



CONSORTIA DEVELOPMENT FUND

INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY 2008-2014

Infrastructure Development Strategy Objective

Consortium Name: Bristol Consortium

Geographical area: Bristol

Lead Body: Voscur

Contact Details:

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Consortium Vision / Mission Statement:

Vision

Communities in Bristol benefit from a strong, diverse and sustainable voluntary, community and social enterprise sector.

Mission

To provide accountable, representative and well resourced infrastructure support services to Bristol's voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) sectors.

Consortium Objectives:

Aims

To have a sustainable, united, effective, efficient and active Bristol Consortium with members having both resources and skills to successfully implement the aims outlined in this strategy and accompanying business plan.

To ensure that all Bristol VCSE organisations have easy access to all infrastructure support services by 2015.

For the Bristol Consortium to be recognised as the representative voice of the diverse Bristol VCSE sector and as equal partners with the statutory sector in co-ordinating the delivery of services to the local community.

To have robust BME, equalities and other specialist expertise working together to ensure specialist support services are available where appropriate and that the frontline VCSE organisations they represent, have full access to and benefit fully from infrastructure support.

Objectives

To influence those local, regional and national policies that impact on our communities.

To work with the sector and other stakeholders to identify and meet the current and future infrastructure support needs of frontline VCSE organisations.

To ensure that plans we develop are intelligence led, and that they influence and inform planning at other levels.

To ensure our plans reflect the equalities and diversity needs of the area.

To establish, agree and deliver strategic priorities for infrastructure investment in line with identified needs and ChangeUp/Capacitybuilders objectives.

To represent and promote the interests of the VCSE sector by providing a clear case for investment in local infrastructure support services.

What are the key changes that the Consortium aims to make over the next 6 years?

DELIVERY

The VCSE sector will be involved as an equal partner in the development and delivery of the Sustainable Community Strategy and the Local Area

Agreement (LAA).

VCSE organisations in Bristol will have improved their organisational performance through advice and support from the Bristol Consortium; have access to learning and development opportunities to meet identified skills gaps; bench-learning opportunities (web-based comparison); have access to support and advice on Human resources issues; access to affordable and reliable ICT support services that are appropriate and user friendly; access to comprehensive, up to date accurate information on issues relevant to the sector locally; governing bodies will be aware of their responsibilities and good practice and have access to governance support and advice.

The Consortium will influence procurement and commissioning policy and practice and the recommendations made in the Audit Commission's Hearts and Minds report will be adopted by the Bristol Partnership (the Local Strategic Partnership).

COMPACT

VCSE engagement will be underpinned by a strengthened Compact. With our partners in the Bristol Partnership, we will review and update the Compact and embed its principles across all sectors. All Compact codes of practice will be implemented. Full cost recovery principles will be understood and implemented by all partners.

INFLUENCING

The diverse views of the local voluntary, community and social enterprise sector will be effectively and accountably represented to external bodies. The sector will have an increased and strengthened role in planning and policy making. Voluntary, community and social enterprise organisations and local residents will be fully engaged with and able to influence neighbourhood governance structures. VCSE representation will be recognised and resourced at all levels within the city's decision-making structures.

INVESTMENT IN LOCAL INFRASTRUCTURE

The LAA target 'Environment for a thriving third sector' will have been taken up and supported by all partners, and as a result all public sector partners will recognise the value of, and invest in local infrastructure support services. The sector will have access to comprehensive, locally delivered, infrastructure support services.

QUALITY STANDARDS

Local Infrastructure organisations and front-line organisations will be working to quality standards that are recognised by all partners and the ChangeUp Consortium will be acknowledged and supported as the main delivery agent for infrastructure support services locally.

FUNDING/INCOME GENERATION MIX

Partners will recognise that an appropriate mix of flexible funding

programmes and income generation activity is needed to ensure the sustainability of existing services, and the growth and development of new services in response to emerging need. Bristol's front-line organisations will be able to take advantage of opportunities to diversify their income sources, demonstrate increased skill in contract negotiation and achieve better standards in effective fundraising.

COMMUNITY COHESION AND INTEGRATION

The ChangeUp Consortium will bring together VCSE organisations, networks and communities to promote interaction and foster positive community relations to create cohesion in local areas. BME, Equalities Communities of Interest and socially excluded groups will have increased capacity so that they are able to offer better services and to influence the development of public policy and practice. VCSE organisations will have an increased understanding of equalities issues within the sector, and how they contribute to community cohesion and integration.

VOLUNTEERING

Bristol will have an effective and high quality volunteering infrastructure reaching, recruiting and placing a greater number and diversity of people, coupled with improved volunteer management.

ASSETS

Local groups will have taken ownership of and will be successfully managing public assets as a route to sustainable community development and income generation.

Please state why you feel these aims are the right ones: (please reference any research, consultation or other data you feel is relevant)

DELIVERY

The reduction in funding available to the sector and the shift towards commissioning and procurement means that it is crucial for local infrastructure to be able to influence this agenda so that both procurement and commissioning arrangements are appropriate, transparent and accessible. We need to support smaller groups or groups working with isolated or excluded communities to ensure that they have equal access to contract/funding opportunities. It is important at this time that the Consortium is able to influence the 'mainstreaming' agenda, as VCSE activity previously supported by Government regeneration programmes has its funding withdrawn over the next three years. We need to ensure that as much of this work as possible is continued, picked up by public agencies and that good practice is 'mainstreamed'.

There is a role for the Consortium in helping groups become 'credible, competitive and confident' to deliver public services. Consortium members have played a major role in the C3 partnership which recently launched the PERFORM toolkit which aims to help voluntary, community and social enterprise organisations improve their performance through a process of self assessment and action planning. Capacitybuilders investment has also enabled us to adapt the PERFORM toolkit to use with groups as a 'funding health-check' and as a development tool with smaller neighbourhood and Equalities groups.

Local, regional and national research has identified the key support and development needs of front-line organisations. A sample of this research is referenced here: Bristol VCSE Infrastructure Strategy updated 2006 and 2007; Bristol VCSE Infrastructure support needs mapping 2005/updated 2006; Bristol Consortium stakeholder events 2006; Bristol Partnership Community Engagement mapping and strategy 2006; C3 Partnership sector training needs research 2005/06, C3 evaluation 2007; Workforce Development in the South West Voluntary and Community Sectors: Skill Shortages Summary (University of Plymouth 2006); Workforce Development for the VCS in the South West Strategic Plan 2006; Voscur Equalities and Inclusive Neighbourhoods Work Evaluation 2007; BME SnapShot report 2005; Capacitybuilders Destination 2014; UK Voluntary Sector skills survey 2007 – Workforce Hub.

COMPACT

We have been partners in the Compact steering group since its inception and have been successful in influencing its content. Limited capacity has meant that promoting wider ownership and monitoring its codes of practice has been difficult. Capacitybuilders investment this year has enabled us to consult with VCSE organisations and public sector partners on developing a local full cost recovery model and to develop and deliver training on this model. We are currently updating the Compact Funding and Procurement Guidance and will launch a further consultation on the draft guidance in the spring. This year we have secured the Leader of the Council as the Compact Champion and a Voluntary Sector Representative as the Chair of the Bristol Partnership. We will build on this success to ensure that all partners within the LSP understand and sign up to a Compact way of working.

INFLUENCING

The end of Neighbourhood Renewal funding, the 'roll out' of neighbourhood governance structures in Bristol and the government's 'duty to involve' (April 2009), means that it is critical at this time to stimulate and maintain engagement with existing and emerging local governance structures and to ensure that there is infrastructure support for engagement at a local level which links to the bigger picture at a city-wide strategic level. The Consortium is leading on a reward target within the LAA, 'Influencing Decision Making', and influencing at a local level is key to the success of this target, which, if achieved will bring additional resources into the city.

INVESTING IN LOCAL INFRASTRUCTURE

In response to the City Council's recent proposal to open up infrastructure support to market forces, our members and other public sector partners told us that this was unacceptable to them and that they wanted local infrastructure support services. Since that time the local authority has made a clear commitment to local infrastructure through engagement with and investment in the Bristol Consortium. It is a challenge to get other public sector partners to acknowledge that whilst they recognise the value of the VCSE sector in delivering services on their behalf, they have a role in strengthening the supply chain (i.e. investing in infrastructure support). We have the opportunity now to push for the inclusion of a target for the strengthening of the sector within the 'refresh' of the LAA. The Consortium commissioned independent research into front-line organisations' infrastructure support needs, which demonstrated that there is an ongoing need for locally delivered, accessible, sustainable, good quality infrastructure support services.

QUALITY STANDARDS

Recognised quality standards for Consortium members will help us to continuously improve our performance, increase others' confidence in the Consortium's ability to deliver, and encourage front-line organisations to adopt quality standards.

FUNDING/INCOME GENERATION MIX

We recognise the need for the sector to generate its own income where this is possible, but also acknowledge that for many groups trading is not an option, and many groups that are able to generate income from trading begin life as small voluntary and community sector organisations, working in specific localities or with particular communities of interest. It is, therefore, vital that groups have access to a range of funding advice (including organisational health checks and business planning) are able to diversify their funding base, and are eventually able to access social enterprise support services.

COMMUNITY COHESION AND INTEGRATION

Community cohesion is an important local issue for the sector as well as for the public and private sectors as every local authority area in the UK is unique. Factors such as age, wealth, gender, ethnicity, religion, sexuality, class and political ideology can create divisions in communities and these divisions can lead to tension. Bristol is a diverse city and celebrates its diversity. Bristol's population is changing and we are identifying emerging issues and needs for our new communities. In partnership with Bristol City Council, the Consortium has organised two Community Cohesion events in 2007 – a conference followed by a seminar to look at how we take forward the recommendations from the conference. The range of recommendations cover issues from cohesion in the workplace, transport, childcare, integration in schools, promoting cohesion through buildings and public space and how public events can help cohesion. The sector has a vital role to play in implementing these recommendations and the Consortium is committed to supporting and co-ordinating this activity.

VOLUNTEERING

Bristol City Council's Quality of Life Survey records that 21.3% of people volunteer in Bristol. Although a direct comparison cannot be made with national surveys which range from between 29% and 39% of the population volunteering, Bristol does appear to be below the national figures.

Promoting volunteering among all communities allows more people, especially those from diverse and marginalised backgrounds to become more involved as citizens. We recognise the need to work as an integrated body to co-ordinate information and outreach support to frontline voluntary organisations to improve their standards of volunteer management and to facilitate their development of volunteering roles more suited to potential volunteers who are currently excluded.

ASSETS

The Quirk Review 'Making Assets Work' and the government's response to it set out the benefits of community management and ownership of public assets, but recognised the risks to both the public owner and to the community organisation wanting to take over ownership. In Bristol we are awaiting the Council's promised Asset Transfer Policy and are willing to work with the Council to help take that forward.

Government's expectations of the role of the sector and its relationship to public sector partners are set out in the following reports.

Strong and Prosperous Communities – Communities and Local government – 2007

The future role of the third sector in social and economic regeneration – Cabinet Office and HM treasury 2007

Hearts and Minds – Commissioning from the Voluntary Sector –2007

The Quirk Review – Making Assets Work – CLG 2007

Our Shared Futures – Commission on Integration and Cohesion 2007

An Action plan for Community Empowerment: building on success – CLG 2007

The Third Sector – the crucial role of the new performance framework – CLG 2007

Partnership in Public Services – an action plan for third sector involvement – Office of the Third Sector 2006

Social Enterprise Action plan – scaling new heights – OTS 2006

Implications of this Infrastructure Development Strategy for the consortium

ChangeUp and Capacitybuilders investment has enabled Consortium members to strengthen their skills base and modernise their internal infrastructure and systems. We now need investment in order to retain the skilled staff that we have employed, build on our knowledge base, and to further develop and benefit from the collaboration that we have worked hard to achieve during the

past three years, particularly between specialist and generalist partners.

Bristol Consortium's own evaluation and the Capacitybuilders self-assessment workshop identified areas for improvement within the Consortium, and areas where we can work more effectively together to improve our services to front-line organisations.

These include: team development activities; skills audit of Consortium members; revise the memorandum of understanding and protocols for decision making; review and develop Consortium membership; promote public sector agencies' understanding of the 'third sector'; review mapping studies; share intelligence; review and update action plans; undertake more joint organisational development activities; joint marketing; better collaboration around information provision; jointly extend and improve sector access to professional services; jointly plan and market training and events; audit advice provision.

Partnership working is costly and time consuming. The Consortium needs enough resource and a period of stability (i.e. investment that lasts more than one year) to support effective partnership working and service delivery to front-line organisations. Bristol Consortium has recognised that if it is to maximise the benefits from working as a Consortium, it needs to employ a Consortium co-ordinator to sustain and develop the Consortium and co-ordinate Consortium activity.

Key, experienced staff within the Consortium membership, need to be able to focus on influencing policy and practice at a local level and developing their organisations and skills to meet the needs of the sector locally.

As well as investment to support the effective functioning of the Consortium as an infrastructure partnership, we also need investment to enable us to continue to deliver high quality locally based support services.

ChangeUp and Capacitybuilders investment has helped us to:

establish a well respected training programme which we have developed in response to sector needs and identified gaps and are now working with public and private sector partners to further develop, and as a Consortium are working to improve co-ordination, branding and marketing of training;

develop a funding health check, offer comprehensive funding advice (sources of funding, planning and writing an application, training on using an outcomes focus, monitoring and evaluation), and business planning advice, influence the implementation of full cost recovery and deliver training in full cost recovery locally;

develop and pilot the PERFORM toolkit which takes groups from an organisational health-check through to action planning for delivery;

increase the number of volunteering opportunities available in Bristol, the number and diversity of volunteers and improve the quality of the volunteering experience;

develop a ChangeUp website with links to sources of infrastructure support;

develop as a partnership and produce a strategic plan and action plan;

engage with, and influence regional infrastructure developments;

be instrumental in establishing the regional network of sub-regional consortia.

The past three years have been challenging for the Bristol Consortium, with changes within the local authority resulting in short-term funding, restructuring of the PCT, developing as a Consortium, the transition from ChangeUp to Capacitybuilders, uncertainty around Capacitybuilders investment programmes and guidance, lack of investment at a local level from the BASIS programme, engagement with the Local Area Agreement and Sustainable Community Strategy, engagement with regional partners, alongside meeting the needs of front-line organisations.

We now need a period of stability and consolidation so that we can function as a Consortium and continue to deliver services to front-line organisations.

Roles of key people/organisations in delivering the Infrastructure Development Strategy:

Between them, the Consortium member organisations represent around 1100 voluntary, community and social enterprise organisations operating within Bristol.

The Black Development Agency (BDA) Limited is the South West's only Black Council for Voluntary Services (CVS). BDA's services include advice and information to new, existing and emerging community groups, advocacy, training in governance/management issues, business planning, organisational development, volunteering, publicity, marketing, quarterly newsletters, briefings and factsheets. BDA facilitates the Consortium of Black Groups (COBG) and its related BME networks, undertaking consultations on a variety of issues and topics relevant to the sector.

The Care Forum provides infrastructure support for the health and social care voluntary sector in Bristol, Bath & NE Somerset, North Somerset and South Glos. It facilitates four health and social care networks; four mental health networks; older peoples network; two children and young peoples networks and a network for parents and carers of disabled children. It has more than 15 years experience of enabling dialogue and consultation between voluntary, community and statutory organisations interested in health and well-being.

Social Enterprise Works supports and develops the social enterprise sector in Bristol and the West of England through business development services, sector promotion and strategic influencing. It promotes, encourages and assists the development of 'not for private profit' trading activities owned by the community

Volunteering Bristol is Bristol's Volunteer Development Agency. Volunteering Bristol co-ordinates and manages a number of activities, including the Time Together Refugee Mentoring Project. Its core work is 'The Volunteer Centre – Bristol' which is a drop-in centre for people seeking volunteering opportunities. It also runs a web-based database of opportunities via the Internet. In addition, Volunteering Bristol provides an outreach service to volunteer-using organisations to help develop their volunteer management skills, and service a number of community-based information points and organise recruitment and promotional events throughout the city.

Voscur is a Council for Voluntary Service (CVS) and the lead organisation for the Consortium. Voscur's vision is a thriving, effective and influential Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise Sector in Bristol. To achieve this it provides a range of direct support services including information, funding advice, performance improvement, networking, training, brokerage and signposting to other support. It has clear accountable systems, allowing representatives from its membership to carry the collective voice of the sector, to strategic partnerships and others, to benefit the city/region.

Timescales, key steps, and process for reviewing the Infrastructure Development Strategy

Bristol Consortium's first Bristol VCSE Infrastructure Strategy (IIP) was written in 2005 following research, consultation, and mapping of sector needs locally.

This was updated and action plans developed in October 2006 following stakeholder events and facilitated sessions for Consortium members.

In 2007 the Consortium commissioned an external evaluation of its effectiveness and a review of roles and responsibilities of Consortium members. We also undertook the Capacitybuilders self -assessment process.

Following these processes and the recommendations made, and a review of the wider policy context, the Consortium's 'Bristol VCSE Infrastructure Strategy' (IIP) was updated, as was the Consortium Development plan. Subsequently guidance from Capacitybuilders asked us to produce a strategy in this format. This document comprises edited extracts from the Consortium's 'Bristol VCSE Infrastructure Strategy' and additional material.

From Jan – March 2008 we will consult with our membership on the content of

this document through our publications (newsletters, e-bulletins, websites) and a stakeholder event.

We will review the strategy annually and the business plan at six monthly intervals to ensure that we are meeting our targets and making a difference.