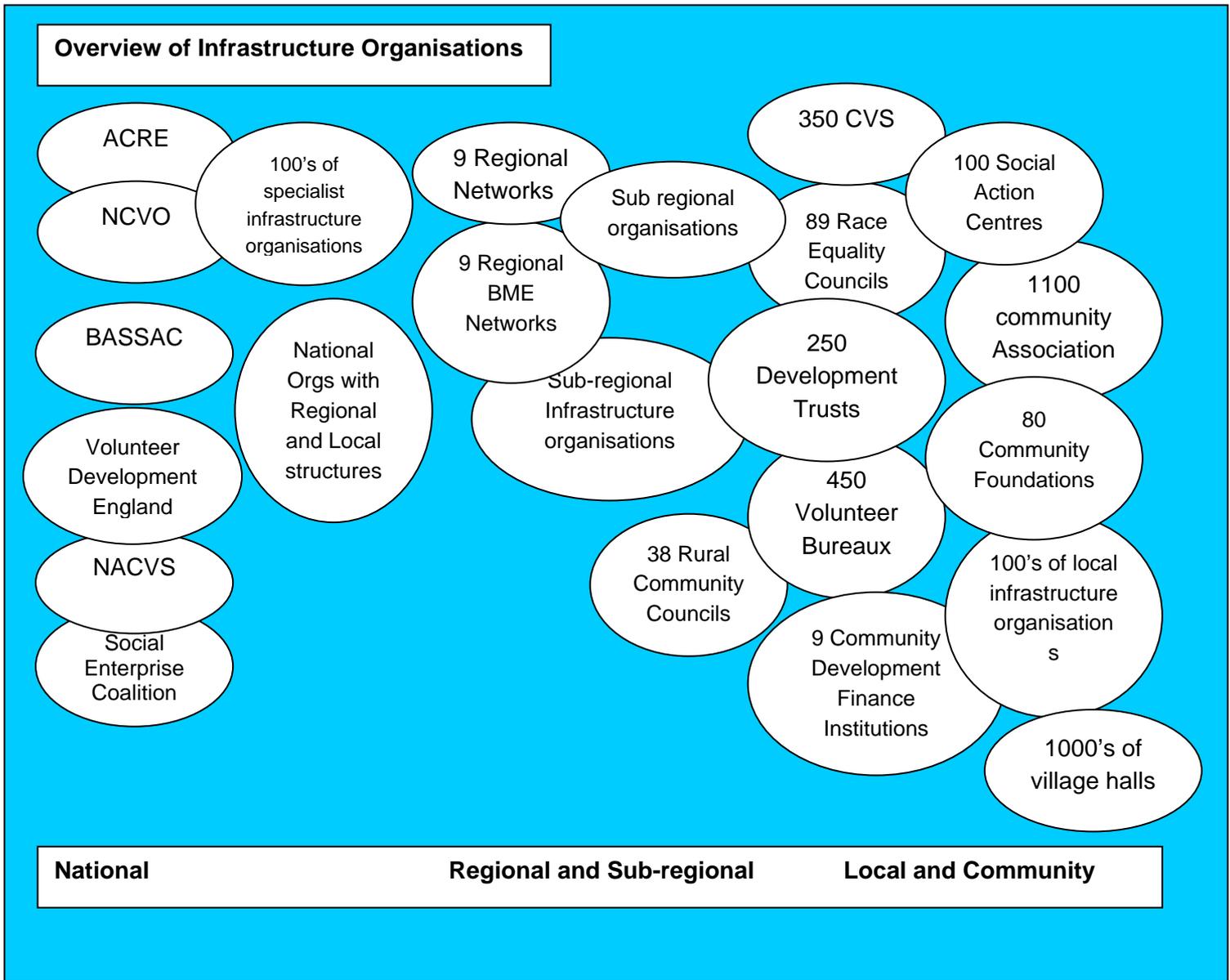
There are 38 Rural Community Councils based in each county of England. The range and extent of other activity at the sub-regional level is more varied, and there is growing demand for some functions to be delivered at this level.

At the local level generalist provision comes from 350 Councils for Voluntary Service, and a wide range of other more specialist providers including volunteer bureaux, settlements and local federations of community organisations.

At the neighbourhood level, generalist provision comes mainly from the estimated 4,000 community associations and 8,900 village halls.

The picture below illustrates some of the key sources of dedicated voluntary sector infrastructure support. This demonstrates the range and diversity of the organisations concerned with infrastructure development.⁷

⁷ This diagram is included here for illustrative purposes only



3.5 Current patterns of funding

Infrastructure at all levels is funded from a variety of sources, including membership fees, charging fees for services, contracts and grants. National and local government are currently the main funders of VCS infrastructure along with foundations and the Community Fund.

National infrastructure is largely strategically funded by central Government. Central government also contributes to the strategic funding of regional generic and BME voluntary sector networks and via the Countryside Agency for County-wide Rural Community Councils. As part of implementing the Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy, Government also funds Community Empowerment Networks. Central Government support for some specialist infrastructure at national and regional levels is more varied.

Levels of funding for local infrastructure vary widely across the country and is provided mainly by local authorities and PCT's. This funding has been particularly vulnerable to time limited funds and to sudden cuts from local public sector agencies who may prioritise front line services when spending priorities change.

3.6 Key strengths and gaps in infrastructure

In devising a strategy for strengthening voluntary sector infrastructure, it is important to recognise that infrastructure organisations have many strengths:

The majority of providers offer a wide range of high quality services and support that make a huge contribution to the effectiveness of front line organisations

There is a high level of trust and goodwill exists between providers and the front line organisations with whom they work

Existing infrastructure organisations are highly experienced at representing their constituents' views to the public sector and other parties

The majority of infrastructure organisations have strong and productive relationships with the public sector

Existing infrastructure organisations make a huge contribution to the generation, dissemination, and promotion of good practice

Infrastructure organisations contribute significantly to economies of learning and to the development and modernisation of the sector

Infrastructure organisations are populated by many dedicated and intelligent staff who are working in a challenging and fast moving environment

This strategy builds on these strengths. It also recognises key gaps and weaknesses including:

Patchy coverage across the country

Too many organisations lacking the critical mass required to deliver significant impact

Insufficiently well understood and signposted provision, which is confusing to people inside and outside the sector

Heavy dependence on short term government funding which leads to organisations dominated by the need to survive rather than being geared up to act more strategically

Concerns about infrastructure providers delivering services and competing with their own members or constituencies for resources

Concerns about accountability to members, the broader VCS and funders

Lack of clarity about the unique contribution of each of the key geographical layers of infrastructure – national, regional, local and community – and how they should work together

Insufficient attention given to monitoring and evaluation and lack of shared understanding of how this might be done

Some overlapping provision with some duplication of services and functions

This is compounded by weaknesses in the public sector including poor understanding of infrastructure, poor signposting and weak or inappropriate accountability of funded organisations.

Key gaps and weaknesses at each of the geographical levels include:

Local: lack of adequate understanding of what exists; patchy and financially fragile provision that is fragmented, not applying economies of scale and has weaknesses in key areas including finance IT and HR issues

Sub regional: Patchy and variable in quality and coverage

Regional: emergent and financially insecure provision, which is not yet sufficiently well networked into local and national structures, and in some areas lacks robust mechanisms for ensuring accountability to members

National: over 300 dedicated infrastructure organisations offering a sometimes overlapping and confusing array of functions and services and not yet providing a sufficient level of strategic leadership to the sector in a range of important areas including: leadership and management skills, HR, funding, legal and financial management

Finally, key gaps and weaknesses in infrastructure support for particular groups and activities include:

Community development: the absence of adequate understanding of what exists, patchy and often inadequate provision, insufficient supply of highly trained generic community development workers

Rural: lack of comprehensive understanding of what exists in each area of the country, insufficient understanding amongst mainstream providers of rural needs, absence of adequate numbers of community development workers, lack of understanding and skills in relation to diversity issues

ICT: lack of strategic understanding of how ICT can benefit VCOs, difficulties in accessing reliable, affordable advice and information, and prohibitive costs of on-going support

Volunteering: an unsustainable number of local volunteer development, inadequate infrastructure support at a regional level, declining provision in rural areas, lack of a joined up approach to volunteering across government departments

BME: Insufficient engagement of mainstream infrastructure providers with the needs of BME and other disadvantaged groups and communities and specialist infrastructure that is financially fragile and insecure

Social enterprise: poor understanding of social enterprise, lack of a sufficiently robust evidence base to 'prove the case' for social enterprise and patchy availability of support to local organisations

It is clear that whilst infrastructure is large and makes a significant contribution to the sector, there are nevertheless many opportunities to increase both its effectiveness and its efficiency.

4. Principles for infrastructure development

This strategy is based on 15 principles that should underpin the development of VCS infrastructure over the next 5 – 10 years.

1. Leadership

Infrastructure should provide strategic leadership for the sector and promote its successful evolution

2. Mutual benefit

Strong and robust voluntary sector infrastructure is of benefit to both Government and the sector

3. Universal coverage

Infrastructure should exist at the national, regional, local and community levels throughout the country

4. Accessible

Infrastructure should be easily accessible to VCOs and other key stakeholders

5. Needs led

Infrastructure development should be driven primarily by the demands of VCOs and their users for functions and services that enable them to achieve their missions.

6. Independence

Infrastructure organisations are independent bodies that determine their own futures

7. Non competitive

Infrastructure organisations exist to support and assist their constituents and should not compete with them for funds or to deliver services

8. Subsidiarity

Functions and services should be delivered as close to the point of need that is economically viable

9. Diversity

Infrastructure should respect the extraordinary diversity of the VCS and reflect different needs in different areas of the country and parts of the sector

10. Excellence

Infrastructure should strive for excellence, even if that means making fewer commitments

11. Efficiency

Infrastructure should be configured to deliver functions and services in the most efficient ways possible

12. Outcome focussed

Infrastructure providers should focus on outcomes and monitor and report on their impact

13. Accountable

Infrastructure should be accountable and responsive to its constituency, funders, and to the wider VCS

14. Collaborative

Infrastructure providers should strive to build and strengthen relationships within the sector and between the sector, Government, and other relevant stakeholders and vice versa

15. Sustainable

Infrastructure should be funded from a balanced variety of sustainable long-term sources including subscriptions, sale of services, trust and foundation and government grants and contracts

5. A vision for the future

This strategy has a vision for VCS infrastructure that:

Is based on clear evidence of need...

Exists in every part of the country...

Is accessible...

Is robust and sustainable...

Provides high quality, trustworthy, efficient, and effective functions and services...

Supports the full range of voluntary and community organisations...

Strengthens partnership and collaboration within the sector and across sector boundaries...

Is led by the sector and accountable to it.

6. Achieving the vision: sector wide objectives for the next 5 years

This section of the strategy outlines 15 high level objectives by which the vision will be achieved. It sets out how infrastructure can:

be developed more strategically to best meet the needs of front line organisations through generalist and specialist in all areas of the country
Mike – doesn't this suggest that specialist needs to exist everywhere – our point that it should be available (though not exist) everywhere and delivered in the most appropriate way.

- support community capacity building
- be funded more sustainably from a diverse range of sources
- be structured for maximum efficiency and impact
- be better co-ordinated at a national level
- strive for excellence
- be more accountable
- be accessible
- monitor and report on its impact
- be highly skilled
- reflect and promote diversity
- champion the sector's engagement with ICT
- work more closely with the public sector
- support social enterprises to develop and flourish
- provide high quality support to organisations in rural areas
- deliver a step change in volunteering activity

Objective 1: Generalist and specialist infrastructure should be available nationwide – Mike – doesn't this suggest that specialist needs to exist everywhere – our point that it should be available (though not exist) everywhere and delivered in the most appropriate way.

Voluntary sector infrastructure has a key role to play in supporting community activity, building capacity within individual organisations, and providing a voice to ensure that the needs of individuals, communities and VCOs are heard. However the benefits that infrastructure can bring are not currently available in every part of the country. There are some critical gaps in provision in both generalist and specialist infrastructure and many areas of England where provision is patchy or inadequate.

Generalist infrastructure is a critically important foundation for the development of the VCS. It provides a baseline of support that is, at least in principle, available to the whole community and has a crucial role to play in signposting individuals and organisations to specialist assistance for particular groups or on particular issues. Local generalist infrastructure is especially important. Around 70% of VCOs operate at a local level and local infrastructure support is crucial to the success of these largely medium sized and smaller voluntary organisations. However, there are currently 40 areas of England where VCOs do not have access to a dedicated local generalist infrastructure provider and many other areas that only have very limited generalist infrastructure support that does not meet the agreed minimum requirements.

Generalist infrastructure providers need to ensure that they provide high quality, appropriate, assistance to all members of the community. Generalist infrastructure alone, however, will not be sufficient to meet the needs of voluntary and community organisations throughout the country. England's voluntary sector is complex and diverse and VCOs will continue to require access to high quality specialist infrastructure that can support their work with particular groups – e.g. with BME communities or disabled people – or on particular issues – e.g. ICT or volunteering. Specialist infrastructure makes an important contribution to the health of the voluntary and community sector and is a valuable repository of knowledge and expertise. However, whilst many specialist infrastructure providers are doing excellent work, coverage is across the country is patchy, some providers lack critical mass, and there are some concerns about duplication of functions and insufficiently strong connections with generalist providers.

High quality generalist and specialist infrastructure needs to be available to support the work of VCOs nationwide. This strategy supports a bottom up, needs-based, approach to developing provision that meets these needs and acknowledges that there will be different demands for support in different parts of the country. Nevertheless, this strategy proposes that in order to ensure availability of good quality specialist and generalist infrastructure support across the country a more strategic and coherent approach to planning and development is required.

This strategy therefore recommends that that locally, regionally, and where relevant sub regionally, stakeholders should be encouraged to come together to identify the key needs of the sector in their area, the generic and specialist advice and support that is required for particular groups and on particular issues, the range of existing providers and their services, the key gaps and weaknesses in provision, and how best to meet these. This strategy envisages that these strategic review and planning exercises would result in plans for meeting gaps and overcoming

weaknesses that identify key functions that are required, the level at which these are most appropriately delivered, and responsibilities for delivery.

This strategy envisages that these strategic review and planning exercises would be led by infrastructure organisations, but would involve front line organisations that receive infrastructure support, front line organisations that also provide significant infrastructure support, as well as key statutory agencies and funders. Generalist infrastructure providers would have a particular responsibility to actively seek the input and involvement of specialist infrastructure providers and front line organisations that work with and for hard to reach or disadvantaged groups.

This strategy envisages that these strategic review and planning exercises would be an opportunity to cement relationships and develop protocols for joint working, building on existing work – e.g. setting out the way in which generalist and specialist providers might work better together. They would also be an opportunity to develop a source of high quality information about the local VCS and infrastructure.

This strategy proposes that the national partnership (objective 5) would oversee the development of guidelines to support this. These would include minimum baselines of provision at each geographical level, a range of possible delivery models, and exemplars of best practice.

Development funding should be made available to organisations needing funds to support their planning and review processes.

Groups of organisations that hold strategic review and planning exercises and have practical plans for action flowing from these should have access to development funding to kick start implementation of changes and new initiatives.

Particular priority should be given to those organisations or groups of organisations wishing to create business plans or take initiatives to establish financially sustainable generalist infrastructure in one or more of the 40 local areas that currently lack such provision. This strategy proposes that all areas of England should have access to good quality generalist infrastructure support at a local level by 2007. This strategy recognises that local circumstances differ widely and that there may be many ways of delivering these needs including: existing organisations expanding to offer the essential services required to be an accredited infrastructure provider; the adoption of a 'hub and spoke' model, whereby organisations in neighbouring areas open subsidiary offices in these areas, by existing organisations working together more effectively and by the creation of new organisations. It recognises that the majority of the areas with no provision are in rural areas and will support local proposals to provide good quality infrastructure at county level or below in a way which is both effective and affordable, building on the Home Office/Defra work currently underway.

Priority should also be given to organisations or groups of organisations in areas with limited generalist infrastructure provision wishing to develop and implement plans to establish higher levels of provision in financially sustainable ways.

Development funding should also be made available to support organisations or groups of organisations who can build on the results of the strategic review and planning exercises and

provide an on-going source of high quality information about how local VCS and infrastructure will be made more easily accessible and well signposted.

Objective 2: Infrastructure should support community capacity building

Highly localised community and neighbourhood activity is key to civil renewal. Encouraging people to participate in community and neighbourhood activity and to engage with statutory agencies and decision making processes helps to build skills and confidence, shape public services and contribute to social, economic, and environmental development.

The most appropriate ways of supporting community and neighbourhood activity are currently being considered under the Civil Renewal Unit's Community Capacity Building Review. The Unit's *Consultation Paper* defines community capacity building as 'activities, resources and support that strengthen the skills and abilities of people enabling them to take effective action and leading roles in their communities.'

The Unit's work focuses on *people* in communities, both as active citizens and in community groups, rather than the VCS itself. However, in practice the distinction between support for individuals and communities and for VCOs can be hard to maintain at a neighbourhood level as some organisations support both community groups and communities. Community capacity building has further links with infrastructure in that it provides the foundation for:

- The growth of more formal VCOs, providing different types of services and
- The building of confidence and leadership skills which equip people for a variety of governance and representation roles, both in the VCS, in public agencies and in partnership structures

Community activity happens in neighbourhoods and parishes and within more dispersed communities of interest. Development support needs to be very accessible, particularly in more deprived or remote areas where people's mobility is often restricted, and within communities that are isolated by language, faith or culture. Intensive work is often needed to overcome lack of confidence, frustration with the past record of public bodies, and divisions within and between communities.

Whilst there are some important examples of good practice in supporting community capacity building, the Community Capacity Building Review found that support for community activity and community capacity building was often inadequate, variable and uncoordinated. Its importance for achieving wider social objectives was often not recognised, either by national or local bodies. Many community development workers, who are crucial to unlocking the resources that exist in all communities, are on short-term and insecure contracts or have narrowly focused briefs, often within statutory sector departmental programmes.

The Civil Renewal Unit's *Building Civil Renewal - Consultation Paper and Review Findings* proposes that neighbourhood/community level infrastructure across the country should include at minimum:

- At least one representative and inclusive forum or network

- At least one physical hub or base for infrastructure activity – e.g. meeting rooms or village hall

- Access to generalist capacity building workers to work with community organisations on the ground

- Access to small grants

This strategy supports this aspiration as a long term goal.

The Community Capacity Building Review sets out as options different approaches that Government could adopt to stimulate and support change in the way that community capacity building is planned and delivered locally. The role of national, regional and sub-regional organisations and networks specialising in the community development field is being considered as part of this consultation.

Objective 3: Infrastructure should be sustainably funded from diverse sources of income

The majority of infrastructure organisations are heavily dependent on short term, restricted, government funding. This pattern of funding constrains their freedom to take independent action and traps them in a continual cycle of 'contract chasing' to secure funding for their survival. Currently, only a small percentage of infrastructure income comes from members, thus weakening the incentive for infrastructure providers to be responsive to members' needs.

The existence of strong and robust VCO infrastructure requires a secure supply of longer term, unrestricted, income from a broader array of sources.

This strategy also recognises that whilst there are opportunities for some VCS infrastructure organisations to increase earned income, they will continue to require a stable supply of public funding, particularly those that represent or work with smaller VCOs that are not involved in service delivery. This strategy therefore assumes a need for substantial on-going public funding for infrastructure.

This strategy proposes that nationally, regionally and locally, the public sector should commit to long term strategic funding for infrastructure.

This strategy proposes that benchmarks for public funding for the core functions of infrastructure should be established. It envisages these might take the form of minimum and ideal annual strategic funding of infrastructure to be achieved at national, regional and local levels. Currently the median spend per person living in an area with a CVS is 32.5 pence. This strategy proposes that appropriate benchmarks for both minimum and optimum public funding should be agreed by the government, the Local Government Association and the VCS by the end of 2005

This strategy recognises that local authorities have a key role to play in supporting voluntary sector infrastructure. It therefore proposes that the LGA, ACU, ODPM and other relevant Government departments should explore ways of encouraging longer term funding and support to VCO infrastructure at a local level through existing mechanisms such as CPA, Best Value, and the second round of LPSAs.

In return for this commitment VCO infrastructure bodies should agree to work to agreed standards and deliver substantial impact. All funders of infrastructure should establish a clear and robust system for allocating strategic funding. They should work with strategically funded infrastructure organisations to agree annually objectives to be achieved and an appropriate regime for monitoring performance.

At present many funders discourage front line organisations from purchasing infrastructure support. Some disallow such costs from funding applications. This strategy proposes that a significantly higher proportion of infrastructure costs should be funded by front line organisations through membership fees and the sale of services. In the private sector and in the voluntary housing sector, infrastructure organisations are much more dependent on member income and this creates greater accountability to members and helps to instil an entrepreneurial approach to service development and delivery.

This strategy therefore proposes that funders accept that provision of infrastructure support is key to front line organisations enhancing their capacity to deliver public services and contribute to civil renewal and is a legitimate expense. It proposes that all funders of local, sub-regional, regional and national front line organisations accept without question that up to 2% of income can be used to purchase infrastructure assistance. It accepts that these arrangements are not appropriate for neighbourhood, smaller and newer organisations.

The government provides over £3.3 billion of funding to the sector and foundations provide a further £1.2 bn. Together this would provide around £90m of sustainable funding for front line organisations to purchase membership and other services from infrastructure organisations. This would be in addition to strategic funding from the public sector.

This strategy acknowledges that VCOs that are not involved in service delivery and the infrastructure that supports them may face greater challenges in securing sources of longer term sustainable funding. It therefore proposes that resources are invested to develop a robust evidence base concerning the contribution of VCOs whose work centres around civil engagement and renewal. This work would be overseen by the national partnership of infrastructure organisations, but might be sub contracted to another organisation or group of organisations.

This strategy also notes the important contribution that social enterprise activity and organisations can play in contributing to the diversification of income streams and increased financial independence of the sector.

This Strategy proposes the establishment of a joint Government, foundation and VCS Task Force to take forward the proposals outlined above. This Task Force should report by the end of 2005. Its work should be closely linked with government spending reviews. The outcome should be formally recognised in a revised Code of the Compact.

Development funding should be made available to support the work of the Task Force and the creation of benchmarks for per capita strategic funding.

Objective 4: Infrastructure should be structured for maximum efficiency and impact

Existing infrastructure provision in some areas and fields is highly fragmented, particularly at national and local levels. There are over 300 national infrastructure organisations and local infrastructure consists of an extraordinary range of bodies, many of which are small and under resourced. Whilst a plurality of provision can help to generate creativity and choice, this degree of fragmentation prevents infrastructure providers from achieving maximum impact with the available resources. In addition, it gives rise to widespread concern amongst front line providers about having to join a number of different infrastructure organisations.

Infrastructure provision should be configured in such a way as to achieve maximum efficiency and impact. In many areas, a greater critical mass is required to achieve economies of scale and to provide high quality functions and services that represent value for money.

This strategy proposes that all infrastructure organisations should strive to increase productivity, producing high quality functions and services in the most efficient ways possible. For larger organisations, there should be greater use of benchmarking to enable infrastructure organisations to identify areas where they can improve their productivity.

This strategy proposes that infrastructure at a **local and regional** level should gradually coalesce into hubs of activity. There should be a hub of organisations delivering generalist and appropriately configured specialist infrastructure functions and services in every local area and every region by 2008.

Hubs would build on the strategic collaborations outlined in objective 1. They would take the form of organisations working in ever-closer partnerships, sharing services, communicating electronically, having common web portals, and integrating their activities. It is envisaged that, over time, the hub would involve organisations coming together physically in the same space to ensure the greatest degree of integration and the best possible communications. Such centres could provide incubation support to newer organisations by, for example, offering office and meeting space. They would provide a particular opportunity for front line and infrastructure providers representing minority or disadvantaged groups to integrate their activities and share experiences with generic and mainstream providers.

The development of hubs will create further opportunities for increasing efficiency by integrating and sharing back office facilities and services (e.g. finance, HR, ICT, purchasing, administration and facilities management). This strategy proposes that all infrastructure organisations in receipt of public funding should review annually the opportunities for sharing services with other organisations and include in their annual reports details the actions they have taken.

At a national level, this strategy also proposes the creation of a number of centres of expertise on key topics. In order to strengthen and develop their practice, VCOs require a rich supply of high quality information, guidance, and best practice material. Whilst a great deal of information already exists, it is not always up to date, consolidated, or easily available to front line organisations and there are also some key gaps in provision. Generic information, guidance and best practice is often produced and disseminated by a wide variety of organisations and so does

not always achieve economies of scale. Centres of expertise offer a more appropriate way of providing high quality and cost effective information, guidance, and best practice on central VCS issues as they can attract sufficient resources to conduct high quality work.

Centres of expertise should act as beacons of best practice and provide strategic leadership in their designated area. They should be responsible for taking a sector wide overview and for advancing thinking and practice in their particular area. They would function in a similar way to local and regional hubs. They should be owned by the sector and housed in existing organisations. They should form close working relationships with regional and local infrastructure bodies who are well placed to distribute information and provide essential feedback. Some work would be conducted by lead organisations, however centres of expertise should also subcontract work where this is most efficiently and expertly carried out by other providers. They should provide many of their services on the web and by phone, and be funded by a mixture of government grants and income earned from selling their skills and expertise to front line organisations.

This strategy proposes that by the end of 2009 there should be a number of national centres of expertise dedicated to achieving excellence in:

- | | |
|--|-----------------------------|
| Leadership, management, and skills development | Finance |
| Governance | ICT |
| Planning and performance management | Volunteering |
| Funding | Community capacity building |

This strategy proposes that leadership and management, skill development and human resources, governance, planning and performance management, and ICT are areas of particularly pressing need and recommends that the development of these should be fast tracked and established by the middle of 2005. It is envisaged that the above list of themes would be modified over time to reflect emerging challenges in the sector and the changing needs and aspirations of front line organisations. Potential examples include social enterprise, diversity and rural issues.

Development funding should be used to establish a national resource of information and best practice that can help infrastructure providers to continuously review and improve their productivity. This should be overseen by the national partnership and be available by the end of 2005.

Development funding should be made available to organisations wishing to establish strategic alliances with other organisations to create local, regional **and national** infrastructure hubs. Organisations which demonstrated that they were part of a local hub and had achieved productivity improvements should be treated preferentially by funders.

Development funding should also be made available to organisations wishing to develop business plans for establishing centres of expertise that respond to the needs of the sector, are entrepreneurial, and financially sustainable. Preference would be given to bids that

demonstrated how centres could be created from the expansion and improvement of existing initiatives.

This strategy also proposes that new infrastructure organisations should not receive government funding unless they can demonstrate that their objectives can be best achieved by a separate body rather than through an existing organisation. A protocol on this issue should be established by the national partnership of VCOs proposed below.

Objective 5: Infrastructure should be better co-ordinated at a national level

There is currently no single place in which issues relating to the infrastructure of the whole sector can be explored and where infrastructure provision can be strategically co-ordinated and developed for the future. However, there are some emerging initiatives including the Umbrella's Forum and the National Regionalisation Consortium (NRC).

This strategy therefore proposes the formation of a national infrastructure partnership that would provide the oversight and leadership required to deliver a step change in the sector's capacity to deliver more public services and make a greater contribution to civil renewal. It should be established by the end of 2004 and would link with, and build on, existing structures.

This strategy envisages that the partnership would consist of 12 infrastructure organisations that best reflect the diversity of the sector. It should include representatives from national, regional, local, community and rural organisations as well as organisations representing BME, disability and other disadvantaged groups. Membership criteria would be established by the sector. The partnership would meet four times a year and would be supported by a small, high level, secretariat, based at an established organisation. The partnership would be funded by member organisations and should be chaired by a senior independent figure from the VCS.

The partnership would be responsible for reviewing infrastructure and progress in implementing this strategy annually and would report to a representative group of VCS and government officials, chaired by the Minister for the Race Equality, Community Policy and Civil Renewal.

In addition to the broad oversight role set out above, the national infrastructure partnership would have lead responsibility for ensuring delivery of a number of specific commitments set out in this strategy document.

It should relate closely to the structures for monitoring and implementing the Compact.

Development funding would be made available to support this work.

Objective 6: Infrastructure should strive for excellence

Whilst some infrastructure provision is excellent, across the country the quality of infrastructure functions and services varies widely.

If the VCS is to continue to play a central role in civil renewal and in the delivery of public services it requires high quality infrastructure support that meets the established needs of the sector and is regarded as trustworthy and effective by other stakeholders.

High performance flows from having a critical mass and sufficient funding for infrastructure organisations to provide top quality functions and services. Excellence also depends on the existence of a highly skilled and motivated workforce.

Infrastructure organisations need to develop a focus on quality. They need a good supply of appropriate information and guidance, and access to diagnostic tools that can help them to assess their internal capacity and plan for improvement.

Infrastructure providers also need to develop outcome focused cultures, where staff are constantly attuned to the impact of their work on organisations and communities. Currently infrastructure organisations tend to concentrate on outputs or activities. They need to embed an outcome focused approach to planning and performance improvement and develop robust mechanisms for measuring and monitoring impact.

This strategy acknowledges that developing outcome focused cultures and planning systems and measuring the impact of infrastructure organisations is not easy. It therefore proposes that the national partnership of infrastructure organisations should assume responsibility for overseeing the development of some appropriate guidelines and best practice in this area working closely with the centre of expertise for planning and performance management. The partnership should also be responsible for commissioning, overseeing the continuous updating, of a range of suitable impact measures. These measures should reflect and be relevant to the diversity of VCS infrastructure organisations. The measures would draw on best practice in the UK and elsewhere and would contribute towards the development of the national standard on impact assessment (see below). Suitable measures should be developed by the end of 2005.

Standards are another way of encouraging organisations to strive for excellence. This strategy therefore proposes that by the end of 2005 there should be nationally agreed standards for infrastructure covering, amongst other issues:

- Service quality
- Governance
- Leadership
- Representation
- Accountability
- Impact assessment
- Workforce development
- Partnership working

Diversity will need to be integrated throughout all the standards.

This strategy proposes that the development and updating of the standards would be led by the national infrastructure partnership. In developing these, the partnership would draw on existing standards and quality work and would work closely with the relevant centres of expertise on these and related topics. The strategy envisages that compliance with the standards would be monitored through a process of peer review that would draw on best practice from local authorities.

This strategy proposes that those organisations that meet the required standards for infrastructure provision in a number of key areas would be eligible to adopt a nationally recognisable kite mark. The kite mark would serve as a badge of approval and also help to signpost provision, directing users to accredited sources of infrastructure assistance. This strategy envisages that the national infrastructure partnership would oversee the development of the kite mark scheme. The scheme should be operational by the end of 2005.

Development funding should be made available to develop self-assessment tools, guidance and best practice on outcome focused approaches to planning, and to define appropriate impact measures.

Funding should be made available for the development of the standards and the kite mark scheme, and to support the initial stages of the establishment of the peer review process.

Objective 7: Infrastructure needs to be accountable

Infrastructure exists – not for its own sake – but to support and promote the voluntary and community sector and to foster collaboration between the VCS and other sectors. Infrastructure providers therefore need to be accountable to their stakeholders for their performance. Ensuring accountability is complex for organisations like infrastructure providers who are accountable in different ways to multiple stakeholders, including funders, members, the broader VCS and communities. Currently not all infrastructure bodies have sufficiently robust systems for ensuring accountability to their many stakeholders.

Accountability involves clarity around roles and expectations, the provision of timely information, opportunities for dialogue around performance, and the existence of credible sanctions for underperformance.

In order to strengthen accountability, infrastructure organisations need to map their accountability relationships and determine who they are accountable to and for what. Providers need to develop clear and concise information about their mission, aims and objectives and ensure that this is widely and easily available on the web and in printed form.

Infrastructure organisations need to develop robust systems for engaging with users and members to ensure that their activities are appropriately designed and meet genuine need – for example through use of member and stakeholder surveys. Infrastructure bodies should also involve members and users in performance review processes.

Infrastructure providers and their funders need to work closely together to develop clear expectations of performance, agree measures against which performance will be measured and information that is required to hold the infrastructure body to account. The national partnership should develop and promote a body of best practice material to help infrastructure organisations and their strategic funders to create low cost performance management arrangements that strengthen the funder-fundee relationship by the end of 2005.

This strategy proposes that by the end of 2008 all infrastructure providers should report on their impact, as an integral part of their annual report. Reporting should include a brief description of the organisation's aims, its strategic objectives, activities, the key outputs it has delivered and, where possible, the outcomes it has achieved. Annual reports of infrastructure organisations in receipt of more than £100,000 public funding should be available on the web by the end of 2007.

Those organisations that report clearly on their impact should receive preferential treatment by funders.

Objective 8: Infrastructure should be accessible

Infrastructure is not easily accessible at present. The plethora of organisations with similar yet distinctive services makes it very hard for people working in front line organisations as well as other stakeholders to know where to turn. Very few people are aware of the range of support that is available and signposting is complex and inadequate. In addition, it is often difficult to access the knowledge resources of particular infrastructure bodies.

Infrastructure exists to serve the interests of its constituents and also to deliver wider public benefit. It therefore needs to be easily and quickly accessible by its constituency and the broader VCS, partners, funders, and other relevant stakeholders.

Infrastructure providers need to view themselves as knowledge organisations and adopt a more strategic approach to creating, packaging and disseminating high quality information that is valuable to users and that they are increasingly willing to pay for because it demonstrably provides value for money.

This strategy proposes the creation of substantially enhanced web based information providing cross-referenced access to the web sites of all dedicated infrastructure providers. It should enable easy access to specialist material in this complex field. For each organisation it should be easy to discover its mission, its strategic objectives, the services it offers, how to access them and what they cost. It should be operational by the end of 2006.

This strategy also proposes the establishment of a national telephone help line for infrastructure queries. The help line would provide a signposting function, directing callers to the appropriate infrastructure provider. It should be operational by the end of 2006.

The national infrastructure partnership should oversee the development of the national web access and telephone helpline building on current examples of good practice. The national kite mark scheme for approved infrastructure providers would also strengthen signposting.

To ensure that VCOs and key stakeholders can access and benefit from providers' knowledge resources this strategy proposes that infrastructure organisations in receipt of strategic funding over £100,000 a year should be required to produce knowledge management plans demonstrating how their knowledge will be made easily available by 2006. The strategy recognises that making knowledge clear and accessible costs money and proposes that organisations should make reasonable charges for information services. Such charges should become increasingly common as the funding from front line organisations increases.

It is envisaged that from 2007 front line organisations should be able to join most infrastructure organisations on the web, receive many of their services, and represent their views via the web. Development funding should be made available for the establishment of the enhanced web access, the telephone help line and actions to put knowledge on the web.

Organisations which demonstrate that they have successfully taken steps to make themselves more accessible to their users should be treated preferentially by funders.

Objective 9: Infrastructure should be highly skilled

The provision of high quality infrastructure support is a skilled activity. Whilst there are already many highly skilled individuals providing infrastructure functions and services, greater attention needs to be paid to ensuring that skill levels are continuously raised and developed.

Infrastructure providers need to be adept at influencing and negotiating, building capacity, working across organisational and sector boundaries, exploiting the benefits of ICT, and managing resources for maximum impact. The world in which VCOs operate is changing rapidly and infrastructure providers also need to be flexible, able to spot trends and emerging issues and provide strategic leadership.

This strategy proposes that there should be extensive investment in the development of a skilled infrastructure workforce. Investment should promote action learning, mentoring and coaching, and secondment opportunities within and outside the sector, as well as more traditional classroom based teaching.

This strategy proposes that there should be a dedicated development function for the infrastructure workforce within the leadership and skill development centre of expertise, funded primarily through the purchase of training and development services.

This strategy proposes that infrastructure organisations in receipt of strategic funding from the public sector over £100,000 a year should have plans for developing the skills and capacity of their workforce in place by the end of 2006

Development funding should be made available to assist organisations that wish to invest in the skills of their own workforce or provide training and development opportunities for the wider infrastructure workforce. Development funding should also be made available to 'kick start' the establishment of the national skill development function. Infrastructure organisations that can demonstrate that they have structured approaches to building the capacity of their own staff should be given preferential treatment by funders.

This strategy also recognises that front line organisations that have a proven track record in delivering services or campaigning for change, as well as public and private sector workers and funders have a great deal to contribute to skills development in the sector. In addition to training opportunities provided by dedicated infrastructure providers, these stakeholders can make an important contribution by establishing twinning relationships with VCOs, sharing information and best practice, seconding staff and so on.

This strategy proposes the development of a national clearing-house where VSC, public and private sector workers who wish to contribute to skills development in the VCS can be matched with VCOs that can benefit from their experience. Development funding should be available to support this work. The clearing-house should be up and running by the end of the 2005 and should be overseen by the national partnership.

Objective 10: Infrastructure should reflect and promote diversity

The Government is committed to ensuring that an emphasis on equality and diversity underpins its drive to transform Britain into a society that is inclusive and prosperous. Many different pieces of legislation are providing the framework for change, including the Human Rights Act (1998), the Disability Discrimination Act (1995) and the Race Relations (Amendment) Act (2000).

Respect for diversity and a commitment to promoting social justice have long been core values in the VCS. The sector has proved adept at raising awareness of the needs of minority and disadvantaged communities and finding creative solutions to meeting their complex and varied needs. Mainstream infrastructure providers are increasingly grappling with equality and diversity issues. However, they have not always succeeded in ensuring their services are accessible and appropriate to the full range of VCOs. Exclusion results in lack of access to capacity building support and partnerships, consultation exercises and decision-making processes at all levels.

The Consultation Document raised the particular issue of infrastructure support to the BME sector. Much work has been conducted over the past ten years to strengthen support for BME organisations. However, some BME communities continue to suffer multiple deprivations and the organisations that work with them remain financially vulnerable and excluded from the traditional structures of the VCS, including VCS infrastructure.

This strategy recognises the particular needs of VCOs working with disabled people. There are twelve and a half million disabled people living in Britain. The majority of disabled people live on or below the poverty line. Consultation exercises suggest that local, regional and national organisations of disabled people have felt distanced from mainstream infrastructure providers who lack understanding of their needs, fail to consult and are not accessible.

Consultation exercises suggest that many groups working with women, and the lesbian, gay and bisexual communities have also felt excluded from mainstream infrastructure support and have experienced a lack of understanding of their needs, and in some cases, hostility and discrimination.

This strategy proposes that infrastructure provision should reflect and promote the full diversity of the VCS. It acknowledges that equality and diversity issues overlap and intersect – with many groups and individuals identifying with two or more diverse groups.

As a matter of good practice, all infrastructure bodies should:

- Assess whether their policies, governance arrangements and activities reflect the needs of diverse communities
- Consult diverse communities on their policies and involve them in evaluating services
- Ensure diverse communities have access to their services
- Ensure that they have in place policies and procedures to ensure fair access to employment

In addition to these measures, however, this strategy recognises the on-going importance of dedicated specialist infrastructure. Specialist infrastructure is a valuable repository of knowledge and expertise on the needs of, and particular ways of working, with key groups. Specialist infrastructure has a particularly important role to play in raising awareness and providing a voice for groups and communities that are marginalized from the mainstream. Much of this provision, however, remains fragile and insecure and insufficiently connected to the mainstream.

Nationally, regionally, and locally, statutory funders need to recognise the particular value that specialist infrastructure providers can add in helping to assess community needs, shape the delivery of public services, combat social isolation and contribute to social cohesion. This strategy proposes that the public sector should commit to longer term more sustainable funding for specialist infrastructure that works with minority or disadvantaged groups, linked to evidence of improved outcomes.

This strategy proposes that all specialist infrastructure that supports minority and disadvantaged groups should be fast tracked with assistance from the mainstream. Nationally, generic infrastructure providers should be encouraged to form strategic alliances with specialist infrastructure providers that work with and represent disadvantaged groups in order to raise awareness, share learning and resources, and create secondment and other opportunities.

The proposals for strategic review and planning exercises and the creation of hubs are designed to further strengthen understanding and links between generalist and specialist infrastructure and ensure better and more appropriate provision for disadvantaged groups.

Specialist providers should also be encouraged to come together to share expertise and develop ways of working together to ensure better support for VCOs who represent groups with multiple equalities issues.

This strategy also proposes that there should be significant investment in initiatives to develop managerial and leadership capacity within specialist infrastructure. These should be closely linked with the centres of expertise on leadership, management and skills to ensure that cross learning and economies of scale can be achieved where this is appropriate.

Development funding should be made available to support specialist infrastructure providers who have robust plans to extend their services to areas of the country where these services are lacking. Plans should demonstrate how specialist provision will link with generalist provision and contribute to cross learning and efficiencies, where appropriate. Funding should also be made available to support the reconfiguration of services to ensure that they are delivered in the most effective and efficient way.

This strategy also proposes that specialist infrastructure support for minority and disadvantaged groups should be accessible through the web. Signposting assistance should be available via the national telephone helpline, to be established by the end of 2006

Objective 11: Infrastructure should champion the sector's engagement with ICT

It is widely recognised that many parts of the VCS have not engaged with the ICT revolution as effectively as the public and private sectors. The FutureSkills 2003 report highlighted that strategic use of ICT was identified by 46% of organisations as a skills gap. The E-Enabling the Voluntary and Community Sectors report found that the sector was not making use of opportunities for reducing costs, improving productivity and enhancing services.

Research has indicated that the primary barriers to the sector's engagement with ICT are a lack of strategic understanding of how ICT can benefit VCOs, and difficulties in accessing reliable and affordable advice and information. VCS infrastructure needs to adopt a leadership role in providing high quality support and assistance on ICT issues if this digital divide is to be combated.

This strategy proposes that there should be significant investment to promote the strategic use of ICT. It also proposes that a range of national and sub regional activities and events should be undertaken to raise awareness and understanding of the strategic use of ICT within the sector, and with funders. Capacity building training, networking events and forums, email news services, and the development of a sector award scheme for ICT are also recommended.

Information about the range of existing ICT support and advice available nationally and sub regionally, best practice information and 'how to' guides, and a strategic analysis of new developments in ICT should be accessible via the web and in other formats. Basic support and signposting on ICT issues should be accessible via the telephone helpline.

From the consultation it is clear that front line organisations want 'hands on' assistance with ICT. This strategy therefore proposes investment in the UK circuit rider movement. Investment should support the development of pilot schemes that can be rolled out across the country.

This strategy recommends further promotion of ITC pro bono services and the development and promotion of IT volunteering across the corporate sector as part of the broader corporate social responsibility agenda. This strategy also recommends that a series of meetings and seminars be held to develop understanding of VCS needs amongst corporate sector suppliers, to explore discounts and sliding scale options and to conduct national negotiations.

This strategy proposes that a partnership of national VCOs should be formed to provide strategic oversight of ICT issues in the sector by the end of 2004. The partnership should be based at an existing organisation and supported by a small secretariat. The partnership would support and co-ordinate relevant activity at a sub regional level.

Development funding should be made available to support these and other initiatives.

Objective 12: Infrastructure and the public sector should work closely together

The development of strong and robust VCS infrastructure that can support the sector's role in service delivery and civil engagement and renewal is clearly in the interests of both the VCS and public sectors at all levels. Although the public sector contributes to the funding of infrastructure, the degree of co-ordination between VCS infrastructure and the public sector and levels of mutual understanding varies.

This strategy proposes that public sector and the sector's infrastructure needs to work together in a more streamlined and effective way if they are to maximise the benefits of collaboration.

This strategy proposes that nationally, regionally and locally government should identify those infrastructure organisations that relate to their areas of activity and establish structured mechanisms for building relationships with these bodies. The public sector should undertake to build relations from which both parties can learn and develop.

This strategy supports the recommendation of the Cross Cutting Review that departmental champions in central Government should work to increase awareness and understanding of the Compact. This strategy also proposes that the VCS and its infrastructure should work with local government to ensure implementation of the Compact in all local areas by the end of 2006.

The ACU, ODPM and the national partnership of infrastructure organisations should work together to gather and disseminate examples of best practice in working with the VCS and its infrastructure to support this work.

Many VCS initiatives cut across the current structure of the public sector. At present, there is no mechanism for resolving the conflicts and contradictions that can arise from different or competing departmental priorities, targets, indicators, and reporting cycles. This strategy therefore proposes that all VCS infrastructure bodies should be linked to a lead public sector body by the end of 2005. Whilst infrastructure bodies will still, of course, retain multiple links and contacts with several parts of the public sector, the lead body would be responsible for providing strategic funding and for resolving conflicts or tensions that arise at the interface between the public sector and the infrastructure organisation.

Building constructive cross-sector relationships requires skills. This strategy therefore proposes that funds should be allocated to develop increased levels of understanding and awareness about the VCS amongst public sector staff at all levels. In particular, investment should be made to develop the skills and capacity of those public sector staff whose roles demand significant contact with the sector. Skills development should be led by the VCS. It should focus on learning and development opportunities that contribute to on-going, productive, relationships between the sectors – e.g. through joint learning and networking and secondments.

Development funds should be made available to support implementation of the Compact in all areas of the country. Funds should also be made available to support the development of training opportunities for public sector personnel.

Objective 13: Infrastructure should support social enterprise

The Department of Trade and Industry defines social enterprise as ' a business with primarily social objectives whose surpluses are principally reinvested for that purpose in the business or in the community. (Social enterprises) include local community enterprises, social firms, mutual organisations...and large-scale organisations operating nationally or internationally'. A small but expanding minority of VCOs call themselves social enterprises, with a greater number undertaking some form of social enterprise activity as they seek to improve their sustainability by diversifying their income sources and reducing their dependence on grants.

There are a number of sources of business advice, development finance and capacity building targeted at social enterprises. These include support services and grants or loans from the Small Business Service, Business Links, and Regional Development Agencies. VCS infrastructure also provides information and support. However, despite this, support for social enterprise remains patchy in terms of quality and availability and awareness and understanding of social enterprise as an activity and its specific support needs remains inadequate amongst infrastructure providers and VCOs.

The Cross Cutting Review identified that there are a number of actions that would help to support social enterprises. In particular, the review recommended that the SEnU should raise awareness of what the Small Business Service and Business Links have to offer and promote better understanding of social enterprises within local authorities and by mainstream funders. These and other recommendations were incorporated into *Social Enterprise: A Strategy for Success* in July 2002, which set out a three-year programme to sustain social enterprise activity.

This strategy supports these continuing efforts.

Feedback on the consultation document confirmed that SBS and Business Links do not always have a good understanding of the culture of the VCS and the ways in which business advice is best provided to VCOs. This strategy therefore recommends that individuals within these services who provide advice to VCOs should be given training to enable them to understand better the VCS and the most effective ways of providing business advice to these organisations.

This strategy also recognises the value of a diversity of sources of support for social enterprise activity. It recognises that some VCOs engaged in social enterprise activity may not self identify as social enterprises and that some VCOs will prefer to access support through voluntary and community sector infrastructure. This strategy therefore recommends that existing VCS infrastructure should be supported to further develop the skills required to advise and signpost VCOs engaged in social enterprise activities.

Support for social enterprise should be effectively signposted via the web

Objective 14: Infrastructure should provide high quality support to organisations in rural areas

Thirty-eight Rural Community Councils are largely responsible for delivering infrastructure support in rural areas. In common with urban areas, their work is complemented by provision from a variety of other bodies including CVS, Volunteer Bureaux and development trusts.

The operating environment for rural VCOs and VCS infrastructure is significantly different from urban areas. Key issues that impact on rural VCOs include the pressure to deliver a wide range of public services due to the withdrawal of some statutory services, the dispersed nature of rural communities, poor transport links, small communities that lack a 'critical mass' of volunteers, low levels of networking between groups and communities, low take up of training and ICT and a lack of understanding of diversity issues in some areas. In addition, the majority of rural districts have two tiers of Government (besides parish councils) requiring VCS organisations to look to both county and district organisations, including LSPs at both levels.

For these reasons, the provision of high quality rural infrastructure support tends to be more expensive per head of population than mainstream infrastructure delivery. It also requires specialist knowledge and expertise relevant to the rural context.

This strategy proposes that high quality, appropriate, and easily accessible support should be available to all VCOs in rural areas across England.

This strategy proposes that specialist rural infrastructure providers should form an integral part of strategic development processes (objective 1) and the creation of local, regional and national hubs. Strong representation is required to avoid marginalisation and increase awareness amongst mainstream VCS infrastructure providers and other key stakeholders.

Investment should be made to develop the skills and capacity of mainstream infrastructure bodies to provide high quality and appropriate functions and services to VCOs in rural areas. Funding should also be made available to further develop the skills of specialist providers in some areas including rural housing and transport.

Information management systems need to be developed to ensure that existing community delivery of public services in rural areas, currently unrecognised and unfunded in wider statutory service delivery strategies, can be supported and accounted for in monitoring impact and progress. Development funding should be available to support this work.

Objective 15: Infrastructure should deliver a step change in volunteering activity

Volunteers are the backbone of the VCS and civil society. Twenty two million people volunteer in Britain, giving an average of 4 hours per week to areas as diverse as sports, education and social welfare. However, there is still not a social expectation that all citizens have a duty to contribute a small amount of time to society and the value to individuals from making such contributions could be much more widely recognised.

Volunteering infrastructure enables and encourages volunteering. It is provided by specialist volunteer bureau and by generalist infrastructure organisations. The core functions have been clarified by Volunteering England. There is widespread agreement on the need to clarify the roles of volunteering infrastructure bodies and to rationalise volunteering infrastructure into fewer, larger organisations able to achieve better local penetration. This will often be at the County/Metropolitan area level.

This strategy recognises the specialist skills required to deliver the core functions. It also acknowledges that there needs to be flexibility in delivery systems to suit local circumstances. It envisages that specialist volunteering infrastructure would be an essential part of local or sub-regional infrastructure hubs. There should be provision in all areas of the country by 2009.

This strategy proposes that there should be a common brand for all volunteering infrastructure linked to the achievement of quality standards available from the end of 2005. Development funds should be identified to develop the brand and link it to up-dated quality standards.

Evidence shows that well resourced local volunteering infrastructure agencies recruit and place significant numbers of volunteers. However, poor management of volunteers continues to be a major cause of volunteer drop out. This strategy proposes further investment in high quality programmes to enhance the skills of paid and voluntary managers of volunteers.

This strategy envisages that volunteering infrastructure will be funded by a combination of public funds, foundations and payments from volunteer involving organisations. Benchmarks for public funding should be agreed by the government and the VCS and established by 2005.

This strategy proposes that work be commissioned nationally to pinpoint the actions required to create the expectation (that is stronger for example in the USA) that everyone should volunteer both for their own self interest as well as to contribute to social capital. School Governors, for example, have made a very important contribution to the public sector at minimal cost and have received valuable advice and training from VCS infrastructure that contributes to their own and their communities' capacity. The national infrastructure partnership and centre of expertise on volunteering would be responsible for commissioning this work.

This strategy proposes that there should be an annual assessment of volunteering in England, its impact on addressing social, educational, cultural and environmental issues and its overall contribution to social capital. It should include a separate assessment of the impact of volunteering infrastructure. The national partnership and centre of expertise on volunteering would be responsible for commissioning this work.

7. Responsibilities of key stakeholders

The objectives in this strategy establish a range of recommendations for key stakeholders.

This section will be further developed to make it more consistent with the main text and to combine some of the actions

The voluntary and community sector should:

- Place higher expectations on infrastructure organisations to provide the functions and services that will help them to achieve their missions
- Contribute to strategic review and planning of infrastructure at all levels (objective 1)
- Use their membership fees to support infrastructure organisations that provide high quality and cost effective services (objective 3)
- Larger and better established organisations should identify ways in which they can share their experience and help to develop the skills and expertise of smaller or younger organisations
- Contribute to the Task Force on funding infrastructure (objective 3)
- Contribute to the Civil Renewal's on-going consultation exercise on community capacity building (objective 2)

Voluntary and community sector infrastructure should:

- Locally, regionally, and nationally, lead the development of highly collaborative strategic review and modernisation exercises (objective 1)
- Work with other infrastructure providers and front line organisations to develop high quality, on-going, sources of information about the sector, its needs, and current infrastructure provision that can be used provide better information on the web (objective 1)
- Develop robust and sustainable plans for providing high quality local generalist infrastructure support in areas that currently lack such provision (objective 1)
- Develop robust and sustainable plans for ensuring access to high quality specialist infrastructure support where this is lacking (objective 1)
- Contribute to the Task Force on funding infrastructure (objective 3)
- Develop plans for entrepreneurial centres of expertise (objective 4)
- Explore ways in which infrastructure organisations can increase efficiency and impact by forming hubs, sharing back office facilities and taking other measures to increase productivity (objective 4)
- Recognise the importance of specialist providers and ensure that they are actively involved in review and planning exercises and the formation of hubs (objective 4)
- Develop protocols governing the allocation of responsibilities and mechanisms for joint working between generalist and specialist providers (objective 4)

Form strategic alliances between generalist and specialist providers, particularly those working with or representing minority groups in order to share knowledge, expertise and learning (objective 4)

Keep abreast of and comply with recent equality and diversity legislation, consult on policies, and assess policies, plans, and activities for their impact on diverse communities (objective 10)

Participate in and work with the national infrastructure partnership (objective 5)

Raise awareness of the strategic importance of ICT and create a partnership to oversee the development of ICT in the sector (objective 11)

Work towards ensuring that members can join and receive services on the web (objective 8)

Explore opportunities for the more efficient and effective delivery of support for volunteering at a local level (objective 15)

Develop a national brand for volunteering linked to the achievement of certain standards (objective 15)

Publish knowledge management plans if their income is over £100,000 a year (objective 8)

Regularly report on their impact and make the results available on the web if their income is over £100,000 a year (objective 7)

Develop and publish skills development plans if their income is over £100,000 a year (objective 9)

Develop a dedicated centre for infrastructure skills inside the HR centre of expertise (objective 9)

The national infrastructure partnership should:

Oversee the development of infrastructure and review and report on progress against this strategy (objective 5)

Oversee the development of guidelines and protocols to support strategic review and planning exercises (objective 1)

Oversee the development of models of delivery, identify minimum levels of provision, and create exemplars of best practice for local generalist infrastructure support (objective 1)

Oversee the development of and disseminate a range of suitable impact indicators for infrastructure providers (objective 7)

Oversee the development of a range of nationally agreed standards for infrastructure provision (objective 6)

Oversee the development of a kite mark for use by those infrastructure organisations that reach agreed standards of provision (objective 6)

Work with local authorities and key central Government departments to gather and disseminate examples of good practice in relation to public sector – VCS working (objective 12)

Oversee the development of an evidence base that can be used to support funding of VCS and VCS infrastructure involved in civil renewal activities (objective 2)

Oversee the development of a national web access and helpline for infrastructure (objective 8)

Establish a clearing house to support front line organisations and public and private sector agencies who might want to contribute to the sector's infrastructure by sharing skills and expertise

Local authorities and other local statutory agencies should:

Contribute to strategic review and planning processes (objective 1)

Identify and then establish supportive relationships with infrastructure providers in their particular areas of interest (objective 12)

Identify a lead public sector agency for each infrastructure organisation that can resolve conflicts arising between different departments and agencies (objective 12)

Accept without question that up to 2% of income can be used to purchase infrastructure assistance (objective 3)

Commit to longer term strategic funding of infrastructure and recognise the contribution that infrastructure can make to their work (objective 3)

Contribute to the development of, and then adhere to, benchmarks for minimum and ideal levels of strategic funding for infrastructure (objective 3)

Contribute to the Task Force on funding infrastructure (objective 3)

Contribute to the development of, and then adhere to, mechanisms for encouraging longer term support of infrastructure through CPA, Best Value, LPSA and other initiatives (objective 3)

Work with the VCS and infrastructure to establish local Compacts in every area of the country (objective 12)

Disseminate and contribute to good practice concerning relationships with infrastructure (objective 12)

Recognise the importance of increasing efficiency and impact and encourage the creation of hubs, sharing of back office facilities, and other measures to increase productivity through the funding application process (objective 4)

Recognise the importance of increasing accessibility through the funding application process (objective 8)

Recognise the importance of reporting on impact through the funding application process (objective 7)

Recognise the importance of infrastructure organisations adopting a structured approach to developing the skills of its workforce through the funding application process (objective 9)

Invest in circuit rider schemes to support the sector's engagement with ICT (objective 11)

Raise awareness of social enterprise and support the development of awareness and skills in and access to the SBS and Business Links (objective 13)

Acknowledge in funding bids the additional cost of supporting VCOs in rural areas (objective 14)

Recognise the central importance of community capacity building and contribute the Civil Renewal's on-going consultation exercise (objective 2)

Invest in the skills of their work force, particularly those that work in close contact with the VCS (objective 12)

Consider ways in which they can support the development of smaller or younger VCOs by sharing knowledge, expertise and skills (objective 9)

Government Offices in the Regions, Regional Assemblies and RDAs should:

- Contribute to strategic review and planning processes (objective 1)
- Identify and then establish supportive relationships with infrastructure providers in their particular areas of interest (objective 12)
- Identify a lead public sector agency for each infrastructure organisation that can resolve conflicts arising between different departments and agencies (objective 12)
- Accept without question that up to 2% of income can be used to purchase infrastructure assistance (objective 3)
- Commit to longer term strategic funding of infrastructure and recognise the contribution that infrastructure can make to their work (objective 3)
- Contribute to the development of, and then adhere to, benchmarks for minimum and ideal levels of strategic funding for infrastructure (objective 3)
- Contribute to the Task Force on funding infrastructure (objective 3)
- Disseminate and contribute to good practice concerning relationships with infrastructure (objective 12)
- Recognise the importance of increasing efficiency and impact and encourage the creation of hubs, sharing of back office facilities, and other measures to increase productivity through the funding application process (objective 4)
- Recognise the importance of increasing accessibility through the funding application process (objective 8)
- Recognise the importance of reporting on impact through the funding application process (objective 7)
- Recognise the importance of infrastructure organisations adopting a structured approach to developing the skills of its workforce through the funding application process (objective 9)
- Invest in circuit rider schemes to support the sector's engagement with ICT (objective 11)
- Raise awareness of social enterprise and support the development of awareness and skills in and access to the SBS and Business Links (objective 13)
- Acknowledge in funding bids the additional cost of supporting VCOs in rural areas (objective 14)
- Recognise the central importance of community capacity building and contribute the Civil Renewal's on-going consultation exercise (objective 2)
- Invest in the skills of their work force, particularly those that work in close contact with the VCS (objective 12)
- Consider ways in which they can support the development of smaller or younger VCOs by sharing knowledge, expertise and skills (objective 9)

Central Government departments should:

- Identify and then establish supportive relationships with infrastructure providers in their particular areas of interest (objective 1)
- Identify a lead public sector agency for each infrastructure organisation that can resolve conflicts arising between different departments and agencies (objective 12)
- Continue to support the work of departmental champions in raising awareness of the Compact (objective 12)
- Accept without question that up to 2% of income can be used to purchase infrastructure assistance (objective 3)
- Commit to longer term strategic funding of infrastructure and recognise the contribution that infrastructure can make to their work (objective 3)
- Contribute to the development of, and then adhere to, benchmarks for minimum and ideal levels of strategic funding for infrastructure (objective 3)
- Contribute to the Task Force on funding infrastructure (objective 3)
- Work with colleagues in local government to identify mechanisms for encouraging longer term local support of infrastructure through CPA, Best Value, LPSA and other initiatives (objective 3)
- Disseminate and contribute to good practice concerning relationships with infrastructure (objective 12)
- Recognise the importance of increasing efficiency and impact and encourage the creation of hubs, sharing of back office facilities, and other measures to increase productivity through the funding application process (objective 4)
- Recognise the importance of increasing accessibility through the funding application process (objective 8)
- Recognise the importance of reporting on impact through the funding application process (objective 7)
- Recognise the importance of infrastructure organisations adopting a structured approach to developing the skills of its workforce through the funding application process (objective 9)
- Invest in circuit rider schemes to support the sector's engagement with ICT (objective 11)
- Raise awareness of social enterprise and support the development of awareness and skills in and access to the SBS and Business Links (objective 13)
- Acknowledge in funding bids the additional cost of supporting VCOs in rural areas (objective 14)
- Recognise the central importance of community capacity building and contribute the Civil Renewal's on-going consultation exercise (objective 2)
- Invest in the skills of their work force, particularly those that work in close contact with the VCS (objective 12)
- Consider ways in which they can support the development of smaller or younger VCOs by sharing knowledge, expertise and skills (objective 9)

Other funders should:

Recognise the importance of increasing efficiency and impact and encourage the creation of hubs, sharing of back office facilities, and other measures to increase productivity through the funding application process (objective 4)

Recognise the importance of increasing accessibility through the funding application process (objective 8)

Recognise the importance of reporting on impact through the funding application process (objective 7)

Recognise the importance of infrastructure organisations adopting a structured approach to developing the skills of its workforce through the funding application process (objective 9)

Invest in circuit rider schemes to support the sector's engagement with ICT (objective 11)

Acknowledge in funding bids the additional cost of supporting VCOs in rural areas (objective 14)

The private sector should:

Consider ways in which they can support the development of smaller or younger VCOs by sharing knowledge, expertise and skills (objective 9)

Increase pro bono ICT consultancy and ICT volunteering as part of the broader CSR agenda (objective 11)

Participate in seminars and other events designed to increase awareness and understanding in the private sector about VCS ICT needs (objective 11)

Explore the possibility of sliding scales for ICT support to the VCS (objective 11)

Appendix 1 Consultation reports commissioned

Topic	Work commissioned from
National infrastructure	National Council for Voluntary Organisations
Urban renewal	Cross River Partnership
Volunteering infrastructure	Volunteer Development England
Volunteering infrastructure	CSV and the National Centre for Volunteering
Community development and urban renewal	Urban Forum
Social enterprise	Social Enterprise Coalition
ICT	National Council for Voluntary Organisations
Rural infrastructure	ACRE
Diversity, Equalities and BME issues	GLAD, WRC, LGB Coalition
Private sector perspectives	Business in the Community

Mike – should we include CIT members?

Appendix 2 OPM and Compass Partnership

OPM

OPM™ works with clients to develop high quality management practices that enable their organisations to improve social results. Founded in 1989 as an independent, not-for-profit centre, OPM became the UK's first public interest company in August 2002. We work exclusively with organisations that share a commitment to improved social outcomes. Our work includes organisational change and development, community and stakeholder engagement, leadership and management development, and qualitative and quantitative research.

OPM London, 252B Gray's Inn Road, London WC1X 8XG
Tel: 020 7239 7800,
email: office@opm.co.uk

Compass Partnership

Compass Partnership is a management consultancy specialising in the management and development of independent non-profit-seeking organisations. Our particular area of skill and expertise is in combining rigorous intellectual analysis with an understanding of how organisations work and how to achieve change.

Compass Partnership, Greenbanks, New Road, Bourne End, Bucks, SL8 5BZ
Tel: 01628 478561
Email: demerson@compassnet.co.uk