



Office of the
Deputy Prime Minister

Creating sustainable communities

National Evaluation of Local Strategic Partnerships

Issues Paper:
Voluntary and Community Sector Engagement
in Local Strategic Partnerships

December 2005



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Deputy Prime Minister
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Department for
Transport

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in Local Strategic Partnerships

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CONTENTS

Executive Summary	i
Glossary	ix
1. Introduction	1
1.1 The Issues Paper	1
1.2 The Voluntary and Community Sector	2
1.3 An evolving role	2
2. Active Communities	4
2.1 Definitions	4
2.2 The VCS and social capital	8
2.3 Active communities and community involvement	10
2.4 Civil renewal	11
3. The VCS and LSP Structures	13
3.1 Local Strategic partnerships	13
3.2 VCS roles	13
3.3 VCS representation on LSPs	15
3.4 VCS and local government	19
4. NRF LSPs and Community Participation Programmes	21
4.1 The Single Community Programme	21
4.2 The purpose of the Community Empowerment Fund	21
4.3 Developing the Community Empowerment Network	24
4.4 CEN activities and achievements	26
4.5 CENs and LSPs	28
5. Relating to the wider constituency	30
5.1 How representative?	30
5.2 Wider involvement	30
5.3 Equalities	33
6. Impact of VCS Involvement on LSPs	37
6.1 Representation – to what effect?	37
6.2 Factors affecting participation in the LSP	39
6.3 Impact	40
7. Capacity and Capacity Building	44
7.1 LSPs' support to the VCS	44
7.2 Capacity building within the sector	46
7.3 Future priorities	47
8. Conclusions and summary of key issues	49
8.1 Main messages	49
8.2 Key issues	50
8.3 Looking ahead	54
Appendix 1: CENI template	56
Appendix 2: References	57

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This is one of series of papers produced as an output of the national evaluation of Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs). The policy clients identified issues of current interest where additional issues papers would be helpful to inform discussion.

Before drawing upon evidence from the LSP evaluation and other research, the paper looks at the changing role of the voluntary and community sector (VCS) over recent decades and the way that it has assumed more importance in government policy as reflected in policy initiatives to give it a greater role in both governance and service delivery. It is seen as contributing to the development of different types of social capital. Nevertheless, there remains uncertainty about the nature of the sector and its actual and potential role, and about some of the related terms and concepts in common use. The report tries to disentangle these.

LSPs are a key part of the government's modernisation agenda. As cross-sectoral, non-statutory, non-executive organisations, their membership and structure should reflect the breadth of their role as well as local circumstances and priorities. The VCS is one of the sectors which government guidance specifies that LSPs should engage. It is a complex task because the VCS is so diverse, spanning groups that vary in size, activities and constituencies. There is a continuum of voluntary and community organisations with no hard and fast distinction between them though there may be marked differences between ones at either end of the spectrum.

This summary focuses first on the main messages coming out of the surveys and case studies that formed part of the national evaluation of LSPs, with reference also to the evaluation of the Community Participation Programmes (CPPs). It gives some examples of VCS representation on, and roles within, LSPs. It then identifies key issues emerging from the study.

Main messages

- There is wide variation in the nature of the sector in different areas, the balance between the voluntary and community organisations and how well the infrastructure is developed.
- There is similarly wide variation in the patterns of VCS representation on LSPs, whether and how they distinguish between the voluntary and community sectors, the types of organisation involved, the level of representation and the means of selection.
- Although the CPPs have played a significant role in Neighbourhood Renewal Fund areas, there are not only differences between NRF and non-NRF areas but also within each of these groupings.
- Time and resources are constraining factors on the sector's involvement, but so also are factors associated with the culture of partnership working and uncertainty both within the sector and amongst partners about the role of the VCS within LSPs.

- The existing relationship between the VCS and the local authority can influence the scope and effectiveness of VCS involvement and be a limiting factor especially if there is perceived to be a very close alignment between the LSP and the Council.
- VCS involvement in wider LSP structures such as thematic groups is important and may provide greater opportunities for influence.
- There is a distinction between engaging the VCS and wider community consultation and participation. LSPs need mechanisms for both.
- Capacity building inside the sector is a prerequisite for full VCS participation and parity of partnership. LSPs can provide different kinds of valuable support and action can be taken by VCS organisations themselves, but the indications are that insufficient resources are being made available yet in most areas for the amount of work that is needed and for a properly strategic and targeted approach.
- It is difficult to measure the impact of the VCS – perceived or actual – or the effectiveness of LSPs in engaging the sector. It would be a time-consuming exercise and attribution would always be problematic. Many factors will affect impact: the sector itself may have no control over some of them and LSPs have no control over others. However, other partners in LSPs recognise the importance of VCS involvement, in particular for the distinctive perspectives that sector representatives can bring and in relation to engaging deprived communities and excluded groups.
- For the sector, the question of the ‘costs’ of partnership and whether the outcome is commensurate with all the effort expended remains a relevant one. Nevertheless, there are major benefits stemming from involvement, including increased knowledge, gaining greater recognition and trust from other sectors and having access to decision making.

Illustrating the messages

The case studies and surveys in the evaluation showed wide variation across LSPs about:

- whether and how far they distinguish between the voluntary and community sectors and what these each comprise;
- the level of representation on the LSP;
- whether or not BME and faith communities come through the VCS or separately;
- the mechanisms for engaging the VCS and selecting/electing representatives;
- the extent to which representatives on LSPs see themselves as representative and accountable to their constituency or rather bringing a particular perspective.

The sector may be represented on LSPs through a variety of types of organisation:

- VCS umbrella groups;
- community network;
- specific voluntary organisations or individuals;
- faith organisations;
- BME groups;
- area or neighbourhood partnerships.

Community Networks in NRF areas, funded through the Community Empowerment Fund are in themselves complex organisations. For example, the Community Network in one NRF city is a 'network of networks'. Together these cover about 1,300 groups representing 65,000 people. Linked with these networks, there are nine thematic steering groups feeding into the Community Network: Arts and Culture; Black and Racial Minorities; Senior Citizens; Faith Communities; Environment; Health and Social Care; 0-25s; Disability; Community Regeneration Forum bringing together people from 5 geographic partnerships across the city.

The VCS has often enabled LSPs to reach groups that might otherwise be excluded. One LSP, for instance, has a range of targeted forums: Strategic Ethnic Alliance; Youth Council; Anti-Homophobic Forum; Disabilities Forum; Pensioners' Forum; engagement with faith groups through Borough Deans, the African-Caribbean Evangelical Alliance and the Moslem Forum. VCS bodies can also help LSPs widen the net of involvement through local forums, conferences and through Community Network members.

There are various ways in which LSPs can support VCS engagement:

- briefing meetings with CEN co-ordinators or VCS representatives;
- support in auditing the sector;
- developing rules of engagement between the VCS and other agencies, through protocols about relationships within the LSP and compacts about wider partnership working;
- providing direct funding, especially in non-NRF areas.

Capacity building is also taking place within the sector itself. In some cases, new infrastructure organisations have been created, which can be the basis for further sectoral development. Some CENs or infrastructure bodies have developed specific training and support mechanisms for VCS representatives on the LSP. The Community Participation Programmes have enabled wider provision extending to previously neglected parts of the sector. Lessons emerged about the length of time and intensity of work needed to reach the most marginalised groups.

Key issues

A number of issues have arisen in the course of this report that would repay both further exploration in future studies of LSPs and more consideration by LSPs themselves.

❑ **The distinctive nature of the sector**

Although the government guidance does not clearly distinguish between the voluntary and community sectors, there are important differences across the spectrum of organisations within the VCS and they are differences that have implications for LSPs. They affect the degree of difficulty in engaging different groups, the nature of their potential contribution and the level and type of support they require.

There are also issues for the sector itself. How does it define itself? Can it define itself? Where does it begin and end? For example, are faith communities part of the VCS or a separate sector? What is the role of infrastructure organisations? How do they span the diversity of organisations and bring together communities of place and communities of interest?

Does the emphasis on *community* engagement mean that advocacy-type organisations are more likely to get drawn in than the larger service deliverers? If so, on the one hand, how do they retain their critical edge whilst at the same time still carrying the full responsibilities of partnership? On the other, where do the voluntary organisations that may be playing a significant service provision role contracted by public sector agencies fit as far as LSPs are concerned? Is it within the VCS or within the relevant sphere of service providers?

❑ **Representation and role**

Another major theme is the challenge for LSPs and the sector of achieving adequate VCS representation and gaining a common understanding and consensus about what 'representation' means. Given the size and complexity of the VCS and recognising that individuals cannot be fully representative, there remain the issues of how representatives should be chosen and how they can be accountable to their constituency. Taking steps towards greater trust and integration within the sector may be as much a prerequisite as building infrastructure and capacity.

How large the representation from the sector should be is one of the critical issues. For many purposes, the overall membership of the different LSP groupings needs to be kept fairly tight in order to remain strategic and action focused. There is an ongoing tension between inclusiveness and effectiveness. After a period of expansion, some LSPs looked again at their Board membership with a view to becoming 'leaner and fitter'. However, having fewer members possibly raises more representational issues for the VCS than it does for other sectors because of the enormous diversity of organisations and interest it encompasses.

The diverse arrangements and different levels and types of participation signal that potentially the VCS has a range of roles within an LSP. It has emerged from the evaluation that partners inside and outside the sector are unclear about what is expected and about how to turn a general sense that participation is necessary and beneficial into practical reality. LSPs need to answer several questions about:

- what is the function of the sector within the LSP in general and in relation to its specific priorities;
- what the VCS representatives are there to do and their role in relation to their own constituency as well as LSP partners;

- whether there is scope for further clarification about the range of possible functions and the types of organisations best placed to fulfil them;
- what are the implications of VCS involvement in LSPs for other forms of governance.

A further question is where within the LSP structures the VCS is most likely to have an impact. There is a danger of viewing LSPs too hierarchically so that people think that the most important place to be is on the Board or Executive whereas some VCS representatives may be more influential on, or have a greater contribution to make to, thematic or area-based groups. The absence of a considered approach to involvement can reflect a lack of understanding or consensus about the purpose of participating.

There remains a need to clarify the relationship between participative and representative democracy and the distinction between the roles of elected members and those of VCS representatives

□ Capacity building

The Local Partnerships Taskforce has produced a Checklist for effective local partnerships addressed to local practitioners in the public and voluntary sectors, but also including supportive actions that might be taken, including ones for central government departments. It covers five areas:

- improving understanding;
- joining-up policy;
- organising ourselves;
- sharing good practice;
- funding it better.

All of these link with the experience of LSPs. It is clear from the evaluation that VCS organisations need and want more support in terms of understanding and resources. There is scope for developmental work at the level of infrastructure bodies, member organisations and individual staff and volunteers. Compacts and protocols are already helpful but there is more to be done in extending their coverage and ensuring compliance and full implementation, with a possible role for Government Offices in monitoring and spreading good practice. There may also be a need now to revisit and strengthen compacts to take account of changes that Local Area Agreements might bring.

The study has also underlined the critical need for resources. The CPPs have been valuable but confined to NRF areas. There are other sources of funding available and there may be a need in each locality to map central government funding sources - not just Home Office and the NRU but other government departments (e.g. DfES Children's Fund's focus on participation of children and young people) - and regional and local sources. More key spending decisions are made by public sector partners within the LSP than by the LSP itself so that mapping local sources could be a

preliminary to making more considered and joined-up long term investment decisions.

The need for capacity building is not confined to the VCS. New forms of governance are not solely a question of bringing in new partners but also a matter of changed relationships. For the sector, this means fully accepting the responsibilities of partnership as well as recognising its potential benefits. For all partners, it means building greater mutual understanding and recognition of the contributions different sectors make and therefore it has implications for capacity building in all sectors. As the National Audit Office indicated, community participation presents a challenge to the way that public and private sector organisations work so that there is a need for wider institutional and behavioural change. Working in a way that facilitates community participation makes particular demands on public sector agencies that may require new forms of organisation, new skills and new roles.

Establishing a clearer policy context nationally and locally could be said to be another form of capacity building. Several of the recommendations of the Local Partnerships Taskforce Checklist are relevant here. At national level, it cites, for example, the need for government departments to present a consistent message to local delivery agents about working with the third sector and generally to develop a clearer rationale for working in partnership with the sector. Locally, it encourages councils to consider the scope for Local Public Service Agreements to focus on effective partnership working with the VCS and recommends that LSPs should consider using the checklist as a basis for an annual health check of their partnership arrangements with the sector.

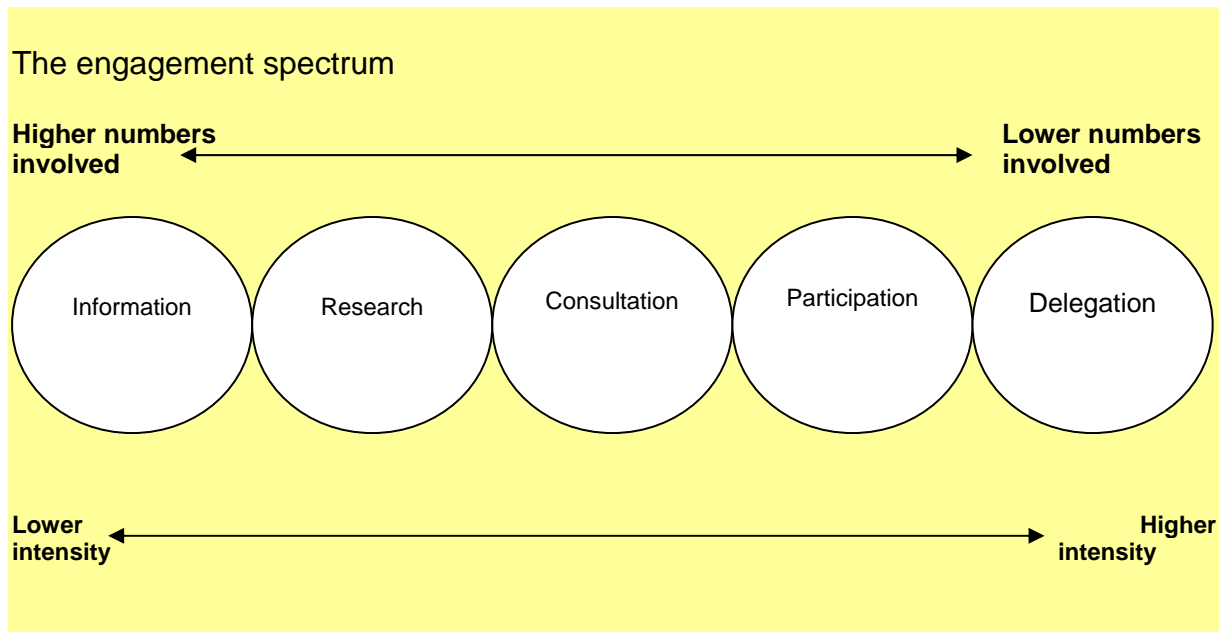
□ **The nature of engagement**

Just as 'community' is a catch-all word that can mean different things to different people or in different contexts, so is 'engagement'. It is clear that the VCS is critical to successful community engagement by LSPs even if it is not the whole answer. What is the relationship between engaging the VCS and engaging the general public?

The Community Engagement Action Learning Set run as part of the LSP evaluation devised an 'engagement spectrum' based upon Sherry Arnstein's ladder of participation (figure). The framework is a way of categorising the different forms of engagement:

- giving *information* to people for the sake of communicating or to enable them to make more informed decisions, which might be through newsletter, websites, roadshows, etc., and might be targeted on specific groups.
- *research* which may be structured (through surveys, interviews or focus groups) or unstructured (such as gathering feedback from service users, for example through suggestion boxes);
- *consultation* through a variety of techniques, such as conferences, workshops, asking for written responses to policies, provision or proposals.
- *participation* that may cover, *inter alia*, involvement in partnership structures or representative involvement on boards.

- *delegation* of responsibilities, powers, management/ownership or budget holding.



It is a framework that has application to any and all of the groups of stakeholders in an LSP. As far as the LSP is concerned, there is scope at one end of the spectrum to reach out to residents and the community at large as well as the VCS but the distinctive roles of the sector depend upon the higher intensity activities at the other end.

In summary, there are key issues for the sector itself, for LSPs and for central government.

For the VCS, it is important to:

- build trust and linkages within the sector;
- develop an infrastructure adequate to encompass the sector's diversity, including different types of organisation, communities of place and communities of interest;
- reach a common mind about the purposes of engaging in LSPs and determine the membership and forms of participation that might best achieve these goals;
- look for ways of building capacity through personal, organisational and infrastructure development.

It is important for LSPs to:

- recognise the breadth and diversity of the VCS, understand its potential roles and provide appropriate mechanisms for engagement;

- promote the necessary institutional changes and build their own and their partners' capacity for working in ways that facilitate partnership with the VCS and community participation;
 - provide resources and support for the sector and help it to access potential funding sources;
 - look at the scope of LPSAs to focus on effective partnership working with the VCS;
 - revisit compacts in relation to any changes brought by Local Area Agreements.
- It is important for central government to:
- develop a clearer rationale about working in partnership with the VCS;
 - present a consistent message to their local agencies about working with the VCS;
 - recognise the resource demands that involvement in partnerships makes upon individual organisations and the sector as a whole.

Looking ahead

To some extent the community participation agenda has shifted again very recently. Several developments are bringing a greater focus on neighbourhood level working: the introduction of the Single Community Programme, the Safer and Stronger Communities Fund, the focus on floor target performance to narrow the gap at neighbourhood level, the launch of *Together We Can*. All these increase the challenge to the sector to be a credible partner. One of the implications, for example, is LSPs holding the VCS to account more and a switch away from the process issues that have hitherto been central to the performance management framework for CENs to much greater focus on outcomes. This will test how far current capacity building measures are really producing the thoroughgoing shake-up of the sector comparable with the modernisation that public sector agencies have been subjected to over recent years. It underlines the potentially crucial role of the *ChangeUp* funding programme and the need for it to be used strategically.

LSPs and their partner organisations will also have to be clearer about what they want from VSC engagement and what they have to do to support the sector's role. This entails developing a better understanding of both the constraints and the potential of the sector. Given a stronger role for LSPs in initiatives such as Local Area Agreements, it is particularly important that local players translate the general dictums of the guidance about VSC involvement into firm strategies and action plans appropriate to local circumstances and priorities.

GLOSSARY

ACU	Asctive Communities Unit
BME	Black and Minority Ethnic
CC	Community Chest
CLC	Community Learning Chest
CEF	Community Empowerment Fund
CEN	Community Empowerment Network
CENI	Community Evaluation Northern Ireland
CPPs	Community Participation Programmes
CRU	Civil Renewal Unit
CVS	Council for Voluntary Service
DfES	Department for Education and Skills
HO	Home Office
LAAs	Local Area Agreements
LNRS	Local Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy
LO	Lead Organisation
LPSA	Local Public Service Agreement
LSP	Local Strategic Partnership
NAO	National Audit Office
NCVO	National Council for Voluntary Organisations
NRF	Neighbourhood Renewal Fund
NRU	Neighbourhood Renewal Unit
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
ODPM	Office of the Deputy Prime Minister
ONS	Office for National Statistics
PIU	Performance and Innovation Unit
RSL	Registered Social Landlord
VCS	Voluntary and Community Sector

VOLUNTARY AND COMMUNITY SECTOR ENGAGEMENT IN LOCAL STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS

1. INTRODUCTION

“ one of the oldest and most basic forms of human activity: the voluntary coming together of individuals to engage in mutual undertakings for their common good. These activities predate the appearance of the state, in any form that would be recognisable to a modern observer. Equally, they are wholly distinct from market exchanges, in not being embarked on for financial profit.” (NCVO 1996, p.15)

1.1 The issues paper

This issues paper is an output from the national evaluation of Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) sponsored by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) and the Department for Transport. The overall aims of the research are to facilitate and support the development of LSPs, to evaluate implementation processes and to inform policy. As part of the programme, policy clients identified a series of issues of current interest, where additional issues papers would be helpful to inform discussion. The involvement of the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) was one of the issues chosen.

The paper brings together different sorts of material. As well as referring to key background documents relating to the VCS and recent policy developments affecting the sector, it draws upon the various strands of the LSP research:

- the case studies carried out in nine LSPs;
- the 2002 and 2004 LSP surveys;
- the action learning set that focused on community engagement.

The paper is structured as follows. In the introductory section, the remainder of this chapter reviews the way the role of the VCS has evolved over the past fifty years. Chapter 2 continues to put the paper in context by examining various concepts that feature in debates about community involvement and outlining ways in which government is currently encouraging a stronger role for the VCS. In the main part of the paper:

- Chapter 3 looks at the VCS and LSP structures.
- Chapter 4 covers NRF LSPs and Community Participation Programmes.
- Chapter 5 examines the relationship between VCS representation in LSPs and the sector as a whole and issues of wider involvement.
- Chapter 6 looks at how far VCS involvement in LSPs is having an impact.
- Chapter 7 focuses on capacity and capacity building.
- Chapter 8 draws together the emerging conclusions and key issues.

1.2 The Voluntary and Community Sector

The VCS covers groups that deliver not-for-profit services and activities that are independent of central and local government even though they may receive funding. The sector includes registered charities and non-charitable and non-profit organisations. Voluntary organisations often have paid staff in addition to volunteers. They are more likely cover wider areas than community groups, have a higher financial turnover and have formal service contracts. Even voluntary organisations range from large national bodies that feed into policy making as well as delivering services to smaller local advocacy or service delivery charities. Community groups are less likely to have paid staff, will usually cover a smaller area and are run by their members. Many are entirely or almost entirely dependent upon voluntary activity. Again they vary widely in terms of size, activities and constituencies.

It is sometimes argued that voluntary and community are two sectors not one, but it is difficult to draw a hard and fast distinction. Rather, there is a continuum of organisations. There may be marked differences between ones at either end of the spectrum, but there is also an area in the middle where they merge or overlap. Altogether, the sector is difficult to delineate. On the one hand, the range of organisations covered is so diverse that it is questionable whether they can be encompassed under one heading. On the other, the boundary between some voluntary organisations and some private sector service organisations providing similar services is becoming increasingly blurred.

1.3 An evolving role

The VCS operates within that sphere of activity known as 'civil society', that is, in the space between the state and the market:

. . . the sphere of institutions, organisations and individuals located between the family, state and the market in which people associate voluntarily to advance common interests. (Helmut K. Anheier, Civil Society, 2004, quoted in NCVO 2005)

The relationship between the sector and government is critical to the scope and contribution of the VCS. It has undergone significant fluctuation over the past half century. The immediate post-War period saw the expansion of the state into areas such as health and welfare previously occupied by voluntary action and an assumption that the sector's role could now become one of "filling the gaps that even an efficient state system would inevitably leave" (Deakin in NCVO 2005, p.22). By the 1960s and 70s, it became clear that not only were there gaps in state provision but that its style was frequently inappropriate and failing to meet the needs of some groups. The VCS spoke up on these deficiencies and presented alternative approaches. However, when during the late 1970s, the government turned more to market solutions to the economic crisis and its impact, the sector was again relegated to a more subordinate position. Although in the early 1980s, the merits of 'active citizenship' started to be trumpeted, it was against a background of government mistrust of the sector. First there were doubts about its efficiency and professionalism – partly stemming from confusion between volunteering and the activities of voluntary organisations. Secondly, its campaigning role fuelled suspicion

that it was unsympathetic to market forces for resolving economic and social problems.

By the 1990s, the limits of the market had become very evident and, at that stage, politicians across the political spectrum started to look for new ways of balancing state, market and VCS activity with the result that the sector is again being seen as an important player.

In this new synthesis between the state as enabler, funder and regulator and the market as a key device for delivery, the voluntary and community sector has found itself offered a new and more prominent role. This is as both the authentic representatives of the citizen body's aspirations, outside the confines of political loyalties, and the means by which services that are sensitive to local needs and preferences can best be delivered. (Deakin in NCVO 2005, p.23)

The sector is now being seen as having an important part to play "in realising the Government's overall aims, which are:

- equitable and efficient public services, offering value for money for the taxpayer;
- a strong civil society with inclusive and cohesive communities; and
- a stable, productive and enterprising economy with opportunity for all." (HM Treasury 2004(a)).

The voluntary sector is growing in terms of the number of organisations, their total income and the size of the paid workforce. In 2001/2, it was estimated that the sector contributed at least £7 billion to the UK economy, a rise of over 250% in ten years (NCVO 2004 quoted in HM Treasury 2004(a)).

This growth in scope and significance is matched by the sector's growing prominence in public policy. The term 'active communities' has become increasingly common currency especially since 1997. It denotes action on the ground but is also the title of the Home Office agency that has the main responsibility for dealing with the VCS. In addition, the sector has moved more centre stage in government policies stemming from other departments, notably ODPM, featuring, for example, in relation to governance and neighbourhood renewal.

Despite this, there remains considerable uncertainty about the nature of the sector and its actual and potential role, and about some of the terms and concepts commonly used in relation to it. The next section of this report, therefore, tries to disentangle some of these threads before the rest of the report addresses VCS involvement in LSPs.

2. ACTIVE COMMUNITIES

2.1 Definitions

Various concepts now in common use relating directly or indirectly to the VCS need clarification:

- community
- community activity and involvement
- community capacity
- community capacity building
- community development
- social capital.

The first term that needs defining is **community**. As Chanan points out, many policy documents use the term simple to mean 'local population', which then gives a connotation of people identifying with the place and each other (Chanan 2003, p.12). However, community is a vague and elusive term that has a diversity of meanings. (Box 2.1)

Box 2.1 Meanings of community

- Community as heritage – expressing a common cultural tradition or identity, a sense of continuity and belonging.
- Community as social relationships – interrelations, reflected in kinship, neighbourliness, mutuality and social interaction often linked with the residential base.
- Community as the basis for collective consumption – linked with the needs or demands of groups or neighbourhoods for local public goods, such as transport or play facilities.
- Community as the basis for the most effective provision of local public goods, whether by public, private or voluntary sectors, including the community itself.
- Community as the source of influence and power from which is derived empowerment and representation, whether through formal or informal representation or participative channels of political action.
- The converse of this is community as a shared sense of powerlessness and alienation.

Community activity¹ can be seen under three headings:

- *Action to build social capital* - building relationships, trust, shared norms and networks. It involves people taking part in community initiatives, groups and organisations, and those groups communicating with the wider population as volunteers, members and participants.
- *Delivering services* – either autonomous services provided by communities, or specialist services provided by community or voluntary groups, controlled by contracts or service level agreements with public agencies.

¹ The definitions used are those that appear in *Building Civil Renewal* (Home Office 2003(a) and (b)).

- *Involvement in governance* – representing the interests of all local people or of particular groups in influencing decisions that affect the quality of local life.

Community capacity is the capacity of the people in communities to participate in actions based on community interests, both as individuals and through groups, organisations and networks.

Signifying activities, resources and support that strengthen the skills and abilities of people enabling them to take effective action and leading roles in the development of their communities, **community capacity building** comprises three main types of activity:

- *Developing skills* – learning and training opportunities for individuals and groups, and sharing through networks and mutual support, to develop skills, knowledge and confidence.
- *Developing structures* – developing the organisational structures and strengths of community groups, communities of interest and networks.
- *Developing support* – developing the availability of practical support to enable the development of skills and structures.

Box 2.1: Key principles of community capacity building*

- **Flexible, reflecting local needs and preferences** - reflecting the diversity of local cultures, using a diversity of approaches to learning and avoiding over-bureaucratic procedures.
- **Democracy** – enhancing democratic decision-making processes within communities, including those relating to local government and other public agencies and supporting community representatives in being more accountable to their communities.
- **Empowerment** – by being organised openly and transparently and building skills, confidence and critical awareness of participants.
- **Inclusion** – seeking to build community organisations open to all who wish to use their services, promoting activities without any form of discrimination, celebrating diversity, encompassing positive action on equality issues and facilitating the inclusion of grass roots community groups.
- **Self reliance** – developing the sharing of resources, co-operation and mutual support in communities; supporting autonomous self-help groups controlled by local people and fostering co-operation between community groups and infrastructure organisations; encouraging an asset-based approach that identifies and builds on the various types of resource found in communities.
- **Sustainability** – aiming for a lasting impact for the present and future; opportunities for new skills and confidence to be used in partnerships and projects; ongoing and well resourced infrastructure; capacity building integrated into mainstream policies affecting funding and resources.
- **Partnership working** – strengthen communities by helping them work together local, regional and national structures; remove barriers to involvement; local groups able to contribute to capacity building policies; local people able to participate actively in setting policies and making decisions.
- **Recognition and valuing** – recognise and value existing skills, talents, knowledge and awareness; consider other ways of accrediting, recognising or rewarding individuals' contributions and learning.

* from *Building Civil Renewal* (Home Office 2003)

In contrast to the specific purposes of capacity building, **community development** is a broader process aiming “collectively to bring about social change and justice by working with communities” [of place or interest] “to:

- identify their needs, opportunities, rights and responsibilities;
- plan, organise and take action;
- evaluate the effectiveness and impact of action all in ways that challenge oppression and tackle inequalities.”²

Although the idea has been around since the early twentieth century, one concept that has come much more to the fore over recent years is that of **social capital**. According to the World Health Organisation, “social capital represents the degree of social cohesion which exists within communities. It refers to processes that establish networks, norms and social trust, and facilitate co-ordination and co-operation for mutual benefit.” The UK government has formally adopted the OECD definition of social capital as *networks together with shared norms, values and understandings that facilitate co-operation within or among groups*. Robert Putman distinguishes between ‘bonding’ and ‘bridging capital’. *Bonding* denotes strong, exclusive ties that link people to their families, close friends or immediate circles and give them practical, social and psychological support. *Bridging* social capital signifies weaker yet more inclusive ties extending to more distant and disparate groups and involving overlapping networks. It “can generate broader identities and reciprocity, whereas bonding social capital bolsters our narrower selves” (Putnam 2000, p 23). Similarly, Putnam makes a distinction between ‘thick’ trust – confidence in personal friends – and ‘thin’ trust in a wider range of people, known and unknown, “that crucial emollient for large complex societies”. (Putman 2000, p.142) A third type of social capital is *linking*, that is connections across different levels of power or social status. These three dimensions or types of social capital mean that it is relevant to a wide range of situations and policy spheres, ranging from individual health and well-being to community cohesion to participation and governance.

Ways of measuring social capital include degrees of informal socialising, levels of volunteering and involvement in community life, or public engagement as measured, for example, by turnout at elections. A fundamental underlying measure is trust: whether people think that others can be trusted. Levels of reported trust vary considerably across communities, regions and countries (PIU 2002).

Social capital can bring a range of benefits: facilitating the more efficient functioning of labour markets, improving educational attainment, contributing to lower levels of crime and better health. Different types may be important at different stages in a person’s life: bonding during periods of vulnerability or frailty, such as early childhood and old age and bonding and bridging combined during adult life. In addition, there is some evidence that social capital may lead to better government from neighbourhood to national and supra-national levels because it may:

- be easier to implement policy in the context of high social capital;
- make citizens more discerning and give them channels for learning, mobilising and lobbying;

² *National Occupational Standards for Development Work* quoted in *Building Civil Renewal* pp.2/3

- make politicians and bureaucrats better at co-operating.

However, there are also potential disbenefits, for example:

- sectional interests that compete with wider social or economic goods;
- social networks that exclude others thus minimising social inclusion and mobility;
- high levels of bonding social capital mixed with low levels of bridging leading to community tensions, such as sectarian conflict;
- high levels of bonding social capital that reinforces various kinds of negative behaviour such as criminality or educational under-achievement.

An ONS report summarises key features of all government and major non-government surveys in the UK that collect information on aspects of social capital using the OECD definition. (ONS 2002) The matrix presents data under five main themes, (each with sub-themes):

- 1) participation, social engagement and commitment;
- 2) control and self-efficacy;
- 3) perception of community level structures or characteristics;
- 4) social interaction, social networks and social support;
- 5) trust, reciprocity and social cohesion.

The analysis indicated the need for a more harmonised approach. It led to the design of a framework for measuring social capital (Table 2.1) and the development of an ONS social capital question bank. (http://www.statistics.gov.uk/about_ns/social_capital/default.asp).

Table 2.1: Elements of a framework for measuring social capital

Dimensions (aspects of definition to which dimensions relate)	Facets for which measures may be developed
Social participation (networks)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • number of cultural, leisure and social groups belonged to (frequency and intensity of involvement) • involvement with voluntary organisations (frequency and intensity of involvement) • religious activity
Social networks and social support (networks)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • frequency of seeing/speaking to relatives, friends or neighbours • virtual networks (frequency and intensity of involvement) • how many close friends or relatives live nearby • who can be relied on to provide help • who is help provided to • perceived control over life • satisfaction with life
Reciprocity and trust (shared norms and values)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • trust in other people who are like you • trust in other people who are not like you • people who will do favours and vice versa • perception of shared values
Civic participation (co-operation)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • confidence in institutions at different levels • perceptions of ability to influence events

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • how well informed about local or national affairs • contact with public officials or political representatives • involvement with local action groups (frequency) • propensity to vote
Views of the local area (shared norms and values)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • views of the physical environment • facilities in the area • enjoyment of living in the area • fear of crime

Source: ONS 2002 cited in Jochum NCVO 2003.

2.2 The VCS and social capital

The VCS has a role to play “in the accumulation of bonding and bridging social capital by fostering trust” (PIU 2002, p.42), but some forms of voluntary organisations stimulate more positive forms than others; for example those with more diverse memberships and contact with people of different backgrounds stimulate higher levels of more generalised trust than more homogenous groups (PIU 2002, p.43).

NCVO has been conducting research to clarify the links between social capital and the voluntary sector and explore the role of voluntary organisations in building social capital (Jochum 2003 and Begum 2003). It sees voluntary organisations as both a source of and beneficiaries of social capital. They can use it “as a resource for achieving their objectives, which subsequently strengthens their capacity to build social capital. This confirms both the productive and self-reinforcing nature of social capital”. (Jochum 2003, p.29) Social capital can also be a tool for voluntary organisations to understand their context better, assess organisational resources or to evaluate their impact. Community Evaluation Northern Ireland has done considerable work to develop a framework for evaluating VCS activity incorporating the concept of social capital. Table 2.2 shows the range of potential outcomes and the types of indicators that can be used to measure them.

Bonding Outcome	Indicator
Empowerment Beneficiaries have confidence, skills and leadership capacity	1. Intended beneficiaries have increased confidence to participate in community activity
	2. Intended beneficiaries have skills to contribute to community activity
	3. Intended beneficiaries exercise leadership within the community
Infrastructure Beneficiaries participate in organisations that are representative and inclusive	4. Intended beneficiaries participate in organisations, projects within the community
	5. Intended beneficiaries connect and network with other people and organisations within the community
	6. Marginalised people are represented in organisation/project structures
Connectedness Beneficiaries are well connected to the community (trusting,	7. Levels of trust between people and organisations in the community
	8. Sharing of information and resources between people and organisations in the community

sharing and working towards shared goals)	9. People and organisations in the community work together to achieve shared goals
Bridging Outcome	Indicator
Engagement Beneficiaries engage with other communities and sectors by participating in relationships and networks	10. Level of engagement by intended beneficiaries with other communities/sectors outside their own
	11. Quality of structures to facilitate engagement between the intended beneficiaries and other communities/sectors
	12. Greater understanding by intended beneficiaries of the interdependence between theirs and other communities
Accessibility Intended beneficiaries have values and participate in structures and processes that make their community accessible to outside communities and sectors	13. Intended beneficiaries' willingness to engage with communities outside their own
	14. Intended beneficiaries awareness and competence to deal with issues of separation between communities and sectors
	15. Intended beneficiaries participate in structures and processes aimed at reducing issues of separation
Innovation Intended beneficiaries are open to new ideas and solutions facilitating their community to adapt to change	16. Intended beneficiaries explore new ideas to meet community needs
	17. Intended beneficiaries adopt new solutions to meet community needs
	18. Appropriateness of new solutions to changing needs of the community
Linking Outcome	Indicator
Resources Intended beneficiaries have access to people and institutions outside the community with power and resources	19. Formal contacts with resource/development agencies outside the community
	20. Value of additional resources levered for intended beneficiaries
Influence Intended beneficiaries have representation on local and regional public fora at which their interests are articulated.	21. Participation of intended beneficiaries in public fora at local and regional levels
	22. Formation of alliances between intended beneficiaries and others participating in public fora
	23. Changes in public policy that better meet the needs of intended beneficiaries
Intended beneficiaries recognise the interdependence between their needs and needs of others	24. Perception and attitudes of public sector agency representatives to the participation and contribution of organisation/project

Source: CENI 2003 (adapted)

CENI's work also illustrates the way that the idea of 'linking' social capital can be applied to the relationship between VCS organisations and other sectors and funders. Appendix I gives the CENI template illustrating how social capital indicators can be used alongside more conventional ones to evaluate VCS activity receiving statutory funding.

2.3 Active communities and community involvement

The establishment of the Active Communities Unit (ACU) in the Home Office in 1998 made clear the Government's commitment to encouraging active communities. "Community involvement is clearly a major part of, if not synonymous with, active communities, and the profile of this issue increased exponentially in the succeeding five years. Nevertheless it still occupies an ambiguous place in government policy . . . Its objectives are sometimes difficult to focus on because it has so many aims loosely attached to it." (Chanan 2003, p.9)

Various developments have underpinned the sector's new standing. First, 1998 saw the introduction of a Compact on Relations between Government and the VCS in England. It comprises a set of principles and commitments providing a framework for relationships. Its scope extends beyond government departments to Government Offices for the Regions, Executive Agencies and non-departmental government bodies. Having the Compact signals that government has accepted that it must respect the sector's independence. There also began to be more openings for the sector to participate in the design and delivery of a range of services with an accompanying flow of resources.

The more positive attitude to the VCS was reflected in the two Treasury reports (H.M. Treasury 2002 and 2004) relating to a cross cutting review of the role of the VCS in service delivery. This "laid the foundation for a new and exciting phase in the relationship between Government and the VCS" (H.M.Treasury 2004, Paul Boateng Foreword) at the same time as indicating the need to build capacity within the sector, which requires external support and investment as well as sectoral activity. It suggested there are broadly four kinds of capacity:

- organisational capacity;
- technical capacity to deliver specific services;
- infrastructure capacity; and
- community capacity.

The review recognised that this was a testing agenda to the VCS itself and that government action was needed for the Compact to work. The ACU was given the lead responsibility for driving change across government. An enhanced budget provided resources for capacity building and infrastructure. Following the review, there were three government initiatives.

- First, the Home Office set up a new £215 million investment fund, *Futurebuilders*. A consortium of VCS organisations manages the fund which offers loans and grants for the development of public service delivery work in the spheres of community cohesion, crime, education and learning, health and social care and support for children and young people. It provides business support to help build VCS organisations' capacity and will invest sums ranging from around £30,000 to £10 million in about 250 of them.
- Second, the £80 million Home Office programme *ChangeUp* aims that "by 2014 the needs of frontline voluntary and community organisations will be met by support which is available nationwide, structured for maximum efficiency, offering

excellent provision which is accessible to all while reflecting and promoting diversity, and is sustainably funded". (HO 2004(a), p.7) This support will cover:

- performance improvement;
- workforce development and leadership;
- ICT;
- governance;
- recruiting and developing volunteers;
- funding voluntary and community sector activity.

These capacity needs will be met in a variety of ways, through:

- national hubs of expertise to be set up by 2006;
- organisations' own regional or national infrastructure;
- organisations helping each other;
- *pro bono* work from public sector and other funders.

Local, sub-regional and regional stakeholders are to come together to agree the shape and structure of provision best suited to the needs of the frontline organisations and the communities in the area so that good quality infrastructure provision is in place everywhere in England by 2009. At national level, an Infrastructure National Partnership will provide oversight and leadership, work with other sectors to produce a step change in the delivery of support and develop tools and standards for performance management.

- Third, the *Invest to Save – Inclusive Communities* fund was launched in the 2004 Spending Review as a refinement of the former Invest to Save Budget with a new focus on building inclusive communities and local partnerships through locally-based initiatives and with the VCS playing an increasingly central role in its projects. The first priority policy areas are:
 - migrant integration;
 - health and social care for older people;
 - employment for people from ethnic minorities;
 - correctional services;
 - hostel provision for homeless people;
 - support for parents and learning services for adults (H.M.Treasury 2004(c)).

2.4 Civil Renewal³

The *Building Civil Renewal* Consultation Paper (Home Office 2003(a) talks about the Government's concern to promote civil renewal, that is, "a way to empower people in their communities to provide the answers to our contemporary social problems". (Home Office 2003 quoting David Blunkett's Edith Kahn Memorial Lecture, June 2003) As such,⁴ it has three essential ingredients:

- active citizens who contribute to the common good
- strengthened communities in which people work together to find solutions to problems

³ This is the term used in the Home Office although the Chancellor refers to 'civic renewal'.

⁴ According to the Home Office website

- partnership in meeting public needs, with government and agencies giving appropriate support and encouraging people to take part in democracy and influence decisions about their communities.

Although individuals have important roles in this, therefore, “the development of sustainable activity in the end depends on people acting together – in groups, organisations and networks”. This in turn depends upon them “having the skills, confidence and opportunities to contribute actively in their communities, to engage with civic institutions and democratic processes, to be able to influence the policies and services that affect their lives, and to make the most of their community’s human, financial and physical assets”.

The Civil Renewal Unit (CRU) carried out a review (HO 2003 (b)) in 2003. After mapping central government programmes and policies, it was concluded that they revealed:

- a lack of consensus or understanding of the basic terms and process applying in the field of community capacity building.
- a lack of recognition of the crucial role of community capacity building in supporting a wide range of government policy goals.
- insufficient understanding of how to plan for and deliver effective community capacity building programmes.
- a lack of broadly agreed indicators or measures by which to evaluate the health and well-being of a community and therefore judge the impact of community capacity building activity.
- a level and style of support for community activity and community capacity building that can be inadequate, inappropriate and inaccessible, particularly at local community level where it is most needed and can be most effective.
- a lack of co-ordination and consistency in the provision of support for community capacity building and community involvement, both across government, within individual government departments, and at local level.

The twin policy priorities of the ACU and CRU upon an enlarged role for the VCS in service delivery and local empowerment as a route to civil renewal need to be seen alongside the ODPM’s increased emphasis on community participation in area-based and strategic partnerships. These themes provide a backcloth to the remainder of the paper, which now turns to looking at the VCS in relation to LSPs.

3. THE VCS AND LSP STRUCTURES

LSPs will only be effective if their core membership includes the public, private, community and voluntary sectors. (DETR, 2001, p.18)

3.1 Local Strategic Partnerships

Local Strategic Partnerships are a key part of the government's modernisation agenda. Their introduction marked a major change to the pattern of local governance in England. As non-statutory, non-executive organisations, their membership and structure are meant to reflect their aims and the breadth of the issues that fall within their scope. They are cross-sectoral partnerships, but local circumstances and priorities will influence the most appropriate composition.

The Government Guidance states that LSPs should consider the views of their communities and involve the communities they serve: "an LSP must work for and be seen to work for the people it serves". In discussing engagement in LSPs, it identifies four sectors:

- public sector/statutory agencies;
- business;
- voluntary and community sector;
- local residents/wider community.

In relation to the VCS, the Compact between government and the community and voluntary sectors, with its associated Codes of Practice and Guidelines for Local Compacts, provides a framework "within which the relationship between the community and voluntary sectors and other partners can be defined and developed" (DETR 2001, p.58).

This and following chapters draw primarily on the findings of the LSP evaluation and, in particular, the two surveys and the nine case studies. The case studies focused on very different areas. In selecting one from each region, the aim was to have a balance of:

- NRF and non-NRF LSPs,
- local government type;
- urban/rural;
- metropolitan/free standing towns and cities
- multiple authority partnership arrangements;
- some well advanced, some at an early stage.

Four out of the nine were NRF areas. There are evident differences across the case studies in terms of VCS engagement, but it is not clear that they are necessarily related to these particular variables. They covered a wide range of issues relating to the structures and activities of LSPs so that it was impossible to explore specific aspects in any great depth.

3.2 VCS roles

VCS organisations have two broad roles relevant to LSPs. In particular, they can "fill the gaps between disadvantaged communities and service providers, by establishing

a dialogue and providing additional services” (DETR 2000, p.18). One role, therefore, is as providers of services in such spheres as youth work, social and health care, childcare and sports and culture. These services may be paid or unpaid; that is involving both the paid ‘professionals’ and the purely voluntary parts of the sector, the larger voluntary organisations and the smaller community groups.

The other role of VCS groups is to ‘speak for’ local people. However, there is a balance to be struck. The sector can bring its knowledge of the impact of service provision on local people. It can serve an important advisory function. In particular, it is especially important that “groups who are more easily ignored or have fewer resources are involved in local joint action”. (DETR 2000, p.18) This has important implications for the breadth of LSP membership. Yet VCS partners cannot claim to be “fully representative of either local people or the community and voluntary sectors as a whole; the community and its organisations are simply too diverse for that to work”. (DETR 2001, p.59) Even in purely practical terms, it would be impossible to cover all interests so that, although “there needs to be a sufficient number of community and voluntary sector members of any LSP to ensure an effective balance of interests and expertise, they should not be seen as the sole voice of local people”. The VCS has a part to play alongside others, such as neighbourhood partnerships, NDCs and Sure Start) also seeking to target deprived groups and neighbourhoods, build their capacity and establish mechanisms for them to participate. LSPs, therefore, need to make a clear distinction between community participation and the engagement of the VCS and should not use the sector as the only conduit to the community. Rather LSPs as a whole need to establish mechanisms for relating to the entire population and do this systematically, using skilled staff.

The fuzziness of terminology referred to in chapter 2 was underlined in the report of the Community Engagement Action Learning Set conducted as part of the LSP evaluation (ODPM 2004) which, in answer to the question “what do we mean by community?” indicated that the term ‘community’ has several implied or explicit meanings:

- ‘everyone else’ apart from partnership members;
- a geographic community such as a local council ward or estate;
- communities of interest or commonality (e.g. users of a particular service, a local school);
- excluded groups (for example, black and minority ethnic groups, young people, carers, people who do not want to be involved);
- the voluntary sector (voluntary groups/organisations, umbrella bodies).

Not only are “definitions are likely to shift and change over time and their exact meaning . . . depend on the context in which they are used” (ODPM 2004), but also the role of the VCS will vary in different contexts. As the Guidance notes, levels of community and voluntary activity in different areas vary, voluntary and community sector groups differ in their nature and size and in their support needs and there is variation in how far the VCS infrastructure is developed and in the degrees of cohesion and trust within the sector.

3.3 VCS representation on LSPs

Deriving the number of representatives from the VCS that can be accommodated on the LSP Board and even its wider partnership groups without them becoming too cumbersome and losing their strategic edge is difficult. To be feasible, it requires a level of trust within the sector that is not necessarily there partly because organisations are as much accustomed to competing for resources as they are to collaborating. Collaboration is necessary to select representatives and also to agree a workable concept of 'representation' that ensures they speak for, and keep in touch with, their 'constituency' without having overwhelming reporting demands placed on them or over-restrictive limits on their freedom to participate without always have a specific mandate. (NRU 2004(b))

The LSP National Evaluation has shown that there is wide variation across LSPs about:

- whether and how far they distinguish between the voluntary and community sectors and what these each comprise;
- the level of representation on the LSP;
- whether or not BME and faith communities (if present) come through the VCS or separately;
- the mechanisms for engaging the VCS and selecting/electing representatives;
- the extent to which representatives on LSPs see themselves as representative and accountable to their constituency or rather bringing a particular perspective.

Box 3.1 illustrates some of the differences.

Box 3.1

Leeds VOICE concluded it that it should aim to get the best people for the Leeds Initiative (the LSP) rather than adopt some formula for representation. One place went automatically to the VOICE Chair. The other five were recruited after advertising the positions and interviewing applicants. About 8-10 people were interviewed. In making the selection, the profile (gender, etc) of the group was borne in mind but was not a criterion applied rigidly. Current representatives are all paid workers:

- one from an RSL but here representing a Latin American community organisations;
- director of a small/medium organisation;
- director of a smaller community organisation;
- director of a CAB;
- one from an infrastructural organisation.

In **Tameside**, the VCS is represented through its CEN, Tameside Voice, and its supporting body, Tameside Third Sector Coalition (T3SC). Tameside Voice is on the Board and the Thematic Partnerships, whereas T3SC is not directly represented on the Board but is actively involved in the wider partnership structures. The relationship between the CEN and the LSP in Tameside was tested when the LSP Chair invited a representative of Better Government for Older People to join the Board without formally consulting the CEN. This brought to a head issues relating to VCS representation and influenced later LSP discussions.

In **Gloucester**, the force of the voluntary sector is felt at the LSP Executive through the representatives who attend and contribute. A voluntary sector presence is also evident in the LSP's working groups and a considerable proportion of participants at the LSP's conferences (which are technically meetings of the full membership of the LSP) are from the voluntary sector.

This variation was evident across the case study areas and emerged from the different patterns of representation shown in the LSP survey findings. The surveys conducted in 2002 and 2004 as part of the national evaluation provide some interesting insights about the involvement and role of the VCS in LSPs. However, in reporting some of the findings, it is important also to attach a cautionary note. Some questions sought responses about levels of representation or structural arrangements, which were solely a matter of report, but others asked for informed opinions. The questionnaires went to the LSP co-ordinators and therefore reflect their views. In some instances, it could well be that other LSP members, and especially those from the VCS, would have very different perceptions.

Total and core membership

In examining the membership of LSPs, the survey asked if the LSP makes a distinction between 'core' and 'total' membership and found that over three quarter of them do so. The point of this question was to try to identify through the 'core' membership which organisations are members of the management group (Board or Executive) and are regularly involved in key LSP-decision making. Table 3.1 shows that between 2002 and 2004 the proportions of some of the various types of organisation comprising the VCS involved in the core bodies of LSPs changed little:

- umbrella groups;
- voluntary sector organisations;
- BME groups.

Table 3.1: 'Core' VCS membership of LSPs 2002 and 2004

	ALL LSPs 2002		ALL LSPs 2004	
	N	%	N	%
Voluntary sector umbrella group	128	86%	188	79%
Voluntary sector organisation/individuals	58	39%	97	41%
Community Network			85	36%
Housing Association/RSL	40	27%	93	39%
Faith organisations/individuals	42	28%	109	46%
Residents groups/individuals	33	22%	33	14%
BME groups	44	30%	70	30%
Area/neighbourhood forums/partnerships			53	22%
Other voluntary and community sector			41	17%

N = the number of respondents represented by the percentage. For this question, the respondents were only those responding positively to the question of whether their LSP distinguished between core and total membership.

The clearest change was in the advent of Community Networks which, by 2004, were included in the core membership of 85% of the NRF LSPs compared with only 17% of the non-NRF LSPs (Table 3.2). (Chapter 4 discusses further the significance of CEF funding for the LSPs eligible for NRF.) However, there has also been an increase in the involvement of housing associations/RSLs and faith organisations/individuals since 2002. A higher percentage of NRF LSPs have housing

associations/ RSLs in their core membership, whereas the percentage of faith organisations is similar for both NRF and non-NRF LSPs.

Table 3.2: 'Core' VCS membership of LSPs 2004: NRF and non-NRF

	NRF LSPs		Non-NRF LSPs		All LSPs	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Voluntary sector umbrella group	46	70%	142	83%	188	79%
Voluntary sector organisation/individuals	25	38%	72	42%	97	41%
Community Network	56	85%	29	17%	85	36%
Housing Association/RSL	35	53%	58	34%	93	40%
Faith organisations/individuals	31	47%	78	46%	109	46%
Residents groups/individuals	14	21%	19	11%	33	14%
BME groups	31	47%	39	23%	70	30%
Area/neighbourhood forums/partnerships	23	35%	30	18%	53	22%
Other voluntary and community sector	10	15%	31	18%	41	17%

Table 3.3 'Total' VCS membership of LSPs 2002 and 2004

	ALL LSPs 2002		ALL LSPs 2004	
	N	%	N	%
Voluntary sector umbrella group	180	93%	274	90%
Voluntary sector organisation/individuals	100	52%	241	79%
Community Network			168	55%
Housing Association/RSL	75	39%	200	66%
Faith organisations/individuals	90	46%	215	71%
Residents groups/individuals	63	32%	150	49%
BME groups	73	38%	171	56%
Area/neighbourhood forums/partnerships			153	50%
Other voluntary and community sector			83	27%

Table 3.4 'Total' VCS membership of LSPs 2004: NRF and non-NRF

	NRF LSPs		Non-NRF LSPs		All LSPs	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Voluntary sector umbrella group	70	84%	204	92%	274	90%
Voluntary sector organisation/individuals	63	76%	178	80%	241	79%
Community Network	74	89%	94	42%	168	55%
Housing Association/RSL	62	75%	138	62%	200	66%
Faith organisations/individuals	56	68%	159	72%	215	71%
Residents groups/individuals	52	63%	98	44%	150	49%
BME groups	63	76%	108	49%	171	56%
Area/neighbourhood forums/partnerships	53	64%	100	45%	153	50%
Other voluntary and community sector	16	19%	67	30%	83	27%

Table 3.3 shows how the total VCS membership of LSPs shifted between 2002 and 2004. Again there was an increase in most categories of membership with the exception of voluntary sector umbrella groups, which again changed little but, as with the core membership of NRFs, would potentially have been affected by the advent of CENs. Table 3.4 shows that proportionately fewer – though still a large majority - NRF LSPs have umbrella groups amongst their membership. Overall, it is apparent that the representation of the VCS strengthened as LSPs developed.

Under-representation

In asking whether any sectors were under-represented in the LSP, the questionnaire distinguished between the voluntary and community sectors, though without defining the terms. Table 3.5 also shows the responses in relation to other constituencies. Of those that responded, 16% thought the voluntary sector under-represented compared with 33% thinking that the community sector was under-represented. This was more likely to be the case in non-NRF LSPs than in NRF ones in relation to both sectors:

- Voluntary sector: 5% of NRF compared with 20% of non-NRF;
- Community sector: 13% of NRF compared with 40% of non-NRF.

Under-representation was more common for the VCS than for the local authority and other public sector organisations, but less common than for the business sector.

Table 3.5 Under-representation of different sectors in LSPs

	NRF LSPs		Non-NRF LSPs		All LSPs	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Business sector	51	61%	126	57%	177	58%
Voluntary sector	4	5%	45	20%	49	16%
Community sector	11	13%	88	40%	99	33%
Local authority councillor	6	7%	18	8%	24	8%
Local authority officers	5	6%	12	5%	17	6%
Public sector	4	5%	22	10%	26	9%

Involvement in wider partnership structures

In practice, VCS representation on LSPs extends beyond the total and core memberships to places on partnership bodies such as theme or working groups. The following examples illustrate the array of arrangements.

- In **West Suffolk** the scope for formal voluntary sector involvement increased after a review of LSP board membership, with three additional representatives to be included, nominated by the Forum, thus providing an opportunity to build links between the LSP and neighbourhoods or localities.
- In **Herefordshire**, the VCS has a relatively high representation on a small board. The Voluntary Sector Assembly (VSA) is an umbrella body of voluntary and community sector groups set up with funding from Home Office. It has a seat on the Board and management group and there are two VCS representatives on each ambition group. Community First (previously Rural Community Council)

remains on the Board and management group primarily in a supportive role to the VSA. Community interests are organised at ambition group level through the Community Development and Local Services Group.

- The VCS accounts for about 11% of the membership of the **Tameside** Strategic Partnership Board and Thematic Partnerships numerically, roughly on a par with the private sector and the housing sector but less than a third of the local authority's membership and about one half of the share taken by 'other public bodies'.
- In **Gloucester**, voluntary/community sector engagement in the LSP takes two different forms: membership of the executive through election co-ordinated by the CVS with specific representation of neighbourhood partnerships (constituted as community groups not voluntary organisations) and faith groups and open participation in the sub-groups of the LSP and the LSP conferences for any community/voluntary organisation with a contribution to make.
- In **Southwark**, there are 5 places for the voluntary sector on the Alliance from SAVO (Southwark Action for Voluntary Organisations), Southwark Group of Tenants Organisations, Southwark Community Care Forum, Southwark Race and Equalities Council, and Voluntary Action Southwark; 8 resident members – one from each of the 8 Community Council areas in the borough; and 2 members from the Multi-Faith Forum. Together these 15 places are slightly over half of the total Alliance membership. Two individuals are Vice-Chairs of the Alliance.

3.4 VCS and local government

The relationship between the VCS and the local authority is a key one and the historic position is important in influencing the present position and current views. - the extent of community development that has taken place in the past; the structures 'below the LSP'; and past relationships between councillors and other types of community representatives. Current council policies are also significant, such as the attitude to the LSP and the levels and processes of grant-making to VCS bodies. Many of the relevant issues here are taken up in two other papers produced as part of the LSP evaluation:

- Local government and LSPs – covering such questions as the possible tension about 'who speaks for the local community?'
- Below the Local Strategic Partnership - looking at the relationship between LSPs and neighbourhoods, the sorts of new structures that are developing either under the auspices of local authorities or LSPs themselves and the role that they play.

Box 3.2 gives contrasting examples that illustrate potential issues: the sometimes fractious relationship between the VCS and local authority; the other, underlying questions about the fit between representative and participatory democracy.

Box 3.2

In **Gloucester**, there is also tension between some of the voluntary sector organisations and the local authority as a result of a review of advice services initiated by the local authority. Some voluntary sector respondents perceived this as an exercise in saving money for the council which would diminish the capacity of the sector and spill over into relationships on the LSP though the Council's position was that voluntary sector grants budgets would be ring-fenced for three years and there would be no cuts to the overall budget for advice. One respondent cited evidence of a 'lack of trust' between council and voluntary sector representatives as a result of this review. Another respondent unconnected to the review argued that too many voluntary organisations were solely dependent on the city council for their funding, inevitably meaning that they were the 'creatures of the local authority' and consequently unable to 'stand up to the local authority' in the LSP. While this was a minority view, it does draw attention to the complicated relationships that underpin the voluntary sector's participation in partnership activities.

In **East Durham**, relations between CEN members and councillors have not been an issue. The LSP has sought to remain apolitical and has therefore debarred councillor involvement. Boundaries between representative and participative democracy are, however, blurred. For example, some LSP members expect that CEN members should always act in a representative capacity but this may be too much to expect in such a varied district and given the patchiness of grassroots structures. The Council's political leadership has welcomed CEN's role in promoting wider community involvement in the LSP, even though it has become more open to more challenge as a result. Tensions between new forms of participative democracy and more traditional elective forms have not surfaced to date because backbench councillors are not that aware of the LSP. Most controversy seems to occur at the grassroots level and the LSP is seen as one step removed by both local politicians and community activists. CEN involvement in the LSP has introduced more young mothers' perspective to debate which is a healthy development given that many councillors tend to be older men. Many members are very familiar with different funding regimes and their involvement in the Strategic Funding Group (which has been handed responsibility for assessing NRF project bids) has improved scrutiny.

Two tier issues

One of the questions occurring in two tier areas is about the appropriate level of intervention and how far the VCS is equipped to participate at different levels. Box 3.3 shows two explicit two tier issues:

- one shows the difficulties of co-ordinating VCS organisations across different spatial levels.
- the other indicates that some policy developments are moving action towards the county rather than city level where there are two tier authorities.

Box 3.3

Although in **East Durham** the LSP had improved community involvement, division between county-level and district-level LSPs tended to reinforce the lack of liaison between voluntary organisations operating at different spatial levels and suggested that until grassroots participative structures are effective, the LSP will struggle to engage groups from certain quarters.

In **Gloucester**, other policy developments are orienting action more towards the county rather than the city, e.g. Children's Trusts, the new funding arrangements for voluntary sector infrastructure and, most recently, Local Area Agreements.

The question of appropriate levels of intervention and involvement in two tier areas also affects the public and private sectors but is perhaps exacerbated for the VCS precisely because of its diverse and diffuse character.

4. NRF LSPS AND COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION PROGRAMMES

“Effective engagement with the community is one of the most important aspects of LSPs’ work and they will have failed if they do not deliver this.” (SEU 2001)

4.1 The Single Community Programme

The areas eligible for Neighbourhood Renewal Fund were also eligible for the Community Participation Programmes (CPPs):

- Community Empowerment Fund (CEF): to support Community Empowerment Networks (CEN) as a route to engaging communities effectively in LSPs;
- Community Chest (CC) and Community Learning Chest (CLC) funding providing small, easily accessible grant to support self-help and community activity, and the development of skills, knowledge and community learning.

A review of the CPPs in 2002-03 led to them being combined in the Single Community Programme (SCP), which will run until March 2006. After that, the SCP will be integrated into the Stronger and Safer Communities Fund to be administered by local authorities. Figure 4.1 shows the different organisations involved in administering the Single Community Programme, nationally, regionally and locally.

This chapter draws heavily on the National Evaluation of Community Participation Programmes, (NRU 2005). This means that it still refers to the CEF. It should be noted that the fieldwork for the CPP evaluation took place late 2003/early 2004. There may well have been progress since then in some areas, but this is the most recent substantive evidence on which it is possible to draw.

4.2 The purpose of the Community Empowerment Fund

The purpose of CEF was to encourage full participation by voluntary and community groups in the LSPs eligible for NRF support, recognising that “support for community and voluntary sector members of strategic partnerships has been under-resourced until now, and the CEF will help to equalise partnerships” (DETR 2001, p.59). It was also admitted that this was a necessary but not a sufficient condition for driving change towards greater parity of partnership. There was also a need to build capacity in the public sector. “There needs to be a step change in the level of skills and knowledge of everyone involved in neighbourhood renewal” (DETR 2001, p.37) and therefore, as part of their work on neighbourhood renewal, LSPs should ensure there are local programmes to improve skills and knowledge and include learning for neighbourhood renewal in their local neighbourhood renewal strategy.

The intention was for this resource to add value to – and not be a substitute for - any support already being given either for community involvement in existing partnerships or for the infrastructure that supports such involvement. The funding went direct to the VCS in each area to cover activities including:

- outreach work to raise awareness and involve the widest possible range of interests;

- facilitation for eliciting community views and procedures for choosing community members for the LSP;
- ongoing training and support for these individuals including reporting back mechanisms;
- two-way dissemination of information;
- communications such as via forums, newsletters, websites;
- opportunities for developing ideas, proposals and contributions to the strategic planning process.

Figure 4.1: Organisations administering the Single Community Programme*

Neighbourhood Renewal Unit

- sets policy
- secures programme funding
- manages Public Service Agreement targets
- conducts overall financial management

Government Office (in each region)

- selects the Responsible Body from the voluntary sector
- conducts quarterly monitoring
- provides advice and support
- releases finance

Responsible Body (in each local area)

- employs the Community Empowerment Team
- is responsible for financial management
- comes from the voluntary sector – most often a CVS

Community Empowerment Team (in each local area)

- provides policy and secretariat support to the Community Empowerment Network
- markets the programme
- co-ordinates the panel for awarding grants
- has on average 4 paid staff
- brokers partnerships between communities and service providers

Community Empowerment Network (in each area)

- a network of local community and voluntary groups
- elects representatives to the Local Strategic Partnership
- influences decision making
- provides a context for shared learning
- provides opportunities for capacity building
- enables direct contact with local service providers
- encourages more active communities

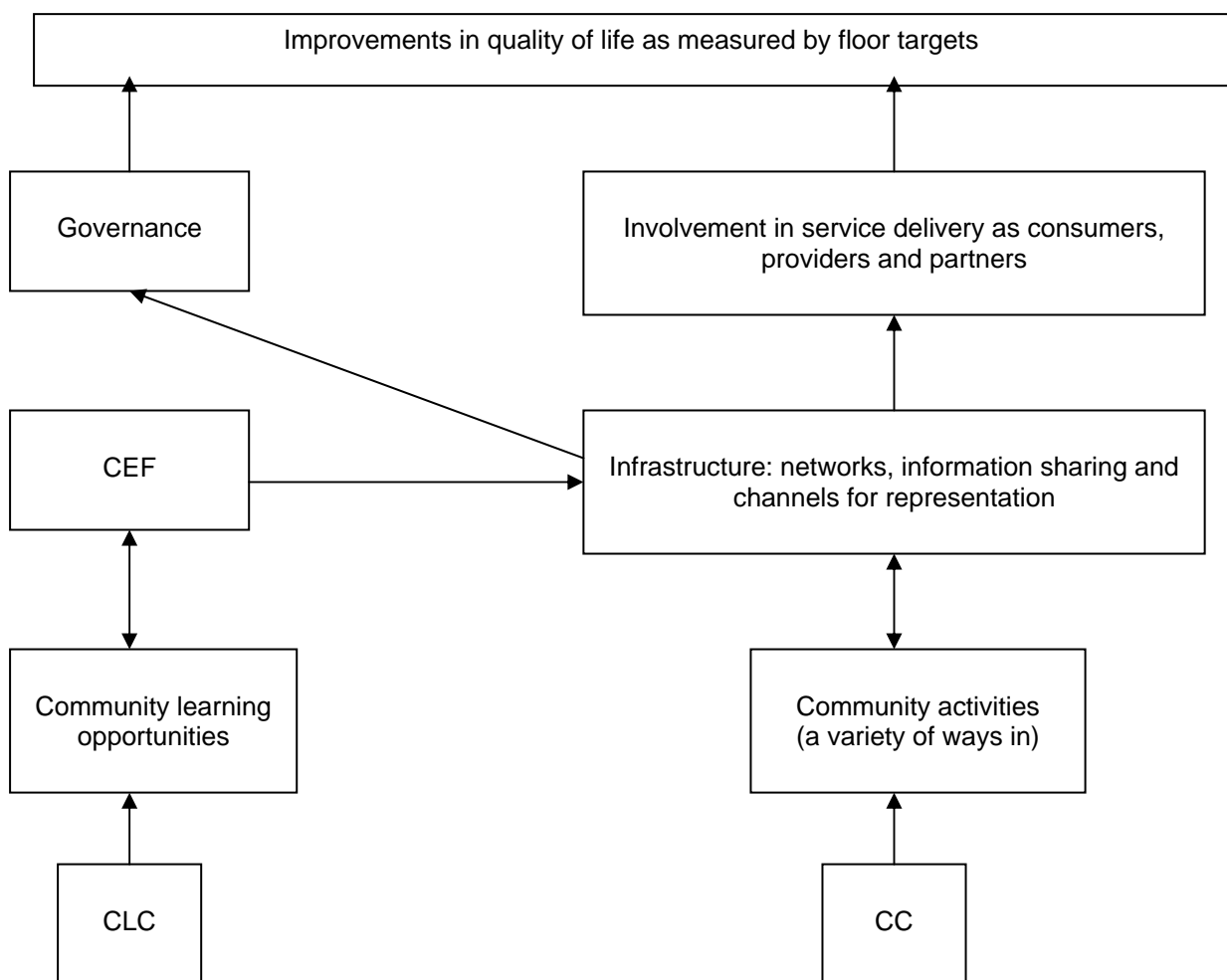
* Source: National Audit Office Analysis (NAO 2004, p.5)

The National Evaluation of CPPs (NRU 2005) indicates the difficulties that earlier area-based initiatives, such as Single Regeneration Budget partnerships, encountered in trying to secure community participation. The challenge is even greater for LSPs because they operate over a larger geographic area and deal with a bigger population spanning a wider range of interest groups and policy spheres.

The NRU had four goals for community participation, which link with the three kinds of social capital discussed in chapter 2:

- *social capital*: increasing confidence and capacity of individuals and small groups to get involved;
- *social inclusion and cohesion*: developing empowered communities capable of building a common vision, sense of belonging and positive identity where diversity is valued;
- *service delivery*: ensuring local communities are in a position to influence and, where appropriate, participate in service delivery;
- *governance*: developing a community voice that enables communities to participate in decision-making and increase the accountability of service providers.

Figure 4.2 The Community Participation Tree (NRU 2005)



The 'Community Participation Tree' (NRU 2005, p.9) shows both the dynamic relationship of the four goals and how the different meanings of social capital relate to the CPPs (Figure 4.2). The tree makes clear the critical importance of building infrastructure and the intended role of CEF to support this process. Fostering links

across communities so that they can work effectively together and developing mutual understanding and co-ordination with the VCS was seen as vital.

The CPP evaluation assessed how far Community Empowerment Networks (CENs) have:

- helped local communities to contribute effectively to local governance through the LSP and other forums;
- represented the range of local communities on the LSP and other local partnerships in a way that is well-informed and accountable;
- had an impact on decision-making and service delivery locally.

4.3 Developing the Community Empowerment Network

Government Offices were responsible for identifying Lead Organisations (LOs) for the CPPs. They did this mainly by drawing on their existing knowledge of the sector and consulting others, though in a few areas they went out to competitive tender. In most areas, the Council for Voluntary Service, or its equivalent, was the LO for CEF. About 40% of places had the same LO for all three programmes. The intention was that the LOs should become redundant once the CENs were properly in place.

The establishment of a CEN was not necessarily straightforward. There could be questions about how it fitted with existing arrangements. It could seem to replicate roles already fulfilled or jeopardise longstanding relationships. It could also create new demands for other services, outstripping provision and putting a strain on infrastructure bodies and almost seem to become the tail wagging the dog. On the other hand, the resources provided the opportunity to invest in new structures and functions and especially extend the range of the engagement of the sector to reach parts that had previously remained marginal.

Most CENs had a steering group, meetings for the whole membership and meetings of member networks or theme groups, but the CPP evaluation survey in autumn 2003 indicated that there were very different approaches to developing a network:

- only just over one third had a written constitution;
- some had no membership structure but operated through databases;
- over one third had no eligibility criteria for membership and where there were criteria, they were often very broad;
- some were networks of networks, with the networks as distinct from their individual organisations counting as members, whereas others counted all the constituent groups as members;
- about 40% had individual as well as group members;
- they varied in whether local authority and/or LSP officers were invited to or attended CEN meetings.

Box 4.1 illustrates the way one 'network of networks' is structured. Its networks include ones that focus on policy areas, on population groups and on neighbourhoods.

Box 4.1 AN EXAMPLE OF A CEN: LIVERPOOL COMMUNITY NETWORK (LCN)⁵

LCN is a 'network of networks' covering c 1,300 groups representing 65,000 people. There are 9 steering groups:

- Arts and culture – 219 organisations
- Black and Racial Minorities – 297 organisations
- Senior Citizens 112 organisations
- Faith communities – 142 organisations; 10 faiths
- Environment – 225 organisations
- Health and Social Care (Welfare Organisations Committee) 107 organisations
- 0-25s – 117 organisations
- Disability – 286 organisations
- Community Regeneration Forum – 5 cluster partnerships across the city.

The website has 1,750 hits per week. The Network is starting to map the sector in terms of activity and funding sources.

The development of a Liverpool Community Network, resourced through the Community Empowerment Fund (CEF), provides the voluntary and community sector with the opportunity to actively engage with Liverpool's Local Strategic Partnership (LSP). Each constituent network provides a range of benefits to its membership, including:

- A direct line of communication with the Liverpool's LSP via network representatives to the Voluntary and Community Sector Assembly.
- Encouraging and providing opportunities for communications and networking between groups. This should include disseminating information and advice about training, skills, funding and good practice.

What Makes An Effective Community Network?

LCN has concluded that to carry out its role effectively, a community network should fulfil - or demonstrate a commitment to fulfil - the following criteria. It should:

- Be able to build an effective relationship between the voluntary and community sector and the LSP
- Include the full range of community and voluntary sector groups, and reach out to those who are currently excluded or unrepresented by any community body.
- Build on existing community and voluntary sector networks and partnerships.
- Have accessible and consistent methods of accountability through reporting back to community and voluntary groups.
- Provide good value - not only financially, but also in how it uses member's time and resources (i.e. by minimising 'partnership burden').
- Draw its leadership from within the community and voluntary sector - including members from the most deprived neighbourhoods and marginalised communities.
- Be accessible to all - including disabled people and those whose first language is not English.

Although every area is unique and will have a different cross-section of communities and of voluntary and community sector groups and organisations, an effective network will always:

- Reflect the diversity of the local population - including under-represented groups, such as minority ethnic and faith communities, the disabled, young and older people.
- Ensure appropriate representation from the most deprived neighbourhoods and marginalised communities - including the provision of additional support where community groups are in the early stages of development.

LCN is working with partners on the LSP to develop plans for its continued existence beyond the three years of the Community Empowerment Fund. It is committed to being well-structured and impartial and to review continuously appropriate membership as the network and the LSP evolve.

⁵ Liverpool CEN was not a case study in either the LSP evaluation or the CPP evaluation.

The CPPs started late in 2001-02 and this meant that many LOs were still recruiting staff and setting up activities in the second year. There were concerns about 'inappropriate timescales and bureaucracy'. Staffing levels varied considerably from one part-timer to nine, with the average being 3.6 full time equivalents. The evaluation found evidence of a high turnover of staff and skill shortages amongst the LOs. One reason mooted for this was too many initiatives chasing too few people, but another was the lack of long-term stability in the funding. The extension to 2006 brought some relief but the change in arrangements after that with the introduction of the Safer and Stronger Communities Fund and the accompanying transfer of power may reawaken the uncertainty.

Recruitment and retention of staff continued to be a problem, sometimes not helped by poor pay scales, which could mean that the staff did not have the requisite skills. The CPP evaluation found that CENs need access to a combination of skills, including "the ability to:

- develop a viable structure of support for individual groups;
- mediate between diverse and sometimes competing groups within the sector;
- command respect both from LSP partners and from the smallest groups on the ground;
- negotiate with considerable sophistication and to support others in doing so; and
- manage a complex programme on limited resources." (NRU 2005, p.39)

Other issues relating to the administration of the CPPs are meeting the monitoring and performance management requirements. Some LOs felt subject to a variety of reporting demands that were at times contradictory, certainly time consuming and not necessarily realistic in the timescales set for achieving objectives. Views of the performance management framework varied. For some, it was a complicated exercise in which it was difficult to engage stakeholders; for others, a positive tool that could aid development, perhaps especially when facilitated by a Neighbourhood Renewal Adviser or a consultant.

4.4 CEN activities and achievements

CENs are not only charged with making sense of these disparate and crosscutting communities and giving them a common voice. They also need to encompass the voluntary sector, which itself is far from homogeneous. (NRU 2005, p.55)

The range of CENs' activities includes:

- networking events for consultation and dissemination;
- training and other outreach events;
- communication activities such as websites, newsletters, e-mail discussion lists and briefings.

There is also a commitment to community development, especially in areas where there was a low level of organisation and activity or where there is a need to build

capacity at neighbourhood level though limited resources may preclude the scale of community development needed to underpin effective community participation.

CENs had very different starting points. Not only do they have to grapple with bridging voluntary organisations and community groups, they also have to contend with the enormous diversity across the whole spectrum of groups. Nevertheless, case study respondents in the CPP evaluation did believe that the CPPs had significantly increased cohesion within the sector, even if there is still room for improvement. They had allowed them to be more systematic and strategic. Although it could be hard to engage smaller groups, the CEN helped overcome the sense of isolation many groups feel and raised their profile within the sector. It could also go some way to reducing the sector's competitiveness and the extent to which groups see others as rivals or a threat, building trust where there might be a history of very adversarial attitudes. In other words, it contributed to building social capital amongst VCOs.

Challenges remain:

- First, there is the challenge of sustaining interest if there is no obvious return for the time and energy expended, no apparent difference being made. In 'networks of networks', links between the CEN and individual organisations might be quite tenuous.
- The challenge of involving the most marginalised groups is even greater. Many CENs are developing new BME networks, a particularly complex task where the BME population is very diverse, or where there are high proportions of asylum seekers or refugees or there is a history of tensions between different groups. There is a dual challenge of increasing the bonding within the BME sector and building bridges between it and the infrastructure of the rest of the VCS. Some, though fewer, CENs are venturing into giving developmental support to other marginalised communities, such as Travellers or LGTB (lesbian, gay, transsexual and bisexual) groups. It would be interesting to know how far their activities are influencing the LSP as the LSP survey in 2004 showed that gay and lesbian and gender issues and issues relating to refugees and asylum seekers and travellers have not featured at all on the agendas of a significant minority of LSPs.
- A third challenge is to make effective links between the voluntary and community sectors. Some CENs have focused on one or the other. Many have made strenuous efforts to target smaller, informal or grassroots organisations but sometimes at the expense of the voluntary sector and, perhaps, especially at the expense of the larger, more professional service delivery organisations. To some extent, this focus may reflect the government guidance given to CENs even though the resulting imbalance was not what was intended. However, it may also signal that it is impossible to square the circle of the diversity of organisations encompassed by the VCS and that, at least in the short term, the expectations of CENs are extremely ambitious. Nevertheless, "respondents in the survey and the case studies still see the CEN as an important new space, where links can be made between different interests and common ground established". (NRU 2005 p.57)

4.5 CENs and LSPs

In order for communities to influence policy and service delivery, the CEN needs to feed effectively into the LSP and other partnerships. The CPP Evaluation reinforced the finding of the LSP Evaluation that CENs vary considerably not only in their size, coverage and arrangements but also in their links with their LSPs. Amongst those responding to the CPP evaluation survey:

- the number of CEN representatives on the LSP board ranged from none to 26, with an average of 7;
- the numbers involved in wider LSP structures ranged from none to 55 averaging 15, but half the respondents reported that ten or fewer were involved across the whole structure.

At the time of the CPP survey, the position was still quite fluid, partly because some LSPs still had VCS representatives who pre-dated the establishment of the CEN. Thus, only 40% of voluntary sector representatives came through the CEN and only slightly more for the community sector. In 75% of CENs, the Network elects the representatives, though some combine elections and nominations. As one reported, this was “partly because of the expense and administrative costs of running elections but principally because of the recognition of the appropriateness of a ‘participatory’ rather than a ‘representative’ model”. It is not necessarily easy to get people to stand or to extend the pool so that there can be uncontested elections and/or a high turnover in CEN representatives particularly ones from smaller organisations. CENs may allocate places on the LSP Board to different kinds of organisation distinguishing, for example, between voluntary organisations and community groups or neighbourhood groups and communities of interest, or specifically designating places for BME groups and/or faith communities. Different approaches to getting representation were also illustrated in the LSP evaluation case studies.

Some CENs make payments to the representative’s organisation to compensate for the time given, though this does not cover potential representatives who work outside the sector and cannot be compensated for loss of earnings. The breadth and maintenance of involvement – and its quality - can be influenced by the timing, accessibility, language, culture and associated workload of LSP meetings.

Benefits of being on the LSP

The CPP evaluation notes that “For many of the respondents to our LO study, the simple fact of having established a place on the LSP is an achievement in itself”. It also brings various benefits:

- gaining knowledge and awareness of policies and plans;
- building trust with, and gaining recognition from, other sectors;
- being consulted;
- having access to decision makers.

Parity of partnership

Despite these benefits, CENs and the sector more generally can still feel they only have junior partner status; that they have not yet overcome all the misconceptions about the role of the VCS and that they are not exercising real influence (echoing the

findings from the LSP evaluation discussed in chapter 6). The timing of different developments was an impediment because the Community Strategy and Local Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy processes were in place before the CEN was set up so that, in some LSPs, the VCS had to find a way into arrangements that were up and running. Many in the sector also perceive LSPs as being dominated by the local authority. This means therefore that, on the one hand its relationship with the local authority is key for the sector and, on the other, significant progress towards equal partnership is unlikely without a change in the council's culture and receptiveness.

The impact of CENs

The National Audit Office (NAO 2004) suggested that the influence of CENs over local decision-making had been limited so far for a variety of reasons. In the first place, timing problems compromised CENs' credibility and damaged their trust in LSPs. Too many structures were put in place prior to the advent of CENs. In addition, however, community participation poses major challenges to existing and accepted work culture and practices in public sector agencies and, in that sense, they may not be ready for it. Partnerships need to share responsibility for successful community participation which "requires multiple strategies on institutional change, capacity building and behavioural change". (NAO quoting Gaventa forthcoming) Conversely, community members need adequate support to help them participate adequately.

5. RELATING TO THE WIDER CONSTITUENCY

Partnerships will not succeed unless they provide real opportunities for people to express their views, influence decisions, and to play an active part in shaping the future of their communities. Special efforts must be made to involve groups that might otherwise be hard to reach, including faith, black and minority ethnic communities. (Hilary Armstrong's Introduction, DETR 2001)

5.1 How representative?

A longstanding issue for VCS representatives in partnerships is how representative they are and what is the 'model' of representation being applied. It is clear that very often the VCS has used a very different concept from that of other sectors. Whereas, for example, business representatives are assumed to bring a business perspective without having rigorously to establish their 'representative' credentials, the VCS has often tried to utilise a 'representative democracy' model, placing greater demands on representatives to be mandated by and feedback to their 'constituency'. This was hard enough to operate in neighbourhood level area-based initiatives. At LSP level, it is impossible. However, CENs can still find that LSP partners and/or some within the VCS have unrealistic expectations because they fail to recognise the difficulties. There can also be tensions between continuity of membership and democratic processes within the sector.

There are differing views on the frequency of elections; some respondents believe annual elections would keep participants fresh, while others believe that three year terms are more appropriate to enable representatives to get to grips with the role.

Accountability

Representiveness is closely allied to accountability. Again, there are perhaps higher expectations of the VCS than of other sectors in this regard because of the assumption that it functions on the basis of representative democracy. There are two types of accountability: taking views into account in advance and giving account later. However, although there is an awareness of their importance and the consolidation of the sectoral infrastructure goes some way towards providing a basis for achieving stronger accountability, the mechanisms for both types are still variable and haphazard. There is a link here with wider aspects of good practice, such as the clarity and transparency of decision-making processes. On the other hand, there is a danger of over-preoccupation with mandating CEN representatives in a way that constrains their full participation and means that the sector's focus is more on processes than the content of policies.

5.2 Wider involvement

There are various ways in which LSPs can reach out to a wider range of people and organisations (beyond the 'usual suspects'), for example:

- using an LSP forum

- community empowerment
- wider dissemination/consultation/communication
- BME involvement
- reaching out to faith groups

Reaching out to a wider public

Box 5.1 shows different ways of extending the net of involvement. In Gloucester, this has come through a new Community Forum to provide a means by which local people have the opportunity to participate in planning issues. In East Durham, LSPTV is an ongoing means of relaying information to the public. The Leeds Initiative used a variety of mechanisms for the consultation over the second Community Strategy and, importantly, allowed sufficient time for real participation in the process.

Box 5.1

In **Gloucester**, a new Community Forum was launched at the November 2004 LSP conference. This forum aims to engage participants from the community sector in issues related to planning and the new planning frameworks. New planning legislation puts a heavier requirement on planning authorities to consult and the proposed Community Forum is one way of working through the infrastructure of the LSP to access potential participants who will have a key role in engaging their communities on planning issues, for example, in relation to the work of the Urban Regeneration Company. Planning officials see this Community Forum as being potentially very important in helping them to widen participation in planning matters.

In **East Durham** the main method of engaging the wider public has been the launch of LSPTV which broadcasts visual information about partnership activity and events in 40 accessible locations such as supermarket cafes, retail centres, doctor's surgery waiting rooms and other community facilities. More informally, LSP developments are relayed by Community Network attendees to their wider membership.

Leeds An example of the wide involvement, also extending to the general public in this case, was the very strong, thorough and unrushed consultation process as part of the preparation of the second Community Strategy, Vision II and everyone worked very hard on it. An important part of it was involving people in Leeds in identifying the main issues and opportunities. There were activities in local neighbourhoods as well as events and projects with young people, older people, black and ethnic minority communities, people with disabilities and carers, women, students, special interest groups, trade unions and the business sector and voluntary and community groups. The consultation document *Your chance to have your say*, was designed to promote general understanding and encourage local people, community groups, businesses and public agencies to get involved in the process. It included a short questionnaire. A communications plan supported the consultation process.

- *Over 6,200 people took part in discussions, workshops, seminars and meetings or responded to the questionnaire;*
- over 505,000 people (71% of the population) were reached by radio, newspapers or websites;
- 20,000 copies of the consultation document were sent out and a further 7,400 downloaded from the internet;
- over 24,400 people contributed to research that directly influenced the development of strategy.
- in total, views were heard from over 30,500 people and organisations, many representing much larger constituencies.

The question sometimes arises of how far the 'person in the street' is or should be aware of the LSP and whether this wider awareness is one measure of its effectiveness. It is arguable that this is important at the stage of determining its vision and strategy as part of the community planning process. However, in the implementation phase the influence of the LSP will be mediated through the partner organisations delivering the strategy. The key challenge, therefore, is for the local population to be aware of the outcomes, though Box 5.2 indicates that some of the process advances may not be very apparent to people not immediately involved. However, associating outcomes with, or attributing them to, the LSP is secondary. Accountability can still be exercised by the individual agencies and the LSP as a whole, but it is not necessarily important to make strenuous efforts to raise the LSP's profile or ensure it gets the credit.

Box 5.2

Herefordshire: Community engagement is limited to interest groups and it is not thought that the general public would be aware of the LSP as such. There was considerable consultation in the development of the community plan but no wider partnership forums. Achievements are communicated through a brief annual review document although this makes no mention of what has not been achieved and why; and the process does not ask for feedback from the public on their perceptions of any changes or improvements. Parish plans and market towns work continues to involve local communities.

Two respondents suggested that there is likely to be a difference in perspective between those inside the partnership and the wider public outside. To the extent that the latter are aware of the partnership, they may not be aware of process gains or may feel that pet issues have been neglected. area and its issues are so big and resources so small that significant but incremental change may not be noticed. Partnership, in other words, is a long journey. It is an easy word to say, but harder to deliver on. Public perception creates a potential risk that with budget cuts, some may argue for downsizing or eliminating the partnership as an ineffective piece of added bureaucracy.

Local Neighbourhood Renewal Strategies (LNRSSs)

A study conducted for the NRU as part of the LSP Evaluation and Action Research Programme in early 2003 (NRU 2004) collected and collated LNRSSs from the 87 NRF LSPs, analysed their contents and provided a collective assessment of their strengths and weaknesses, bearing in mind that these were very early versions of the strategies. One of the headings used for the analysis was 'structures and processes'. These included community and stakeholder engagement and capacity building.

This study found that LNRSSs always underlined the significance of community involvement as a condition of successful neighbourhood renewal, so that mechanisms for engagement were also vital. How far LSPs had set up new structures and mechanisms depended considerably on what was already in place. Although some were trying to work primarily through the LSP's own structures, most were using existing VCS infrastructures as well as council-led authority wide community development or engagement structures or building on ones developed by area-based initiatives, for example, using neighbourhood management schemes as a foundation of community engagement. Some LSPs were piggybacking on other partner organisations' engagement mechanisms such as the Primary Care Trust or Learning and Skills Council. Although they made a distinction between community consultation and community engagement/empowerment, at least at this early stage,

it was not always clear that LSPs were progressing from one to the other. Some strategies were strong on consultation to ascertain the priorities for the LNRS, but less clear about how the community might be involved in developing neighbourhood plans.

A number of issues arose from the study:

- how far LSPs – and the VCS itself - were able to reach beyond the ‘usual suspects’ in involving groups and identifying representatives. There remain difficulties in involving ‘hard-to-reach’ groups.
- whether engagement structures should be area-wide or only put in place in the neighbourhoods targeted for renewal.
- how manageable the structures were once in place and how easily they could be accommodated within the LSP. There was an apparent danger that constructing massive structures would raise over-inflated expectations about the extent and nature of influence that the VCS and its representatives could exercise.

5.3 Equalities

BME groups

Most CENs found it especially difficult to engage BME groups (NRU 2005, p.28), often because the BME infrastructure was under-resourced and itself struggling to pull together diverse communities. Some Lead Organisations employed dedicated BME workers and most would provide publicity in several languages and display it in venues likely to reach the groups concerned.

Box 5.3 provides illustrate how LSPs in very different areas involve and work with BME groups. They raise issues about:

- the difficulties of securing representation;
- the need for additional support;
- the importance of communication; and
- the interrelationship between securing engagement and tackling issues specific to minority communities.

Box 5.3

In **East Durham** the CEN has made some attempts to engage BME and other groups such as faith, and gay and lesbian groups, but it has tended to happen more at a grassroots than LSP level and engagement only occurs if the individuals concerned also serve as volunteers on LSP groups. A lack of BME organisations means that considerable development work would be necessary for more systematic engagement.

Leeds Initiative has two representatives from the BME Strategy group.

In **Tameside**, although there are BME representatives on the Board there are issues about the difficulty in securing representation of BME communities and the continuing need to find effective ways of supporting them.

Herefordshire: Until recently, race equality and BME community development have not been considered serious issues. Now, however, migrant agricultural workers from Eastern European accession states and Portugal are making these important. The Board is now looking at diversity in its widest sense, and considering how the partnership can work effectively around the issues. The partnership has a Race Equality Board, chaired by the Chief Executive of the Chamber of Commerce and on which key actors are represented. A race equality (officer) group supports this board. The Partnership's race equality officer, who also chairs the Social Inclusion Ambition Group, feels that race equality issues are siloed within the ambition group. Thus, he feels, the race equality agenda has not been mainstreamed, despite apparent awareness of the potential implications of immigration to the agricultural labour force. He did not feel that the Race Equality Board yet exerts enough influence on the LSP. One exception was the LEA, which has mainstreamed race equality effectively with a particular focus on awareness work in schools.

The Social Inclusion Group has done a substantial amount of work on race equality issues, establishing small task groups to work on welfare rights and connecting communities. It has looked at issues for seasonal workers and is currently working with longer term Portuguese workers at Sun Valley and assisting their integration into Herefordshire. The Race Equality Officer has been to see the ESOL group to set up a *Welcome to Hereford* meeting for recent immigrants and is also addressing issues that they can find difficult, like setting up bank accounts and housing. They have planned a series of exhibitions to tackle myths and stereotypes and raise awareness, particularly in local parishes. The ambition group is also producing a newsletter for wider distribution.

Whilst the Race Equality Board is not a formal part of the LSP structure, its chair sees it as a sub-group of the Board, particularly as it comprises nearly the same membership. There are regular reports to the LSP Board, but issues remain about integration and communication.

The Herefordshire example also demonstrates how much can be done across a range of policy areas given both some external stimulus and energy and drive by people in a position to push the agenda forward. Even in this case, however, the Race Equality Officer felt there was scope for much more community involvement and the need for LSP leaders to take more seriously the views of BME and other minority groups with whom typically they do not speak.

The LNRS study showed that some LSPs were paying particular attention to BME groups in a variety of ways, for example through:

- BME forums;
- building cross-cultural networks;
- capacity building measures;
- ring-fenced resources to support involvement;
- the appointment of diversity officers;
- developing codes of practice for partners;
- encouraging agency diversity audits;
- developing community cohesion projects;
- supporting black-led initiatives.

Southwark had a range of forums and engagement mechanisms (Box 5.4). This example illustrates the way that existing as well as new organisations can be used and underlines that the purpose of engagement is not solely to influence the LSP,

but also the way that its member organisations function and the services they provide.

Box 5.4

Southwark's forums and engagement mechanisms

- a Strategic Ethnic Alliance that aims to bring together and support BME VCS organisations;
- Youth Council that seeks to inform the LSP of the views of young people;
- Anti-Homophobic Forum which addresses homophobic incidents;
- Disabilities Forum through which people with disabilities can engage with mainstream service providers about how services can be improved to meet their needs;
- Pensioners' Forum through which older people can engage with mainstream service providers about how services can be improved to meet their needs;
- engagement with faith groups through Borough Deans, the African-Caribbean Evangelical Alliance and Southwark Moslem Forum.

Comments taken a case study in the LSP evaluation indicate that there are issues beyond just 'being at the table' that are important if minority issues are to be pursued properly. One is commitment by other partners and this may also entail prioritisation that is expressed in local or national targets. Another is having an adequate database in relation to areas and target groups to diagnose the problems and provide a baseline for measuring progress.

One BME voluntary sector representative voices serious concerns about the equalities agenda. Why does NRU not promote it more strongly? – there needs to be more join up between CCU in the Home Office and NRU. Locally, he feels the equalities agenda is only there on paper with the LA and other major agencies. His organisation has to spend too much time monitoring what agencies aren't doing. There needs to be an equalities target mainstreamed throughout everything the LSP does and also better data – there is no proper data at ward level even though this has been the way NRF has been allocated.

Faith groups

As was indicated earlier, an increasing number of LSPs are now including faith groups within or alongside their VCS representation. In Tameside, the CVS and the Race Equality Council combined to launch an Inter-Faith conference that attracted 150 delegates to its inaugural meeting in September 2004. In Southwark, there are 2 members from the Multi-Faith Forum – one of whom is a Vice-Chair of the LSP. In Leeds, there are now two faith representatives on the Board, coming through the Faith Communities Liaison Group.

Other examples from the evaluation case studies indicate that it may not be easy to attract representatives and that even where ones have come forward, they may be unclear about their role. Box 5.5 underlines that, at least in some people's minds, there is a close link between involving faith communities and BME groups and that sometimes the primary, and perhaps misplaced, motivation for involving the former is to reach the latter.

Box 5.5

In **Hampshire**, the representative of Churches Together has been uncertain – and sometimes frustrated - over the role and function of the LSP in general, and his own role in particular. Drawing together the several Churches Together groups across the county and concerned about how to represent the interests of a variety of multi-ethnic multi faith communities, the representative is hoping that the LSP might develop a more explicit set of values behind its work, and is concerned personally to inject spirituality into the strategic debate.

In **Gloucester**, the ‘faith’ representative seat on the LSP has only recently been filled. It is meant to be shared between representatives, one Christian, one Muslim. However the Muslim representative has not yet taken up his seat furthering the concern among some respondents that not all minority ethnic communities in the city are linked into the LSP.

Youth

The LNRS study showed that **young people** were another group singled out for special focus in engagement by some LSPs, often reflecting the priority they were given in the LNRSs themselves.

6. IMPACT OF VCS INVOLVEMENT IN LSPs

6.1 Representation – to what effect?

Contribution and adaptation

A question in the national evaluation survey asked how far the different sectors bring skills and experience to the LSP (Table 6.1).

Table 6.1 Contribution of different sectors in ALL LSPs

	Good		Moderate		Limited		Don't know		Total
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N
Bring relevant skills and experience									
Business sector	112	41%	81	30%	72	26%	9	3%	274
Voluntary sector	186	65%	81	28%	16	6%	2	1%	285
Community	125	47%	82	31%	44	17%	14	5%	265
LA councillors	161	57%	95	34%	22	8%	4	1%	282
LA officers	240	87%	32	12%	1	0%	3	1%	276
Public sector partners	224	78%	54	19%	7	2%	2	1%	287
Securing change in their own organisations									
Business sector	20	8%	39	15%	130	50%	73	30%	262
Voluntary sector	59	22%	104	38%	76	28%	32	12%	271
Community	46	18%	66	26%	95	38%	43	17%	250
LA councillors	90	33%	119	43%	54	20%	11	4%	274
LA officers	134	50%	99	37%	28	11%	5	2%	266
Public sector partners	77	28%	121	44%	58	21%	17	6%	273

Question: How would you assess the involvement of partners in your LSP?

Across all LSPs, 65% of respondents thought that the voluntary sector had made a good contribution whereas only 47% thought this of the community sector. Although the case studies did not provide detailed information about the precise skills brought by the VCS, they showed that there is reliance on the sector's connections with some groups or organisations that other sectors would find harder to reach. The pattern is similar in the survey responses about whether partners have secured change in their own organisations, but the views about change are more pessimistic.

Table 6.1 shows how respondents rated the VCS compared with other sectors:

- under half the respondents thought the *business sector* was good at bringing relevant skills and experience and fewer than 10% thought business members had been good at securing change in their own organisations;
- *local authority councillors* ranked between the voluntary and community sectors in terms of bringing skills and experience but rather more – a third - of LSPs thought they had been good at securing change in their organisations.
- *local authority officers* ranked most highly on both questions.

- over three quarters of respondents thought *other public sector partners* were good at bring their skills and experience but only just over one quarter thought they had secured change

Comparing NRF and non-NRF LSPs

Table 6.2 Contribution of different sectors in NRF LSPs

	Good		Moderate		Limited		Don't know		Total
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N
Bring relevant skills and experience									
Business sector	34	44%	30	39%	11	14%	3	4%	78
Voluntary sector	52	68%	20	26%	5	7%	0	0%	77
Community sector	42	55%	26	34%	9	12%	0	0%	77
LA councillors	51	66%	21	27%	5	7%	0	0%	77
LA officers	62	85%	10	14%	1	1%	0	0%	73
Public sector partners	66	84%	12	15%	1	1%	0	0%	79
Securing change in their own organisations									
Business sector	8	11%	15	20%	38	51%	13	18%	74
Voluntary sector	20	27%	26	36%	19	26%	8	11%	73
Community sector	21	29%	21	29%	22	31%	8	11%	72
LA councillors	34	46 %	27	37%	12	16%	1	1%	74
LA officers	40	56%	24	34%	7	10%	0	0%	71
Public sector partners	25	34%	35	47%	12	16%	2	3%	74

Table 6.3 Contribution of different sectors in Non-NRF LSPs

	Good		Moderate		Limited		Don't know		Total
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N
Bring relevant skills and experience									
Business sector	78	40%	51	26 %	61	31%	6	3%	196
Voluntary sector	134	64%	61	29%	11	5%	2	1%	208
Community sector	83	44%	56	30%	35	19%	14	7%	188
LA councillors	110	54%	74	36%	17	8%	4	2%	205
LA officers	178	88%	22	11%	0	0%	3	2%	203
Public sector partners	158	76%	42	20%	6	3%	2	1%	208
Securing change in their own organisations									
Business sector	12	6%	24	13%	92	49%	60	32%	188
Voluntary sector	39	20%	78	39%	57	29%	24	12%	198
Community sector	25	14%	45	25%	73	41%	35	20%	178
LA councillors -	56	28%	92	46%	42	21%	10	5%	200
LA officers	94	48%	75	39%	21	11%	5	3%	195

Public sector partners	52	26%	86	43%	46	23%	15	8%	199
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Tables 6.2 and 6.3 separate out the results for NRF and non-NRF LSPs.:

- Responses tend to be more positive from the NRF partnerships than the non-NRFs in relation to both questions across all sectors (with the exception of the skills and experience brought by local authority officers).
- The margin of difference is greater in relation to the community sector than the voluntary sector in the responses to both questions and far more respondents replied 'don't know' to the question of change in the community sector.

6.3 Factors affecting participation in the LSP

Being seen as effective partners by other LSP members would be a driver towards the VCS gaining parity. Arguably a major obstacle in their way is that the rules of the partnership game have largely been written by others and to suit others. "CEN representatives find that the way meetings are run reinforces their junior status." (NRU 2005, p.68) Long agendas, late papers, jargon, the way the meetings are chaired and the style of debate are all reasons cited by CENs (NRU 2005) as being counter-productive to them feeling comfortable and playing an effective role. The LSP evaluation also found that VCS representatives can feel out of place because they feel overwhelmed by the number of council and other public sector officers.

For some respondents, limited voluntary sector influence has much to do with the perceived close alignment between LSP and Council. Some Council staff conceded that, rightly or wrongly, they are perceived as dominant by some within the voluntary and community sectors. One suggestion is that there could be a clearer organisational separation between LSP and Council.

Reference has already been made to the limited resources available to the VCS. Time is as much a constraint as finance. Although the VCS in NRF areas has had CEF funding, there can still be complaints about lack of capacity. For many representatives, involvement is additional to their day jobs and is not necessarily recognised as part of their remit. If they are volunteers, then participation in the LSP comes on top of their original volunteering activity. It may be far removed from their main interests and seem to risk either being a distraction or distancing them from those they see as their key allies. The following observations taken from the case studies illustrate some of the issues:

The strategic organisation set up to enable VCS engagement in the LSP is more representative of the voluntary than the community sector. It is also seen as under-resourced and therefore facing a major challenge. It has recognised that there are a number of larger organisations not within the organisation and is setting out to identify key groups and individuals.

The voluntary sector continues to experience difficulties in engaging with strategic partnership working, including the lack of funding to pay for attendance at meetings or for associated expenses. There is a commitment to use some of the LPSA1 reward money from next year to support the voluntary sector and facilitate its engagement. A draft/indicative business plan earmarks £50,000 pa. for voluntary sector capacity building over three years from 2005.

There was general recognition from respondents from all sectors that voluntary sector representatives are a key element of the LSP. While the commitment of the majority of voluntary sector representatives is not questioned by respondents, their capacity to continue to participate at the level at which they do without additional resources to support them is questionable.

In addition to factors directly to do with engagement with the LSP, there can be competing interests for the sector, particularly at a time when other government agendas are both providing new opportunities and bringing new pressures. As was reported from one of the case study areas:

The focus of the voluntary sector has been drawn away from the LSP of late as the sector across the county has been negotiating its way into a new Home Office initiative for the sector.

6.2 Impact

There is a distinction between the numerical representation of the VCS and its effects on the LSP, for example, in terms of how much influence it wields. The latter may be affected by the perceptions and expectations of partners from other sectors and the scope they give the sector as well as by the actual capacity of the VCS. The sector's overall lack of resources, the fact that it largely comprises lots of smaller organisations rather than fewer more muscular ones and the status of the representatives all contribute to the VCS being an unequal partner in terms of power and influence.

Within the sector, although some actors feel that the VCS has had some impact, it has not been as great as it should have been. The influence was often felt to be greatest at the theme or ambition group level, partly depending on the subject matter and partly upon how sympathetic the chairs of such groups are to the sector.

Perceptions from other partners included very mixed views. For some the sector is "strong on talk, no action"; "has no resources and so no clout"; "the community sector not relevant at county level"; "not doing as much as they could". There is a distinction between being there in numbers and actually exercising influence. For others, VCS partners are making a very valuable contribution, providing different perspective and having an equal voice. Nevertheless, they recognise the difficulty of obtaining representative members from a sector that is so large and diverse.

Boxes 6.1 and 6.2 illustrate some of the issues as exemplified in two non-NRF LSPs. They underline:

- the difficulties in organising such a diverse and fragmented sector,
- the differences in approach, capacity and interests across VCS organisations that affect the quality and extent of their engagement;
- the challenge of engaging some hard-to-reach groups;
- the difficulty of ensuring that representative voices emerge from the engagement process;
- the significance of (the lack of) resources;
- questions about what the sector itself gains from involvement

Box 6.1: Herefordshire

“The voluntary sector contribution to the partnership is widely perceived to be positive, bringing it ‘back down to earth’ and frequently providing a valued challenge to the professional viewpoint. As a whole the sector is considered to do a vast amount of irreplaceable work. However, the enormous size and diversity of the sector makes it difficult for a partnership to engage with it . This labyrinthine network of dispersed organisations does not work as a totality and consequently it is difficult to say whether the Voluntary Sector Assembly is representative.

One consequence of this complexity is that not all voluntary sector organisations view the LSP positively and some ask what added value it has produced and whether they wish to be a part of it. A second consequence has been tensions between different parts of the voluntary sector network. It is unlikely that these can be completely overcome, driven as they are in some cases by profound philosophical differences about what ‘voluntary’ means. There is a perceived lack of clarity about the role of the VCS representative on some ambition groups and more support and guidance has been requested.

Box 6.2: Gloucester

All respondents acknowledged the importance of VCS involvement and there was general recognition that the representatives are a key element of the LSP and that their commitment was unquestioned. However, there were doubts about their capacity to continue to participate at that level without additional resources to support them. Key issues expressed by respondents were:

1. That the CVS had not been able to deliver what was expected in terms of regular elections and interactive dialogue between the representatives and the wider sector (whether this was all about resources was disputed by some respondents)
2. That the voluntary sector representatives on the LSP Executive were not fully accountable to the wider sector (beyond their own commitment to give an account of their actions and seek out others views) and mechanisms needed to be put in place to enable representatives to be more accountable.
3. Voluntary sector representatives had different capacities. Some could engage easily with the LSP, while others found it difficult to go beyond their individual interests.
4. That the fragmented nature of the voluntary and community sector in the city meant that it was very difficult for the CVS to be able to act as a coordinating body.

There are issues about how well some VCS representatives are able to fulfil their role:

- how far they understand it (as well as whether other partners have a clear view of it);
- whether, in comparison to the other LSP members, they have sufficient clout;
- whether they are able to bring a strategic view.

These questions are closely linked with the perceived constraints on the full participation of VCS organisations.

One major difference between the VCS and the public sector is that whilst the chief executives of the public agencies involved in LSPs can determine how far LSP decisions are carried through into their own organisations, VCS representatives are in a much weaker position because on the whole they do not have executive powers within the groups they represent.

Sometimes the lack of clarity about the role of VCS representatives whether at Board level or on theme or other sub-groups is another significant factor. In part, this is because VCS representatives do not necessarily feel equipped to address the high level strategic issues nor that this is where their interests lie.

Some of the community organisations we interviewed felt that the LSP dealt with borough-wide rather than their local concerns and did not feel at liberty to raise latter issues because they felt they would be accused of not taking a strategic perspective and of being too parochial.

There are sometimes questions about the culture of the sector:

- how far it is attuned to partnership - even within the sector, organisations can be more used to competing with one another for funding or influence; or
- whether there is still a need for the VCS to move away from a 'them and us' stance to take on the responsibilities of partnership and not merely see the LSP as an opportunity to confront others.

However, the challenge of maximising the role of the VCS springs as much from the distinctiveness of the sector as from any weaknesses. For example, precisely because VCS organisations often represent under-represented groups, they tend to be more individual in their interests than others. There needs to be a 'space' within the LSP structures for these perspectives and insights to be shared even if it is not exclusively at the LSP Board (Box 6.3).

Box 6.3

Leeds: There is a dilemma about whether the Board is the right place for VCS representatives to be and some, even within the sector, conclude it may not be – at least with the strong numerical representation there is at present. Two issues weaken their position on the Board. First, some of them are not necessarily involved in the LSP in any other way and therefore have nothing to bring from other levels of the Partnership or on specific themes. Secondly, whereas others round the table are at a chief executive/senior strategic level in their own organisations, they are not. Their strength may be in bringing a more grass roots perspective. The weakness is that their contributions can be off-beam because they are too narrow. In terms of exercising influence, therefore, they are better placed within Strategy groups.

East Durham: Despite the work of the Community Network, some grassroots organisations still struggle to grasp what the LSP is, who runs it, what its powers are and how decisions are taken. It was seen as a large complicated removed from grass roots concerns and decision-making. They found it difficult to discern how to influence the LSP.

The CPP evaluation (NRU, 2005) found that some LSPs attribute more influence to the VCS than the sector itself would claim. This may come through having a presence on the relevant sub-groups and influencing the Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy and NRF spend, sometimes in ways that potentially have a direct impact on floor targets; for example, securing a greater focus on liveability or teenage pregnancy. Similarly the sector can achieve changes in the LSP's culture, such as widening its approach to diversity issues. Being involved in the LSP can also be the route towards influencing other partners' policies towards the VCS. For example, negotiating a local Compact through the LSP can set a framework for the public sector's dealings with the sector or the VCS may use LSP to address specific issues affecting the sector such as grant regimes.

Full representation, exerting influence and having an impact are all critically determined by the VCS's capacity. The next chapter turns to looking at ways in which LSPs can support the VCS and at capacity building activities within the sector itself.

7. CAPACITY AND CAPACITY BUILDING

Much has already been said about the diversity of the VCS and across different areas, the variation in:

- the balance between voluntary sector and community sector organisations,
- the spread of different types of voluntary organisation and
- the balance of interest groups and neighbourhood/area-based groups.

7.1 LSPs' support to the VCS

LSPs can support their VCS in a variety of ways:

- financial support;
- direct work with LSP representatives to inform and brief them;
- support in auditing the sector and networking;
- developing the rules of engagement between the VCS and other agencies through Protocols – about relationships within the LSP - and Compacts – about wider partnership working.

The most common form of support to the involvement of the VCS is through the development of a Compact or protocol. This has happened in 71% of all LSPs, ranging from 60% of non-NRFs to 98% of NRFs (Table 7.1). Clearly the survey only gives information about developing compacts.

It is evident that NRF LSPs are more likely to provide support under all the headings cited but some disparities are greater than others, mainly in relation to activities that are more resource intensive, such as providing financial support and training and infrastructural development.

Table 7.1 LSP support for the voluntary and community sector

	NRF LSPs		Non-NRF LSPs		All LSPs	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Providing financial support	67	81%	47	21%	114	3%
Mapping VCS	29	35%	55	25%	84	28%
Training and infrastructural development	50	60%	33	15%	83	27%
Providing tailored support to voluntary and community representatives on the LSP	61	74%	66	30%	127	42%
Developing and agreeing a compact or protocol	81	98%	134	60%	215	71%
Broadening involvement in terms of communities of interest and identity	64	77%	99	45%	163	53%
Broadening involvement in terms of contribution to themes	71	86%	143	64%	214	70%
Other	14	17%	24	11%	38	13%

Mapping the sector

Inside and outside the VCS there can be uncertainty about what exists and the contribution of the sector. Only a minority of LSPs have mapped the VCS, but this is an area in which non-NRFs do not lag so far behind the NRFs, perhaps because doing some form of mapping was a desirable preliminary step to establishing appropriate sectoral representation on the partnership. (Box 7.1)

Box 7.1

East Durham: The CEN and CVS jointly commissioned an investigation into the range, extent and dynamics of community involvement and development work in the district from an independent consultant. The resulting report highlighted the under-developed and uneven nature of local community and voluntary activity which had been exacerbated by short term regeneration programmes, episodic involvement of community support organisations, strong village identities, decline of mining social institutions and a dependency culture. Mapping work showed the need for better inter-agency dialogue, sharing of resources and the need to work within a common vision and framework.

There are issues about the strength of the sector, its existing infrastructure and how far co-ordination is possible. In some cases, new infrastructure organisations have been created during the lifetime of the LSP and these can provide the basis for building capacity. For example, VOICE is the strategic organisation set up to enable VCS engagement in the Leeds Initiative. (Box 7.2) It still sees itself as under-resourced and therefore facing major challenges especially as the VCS was previously underdeveloped.

Box 7.2

Leeds: There is an acknowledged capacity issue within the VCS in relation to time and level of knowledge. Involvement for all the representatives is additional to their day jobs. At times it has been embarrassing because the Network has spent a lot of time pushing for places for the sector on various LSP groups then either they cannot fill them or people do not turn up to meetings.

In other cases, the LSP has made a contribution (Box 7.3) though this may only be a short-term measure. Mainstreaming such support through public sector partner agencies may also be difficult especially if no distinction is made between infrastructural support and grant aid to individual organisations.

Box 7.3

In **Herefordshire**, the LSP contributes £10,000 to support the development of the VSA. The intention was for mainstream agencies to continue funding it via the Partnership. This has not happened. According to the voluntary sector representatives, the Partnership was not enthusiastic about providing any funding to VSA because of the shortage of resources and because of the Council Chief Executive's view that the Authority supports VCS through core grant funding. Free and independent ICT advice is available to all businesses and voluntary and community sector organisations in the County through the Herefordshire In Touch (HIT) programme.

In **Gloucester**, The CVS argued and the LSP agreed that in order to support the development of the sector additional resources would be needed to help build capacity and facilitate engagement. £5000

was allocated on an annual basis to the CVS to provide this support and organise voluntary sector involvement.

LSP staff give other forms of support (Box 7.4) to VCS representatives. This is perhaps more common in NRF LSPs than non-NRFs not only because the CEN provides an obvious sphere of collaboration but also because they are likely to have more staff available.

Box 7.4

In **East Durham**, support to the community/voluntary sector by the LSP has thus far taken the form of the co-ordinator holding pre-briefing meetings with the CEN co-ordinator so that he can in turn offer support to CEN members, agreeing the protocol and continuing to stage meetings in different community venues around the borough. Most parties felt that the more inexperienced CEN members need further support and capacity building and one cited service improvement assessment as an area where they felt requisite skills were sometimes lacking. The protocol includes EDLSP a statement of intent which recognises the value and importance in terms of enhancing accountability of involving local community and voluntary sector representatives in all aspects of its work and that the CEN has greater need for support than other partners. It details representation on different LSP groupings, CEN members' role and responsibilities, CEN commitment to involve all sections of the community in its activities, handling of LSP and CEN business, arrangements for regular liaison between LSP and CEN staff. The LSP also stated that it would endeavour to support its search for continued funding once CEF expired.

7.2 Capacity building within the sector

Some CENs or infrastructure bodies have developed specific training for representatives and/or briefings and support mechanisms. There is a need to bring together VCS representatives involved in different parts of the LSP structure so that they are not working in isolation and so that they can get a grasp of the bigger picture. In Leeds, VOICE holds pre-meetings for representatives on the Leeds Initiative and has set up a strategy group for representatives as an arena for sharing and reporting back with the aim of achieving more integrated and effective involvement.

The CPP evaluation (NRU 2005) found that the Community Chests and Community Learning Chest had often allowed Lead Organisations to reach parts of the sector that had not previously be reached, even by well established CVSs. The strengths of the Chests included their flexibility, the independence of the funding and minimum bureaucracy and the support that could be given to unsuccessful as well as successful applicants. The provision made, such as training and IT, enables groups to function more effectively. Lessons emerged from the process about the length of time and intensity of outreach work that is necessary to reach the most marginalised groups.

Infrastructure organisations are also aware of the need to build bridging social capital to improve the cohesion within the sector and co-operation between groups. Although the links between the voluntary sector and the community sector remain weak in many areas, bringing together networks of place and communities of interest within an overarching network has helped to highlight common interests and create

linkages and pointed to ways of improving training and support. Where LSPs or local authorities are creating more devolved structures, some parallel moves are being made to develop the sector to strengthen area-based representation⁶.

7.3 Future priorities

It is clear from the case studies that the LSPs are working on the premise that active and co-ordinated community engagement is vital to their success even though their experience to date has underlined the huge challenge of achieving effective community participation. The survey also demonstrates the priority that LSPs have given and still intend to give to it. Table 7.2 indicates that engaging with communities and excluded groups has been 'very important' or 'important' for nearly 90% of LSPs and within the NRF LSPs this percentage rises to almost 100%. Table 7.3 shows that it engagement with communities and excluded groups remains on the agenda for 83% of LSPs

Table 7.2: Importance of activities undertaken over the period 2002-2004

	Very important		Important		Not very important		No activity		N/A / don't know		Total
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N
All LSPs											
Consolidating and reviewing membership	124	41%	139	46%	25	8%	9	3%	4	1%	301
Engagement with communities and excluded groups	141	48%	119	41%	11	4%	18	6%	3	1%	292
NRF LSPs											
Consolidating and reviewing membership	36	44%	36	44%	9	11%	1	1%	0	0%	82
Engagement with communities and excluded groups	47	58%	33	41%	1	1%	0	0%	0	0%	81
Non-NRF LSPs											
Consolidating and reviewing membership	88	40%	103	47%	16	7%	8	4%	4	2%	219
Engagement with communities and excluded groups	94	45%	86	41%	10	5%	18	9%	3	1%	211

⁶ refer to the 'Below the Local Strategic Partnership' issues paper by Helen Sullivan and Jo Howard also produced as part of the LSP National Evaluation

Table 7.3: Activities that LSPs are planning to undertake in 2004-2006

	NRF LSPs		Non-NRF LSPs		All LSPs	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Consolidating and reviewing membership	57	69%	183	82%	240	79%
Engagement with communities and excluded groups	72	87%	182	82%	254	83%
Consolidating and developing partnership structures and processes	63	76%	188	85%	251	82%

The survey also showed that nearly all LSPs rate the contribution of their VCS partners as 'very important' or 'important' to their progress over the next two years (Table 7.4).

Table 7.4: Importance of contribution of VCS partners in influencing future progress of LSPs over the next two years

	Very important		Important		Not important		Don't know		Total
	N	%	N	%	Count	N	N	%	N
All LSPs	156	53%	134	45%	4	1%	2	1%	296
NRF LSPs	38	46%	43	52%	0	0%	1	1%	82
Non-NRF LSPs	118	55%	91	43%	4	2%	1	0.5%	214

8. CONCLUSIONS AND SUMMARY OF KEY ISSUES

8.1 Main messages

Against a background of the government attaching increasing importance to the civil renewal and service provision roles of the VCS, this report has explored research findings on VCS engagement in LSPs. Some of the main messages emerging from the study are:

- There is wide variation in the nature of the sector in different areas, the balance between the voluntary and community organisations and how well the infrastructure is developed.
- There is similarly wide variation in the patterns of VCS representation on LSPs, whether and how they distinguish between the voluntary and community sectors, the types of organisation involved, the level of representation and the means of selection.
- Although the CPPs have played a significant role in NRF areas, there are not only differences between NRF and non-NRF areas but also within each of these groupings.
- Time and resources are constraining factors on the sector's involvement, but so also are factors associated with the culture of partnership working and uncertainty both within the sector and amongst partners about the role of the VCS within LSPs.
- The existing relationship between the VCS and the local authority can influence the scope and effectiveness of VCS involvement and be a limiting factor especially if there is perceived to be a very close alignment between the LSP and the Council.
- VCS involvement in wider LSP structures such as thematic groups is important and may provide greater opportunities for influence.
- There is a distinction between engaging the VCS and wider community consultation and participation. LSPs need mechanisms for both.
- Capacity building inside the sector is a prerequisite for full VCS participation and parity of partnership. LSPs can provide different kinds of valuable support and action can be taken by VCS organisations themselves, but the indications are that insufficient resources are being made available yet in most areas for the amount of work that is needed and for a properly strategic and targeted approach.
- It is difficult to measure the impact of the VCS – perceived or actual – or the effectiveness of LSPs in engaging the sector. It would be a time-consuming exercise and attribution would always be problematic. Many factors will affect impact: the sector itself may have no control over some of them and LSPs have no control over others. However, other partners in LSPs recognise the

importance of VCS involvement, in particular for the distinctive perspectives that sector representatives can bring and in relation to engaging deprived communities and excluded groups.

- For the sector, the question of the 'costs' of partnership and whether the outcome is commensurate with all the effort expended remains a relevant one. Nevertheless, there are major benefits stemming from involvement, including increased knowledge, gaining greater recognition and trust from other sectors and having access to decision making.

8.2 Key issues

A number of issues have arisen in the course of this report that would repay both further exploration in future studies of LSPs and more consideration by LSPs themselves.

The distinctive nature of the sector

Although the government guidance does not clearly distinguish between the voluntary and community sectors, there are important differences across the spectrum of organisations within the VCS and they are differences that have implications for LSPs. They affect the degree of difficulty in engaging different groups, the nature of their potential contribution and the level and type of support they require.

There are issues for the sector itself as well. How does it define itself? Where does it begin and end? For example, are faith communities part of the VCS or a separate sector? What is the role of infrastructure organisations? How do they span the diversity of organisations and bring together communities of place and communities of interest?

Does the emphasis on *community* engagement mean that advocacy-type organisations are more likely to get drawn in than the larger service deliverers? If so, on the one hand, how do they retain their critical edge whilst at the same time still carrying the full responsibilities of partnership? On the other, where do the voluntary organisations that may be playing a significant service provision role contracted by public sector agencies fit as far as LSPs are concerned? Is it within the VCS or within the relevant sphere of service providers?

Representation and role

Another major theme is the challenge for LSPs and the sector of achieving adequate VCS representation and gaining a common understanding and consensus about what 'representation' means. Given the size and complexity of the VCS and recognising that individuals cannot be fully representative, there remain the issues of how representatives should be chosen and how they can be accountable to their constituency. Taking steps towards greater trust and integration within the sector may be as much a prerequisite as building infrastructure and capacity.

How large the representation from the sector should be is one of the critical issues. For many purposes, the overall membership of the different LSP groupings needs to

be kept fairly tight in order to remain strategic and action focused. There is an ongoing tension between inclusiveness and effectiveness. After a period of expansion, some LSPs looked again at their Board membership with a view to becoming 'leaner and fitter'. However, having fewer members possibly raises more representational issues for the VCS than it does for other sectors because of the enormous diversity of organisations and interest it encompasses.

The diverse arrangements and different levels and types of participation signal that potentially the VCS has a range of roles within an LSP. It has emerged from the evaluation that partners inside and outside the sector are unclear about what is expected and about how to turn a general sense that participation is necessary and beneficial into practical reality. LSPs need to answer several questions about:

- what is the function of the sector within the LSP in general and in relation to its specific priorities;
- what the VCS representatives are there to do and their role in relation to their own constituency as well as LSP partners;
- whether there is scope for further clarification about the range of possible functions and the types of organisations best placed to fulfil them;
- what are the implications of VCS involvement in LSPs for other forms of governance.

A further question is where within the LSP structures the VCS is most likely to have an impact. There is a danger of viewing LSPs too hierarchically so that people think that the most important place to be is on the Board or Executive whereas some VCS representatives may be more influential on, or have a greater contribution to make to, thematic or area-based groups. The absence of a considered approach to involvement can reflect a lack of understanding or consensus about the purpose of participating.

There remains a need to clarify the relationship between participative and representative democracy and the distinction between the roles of elected members and those of VCS representatives

Capacity building

The Local Partnerships Taskforce has produced a Checklist for effective local partnerships addressed to local practitioners in the public and voluntary sectors, but also including supportive actions that might be taken, including ones for central government departments. It covers five areas:

- improving understanding;
- joining-up policy;
- organising ourselves;
- sharing good practice;
- funding it better.

All of these link with the experience of LSPs. It is clear from the evaluation that VCS organisations need and want more support in terms of understanding and resources. There is scope for developmental work at the level of infrastructure bodies, member organisations and individual staff and volunteers. Compacts and protocols are already helpful but there is more to be done in extending their coverage and ensuring compliance and full implementation, with a possible role for Government Offices in monitoring and spreading good practice. There may also be a need now to revisit and strengthen compacts to take account of changes that Local Area Agreements might bring.

The study has also underlined the critical need for resources. The CPPs have been valuable but confined to NRF areas. There are other sources of funding available and there may be a need in each locality to map central government funding sources - not just Home Office and the NRU but other government departments (e.g. DfES Children's Fund's focus on participation of children and young people) - and regional and local sources. More key spending decisions are made by public sector partners within the LSP than by the LSP itself so that mapping local sources could be a preliminary to making more considered and joined-up long term investment decisions.

The need for capacity building is not confined to the VCS. New forms of governance are not solely a question of bringing in new partners but also a matter of changed relationships. For the sector, this means fully accepting the responsibilities of partnership as well as recognising its potential benefits. For all partners, it means building greater mutual understanding and recognition of the contributions different sectors make and therefore it has implications for capacity building in all sectors. As the NAO indicated, community participation presents a challenge to the way that public and private sector organisations work so that there is a need for wider institutional and behavioural change. Working in a way that facilitates community participation makes particular demands on public sector agencies that may require new forms of organisation, new skills and new roles.

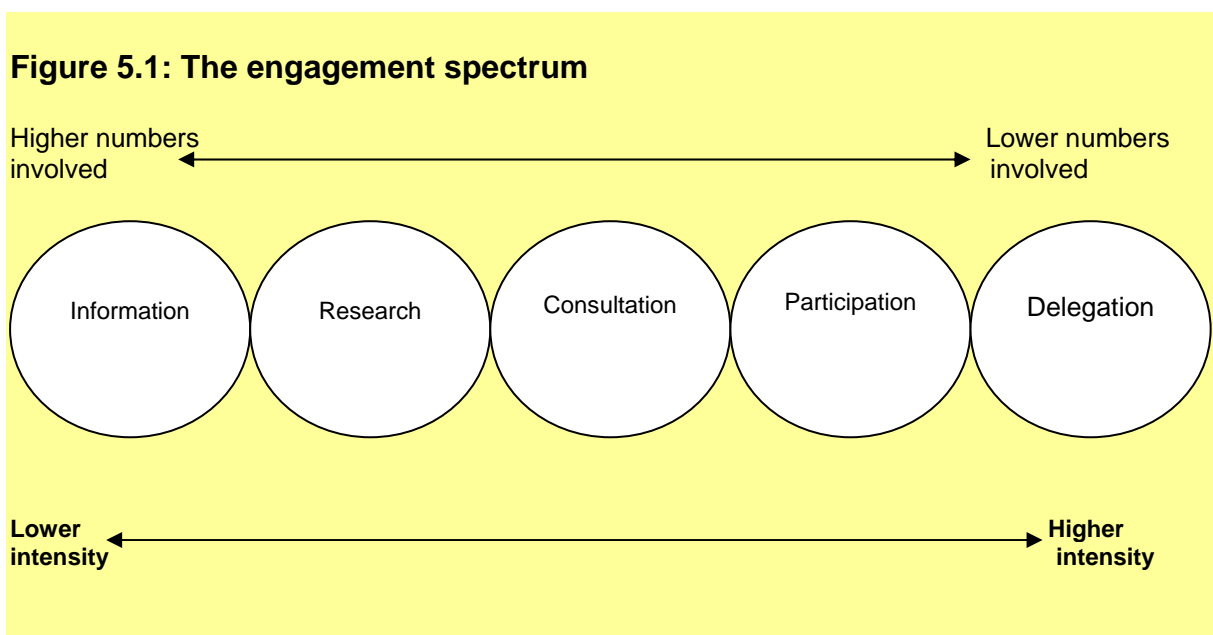
Establishing a clearer policy context nationally and locally could be said to be another form of capacity building. Various of the recommendations of the Local Partnerships Taskforce Checklist are relevant here. At national level, it cites, for example, the need for government departments to present a consistent message to local delivery agents about working with the third sector and generally to develop a clearer rationale for working in partnership with the sector. Locally, it encourages councils to consider the scope for Local Public Service Agreements to focus on effective partnership working with the VCS and recommends that LSPs should consider using the checklist as a basis for an annual health check of their partnership arrangements with the sector.

The nature of engagement

Just as 'community' is a catch-all word that can mean different things to different people or in different contexts, so is 'engagement'. It is clear that the VCS is critical to successful community engagement by LSPs even if it is not the whole answer. What is the relationship between engaging the VCS and engaging the general public?

The Community Engagement Action Learning Set run as part of the LSP evaluation devised an 'engagement spectrum' based upon Sherry Arnstein's ladder of participation. (figure 5.1) The framework is a way of categorising the different forms of engagement:

- giving *information* to people for the sake of communicating or to enable them to make more informed decisions, which might be through newsletter, websites, roadshows, etc., and might be targeted on specific groups.
- *research* which may be structured (through surveys, interviews or focus groups) or unstructured (such as gathering feedback from service users, for example through suggestion boxes);
- *consultation* through a variety of techniques, such as conferences, workshops, asking for written responses to policies, provision or proposals.
- *participation* that may cover, *inter alia*, involvement in partnership structures or representative involvement on boards.
- *delegation* of responsibilities, powers, management/ownership or budget holding.



It is a framework that has application to any and all of the groups of stakeholders in an LSP. As far as the LSP is concerned, there is scope at one end of the spectrum to reach out to residents and the community at large as well as the VCS but the distinctive roles of the sector depend upon the higher intensity activities at the other end.

In summary, there are key issues for the sector itself, for LSPs and for central government.

□ For the VCS, it is important to:

- build trust and linkages within the sector;

- develop an infrastructure adequate to encompass the sector's diversity, including different types of organisation, communities of place and communities of interest;
- reach a common mind about the purposes of engaging in LSPs and determine the membership and forms of participation that might best achieve these goals;
- look for ways of building capacity through personal, organisational and infrastructure development.

☐ It is important for LSPs to:

- recognise the breadth and diversity of the VCS, understand its potential roles and provide appropriate mechanisms for engagement;
- promote the necessary institutional changes and build their own and their partners' capacity for working in ways that facilitate partnership with the VCS and community participation;
- provide resources and support for the sector and help it to access potential funding sources;
- look at the scope of LPSAs to focus on effective partnership working with the VCS;
- revisit compacts in relation to any changes brought by Local Area Agreements.

☐ It is important for central government to:

- develop a clearer rationale about working in partnership with the VCS;
- present a consistent message to their local agencies about working with the VCS;
- recognise the resource demands that involvement in partnerships makes upon individual organisations and the sector as a whole.

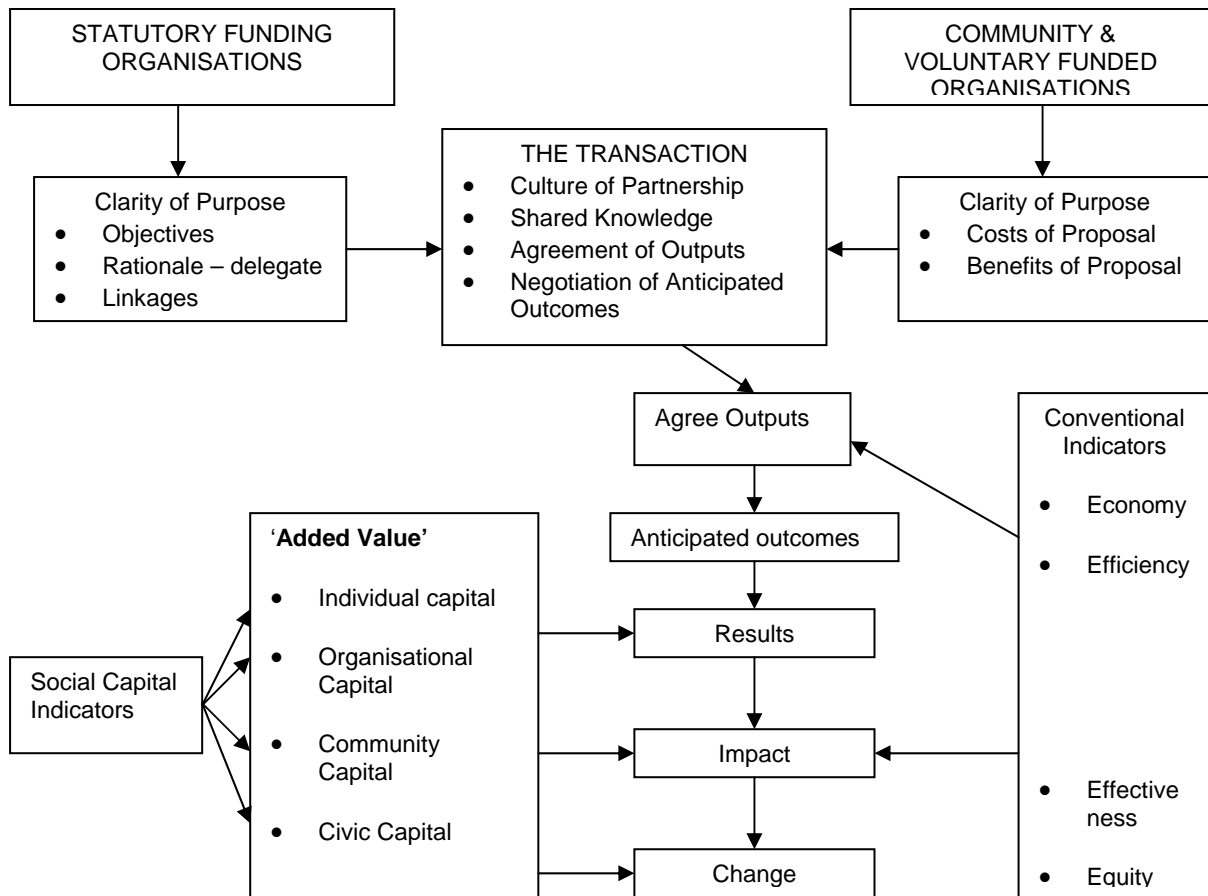
8.3 Looking ahead

To some extent the community participation agenda has shifted again very recently. Several developments are bringing a greater focus on neighbourhood level working: the introduction of the Single Community Programme, the Safer and Stronger Communities Fund, the focus on floor target performance to narrow the gap at neighbourhood level, the launch of *Together We Can*. All these increase the challenge to the sector to be a credible partner. One of the implications, for example, is a switch away from the process issues that have hitherto been central to the performance management framework for CENs towards a much greater focus on outcomes. This will test how far current capacity building measures are really producing the thoroughgoing shake-up of the sector comparable with the modernisation that public sector agencies have been subjected to over recent years. It underlines the potentially crucial role of the *ChangeUp* funding programme and the need for it to be used strategically.

LSPs and their partner organisations will also have to be clearer about what they want from VSC engagement and what they have to do to support the sector's role.

This entails developing a better understanding of both the constraints and the potential of the sector. Given a stronger role for LSPs in initiatives such as Local Area Agreements, it is particularly important that local players translate the general dictums of the guidance about VSC involvement into firm strategies and action plans appropriate to local circumstances and priorities.

Appendix 1: CENI Template



Appendix 2: References

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