

Final Commissioning Strategy for Voluntary and Community Sector Infrastructure Support Services

Executive Summary

The Final Commissioning Strategy is the result of a Needs Assessment which Bristol City Council's Community Development Investment and Grants Team did as part of the Commissioning VCS Infrastructure Support Project and Consultation on a Draft Commissioning Strategy which set out the City Council's proposals in response to the Needs Assessment. The Draft Strategy was out for consultation from 19th October 2009 to 22nd January 2010.

This Commissioning Strategy represents the final proposal for commissioning VCS Infrastructure support and informs the Cabinet Report which will be presented to Bristol City Cabinet on 25th March 2010. Bristol City Council is proposing to commission these services to start from Quarter 4 2010/2011.

1. Issues which the Project is addressing:

- 1.1.6 Infrastructure organisations are grant-funded at £402,879 a year (plus @ £45,000 for Children and Young People's networks) to provide 'main offer' VCS Infrastructure services. BCC wants to use this funding to provide a consciously designed, city-wide set of services around VCS Infrastructure Support.
- 1.2. Changes in how BCC Community Development work means there is less support for VCS organisations in the city
- 1.3. The VCS/Third Sector is facing funding changes in the form of commissioning and the challenge of the recession. The new service will be based on what the Sector says it needs to survive and thrive in this new context.

2. Intended benefits of the Project

- 2.1. A more sustainable VCS sector in Bristol
- 2.2. A stronger voice for the VCS in Bristol
- 2.3. Improved continuity of funding and service planning for Infrastructure Support Services – a minimum three year contract with potential further two years.

3. Needs Assessment Methods used

- 3.1. A Survey: 219 VCS groups responded
- 3.2. Focus Groups: 99 people attended, representing 79 organisations.
- 3.3. In-depth interviews: with current providers, statutory funders and commissioners

4. Consultation Methods used

- 4.1. An online response form: 13 VCS groups responded
- 4.2. General and Equalities-specific Consultation meetings and consultation through existing Equalities VCS events: 80 organisations were represented at 15 consultation events
- 4.3. Written representations received: 4 written responses received
- 4.4. Responses from service commissioners: NHS Bristol; Government Office of the South West; BCC Childrens and Young People Services; BCC Health and Social Care; BCC Economic Regeneration

5. Context in which VCS Support will operate over the next five years

- The Economy and Recession

- Policy developments: Putting People First; Single Equalities Scheme; shift to commissioning and contracting and changing ways of funding the VCS
- Demographic changes: new communities arriving and an aging population – community cohesion will continue as a strong theme.
- Funding – pressure on reduced public funding, changes to how funding is accessed, through commissioning and competitive tendering and some opportunities for new funding
- Legal and governance: – new legal identities being introduced which VCS groups will want to explore and adopt
- Environment – sustainability and environmental impact will be reflected in quality service provision

6. Needs Assessment Headline results

The Survey said:

6.1. Satisfaction expressed with current information and advice services; training; funding advice, networking, volunteer support and governance and legal support

6.2. Improvements asked for include more clarity about the services available; access to services outside work hours; more tailored and more practical services; more specialised support and more awareness on specific equalities issues.

6.3. Key Priorities for future Infrastructure support

- Improving funding and financial stability
- Providing better services
- Increasing your influence
- Some Equalities VCS groups have additional priorities

6.4. How the VCS would prefer Infrastructure Support to be delivered

- Overall, **face to face**, followed by **On-line and e-mail advice, Training, courses and learning events, tailored training and consultancy, Forums and networking** and **Outreach**.
- Some Equalities VCS groups do rank these differently – eg. BME VCS prefer face-to-face and outreach styles to on-line support

6.5. Qualities wanted in the delivery of VCS Infrastructure support from providers

- Open and transparent
- Flexible and responsive
- Effective at getting Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) voices heard and listened to by key decision-makers
- Convenient and easy to access
- Reliable and good quality
- Well networked with local groups, agencies and partnerships

Focus Groups and interview respondents said they wanted:

6.6.

- improved clarity about what services are on offer and easier access to them – a 'one-stop shop' approach
- Have layers of service organised around needs of VCS groups at different stages of their development
- Improved access to Specialist services – eg, HR, buildings support

- Consistent high quality from services and reducing duplication of services
- Explore the correct balance between practical, 'hands-on' support services and influencing/strategically-focused services
- Increase skills around commissioning, tendering for services and partnerships to win contracts
- More tailored work to support equalities VCS groups
- a Community Development type, 'hand-holding' service

7. Consultation Headline Results

Summary of responses

VCS groups:	City Council response:
In general mostly welcome concepts of co-ordinated set of services and consistent assessment and tracking of needs; mostly welcome 'single main provider' – that is, the idea of co-ordination of the infrastructure support offer - but with reservations about potential creation of a monopoly or dominant organisation.	In response to consultation, City Council is no longer preferring a particular delivery model; is happy to accept consortia proposals but all bids should be in a single bid with a clear Lead Organisation
Some concern expressed that 'nothing will change'; has the decision already been made	The City Council is taking most suggestions forward to the Specification Development Group to be reflected in the Specification
Some BME groups are very concerned that the needs of BME VCS will not be adequately addressed - although the Consortium Of Black Groups meeting identified particular support areas that need to be delivered by BME providers. Some concern expressed that the future of BDA is threatened by the proposal	The City Council accepts that BME representation should be delivered through BME channels; accepts that cultural competence is essential in delivery of services to BME communities and will assess proposals against their effectiveness to do this
Commissioners: in general Commissioners welcome the co-ordinated delivery and the clear accountability for service delivery. Need to ensure benefit to Equalities Groups emphasised.	The City Council is working more closely with strategic partners to explore increased funding of the Infrastructure services and to work together to design the Specification and selection process
Current Providers:	
They are critical of the fact that the Draft Commissioning Strategy proposes a service model, rather than a purely Outcomes-based process	The City Council is focusing Specification development on Outcomes; however the model proposed does express ideas derived from the Needs Assessment; The specification will not require replication of it but that a co-ordinated model is proposed within available resources.
that the preferred 'single main provider' delivery model will result in increased administration and management costs with a resulting reduction in resources available for delivery	City Council is no longer preferring a particular delivery model; is happy to accept consortia proposals but all bids should be in a single bid with a clear Lead Organisation. The City Council is exploring increased funding of the Infrastructure services.
That there is insufficient funding going into the proposal to produce a step change in effective support (less than 1% of the total BCC annual spend on VCS organisations)	The City Council is exploring increased funding of the Infrastructure services

that the model isn't costed but represents an ideal set of services	The Specification will specify minimum levels of service and indicate the spread of investment between direct support and representation services
Re-draft the commissioning strategy to be 'outcomes-led' and go back out for a further 3 months of consultation.	The City Council does not accept this request
If not, would like to see NHS Bristol play an active part in Project Board	The City Council accepts this – NHS Bristol are represented on both the Project Board and the Specification Development Group
Delay the release of the VCS Infrastructure Commissioning until the Third Sector Strategy has been agreed and adopted by Bristol Partnership	The City Council does not accept this request – they are developing together
Have a longer timetable to allow consortia to be formed	The City Council accepts this and has build in time and some support for this
Want to see the services funded by Grant/Funding Agreement	The Cabinet report recommends this as most appropriate to the nature of the relationship being created. Recommends the opportunity being open to organisations outside Bristol to get a competitive selection process
Want acknowledgement that some current providers bring in additional funding to add to the BCC funding they receive to enhance services.	The City Council accepts this and wishes to work with the service providers to support maximise the opportunities to bring additional funding into the city
That Council can demonstrate how all equalities perspectives will be reflected in the Specification	The Consultation produced a wide range of recommendations which are referred to the Specification Development Group to be taken up
That a single provider can't reflect BME needs and want to know how they would meet their RRA duties	The City Council will expect providers to comply with Race Equality and any other Equality duties that apply to public bodies. This will be made clear in the Specification.
Want to be assured that the decisions are not already taken – that the consultation period will influence the final Strategy	The City Council has made changes as a result of the Consultation

8. Proposed Service Model and Delivery method

8.1. Proposed VCS Infrastructure Service Outcomes

The key Strategic Goal of the Strategy is the creation of a co-ordinated, coherent, customer-focused set of services with common referral, recording and impact measurement processes and shared quality standards. This will enable the effective demonstration of the accumulated impact of VCS Infrastructure Support Services in supporting a thriving Voluntary and Community Sector in Bristol.

Outcome 1: The Bristol VCS has increased Capacity, Sustainability and Quality

Outcome 2: The Bristol VCS is well-informed and well-connected

Outcome 3: Bristol VCS groups have a strong and influential voice

Outcome 4: The Bristol VCS has Strategic Involvement

Outcome 5: Bristol VCS groups contribute effectively to meeting the changing needs of communities in the city

8.2. Proposed '*Bristol VCS Support Service*' Model (see accompanying diagram)

The proposed service model is an 'ideal' service. The Specification will define the balance of services, drawing on feedback from the Consultation about how the VCS and commissioners want to prioritise where available funding should be focused.

- **Service identity and Access into it:** The '*Bristol VCS Support Service*' should have its own 'brand' identity and its own website through which all services can be viewed and accessed. It should be promoted as an integrated support 'offer' to the Bristol VCS. VCS groups should be able to access services through its website, by phone, e-mail, drop-ins and referral. Appropriate accessibility options for disabled users should be in place
- **Service Levels:** The '*Bristol VCS Support Service*' should offer the following tiers of service to meet the different needs of groups as they develop:
- **Enquiry and Assessment service:** consistent assessment of need and referral within the wider service as appropriate; possibly some evening and weekend availability;
- **Community Development 'wrap-around' Service:** support to provide capacity-building on on-going basis to newer groups and developing groups, groups from new communities, equalities VCS and user-led groups; hot-desking and practical support on offer, as well as access to all the specialist support and training
- **Established VCS groups development service:** support with crises, specialist support from HR, fund-finding services etc., training, tailored training packages
- **Established VCS Groups Service:** support with training, tailored training, specialist services
- **Strategic development, Representation, Policy and Sector Promotion:** networking, influencing, advocacy, representation and sector promotion takes place through all levels of the '*Bristol VCS Support Service*'

8.3. Delivery Models for the '*Bristol VCS Support Service*' Model

The City Council will consider delivery models, including proposals from consortia, which can demonstrate that they can deliver against the Strategic goal of:

The creation of a co-ordinated, coherent, customer-focused set of services with common referral, recording and impact measurement processes and shared quality standards.

8.4 A single Proposal and Lead Organisation

6 Regardless of the delivery model that sits behind it, The City Council will require all bids to be presented in a single proposal with a Lead Organisation in place which will co-ordinate delivery.

8.5 The **Bristol VCS Support Service** must deliver effective, outcome-evidenced support to BME-led; Disabled-led and other Equalities-led VCS groups.

9. Funding Method for the service

Following advice from Legal services the Project Board decided on 27th January 2010 to recommend a Funding Agreement funding method to secure the VCS Infrastructure support services, rather than a procurement method. It is recommended that this should be open to proposals from national VCS organisations in order to explore Best Value, promote contestability and mitigate the risk of State Aid. The present services are mainly funded under the Community Investment Fund, which is only available to local Bristol-based VCS groups.

10. Commissioning VCS Infrastructure Support Project activities timetable, March to January 2011

The following key activities will take place during the period March 2010 to the beginning of January 2011:

Cabinet decision on Commissioning Strategy: 25th March 2010

Specification approval: End of April 2010

Potential Provider meetings and Consortia development support: April/May 2010

Issue of Specification and invitation for proposals: June

Deadline for proposals: mid-August

Selection and appointment of new providers: September 2010

Contract negotiation and preparation: October-December 2010

New contract begins: January 2011

11. The Final Commissioning Strategy

The full Final Commissioning Strategy is online at the following website:

www.bristol.gov.uk/vcssupport

Strategic influencing, networking, information & policy

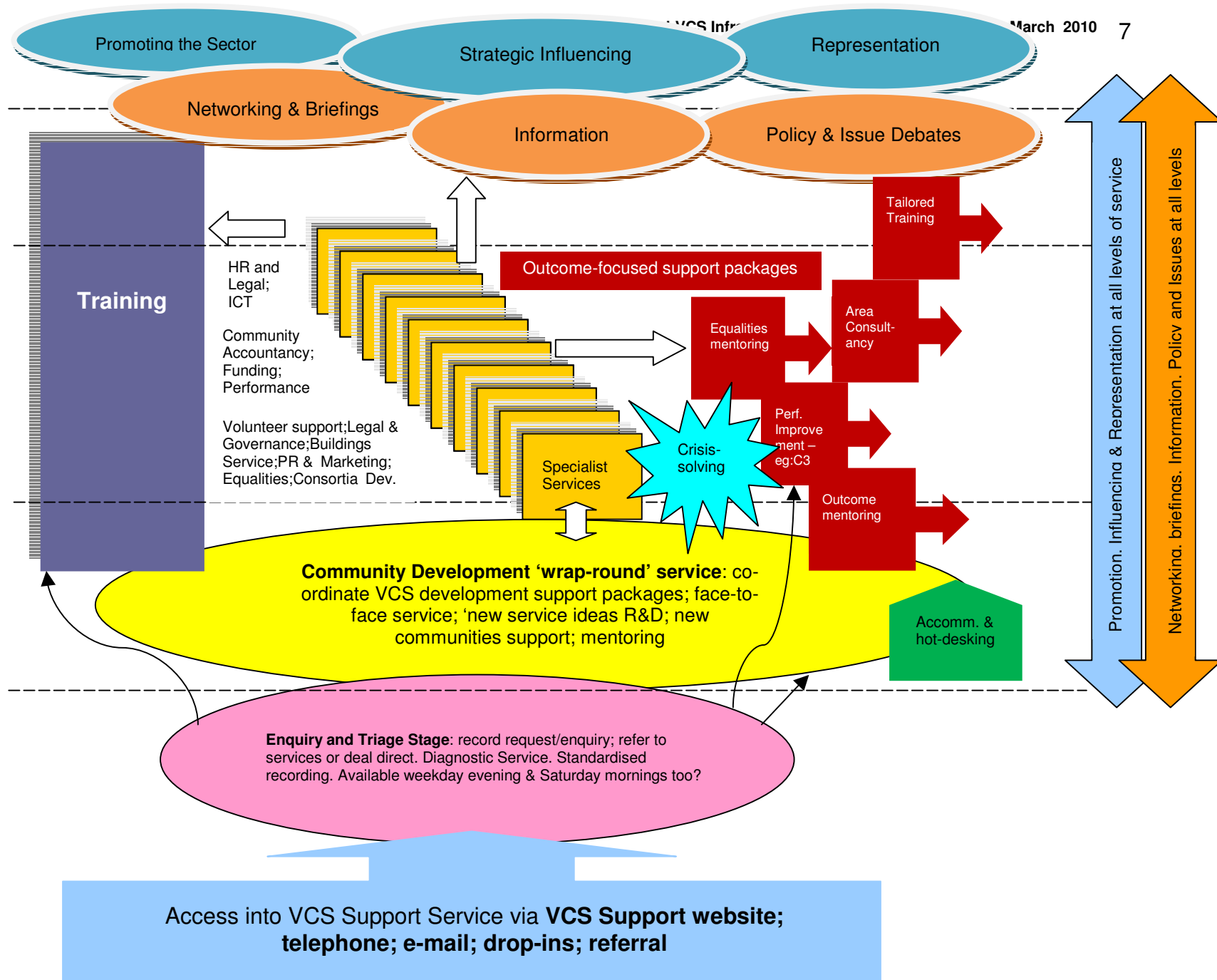
Established groups: range of services, information and policy/issue development

'Established – in development' services: supporting groups with growth, service development, planning, management, resources

Community Development 'wrap around' services: supporting new groups, new communities, small VCS, 'forming' groups

Enquiries and Triage service: help VCS users identify what they need and facilitate access to services

Access into VCS Support Service via VCS Support website; telephone; e-mail; drop-ins; referral



Promoting the Sector Strategic Influencing Representation

Networking & Briefings Information Policy & Issue Debates

Training

HR and Legal; ICT

Community Accountancy; Funding; Performance

Volunteer support; Legal & Governance; Buildings Service; PR & Marketing; Equalities; Consortia Dev.

Outcome-focused support packages

Equalities mentoring

Area Consultancy

Perf. Improvement - eg: C3

Outcome mentoring

Crisis-solving

Specialist Services

Accomm. & hot-desking

Community Development 'wrap-round' service: coordinate VCS development support packages; face-to-face service; 'new service ideas R&D; new communities support; mentoring

Enquiry and Triage Stage: record request/enquiry; refer to services or deal direct. Diagnostic Service. Standardised recording. Available weekday evening & Saturday mornings too?

Access into VCS Support Service via **VCS Support website;** telephone; e-mail; drop-ins; referral

Promotion, Influencing & Representation at all levels of service

Networking, briefings, Information, Policy and Issues at all levels