

Final Commissioning Strategy for Voluntary and Community Sector Infrastructure Support Services

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Section 1: Context and Background to the Final Commissioning Strategy

Introduction

The Final Commissioning Strategy is the result of a process of Consultation on a Draft Commissioning Strategy which was developed following a Needs Assessment undertaken as part of the Commissioning VCS Infrastructure Support Project in the Summer of 2009. The Consultation took place from **19th October 2009 to 22nd January 2010**. This Commissioning Strategy represents the final proposal for commissioning VCS Infrastructure Support Services and informs the Cabinet Report which will be presented to Bristol City Cabinet on 25th March 2010. The new services will be commissioned to replace the current model of from Quarter 4 2011.

1. The Commissioning VCS Infrastructure Support Project

- 1.1. The Commissioning VCS Infrastructure Support Project is based in the Community Development Investment and Grants Team in Bristol City Council's Neighbourhoods Directorate. The Project was set up to develop a Commissioning approach to the re-design of the 'main offer' Infrastructure Support Services which support Bristol's VCS organisations, funded by current funding strands of £402,879 in 2009/2010. The Project will achieve a clear specification of a 'main offer' Infrastructure Support Service for the city which is evidence-based on a robust Needs Assessment, including an Equalities Impact Assessment. The Project will identify a model for 'main offer' Infrastructure Support and a Commissioning Strategy to secure appropriate services to deliver it which will reflect national good practice in Commissioning the Third Sector. A co-ordinated, Outcomes-focused VCS Infrastructure Support Service will be purchased for a minimum period of 3 years and, potentially, for 5 years, to start operation from Quarter 4 2011.
- 1.2. The Project worked with current Grant-funded Provider organisations during the early stages of the work to explain the intended development and secure their assistance in helping identify strengths, weaknesses, gaps and opportunities for the future. The Project co-ordinates the views of key Stakeholder Statutory Services and current funders; current and potential users of Infrastructure Support Services from the VCS and regional bodies as well as reviewing national developments and those in other, comparable Local Authorities to inform the eventual shape of the services which are purchased.
- 1.3. Governance of the Commissioning VCS Infrastructure Support Project takes place through the Project Board, which has consisted of the following membership:
 - Graham Sims, Strategic Director for Neighbourhoods; Neighbourhoods, BCC
 - Richard Lyle, Programme Director for Older People, NHS Bristol (from February 2010)
 - Claudia McConnell, Service Director, Performance, Policy and Partnerships, Children and Young People's Services, BCC;
 - Kevin Tinsley, Bristol Locality Manager, Government Office of the South West;

- Linda Prosser, Interim Service Director, Older People, Health and Social Care; BCC
- James Woods, Enabling Commissioning Programme Manager, Transformation, BCC (March 2009 – December 2009)
- Gillian Douglas, Equalities and Community Cohesion Manager, Neighbourhoods BCC

2. The Scope of the Commissioning VCS Infrastructure Support Project

2.1. The Project is designed to commission a model for VCS Infrastructure support which focuses on the use of the £402,879 per annum identified as providing the 'main offer' support to Bristol's VCS community, described in section 3 below. The Project recognises that there are other providers of VCS Infrastructure support in Bristol which are outside the scope of this commissioning work. Social Enterprise Works (SEW) sits alongside the 'main offer' VCS Infrastructure support services to help develop social enterprise skills and business development (and is a member of the Bristol ChangeUp Consortium). BAND (Bristol Area Neighbourhood Daycare) supports the childcare sector, working alongside the 'main offer' Infrastructure providers; Refugee Action have funding for five years as part of the National Lottery Basis Project to capacity build Refugee Community Organisations; Quartet provide grants for a range of development and capacity building activities; Cherry D; Young Bristol; SPAN; Trinity Community Initiative; Bristol Wireless all offer support to VCS groups in the city and the Ethical Property Foundation is currently funded to support charities and voluntary groups find and manage buildings. Pro-Help co-ordinates skills from the private sector to support VCS organisations.

3. Background

- 3.1. BCC Community Development currently grant-funds VCS Infrastructure support services through: Voscur, the Black Development Agency, Bristol Community Accountancy Project, Volunteering Bristol and Avon & Bristol Law Centre. (See *Appendix A: VCS Main Offer Infrastructure Support Service Funding 2008/2009 & 2009/2010*)
- 3.2. BCC Health & Social Care also grant fund the Care Forum to support representation of the social care VCS strategically and facilitate communication and networking within the sector and with the Statutory sector. They are including this investment as part of this Commissioning process.
- 3.3. BCC CYP&S are reviewing their historical funding of networks in line with expected new Children and Young People's Partnership guidance.
- 3.4. NHS Bristol also fund elements of Children and Young People's Partnership Infrastructure support and want to work with this process to deliver joined-up service design and funding
- 3.5. The funding for elements 3.3 and 3.4 above is being considered for potential inclusion in this commissioning.

4. Issues which the Project has been designed to address:

- 4.1. Bristol City Council (BCC) (including NHS Bristol funding) funded 'main offer' VCS Infrastructure services at £402,879 a year in 2009/2010 (additional funding of @ £45,000 a year supports Children and Young People's VCS networks). The Investment and Grants Strategy, against which current VCS Infrastructure

Providers develop their proposals, is not specific or detailed enough to shape a consciously designed, city-wide set of services around VCS Infrastructure Support.

- 4.2. Recent changes in BCC's Community Development work means there is potentially less capacity to respond to VCS requests for support around organisational development in those teams and this pressure is being reflected in increased demand on current Infrastructure providers
- 4.3. The VCS/Third Sector is facing considerable changes in how they will be funded with the shift towards a commissioning culture among statutory funders and challenges in the current economic climate for their sustainability. BCC and other partners' funding needs to be directed accurately at their needs if they are to thrive. This Project will include a Needs Assessment as the basis for the service design.

5. Intended benefits of the Project

Three principal benefits will flow from this Project:

5.1. A more sustainable VCS sector in Bristol through:

- a. VCS Infrastructure Service provision which has been designed with the active participation of VCS organisations to meet their needs effectively and which reflects national good practice
- a. Clearer routes and pathways to access VCS Infrastructure support services and greater co-ordination between services to meet identified needs

5.2. A stronger voice for the VCS in Bristol through:

- a. Improved representation, networking and influencing
- b. Better defined networks and information routes
- c. Clarity about how VCS organisations contribute to the identification of service gaps and influence the achievement of better outcomes with their innovation
- d. A re-defined, clearer sense of purpose which strengthens the relationship on both sides between Strategic Planners and the VCS in Bristol

5.3. Improved continuity of funding and service planning for Infrastructure Support Services through:

- a. Co-ordinated funding arrangements in place to make best use of available funds for Infrastructure Support.
- b. Longer contract/agreement terms to enable more service continuity and financial sustainability for Infrastructure Support services
- c. Outcome-focused Performance Management targets, indicators and processes which are supported by Funders and VCS organisations and which support a clear demonstration of the impact of the services on VCS success in the city.

6. Key Policy and Strategic Drivers within the City which the Project supports

6.1. Bristol City Council Transforming Business Programme

Bristol City Council is moving towards becoming a Commissioning Council as part of its Transforming Business Programme. Specifically the Enabling Commissioning Programme aims to deliver the following benefits:

'improved ability to meet the assessed needs of citizens in the best way at the best cost, which can be tracked and demonstrated'

‘clarity around the nature, quality and cost of services, which will provide robust justification for each service commissioned’.

Developing a commissioning approach to VCS infrastructure provides the Investment and Grants team within Community Development with the opportunity to apply these benefits to a vital set of services for the Voluntary and Community/Third Sector in the city.

6.2. Local Area Agreement Designated Target NI 007

In the LAA 2008-2011 BCC is committed to delivering against National Indicator 007 – Environment for a Thriving Third Sector: ‘the contribution that local government and its partners make to the environment in which independent third sector organisations can operate successfully.’

The Delivery Plan to address NI 007 includes a commitment to review the needs of the VCS sector around Infrastructure support, ‘including support to organisations led by and delivering to equalities groups (e.g. BME, Disabled people)’ and to commission a set of services which are designed to secure the maximum benefit for the sector by addressing their current and future needs.

7. Methodology of the Needs Assessment and Draft Commissioning Strategy Consultation.

The Needs Assessment was undertaken between 26th May and 20th August 2009. It was conducted through three routes:

- 7.1. Survey of VCS organisations: This was conducted on-line, with the option of paper copies offered with Freepost reply envelopes. **219** organisations completed this survey. This method had the broadest reach into the VCS community, with 26% of respondent organisations with an income of less than £5,000 per annum (see *Appendix B: Analysis of the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) Infrastructure Support Needs Survey 2009*)
- 7.2. Focus Groups: 4 open Focus Group sessions were run with a further two focused on Refugee/newly-arrived communities and Disabled-led/for Disabled people organisations. In addition member groups of the Somali Forum were consulted at one of their meetings. A total of 99 people attended these consultation meetings, representing 76 organisations. These events added depth and nuance to the answers in the Survey, allowing the Investment and Grants team to ask questions and explore ideas for future service delivery with participants.
- 7.3. In-depth interviews: these were conducted with representatives of the 6 organisations which are currently funded to provide general VCS infrastructure services; interviews with Social Enterprise Works and BAND were conducted as providers of VCS support outside the scope of this commissioning brief but as important partner organisations for the future VCS Infrastructure service; 18 interviews were conducted with funders and commissioners in Bristol City Council/NHS Bristol/Government Office of the South West and an interview took place with the Executive Member with responsibility for the VCS in Bristol City Council. (See *Appendix C: Needs Assessment Report from Focus Groups and interviews with Current Infrastructure Support providers and Statutory stakeholders* and *Appendix D: VCS Infrastructure Support Commissioning Project Needs Assessment Contributors*)

The Consultation on the Draft Commissioning Strategy was undertaken between 19th October 2009 and 22nd January 2010.

7.4. Methodology of the Draft Commissioning Strategy Consultation

7.5. Consultation methods

Consultation used the following methods to collect opinions and comment:

- On-line comment form was available throughout between 19th October to 22nd January 2010 and a paper copy of the Comment form was available on request, along with a freepost reply envelope: 14 responses were received.
- 4 Open Consultation meetings were held for VCS groups in Bristol
- Consultation meetings were held for the following Equalities VCS groups: Black and Minority Ethnic; Disabled-led and groups providing services to disabled people; Refugee and Asylum Seeker Community organisations; Women's VCS groups; Older People's VCS groups; Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender VCS groups; Faith VCS groups; Young People's VCS groups.
- A total of 15 meetings/consultation events were held, attended by 80 VCS groups
- 5 written responses were received
- Commissioners consultation comment form was distributed. 7 were received

7.6. Consultation audience

The audience and active contributors to this consultation was:

- Bristol-based voluntary and community/Third Sector groups of all sizes
- VCS groups led-by or providing services to Equalities communities
- Potential VCS Infrastructure provider organisations
- Statutory commissioners and funders of VCS/Third Sector organisations
- Statutory sector commissioners and funders of VCS Infrastructure services
- Government Office of the South West

8. Background and context for the Voluntary and Community Sector and VCS Infrastructure Services over the next five years

The Commissioning VCS Infrastructure Support Project sits within a coherent national and local strategy and policy context. The following opportunities and challenges were identified over the course of the Needs Assessment:

8.1. National Policy

The current government has placed a strong emphasis on the role of the Third Sector in delivering innovative and effective public services.

The Office of the Third Sector's overarching aim is to:

'Develop and support an environment which enables the third sector to thrive, growing in its contribution to Britain's society, economy and environment.'

The Third Sector (meaning the Voluntary and Community sector and Social enterprise/not for profit sector) is seen as both a means of delivering public services and a means of building active citizenship and participation in decision-making at a local level.

8.2. National Indicator 007: Environment for a Thriving Third Sector

National Indicator 007 is a key way of measuring the impact of the Statutory sector in helping achieve a environment for a thriving Third Sector. The National Survey of Third Sector Organisations conducted in the autumn of 2008 provides a baseline against which 149 upper tier Local Authorities can measure their progress in working with other Statutory partners to develop this support for the Sector.

Bristol's result for the key headline question: ***Taking everything into account, overall, how do the statutory bodies in your local area influence your organisation's success?*** Was **14.7%** (i.e. 14.7% of survey respondents answered 'very positive influence' or 'positive influence'. This contrasts with a national average of 16. 2%. Bristol now has a target of **19.1%** to achieve over the next two years. This is a target in the city's 2008-2010 Local Area Agreement.

At the same time Bristol has more Third Sector organisations per 1000 of population than the national average (3.95 as opposed to 3.38 nationally) and a significantly higher number of employees working in the Third Sector than the national average (18.86 per 1000 against a national average of 12.69).

8.3. Capacity Builders Change Up Programme

Destination 2014 is the overarching Strategy for the ChangeUp programme, which aims to build the capacity of the Third Sector. It funds work nationally and regionally against the following five objectives:

- Improving the quality and effectiveness of infrastructure support for third sector organisations
- Demonstrating to key stakeholders the benefits of support services to frontline organisations
- Ensuring equal access for all third sector organisations to mainstream support services, and targeting resources where necessary
- Developing and influencing funding practice to sustain support for third sector organisations
- Engaging with the public sector

In the South West Region the ChangeUp programme's strategy has been developed by the South West Infrastructure Development Partnership, part of the South West Forum. 'Infrastructure Strategy South West 2006 for the Voluntary and Community Sector' describes their overarching vision:

'By 2014 the needs of frontline voluntary and community organisations in the South West will be met by support which is available across the region, structured for maximum efficiency and offering excellent provision which is accessible to all and sustainably funded. Support will be provided in ways which meet the particular needs of groups in urban and rural areas. Support for BME and other equality groups through mainstream and specialist provision will be

consistent across the region but delivered in ways appropriate to and determined by those communities.'

8.4. **Bristol's ChangeUp Consortium**

In Bristol the ChangeUp Consortium brings together 5 of the 6 currently funded VCS Infrastructure provider organisations. Its aims are expressed in its 2008-2011 Business Plan as:

- To have a sustainable, united, efficient and active Bristol Consortium with members having both resources and skills to successfully implement the aims outlined in the Consortium strategy and business plan.
- To ensure that all Bristol VCSE (Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise) organisations have easy access to all infrastructure support services by 2015
- For the Bristol Consortium to be recognised as the representative voice of the diverse Bristol VCSE sector and as equal partners with the statutory sector in co-ordinating the delivery of services to the local community
- To have robust BME, equalities and other specialist expertise working together to ensure specialist support services are available where appropriate and that the frontline VCSE organisations they represent have full access to and benefit fully from infrastructure support

8.5. **Bristol's Local Area Agreement 2008-2011**

A number of National Indicators within Bristol's LAA are either directly focused on the VCS/Third Sector or can be significantly influenced by investment into the sector: NI007 has already been mentioned above; in addition the VCS can influence delivery around the LAA's Safe and Healthy; Thriving Neighbourhoods; Learning City and Prosperous and Ambitious Indicators.

8.6. **Bristol's 20:20 Sustainable City Strategy 2009-2019**

The 20:20 Sustainable City Strategy sets out a vision for the city with 4 primary Objectives:

- Reduce health and wealth inequality
- Raise the aspiration and achievement of our children, young people and families
- Making our prosperity sustainable
- A city of stronger and safe communities

The city's VCS impacts on all these Outcomes.

8.7. **Bristol's investment in the Voluntary and Community Sector**

While there are no figures available for the total Statutory sector investment into the VCS in Bristol, the largest funding agency is Bristol City Council. The investment/spend into the VCS by Bristol City Council in 2009/2010 totals **£38,056,676**, funding 267 individual VCS organisations.

One measurable impact of this investment appears in Bristol results from the 2008 Place Survey, where Bristol has a higher rate of regular volunteering at

24.1% of the population than either comparable Core Cities (20%) or the national average (23.2%)

8.8. Bristol's Neighbourhood Partnerships and Locality Governance Arrangements

Bristol is moving to strengthen the influence of its 14 Neighbourhood Partnerships and to devolve increasing decision-making powers and budgets to them, increasing both the opportunity and pressure on the VCS to participate at this level. The Children's Trust arrangements have also created Locality Governance arrangements with ambitions to commission services within 10 localities. These too are arenas which the VCS can both influence and potentially benefit from as deliverers of local services.

8.9. Bristol City Council Transformation agenda and Enabling Commissioning

The City Council is undergoing a process of organisational and service delivery transformation, a key element of which is its transformation into becoming a Commissioning Council. The City Council is in the process of developing a consistent commissioning practice for its service delivery. This is a potential source of opportunity and threat too for the VCS. There is concern by some within the sector that grant-making to the VCS may be threatened by a shift into procurement by competitive tendering and the sustainability of smaller, niche organisations may be compromised if grants are reduced. The current VCS infrastructure services are actively developing the Compact to negotiate with the Statutory services how 'intelligent commissioning' can preserve the positive impacts of the VCS in the city while offering new opportunities to win contracts and develop the business skills of the sector to thrive within this new environment.

9. Challenges and Opportunities facing the VCS over the next five years

9.1. The Economy and Recession

The Recession is widely seen as a threat. Less money around means everyone will be chasing less. Funders are seen to be likely to become more tight and inflexible about what they'll fund. A squeeze on the VCS in terms of their overheads is anticipated by the sector – that funders won't be willing to fund on a Full Cost Recovery basis, especially funders such as Trusts. The Recession is also seen as a challenge to the recent focus on VCS organisations generating income through selling their services: there is real doubt now about how feasible this is, especially in more deprived neighbourhoods. A proactive programme around collaboration/mergers and needs analysis for neighbourhoods and within niche sectors of the VCS is seen as a necessary support to the sector.

The financial downturn will have an impact on the cultural sector, as top level sponsorship dries up. The sustainability of community buildings is also threatened as disposable income dries up to spend on local activities taking place in local centres – again, especially in the city's deprived areas.

VCS groups have noticed that increasing poverty threatens local people's more basic needs. People are unable to afford to pay even small amounts and groups are closing down as a result.

Local VCS groups are reporting a rise in addiction-related need, both alcohol and drug use and a rise in incidence of domestic abuse. People's access to good nutrition is compromised, which affects the nature of support which is being sought by residents from local groups.

A potential benefit from recession could be an increased availability of volunteers, although this is not a certainty. Government policy is supporting engagement with volunteering but the way it is structured – looking to deliver 30 hours of volunteering work – is seen as more of a problem than a solution. Organisations are looking for long-term commitment and continuity in volunteering not brief secondments, which some see as generating more work than they are potentially worth.

9.2. Policy developments

The context in the city in which the VCS operate has changed massively: Children's Trust, multi-agency working have created an increase in expectations & in the need for information sharing. Participation in panels and Neighbourhood Partnerships is required but capacity of the sector is often stretched.

The Putting People First agenda is a key opportunity and challenge to VCS providers. Individual budgets for service users is a key element and the VCS will have to become more skilled at structuring its services as a business and winning enough 'customers' to fund its activities. Another strand of Putting People First is the requirement for every Local Authority to have user-led organisations with which to do business. This is likely to increase opportunities for self-organisation for disabled and older people's groups and generate potential additional demand – and income – for infrastructure support services.

These changes represent a significant shift in culture and practice for both the statutory sector commissioners and the VCS providers and some imaginative conversations about how to sustain and develop the sector through this culture change needs to take place over the coming period.

Bristol City Council's Single Equalities Scheme wants to engage in consultation with the Equalities VCS over the next three years and will be looking for effective communication channels with the sector and to engage in an increasingly sophisticated dialogue.

The other key shift for the sector is the focus on outcomes in both commissioning and in assessing the impact of services. This too is a culture change for all involved and up-skilling of the sector in how to express its impact effectively – particularly around the so-called 'softer outcomes' – is important to its future success.

9.3. Demographic changes

The city's population will continue to change over the next period. New communities are growing and with them new needs. There is a dilemma for the statutory sector in how to respond to that demand with a pot of funding that is not growing. There will be growing funding pressure on established groups if funding shifts to newer groups. Community cohesion issues will continue to grow in significance and solutions will need to be negotiated to meet the needs of newer communities innovatively within budgetary constraints.

The city will also see an aging population amongst established communities, with younger population growth among newer communities, changing the city's cultures and service demands.

9.4. Funding

The city is still working through the ending of UK and EU-derived Regeneration funding, which has been a significant source of support to the VCS. Other funds which will come to an end in the coming period include Capacitybuilders funding for Infrastructure support organisations.

At the same time VCS has an opportunity through commissioning to demonstrate what they can deliver. A challenge is to assist the VCS to take advantage of commissioning to sustain themselves by delivery of services via contracts. The future of grant-funding within a broader Commissioning approach is not clear at present and is a focus of concern for the VCS in the city.

More partnering developments and consortia/coalitions will be needed to respond to these opportunities. There are legal implications of setting consortia up properly, with effective and appropriate limited liabilities. Reducing overhead through working together to get shared benefits from shared services is a further challenge which can help the VCS market themselves as efficient providers.

Specific funding/asset opportunities for the city's VCS include the £70M Communitybuilders Fund (mixture of loan finance and grants) and the development of the City Council's Community Asset Transfer Policy which can deliver an ex-council building as an asset through long-leases at low/favourable rate. The PCT/Police/Fire Service also have significant assets. This is both an opportunity and a problem, given the lack of capital within the Sector. This raises the need for a further set of skills which VCS Infrastructure services need to deliver to help the sector as Community Asset Transfer creates new roles and demands.

The Urban Enterprise initiative is also now in development through the Strategic Investment Framework – through European Union ERDF match funded by RDA. This can deliver £18 million to benefit the city. Urban Enterprise's focus is supporting small businesses, social businesses and new starts in disadvantaged parts of the city.

While commissioning and new funding provide opportunities the VCS is concerned about how it can supporting its core functions and is worried about destructive competition from larger/national organisations.

9.5. Legal and governance

New legal structures are becoming available to VCS and Third Sector organisations which will impact on demand for Infrastructure support. The introduction of CICs (Community Interest Company) or CIO (Charitable Incorporated Organisations, via the Charity Commission) as well as changes in company law and charity law will result in many organisations seeking to change their legal identity and needing to understand their new responsibilities and powers. This demand will grow from April 2010 as the phased implementation of these changes begins.

The realities of funding pressures mean inevitably that some VCS groups will not survive and will need help and support to dissolve solvently. Advice about the liabilities of Trustees, redundancies and TUPE support will also be important.

9.6. **Environment**

Climate change and green issues will continue to be important to the wider issue of sustainability. Increasingly sustainable use of resources will become a mark of innovative, quality service provision for funders and commissioners.

Section 2: VCS Infrastructure Needs Assessment Summary and Draft Commissioning Strategy Consultation Responses Summary

This section summarises the findings of the VCS Infrastructure Support Needs Survey and the Focus Groups, Current Service Provider interviews and interviews with Statutory Stakeholders and summarises the comments from the Consultation on the Draft Commissioning Strategy. The full reports on both pieces of work can be found in **Appendices B and C** (Needs Assessment) and Appendices D, E & F (Consultation responses).

1. Summary of the VCS Infrastructure Support Needs Survey

1.1. Respondents

- There were 219 responses to the survey.
- Legal structures and types of organisation: 58% of respondents are a registered charity. The most common legal structure is that of a Company limited by guarantee but a wide range of organisation structures are included, including unincorporated groups and newer types such as Community Interest Companies (CICs).
- Main areas of work: The main fields within which respondents work are health & social welfare (19%) and arts/media/sport (18.5%), followed by Advice/counselling/advocacy; Immigration/Asylum and Housing/homelessness organisations (15.5%) and then Community-focused buildings and groups (14%) and early years/play/young people and Education support organisations 12.5%).
- Equalities Groups: 50% of respondents indicate that they are led by an Equalities Group. The main Equalities Groups represented are Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) at 10% of the total; Children and Young People at 9.5 % and Disabled People at 8% of all respondents. There is a fairly even spread between three equalities groups – BME, young people and disabled people. These groups are more represented than the other equalities groups.
- Where Groups work: 77% of Groups mainly operate within Bristol and surrounding area, and generally provide services to all within the community.
- More of these groups are working in what are the old Neighbourhood Renewal areas of Bristol (Easton, Ashley and Lawrence Hill in particular). However, the spread is fairly even across the city, probably meaning that organisations operate citywide.
- Income levels: 37% of respondents had an income level of less than £20,000 in 2008/2009 (26% less than £5000); A further 24% are in the £20,000 - £100,000 bracket; 21.5% between £100,000 - £500,000 and 17.5% from £500,000 to over £1million.
- Age of groups: Most responding groups have existed for over 10 years (71%), with 10% between 5 and 10 years old; 13% 2 to 5 years and 6% under two years in existence.

1.2. Areas of the current Infrastructure services which are most effective for VCS groups

Organisations which had used existing services expressed significant levels of satisfaction with information and advice services; training; funding advice, networking, volunteer support and governance and legal support

Ideas for improvements, developments which can improve access (See Survey report for details)

A number of support areas for development or barriers to accessing support were identified. These include more clarity about the services available and access to services outside work hours; more tailored and more practical services; in particular how services could be delivered more effectively, a need for more specialised support and concern for more awareness on specific equalities issues. Access to funding is the biggest barrier facing VCS organisations, and funding advice is one of the main support features accessed. A number of the ways Bristol City Council functions are also barriers to a significant minority of respondents. More investment in Infrastructure services was also proposed.

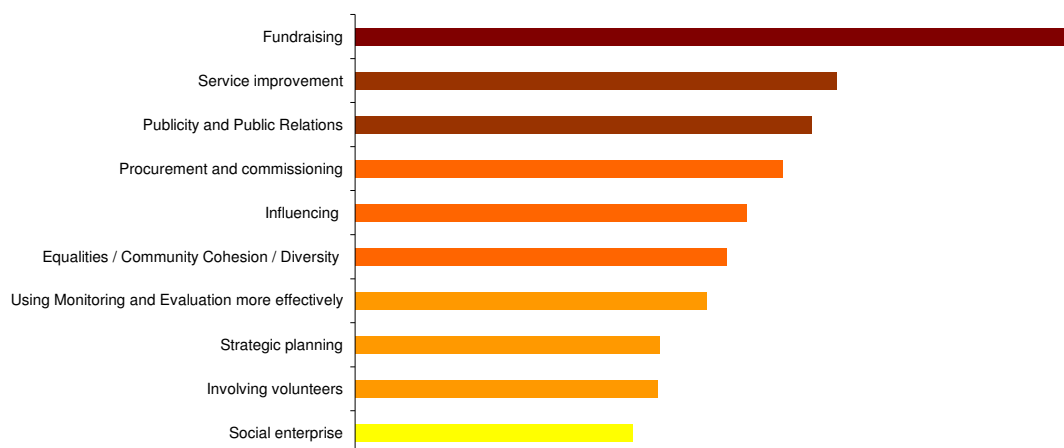
1.3. Priorities for future Infrastructure support

The **top 3 Overall Priority** areas for support are:

- **Improving funding and financial stability**
- **Providing better services**
- **Increasing your influence**

A more detailed exploration within these general support categories produces the following 10 priorities:

1.4. Top 10 priority areas



After weighting all the functions and areas where support could be provided, **fundraising** remains by far the highest priority of VCS organisations. This is followed by **Service Improvement; Publicity and Public Relations; Procurement and commissioning, Influencing** and **Equalities/Community Cohesion/Diversity**.

There are exceptions and additional nuances to this overall picture, however, when support priorities are cross checked against different categories of VCS organisation, set out below:

1.5. **Income levels:**

There is no difference between a company with less than £5k p.a. income compared to one with more than £1million in terms of how they rank priorities. In almost every case, it follows the order:

1. **Improve funding**
2. **Provide better services**
3. **Increase influence**

For small groups between £5,000 - £20,000 **Improving your physical resources and environmental impact** is a significant need.

1.6. **How long organisations have been in existence**

The main thing to note is that new companies under 2 years old prioritise **increasing influence** as their most important need, and also rate **developing skills** as highly as providing better services. However, these groups make up the smallest proportion of respondents (only 6%) but are presumably also among the most vulnerable of VCS groups.

1.7. **Equalities groups**

Equalities VCS groups have a number of other key priorities. In addition to the focus on **improving funding, better services** and **influencing** noted above they prioritise the following:

BME-led and service providing groups rate **developing skills** as one of their priorities;

Faith groups and Refugee and Asylum-supporting groups both look for **Managing your organisation better** support, and Refugee and Asylum Seeker-led groups want help to **improve how they manage people resources** (paid staff and volunteers)

Older people's groups in particular want to **increase their influence** and **improving physical resource and environmental impact** are important to LGB organisations and groups providing services to Older People.

1.8. **How the VCS would prefer Infrastructure Support to be delivered**

- Overall, the most helpful way of accessing support is **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**.
- But within this overall picture there are significant differences in how VCS groups at different stages of development, income level and from Equalities groups prefer to receive support:
- **Income Levels:** while all income levels rate **face-to-face advice and help** highly, **on-line help** is as helpful to lower income groups, while **training** is also strongly preferred by groups above £20,000 income levels. **Tailored training and consultancy** is particularly sought by groups over £50,000 income.

- **Age of group**: newer groups value **training** as much as **face to face** support or **Outreach** and **Advocacy** is important to them. **On-line support** and **face to face** help are strongly preferred by groups over 5 years old.
- **Equalities groups – led by**: BME-led groups prefer **face-to-face, training and outreach** services over **on-line support**; disabled-led groups want **on-line services** as their top preference as well as **face-to-face and training**; Refugee and asylum seeker-led services also look for **face-to-face** and **outreach services**, alongside **tailored training and mentoring**. Older people-led groups also prefer **on-line support, face-to-face** and **signposting to specialist services**. Faith-led groups rate **advocacy support** as highly as **face-to-face** and **training**.
- **Equalities groups – services to**: **Advocacy support** has a high preference for Faith Groups; **Online advice** is the preferred support for groups providing services to Disabled people; to Older People and to Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual People; Groups providing services to BME communities however prefer **Outreach** and **Training** over **online support**, as well as **face-to-face support**. Refugee/Asylum Seeker support services want **face-to-face, outreach** and **tailored support and mentoring**. Women's groups look for **tailored support, face to face** and **training**. **Face to face** and **tailored training** is also a favoured support style for groups supporting Disabled People. Only groups supporting Older People and Men prefer support through **briefings and consultations**, with **Forums and networking** also good for Older People's groups.

1.9. Qualities which are looked for from VCS Infrastructure Support Services

In particular, VCS organisations supported the following six qualities as the most important to them about the delivery of VCS Infrastructure support:

- 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

2. Summary of what Focus Groups, Current Infrastructure Support providers and Statutory stakeholders want from VCS Infrastructure Support

The Focus Groups, both the generic and the equalities VCS groups, added detail to the Survey information and interviews with current Service Providers and Statutory funders and commissioners brought a wide range of experienced viewpoints to the Needs Assessment. A brief summary identifies the areas where there is general consensus on need and where there is particular emphasis from different stakeholders.

2.1. Areas of Consensus from VCS focus groups, current providers and statutory stakeholders:

- There needs to be clarity about access to Infrastructure support services: a 'one-stop shop' model was mooted by Focus groups and statutory stakeholders as a desirable potential development.

- Support for 'segmented' services which reflect the different stages of development which VCS organisations go through, providing support which reflects those different needs was strongly endorsed
- Support for a Community Development-style service, particularly for new VCS groups and VCS groups in new communities and some BME VCS groups, which provides a more wrap-around, 'hand-holding', personalised support service was a much-repeated theme
- Maintaining training services but cutting out duplication and co-ordinating the training. There is also support for more tailored training packages for VCS groups within neighbourhoods or a sector of VCS services, as well as individual organisations.
- Developing equalities support – Somali groups want support that acknowledges the oral traditions in their communities and which works in culturally appropriate ways to reach Somali women and young people; niche provision could be purchased to meet this kind of need, they suggest; Refugee Community Organisations need language support to access Infrastructure and a personalised, face-to-face method of delivery to facilitate capacity building; Disabled groups need a range of access methods to Infrastructure support and mentoring to make management committee development effective
- Support for a range of specialist expertise, such as access to HR and legal support around employment and other key areas
- Support for consistent quality standards in delivery across the Infrastructure services
- Support for development of skills and expertise around commissioning and ability to win contracts to deliver services, including development of joint working and partnerships. Increased 'business' skills to price services accurately.
- Re-assessment of the balance between practical development skills and services for VCS and the representation, voice and strategic influencing role of Infrastructure support. Both elements are priorities for all stakeholders but overall there was a desire to increase the practical support available.

2.2. VCS Groups and Current Providers:

- Both emphasised the need to value the contribution made to the city by the VCS – there was a strong feeling that it wasn't understood and valued
- Both were interested in developing wider debates within the city about key issues of citizenship, integration of new communities with established ones and other key VCS issues which improve the quality of the city's life

2.3. Current Providers and Statutory stakeholders:

- want to explore the needs of BME VCS groups for specialised BME delivery of services and representation – where generic services can meet the needs of BME communities and where BME-specific services provide better outcomes. Both want to see BME groups increase their representation and voice and succeed in practical service delivery.
- Want to improve the tone of the relationship between Statutory stakeholders and the VCS – increase the sense of partnership and shared agenda, mutual respect and reduce the sense of an ‘adversarial’ relationship between the statutory sector and VCS
- Want to develop support for Community Buildings and VCS accommodation in the light of the development of Community Asset Transfer policies

2.4. Statutory Stakeholders:

- Emphasise Governance support which they see as needed for VCS groups and Equalities development, in particular developing VCS Infrastructure services on the basis of the single equalities scheme approach.

3. Draft Commissioning Strategy Consultation Summary

The Consultation on the Draft Commissioning Strategy heard from 80 groups through consultation meetings; 14 groups through the online consultation and 5 submitted written comments. 7 written responses were received from commissioning organisations and the Government Office of the South West. See **Appendix H** for list of responding organisations. See **Appendices D, E & F** for a full collation of comments and the City Council’s responses.

3.1 What has changed in response to Consultation process: You Said, We Did

Outcomes: Outcomes have been changed to reflect feedback from consultation and suggestions on ways to measure impact are being used by the Specification Development Group.

Service Model: The Service Model within the Commissioning Strategy reflects the needs and ideas which were expressed through the Needs Assessment. Potential Providers are free to propose alternative models within which they will deliver the outcomes and the key Strategic Goal of a co-ordinated, coherent, customer-focused set of services with common referral, recording and impact measurement and shared quality standards.

Delivery Model: The City Council has now dropped the preferred Single Main Provider delivery model in response to consultation comments. The funding method of competitive Funding Agreement/Grant for the new services means they will be co-ordinated by the not-for-profit sector. Additional time for consortia development has been added into the timescale.

Equalities: The service delivery needs from the Equalities VCS consultation are being used by the Specification Development Group; it is accepted that representation services for BME VCS organisations must be delivered through BME providers.

Balance of Service Provision: The preferences expressed by both VCS groups and commissioners for the balance of where resources should be directed between practical support services and representation/influencing/networking/information services are being used by the Specification Development Group to design the Specification.

3.2 From VCS groups (see Appendices D & E)

Summary of Comments on Draft Commissioning Strategy		Summary of BCC responses
a	<p>Outcomes: The draft Outcomes were broadly accepted but concerns expressed that they should be measurable and deliver real, demonstrable impact so the VCS can tell if the services are delivering their needs.</p>	<p>The City Council notes this point. The Outcomes are being developed with Key Performance Indicators by the Specification Development Group to be able to describe real impacts, reflecting consultation comments.</p>
b	<p>Service Model: the concept of co-ordinated services was generally welcomed; a co-ordinated assessment process and services being organised around the different development needs of organisations was welcomed, with co-ordinated access to all services. Concerns expressed include that co-ordination and assessment may make services too bureaucratic; that the management cost of co-ordination will increase, reducing resources for direct service delivery</p>	<p>The City Council is exploring sources of additional funding to support the new VCS Infrastructure support services.</p> <p>Systems to deliver and monitor performance will be expected to be part of proposals and the costings of potential providers.</p>
c	<p>Delivery Model: This was the most controversial element of the Draft Commissioning Strategy. While many VCS groups could see the Single Main Provider model preferred by BCC having potential to improve accountability and effective co-ordination the following concerns were expressed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - alternative models for delivery: there were a number of suggestions made that a consortium model could deliver the Outcomes and objectives described in the Draft Commissioning Strategy. - risk of loss of diversity of suppliers - loss of local providers and current good practice and knowledge - private sector provider fails to understand issues or raises ethical concerns - risk of an oppressive single organisation or over-bureaucratic processes - risk that BME VCS needs in particular could be marginalised - as above, that the management costs 	<p>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.</p> <p>The City Council is recommending a Funding Agreement/competitive grant funding mechanism for VCS Infrastructure Support Services. This is only available to not-for-profit organisations. Private sector providers could still supply an element of specialist support services into the whole VCS Infrastructure Service.</p> <p>BCC fully supports an inclusive service and the Service Specification will require delivery of specific benefits to equalities groups, including BME. These will be informed by the Consultation feedback.</p> <p>The efficiency of the processes</p>

Summary of Comments on Draft Commissioning Strategy	Summary of BCC responses
	<p>of the preferred model could increase as a result of their role in managing subcontracting relationships, reducing resources for direct delivery</p> <p>which support front line delivery will form an element for assessing proposals for the new services</p> <p>The City Council is exploring sources of additional funding to support the new VCS Infrastructure support services.</p>
<p>d</p> <p>Equalities: <u>BME VCS</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - groups stressed the need for the new infrastructure services to deliver concrete improvements for them and were concerned that their needs must get met in the new services. - Somali groups stressed that they need to get demonstrable benefits from new services; - Community development-style services are particularly needed - representation work needs to be delivered by BME organisation; - particular concerns were expressed that the Single Main Provider delivery model would make it hard for BME organisations to deliver into the new infrastructure services; - concern that new services must demonstrate how they deliver race equality and Race Relations Act duties; - Interpretation and translation is important to Refugee and asylum services; <p><u>Disabled VCS groups</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - concerned that disability equality is embodied throughout the new services - and that representation should facilitate disabled people's groups to be heard, not act on their behalf; - that new services should contribute to the development of User Led Organisations as part of the Putting People First agenda. <p><u>Women's VCS</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - stressed the development of women's leadership, influence and volunteering; - also low pay within the sector as it 	<p>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 other equalities communities) and will assess proposals against their effectiveness to do this.</p> <p>The City Council will expect providers to comply with Race Equality and all other Equality duties that apply to public bodies. This will be made clear in the Specification.</p> <p>The specific issues from Equalities VCS groups will be developed in the Specification by the Specification Development Group. This group includes 5 VCS representatives, including 2 from Equalities-led VCS groups</p>

Summary of Comments on Draft Commissioning Strategy	Summary of BCC responses
<p>affects women</p> <p><u>Older People's VCS</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - seek to increase influencing and funding support; - support with funding and development of buildings <p><u>Young People's VCS</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - are concerned that support is available outside office hours - supports young people's involvement; <p><u>LGBT VCS</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - want consistent monitoring around sexual orientation across new services - their VCS groups to be supported to influence and in practical service support; <p><u>Faith groups VCS</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - need stronger links with Infrastructure services in order to get benefit from them - to increase their influence. <p>Many of the Equalities VCS groups wanted to see clear equalities representation in the management of new VCS Infrastructure Services.</p>	
<p>e Oversight of services: there was a strong desire to see on-going assessment of how well the new VCS infrastructure support services are working and BCC to get feedback from providers.</p>	<p>The City Council accepts this point and will consider it in the design of Funding Agreement Management</p>
<p>f Commissioning process: Some VCS groups question the degree to which BCC will be influenced by the consultation process, whether decisions have already been made? There is some concern that nothing will change in service provision; queries about whether sufficient consultation has taken place; Whether there is sufficient time within the commissioning process for transition to new service arrangements which doesn't disrupt service provision for the VCS.</p>	<p>The City Council is taking most suggestions forward to the Specification Development Group to be reflected in the Specification.</p> <p>The City Council has made changes as a result of the Consultation – particularly around the Delivery model.</p> <p>The Consultation has received 100 organisations' responses, including extensive consultation with equalities VCS groups</p> <p>The selection process will ask providers to demonstrate their</p>

Summary of Comments on Draft Commissioning Strategy		Summary of BCC responses
		plans for the transition from current service provision to the new services.
g	Balance of Service provision: Overall ideas of where balance of service provision should fall suggested a preference from VCS groups for the greater proportion of resources to be directed at practical support services and a smaller proportion directed at influencing, networking and representation. The balance which emerged from consultation meetings suggested the proportion of 20-25% focused on representation and 75-80% focused on practical support.	These responses will be considered by the Specification Development Group in the design of the Specification

3.3 From Current Infrastructure Providers (see Appendix D)

Summary of Comments on Draft Commissioning Strategy		Summary of BCC responses
a	Service Model: current provider organisations 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.
b	Delivery Model: 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
e	Commissioning Process: Re-draft the commissioning strategy to be 'outcomes-led' and go back out for a further 3 months of	The City Council does not accept this request

Summary of Comments on Draft Commissioning Strategy	Summary of BCC responses
consultation.	
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
The Consultation notice period was short for the earlier consultation meetings	The City Council accepts this and extended the consultation period and organised an additional consultation meeting in mitigation
f Equalities: 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.
G3 Consultation Process: 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

3.4 From Commissioners (see Appendix F)

Summary of Comments on Draft Commissioning Strategy		Summary of BCC responses
a	Outcomes: overall Commissioners supported the draft Outcomes, while noting the need to develop them further through specific performance indicators that focus on what success will look like	The City Council notes the comments
b	Service Model: There was overall support for the Service Model with concern to retain specialist support to parts of the VCS (health/social care); there is support for co-ordinated service delivery and access to services and also for a consistent assessment process and coaching/community development. There was support for support services arranged in layers to meet the different development needs of the VCS. There was one suggestion that representation should be separated from service delivery and that there should be a wide pool of specialist services which could be funded from a bursary fund.	The City Council notes the comments and will consider them in the Specification Development Group
c	Delivery Model: there was support for the Single Main Provider proposal in terms of accountability and leadership of innovative change. GOSW supported BCC being open to a range of potential delivery models, rather than preferring the Single Main Provider over any other	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.
d	Equalities: Commissioners stressed the need for culturally competent services for equalities groups, and a consistent equalities perspective and practices for all equalities groups at the heart of the new services and how they work; the need to deliver stronger voice and influence for equalities groups.	The City Council notes the comments and will consider them in the Specification Development Group, alongside the direct comments from Equalities VCS groups
e	Balance of Service provision: there was an equal split between support for a greater proportion of resources going into practical support services over representation, networking and influencing and an equal allocation of resources between both elements.	The City Council notes the comments and will refer them to the Specification Development Group
f	Further Investment in the new services:	The City Council notes the

	some commissioners indicated their interest in investing additional resource into the new Infrastructure services or in purchasing specific services to support their commissioning or market development within the VCS	suggestions and will finalise any additional investment discussions with other commissioners to include in the final Specification
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Section 3: Voluntary and Community Sector Infrastructure Support Service Proposal and Delivery method

Introduction

This section sets out the Proposal which has been developed in response to the needs, comments and suggestions made during the Needs Assessment process and subsequent comments from the Consultation period.

The Service Model reflects the needs outlined in Section 2 and describes an ideal set of services. The City Council will develop a Specification which focuses on a core set of priorities derived from feedback from stakeholders in the Consultation process.

This proposal is intended to address the frequent references during the Needs Assessment process to the difficulty of knowing what the infrastructure 'offer' is at present, the expressed desire for easy, 'one-shop' point of access and a clear 'menu' of services on offer.

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 impact of VCS Infrastructure Support Services in supporting a thriving Voluntary and Community Sector in Bristol.

1. VCS Infrastructure Service Outcomes

Outcome 1 (supports the high priority given to Improving funding and financial stability and Providing better services in the Needs Assessment)

The Bristol VCS has increased Capacity, Sustainability and Quality

The Voluntary and Community Sector in Bristol becomes more effective, efficient and sustainable

Outcome 2 (supports the high priority given to Providing better services and Increasing your influence in the Needs Assessment)

The Bristol VCS is well-informed and well-connected

There is improved information sharing, partnership working and collaboration between VCS organisations and the Business, Public and Social Enterprise sectors

Outcome 3 (supports the high priority given to Increasing your influence in the Needs Assessment)

Bristol VCS groups have a strong and influential voice

There are structured routes for consultation and dialogue within the VCS that enable the diverse voices of the VCS to be heard

VCS Infrastructure support services facilitate dialogue, consultation, influence and feedback.

Outcome 4 (supports the high priority given to Increasing your influence in the Needs Assessment)

The Bristol VCS has Strategic Involvement

The VCS is represented and is influencing planning and policy making at strategic levels as a result of infrastructure support activities

Outcome 5 (supports the high priority given to Providing better services and Increasing your influence in the Needs Assessment)

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

VCS groups are supported to develop and innovate to meet changing needs and to identify patterns of need to feed into strategic needs assessments in the city

2. Proposed 'Bristol VCS Support Service' Model (see accompanying diagram on page 31 which illustrates the way service layers could be organised.)

Access to the Services (Supports all 5 Outcomes)

Uncertainty about what services are available in total and how to access them is a key theme in the Needs Assessment. The following proposals are intended to address these issues:

2.1. Service identity

The existing set of VCS Infrastructure services are identified through the distinct organisations which provide them and access to them is strongly dependant on knowing which organisation to approach and what they can provide.

The Proposed Voluntary and Community Sector Infrastructure Support Model should have an explicit, clear and distinct identity through which all available support and services are described and can be accessed. So the Service should have an identity and a title such as, for example, **Bristol VCS Support Service** under which any potential user of the services can see all available support, representation, information and influencing services.

This Service Identity should have a clear 'brand' identity and be promoted as a single, integrated offer to the Bristol VCS and statutory sectors. As a 'brand' its identify should take precedence over the particular organisation or organisations which deliver the specific services which make up the whole.

2.2. Access into the Service

The **Bristol VCS Support Service** should be able to be accessed through its own website, via e-mail, phone contact (with appropriate accessibility options for deaf and visually impaired users), through VCS support drop-in services and by direct referral.

Service Levels

The Needs Assessment came up with suggestions that Infrastructure support should be organised into 'tiers' of service in recognition of the different needs of VCS groups of

very different sizes, stages of organisational development and capacity. This is expressed in the following proposed series of service levels:

2.3. Enquiry and Assessment service (supports Outcome 1)

All contacts with the **Bristol VCS Support Service** should be handled and responded to in a consistent, good quality manner. All enquiries should be responded to within an agreed time and a record kept of the enquiry. All requests for assistance should be assessed. This can range from a simple response to an information request to making a time to visit a group to sit down and explore a range of support needs. This can result in referral to specific services available within the **Bristol VCS Support Service** or an exploration of how to access them outside the available services.

Availability of Enquiry and Assessment: it is envisaged that this process could be delivered at a number of access points and that all or most organisations which provide services within the framework of **Bristol VCS Support Service** should provide this service and deliver it to agreed, common standards. Because VCS organisations made the point that many are run entirely by volunteers and that they need access to Infrastructure outside of 9 to 5 hours the possibility should be explored of an evening and/or Saturday Enquiry and Assessment service to help these groups.

2.4. Community Development 'wrap-around' Service (Supports Outcome 1 & 5)

This is a gap that was highlighted from all contributors to the Needs Assessment as a need for new, forming VCS groups, for communities new to the city, for VCS groups led by Equalities communities and within deprived neighbourhoods and for small VCS groups. It could deliver

- provide staffing with community development skills who can build effective helping relationships with the above groups, offer a capacity-building service and continuity of relationship. These characteristics have been strongly identified as important to the success of this level of service.
- While this service will deliver support directly it can also broker access to specialist services and training within the broader **Bristol VCS Support Service**.
- The service will help VCS groups develop effective governance, volunteer support and all the bedrock elements of a VCS group reflected in Bristol City Council Baseline Standards. It will also help smaller groups develop their influencing capacity.
- The service will deliver consistent standards and a consistent way of recording input and identifying the outcomes which their work achieves.
- A possible element of this service is to provide an exploratory '**research and development**' service to groups proposing new service development. This could involve exploring the 'business case' for new groups and services, routes to fit with statutory policy, strategies and funding/commissioning options and how new ideas could join up/add value to existing groups or work in the city. The aim of this element of the service would be to determine the feasibility of new service ideas and increase efficient use of resources and volunteer time.
- **Practical support, accommodation and resources:** this is a particular need of newer/smaller groups who could benefit from this service. As an offer

it should include access to office spaces, 'hot-desking', administration and IT support and meeting space to enable new, unfunded groups to access basic practical tools

2.5. Established VCS groups development service (Supports Outcome 1 and 5)

VCS groups which have a moderate level of funding, are established in legal and service provision terms have a wide range of support needs for both maintenance and growth and development, as well as the need to influence city strategy, develop their practice and improve services. This service element could deliver:

- A **Training** programme which responds to current and up-coming needs within the VCS
- Access to a range of **specialist support services**, some of which could be a permanent 'standing' element within the **Bristol VCS Support Service** (eg. Community Accountancy support; Legal and governance support; volunteer placement and support). Some could be bought on a 'spot purchasing' arrangement as needed. Some, such as a VCS Building support service, have been indicated as a need in the Needs Assessment but are not part of the current VCS Infrastructure support.
- Ideally **specialist support** would include: Community Accountancy; Volunteer Support; Legal and Governance support; Equalities expertise; Performance improvement; Funding, fundraising support & income-generation advice; PR and marketing skills; ICT support and new media; Human Resource legal advice and support; Business planning services; Procurement and Commissioning support; Building and accommodation support
- Delivery of '**outcome-focused**' **support packages**. Tailored consultancy and organisational development either to specific VCS groups, or VCS groups within a neighbourhood or group of similar VCS organisations to assist with organisational development or sector development or skills development.
- A '**crisis/problem-solving**' **response** capacity to assist VCS groups with specific difficulties such as disciplinary/legal/conflict-resolution problems.

2.6. Established VCS Groups Service (Support Outcome 1 & 5)

This level of service is about meeting the needs of established organisations with a reasonable level of funding and resources for access to specialist services, training and tailored service development, in many ways similar to the mid-range programme of services set out above. A key difference is that many of the most-established VCS groups may well have their own HR services or access to specialists themselves through membership of national specialist infrastructure bodies.

- Access to specialist services, information, training and tailored service development
- A role for the **Bristol VCS Support Service** could be to broker ways in which better established VCS groups could support the wider VCS with, for example, leadership mentoring, service development etc.

- It could also include brokering in support from the private sector to support the VCS.

2.7. Strategic development, Representation, Policy and Sector Promotion (Supports Outcomes 2, 3, 4 and 5)

This 'level' is an overarching set of activities which encompasses all kinds of VCS groups and runs through all levels of the ***Bristol VCS Support Service***, enabling:

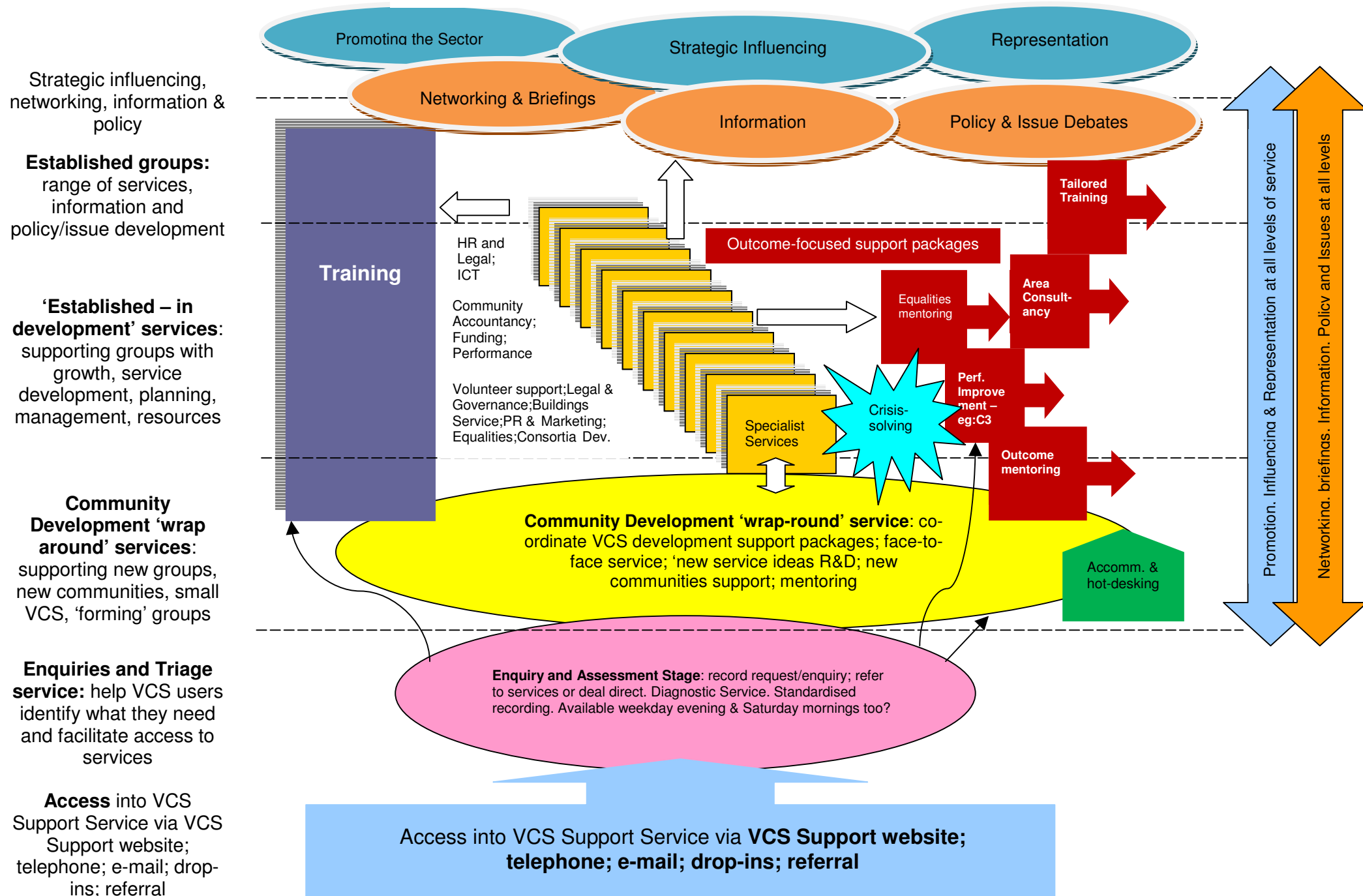
- Networking
- information sharing and dissemination
- wider policy and issues discussion and debate
- Representation and consultation
- Mobilising the varying layers of VCS 'voice'
- Engaging and enabling engagement in strategic developments in the city, regionally and nationally
- Promoting the sector

2.8. Relationships with complementary networks

The ***Bristol VCS Support Service*** should facilitate positive relationships with all other specialist VCS infrastructure supporting organisations within the city (for example Social Enterprise Works, BAND, Young Bristol) and with Statutory and private sector partners (such as NHS Bristol, BCC Community Development) which support the successful thriving of the VCS in Bristol.

Sub-regional, regional and national consortia and VCS Infrastructure umbrella organisations are also significant partners and active relationships must be developed/maintained to support the Bristol VCS with access to resources, capacity, information and good practice models as well as access to influence on regional and national strategy.

2.9 VCS Infrastructure Support Model



3. Delivery of the '*Bristol VCS Support Service*'

Following feedback during the Consultation process the City Council accepts that a range of possible delivery models could be put forward by potential providers to deliver the Service Outcomes, as set out in Section 3, paragraphs 1 and 2.

3.1. Delivery Models

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.

3.2. A single Proposal and Lead Organisation

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.

3.3. Support for Consortium formation

The City Council will actively support potential providers to explore the formation of consortia

3.4. Equalities VCS groups and VCS groups in deprived communities

Service delivery to Equalities-led VCS groups and Equalities communities and infrastructure support to VCS groups within Bristol's more deprived neighbourhoods will be a service priority. An Equalities Impact Assessment has been completed (Part 1 and Part 2 are attached as **Appendices I & J**). This included specific consultation events across all Equalities VCS groups. Their comments are recorded in **Appendix D** and will be reflected in the Specification.

- The ***Bristol VCS Support Service*** must deliver effective, outcome-evidenced support to BME-led; Disabled-led and other Equalities-led VCS groups. This will be described in the Service Specification.
- Service delivery and effective outcomes for VCS groups in deprived neighbourhoods must be delivered by the service.
- Specific delivery plans to ensure that the needs of Equalities VCS groups are effectively met will be essential for the Provider(s) to demonstrate in their delivery plan.
- The representation of the voice of Equalities VCS and VCS groups within deprived neighbourhoods must be reflected in the representation, influencing and policy development elements of the ***Bristol VCS Support Service***.

3.5. Market Assessment process

A key factor in deciding the funding mechanism for the **Bristol VCS Support Service** is the Market Assessment. This involves assessing how many organisations are interested in putting themselves forward as potential the Single Main Provider Organisation and how many are interested in supplying elements of the Support Service as sub-contractees of the Main Provider.

In order to assess the level of interest the Project contacted all potential organisations registered on BePS (the Bristol e-Procurement System) to notify them that BCC is looking for potential suppliers and asking them if they wanted to register an interest as a potential provider. This produced 115 interested organisations.

Having established the potential market for provision the Project Board used this information as part of the decision making process in putting forward a recommendation about the funding method for the new VCS Infrastructure services.

3.6. Service funding method

The current VCS Infrastructure services are **grant-funded** through the Community Investment Strategy 2008-2011.

The Project Board sought advice from Bristol City Council's Legal Service to guide them in making a recommendation to Bristol City Council Cabinet on the funding method for the new **Bristol VCS Support Service**.

The decision was made in January 2010 to fund the new services through a **competitive Funding Agreement/grant process**, making the opportunity available nationally in order to create contestability and produce a number of proposals from which the City Council can chose the best to achieve the Outcomes in this Strategy.

Section 4: Next Steps in taking forward the Commissioning Strategy

Introduction

This section describes the activities which will take place during stage 4 of the VCS Infrastructure Commissioning Project (April 2010 - January 2011) to purchase the new VCS Infrastructure Support Services

1. Provider Events

When Cabinet approval is obtained for the Strategy the City Council will invite potential providers to Provider Events in April/May 2010 to enable them to explore collaborative partnerships for service delivery.

2. Specification development process

The development of a Specification for the **Bristol VCS Support Service** is being undertaken by a Service Specification Development Group.

2.1. Service Specification Development Group

In order to represent the interests of a wide range of stakeholders the Group consists of a maximum of 14 people, comprised of the following membership:

2.2. Membership

- Bristol Voluntary and Community groups, as potential users of VCS Infrastructure services: maximum of 3
- Equalities VCS groups, as potential users of VCS Infrastructure services: maximum of 2
- Bristol City Council: Investment & Grants Team maximum of 2
- Bristol City Council: Health and Social Care: maximum of 1
- Bristol City Council; Children's and Young Peoples Services: maximum of 1
- Bristol City Council Commissioning Team: maximum of 1
- NHS Bristol: maximum of 1
- Bristol Partnership: maximum of 2

The Group is serviced by the Commissioning VCS Infrastructure Project Manager.

2.3. Aims of the Specification Group

The Specification Development Group has agreed the following aims for their work:

- a. To draft a Specification for VCS Infrastructure Support Services to recommend to the Project Board for approval
- b. To develop the Draft Outcomes in the Draft Commissioning Strategy for use in the Specification
- c. To develop Key Performance Indicators for use in the Specification and subsequent monitoring of the services commissioned
- d. To develop a pre-qualification questionnaire for use in assessing bidding organisations
- e. To develop assessment/evaluation criteria and weighting for use in the bid assessment process

- f. To ensure the needs of equalities VCS groups are reflected in the Specification
- g. To make recommendations of any quality standards for providers which should be included in the Specification
- h. To make recommendations on priorities for key areas of work to support with the available funding

The Group will forward a Specification, evaluation criteria and proposed Bidding process to the Project Board for approval at the end of April 2010.

2.4. Meeting frequency:

The Group is meeting from January 2010 to April 2010.

3. Commissioning VCS Infrastructure Support Project activities timetable, March 2010 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

4. Project Timetable for the Commissioning VCS Infrastructure Support Project

The timetable for the entire Commissioning VCS Infrastructure Support Project is attached as **Appendix L: Project Timetable Version 8.0)**