

Buckinghamshire County Council
Voluntary & Community Sector Policy

Proposals for future engagement with the Voluntary & Community Sector in Buckinghamshire

July 2008

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Foreword by the Lead Cabinet Member

This draft Voluntary & Community Sector Policy is intended to provide a framework for the Council's future engagement with the voluntary and community sector (VCS) in Buckinghamshire. The Policy will update the Council's position (last reviewed in 2003) and reflect the significant developments, both locally and nationally, that have occurred in this area over the last five years.

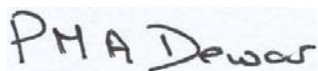
The policy seeks to clarify the Council's understanding of the roles, composition and contribution of the sector. It sets out the strategic aims we seek to achieve and identifies the objectives and actions required to realise these.

The policy aims to build on the range of good practice being developed in the Council's various service areas while providing a consistent and agreed set of principles and practices. Our intention is to create a corporate policy framework which enables service level flexibility and innovation while ensuring the delivery of a standard and consistent approach based on best practice.

This policy is predominantly concerned with clarifying and developing the County Council's position. We recognise however that successful delivery of many areas of the policy requires the collaboration of a broad range of stakeholders. We will therefore seek to achieve our aims and objectives in partnership with organisations across the private, statutory and voluntary sectors as appropriate.

Nationally the term "Third Sector" has been adopted to encompass not for profit organisations. In Buckinghamshire we are committed to ensuring that the ethos of voluntary service remains at the heart of our understanding of the sector. While our definition includes not for profit organisations, the Council intends to retain "Voluntary and Community Sector" as our chosen term.

I look forward to receiving your comments and feedback.



Margaret Dewar

Lead Cabinet Member, Voluntary & Community Sector

2.0 Introduction

- 2.1.** Buckinghamshire has a diverse and flourishing voluntary and community sector (VCS). The sector makes a vital contribution to residents of all ages and backgrounds across the County, from co-ordinating and delivering a significant volume of volunteering activity to the provision of key services.

Buckinghamshire County Council recognises that VCS organisations have often grown up in response to the identified needs of some of the most vulnerable and excluded sections of society, providing a range of skilled, trusted and niche services.

Volunteers provide essential care to elderly residents and those with disabilities or illness. They organise and support youth, sport, leisure and environmental activity in the County and contribute to the delivery of a number of the Council's own services.

A growing number of social enterprises and not for profit organisations are supplying a diverse range of services, tackling key issues from debt management to sustaining rural community cohesion.

Often characterised by its flexibility and capacity for innovation, the VCS is a dynamic and evolving sector. The Council welcomes the development of new and existing organisations seeking to meet the needs of residents and communities.

- 2.2.** In the five years since the Council's last VCS policy statement there have been significant developments, both locally and nationally, in how we envisage the role of the sector and its contribution to strengthening communities, transforming public services and advocating on behalf of marginalised groups.

- 2.3.** Locally, the relationship with the VCS continues to have a high profile on the Council's agenda. Many service areas have established relationships with a number of frontline (delivery) VCS organisations and are increasingly looking to the sector to deliver a variety of services in the community.

The Council was a founder member of the cross-sector Compact Steering Group, contributing to and signing the Buckinghamshire Compact (2004) and the subsequent codes of practice on Funding and Procurement and Volunteering (2006).

- 2.4.** In 2006 the County and District Councils collectively tendered for the provision of infrastructure services to the VCS, letting a single contract to

Voluntary Impact Bucks (a consortium of Buckinghamshire infrastructure support organisations) in April 2007. Buckinghamshire was one of the first areas nationally to undergo this process.

2.5. In September 2007 the Council's Adult Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee published its "Review into the Development of the Voluntary & Community Sector (VCS) in Buckinghamshire". The report made a number of key recommendations in the following areas:

- Revising the County Council policy for working with the VCS;
- Creating a single access point for dissemination of information to the sector;
- Ensuring compliance with the Compact and its associated Codes of Practice;
- Constituting a Member Advisory Panel for the sector;
- Clarifying the role of the Lead Cabinet Member for the VCS and member representation on VCS bodies;
- Reviewing all VCS funding at the outset of the Council's annual budget setting ("Medium Term Planning") process and engaging funded organisations in discussions at this stage;
- Developing and adopting standard templates for financial agreements (e.g. funding application and monitoring forms).

Activity to deliver the recommendations is ongoing, with the "VCS Hub" - accessible via the Council's website¹ - now providing the single access point cited above. This policy will deliver on the first recommendation and seeks to bring the various associated workstreams within a single framework.

2.6. In April 2008 the Council agreed to adopt the motion:

"This Council continues to value the contribution given by the Voluntary Sector in contributing to service delivery in Buckinghamshire, it is therefore committed to support these voluntary organisations and would ensure that the commissioning process both supports the sector and provides the best quality service for our clients and the best value for money for our Council Tax payers."

(County Council)

Plans to support the motion are outlined further in Aim 3.

¹ www.buckscc.gov.uk Home > Community > VCS Hub

- 2.7.** The VCS is represented throughout the major partnerships in the county (i.e. the Buckinghamshire Strategic Partnership, district Local Strategic Partnerships) and plays a key role in the development and delivery of key strategies including the Sustainable Communities Strategy, Local Area Agreement and Children and Young People's Plan.

Significant efforts have been made to ensure that the VCS is fully engaged in the design and delivery of the Local Area Agreement. This has been recognised by GOSE as good practice in the region.

- 2.8.** A key recent development has been the adoption of the "Environment for a Thriving Third Sector" national indicator (NI7) as one of the principal targets in the 2008-11 Local Area Agreement. This has the potential to focus activity and deliver a wide range of service and partnership aims.
- 2.9.** The VCS has also had a consistently high profile in the current national government agenda, from the establishment of the national Compact between Government and the VCS in 1998.

In May 2006 the Office of the Third Sector (OTS) was established to lead work in this area. A number of key documents have since been published outlining the government's vision of the sector's role in more detail².

The "Strong and Prosperous Communities" Local Government White Paper (2006) proposed a duty on local authorities to involve the VCS in the preparation of Sustainable Community Strategies and Local Area Agreements.

More recently the government has established two national indicators in its new performance framework specifically targeting the sector, "Participation in regular volunteering" (NI6) and "Environment for a Thriving Third Sector" (NI7).

- 2.10.** For the purpose of this policy the Council's definition of the VCS includes organisations which are:

Non-governmental, which are driven by their values and which principally reinvest any financial surpluses to further social, environmental or cultural objectives.

This includes voluntary and community organisations, charities, social enterprises, cooperatives and mutuals both large and small.

² E.g. [Partnership in Public Services: An Action Plan for Third Sector Involvement \(Cabinet Office, 2006\)](#); [The Future Role of the Third Sector in Social and Economic Regeneration \(Cabinet Office, 2007\)](#)

(Source: Office of the Third Sector, Cabinet Office)

This definition includes a wide range of organisations from small community based self help groups to large household name charities. It is intended to include faith and religious organisations only in their provision of non-religious activities³ and excludes political parties or activities intended to directly support such parties.

The Council recognises that the term “Third Sector” is commonly used to describe the organisations identified above. While the Council does not intend to adopt this term its definition does encompass all such organisations.

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³ Activities and services funded by Buckinghamshire County Council must be open to all groups regardless of faith or religious belief. The Council cannot support activities which actively proselytise or promote particular faiths.

3.0 Vision

3.1. The County Council's vision is:

A thriving voluntary and community sector in Buckinghamshire, equipped to harness the energy of local residents, contribute to the design and delivery of high quality services and advocate on behalf of all sections of the community.

The County Council will contribute to the realisation of this Vision through the Aims and Objectives set out in this Policy.

3.2. Key outcomes we expect to see through this work are:

- VCS organisations will be able to access a variety of high quality support services provided in partnership by statutory and infrastructure support organisations, to ensure they can achieve their aims and aspirations.
- Open and transparent funding processes (grants or procurement) will be in place to ensure all organisations have a fair opportunity to access Council resources, allocated for multiple years (where this represents value for money) and effectively and proportionately monitored.
- The Buckinghamshire Compact will be comprehensively implemented, ensuring the Council's relationship with the sector is founded on mutually agreed principles and best practice.
- The activities of a diverse and thriving VCS will deliver better services for residents and outcomes for communities.

4.0 Corporate Aims and Values

4.1. Buckinghamshire County Council has identified five key outcomes which contribute to our organisational vision of “Achieving Outstanding Performance”:

- Customers First
- Great Partnerships
- Strong Communities
- First Choice Employer
- Business Excellence

These outcomes are underpinned by four key values which shape the way we work; to be adaptive, flexible, innovative and responsive.

4.2. To deliver our vision the Council has agreed seven key corporate aims:

1. Involving, representing and serving all who live or work in Buckinghamshire;
2. Providing efficient and effective services, including:
 - i. achieving value for money;
 - ii. driving up performance in all areas; and
 - iii. developing new and effective ways of delivering services which improve outcomes for the community.
3. Giving children and young people the best possible life chances;
4. Improving the quality of life for adults;
5. Providing support to help families cope with their responsibilities;
6. Building with you safer stronger and healthier communities;
7. Maintaining a vibrant economy whilst protecting the environment.

This policy seeks to ensure the Council's engagement with the VCS is underpinned by our core values and is aligned to our key aims, which in turn support the delivery of our overarching vision.

4.3. The Council recognises that the VCS is already making a diverse and significant contribution across all our aims, from representing the views of service users directly to Council officers (Aims 1 and 4) to recruiting and co-ordinating volunteers to preserve the Buckinghamshire environment (Aim 7).

4.4. Buckinghamshire County Council is committed to promoting equality and ensuring that neither residents nor communities are treated less favourably because of their nationality, ethnic or national origin, gender (including transgender), marital status, disability, religion/belief or sexual orientation.

The County Council will work in partnership with the voluntary and community sector to support communities to:

- Be culturally sensitive and inclusive;
- Develop a common vision and civic pride about their local area;
- Contribute to community cohesion (for example, through providing opportunities for people to come together, have a voice and to participate in decisions affecting their local area);
- Build resilience to extremism in the local community; and
- Respond appropriately to events that raise community tensions.

The Council will provide the VCS with appropriate information and support to help ensure all services - whether funded by the Council or not - meet their legal requirement to ensure equal treatment and access for all.

5.0 The Policy

- 5.1.** This policy provides a framework to guide the County Council's voluntary and community sector activity for the period 2009-12, based around six key aims:

Aim 1: To strengthen our partnerships with VCS organisations;

Aim 2: To improve the availability of local resources for the sector in Buckinghamshire;

Aim 3: To ensure the Council achieves best value for its funding of the sector;

Aim 4: To improve opportunities for the VCS, residents and communities to influence local decisions;

Aim 5: To ensure the provision of high quality infrastructure services to frontline organisations;

Aim 6: To improve cross Council co-ordination and our overall contribution to a thriving VCS.

- 5.2.** To achieve these aims the Council intends to deliver the following key objectives:

AIM 1

1. Ensure opportunities for the systematic and appropriate involvement of VCS organisations in partnerships, including the Buckinghamshire Strategic Partnership (and Local Area Agreement), Children and Young People's Trust and Local Area Forums;
2. Support and resource the Council's own engagement in partnerships seeking to improve the environment for the VCS in Buckinghamshire, including the Buckinghamshire Compact, Change-Up Consortium and Encompass;

AIM 2

3. Develop an "Additional Support" strategy identifying sources of in-kind support, including a revised employer supported volunteering policy;

AIM 3

4. Review funding processes and mechanisms to ensure these are fit for purpose, Compact compliant and support a wide range of VCS activity;
5. Develop commissioning practices that ensure the VCS have opportunities to engage throughout the commissioning cycle and can compete for contracts on fair terms;
6. Review our standing orders to ensure these enable the Council to realise maximum benefit from its investment in the VCS;

AIM 4

7. Engage the VCS in the development and delivery of Council and partnership strategies, including the Buckinghamshire Locality Strategy and revised Sustainable Communities Strategy;
8. Identify opportunities for the VCS to directly engage residents and communities in influencing and making decisions;

AIM 5

9. Support capacity building and infrastructure services, supporting local VCS providers to acquire the skills, systems and standards required to deliver high quality services;

AIM 6

10. Develop a whole Council approach to the sector, ensuring that the policy and practice of service areas is underpinned by a consistent and agreed set of principles and practices;
11. Monitor the implementation of the Buckinghamshire Compact across the Council and take appropriate remedial action where necessary;
12. Identify opportunities for integrating policy and practice with statutory partners through the Buckinghamshire Pathfinder, Compact, Strategic Partnership and the Children and Young People's Trust as appropriate;
13. Deliver, in partnership, the "Environment for a Thriving Third Sector" Local Area Agreement target (NI7) and the "Participation in Regular Volunteering" local priority target (NI6).

5.3. The Council's policy is founded on the following principles:

- 5.3.1. The County Council recognises and will work to protect and enhance the independence of the VCS and the fundamental principle of voluntary effort;

5.3.2. A recognition of the multiple roles of the VCS, principally:

- Campaigning and Advocacy – on behalf of individuals and groups within the community;
- Advice – on service design and the needs of service users;
- Provision – of both mainstream and complementary services to the community;
- Innovation – in existing and new services and in service interfaces (i.e. between provider and recipient).

5.3.3. The Council recognises the rich and varied contribution VCS organisations make to the quality of life and well being in Buckinghamshire, including their activities as:

- Catalysts for community action, empowerment, social capital and self help;
- Promoters of greater inclusion, cohesion and participation in civic life;
- Deliverers of a diverse range of skilled, trusted and sometimes niche services;
- Providers of training to the public, and to the statutory and voluntary sectors;
- Managers of community assets, including buildings;
- Significant players in the local economy;
- Magnets attracting resources into the County from external sources.

5.4. Aim 1 - To strengthen our partnerships with VCS organisations

5.4.1. Voluntary and community sector engagement in partnerships across the county is key to the successful development and delivery of a range of key strategies and initiatives.

There are a significant number of active partnerships ranging from the countywide (e.g. the Bucks Strategic Partnership) to the local (e.g. Local Area Forums) and from the cross-cutting (e.g. Community Cohesion & Equalities Forum) to the specific (e.g. Bucks and Milton Keynes Sports Partnership).

The Council recognises that engaging in partnership work requires a level of resource commitment which can be challenging for VCS organisations.

The County and District Council jointly funded VCS infrastructure contract makes provision for a minimum level of representation for the sector throughout the Bucks Strategic Partnership (BSP) by Voluntary Impact Bucks (VIB; the consortium of Bucks infrastructure organisations delivering the contract). VIB are currently delivering the “3Ps” programme which aims to enhance the representation of VCS organisations.

The Council will ensure that opportunities for engaging in partnerships – whether through direct representation or through intermediaries (e.g. VIB) - are communicated widely to the sector.

5.4.2. The Council is committed to supporting a number of key partnerships with a specific remit around the VCS, particularly the Buckinghamshire Change-Up Consortium, the Buckinghamshire Compact Steering Group and sub-groups and Encompass. The Council will ensure adequate resources are available to enable its full participation in meetings and associated work programmes.

Objective 1: We will ensure there are opportunities for the systematic and appropriate involvement of VCS organisations in partnerships, including the Buckinghamshire Strategic Partnership (and Local Area Agreement), Children and Young People’s Trust and Local Area Forums;

Objective 2: We will support and resource our engagement in partnerships seeking to improve the environment for the VCS in Buckinghamshire, including

the Buckinghamshire Compact, Change-Up Consortium and Encompass;

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5.5. Aim 2 - To improve the availability of local resources for the sector in Buckinghamshire;

5.5.1. The County Council is a major provider of direct funding to the local VCS. It is also an organisation with a large, skilled and committed workforce and a number of in-house support services (e.g. IT, training, external funding).

While the Council continues to operate in a climate of significant financial constraint there are unrealised opportunities for the Council to contribute in-kind resources to the VCS, including greater encouragement of employees to volunteer either in their own time or through employer supported volunteering (ESV).

The Council will develop an “Additional Support” strategy building on the good practice already being developed in a number of service areas⁴. The strategy will include the contribution of human resources (e.g. volunteers, trustees) and the provision of support services (e.g. training).

The Council will also commit to being a Volunteer Champion as part of the Volunteer Workout project⁵, modelling and promoting good practice in ESV.

5.5.2. The Council benefits from the generous contribution of a significant number of Buckinghamshire residents who volunteer for the Council. The Council will make sure it is meeting its commitments under the Compact Code of Practice on Volunteering and specifically that it is not discriminating against individuals or groups by ensuring the availability of all out of pocket volunteer expenses.

5.5.3. The Council recognises the key role external funding plays in the sustainability and independence of the VCS. The Council will:

- maintain its support for the Buckinghamshire Funding Group (a partnership of county and district council and VCS representatives);

⁴ For example:

1. the Children and Young People’s commissioning training events organised by the Council and Youth Focus;
2. the Safer and Stronger Communities Portfolio commitment to two days matched time paid special leave for staff to volunteer; and
3. the recent ESV promotional campaign for staff working in Adult Social Care.

⁵ Volunteer Workout is a five year project (from April 2008) to encourage employer supported volunteering in Buckinghamshire. It is being delivered by Voluntary Impact Bucks with funding from the Big Lottery and the Bucks Strategic Partnership.

- incorporate the outcomes of the Council's External Funding Strategy review (completion in Autumn 2008) into the VCS policy as appropriate.

Objective 3: We will develop an "Additional Support" strategy identifying sources of in-kind support, including a revised employer supported volunteering strategy;

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5.6 Aim 3 – To ensure the Council achieves best value for its funding of the sector

5.6.1 The Council is a major funder of local VCS organisations, supporting a diverse range of services and activities across the county. In 2007-08, the Council committed some £43m to the sector. Funding ranges from substantial contracts for the provision of care services to older people and people with learning disabilities (e.g. £9.5m with the Fremantle Trust) to small grants to support grassroots organisations like the Chiltern Woodlands Project.

5.6.2 The Council provides:

- a. Project Funding: to fund specific projects. For example, the “Reducing Exclusion” project to raise the aspirations and inclusion of young people from particular minority ethnic groups.
- b. Funding for Service Delivery: to provide services on behalf of the County Council. For example, the £1.6m “Carers Services in Buckinghamshire” contract to deliver support, information and advice to carers across the county.

5.6.3 The Council’s aim is to achieve value for money in all its expenditure and that this supports the delivery of excellent services that meet the needs of, and improve outcomes for, the communities and residents of Buckinghamshire.

To this end the Council will build on and further develop a strategic, outcomes based approach to its support for the VCS, ensuring funding is aligned to – and assessed against – corporate and partnership priorities (e.g. Corporate Plan, Cohesion and Equalities Strategy, Children and Young People’s Plan, sustainable community strategy and Local Area Agreement).

Measures taken will be in line with the Buckinghamshire Compact and will include:

- Establishing and maintaining a corporate overview of voluntary sector funding and support, including mechanisms for sharing this information internally and with other statutory sector partners;
- Developing a framework which specifies the type of funding agreement to be used against value of service procured, duration of funding and the particular purpose, i.e. new and innovative projects, pilots, provision of statutory services etc;

- Developing a Council wide approach to application processes, contracts (including service level agreements) and monitoring requirements, ensuring these are proportionate to the values of funding involved.

Processes will be consistent with other statutory sector partners where possible;

- Analysing the benefits and viability of developing a mixed economy of funding to ensure the most effective and appropriate mechanisms are available (e.g. grants versus procurement);
- Developing protocols for joint funding (where these are not currently in existence);

5.6.4 The Council recognises that annual funding poses considerable challenges for VCS organisations and that the significant benefits realised by longer term funding (e.g. enhanced medium term planning and strategic direction, improved staff retention) can help the Council achieve its value for money objectives.

The Council will therefore implement three year funding arrangements as standard unless these do not represent value for money, and will ensure that the Medium Term Planning (MTP) process⁶ and associated guidance actively facilitates this.

At the start of the MTP process all services will review VCS funding against Council and service priorities and will engage organisations in discussions at this point.

All decisions relating to reduction or cessation of funding to VCS organisations will include an impact assessment to appraise the full outcome of any cuts (to be developed by the Compact Steering Group).

5.6.5 The Council recognises that the shift in emphasis from grant funding to commissioning presents considerable challenges to particularly small and medium local VCS organisations. The Council also acknowledges that larger and better resourced national VCS organisations may have a competitive advantage in the commissioning process. The Council will therefore:

- a) Ensure early communication of all tendering opportunities to local organisations;
- b) Monitor the outcomes of its procurement and commissioning activity on Buckinghamshire VCS organisations;

⁶ The Council's principal budget setting mechanism

- c) Provide training and capacity building support to local organisations around commissioning;
- d) Provide training to commissioners within the Council to:
 - improve their knowledge and understanding of the sector and the constraints and challenges VCS organisations can face;
 - ensure appropriate procurement practices are employed which do not inadvertently place barriers to the sector's participation⁷;
 - ensure that processes for evaluating bids and tenders take appropriate account of any added value local VCS organisations can contribute through their experience of working in the County.

Commissioning policy in all areas of the Council will embed and mainstream the eight principles of good commissioning identified by the Office of the Third Sector (Appendix 1) and any appropriate measures identified in the Bucks Compact and accompanying Code of Practice on Funding and Procurement.

Commissioners will consider how the VCS can be effectively engaged throughout the commissioning cycle and how it can be encouraged and enabled to compete where appropriate.

Because the commissioning process places the sector in an openly competitive environment, alongside potential public and private sector providers, action will be taken – where possible - to ensure that the VCS can compete on fair terms in accordance with contract regulations.

5.6.6 The Council acknowledges that many local VCS organisations are concerned about the Council's Standing Order requirement for competitive tendering for all contracts (including grant funding agreements) with a value exceeding £50,000. As the value relates to the lifetime of the contract, the Council's commitment to three year funding agreements will see the effective *annual* threshold reduce to £17k (i.e. a third of £50k). This may result in an increase in the number of particularly small organisations subject to competitive tendering.

⁷ For example:

1. Sufficient timescales should be allowed for the preparation of tenders, particularly where these may require the development of consortia. Decisions to bid are often subject to the agreement of Boards of Trustees (who are themselves volunteers) that may not meet frequently;
2. Contractual requirements should be proportionate and related to the risk, value, complexity and nature of the contract.

Standing Orders will be reviewed to ensure they enable the Council to fund the sector in a way that allows it to achieve maximum benefit for its investment.

Objective 4: We will review funding processes and mechanisms to ensure these are fit for purpose, Compact compliant and support a wide range of VCS activity;

Objective 5: We will develop commissioning practices that ensure the VCS have opportunities to engage throughout the commissioning cycle and can compete for contracts on fair terms;

Objective 6: We will review our standing orders to ensure these enable the Council to realise maximum benefit from its investment in the VCS;

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5.7 Aim 4 - To improve opportunities for the VCS to influence local decisions

5.7.1 VCS organisations have three principle routes for influencing local decisions; by engaging in partnership work (either directly or through an intermediary); by responding to consultations; and through the day to day relationships that exist across Services, both countywide and in each of the 19 local community areas.

In addition to the objectives outlined in 5.4 above the Council will ensure it follows best practice by:

- Consulting the VCS on the development of key policies and strategies;
- Giving a minimum of 12 weeks for written consultations at least once during the development of a policy;
- Ensuring a variety of consultation methods and formats are used where possible and appropriate;
- Abiding by the Council's own [commitment to consultation](#) and ensuring that all consultations are available through the Council's "Have your say" portal;
- Working with VCS infrastructure organisations to ensure consultations are widely communicated to the sector and targeted where appropriate;
- Involving the VCS in the 19 Local Area Forums and the development of the 19 local community plans.

Objective 7: We will engage the VCS in the development and delivery of Council and partnership strategies, including the Buckinghamshire Locality Strategy and revised Sustainable Communities Strategy;

Objective 8: Identify opportunities for the VCS to directly engage residents and communities in influencing and making decisions;

5.8 Aim 5 - To support the provision of high quality infrastructure services to frontline organisations

5.8.1 VCS infrastructure organisations play a key role in developing and sustaining a thriving local sector. The District and County Council funded VCS infrastructure contract is the Council's principal means of support in this area, funding the provision of advice, guidance and training and the volunteer development and placement service.

The contract also funds the provision of community appraisal support, particularly the development of parish plans.

The Council recognises Voluntary Impact Bucks⁸ and Youth Focus⁹ as key partners in supporting and building capacity in the sector. In addition to the VCS infrastructure contract the Council will continue to work in partnership to develop and deliver:

- action plans for the NI7 “Environment for a Thriving Third Sector” LAA target and NI6 “Participation in Regular Volunteering” indicator;
- the Buckinghamshire Compact and associated action plans;
- external funding bids to provide additional infrastructure support;
- additional training for the VCS to meet new and emerging skills gaps (e.g. commissioning);
- training for Council staff (e.g. volunteer management);
- the “Additional Support” strategy (Objective 3).

Objective 9: We will support capacity building and infrastructure services, supporting local VCS providers to acquire the skills, systems and standards required to deliver high quality services;

⁸ The consortium of local CVS and Volunteer Centre organisations and the Buckinghamshire rural community council jointly responsible for delivering the VCS infrastructure contract

⁹ The specialist youth infrastructure organisation

5.9 Aim 6: To improve cross Council co-ordination and our overall contribution to a thriving VCS

5.9.1 A number of policy objectives cut across the five aims outlined above and are aimed at improving the way in which the Council co-ordinates VCS activity and supports the sector.

5.9.2 In the absence of a co-ordinated Council approach to the VCS, Portfolios and services have developed a range of policies and practices. Where good practice has been developed it has not always been shared, policies and systems have been duplicated and a varying approach to the sector has resulted. This issue was highlighted in the Adult Services Overview and Scrutiny report, which suggested there would be “great benefit in the County Council clarifying and strengthening its corporate approach to the VCS” (p30).

The intention of this policy and its associated action plans is to develop a whole Council approach to the VCS. This will ensure that the policies of service areas are underpinned by a consistent and agreed set of principles and practices. Service areas will have sufficient flexibility to develop innovative and tailored approaches within a broader policy framework.

5.9.3 The policy will build on a number of developments the Council has already made to strengthen its corporate approach, including the implementation of the VCS Hub, the formation of a Heads of Service VCS Consultation Group and the introduction (from December 2006) of a corporate policy officer post dedicated to the VCS.

5.9.4 The Buckinghamshire Compact is the “golden thread” that runs through all of the Council’s engagement with the VCS. While progress has been made since 2004 the Compact has not been comprehensively implemented.

The Council has agreed to adopt the following performance indicators, identified by the Compact Steering Group and reflecting the sectors’ top priorities:

- a) 12 weeks notice of funding decisions before funding starts or ends;
- b) Percentage of SLAs or contracts with the VCS that have been agreed for 3 years or more;
- c) Minimum of 12 weeks for written consultations at least once during the development of a policy;

d) Availability of all out of pocket volunteer expenses.

The Council will also develop a Compact Champions Programme. This programme will start with an audit of current progress, enabling a baseline to be identified against which progress can be measured. The Compact Champions core group will be responsible for devising and monitoring the delivery of a Compact Champions action plan.

5.9.5 The Council will continue to work with its statutory partners (including the District Councils, Health, Police and Fire and Rescue) to identify opportunities for integrating policy and practice and to develop consistent approaches to the sector.

The “Environment for a Thriving Third Sector” Local Area Agreement target provides a major opportunity to develop work in this area. The Council is committed to working with partners across the statutory and voluntary sectors to successfully deliver the target and maximise benefits for all stakeholders.

5.9.6 The Council recognises local and national concerns around the role of elected members who also serve on the management committees of VCS organisations. In seeking to enhance the independence of the sector the Council is aware that tensions may arise where there is a lack of clarity around the capacity in which Members are engaging, particularly where organisations are in receipt of Council funding.

The Council will review its current policies on Member involvement and representation and ensure that these are fit for purpose. The community leadership role of local Members and links with local VCS bodies through the 19 local community areas will be part of this review.

5.9.7 The role of the lead Cabinet Member for the VCS will be clarified. The following key roles are envisaged:

1. To champion the Bucks Compact at Cabinet level;
2. To present an annual report on the Council's engagement with the sector;
3. To receive briefings on significant developments regarding the VCS locally and nationally and communicate these to colleagues as necessary.

Objective 9: We will develop a whole Council approach to the sector, ensuring that the policy and practice of service areas is underpinned by a consistent and agreed set of principles and practices;

Objective 10: We will monitor the implementation of the Buckinghamshire Compact across the Council and take appropriate remedial action where necessary;

Objective 11: We will identify opportunities for integrating policy and practice with statutory partners through the Buckinghamshire Pathfinder, Compact, Strategic Partnership and the Children and Young People's Trust as appropriate;

Objective 12: We will deliver, in partnership, the "Environment for a Thriving Third Sector" LAA target.

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6 Delivery

6.1 Developing an Action Plan

Following the formal adoption of the Voluntary and Community Sector Policy by County Council a three year action plan will be developed to deliver against the aims and objectives set out above.

The plan will be aligned to a number of associated Council and partnership workstreams, including:

- Children and Young People's Plan
- Adult Social Care commissioning strategies
- Buckinghamshire Locality Strategy
- Cohesion and Equalities Strategy
- Environment for a Thriving Third Sector (NI7) and Participation in Regular Volunteering (NI6)
- Compact Action Plan.

6.2 Performance Management

A performance management framework will be adopted committing the Council to a series of performance indicators related to the policy's aims and objectives. The framework will seek to synchronise these with the monitoring of relevant items in the workstreams at 6.1.

Two centrally administered surveys will be used to baseline (2008) and measure progress (2010) against NI6 and NI7. These will provide valuable external assessments of the Council's progress.

6.3 Resource Implications

To be completed, this section will cover:

- Estimate of current spend on VCS delivery
- The value of the VCS Infrastructure Contract and how this is funded
- An indication of the BCC resources which are employed in co-ordinating work with the VCS
- Confirmation that the proposals in this Policy do not have additional financial implications

Appendix 1

Eight principles of good commissioning (Office of the Third Sector)

- Understanding the needs of users and other communities by ensuring that, alongside other consultees, you engage with the third sector organisations, as advocates, to access their specialist knowledge;
- Consulting potential provider organisations, including those from the third sector and local experts, well in advance of commissioning new services, working with them to set priority outcomes for that service;
- Putting outcomes for users at the heart of the strategic planning process;
- Mapping the fullest practical range of providers with a view to understanding the contribution they could make to delivering those outcomes;
- Considering investing in the capacity of the provider base, particularly those working with hard-to-reach groups;
- Ensuring contracting processes are transparent and fair, facilitating the involvement of the broadest range of suppliers, including considering sub-contracting and consortia building, where appropriate;
- Ensuring long-term contracts and risk sharing, wherever appropriate, as ways of achieving efficiency and effectiveness; and
- Seeking feedback from service users, communities and providers in order to review the effectiveness of the commissioning process in meeting local needs.

Appendix 2

Glossary of Terms

[to follow]

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Appendix 3

Key Relationships between the Council and the Voluntary and Community Sector

