



Wiltshire and Swindon Voluntary Sector Infrastructure Investment Plan

2005 – 2010

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The environment within which the voluntary and community sector (VCS) operates has changed rapidly over recent years. This Investment Plan will review and evaluate those changes, appraise the ability of infrastructure organisations in Wiltshire and Swindon to meet the challenge of change and agree a work programme that will address the support needs of voluntary and community groups and organisations in the coming five years.

Initial work under the Government's capacity building programme for the voluntary sector resulted in a comprehensive report for Wiltshire and Swindon, *Future Shape of Voluntary Sector Infrastructure Support in Wiltshire and Swindon* by Asher Craig, Fullemploy 2004. The report took an in-depth look at the effectiveness and suitability of the Infrastructure Organisations that provide services to the VCS, their long term sustainability and some critical gaps and challenges that need to be addressed if the sector is to continue to maximise its contribution to service delivery and civil society more broadly.

It also sets out a framework for addressing these capacity gaps and challenges on which many of the assumptions of this Investment Plan are based.

Wiltshire & Swindon's Voluntary and Community Sectors

It is estimated that there are over 8,000 voluntary and communities groups in Wiltshire and Swindon, of which there are between 1700-1800 registered charities, with little or no income to a few organisations providing a service that employ many paid staff and have a turnover measured in millions.

Within the sub region a well established network of Infrastructure Organisations includes Councils of Voluntary Services (CVS) based in each local authority district and Swindon borough, Community First (RCC) at a county level, providing support for the local voluntary and community sector. The Charities Information Bureau (CIB), Wiltshire Racial Equality Council (REC), Learning Curve and the Volunteer Centre (Swindon only) each provide specialist services across Swindon and Wiltshire.

In Wiltshire, the rural infrastructure also delivers specialist infrastructure to parish councils and local rural frontline organisations on housing, transport and community space. In some cases the infrastructure organisation is delivering both infrastructure and direct services.

The operating environment for rural VCS and VCS Infrastructure is significantly different from urban areas. Key issues that impact on rural Voluntary Community Organisations are:

- the dispersed nature of rural communities
- poor transport links
- small communities that lack a 'critical mass' of volunteers
- a lack of understanding of equality and diversity issues
- higher costs of delivering equivalent services
- significant pockets of deprivation often within areas of high wealth
- underdeveloped ICT links

The Consortium

In order to meet the support needs of the local VCS and the Government's agenda as set out in ChangeUp infrastructure organisations joined together in a Consortium that aims to:

- Promote partnership working
- Establish collaborative working
- Facilitate development between rural BME and other minority/socially excluded groups
- Assist in monitoring and evaluating Compact
- Improve representation by VCS in strategic partnerships and public forums

The Infrastructure Organisations themselves do not claim to wholly represent the community and voluntary sectors in Wiltshire, and Swindon but there is a clearly emerging demand for Infrastructure support that can and will fill identified gaps. The Consortium therefore must be able to demonstrate both a spread of geographical interests and community interests; and provide representation on behalf of both large and small community and voluntary groups and disadvantaged communities across Wiltshire and Swindon if it is to succeed.

The role of the Consortium should be twofold - to deliver specialist expertise to the sector and represent its interests.

The delivery of the specialist hubs of expertise should:

- provide consistent information, advice and support to the VCS
- help create stronger infrastructure organisations in the longer term
- provide open access for members and non-members
- increase sustainability of community and voluntary organisations

The representational role should:

- be realistic about the needs of local authorities and statutory service providers
- be prepared to speak on behalf of the sector's interests
- facilitate consultation and engagement
- acquire authority
- be open, accessible and transparent
- acknowledge the lack of a formal mandate

The Consortium has worked to agree the Principles under which they will work together, This has been agreed and signed by the Trustee Boards of each of the organisations in the Consortium.

An initial successful application to ChangeUp for development support has enabled the members to develop ideas for specialist hubs of expertise and these form the work programme detailed in this Investment Plan.

During this process the Consortium has contracted with an independent consultant, *Resolve Consultancy*, to undertake detailed consultation with the wider VCS in the sub-region. This has included face to face interviews with 50 organisations and a sub-region wide consultation event. The outcomes of this consultation have supported the development of the work programme.

Proposed activity and implementation Plan

In order to take forward the strategy to meet the Consortium's vision for '*a vibrant, effective, inclusive and sustainable voluntary and community sector in Wiltshire and Swindon*' the Investment Plan maps out eight key Hubs of Expertise. They are:

- Development of the Consortium - Increasing Collaboration and Strategic Working
- Promoting awareness of the Consortium and developing communication and information systems
- Performance Management
- Developing an effective voice for VCS Organisations
- Inclusion of BME and diversity issues
- Developing diverse and sustainable volunteering opportunities
- Providing high quality funding advice and support
- Workforce development

This framework for delivery of the Plan is based on existing infrastructure organisations and their capacity to maximise current and future resources. The Consortium aims to create a framework for collaborative working which will mean that the continuation of the collaboration is not directly dependent on external funding. In developing the budget for this work the Consortium has worked on the basis of full cost recovery recognising that within the Hubs there is considerable potential to take a social enterprise approach to delivery in the future.

WILTSHIRE & SWINDON INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENT PLAN

1. CONTEXT

The environment within which the voluntary and community sector (VCS) operates has changed rapidly over recent years, and the pace of change is quickening. This Infrastructure Investment Plan (IIP) will review and evaluate those changes, appraise the ability of infrastructure organisations within the Wiltshire & Swindon Consortium to take the lead in meeting the challenge of change and agree a work programme that will address the support needs of voluntary sector organisations in the coming five years.

The following initiatives have impacted on that change:

1.1 National Policy Context

- The 1996 Commission on the Future of the Voluntary Sector contained proposals for strengthening the voluntary and community sector.
- The Compact Working Group launched The Compact (1998), an agreement between the Government and the whole VCS designed to improve their relationship for mutual advantage. The national Compact's principles have now been turned into Codes of Practice on funding, consultation, volunteering, BME and community groups.
- The Government's Cross-Cutting Review of the VCS in Service Delivery (Sept 2002) recognised that the sector has grown rapidly and its current form represents past and not future needs.

- Government Policy for the Rural VCS. The Rural White Paper of November 2002 identified the importance of a healthy civic society and committed the Government to supporting voluntary, community and parish council contributions.
- Defra's (Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs) 'Community Capacity Building and Voluntary Sector Infrastructure in Rural England' document was produced in December 2000 and is a companion to The Home Office publication 'Community Capacity Building'.
- Building Civil Renewal (Dec 2003) – The Home Office's review of Government support for community capacity building Consultation paper and Review of Findings.
- Voluntary & Community Sector Infrastructure – A Consultation Document, ACU (Sept 2003).
- *ChangeUp* - Capacity Building and Infrastructure Framework for Voluntary and Community Sector (June 2004).
- Review of the legal basis of charities which has led to the current Draft Charities Bill, published May 2004.
- Consultation on the future of Compact and ChangeUp launched by the Home Secretary and Minister of State (March 2005)

1.2 Local Wiltshire & Swindon Context

Wiltshire and Swindon have a highly organised, engaged and active sector with energetic Infrastructure Groups who have a long history of joint working. A number of recent local factors have brought organisations closer together to work jointly for the benefit of communities in the sub-region.

- Wiltshire recently launched its Compact which sets out the principles by which the statutory and VCS agree to work. The organisations involved in developing the Compact include the four Councils for Voluntary Service (CVS)

in Wiltshire, the Rural Community Council, Race Equality Council, Primary Care Trusts and County and District Councils.

- The Wiltshire Compact Working Group is currently consulting on the draft codes of practice: Communication and Consultation, Funding and Equality & Diversity, to be launched in the spring/early summer of 2005. There is also agreement to develop a Volunteering Code. Swindon launched its Compact on 17 March 2005 and is currently consulting on the draft Funding Code of Practice
- 4 Primary Care Trusts were established across the sub-region in 2001
- Development of Local Strategic Partnerships in Swindon & Wiltshire, at county, unitary and district levels have posed questions as to how the VCS can best be represented at a strategic level
- Community Plans developed for Wiltshire County Council, each of the four District Councils and also Swindon Borough Council which are impacting on funding priorities of the VCS
- Defra Rural Support Programme and Home Office Early Spend Regional Exemplar Fund (April 2004) which funded joint working and the development of local consortia

2. ADDRESSING THE CHALLENGES

On 10th December 2003 the Government announced that community and voluntary organisations across England were to receive a £6.25 million pound cash boost to promote closer working, communicate better and have a stronger voice in policy-making and to support VCO's (Voluntary and Community Organisations) in the delivery of better public services. The money is to be used by organisations that help the VCS make its voice heard in policy-making, and help organisations work together and improve communication with each other.

In the South West Region, the Government Office for South West (GOSW) funded a limited number of 'development' and 'exemplar' projects that aim to build the capacity of VCS infrastructure in the region. VCS Infrastructure organisations were invited to submit bids to the Government Office to fund this work. On behalf of Wiltshire & Swindon VCS Infrastructure organisations, Salisbury and District CVS successfully applied for a project to consider the future shape and delivery of VCS infrastructure support in Wiltshire and Swindon.

In recognition of the particular circumstances faced by infrastructure bodies operating in rural areas, GOSW/Defra commissioned additional activity to integrate and strengthen local infrastructure, focusing on rural areas but also considering the needs of urban parts and the urban/rural interface. With this funding, Community First, the Rural Community Council, led work to develop a consortium to explore the opportunities, benefits and barriers to collaborative working. It is this Consortium that has worked to develop this Investment Plan following consultation with the wider VCS in Wiltshire and Swindon.

The result of this Early Spend work was a comprehensive report *Future Shape of Voluntary Sector Infrastructure Support in Wiltshire and Swindon* by Asher Craig, Fullempley 2004. The report took an in-depth look at the effectiveness and suitability of the Infrastructure Organisations that provide services to the VCS, their long term sustainability and some critical gaps and challenges that need to be addressed if the sector is to continue to maximise its contribution to service delivery and civil society more broadly.

It also set out a framework for addressing these capacity gaps and challenges on which many of the assumptions of this Investment Plan are based.

2.1 Wiltshire & Swindon's Voluntary and Community Sectors

Wiltshire and Swindon has a history of active participation in civil society, including an energetic, well-developed diverse and independent voluntary sector and a historically powerful and influential private sector. It is estimated that there are over 8,000 voluntary and community groups in Wiltshire and Swindon, of which 1700-1800 are registered charities, ranging from those with little or no income to a few organisations providing a service – in care or housing for example – that employ many paid staff and have a turnover measured in millions.

Such is the complexity of this network of groups that it is little surprise there is common cause in many issues and mutual support through their own networks. Supporting these groups today is a network of 'Infrastructure Organisations' providing services to individual groups, and to the sector as a whole, and in some instances seek to act as a representative voice, either for the sector as a whole or their members.

Within this structure the VCS has to work with multiple statutory bodies: local authorities, Wiltshire Constabulary, Swindon and Salisbury Health Care Trusts, Primary Care Trusts, Learning and Skills Council etc. In Wiltshire this comprises three tiers of local government: county, district and parish councils; and in Swindon this is two: the unitary authority and parish councils.

Over the past decade local authorities have increased their community development functions, supporting community planning partnerships, funding local group activities that meet local authority strategies, and providing differing levels of advice and support to the VCS. They are also key funding partners for the local infrastructure organisations.

Wiltshire and Swindon are fortunate in having five CVS based in each of the four districts and in the unitary authority, together with Community First and Wiltshire & Swindon Community Foundation providing support at a county level, for the local voluntary and community sector. The Charities Information Bureau (CIB), Wiltshire Racial Equality Council (WREC), Learning Curve and the Volunteer Centre (Swindon only) each provide specialist services across Swindon and Wiltshire.

The structure of Wiltshire and Swindon's VCS is complex and diverse. There is a wide range of organisations representing both communities of interest and communities of place. These organisations, on the whole, work well together, there are many overlapping networks and cross memberships between organisations, both local and national networks including Action with Communities in Rural England (ACRE), Association of Chief Executives of Voluntary Organisations (ACEVO), National Association of Councils for Voluntary Service (NACVS), National Council of Voluntary Organisations (NCVO), Volunteering England and the South West Voluntary Sector Forum.

In Wiltshire, the rural infrastructure also delivers specialist infrastructure to parish councils and local rural frontline organisations on housing, credit unions, transport, community safety and community facilities. In some cases the infrastructure organisation is delivering both infrastructure and direct services.

Wiltshire and Swindon is a relatively rural and affluent area, therefore social exclusion is less visible. Disadvantage is found in small pockets at a much localised neighbourhood level or associated with issues such as disability, health problems, homelessness etc. This has been recognised by major funders such as the Big Lottery £1.4 million Healthy Living Programme in the rural western wards of South Wiltshire and the European LEADER+ programme, called Sustain the Plain, a six year £2.4 million programme linking communities on Salisbury Plain

The key issues which impact on rural frontline organisations in Wiltshire and Swindon include:

- the dispersed nature of rural communities
- poor transport links
- small communities that lack a 'critical mass' of volunteers
- a lack of understanding of equality and diversity issues
- higher costs of delivering equivalent services
- significant pockets of deprivation often within areas of high wealth
- underdeveloped ICT links

Whilst these issues can be seen as inhibitors for the delivery of support services to rural communities they also encourage active communities and creative solutions but there is a lack of capacity by key VCO's to deliver significant support to rural and dispersed communities. In this context the VCS is an important mechanism to ensure that key issues, problems and opportunities are addressed and met for these communities.

The Wiltshire Strategic Board is looking to address the issue of rural proofing for each of its eight themes with a robust process that could be linked to the scrutiny functions of the county and district councils. In Swindon a distinct Rural Strategy Group has been set up as part of the LSP. The Consortium intends to engage with this process as part of the rural proofing for this plan.

3. THE CONSORTIUM

The Wiltshire and Swindon Infrastructure Consortium consists of 10 organisations; Charities Information Bureau, Community First, Learning Curve, Salisbury and District Council for Voluntary Service, Voluntary Action Kennet, Voluntary Action North Wiltshire, Voluntary Action Swindon, Volunteer Centre Swindon Voluntary Action West Wiltshire and Wiltshire Racial Equality Council. Initial development of the group was facilitated by Defra's Rural Infrastructure Preparatory Programme.

These infrastructure organisations themselves do not claim to wholly represent the community and voluntary sectors in Wiltshire and Swindon but there is a clearly emerging demand that came through the *Future Shape of Infrastructure Support in Wiltshire and Swindon* research for infrastructure support that can and will fill identified gaps. This was further evidenced in consultation to support this Investment Plan.

If the Consortium is to meet this demand it must be able to demonstrate a spread of both geographical interests and community interests, and represent the broad interests of both large and small community and voluntary groups and disadvantaged communities across Wiltshire and Swindon. Consortium members are playing key roles in working with the constabulary, public authorities and others to address issues of race, sexual orientation and disability as they affect crime and social cohesion.

However, more work is required by the members of the Consortium to strengthen both their own relationships with each other and with their grass roots constituencies, in particular those groups considered most isolated and socially excluded, and who make up a significant proportion of the VCS across Wiltshire & Swindon.

In the period between completion of the Early Spend work and the publication of the ChangeUp application process, the Consortium has worked to agree the Principles under which they will work together, *Appendix 1*. This document has been agreed and signed by the Trustee Boards of each of the organisations in the Consortium and will be developed further.

An initial successful application to ChangeUp for development support has enabled the members to define the role of the Consortium, *to deliver specialist expertise to the sector and represent its interests*. To fully undertake this role may require changes to the current culture and structure of some bodies.

3.1 The representational role should:

- be realistic about the needs of local authorities and statutory service providers
- be prepared to speak on behalf of the sector's interests
- facilitate consultation and engagement
- acquire authority
- be open, accessible and transparent
- acknowledge the lack of a formal mandate

3.2 The delivery of the specialist hubs of expertise should:

- provide consistent information, advice and support to the VCS
- help create stronger infrastructure organisations in the longer term
- provide open access for members and non-members
- increase sustainability of community and voluntary organisations

In order to carry out these roles the Consortium requires a strong and sustainable funding base that recognises the full cost of delivering consistent high quality services across a largely rural area. This includes informed partnership working with statutory partners, particularly local authorities, to ensure the value of infrastructure support is reflected in funding agreements.

During this process the Consortium has contracted with an independent consultancy, *Resolve Consultancy*, to undertake detailed consultation with the wider VCS in the sub-region to test earlier research and assumptions.

This has included face to face interviews with 47 organisations and a sub-region wide consultation event. The outcomes of this work have supported the development of the work programme. The consultation report is *Appendix 2* to this document. The title of the report is from the following quote by one of the groups interviewed about how they would like infrastructure support provided:

‘On a plate’, by efficient professional people, speedily and with a smile!! I am not interested in the structure or how it is provided but in the availability and efficiency.

The Executive Summary of the report identified some clear and consistent priorities for infrastructure support and representation have emerged from the research. The issues that had the biggest impact on groups and that helped them to achieve their aims included:

- **Funding** – access to secure funding and effective funding advice
- **Volunteers** – these are the backbone of many VCS organisations and recruiting, supporting, retaining, training and managing them well was a key priority.
- **High quality staff and skills development** – the training, development and retention of professional and competent staff, including managers, was vital to the sustainability of the sector.
- **Effective partnership working** – some of the VCS in Wiltshire and Swindon had not experienced good partnership working with some statutory partners but most recognised that it was critical to their future success.

- **Organisational development** – this was a particular priority for community groups without paid staff and was also important to larger groups that wanted to grow or expand.

These issues are reflected in the hubs of expertise that are proposed for Wiltshire and Swindon. Interestingly, ICT support did not come through as a particularly strong priority in the research, although access to good information is important to VCOs.

For BME groups, knowing and trusting infrastructure organisations was one of the most important factors, suggesting the need for specialist support for these groups.

It is important not to underestimate the challenge that the development of the Consortium represents. It is vital to recognise that the capacity to engage fully in the process is very varied and that to put aside organisational fears and unrealistic expectations is often difficult when working together to deliver a joint programme. It is evolving as ‘work in progress’ and in that context has agreed to a Vision, Aims and Objectives in order to take the work forward.

Members will be developing a protocol to guide the Hubs of Expertise, this will be a priority for the group once the Infrastructure Investment Plan is approved by the Trustee Boards of all partners and GOSW. The Consortium also intends to consider the creation of a Scrutiny Body that will provide an independent oversight on the implementation of the Infrastructure Plan and delivery of services.

3.3 Vision

A vibrant, effective, inclusive and sustainable voluntary and community sector in Wiltshire and Swindon.

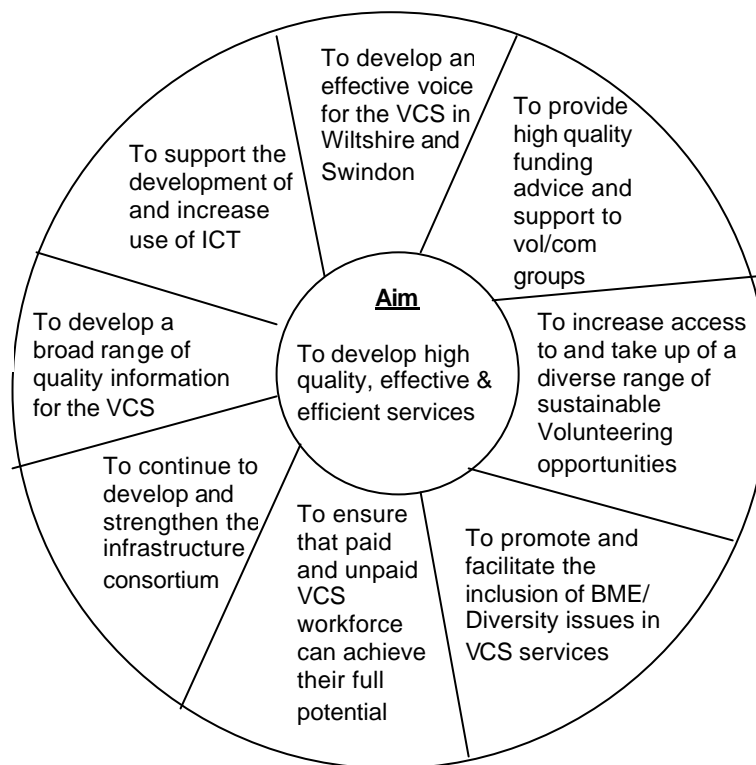
3.4 Strategic Aim

To develop effective methods of working together to deliver high quality, effective and efficient services for the benefit of communities in Wiltshire and Swindon.

Within this we aim to:

- *Promote partnership working*
- *Establish collaborative working*
- *Facilitate development between rural BME and other minority/socially excluded groups*
- *Assist in monitoring and evaluating Compact*
- *Improve representation by VCS in strategic partnerships and public forums*

3.5 Objectives



4. PROPOSED ACTIVITY AND IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

4.1 Development of the Consortium - Increasing Collaboration and Strategic Working

Consortium members have valued the opportunity to work together to research and develop this Infrastructure Investment Plan (IIP) and it has added value to the work they undertake as individual organisations and collectively. By continuing to work in partnership Local Infrastructure Organisations will be able to:

- implement the IIP
- collaborate more effectively
- share good practice to establish benchmark services
- meet recognised quality standards and targets for performance improvement
- enhance the provision of infrastructure services to local VCS organisations
- overcome gaps in services and clearly identify any remaining gaps in provision
- address diversity issues as they affect the sub-region

In order to achieve this more effectively the Consortium needs to undertake the following key activities:

- refine the purpose of the Consortium and consider future working methods
- identify and consider how other bodies providing infrastructure services to the VCS should relate to the Consortium
- develop a protocol for joint working
- identify and secure the resources needed to deliver the strategic objectives and actions set out in the IIP
- develop detailed implementation plans (including outcomes, costs and milestones) and commission work as required
- develop an independent scrutiny body to monitor the work of the Consortium

Members of the Consortium also recognise the need to reassess the way in which support is provided to local VCS organisations. The Consortium will continue to meet regularly to oversee future investment, review progress of the IIP, monitor outcomes, identify and evaluate lessons learned, and incorporate good practice into Consortium members' mainstream activities.

Consortium meetings will enable members to identify unintended outcomes, barriers to implementation and share good practice with each other. Both Learning Curve and CIB are lead members of successful regional thematic programmes, on Workforce Development and Funding Advice respectively. The Consortium will be able to utilise the support and development offered through this work as well as the proposed National Hubs of Expertise.

4.2 Promoting awareness of the Consortium and developing communication and information systems

To facilitate cohesive working the Consortium has identified the need to raise its awareness, profile and identity amongst VCS organisations and partners. Initially, this should focus on promoting a greater understanding of the role of infrastructure organisations: who they are; how they can be accessed; and what happens where.

The *On a Plate* report identified the need to demystify the range of services available to the VCS. The Consortium believes that to achieve this a common identity must be forged that can provide a single gateway from which local infrastructure services are readily obtainable, thereby reducing confusion about where to go for advice and support.

The Consortium is developing a joint website with a basic portal that could direct visitors to the infrastructure services provided by Consortium members and host details of the Consortium's joint work (e.g. current training programmes, funding advice). It could also provide a facility to enable local VCS organisations to have their own web page on site and host a message board/chat room as a way of capturing current issues affecting the sector and as a tool to stimulate debate. It can provide access to information and best practice at a number of different levels. A joint web site would also provide opportunities for supporting organisations in recruiting, retaining and managing volunteers.

One of the key methods of communication with the VCS is through regular newsletter distribution. A single point website development would be an opportunity to establish common newsletter pages and other common services to which localised pages might be added via individually linked sites, using a standard format. Developing this web based solution will incur set-up and training costs but has the potential to earn income to sustain its maintenance and future development costs.

A joint website will enable VCS organisations and individuals to:

- use a common route to identify local infrastructure organisations and understand their link in the provision of infrastructure services across Wiltshire and Swindon
- be signposted to resources and providers of infrastructure services within their locality and elsewhere across the sub-region
- access common information such as the central section of a newsletter for all VCS organisations
- access pro-forma documentation
- share, and participate in discussion of, good practice
- be empowered through access to local, regional, national and international information

A common sector identity will also provide a common point of access to the sector for local authorities, statutory bodies and others working at a sub-regional level.

The key activities will be to:

- survey current ICT capacity of infrastructure organisations and bring all organisations up to the same level in both hardware and software
- develop a detailed design brief and management specification for a joint website and each organisation's own website
- commission specialist provider(s) to design and build the websites
- widen access to ICT through training and support
- develop a network of ICT specialists across the Consortium to keep the system updated and provide support and advice to VCS

This will be achieved through an Information and Communication Hub.

4.3 Performance Management

Members of the Consortium and their public sector partners recognise the need for performance management indicators that will demonstrate the quality and quantity of services delivered to local communities. At present there are a number of systems and processes in place and varying requirements from funders. It is not uncommon for Consortium members working across the sub region with a number of public sector funders to have to produce a range of information for the same work but be required to meet individual funders different requirements.

The Consortium recognises that effective performance management is critical to the success of a well run organisation. Funders and funded alike need to know the level of performance expected and achieved in key areas of service delivery. In particular, statutory funders are being required to introduce performance management systems that demonstrate to the Audit Commission that set objectives are being met and that authorities are responding to actual performance to make outcomes better than they would otherwise be.

A Performance Management Hub will be set up to develop a demonstrable performance management system, acceptable to funders and funded, that can be used by organisations, whether voluntary, community or private .

This will enable the quality of service delivery requirement of ChangeUp be addressed uniformly across the Sub Region both by funders and VCOs.

The key activities will be to:

- appoint a part time i.e. 20 hours person of suitable experience and knowledge
- review all systems of recording and reviewing services delivered by members of the Consortium and report back
- engage with key government bodies working with Consortium members to identify how their systems can work with VCO's
- develop a Performance Management system that has the agreement of Consortium members and government bodies

- undertake training in Performance Management for key staff
- support Consortium members to put the system in place in their organisation
- review the system with government bodies and Consortium members and make appropriate adjustments
- undertake 'awareness' and training with the wider VCS

4.4 Developing an effective voice for VCS Organisations

VCS organisations, and the communities they represent, desire to have an effective voice. This voice – or rather these voices – need to be heard within the sector, by statutory bodies, funders, potential volunteers and other opinion formers. There needs to be discussion on a range of public policy and other issues affecting the sector; on the needs of local VCS organisations and how these are met by Local Infrastructure Organisations; of local Community Plans, and on local public services and the links to Local Strategic Partnerships.

There are increasing demands placed upon the voluntary, community and public sectors to consult on a wide range of issues and to involve local communities. There is a need to encourage greater participation in local democracy, particularly at parish level and amongst young people, and in the development of parish, neighbourhood and local area plans.

Gaining an effective voice requires effective communication, publicity and consultation skills. Seeking out the views of local VCS organisations, including BME groups, young people, those in rural communities and other hard to reach groups, can be difficult and time consuming. The consortium will build on other work identified within the IIP – e.g. promoting awareness, development of website, communication and information systems, targeting of hard to reach groups, skills development and recruiting volunteers – to enable the sector to gain an effective voice(s).

The Consortium and its constituent members currently lack a consistent and cohesive approach to identifying the views of the sector on relevant issues. The diversity of views is recognised and the Consortium has the ability to bring these diverse views together, which should bring broader benefits to all. Working together will enable local VCS organisations to gain a common understanding of how to ensure that their views can be represented.

Key activities will be to:

- develop a Voluntary Sector Forum for Wiltshire and Swindon fed by district forums and the Swindon borough
- organise briefings, seminars, networking and consultation events on issues of interest to the sector
- promote and enable local community groups to develop and participate in parish/neighbourhood community planning processes
- develop mechanisms for effective representation at strategic partnership levels

4.5 Inclusion of BME and diversity issues

It is widely recognised that black and minority ethnic people, gay, lesbian and transgender individuals and groups, people with disabilities, faith groups and other minority groups in Swindon and Wiltshire experience racial harassment, homophobic crime, discrimination and lack of opportunities, and that such problems are exacerbated by the scattered nature of the populations, especially in rural Wiltshire.

Mainstream service providers have not successfully engaged black and ethnic minority groups and communities as users of their services, although across the sub region there is greater recognition and involvement of disability groups and organisations. As a result, programmes frequently suffer from "colour-blindness" or, if they do try to address ethnic minority issues, fail to achieve this because they do not undertake the preparatory outreach and training work required to reach the communities.

Many people from black and ethnic minority communities speak languages other than English in their home, associate only with other people from their own communities and work hard with low pay in family-run businesses which do not require significant social contact with other communities. Social contact that is available to individuals outside the close circle of family and friends is often culturally inappropriate and always requires a good level of English-speaking. As a result, ethnic minority people often have only limited access to mainstream services and are frequently unaware of their rights in this area.

Even the jobs, which do exist, may be unattainable for many. Low skills levels - or lack of the right skills - are not the only barriers. Poor health, lack of affordable childcare facilities or transport, lack of experience in the UK labour market, not having British citizenship, low self-esteem and cultural factors, all deny people from refugee and minority ethnic communities to access employment and the chance of a better lifestyle.

A major barrier to engagement with minority groups and people is the absence of sufficient or appropriate support structures. This is in terms of both agency and community led structures. Through the Consortium we have an opportunity to build the knowledge, abilities, skills and the confidence of these people and groups to enable them to actively engage in developing their groups or communities. There is also a need to support the voluntary sector to increase knowledge and best practice in service provision, so that they are better equipped to engage with minority people, groups and communities.

There is a gap in what community groups expect from the existing provision of information, advice and guidance in the sub-region and what is actually delivered to them. This includes the lack of user-friendly publicity containing clear information about the availability of this provision and also the lack of an effective mechanism to deliver this to the rural population.

To some extent, individual members from the communities tend to rely heavily on their respective community organisations for support, advice and information. However, this service tends to be insufficient in some cases as no links have been developed between these organisations and key agencies in the sub-region. In other cases community organisations simply cannot provide this service due to lack of capacity.

A Hub of Expertise with a working title of 'The Depot' is to be set up to provide a forum for the VCS to identify gaps in infrastructure support to BME and minority groups and individuals. 'The Depot' will work in support of the BSWN post working on 'Linking Communities' to support BME infrastructure inclusion and representational voice to build positive relationships. The role of faith groups in BME communities as well as the wider community is recognised and the Hub will be looking to engage with them through recognised means.

The Key activities will be to:

- develop a forum of VCS organisations
- Work with the BSWN thematic bid postholder on 'Linking Communities'
- develop communication and information systems including a specialist database and advocacy support
- build the capacity of the voluntary sector to meet identified needs
- build the capacity of BME and minority groups and individuals to participate in voluntary sector activity
- Engage with the 'faith groups' network

4.6 Developing diverse and sustainable volunteering opportunities

The 2004 report *The Future Shape of Voluntary Sector Infrastructure in Wiltshire and Swindon* (Asher Craig, Fullemploy) identified that there is a clear need to work with Volunteering England to implement an appropriate local volunteering development plan that will increase the quantity and improve the quality of volunteering locally.

There is currently no volunteer development agency within Wiltshire but in some districts people are able to access information about volunteering through their local CVS. Volunteer Centre Swindon is a fully accredited member of Volunteering England and fulfils the six core functions of volunteering infrastructure. Asher Craig's report recommends that the core functions should be used as both guidance and a benchmark for monitoring and assessing the impact of Wiltshire's volunteering infrastructure.

The VCS infrastructure organisations are faced with trying to provide a consistent approach to enable people who wish to be actively involved in community engagement to have access to opportunities within their district. Infrastructure organisations should encourage good practice for agencies and groups who involve volunteers.

Throughout the work of promoting volunteering the involvement of all sections of the community needs to be addressed recognising the cross-cutting themes of diversity and inclusiveness.

Given the rural nature of much of Wiltshire and some of the areas on the edge of Swindon Borough, it is necessary to develop structures that enable people to access volunteering and provide support for groups involving volunteers, in an imaginative way. The use of ICT may be key to this.

The Volunteer Centre Swindon and CIB are already working with the major companies in Swindon to encourage employee volunteering. This could be developed across Wiltshire.

A Volunteering Hub will be set up to increase access and take up of a diverse range of volunteering opportunities. The key activities will be to:

- develop information access points in each district
- train network of outreach workers to support local groups
- develop Vbase in all districts
- develop common good practice in all infrastructure organisations
- develop and market volunteering opportunities.

4.7 Providing high quality funding advice and support

Access to funding advice and support comes at the top of every VCS group's top ten list of 'must have' services. It is evidenced most recently in *On a Plate* the report of consultation with the sector in Wiltshire and Swindon that took place in January 2005.

The recommendation to strengthen specialist funding advice and information across the sub-region is stated in '*Future Shape of Voluntary Sector Infrastructure in Wiltshire & Swindon*' where a specialist hub and a dedicated fund-raising support team is proposed. The report states that 'strengthening of this hub will lead to a more informed, empowered, active and better-resourced sector'. There is an acknowledgement that there is a 'great deal of unmet need, especially amongst isolated rural and BME groups who have not received a great deal of support and attention through previous funding programmes'.

The report sees the Charities Information Bureau (CIB) as consolidating and expanding their role in this work with a need to set up a dedicated Fund-raising Support Team that will be integrated into the strategic capacity building processes of the four CVS's in Wiltshire. This has been addressed through CIB's successful Thematic bid to ChangeUp to develop funding advice across a wider area. This will include the development of accredited training for funding advisers and the appointment of 2.5 FTE funding advisers that will support the CVS's to provide quality funding advice locally.

The report *Funding Advice Services in the South West* identified the gaps, the levels of service provision and of access to funding advice services. Issues raised included the lack of capacity and resources to meet demand. The report also identified an increase in demand for funding advice services as cuts in local authority support to groups set in, and community planning processes generated more need for funding advice.

Whilst the Funding Hub will focus on the development of funding advice, one of the key services provided by CIB is governance and charity law expertise. The Consortium recognises that these are cross cutting themes that are woven into all aspects of this Investment Plan but will use CIB as the conduit for development of best practice in the VCS.

The Hub will also recognise the social enterprise approach as a funding route for voluntary organisations and will develop links with Social Enterprise Wiltshire (SEW's) a sub regional partnership comprising of Business Link Berkshire and Wiltshire, Community First, Co-Operative Futures and Learning Curve.

The Funding Advice Hub will be set up to provide high quality funding advice and support. Its key activities will be to:

- research needs of VCS in Wiltshire and Swindon
- improve access to funding information
- improve access to funding advice and support
- develop accredited training to advice workers
- develop partnerships with key funders
- improve governance and charity law services

4.8 Workforce development

Learning Curve's experience in Wiltshire & Swindon over a number of years has demonstrated the benefits of a collaborative approach to workforce development for the voluntary and community sector. The organisation has been able to develop a wide-ranging and affordable programme of learning for the sector and to draw in substantial funding from the Learning and Skills Council and other funders to help meet these needs.

The Evaluation Trust report identifies a gap between training needs and training provision throughout the region and recommends the Learning Curve approach as a possible model for future training developments. The regional mapping study also recommends Training and Learning as one of the areas for development of specialist organisations at local or sub-regional level.

At a national level, developing a highly skilled workforce is seen as one of the key outcomes for ChangeUp investment. The draft business plan for the national workforce development hub also identifies that there is "...clear evidence that voluntary and community organisations face considerable skills gaps and shortages."

This need is reflected in local experience, with the regional mapping study and the Evaluation Trust identifying skills training needs in areas such as fundraising, diversity, ICT, HR and management.

The *Snap Shot* report shows that skills shortage is considered to be the most significant barrier to development in the BME sector. The next two significant barriers are lack of effective business planning and inadequate financial management – both of which suggest training needs for workers and trustees.

Affordability and availability of training were cited as two issues that needed to be addressed with a recommendation that training was practical, affordable and modular. In addition, the report stresses the need to develop skills within BME communities to support community action rather than importing the skills from outside the communities.

To develop a sustainable delivery base to meet these workforce development needs we propose to establish a Workforce Development Hub to:

- promote a social enterprise approach amongst VCS organisations (e.g. as considered in the 'Snapshot' report)
- encourage mainstream providers, such as colleges, to provide relevant, accessible and affordable provision to meet the needs. The need for providers to understand the ethos of the voluntary and community sector was one highlighted in the mapping report p.24

To achieve this we will develop:

- a strategic and collaborative approach to the planning of workforce development provision to create the capacity to guide and influence providers
- a sufficiently substantial market to support the sustainability of voluntary and community sector providers developing a social enterprise approach and encourage mainstream providers to adapt their provision to meet the needs of the voluntary and community sector

It is the aim of the hub to address these two issues and thereby create a comprehensive and sustainable provision for the voluntary and community sector across Wiltshire & Swindon. The project will be aiming to address the workforce development needs of all organisations, their workers, volunteers and trustees. As part of this the Consortium will ensure equality of access and that the needs of diverse communities are being addressed.

The key activities will be to:

- create a central repository for information, resources and tools relating to learning, training, and governance
- provide 'back room' support services to LIO's on workforce development issues

- co-ordinate the promotion of workforce development programmes
- carry out ongoing analysis of needs
- ensure that resources are available to meet the needs and to develop new provision where needed
- work with funders and other influencers to ensure they contribute fully to supporting workforce development
- provide, or ensure the provision of, support to achieve quality standards
- deliver workforce improvement programmes directly where appropriate

5. SUSTAINABILITY

In developing the IIP, and the implementation of identified priorities, the Consortium has worked on the basis of full cost recovery. The framework for delivery of the Plan is based on existing infrastructure organisations and their capacity to maximise current and future resources.

Both CIB and Learning Curve have successfully bid for additional ChangeUp funds to support the Funding Advice and Workforce Development Hubs. This will give the Consortium access to regional networks facilitating the improvement of service delivery in Wiltshire and Swindon and across the South West.

The Consortium aims to create a framework for collaborative working which will mean that the continuation of the collaboration is not directly dependent on external funding.

However, within the Hubs there is considerable potential to take a social enterprise approach to delivery. The ICT/Information, Workforce Development, Performance Management, Funding Advice Hubs and the administration of the Voluntary Sector Forum all have the potential to earn income to support their continuation in the longer term.

6. MONITORING AND EVALUATION

The Consortium will continue to meet regularly to set and monitor milestones, review progress of the IIP, apply agreed performance management criteria, monitor project outcomes, identify and evaluate lessons learned, and incorporate good practice into Consortium members' mainstream activities.

Consortium meetings will enable members to identify unintended outcomes, blockages to implementation and share good practice from each other. The Consortium will also be able to examine VCS infrastructure work disseminated by regional and national exemplar projects (e.g. VCS mapping, quality standards, accreditation) and utilise the support and development offered through the proposed National Hubs of Expertise. Each member organisation of the Consortium is governed by a Board of Trustees who will play an important role in monitoring individual organisations involvement in the Consortium and delivery of the IIP.

An important aspect of future monitoring and evaluation will be the collection of data and feedback from front line VCS organisations benefiting from the actions proposed in this Investment Plan.

Greater use of user feedback and surveys will be needed. This will enable Local Infrastructure Organisations to provide evidence of the extended reach of their infrastructure services, particularly to smaller organisations, hard to reach groups and marginalised communities and increases in volunteering opportunities, volunteers, the take up of learning and skills development opportunities etc. The evidence collated will inform, focus and re-direct the energy of Consortium members to meet the long-term vision set out in this Infrastructure Investment Plan.

7. BUDGET

A detailed budget will be submitted to support a full application to ChangeUp to fund the proposed implementation of this Investment Plan. The figures below are based on estimated costs where available and take into account the availability of thematic funding and our stated priorities in the IIP.

	Revenue (£)	Capital (£)	Total (£)
Consortium development central costs	24,954	3,565	28,519
Performance Management	14,661	2,094	16,755
ICT/Information Hub	28,074	4,011	32,084
Diversity Hub	31,193	4,456	35,649
Volunteering Hub	56,147	8,021	64,168
Funding Hub	15,596	2,228	17,825
Workforce development hub	15,596	2,228	17,825
Capital Fund	0	53,206	53,206
Total	<u>186,222</u>	<u>79,809</u>	<u>266,031</u>

Note:

The capital investment available for the investment plan will be used strategically to:

- * Ensure that all the Infrastructure organisations have equivalent and compatible ICT systems to allow inter-working
- * Maximise the impact on services to front-line organisations

A proportion of the capital funding will be allocated to the Hubs to support the capital needs of individual Hubs. The balance will be held centrally by the Consortium as a strategic investment fund to address other infrastructure capital investment needs that are identified during the first year of the implementation of the plan. In particular, investment will be influenced by the recommendations of the proposed ICT Hub's survey of the current ICT capacity of infrastructure organisations.

GLOSSARY

ACEVO	Chief Executives of Voluntary Organisations
ACRE	Action with Communities in Rural England
BME	Black minority ethnic groups
CIB	Charities Information Bureau
CVS	Councils for Voluntary Service
Defra	Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
GOSW	Government Office for the South West
IIP	Infrastructure Investment Plan
LSP	Local Strategic Partnership
NACVS	National Association of Councils for Voluntary Service
NCVO	National Council of Voluntary Organisations
PCT	Primary Care Trust
RCC	Rural Community Council
REC	Racial Equality Council
VCO	Voluntary and community organisations
VCS	Voluntary and community sector
WREC	Wiltshire Racial Equality Council
WSIC	Wiltshire and Swindon Infrastructure Consortium

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