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Cohesive communities –

the benefits of effective partnership working between local government and the voluntary and community sector

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Acronyms

Area Based Grants (ABGs)
Black training and enterprise group (BTEG)
Black, Asian and minority and ethnic (BAME)
Community Empowerment Network (CEN)
Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA)
Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA)
Local Area Agreement (LAA)
Local Strategic Partnership (LSP)
National Indicator (NI)
Neighbourhood Management (NM)
PQASSO (Practical Quality Assurance System for Small Organisations)
Primary Care Trust (PCT)
Public Service Agreement (PSA)
Service Level Agreement (SLA)
Voluntary and community sector (VCS)

Definitions

Local Compact – a Compact is an agreement between the local authority, other public sector agencies, and local voluntary and community sector organisations. It is designed to facilitate successful partnership working.

Prevent – this national strategy aims to stop people becoming terrorists or supporting violent extremists. It is one of the four components of the government's counter-terrorism strategy, known as CONTEST.

Local infrastructure organisations – support local voluntary and community sector groups and organisations. They provide their members with a range of services and development support, and are the voice of the local voluntary and community sector. LIOs differ greatly in character and size, from small rural organisations with one or two paid staff, to large multi-million pound operations.

National Indicator 1 (NI1) – per cent of people who believe people from different backgrounds get on well together in their local area.

National Indicator 7 (NI7) – creating an environment for a thriving third sector.

Public Service Agreement 21 (PSA 21) – build more cohesive, empowered and active communities.

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Executive summary

This report was commissioned by the IDeA to investigate how local authorities and the voluntary and community sector (VCS) can work more productively together to build empowered and cohesive communities. The research took place over a period of four months, and included interviews, four case studies of local areas and a quantitative survey of local authorities across England. This report serves as a resource for local authority officers seeking to promote cohesion in the context of local government, including key findings and recommendations for how those relationships can be made stronger to increase cohesion related outcomes. Key findings include:

The VCS plays an important part in building cohesive and empowered communities

The VCS can help build cohesion through developing bridging, bonding and linking social capital. Where councils are working cooperatively with the VCS, they are seeing increased cohesion outcomes – particularly around linking mainstream services with specialist provision; providing services that rely on trust and cultural sensitivity; and mediating between conflicting groups, both within and between communities.

To support positive outcomes this report recommends that local authorities focus on:

• Developing an evidence base – promoting cohesion requires that local authorities develop a firm evidence base, mapping and assessing the ability of the VCS to contribute to the development of social capital and cohesion.
• Tap into the expertise of frontline workers – setting achievable and realistic cohesion and Local Area Agreement (LAA) targets requires that local authorities do more to utilise the data and expertise of frontline providers.

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- Develop cohesion measurement tools – for cohesion to become a worthwhile aim and objective, it needs to be measurable. Local authorities can consider developing a toolkit for measuring and assessing cohesion, including the use of qualitative and quantitative indicators.

Councils play a key role in supporting the VCS to deliver cohesion outcomes

Local authorities play an important role in supporting and facilitating VCS involvement through funding arrangements, partnership working and capacity building. However, the VCS is made up of a diverse range of organisations, with varying asset bases, managerial capacity and financial capacity. This requires flexibility in ways of working to enable a broad range of participation.

To enable a broad range of participation, this report recommends that local authorities focus on:

- Funding – a diverse range of funding mechanisms is necessary to support the VCS in delivering cohesion related outcomes. Moves towards competitive procurement need to be made with care, giving time for VCS organisations to learn about the process. Additionally, maintaining grant funding is important for supporting the development and growth of the grassroots VCS.
- Partnership working – funding is not the only solution to creating stronger relationships between councils and the VCS. In this time of transition to new ways of working, local authorities should consider how to include VCS organisations in priority setting, highlighting needs and delivering services. Such involvement requires that relationships be formed and facilitated informally, not just at Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) meetings, but also through lunchtime seminars, area assemblies and the development of grassroots networks.

- Capacity building – our research across England frequently highlighted an underdevelopment of the black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) VCS. Capacity building more fragile parts of the sector will be important to making the cohesion agenda a success, and can be achieved through promoting equality in capacity building and creating a ladder of participation to help the smaller VCS organisations participate effectively.

Councils' approach to facilitating involvement can complement strategies for cohesion and empowerment

Promoting empowerment and cohesion can help councils develop a strong and holistic strategy for community and VCS engagement in local places.

To build an approach to engagement that complements cohesion and empowerment objectives this report suggests councils focus on:

- Involving councillors – as local authorities and VCS organisations move towards a more strategic relationship, the role of councillors must also be given greater consideration. In particular, councillors can have positive effects on cohesion by encouraging partnership working between VCS organisations, and highlighting grassroots successes as a way of demonstrating the importance of civic activism and the benefits of getting involved.
- Broadening the agenda – councils can help link the promotion of cohesion with community and VCS involvement by taking a broader perspective of cohesion, including linking achieving cohesion related outcomes more closely with the attainment of targets, and using cohesion as a lens to think more broadly about issues like economic growth and development.

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- Addressing inconsistency – promoting
cohesion in the context of local government
requires that councils maintain and promote
a consistent vision of cohesion and equalities
internally, as well as externally in the
community. Consistency of practice is also
important to developing engagement and
empowerment strategies and providing
clarity about the potential outcomes from
consultation and participation.

In conclusion, our report suggests that
promoting cohesion and equalities in the
context of local government must be seen
and understood as an exercise in partnership
working, requiring leadership from a range
of different stakeholders, including the
VCS, communities and individuals and local
authorities. Promoting a new understanding of
partnership working requires increased flexibility
in ways of working between local authorities
and the VCS. Indeed, increased cooperation
will be vital to mitigating the negative effects of
recession and developing resilience and capacity
within communities to build inclusive and
empowered places to live.

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Part 1
Introduction

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Community cohesion is a contentious subject. While it is now an established policy agenda in England, many remain unaware of its roots and this context remains important to making cohesion relevant today. The cohesion agenda rose to prominence after the 2001 disturbances in the north of England and the subsequent report by Professor Ted Cantle. However, the discourse of race, culture, integration and public policy began much earlier – dating back to the race relations legislation of the 1960s and 1970s. This was heavily influenced by the definition coined by then Home Secretary Roy Jenkins:

"integration (is) not... a flattening process of assimilation but... equal opportunity accompanied by cultural diversity, in an atmosphere of mutual tolerance."[1]

Successive legislation on race has built on this tradition. The race relations and anti-discrimination agenda have grown in prominence since Labour came to power in 1997. However, it was not until the publication of the Macpherson report in 1999 – an inquiry into the murder of a black teenager, Stephen Lawrence, by five young white people – that the effects of institutional racism were recognised for the first time[2]. In response to the Macpherson report, the Government introduced the Race Relations (Amendment) Act (2000) which extended further the application of the Race Relations Act (1976) to the police and other public authorities – placing a duty on public authorities to promote equality of opportunity, eliminate racial discrimination and promote good race relations.

1 Speech by Roy Jenkins May 29 1966

2 Institutional racism, "consists of the collective failure of an organisation to provide an appropriate and professional service to people because of their colour, culture, or ethnic origin. It can be seen or detected in processes, attitudes, and behaviour which amount to discrimination through unwitting prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness and racist stereotyping which disadvantage minority ethnic people." From: 'The Stephen Lawrence inquiry: report of an inquiry' by Sir William Macpherson of Cluny. CM4262-I, para 6.34.

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The 2001 riots in Bradford, Burnley and Oldham brought into sharp focus an additional dimension to debates around race relations in Britain – the role of segregation in contributing to hostility and distrust between communities. The Cantle report[3] painted a complex picture of the mutual misunderstandings and resentments which had made these places so prone to conflict. The report highlighted how well intentioned policies in schools and regeneration could lead to increasing hostility rather than building trust and mutual support. Central government regeneration programmes had fuelled competition for funding by requiring neighbourhoods to bid against each other. Housing and school admissions policies had reinforced divisions and inadvertently led to segregation.

Although generally well received, the Cantle report was also criticised. Particularly for the heavy focus on issues around segregation and light touch on socio-economic challenges and historic racial inequality which led many to fear the focus on the equality and anti-discrimination agenda would be lost. However, as the cohesion agenda sits within a powerful legal framework on human rights and equality, this anxiety has proven to be largely unfounded. Indeed, the cohesion agenda has brought into sharp focus the need to not only address socio-economic inequality and disadvantage, but also the need to build a strong sense of community and connection between people of different backgrounds; the need to take greater care in how resources are allocated; the need to invest in local leadership and capacity; and the need to develop projects and programmes that encourage interaction and bonding between people of different backgrounds, races and faiths, especially among the young.

Many of the insights that preceded the Cantle report remain relevant as Britain continues to grapple with questions of how to encourage people to live together in harmony and build trust and mutual understanding while ensuring that disadvantage is tackled, particularly in light of the current economic climate. While unemployment figures recently fell, from 7.9 per cent in December 2009 to 7.8 per cent in January 2010. This drop was primarily due to an increase in part-time work, which hit a record high in Britain at 7.71 million[4]. Indeed, employment has a long way to go to recover from the recent economic shocks. Particular groups have suffered more than others – unemployment and redundancy have hit men harder than women, while unemployment rates for young people experienced the largest percentage point rise of all groups in 2008, although the latest figures show some sign of recovery[5, 6].

3 Cantle, Ted. (2001) 'Community cohesion: A report of the Independent Review Team', Home Office, available at: http://resources.cohesioninstitute.org.uk/Publications/Documents/Document/DownloadDocumentsFile.aspx?recordId=96&file=PDFversion

4 www.dwp.gov.uk/newsroom/press-releases/2009december-2009/dwp079-09-161209.shtml

5 Barnham, Catherine; Clancey, Gareth; Hicks, Stephen; Jenkins, Jamie; Walling, Annette (2008) 'Impact of the recession on the labour market', Office for National Statistics, UK, available at: www.statistics.gov.uk/downloads/theme_labour/Impact-of-recession-on-LM.pdf

6 Barnham, Catherine; Clancey, Gareth; Hicks, Stephen; Jenkins, Jamie; Walling, Annette (2008) 'Impact of the recession on the labour market', Office for National Statistics, UK, available at: www.statistics.gov.uk/downloads/theme_labour/Impact-of-recession-on-LM.pdf

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If past recessions are anything to go by, anti-immigration sentiments tend to grow[7] and the recession's effects on particular groups, such as the unemployment rates among BAME communities, tend to be particularly severe[8]. Building cohesive communities is therefore more important than ever if we are to minimise possible conflict and resentments between groups.

The recession also has significant ramifications for local authority budgets, which are predicted to tighten significantly in the coming years. As a consequence of these cuts, and in light of the potential for rising tensions, there will be an increased impetus for partnership working to ensure services are delivered, local needs met and conflicts resolved. Local authorities play a vital role in ensuring this can happen alongside VCS organisations.

This report aims to explore how local authorities can work with the VCS to promote community cohesion and can serve as a resource to help local authority officers develop this strand of work in their local area.

Research and methodology

This report focuses specifically on the relationship between the VCS and local authorities, asking how that relationship could be made stronger to promote cohesion and enhance wellbeing.

The research has five main components:

• A web-based questionnaire sent to all local authorities in England
• From 118 responses, 23 follow-up telephone interviews were conducted, probing further into the answers from the survey
• Eight in-depth interviews were conducted with local VCS organisations and another seven with national and regional organisations
• Four in-depth case studies were completed, with 10-12 interviews per local authority; including officers, councillors, and VCS organisations, from small front-line providers, to local infrastructure organisations
• A policy workshop delivered with eight local authority officers and three members of the VCS

In total 80 interviews were conducted looking at four main themes:

• What community cohesion means in local places and how it is being implemented
• The structures of local government and mechanisms of involvement with the VCS
• Commissioning, procurement and funding
• Communications and empowerment

A more detailed overview of the methodology is presented in Appendix A. Before turning to the specific findings, the report provides an overview of the context, and the key issues highlighted by the research[9].

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7 See for example, Papademetriou Demetrios, Sumption Madeleine, Somerville Will, 2009 'Migration and the economic downturn: what to expect in the European Union', Migration Policy Institute: Washington, US, available at: www.migrationpolicy.org/transatlantic/EU_Recession_backgrounder.pdf. Recent evidence contradicts this however. According to Professor Peter Taylor Gooby, during the late 80s downturn, pollsters Ipsos-Mori found no impact on attitudes to immigration while the wider British Social Attitudes survey found support for "less settlement" by foreigners in the UK actually declined. Reference: Fears of anti-immigrant feeling during recession may be misplaced, the Guardian: www.guardian.co.uk/politics/blog/2009/mar/20/recession-immigrants

8 www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/we-will-shield-minorities-from-the-recession-vows-minister-1634772.html

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9 Some of the findings raised issues that are beyond the scope of this report, including the relationship between Prevent and cohesion and equalities and cohesion.

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Part 2
Community cohesion and why it matters

Defining community cohesion

In the Department for Community and Local Government's (CLG) response to the Commission on Integration and Cohesion's 2007 report, 'Our shared future'[10], a definition of a cohesive and integrated community was created:

"Community cohesion is what must happen in all communities to enable different groups of people to get on well together. A key contributor to community cohesion is integration which is what must happen to enable new residents and existing residents to adjust to one another.

Our vision of an integrated and cohesive community is based on **three foundations**:

- People from different backgrounds having similar life opportunities
- People knowing their rights and responsibilities
- People trusting one another and trusting local institutions to act fairly

And **three key ways of living together**:

- A shared future vision and sense of belonging
- A focus on what new and existing communities have in common, alongside a recognition of the value of diversity
- Strong and positive relationships between people from different backgrounds."[11]

10 Department for Communities and Local Government, 2008. 'Communities in control: real people, real power', available at: www.communities.gov.uk/publications/communities/communitiesincontrol

11 Department for Communities and Local Government, 2008, 'The government's response to the Commission on Integration and Cohesion', available at: www.communities.gov.uk/documents/communities/pdf/681624.pdf

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This definition, in comparison to earlier iterations, puts more of an emphasis on citizenship and empowerment and, according to CLG, places importance upon the role of integration in promoting commonality, trust and positive relationships[12].

The problem

Creating cohesive communities is a complex challenge, particularly given that cohesion is being promoted in the changing context of local and national government, where numerous other strategies, policies and decision makers interact, and in some cases counteract, cohesion's stated aims. Cohesion, therefore, cannot only be understood as soft, social capital building exercises, but must also be considered in its relationship to service delivery, equalities and policies like Prevent. Indeed, cohesion is cross-cutting, used both as a principle to be mainstreamed in the delivery of services, as well as a criterion for funding activities and services. It is a concept schools have a duty to promote, and local authorities to deliver.

Despite the fact that cohesion affects a wide range of policies and activities, it remains an unclear agenda. Currently, there is no one document to which local authority officers can refer. Indeed, the point must be made that cohesion is only useful insofar as it promotes positive outcomes for people and communities.

Cohesion policies can achieve positive outcomes, and be more than an end in themselves, when linked to the attainment of other goals, such as reducing unemployment and increasing access to services. Indeed, a lack of cohesion and trust between different groups and statutory agencies can exacerbate problems, reducing reporting when problems occur or resulting in low uptake of programmes / services. Too much cohesion

can also be a challenge, keeping groups and communities from forming external links that can help draw in resources and develop skills. Cohesion, understood as trust and reciprocity, must be about the right connections between and within groups.

The shift towards more local solutions, greater partnership working and tension monitoring have collided in the current context, providing an impetus to make 'building safer, stronger communities' both a priority and a necessity. Making cohesion work in this context means being aware of the history, the current challenges, and also the wealth of opportunity that diversity has brought to Britain. The questions that must be asked are:

• What does thinking in terms of cohesion add?
• How can we link the promotion of cohesion to better outcomes?
• How do relationships and ways of working in local government need to shift to facilitate those outcomes?

Policy context

There have been a number of policy drivers that have attempted to integrate the cohesion agenda into the policy and practice of local government. The White Paper 'Strong and prosperous communities', launched in 2006, for example, set the stage for the reform of public services. A year later, the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act (2007) provided the framework to implement these changes, along with the introduction, in April 2009, of the Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA). CAAs measured working relationships and the progress local authorities and their partners made towards achieving Local Area Agreement (LAA) goals and enhancing quality of life. The CAA measured, for the first time, how all local delivery partners were doing on delivering Public Service Agreement 21 (PSA 21), building cohesive, empowered and active communities.

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12 Department for Communities and Local Government, 2008, 'The government's response to the Commission on Integration and Cohesion', available at: www.communities. gov.uk/documents/communities/pdf/681624.pdf

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Other provisions to promote cohesion include the Education and Inspections Act (2006), which tasks schools with the promotion of cohesion. This asks schools to focus on helping diverse communities live better together and dealing with difference in a positive manner[13].

Local authorities are central to promoting wellbeing, as the Local Government Act (2000) recognised, and cohesion is an important part of this duty. However, along with these statutory duties to promote cohesion and enhance quality of life has come the understanding that local government cannot deliver cohesion alone. Partnerships, through the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) and Local Area Agreement (LAA), are seen as vital to creating solutions that reflect local priorities and needs. The role of the VCS has increased as a result of this realisation. the Community Empowerment White Paper, 'Communities in control: real people, real power', states that: "the VCS also has a unique ability to articulate the views of citizens and drive change, and we will work with them to develop principles for their participation in Local Strategic Partnerships"[14].

While the importance of promoting cohesion has been made clear through legislation and policies, there remains ambiguity on measuring progress towards this goal. Part of this reflects the fact that cohesion is measured by PSA 21 – a set of perception-based questions that many local authorities don't feel accurately reflects reality on the ground. There is also variation between local authorities in the extent to which this duty has gained prominence, in part because many officers feel it is ill-defined.

13 The Department for Children, Schools and Families and the Department for Communities and Local Government 2007, 'Guidance on the duty to promote community cohesion', available at: www.teachernet.gov.uk/_doc/11635/Guidance%20on%20the%20duty%20to%20promote%20community%20cohesion%20pdf.pdf

14 Department for Communities and Local Government, 2008, 'Communities in control: real people, real power', available at: www.communities.gov.uk/publications/communities/communitiesincontrol

As a result, both statutory agencies and VCS organisations are grappling with how to fund and deliver services that promote cohesion, as well as evidence the impact their activities are having towards that aim.

What have we found?

Our research looked at the role the VCS plays in promoting cohesion and integration; the role that councils play in supporting and facilitating VCS involvement to promote cohesion through capacity building, partnership working and commissioning; and how this approach fits with other agendas such as community empowerment and Prevent.

The main findings of this research will be presented as outlined below:

1. What role does the VCS play in supporting cohesion and integration?

2. What role do councils play in supporting and facilitating VCS involvement through funding, partnership working and capacity building?

3. How does the approach of councils to facilitating involvement fit with the promotion of cohesion and empowerment?

In each part of the report we will present the existing data, and subsequently identify our own findings. Throughout the course of the report, we will refer to our four case study areas, in which we conducted our most in-depth reviews: Sheffield, Norfolk, Pendle and Haringey. More information and findings from the specific case studies can be found in Appendix C. We will also offer evidence from the other interviews conducted with local authority officers and members of the VCS across the country, as well as data derived from the web-based survey (with a table of key survey findings presented in Appendix B).

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Recognising the importance of partnership working is central to building stronger relationships between the VCS and local authorities, particularly in light of increasingly constrained budgets. However, the goal of collaboration must be kept in sight at all times. As a cohesion and Prevent officer in a local authority said, "the general public doesn't understand the LAA, it is about how we communicate with people in the community. What they want to know is that the bins are emptied and that they can access the services they want to. We have to keep an eye on that"[15].

Overview of the main findings

Cohesion and shifts in local government add a new lens to the relationship between local authorities and the VCS. As local authorities increasingly focus on delivering targets set out in LAAs, and move away from historical grant funding of the VCS towards commissioning models, new questions must be asked. Importantly, local authorities should consider how to maintain, mainstream and increase the benefits the VCS brings to communities, despite tight budgets, while encouraging innovation and diversification within the sector to promote independence, sustainability and generate efficiencies. In this section we will present the main findings from the survey, as well as an overview of the barriers to more productive partnership working taken from our interview and case study analysis.

The survey

Our quantitative survey highlighted several important trends in thinking about cohesion across the country.

A shared vision of cohesion has yet to emerge – fewer than ten per cent of local authority officers surveyed strongly felt there was a shared understanding of community cohesion between the local authority and VCS organisations. Additionally, the focus of cohesion shifts depending on the area. Amongst our respondents, engaging with different groups in the community was considered the most important facet of community cohesion, followed by the promotion of equalities and empowering communities. Addressing unemployment and under-employment and promoting intergenerational understanding fell last in that list. This could point to a continued 'soft-focus' on cohesion, rather than a commitment to mainstreaming cohesion principles in tackling more difficult issues.

Cooperative working between the VCS and local authority has room for growth – the relationship between the VCS and local authorities in promoting cohesion, while developing, still has room for improvement. Less than a quarter of local authority officers responding to our survey felt that the VCS and local authority were working cooperatively 'to a great extent' to promote cohesion. However, where they are working together, 75 per cent of local authorities felt the VCS was most effective in promoting cohesion through services or activities funded or contracted by the public sector. Furthermore, 63 per cent of local authority officers felt the greatest cohesion impacts were being realised at the neighbourhood level. From these findings, we can extrapolate that local authorities could help promote cohesion by focusing on increased cooperation between themselves and the VCS, particularly around grassroots service delivery, a finding our interviews corroborated.

15   Ansell, Angela, Cohesion and Prevent Officer, Pendle Borough Council, interviewed 31 March 2009

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Engagement with the VCS on cohesion remains patchy – engagement with the VCS around cohesion is taking place largely through formal structures. 78 per cent of local authorities reported that they engage with the VCS about cohesion primarily through the LSP, with the subgroups of the LSP and local infrastructure organisations listed as the secondary and tertiary points of contact. However, the degree to which the VCS represent their communities is mixed, with 26 per cent of local authorities reporting that they were unsure whether the local VCS represented all groups in their communities. Furthermore, local authorities vary in the extent to which they feel representation of a group's interests must be voiced by a member of that same group. These findings suggest that for members of the VCS not linked in to formal mechanisms of engagement, representing the interests of those they serve could be a challenge.

Funding mechanisms to support innovation and promote cohesion are in their infancy – new ways of working and funding within local authorities have not yet resulted in significant changes between local authorities and the VCS, particularly in relation to funding. 42 per cent of local authorities said they did not know what impact Area Based Grant (ABG) had on increasing the participation of the VCS in service delivery around cohesion activities. However, 48 per cent of local authorities ranked the LAA targets as most influential in enabling the VCS to contribute to services in support of community cohesion. Local authorities and the VCS are clearly beginning a more productive engagement aimed at delivering outcomes. However, allocating funding to match this increased engagement continues to be a complex issue.

The interviews and case studies

As the survey results demonstrate, relationships between local authorities and the VCS are strengthening. However, our interviews and case study analysis uncovered a number of key barriers that are inhibiting the process towards more flexible and effective ways of working. These key barriers are addressed below.

Addressing divergent focuses – our research found a disconnect between the focus on promoting cohesion from councils, and the adjustment to a new funding environment and policy picture for the VCS. Part of this disconnect has to do with the shifts in ways of working in local government. LAAs and LSPs are pushing councils and their partners to focus increasingly on outcomes. While there is an assumption from national government that the VCS "can be incentivised to undertake work for government from local to a national level"[16], the readiness and willingness of the VCS to do so remains in question.

Shifting to new ways of working – shifts in ways of working have had positive and negative consequences for building partnerships between local authorities and the VCS. Positively, as local authorities move towards a more professionalised environment, there is increasing room for VCS organisations to have a real say in setting priorities in local areas. However, on the negative side, there is a real challenge for local authorities in ensuring that all parts of the VCS can participate in such processes, and particularly those at the grassroots, who might have lower levels of capacity to engage.

Addressing these challenges is of significant importance, particularly if the expectations of national and local government are to be realised – namely that the VCS will deliver services

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16   Chapman, T., Brown, J. and Crow, R, 2008, 'Entering a brave new world? An assessment of third sector readiness to tender for the delivery of public services in the United Kingdom', Policy Studies, 29:1,117

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and activities in support of the government's agenda and consequently promote cohesion. As our research shows, ensuring such aims are met will require that appropriate mechanisms are put in place to guarantee involvement and participation for all parts of the VCS, and particularly those at the grassroots.

Linking cohesion to improved outcomes – equally important to promoting positive ways of working is linking cohesion more closely with improved outcomes. To this end, cohesion's relationship to promoting social capital must be made more explicit. The definition of cohesion provided by CLG does not note the importance of all forms of social capital – bridging, bonding and linking – and also omits the institutional environment in which cohesion is promoted. The VCS is important not only in a service delivery capacity, but also in highlighting needs, raising issues, and serving as advocates and champions for individuals and communities. Local authorities must therefore work in partnership and fund the sector to do more than provide services, but also to serve as advocates – bridging, bonding and linking communities in positive and mutually beneficial ways to the whole statutory sector. As the landscape of local government changes, this will require capacity building, partnership working and flexible funding arrangements.

Cohesion can be more than a policy initiative, and is adding benefits in local areas by helping local authorities gain a more holistic understanding of people, access to services, rights and responsibilities. It is also pushing local authorities to engage more effectively with the VCS in order to build trust and networks with segments of their communities in which such links are few.

Both the VCS and local authorities have that same goal in mind; indeed the two are natural allies. Therefore the question becomes – what keeps local authorities and the VCS from

working together as allies? There is work for both the VCS and local and national government in relation to this question.

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Part 3

What role does the VCS play in supporting cohesion and integration?

The flux and change of communities requires flexible ways of working. It is important to note that while local authorities are utilising the VCS to deliver services, promote cohesion and increase empowerment, the VCS is only one of the components needed to support communities. Our research found that crosscutting solutions aimed at innovation are occurring where the various sectors of the economy overlap, for example, where cohesion is being addressed through education programmes (see Appendix C for examples). These innovations can serve multiple purposes, creating cost savings, promoting cohesion and redefining the provision of services.

Competing discourses often get in the way of more productive engagement between local authorities and the VCS. The value of the VCS is widely noted, but translating that into real partnership working can be challenging. Too often the VCS and the council see each other as adversaries, rather than natural allies. Our research found that where councils and the VCS are working well together, the focus of the relationship is on meeting the needs of communities, rather than debating the value of the VCS versus the council. There can be no 'one size fits all' for relationships between the two sectors if partnership working is to produce cohesion benefits for an increasingly diverse Britain.

This section will ask whether and how the VCS promotes community cohesion and what local authorities can do to maximise those benefits.

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How does the VCS promote community cohesion?

Our research has found that local authorities are working closely with the VCS to promote cohesion and empowerment at the local level. The case studies (see Appendix C) demonstrate the degree to which local authorities rely upon the sector to connect the council to the most marginalised, deliver services that rely upon trust and cultural sensitivity, and mediate between conflicting groups. In other words, the VCS is essential to nurturing bridging, bonding and linking social capital.

Linking

Linking social capital can be defined as, "the capacity to leverage resources, ideas, and information from formal institutions beyond the community"[17], and is often in shortest supply among poor and disadvantaged communities. A key part of enabling linking social capital is creating linkages between people in the community and those with access to resources or power outside of the community. The VCS can act in this capacity.

In many places, the VCS is helping councils to link community assets or resources with statutory agencies. These links can leverage the good social capital in communities towards better aims and outcomes. For example, in Sheffield, community language schools have been a central component in the council's bid to raise attainment in BAME communities, in particular Gypsies and Travellers. The council found that children behaved better in these schools and is working to connect those community successes to the mainstream school environment.

Additionally, councils can utilise the VCS to link marginalised and disconnected communities to mainstream services by making them more accessible and friendly. Where councils are utilising the VCS in this respect, multiple benefits are occurring, helping close equality gaps related to health and education, as well as providing mechanisms for communities to address and solve their own issues.

Haringey Council is realising these benefits through their work with the Ethiopian Community Centre. One of the centre's most successful projects assists HIV patients while in hospital, helping doctors and patients communicate more effectively, producing better health outcomes and reducing frustration from both sides. Additionally, they have established a mentoring scheme where HIV positive members of the community offer help and support to the newly diagnosed. According to Alem Gebrehiwot, Director of the centre, "this mentoring support is particularly important in communities where the stigma of HIV and AIDS is high and diagnosis can lead to both ostracisation and low take-up of support services and treatment".[18]

As this example shows, local authorities can utilise the VCS in key linkage roles, providing a bridge between the council and marginalised communities. This can promote cohesion by encouraging communities to access services and work with the council in solving and addressing their own issues.

17 Woolcock, Michael, 2001, 'The place of social capital in understanding social and economic outcomes', Canadian Journal of Policy Research

18 Gebrehiwot, Alem, Executive Director, Ethiopian Community Centre, interviewed 31 May, 2009

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Bonding

Bonding social capital refers to ties between close friends, relatives and neighbours. Councils can utilise the VCS to build bonding capital by, for example, helping communities recognise their similarities, rather than differences. In Pendle, the arts are an important vehicle for tackling negative assumptions and creating community bonds. In one project, neighbourhood management staff and the museum service worked together on a project called 'Hidden Histories' where people share personal mementos. This project helped many residents from different backgrounds recognise the similarities in their histories.

Councils are also seeing the benefits of utilising the VCS to mediate within communities when conflicts arise. Where this is happening, councils are more able to embed feelings of fairness relating to the allocation of resources, as well as connect to communities they couldn't otherwise reach. In Burnley, Mediation Northern Ireland has helped the council confront complaints lodged against the largely Pakistani taxi driver fleet. Similarly Mediation Sheffield has worked in communities where violence against asylum seekers was occurring, helping the council connect to communities where there was little trust. Communicating through channels of trust can help councils disseminate their messages more quickly and effectively.

While the VCS is useful for addressing 'negative' aspects of cohesion, councils should also consider how they can build cohesion by linking the attainment of cohesion related outcomes to other key agendas, like training and employment. Haringey Council is developing a programme to utilise and train low or no income residents as 'citizen mappers'. The information gathered from such programmes can add to councils' knowledge of levels of cohesion and tensions. These individuals can also serve as useful bonding agents by developing points of trust within and between communities that can

be utilised when tensions arise and to promote the benefits of civic engagement.

Bridging

Bridging social capital is concerned with connections between more distant friends, associates and colleagues[19]. Bridging connections are created by developing linkages between individuals in positions of power that can help communities leverage in resources. Our research found that frontline council officers, such as those working in neighbourhood management, often serve this purpose. Frontline workers can be effective in terms of nurturing greater intra-community ties, as well as building important bridges between communities. Indeed, as our survey found, the majority of local authority officers (63 per cent) thought they were having the greatest impact on cohesion at the neighbourhood level.

Councils can utilise frontline VCS organisations and council officers to deliver the cohesion agenda at the grassroots by bridging connections between communities through the promotion of positive activities that also address key areas of need. In Haringey, neighbourhood management staff started a programme called 'Living Under One Sun' where women from different cultural backgrounds come together in a range of activities that now includes job training and healthy living courses. The success of this programme has attracted the attention of many councillors and council officers and is now being expanded to other areas.

Councils are also finding VCS organisations important for building trust outside of statutory agencies among new communities, helping increase the uptake of services in disadvantaged areas and teaching the value and benefits of citizenship. Norfolk's statutory agencies and VCS work together formally and informally

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19 Woolcock, Michael, 2001, 'The place of social capital in understanding social and economic outcomes', Canadian Journal of Policy Research

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to capitalise on that trust to the benefit of residents. 'New Routes' in North Norfolk is one example of where this is happening. 'New Routes' initially provided non-accredited English classes for migrant women who couldn't access other courses due to a lack of crèche facilities. The service is now open to all BAME communities, and serves as an important bridge between different migrant communities who share similar challenges, such as low English proficiency, but who often have little opportunity to connect. The success of this programme has attracted the attention of local service providers, who rely on 'New Routes' to access seldom heard communities[20].

Councils should consider utilising and funding the VCS to serve as brokers of trust and as key sites for innovation in tackling problems at the neighbourhood level.

Enabling bridging, bonding and linking social capital

Bridging, bonding and linking social capital are all key elements of building cohesive communities. Councils should consider how best to promote the development of such capital, recognising that close relationships with the VCS will be important to accessing the grassroots and filling gaps in the council's reach or bridging to areas where trust in statutory agencies is low. Such partnership working is an essential part of creating appropriate and attainable cohesion and LAA targets.

Cohesion can be promoted by focusing on all forms of social capital. As research has shown, "it is different combinations of bonding, bridging, and linking social capital that are responsible for the range of outcomes"[21]. It is also important to recognise that the promotion of cohesion occurs within a complex institutional

environment of local government, and therefore, "the vibrancy or paucity of social capital cannot be understood independently of its broader institutional environment"[22].

Building all three forms of social capital requires that local authorities develop a firm understanding of their own institutional environment, and in particular of the VCS, including the number of organisations, their spread, level of funding and their mix of volunteers. Local authorities can address this need by conducting community mapping exercises. From this information, local authorities can assess the capacity of the VCS to do the key bridging, bonding and linking work necessary for promoting cohesion. In many places, poor communities have few links to resources outside their communities[23]. In these areas, strengthening the capacity of small grassroots VCS organisations can be an important step in promoting cohesion.

Developing an evidence base

The third sector review acknowledged the need for a strong evidence base detailing the role that the VCS plays in local places and at a national level[24]. Many local authorities are undertaking reviews of the VCS, mapping and assessing its current state, including internal and external funding of the sector, the spread of organisations across local places, perceptions of local authorities from the VCS and the spread of volunteers across local areas. All of this information is vital to filling the gaps and encouraging growth of specific parts of the

20 Robinson, Dee, New Routes Project Coordinator, interviewed 15 May 2009

21 Woolcock, Michael, 2001, 'The place of social capital in understanding social and economic outcomes', Canadian Journal of Policy Research

22 Woolcock, Michael, 2001, 'The place of social capital in understanding social and economic outcomes', Canadian Journal of Policy Research

23 Thomson, L and Caulier-Grice, J, 2007, 'Improving small scale grant funding for local voluntary and community organisations' – discussion paper, The Young Foundation. Available at: www.youngfoundation.org/files/images/07_07_ Improving.pdf

24 The Office of the Third sector, 2007, 'The future role of the third sector in social and economic regeneration: final report', available at: www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/third_sector_ review/third_sector_review_final_report.aspx

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sector, such as BAME organisations, to serve marginalised communities.

Local authorities can set realistic and achievable LAA and cohesion targets by tapping into the knowledge, performance and client data of grassroots organisations. Grassroots organisations often have detailed understandings of the needs of communities – which can be a significant aid to local authorities' understandings of their communities and the shifting and changing needs of the marginalised.

As our research has found, local authorities sometimes set LAA or cohesion targets without having a firm understanding of the reality on the ground, making the delivery of such goals a challenge. Addressing gaps between the targets and realities on the ground can help councils gain a better understanding of local need that can serve as baselines for addressing cohesion issues, for example poor English language skills. In Lancashire, members of the Children's Trust drew-up a list of underpinning objectives to be achieved before work on the LAA targets can begin[25]. Many of these underpinning needs are issues of cohesion, such as providing English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classes, teaching parents how to support their children and raising awareness of services available. As Audrey Wilson, Head of the Walton Lane Children's Centre said, "it's almost as if we need to support families to understand citizenship at a very early age"[26].

Where councils are doing more to understand issues at the grassroots, and build capacity to support local understandings of cohesion, they are gaining better understandings of their local communities.

Measuring impact

While local authorities and the VCS are working to promote cohesion, their affects on enhancing it need to be measurable, and this is where significant work remains to be done.

Our research found that measuring the impact of services and activities on cohesion is difficult and often ill-defined. Yet it is clear that the way in which services are provided, and regeneration and development promoted, has implications for cohesion. One of the key points to come out of a workshop with policy makers and members of the VCS was the need to include a community impact assessment in the planning of all local authority services and activities, as well as in the planning for regeneration and economic development activities.

Councils can evidence impact on cohesion, using both qualitative and quantitative indicators in their measurement. Indeed, the use of case studies, narratives and profiles of best practice can help provide a 'pipeline' of innovative and successful practice that can be drawn upon to assess the viability of projects and determine when scaling successes might be appropriate. Commissioners of mainstream and general services should also be made aware of how to use such information when creating tenders for new services.

Highlights

Where councils are working cooperatively with the VCS, they are seeing increased cohesion outcomes – particularly with linking mainstream services with specialist provision; providing services that rely on trust and cultural sensitivity, and mediating between conflicting groups – both within and between communities.

Additionally, frontline workers can be key to attaining demonstrable cohesion results and linking local authorities with more marginalised groups in the community. Local authorities can help build connections to marginalised groups by promoting diversity within the sector and

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25 Wilson, Audrey, Head of Walton Lane's Children's Centre, interviewed 6 May 2009

26 Wilson, Audrey. op. cit.

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building strong links between the VCS and statutory agencies.

Recommendations

To enable more productive engagement in support of cohesion objectives, this report recommends that councils focus on developing in-depth understandings of their communities and VCS. This can be accomplished, in part, through:

- conducting robust assessments of the local VCS, including spread and diversity of volunteers and funding across the area. Where capacity is low, this report recommends that councils focus on increasing diversity of representation, particularly of BAME and marginalised groups within the VCS

- conducting reviews of LAA targets against data and information from frontline providers. Local authorities can set baselines for cohesion targets from that information

- focusing on measuring and evidencing cohesion outcomes. We recommend that community assessments – utilising qualitative and quantitative data – are used when planning for and commissioning services and activities, and when considering growth and regeneration strategies. Councils can create their own qualitative evidence guide, utilising case studies, examples of best practices and outcome matrices to help commissioners assess and measure success.

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Part 4

What role do councils play in supporting and facilitating VCS involvement through funding, partnership working and capacity building?

Councils play a key role in supporting the VCS to deliver cohesion outcomes. Our survey indicated that 75 per cent of local authorities found the VCS most helpful in promoting cohesion through service delivery funded or commissioned by local authorities. However, councils face a challenge, particularly with regards to funding and ways of working, in supporting the VCS to fulfil all of its primary roles, including service delivery, advocacy, the provision of advice and information, and campaigning and research.

As research has found, within the VCS there is a clear "interaction between organisational type and their capacity and willingness to engage in contracts"[27]. Part of the solution for councils who want to encourage and widen the participation of a wider range of VCS organisations in the delivery of services and activities, as well as support the VCS in their role of building social capital, is a recognition of how the size and asset base of organisations affects their ability to be involved in the increasingly formalised and professionalised environment of local government.

Our research shows that a flexible funding environment and good partnership working must be maintained and cultivated in order to deliver services and activities that promote cohesion and sustainability. Furthermore, as ways of working change, explicit commitments through the use of Compacts or LAA targets must be utilised to ensure ease of contracting is not privileged over meeting the needs of communities.

27   Chapman, T., Brown, J. and Crow, R, 2008, 'Entering a brave new world? An assessment of third sector readiness to tender for the delivery of public services in the United Kingdom', Policy Studies, 29:1,117

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The table below, adapted from recent research[28] assessing the readiness of the VCS in England to deliver services, provides a helpful classification for understanding the sizes and corresponding functions of organisations. This classification is not applicable to every organisation, but serves as a useful framework that we will refer to in the remainder of the publication.

Table 1. Organisational type and income level

Type	Income	Primary organisational function
Small	£50,000	Campaigning and research
Medium	£50,000 - 249,000	Secondary service delivery, such as advice and information
Large	Above £250,000	Primary service delivery, such as social care and homeless services

The changing funding environment

Trends towards commissioning, competitive procurement practices and more robust performance management have negative and positive implications for the ability of the VCS and local authorities to work together and promote cohesion. In this section, we will focus on how funding and ways of working within local government can support cohesion objectives, through:

- grant aid
- competitive tendering
- commissioning
- embedding transparency
- decommissioning
- rethinking access to services
- trading locally.

Grant aid

Local authorities are being pushed to recognise significant cost savings. Commissioning and competitive procurement practices can be a means of adding transparency and embedding a focus on value for money. However, our research has shown the value of continuing grant funding. Officers working within local authorities provided significant evidence of how grant aid could be made more effective and transparent[29].

Grant funding has long been the norm in the relationship between local authorities and the VCS. However, it also has many drawbacks, including what some consider a lack of transparency, few controls on how money is spent and little evidence that such funding achieves worthwhile aims and objectives.

28 Chapman, T., Brown, J. and Crow, R, 2008, 'Entering a brave new world? An assessment of third sector readiness to tender for the delivery of public services in the United Kingdom', Policy Studies, 29:1,117

29 National Association for Voluntary and Community Action, 2007, 'Sustaining grants – why local grant aid is vital for a healthy voluntary and community sector and thriving communities', available at: www.navca.org.uk/NR/rdonlyres/C313D3B3-0315-417E-AD82-4DA7934B055E/0/SustainingGrantsWeb.pdf

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Given the increasingly constrained funding environments in which many councils find themselves, cutbacks in grant funding can be expected, our research found evidence of this pattern. However, these constraints may accelerate reviews of local authority grant funding portfolios, including the decommissioning of organisations where they no longer meet the needs of particular communities, and funding others whose aims and objectives align better with local authority priorities.

Despite these constraints, grant funding remains an essential part of the way in which local authorities support the VCS to deliver key work. Particularly, grant funding can be important for maintaining links to grassroots or smaller organisations, who often have less robust managerial capacity and lower turnover, making competing for tenders too time consuming[30]. As local authorities move towards a relationship focused on service delivery with the VCS, maintaining grant funding for organisations fulfilling non-service delivery roles – such as capacity building, advocacy and involvement in consultation and decision making – will be important to maintaining the vibrancy of the VCS and their role in community building and strategic planning, which is a key part of delivering on the cohesion agenda.

Given the flux and change within funding environments, grant funding organisations working in a capacity building manner can be particularly important to ensuring a smooth transition to new commissioning environments. Such support can help the VCS turn challenges into opportunities. Norfolk County Council supports various forums, including the youth forum, through grant funding to Norfolk Council for Voluntary Youth Services – the agency that

30 Thomson, L and Caulier-Grice, J, 2007, 'Improving small scale grant funding for local voluntary and community organisations' – discussion paper, The Young Foundation. Available at: www.youngfoundation.org/files/images/07_07_Improving.pdf

leads and capacity builds organisations involved in the provision of youth services. By supporting this organisation to keep members updated on changes, raise awareness of funding available and serve as a central point of contact, the council ensures a constant dialogue and positive relationship with the VCS.

Councils should consider how they use grant aid to develop and continue strategic relationships with the VCS. They should work to determine which organisations are fundamental to delivering the targets and agendas set out in the LAA, and particularly those aligned to building community cohesion. In many areas, our research found that the most important organisations in maintaining and building a positive relationship between the VCS and local authority were those engaged in capacity building and providing strategic points of contact in the sector for the council, as well as those that represent essential links into communities with whom councils have less trust and reach.

Competitive tendering
Research on VCS awareness and readiness to engage in service delivery highlights the risks associated with tendering. The findings show that:

"Almost half of smaller VCS organisations interviewed lacked knowledge about tendering opportunities. Awareness increased by size of organisation with 16 per cent of medium-sized VCS organisations and only 4 per cent of larger VCS organisation being unaware of tendering opportunities. It is also useful to note that willingness to engage in tendering activity is affected by organisational size. While these data record that over 20 per cent of small VCS organisations do not wish to engage in tendering because it clashes with core values, this may be an underestimate given that so many organisations are unaware of

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the opportunities. If those VCS organisations are excluded from the analysis, then it is apparent that about 40 per cent of small organisations think that tendering is contrary to their core values."[31]

As indicated above, competitive tendering practices can present challenges for engaging VCS organisations in service delivery. As a result, a wider range of funding mechanisms need to be considered to purchase services, provide activities and sustain organisations fulfilling non-service delivery related roles, such as capacity building and advocacy. Particularly, shifts towards competitive tendering carry the risk of sidelining smaller to medium-sized VCS organisations. Research from the National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) has confirmed this trend, showing a rapid growth in the number of large charities and a decline in income for medium to small organisations in 2007[32]. Evidence also suggests that some local organisations doing effective work on the ground are losing out on tender opportunities to larger national and regional organisations[33]. During this time of transition, councils have the chance to consider how to be more creative and inclusive with the tendering process.

Our research found that one of the main barriers for VCS organisations in competing for tenders is basic knowledge about the process. For example, council officers noted a specific need to help small to medium-sized local VCS organisations develop more rigorous governance structures to enhance their ability to win tenders in an increasingly professionalised environment.

However, our research found that competitive tendering can be flexible and, when used to deliver smaller portions of money, help smaller local organisations learn about the process. Councils recognising this need are putting in place mechanisms to ensure local VCS providers have the capacity to be competitive in this new environment.

Pendle Borough Council believes it has a responsibility to build capacity within the VCS, and is doing so by utilising ABG for cohesion and Prevent. Both cohesion and Prevent funds were allocated in 2008/09. VCS organisations applying had to evidence how their work would deliver the outcomes listed in the cohesion action plan, and also agree to work towards PQASSO (the Practical Quality Assurance System for Small Organisations) accreditation in six months, which the council and Pendle Community Network (PCN) will support them in achieving. For those unsuccessful in their applications, or those who would like to get funding next year, Cohesion and Prevent Officer, Angela Ansell, holds mid-financial year workshops to make sure groups have the documentation in place, making the application process less of a struggle[34].

Capacity building the VCS to compete for tenders is therefore an important part of maintaining and building the ability of grassroots VCS organisations to work effectively with councils to deliver cohesion related objectives.

31   Osborne, S.P. and McLoughlin, K., 2004, 'The cross cutting review of the voluntary sector: where next for local government / voluntary sector relationships?' Regional studies, 38 (5), 573-582. p. 578.

32   Reichardt, Oliver; Wilding, Karl and Kane, David, 2007, 'The UK voluntary sector almanac', NCVO

33   The National Council for Voluntary Organisations, 2009, 'The UK civil society almanac 2009', available at: www.ncvo-vol.org.uk/almanac

34   Ansell, Angela, Cohesion and Prevent Officer, Pendle Borough Council, interviewed 31 May, 2009

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Commissioning

Commissioning can be delivered through a range of funding mechanisms such as grants, contracts and Service Level Agreements (SLAs), which can deliver value for money and transparency when done in a rigorous fashion. The central questions around which all funding processes, including commissioning, should revolve are the needs of the users and desired outcomes, from which the appropriate provider(s) and funding mechanism can be identified.

Commissioning services and activities that promote cohesion and provide sustainable outcomes can require flexible approaches to funding. In particular, there is often a need to utilise funding mechanisms that work for local organisations that know the communities in which they operate. In the case of community based activities and programmes, grants with SLAs can ensure that the activity remains with local organisations. As one council officer noted:

"Council officers are much more inclined to undertake an open procurement process, essentially because it is clear and transparent and the voluntary sector has very little grounds to argue against it. But they do not necessarily do very well out of it. We are more inclined to say 'we do not mind commissioning a service, but it is going to be grant aid' we will have an SLA with you but we are not going through the procurement process. I think this is better for the voluntary sector because we are not letting an organisation outside Sheffield to come in. We want locally based organisations that know the communities and have volunteers."[35]

Commissioning for sustainable outcomes and in support of cohesion objectives will increasingly require flexible funding arrangements to enable and support local VCS organisations to continue providing services and activities in local communities. As local authorities move away from historical funding arrangements, the challenge will be to link successful programmes and organisations to mainstream provision, with the question being how to bridge and build upon successes in both statutory and VCS organisations.

Embedding transparency

As councils move away from historical funding of the VCS, clarity in priority setting and broad communication of those priorities will become essential to making the relationship between local authorities and the VCS more strategic and mutually beneficial. Councils can embed transparency by informing all partners about the council's goals, such that, when funding is removed, there is a set of criteria councils can point to as firm evidence for the decision. Failing to do so can have negative impacts on cohesion. As one council officer noted, "a lot of it is about communication. There is a real perception about resources and who the council provides for. That is really important in relation to cohesion because people will perceive it as divisive"[36].

Additionally, as councils make the transition to new funding arrangements, groups must be given time to accommodate new targets and performance management. Where councils have not appropriately evidenced what organisations are failing to do through Equality Impact Assessments (EqIAs), or have not allowed time for transitions to new ways of working, there have been negative impacts on individuals whose services have been discontinued. When awarding contracts for service delivery, local authorities should consider not only the effects the service will have on cohesion, but also the effects that disruption or closure of the service

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35 Council officer, Sheffield City Council,
interviewed 24 April 2009

36 Council officer, Sheffield City Council,
interviewed 24 April 2009

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will have on cohesion[37]. Common performance management frameworks can help to embed transparency and fairness.

Decommissioning

An equally important aspect of the new funding environment is decommissioning. Our interviews highlighted the fact that many local authorities are working towards embedding the transparency and fairness addressed above in order to ensure that VCS organisations funded by the council are providing the services and attaining the outcomes they are tasked with delivering. Indeed, robust decommissioning processes are necessary to ensuring that new organisations can be funded by local authorities as community demographics shift and needs change. Providing opportunities to fund new groups in the community is important to promoting cohesion. However, as our research found, current grant aid practices discourage many local authorities from finding funds to work with new organisations. As one local authority officer noted:

"The granting process never gets criticised and yet it probably should. We hardly ever fund any new organisations. It is not a bidding round, we only invite organisations to apply that we have previously funded. Occasionally when we have squeezed out funding to do X we might say we could do with funding an organisation to do Y and the members will approve."[38]

Many local authorities are struggling with finding funds for new organisations, aware of the fact that removing funding can often cause a political backlash. However, creating robust, well communicated and regular performance management systems can help

depoliticise funding decisions and enable the decommissioning process to work more smoothly.

Cohesion can be an important mechanism for helping local authorities rethink how services are delivered and which organisations are best placed to deliver services that promote cohesion.

Rethinking access to services – equalities and cohesion

Cohesion can be a helpful lens for rethinking access to services. In many places, it is broadening out the understanding of need to include issues such as rurality, disability and gender. Cohesion is helping local authorities focus on increasing all forms of social capital, which research has suggested "can be useful in resolving public problems and enhancing wellbeing" (Woolcock and Sweetser, 2002; Pretty, 2002).[39]

Where councils have a firm understanding of the connection between equalities and cohesion, both cost savings and cohesion benefits are occurring. In some places, assessing equalities as a baseline for delivering cohesion is proving the need for, and benefits of, cross-sector and intra-agency working, particularly in meeting the needs of the most marginalised[40]. As the Assistant Chief Executive of Pendle Borough Council, said, "if you don't do your equalities work, you can't do cohesion. That is the fundamental baseline."[41]

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37 The Queen on the application of Kaur and Shah vs London Borough of Ealing, The Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2008

38 Council officer, Sheffield City Council, interviewed 24 April 2009

39 Dahal, Ganga and Adhikari, Krishna, 2008, 'Bridging, linking and bonding social capital in collective action: the case of Kalahan Forest Reserve in the Philippines', CGIAR Systemwide Programme on Collective Action and Property Rights (CAPRi), DC, USA, available at: www.capri.cgiar.org/pdf/capriwp79.pdf

40 Establishing cohesion baselines is not the normal function of an EqIA

41 Dodds, George, Assistant Chief Executive, Pendle Borough Council, interviewed 28 April 2009

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From these baselines, Pendle is working in a multi-agency manner and with the VCS to deliver more holistic support for the most deprived. In one project, Pendle Borough Council, working with Home Start and a number of statutory agencies, targeted the 40 families presenting most frequently to a wide range of social services. By working in partnership, the council was able to provide more comprehensive and holistic support to the families, a key factor of which was Home Start's access to those families and foundation of trust within their communities.

Where councils have a strong focus on equalities work, cohesion benefits are being realised and partnership working is becoming a foundation for new ways of working. Much of this requires a solid knowledge of community demographics and a good foundation of trust, which is strengthened by working with the VCS.

Trading locally

As local authorities are moving towards more robust needs assessments, there must be recognition of the benefits key local organisations play in delivering services that promote cohesion. As was noted in the Office of the Third Sector's 2006 publication, 'Partnership in public services: an action plan for third sector involvement', "we know that, throughout the country, there are programmes being delivered by charities, social enterprises and voluntary groups that work brilliantly. It is groups like these at the frontline of delivery who know about what works and what doesn't."[42]

Trading locally is a commitment that must be made over time and often requires capacity building for smaller VCS organisations. Capacity building efforts are important to ensuring that outcomes, over ease of contracting, are considered in the provision of services and activities. Where ease of contracting has been the primary objective, cohesion has suffered. For example, in one of our case study areas a mental health contract was awarded to a consortium of partners, of which one was an outside organisation with little knowledge of the area. The agency had to pull out of the contract, to the detriment of the vulnerable and marginalised residents using the service.

Trading locally has benefits for both the VCS and local authorities. Indeed, the VCS can be an important vehicle through which to drive efficiency and sustainability. For example, Sheffield Primary Care Trust (PCT) undertook a review of funding, which made clear the importance of the local VCS in helping the PCT reach its health and wellbeing goals. The PCT made a financial commitment to facilitating a more strategic and transparent relationship by allocating funds to create a health Compact. The VCS now has an assurance of three year funding, and the PCT has a mechanism to ensure proper performance management.

Commitments to trading locally can be made through a number of mechanisms, such as local Compacts, or through LAA targets, such a National Indicator 7 (NI7) 'creating an environment for a thriving third sector'. In some areas, councils have made a commitment to providing the VCS with a percentage of ABG. While flexibility in ways of working and funding is important, enabling the sector to contribute sustainably means funding them to do so. Directing a percentage of local ABG towards that aim could be an important mechanism to delivering on the agenda of partnership working for some local authorities.

42 Office of the Third Sector, 2006, 'Partnership in public services: an action plan for third sector involvement', Cabinet Office, available at: www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/media/cabinetoffice/third_sector/assets/psd_action_plan.pdf

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Partnership working

Funding is not the only solution to creating stronger relationships between councils and the VCS. In this section we will look at the importance of:

- building strong non-monetary relationships
- increasing VCS awareness of LAAs
- generating greater VCS involvement in LSPs
- making stronger links between levels of decision making.

Building strong non-monetary relationships

Councils can help support VCS participation in a range of activities by building stronger non-monetary relationships. However, our survey results suggest this process has a way to go – only 26 per cent of local authorities surveyed reported that they engage with the VCS concerning cohesion through informal mechanisms. 78 per cent noted they engage primarily through the LSP and the local council for voluntary services.

Promoting non-monetary relationships between the sectors is important for identifying needs, and for moving away from a culture of dependency between local authorities and the VCS. As the 'UK Civil Society Almanac for 2009' reports, 75 per cent of VCS organisations receive no government funding[43]. For those it does fund, the shift towards strict contractual arrangements:

"...carries with it a number of dangers and particularly both of the creation of inter-dependent relationships between government and its chosen VCOs, to the exclusion of other VCOs... with the consequent loss of their distinctive contribution to local public services."[44]

Current relationships between the VCS and local authority often revolve too much around money. Such a focus, "[…] pushes the parties into 'distributive' negotiation (or win-lose arguments) instead of 'interest-based' negotiation (or win-win exchanges)"[45]. Increasing 'win-win' relationships can help highlight and disseminate innovation and encourage partnership working. For example, bringing communities together in dialogue has helped Haringey Council be creative about tackling sensitive cohesion issues, as Councillor Lorna Reith noted:

"Some community cohesion work we did involved white and African-Caribbean elders. One of the interesting things to come out of this was that fear of young people transcended race backgrounds. Elders were equally concerned about all young people."[46]

In some areas, it is clear that councils could do more to promote informal partnership working around cohesion and service delivery. This is particularly important for maintaining the buy-in of grassroots organisations and facilitating partnership working between different parts of the sector.

Increasing VCS awareness of LAAs

LAAs are a key mechanism for delivering the cohesion agenda, as 48 per cent of local authority officers in our survey noted. In relation to delivering cohesion outcomes, local authorities face a challenge in ensuring that the VCS is aware of LAA targets, including those specifically designed to enhance cohesion, and is supported in helping the council to deliver these.

The LAA reference group in Norfolk is a best practice example of how the council and partners work together to enhance understanding of the LAA. Following a

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43   The National Council for Voluntary Organisations, 2009, 'The UK civil society almanac 2009', available at: www.ncvo-vol.org.uk/almanac

44   Osborne, S.P. and McLoughlin, K., 2004. op. cit.

45   Chapman, Brown and Crow, op. cit. p. 13.

46   Cllr. Reith, Lorna, Haringey Council, interviewed 30 March 2009

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secondment from the council to Voluntary Norfolk, a reference group of key VCS bodies was established to increase the capacity of the sector to directly respond to and shape LAA targets. As a result, the LAA Engagement Project was established, and has helped VCS organisations in Norfolk better understand the LAA targets and their role in contributing to them.

For VCS and local authority partnerships to be effective, the VCS needs to be made more aware of LAA targets and supported in helping the council and its partners to deliver these.

Our research found this to be particularly important in maintaining involvement and including the smaller VCS organisations, who have been recognised as important brokers of trust and providers of specialist services for BAME communities[47].

Generating greater VCS involvement in LSPs

Councils agree that VCS organisations are central to representing the needs of communities in decision making structures. There seems to be little disagreement about the need for the VCS to be involved in delivering cohesion related outcomes. Indeed, our survey indicated that 78 per cent of local authority officers engage with the VCS around cohesion through the LSP, with 70 per cent noting the LSP subgroups as the secondary point of engagement.

Despite the push towards greater partnership working, LSPs remain out of reach for many VCS organisations. Among those VCS organisations not engaging through the LSP, BAME representation is particularly low. Recent research from the Black Training and Enterprise Group (BTEG) found that only half of LSPs in

England have BAME representation on their boards. BTEG Director Jeremy Crook notes that, "LSPs spend millions of pounds in the 88 most deprived areas of the country where 70 per cent of black communities live. It is unacceptable that so few LSPs have black people on their boards."[48]

Additionally, our research found it particularly difficult for smaller VCS organisations to engage with the LSP process. This was attributed, by a number of interviewees, to the delivery focus of the LSP, which can make it difficult for organisations not involved at that level to contribute. Where partnership working is ineffective, it can lead to disempowerment[49]. In Sheffield, a number of interviewees noted that some VCS organisations were having a difficult time engaging at LSP meetings, and that it was hard for many organisations to figure out what they could add.

In addition to problems of representation, the structure of LSP meetings was a concern raised by a number of VCS and local infrastructure organisations. The most common concerns related to the inflexible structure of meetings, the times at which they are held and the lack of citizen engagement. Councillors raised similar concerns about the formal structure of LSPs, which were seen to fail at actively drawing upon and utilising the expertise of VCS organisations, particularly those at the smaller end of the sector.

Councils can help make LSP meetings more inclusive by utilising LSP meetings more effectively, and allowing time in meetings for organisations not involved in delivering on the LAA agenda to raise issues or concerns they

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47 Communities and Local Government, 2009, 'Tackling race and inequalities: a discussion document', available at: www.communities.gov.uk/documents/communities/pdf/1155456.pdf

48 Black Training and Enterprise Group, 2006, 'Getting involved in Local Strategic Partnerships: a guide for black and minority ethnic groups in England'

49 The Young Foundation, 2006, 'Managing the risks of neighbourhood governance', available at: www.youngfoundation.org.uk/files/images/ingtherisksofneighbourhoodgovernance25_10_06.pdf

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have relating to that particular service, as well as other issues.

Making stronger links between levels of decision making

In some areas, councils could do more to connect their own frontline workers to strategic decision making. Neighbourhood management and frontline council staff often serve as important links to the grassroots and can be particularly helpful in connecting the council to marginalised or seldom heard communities and VCS organisations within them.

Our research in Haringey found that a number of small BAME organisations showed strong links with neighbourhood management workers, who they felt understood their needs and concerns. However, our interviews with frontline council staff found a significant degree of disconnect between their sphere of influence and that of corporate decision making much of the time. These fissures can develop into more complex problems, and potentially a two tier system within the VCS if the concerns and priorities of small VCS organisations have no link to corporate decision making structures. This can happen, for example, where mainstream VCS organisations are represented through local infrastructure organisations, while those not connected via that mechanism are left out.

Additionally, in some areas, councils could do more to build productive relationships between frontline council staff, and the mainstream VCS. Our interviews highlighted feelings of distrust between mainstream VCS organisations and frontline council staff, particularly because frontline council workers are often seen to be usurping the role of the VCS. Additionally, divisions of frontline workers, such as neighbourhood managers, often allocate funds to the VCS, and where those grant funds go through different decision making structures,

a sense of unfairness can result.

Communicating strategic priorities at all levels of the council, including grassroots, is an important aspect of building more productive relationships between local authorities and the VCS. Specifically, councils could do more to tie-in successful one-off projects with strategic priorities outlined in the LAA. For example, by including frontline staff who have knowledge of 'on the ground' projects in decision making structures, or doing more to consult them in priority setting.

Including a wide range of VCS organisations in priority setting, raising needs and service delivery requires that relationships be formed and facilitated informally – not just at LSP meetings, but through lunchtime seminars, area assemblies and the development of grassroots networks. This can be particularly important for engaging underdeveloped parts of the VCS in delivering and developing the cohesion agenda.

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Capacity building and equality

Our research across England frequently highlighted an underdevelopment of the BAME voluntary and community sector, which can make including such organisations in delivering cohesion objectives difficult. Capacity building more fragile ends of the sector will be an important part of making the cohesion agenda a success. This section will focus on how local authorities can deliver equality in capacity building and how to create a 'ladder of participation' to involve the most fragile parts of the VCS in delivering services and promoting cohesion.

Equality in capacity building

In some areas, such as Norfolk, reviews of the VCS have found that a disproportionate number of BAME organisations rely on volunteers, rather than paid staff in day-to-day operations[50]. As a result, ways of working need to be flexible to accommodate this discrepancy. In Sheffield, objectives set out in the cohesion agenda include increasing the representativeness of the VCS, and encouraging the development of a BAME forum. Arrangements have been put in place to allow the forum one-to-one meetings with LSP boards while it develops.

Councils should consider how well ways of working incorporate diversity of participation. In many local authorities, the local infrastructure organisation is one of the largest recipients of core grant funding, and is in charge of capacity building for the local VCS. However, our research found that capacity building and advocacy for BAME and women's groups may not always benefit from the mainstream local infrastructure organisation. Research from Black Training and Enterprise Group (BTEG) found similar problems, with a significant lack of information and understanding about LAAs and

LSPs within BAME and women's groups[51].

BAME networks and equality forums can act in important capacity building roles in addition to mainstream local infrastructure organisations. Many local authority cohesion and partnership officers are currently working to build or encourage such forums for BAME groups, as well as migrants, Gypsies and Travellers. Where councils are funding local infrastructure organisations to capacity build the VCS, they should consider how that work could be shared between organisations to maximise the impact and increase representativeness of BAME and women's organisations in local decision making processes and structures.

Increasing the diversity of the VCS

Norfolk County Council undertook a review of the VCS and found low numbers of BAME individuals volunteering and involved in the operation of VCS organisations. Adjusting this disparity and encouraging more BAME individuals and communities to get involved in the VCS is part of Norfolk's cohesion agenda. In addition to choosing NI7, 'creating an environment for a thriving third sector', a local indicator designed to increase the diversity of volunteering has been established and is being delivered by the main infrastructure organisation, Voluntary Norfolk. As County Cohesion Officer, Claire Bailey, said, "there is a big gap in terms of people who feel empowered and the only way to do that is to enable people to do it for themselves"[52].

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50 Stevenson, N and McDaid, L, 2006, 'The sector counts: researching the impact of Norfolk's voluntary and community sector for the Local Area Agreement', The Guild

51 Black Training and Enterprise Group, 2009, 'Increasing black and minority ethnic and women's representation on Local Strategic Partnerships', available at: www. bteg.co.uk/increasing_black_and_minority_ethnic_and_ women%E2%80%99s.html

52 Bailey, Claire, North Norfolk District Council, County Community Cohesion Officer, 19 May 2009

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Creating a ladder of participation

Our case study analysis found that where relationships between the VCS and local authority were strong, capacity building was seen as a duty for both the infrastructure organisations and council officers.

The majority of the smaller VCS organisations we interviewed expressed the need for specific help around filling out funding applications and completing monitoring and evaluation requirements. For the smallest VCS organisations, operating with few staff members, and, in many cases, only one staff member, participation in any external engagement can mean having to close the organisation for a few hours to enable attendance at meetings[53].

In North Tyneside, there is a proposal to provide a small project called 'Getting Involved' to target VCS organisations with a turnover of less than £10,000 per annum. Felicity Shoesmith, Community and Voluntary Sector Lead Officer, explained, "we know from talking to groups that represent these communities that a lack of even basic funding is a barrier – and our funding would cover travel expenses and other out of pocket costs to enable people from these communities to get involved"[54]. While the details haven't been finalised, it is expected that organisations will have discretion to use the funding as they choose, with some agreed outcomes such as attendance of at least three members of each group at an induction to engagement event and at least three other events on the council's engagement timetable.

Highlights

Local authorities play an important role in supporting and facilitating VCS involvement through funding arrangements, partnership working and capacity building. There is a "clear interaction between organisational type and capacity and willingness to engage in contracts"[55]. Delivering cohesion requires flexible ways of working and funding arrangements to enable engagement with VCS organisations of differing focuses, asset bases and governance capacities.

Where councils are working well with the VCS, the resourcing of the sector is based around meeting the needs of communities. Additionally, as ways of working shift, councils working productively with the VCS in support of cohesion outcomes are taking capacity building seriously, as a job to be done both internally by council officers, and externally by local infrastructure organisations.

Funding arrangements are of particular importance to maintaining and building productive relationships between councils and the VCS. Competitive tendering can carry specific risks to promoting cohesion if local VCS organisations lose out to larger national or regional VCS organisations for service contracts.

In sum, councils need to recognise the importance of utilising local service delivery organisations and embed mechanisms to protect and encourage organisations to work with statutory agencies towards agreed aims and objectives. Specifically, local authorities should consider the following:

53   Chapman, Brown, and Crow, 2008, op. cit. and Norfolk VCS, 2006. op. cit

54   Shoesmith, Felicity, Community and Voluntary Sector Lead Officer, North Tyneside Council, interviewed 19 May 2009

55   Osborne, S.P. and McLoughlin, K., 2004, 'The cross cutting review of the voluntary sector: where next for local government / voluntary sector relationships?' Regional studies, 38 (5), 573-582. p. 578.

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- Maintaining levels of grant funding – it is important that local authorities maintain grant funding towards achieving cohesion related objectives, this is particularly key in terms of supporting grassroots organisations and organisations engaged in capacity building of the VCS.

- Commissioning services in a flexible manner – achieving cohesion related outcomes requires that local authorities be more inclusive with the commissioning process. This can be accomplished, for example, by utilising commissioning processes, but also by delivering contracts through the use of grants with attached SLAs. Such flexibility can be important to promoting sustainability and ensuring that local VCS organisations continue to be included as key service delivery agents.

- Capacity building the VCS to bid for tenders – competitive tendering can carry specific cohesion risks, particularly in relation to privileging larger national organisations. As funding environments change, capacity building the VCS to compete for tenders will be an important part of maintaining a healthy local economy that can adequately address the needs of local people.

Recommendations

To enable this flexibility, this report recommends that councils:

- base commissioning decisions on the needs of users, rather than the ease of commissioning, this will require utilising grant aid in a more innovative and robust manner, including increased use of Service Level Agreements (SLAs) and clear monitoring and evaluation frameworks

- be clear about which VCS organisations are essential to maintaining links with communities and which organisations deliver a key capacity building mechanism for other parts of the VCS

- invest in the capacity of local organisations to deliver services by creating mechanisms to ensure effective ways of working, for example developing strong local Compacts and including NI7 in the LAA

- create standardised performance evaluation frameworks to make it clear to the VCS what needs to be evidenced and delivered as part of contracts, grants and tenders

- conduct robust Equality Impact Assessments (EqIAs) for new services / activities and when removing funding. EqIAs can be utilised as baselines for cohesion targets, as in Haringey and Pendle

- focus on increasing representativeness of the VCS by promoting equality of capacity building. This could mean funding a number of groups to do capacity building work in partnership to maximise reach

- encourage more informal partnership working between the VCS and local authorities around cohesion issues, through the use of lunchtime seminars and forums, as has happened in Norfolk.

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Part 5
How does the approach of councils to facilitating involvement fit with the promotion of cohesion and empowerment?

This section looks at the ways in which councils are facilitating involvement and how that fits with promoting cohesion and empowerment. As our research found, promoting empowerment and cohesion can help councils develop a strong and holistic strategy for community and VCS engagement in local places. Achieving such objectives requires that local authorities focus on involving councillors in attaining strategic goals; broadening the definition of the cohesion agenda away from being seen as a problem and towards a more holistic and forward looking concept; addressing inconsistency through developing practical empowerment and engagement strategies, and creating consistency about the outcomes of consultation and participation in decision making.

Councillors

As local authorities and the VCS move towards a more strategic relationship, the role of councillors is increasingly important. Our research uncovered a need for councillors to be involved in strategic priorities related to cohesion and the larger picture of service delivery. Councillors can have a positive influence on cohesion by encouraging partnership working between VCS organisations, and highlighting grassroots successes as a way of demonstrating the importance of civic activism and the benefits of getting involved. As one policy officer said, "they need to understand the 'so what?' of who the council is funding and why"[56].

Councillors can play an important role in highlighting grassroots successes and linking the corporate side of the council with what is happening on the ground. Where councils are harnessing the influence of councillors at the grassroots when engaging with successful projects, councillors are coming together across party lines to recognise need and support good work. This engagement can help communities and individuals feel like their voice is being

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56 Ansell, Angela, Cohesion and Prevent Officer, Pendle Borough Council, interviewed 31 March, 2009

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heard, and encourage civic activism as a way to promote change.

In Haringey, councillors are engaging with neighbourhood management to promote successful projects like 'Living Under One Sun'. Such engagement demonstrates the council's commitment to community building, which can help establish trust between the grassroots and strategic decision makers. As neighbourhood manager Leyla Laskari said;

"Where I have been successful is where local councillors have actually embraced what we are doing even though they may have conflicts of interest. But it is also about process. I think process is important because it is about trust-building. It's about translating your aims and objectives into very, very clear, healthy little chunks of activism that work and practical stuff that gives you the outcomes you need. This creates generations that expect more for themselves and want more, want to be present."[57]

Partnership working, whether formal or informal, is also important to making cohesion principles work in two tier areas and councillors are essential to communicating key local authority priorities. This is starting to happen in Pendle where the borough and county council are utilising Lancashire local grants to fund 27–28 VCS organisations on three year contracts. Councillors are an important part of this process. Small local councillor grants are enabling councillors to connect to what is happening on the ground. Councillors are an important part of making relationships more strategic and can help the sector by "reinforcing the message about working together, sharing venues and resources"[58].

Councils should consider how to engage councillors at the grassroots to promote sustainability of smaller organisations by encouraging partnership working where appropriate. Councillors should also be recognised for their role in championing successes, which can help individuals and groups feel their voice has influence at the local level, a key measurement for cohesion.

Broadening the agenda

Councils and LSPs vary in the degree to which they are considering cohesion both from a standpoint of preventing exclusion through activities and myth-busting, as well as from a standpoint of promoting inclusion, though employment, education and service delivery. Softer cohesion activities, like parties in the park or community days, cannot replace a focus on jobs and integration. Councils can utilise the VCS to deliver innovative projects that help provide incentives for behaviour change, particularly with the young. Additionally, where community relationships are not perceived to be an immediate problem, councils should use cohesion as a strategic tool to consider future change and development, setting the baseline against which change can be measured.

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57 Laskari, Leyla, Neighbourhood Management Project Officer, Haringey Council, interviewed 25 March 2009

58 Styan, Jan, District Partnership Officer, Pendle Borough Council, interviewed 29 April, 2009

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Achieving cohesion through innovation

Councils should consider how they could create synergies between LAA targets and cohesion outcomes towards innovative solutions that are sustainable. The VCS can be an important delivery agent for more innovative ways of working.

According to Lee Blake, founder of 50fifty Clothing, a training and education enterprise working with excluded young people, too many activities for the disengaged or excluded are centred solely on the arts and sports. According to Blake, not enough is done to teach marketable skills that provide incentives for young people to change their behaviour. Blake's programme provides training and skill development such as mathematics to young people by training them to design, develop and sell T-shirts. Blake's shirts are also an expression of a multi-ethnic Britain, combining the Union Jack with flags from different countries, helping young people express their multiple identities, which Blake says promotes a positive and inclusive concept of patriotism, rather than an exclusive version of nationalism[59].

Making cohesion more than a 'problem'

The cohesion agenda has helped local authorities address issues they might not have otherwise, in part because resources have been specifically identified for this purpose. However, many council officers noted that where cohesion was not perceived to be a 'problem', it was being lost. Such a focus could disadvantage the more marginalised within communities, such as women – a group policy officers and members of the VCS both noted as being 'missing' from thinking on cohesion. The 'Cohesion guidance for funders – consultation' recommended focusing on 'bridging' social capital, providing more opportunities for communities to interact

with each other as a way to enhance cohesion[60]. However, intra-community levels of cohesion must be addressed as well and local authorities should consider the negative effects of 'too much cohesion', which can disadvantage the most vulnerable.

Linking cohesion to growth and development

In Broadland, a district council in Norfolk, the big issues of cohesion relate to significant housing growth and the development of an eco town. At the time of our interviews, the council was thinking about how the growth strategy would affect their communities, and acknowledged the need for increased engagement with the VCS to mitigate potential negative effects on communities as growth occurs.

Where councils are thinking about cohesion in a forward-looking manner, questions about the level at which cohesion could best be addressed have been raised. In Broadland, the suggestion was made that regional agencies need to be more engaged in addressing how cohesion relates to broader agendas, such as growth strategies. According to Matthew Cross, Strategic Director, Broadland's community cohesion challenges have less in common with other districts in the same county, such as King's Lynn & West Norfolk (which has experienced an increase in migrant workers) and more with areas elsewhere which have seen large development growth[61]. Measuring the impact of growth on cohesion within and between communities over a number of years and in different areas could help create comparative assessments useful for future planning and setting baselines for achieving cohesion objectives.

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59 Blake, Lee, Founder 50fifty Clothing, interviewed 26 March 2009

60 Communities and Neighbourhoods, 2008, 'Cohesion guidance for funders – consultation', available at: www.communities.gov.uk/publications/communities/cohesionfundersconsultation

61 Cross, Matthew, Strategic Director (Organisational Development), Broadland District Council, interviewed 13 May 2009

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Addressing inconsistency

Promoting cohesion in the context of local government requires that councils focus on delivering clear consistent messages about the potential outcomes of community participation and involvement. As our research found, the cohesion agenda is highlighting the need for more consistent practices in relation to:

• the meaning of cohesion and equalities in local places

• approaches to engagement and empowerment

• the outcomes of consultation and representation.

The meaning of cohesion and equalities in local places

One of the greatest challenges to creating a sustainable and deliverable cohesion agenda identified by our research was the lack of 'joined-up-ness' within councils themselves, particularly in relation to understandings about the relationship between cohesion and equalities across councils. Promoting, measuring and delivering both equalities and cohesion require expertise and training of staff at all levels. Our research found that maintaining a corporate cohesion and equalities lead is central to delivering a strong, shared vision of cohesion.

Communicating the importance of delivering cohesion and equalities is important to creating buy-in within the council and among service delivery partners for such efforts. Cohesion and equalities are sensitive subjects, requiring that councils work with officers to ensure they are well understood. For example, implementing Equality Impact Assessments (EqIAs) effectively, and this requires training. One council officer and former equalities lead said that more needs to be done to train council officers at all levels about how to implement cohesion and equalities, what it means, and why it is important.

Our research found that where consistency of message and practice about cohesion were most developed, such efforts were often spearheaded by a strong cohesion and equalities team with access and influence over the cohesion budget. Equalities and cohesion require significant expertise for implementation to be effective and embedded comprehensively. Where there has been a lack of leadership on cohesion and equalities, negative impacts on cohesion have resulted. For example, in a number of areas, the allocation of money to organisations which lacked the trust of the community had negative implications for the council's ability to achieve cohesion related outcomes. As Angela Ansell, Cohesion Officer in Pendle council said;

"It is important to have separate equalities and cohesion team with a budget, there is expertise in doing this job, you cannot expect everyone to add that on to their day job. Whilst it is great for people to start taking it [cohesion] on board, and they should be, there should be someone there to add the extra advice and keep an eye on the bigger picture because otherwise you can get very Pendle-centric, or London-centric, we need to look at what the bigger picture is and there has to be someone with the time to do that."[62]

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62 Ansell, Angela, Cohesion and Prevent Officer, Pendle Borough Council, interviewed 31 March 2009

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Approaches to engagement and empowerment

Our research uncovered a need for some councils to do more to understand their current processes of engagement and develop a road map for engagement that sets out, in concrete terms, what engagement looks like and how to put it into practice. Engagement strategies can help map out existing networks and relationships within communities, as well as help local authorities determine where stronger relationships with the VCS and communities need to be built. They can also form an essential part of a local authority's 'duty to involve' and can be used to measure levels of engagement across councils.

Practical approaches to engagement can help councils articulate what different levels of engagement look like, and measure progress towards deeper engagement. Our research uncovered several examples of good engagement strategies. For example, Norfolk's engagement strategy articulates levels of engagement along a continuum. The framework identifies five levels of community involvement – informing, consulting, involving, collaborating and empowering – with different mechanisms for empowerment under each, such as brochures for informing and user-led commissioning for empowering[63]. This engagement strategy will help the council and responsible bodies in the LSP share a common vision for empowerment, and also set helpful benchmarks for measuring improvement.

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63 Norfolk Community Engagement Framework, 2009, available at: www.norfolkambition.gov.uk/consumption/ groups/public/documents/article/ncc067075.pdf

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Table 2: Norfolk community engagement framework

The five levels of community involvement				
Increasing level of public involvement				
Informing	Consulting	Involving	Collaborating	Empowering
Providing information for the public to enable them to understand issues.	Obtaining public feedback to inform decision making.	Working directly with the public to ensure that issues and concerns are addressed.	Partnering with the public in decision making.	Placing final descision making in the hands of the public.
Impact on the public	Impact on the public	Impact on the public	Impact on the public	Impact on the public
We will keep you informed.	We will keep you informed, listen to your views and provide feedback on how your input influenced decision making.	We will work with you to ensure that your concerns are directly reflected in options and provide feedback on how your input influenced decision making.	We will look to you for advice and innovation in finding solutions and incorporate your advice to the maximum extent.	We will implement what you decide.
Example	Example	Example	Example	Example
Brochures	Surveys	User panel	Community	User-led

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Developing empowered communities requires attention to consistency in approach and messaging. Indeed, as the debates and evidence around empowerment have developed, the question of who empowers whom has shifted numerous times. From an initial focus on creating institutions and building the VCS to empower through the creation of the community empowerment networks (CEN), more recent developments have focused on the citizen, encouraging participation through area assemblies, user engagement in commissioning, participatory budgeting exercises and user feedback.

Research from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation has found that community empowerment strategies are often overlapping, duplicating or challenging existing empowerment structures[64]. Our research uncovered similar problems, particularly in relation to changing political environments that usher in new ideologies about empowerment. Despite the challenges, our findings suggest the VCS is integral to achieving empowerment outcomes. Our quantitative survey showed that 72 per cent of local authority officers felt that the VCS was moderately effective at empowering local people to become engaged in local decision making processes, but also found that a significant number (57 per cent of local authorities) feel more networks and groups need to be formed to represent their changing communities.

Given the variation in the extent to which the VCS is representative of the communities they serve, our research found that promoting empowerment requires that councils are clear about their approach to empowerment, and how that fits with, or is different from, previous approaches. Additionally, to address under-representation, councils can consider

creating multiple methods of empowerment, through the VCS, councillors, local forums and assemblies. Finally, where councils are shifting to new empowerment approaches, councils should consider how shifting empowerment agendas can affect trust within communities and between the council and VCS. As our research found, once links into communities are lost, it can be difficult to reconnect them. Councils can help prepare for transitions more effectively by making sure to include the VCS in these shifts, being clear about what they are doing and why and how organisations can continue to be involved in supporting empowerment.

The outcomes of consultation and representation

Expectations around involvement are rising. National government has recognised that "the VCS will be able to contribute information and evidence about local priorities and needs to support statutory bodies' decision making and service planning"[65].

In many areas, the VCS and local authority are working increasingly closely together. Positively, the VCS has much more of a voice, but it is important to ensure that increased involvement does not lead to expectations which are not met. Raising and then failing to meet expectations can cause significant mistrust between sectors that can be hard to repair. Consistency from councils about the process of consultation and outcomes of participation is important to maintaining positive relationships between councils, communities and the VCS.

In many places, while councils are developing stronger relationships with the VCS, there remains a disconnect between the rhetoric and reality, particularly in relation to the participation

64 Adamson, Dave and Bromiley, Richard, 2008, 'Community empowerment in practice – lessons from Communities First', Joseph Rowntree Foundation, available at: www.jrf.org.uk/publications/community-empowerment-practice-lessons-communities-first

65 Communities and Local Government, 2007, 'Principles of representation – a framework for effective third sector representation in Local Strategic Partnerships', p.14. available at: www.communities.gov.uk/publications/communities/principlesofrepresentation

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of the VCS on decision making boards and bodies. As our research found, while LSPs often serve as the mechanism for delivering cohesion related outcomes, discussion about service reform frequently occurs elsewhere. Interviews with VCS organisations across a range of local areas uncovered difficultly in securing representation on boards outside of the LSP. And even within the LSP, many VCS organisations interviewed were unable to penetrate sub-boards specifically concerned with the economy and regeneration.

Additionally, our research found a lack of consistency in relation to consultation and participation between local, national and regional government bodies on funding and strategies aimed at increasing cohesion in local places. In areas where national funding for cohesion or Prevent occurred without consultation of local councils or the VCS, negative impacts on cohesion resulted. Our research found a strong need for national and regional funding bodies to utilise the information and local knowledge of councils and the VCS when funding VCS organisations, particularly for cohesion and Prevent related work.

Achieving positive cohesion related outcomes is dependent upon multiple agendas working together in local places. It is easy for outside decisions to disrupt the balance and the positive work happening on the ground. Achieving more positive outcomes from consultation and participation requires that local authorities do more to specify the outcomes of such participation and follow through on the commitments made. This is true for regional, national, and county level decisions.

Highlights

Our research found that where councils have clear priorities that are communicated consistently, a more strategic relationship between councils and the VCS is emerging. However, councils need to do more to embed the importance of addressing equalities and cohesion throughout the organisation and encourage a focus on partnership working.

Councils also need to consider how to be more innovative in linking cohesion to LAA targets, and utilise mechanisms of involvement already in place to deliver multiple agendas. The VCS is already doing significant work in this respect, and mainstreaming successes that addresses multiple issues should be a priority for councils, particularly as budgets tighten.

Finally, as councils promote increased empowerment and participation, both within communities and the VCS, setting clear parameters about the extent to which engagement can influence decision making, and being clear about expectations, will be central to maintaining positive perceptions about cohesion. Where there is less money, or where funds have to be allocated elsewhere, councils should make that clear. Lack of transparency can breed disempowerment and lead to unhealthy relationships.

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Recommendations

The ways in which local authorities facilitate involvement has an impact on the promotion of cohesion and empowerment. To facilitate more productive engagement between the VCS and local authorities towards sustainability, this report recommends that local authorities:

• support frontline councillors to communicate strategic priorities, encourage partnership and promote successes. Devolved councillor budgets utilised with the help of council officers can help to encourage new ways of working, as in Lancashire

• include representation from the VCS on all LSP boards, including those dealing with the economy and regeneration. And / or create more mechanisms for the VCS to raise concerns / issues / offer solutions in relation to a wider range of issues

• utilise the VCS innovatively to deliver programmes that incentivise behaviour change. The VCS needs to be used more productively in its capacity as innovators, particularly with young people, as in the case of 50fifty Clothing

• consider cohesion more broadly, not just in relation to problems. Councils should consider how to learn from others with similar issues, not just those in the same geographical area. Cohesion can be used as a strategic tool by creating baselines to be measured over time in relation to change, for example, growth and regeneration, as was discussed in Broadland

• invest in increased training about Equality Impact Assessments (EqIAs) and cohesion at all levels of the council, particularly for frontline workers. Councils should also maintain a cohesion and equalities lead corporately to monitor progress and identify problems

• develop clear empowerment and engagement strategies. Towards this aim, councils should consider creating empowerment strategies that clearly set-out different levels of engagement. Progress towards enhanced engagement should be measured as part of performance management

• communicate about the outcomes of consultation and participation in decision making, particularly in the allocation of funds. National and regional funds need to utilise local information more effectively when funding the VCS, and should go through the LSP when making decisions. Funding organisations without trust in the local community can have negative impacts on cohesion.

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Conclusion

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This report was commissioned by the IDeA on the hypothesis that achieving community cohesion is a worthwhile and important goal – and one that can only be achieved through meaningful partnership working between various sectors and, in particular, the VCS and local authorities. Through the course of this research we have looked at the role the VCS plays in promoting cohesion and interrogated how relationships between local authorities and the VCS can be strengthened to increase cohesion related outcomes. Finally, we have assessed how the current approach within councils to facilitating community involvement fits with the promotion of empowerment and cohesion.

As our findings show, relationships between the VCS and local authorities are improving. However, there remains work to be done. In particular, our research has highlighted the need to remember that cohesion cannot be delivered by one institution, through one policy, or indeed, by one sector. Additionally, it has raised the issue that cohesion – defined most aptly as a positive relationship between and within communities – is a long-term goal, requiring leadership from a range of different stakeholders, including councils, the VCS and perhaps most importantly, the buy-in from individuals on the ground.

The main finding of this report is that delivering services that build cohesive and empowered communities requires flexibility in ways of working between local authorities and the VCS. All of the roles that the VCS play are important to promoting cohesion – including delivering services, planning for and allocating resources, and raising awareness and advocating on behalf of communities. However, the VCS is comprised of a diverse range of institutions, with varying asset bases and managerial and financial capacities. In this time of transition to more professionalised working environments, maintaining and increasing multiple channels of participation, allowing for a diverse funding

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mix and ensuring equality in capacity building will be fundamental to ensuring the VCS is representative of the communities it serves. This is a key component of encouraging active citizenship, achieving empowerment and promoting cohesion.

The impact of recession adds to the challenge of promoting cohesion. However, the ambition to recognise efficiencies and promote cohesion need not sit in opposition to one another. Indeed, the recession provides an excellent opportunity for local authorities to enable and incentivise the VCS to develop innovative solutions to meeting local needs. Additionally, as budget cuts loom, utilising the VCS as a partner to communicate changes and fill the gaps left by a retreating state will be essential to stemming disturbances and supporting cohesion.

Promoting cohesion and empowerment in the context of local government is an exercise in partnership working – both in terms of getting things done, but also, at a more fundamental level, in providing opportunities and platforms through which a multiplicity of voices can be heard, acknowledged and used to shape the story of local places.

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Appendix A – Methodology

This piece of research focused on the relationship between the VCS and local authorities, asking how that relationship could be made stronger to promote cohesion and enhance wellbeing. This question was explored through complementary survey and qualitative research methodologies, followed by an action research component in the form of a policy workshop, which brought together VCS organisations and local authorities to test initial recommendations and prompt discussion and interaction around relevant issues. The methodology of the study is elaborated below:

1. Survey research

2. Qualitative research

3. Online survey follow-up interviews

4. In-depth interviews

5. In-depth case studies

6. Analysis and write-up

7. Policy workshop
   (respondent validation / action research)

8. Ethics

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1. Survey research

A web-based questionnaire was sent to all local authorities (n = 388 at the time of the survey) in England. 118 questionnaires were completed, during March and April 2009. The characteristics of surveyed local authorities are presented in Table 1, in terms of region, type and political control. The main thematic areas explored through the survey included:

1. local understandings of community cohesion

2. how the VCS supports cohesion in different localities

3. how the council is supporting the VCS in its work on community cohesion.

Key questions and accompanying descriptive results are presented in Appendix B.

Table 1. Web-based questionnaire – sample characteristics

Authority region		
East Midlands	14	12%
East of England	17	14%
London	10	8%
North East	9	8%
North West	12	10%
South East	30	25%
South West	13	11%
West Midlands	7	6%
Yorkshire and the Humber	6	5%
Total	**118**	**100%**
Authority type		
Shire County	14	12%
Shire District	59	50%
English Unitary	22	19%
Metropolitan District	13	11%
London Borough	10	8%
Total	**118**	**100%**
Political control		
Conservative	68	58%
Labour	18	15%
Liberal Democrat	12	10%
Independent	1	1%
No overall control	19	16%
Total	**118**	**100%**

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2. Qualitative research

Qualitative research – which involved follow-up telephone interviews with online survey respondents, as well as in-depth interviews and case studies with a wide range of stakeholders – was conducted to further explore how local authorities are working with the VCS to promote community cohesion. The aim of the qualitative component of the research was to complement and add depth to the survey findings; to explore, in greater depth, continuity and variation in the relationship between the VCS and local authorities across contexts, and to bring in multiple perspectives to increase the validity of the research and better inform policy and practice.

In total, 80 interviews were conducted, during March, April and May 2009, looking at four main themes:

1. what community cohesion means in local places and how it is being implemented

2. the structures of local government and mechanisms of involvement with the third sector

3. commissioning, procurement and funding

4. communications and empowerment.

2.1 Online survey follow-up interviews

Of the 118 local authority respondents who completed the online survey, 46 (39 per cent) indicated that they were willing to participate further in the study. Follow-up telephone interviews were conducted with a sample of 24 of these respondents, drawn from a range of authority types, regions and political control (see Table 2 and 3). These interviews lasted 15–25 minutes each.

Table 2. Online survey follow-up interviews – sample characteristics (authority type / region)

Authority region	Shire County	Shire District	London Borough	Metropolitan District	English Unitary	Total
East of England		2			1	3
East Midlands	1	3				4
London			3			3
North East				1	1	2
North West	1	1		2		4
South East		2				2
South West		2				2
West Midlands	1				1	2
Yorkshire and the Humber				1	1	2
Total	3	10	3	5	3	24

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Table 3. Online survey follow-up interviews – sample characteristics (political control)

Political control	Total
Conservative	8
Independent	1
Labour	4
Liberal Democrat	3
No Overall Control	8
Total	**24**

2.2 In-depth interviews

Eight in-depth interviews were conducted with local VCS organisations, and another seven with national and regional organisations. The organisations (listed in Table 4) were purposively sampled, to ensure a range in remit – from organisations involved in large-scale policy work to organisations operating at the grassroots – and a spread in terms of target group (eg young people, older people etc) and the specific cohesion related issues being addressed (eg health, unemployment, inter-generational etc).

Table 4. In-depth interviews with local, regional and national organisations

No. of Interviews	15
Participating individuals / organisations	
An-Nisa Society	
Black Training and Enterprise Group	
City Gateway	
Community Employment Team, Tower Hamlets NHS	
Community Links	
Fight for Peace	
Magic Me	
Muslim Youth Helpline	
Operation Black Vote	
Oxford House	
Southall Black Sisters	
The National Council for Voluntary Organisations	
The Service Users Complementary Holistic (SUCH) Project	
TimeBank	
Voice4Change	

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2.3 In-depth case studies

In-depth case studies were conducted in four local authorities – Haringey, Norfolk, Sheffield and Pendle. These authorities varied in terms of region and political control, and espoused different dimensions of, and approaches to, addressing community cohesion. In each authority 9-11 interviews were conducted. Participants included officers, councillors, and representatives from VCS organisations, ranging from small front-line providers to local infrastructure organisations. The full case studies are presented in Appendix C.

Table 5. Case study participants

Local authority	Haringey	Norfolk	Sheffield	Pendle
No. of interviews	11	11	9	11
Participating individuals / organisations	Ethiopian Community Centre	Age Concern Norfolk	Bannerdale Community Centre	Blackburn Diocese
	Extending Experience	Broadland District Council	OFFER	Building Bridges Pendle
	Haringey Association of Voluntary and Community Organisations	New Routes Norfolk	Sheffield City Council – officers and councillors	Burnley Pendle and Rossendale CVS
	Haringey Council – officers and councillors	Norfolk Council for Voluntary Youth Services	Voluntary Action Sheffield	Lancashire County Council – officers
	Haringey Somali Community and Cultural Association	Norfolk County Council – officers and councillors		Pendle Borough Council – officers and councillor
		Norwich and Norfolk Citizens Advice Bureau		Pendle Community Network
		Norwich and Norfolk Racial Equality Council		Walton Lane Children's Centre
		Voluntary Norfolk		
		West Norfolk Voluntary & Community Action		

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3. Analysis and write-up

All qualitative interviews were recorded, with the permission of the participant, and then fully transcribed. The material was coded, sorted and then synthesised according to a set of key themes and concepts which framed the research question – ie the meaning of community cohesion in local places and how it is being implemented; the structures of local government and mechanisms of involvement with the VCS; commissioning, procurement and funding; and communications and empowerment. Close attention was paid to contextual specificities, and continuities and variation in experience and perception, depending on local place and stakeholder. The different sources of evidence – from both the survey and qualitative components of the research – were then synthesised and written up in a way that privileged the multiple perspectives from which the material was derived. Recommendations were developed, to be tested at the policy workshop.

4. Policy workshop (respondent validation / action research)

Following the analysis, synthesis and write-up of the data, a policy workshop was held in London, in July 2009. In attendance were eight local authority officers and three members of the VCS, as well as representatives from The Young Foundation (who carried out the research) and the IDeA (who commissioned the research). The workshop served as an opportunity to test initial recommendations, and as a 'respondent validation' tool – in that research participants were invited to give input on the validity of the interpretations and recommendations. There was also an 'action research' dimension to the policy workshop, to the extent that it brought together VCS organisations and local authorities, and provided an opportunity for discussion and interaction around relevant issues. The final report and recommendations were informed by the input of the participants of this event.

5. Ethics

The Social Research Association (SRA) ethical guidelines were adhered to throughout the course of this project. Key ethical issues which were taken into account and addressed included:

- **informed consent and voluntary participation** – all study participants were fully informed about the purpose of the study and their involvement, and participation was entirely voluntary

- **anonymity and confidentiality** – all responses were treated confidentially and in accordance with the Data Protection Act. In the case of the online survey, information was aggregated, and no individual or authority identified in the publication – although respondents were advised that identifiable information may be used internally within the Young Foundation, LGA and IDeA. In the case of qualitative interviews and case studies, interviews were recorded with the consent of the participants, and participants were offered the right to choose whether on not to remain anonymous when their views were presented in the publication

- **referencing** – the highest standards of referencing were rigorously adhered to, and intellectual ownership acknowledged

- **respondent validation techniques** – these were employed (i.e. the policy workshop) to ensure that participants could have an opportunity to give input on whether their views were accurately presented in the research findings

- **political sensitivity** – to the issue under investigation as well as sensitivity to the relationships between stakeholders was maintained at all times.

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Appendix B –
Key survey findings

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To what extent do you think there is a shared understanding of community cohesion between your authority and local community organisations?

To a great extent	9	8%
To a moderate extent	49	42%
To some extent	53	45%
Not at all	4	3%
Don't know	2	2%
Total	**117**	**100%**

What do you see as the most important facet of community cohesion in your authority? (aggregated results of respondents' assigned rankings from 1 to 5 where '1' = most important)

Promotion of equalities	3
Addressing unemployment/ under-employment	4
Promoting intergenerational understanding	4
Engaging with different groups in the community	2
Empowering communities	3
Other, please specify	3

In your opinion, to what extent do local voluntary and community sector organisations work cooperatively with your authority to promote cohesion?

To a great extent	25	21%
To a moderate extent	48	41%
To some extent	44	37%
Not at all	1	1%
Don't know	0	0%
Total	**118**	**100%**

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In your opinion, how effective are voluntary and community sector organisations in helping to promote cohesion in your area through consultation and involvement in local decision making?

Very effective	17	15%
Moderately effective	78	67%
Not very effective	18	15%
Not effective at all	2	2%
Don't know	2	2%
Total	**117**	**100%**

In your opinion, how effective are voluntary and community sector organisations in helping to promote cohesion in your area through the services /activities they deliver funded or contracted by the public sector?

Very effective	9	8%
Moderately effective	89	75%
Not very effective	15	13%
Not effective at all	1	1%
Don't know	4	3%
Total	**118**	**100%**

In your opinion, how effective are voluntary and community sector organisations in helping to promote cohesion in your area through the services/activities they deliver not funded or contracted through the public sector?

Very effective	13	11%
Moderately effective	81	69%
Not very effective	16	14%
Not effective at all	1	1%
Don't know	6	5%
Total	**117**	**100%**

In your opinion, how effective is the voluntary and community sector at empowering people to become involved in local decision making processes?

Very effective	6	5%
Moderately effective	84	72%
Not very effective	24	21%
Not effective at all	2	2%
Don't know	1	1%
Total	**117**	**100%**

In your opinion, to what extent are voluntary and community sector organisations working with marginalised / hard-to-reach groups to support your authority's cohesion agenda?

To a great extent	12	10%
To a moderate extent	48	41%
To some extent	53	45%
Not at all	3	3%
Don't know	2	2%
Total	**118**	**100%**

At what level do you see the most impact being made on the community cohesion agenda?

At the district (or single tier authority) level	24	21%
At the county level	5	4%
At the neighbourhood level	73	63%
Don't know	14	12%
Total	**116**	**100%**

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In your opinion, are there any groups in your community whose interests are not adequately represented by the voluntary and community sector in your area?

Yes (please specify which)	65	57%
No	20	17%
Don't know	30	26%
Total	**115**	**100%**

In your opinion, to what extent do you agree that to be heard effectively a group's interests need to be represented by a member of that same group?

To a great extent	34	29%
To a moderate extent	39	33%
To some extent	34	29%
Not at all	9	8%
Don't know	2	2%
Total	**118**	**100%**

To what extent does your authority support the voluntary and community sector through capacity building activities to increase their participation in the planning or delivery of services and activities that contribute to the local response to cohesion?

To a great extent	24	21%
To a moderate extent	47	40%
To some extent	43	37%
Not at all	3	3%
Don't know	0	0%
Total	**117**	**100%**

Overall, how does your authority engage with voluntary and community sector organisations in decision making concerning community cohesion issues?

Through the LSP	92	78%
Through a sub-group of the LSP	83	70%
Through the local council for voluntary service or other local voluntary and community sector infrastructure body	85	72%
Through local councillors or the local authority	66	56%
Through other formal structures (please specify)	43	36%
Through informal relationships (please specify)	31	26%
No engagement currently	1	1%
Don't know	1	1%
Total	**118**	**100%**

To what extent are cohesion objectives reflected in service delivery planning across the LAA?

To a great extent	24	21%
To a moderate extent	46	39%
To some extent	36	31%
Not at all	1	1%
Don't know	10	9%
Total	**117**	**100%**

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To what extent are cohesion objectives reflected in service delivery planning across sectors?

To a great extent	11	10%
To a moderate extent	39	34%
To some extent	51	45%
Not at all	2	2%
Don't know	11	10%
Total	**114**	**100%**

What effect has the introduction of area based grants had on participation of the voluntary and community sector in service delivery around cohesion activities?

It is easier to include a diverse variety of partners	25	21%
It is harder to include a diverse variety of partners	7	6%
Other, please specify	9	8%
No effect	29	25%
Don't know	50	42%
Total	**118**	**100%**

To what extent does local government finance (such as area based grants or other funding sources) enable your authority to try different approaches to increasing community cohesion in your local area?

To a great extent	15	13%
To a moderate extent	24	21%
To some extent	35	30%
Not at all	16	14%
Don't know	26	22%
Total	**116**	**100%**

In your opinion, to what extent do voluntary and community sector organisations work together across district and county lines to support community cohesion?

To a great extent	4	6%
To a moderate extent	27	38%
To some extent	33	46%
Not at all	5	7%
Don't know	3	4%
Total	**72**	**100%**

In your opinion, which of the following have been most influential in enabling the voluntary and community sector to contribute to services in support of community cohesion in your authority?

The Prevent agenda	17	14%
The community cohesion agenda	57	48%
Area based grants	21	18%
LAA targets	68	58%
Local leadership	49	42%
Development of voluntary and community sector strategy or commissioning framework	45	38%
Local compact development	48	41%
Other, please specify	8	7%
Don't know	8	7%
Total	**118**	**100%**

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In your opinion, to what extent do you think that your authority's cohesion strategy has been / will be affected by the recession?

To a great extent	8	7%
To a moderate extent	25	21%
To some extent	52	44%
Not at all	15	13%
Don't know	17	15%
Total	**117**	**100%**

In your opinion, how, if at all, has the role of the voluntary and community sector changed in relation to cohesion, in response to the recession?

Greater role	38	32%
Lesser role	5	4%
No change	47	40%
Don't know	28	24%
Total	**118**	**100%**

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Appendix C –
Case studies

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Pendle Borough Council case study

Location – East Lancashire
Type of council – Shire District
Political control – No overall control
Population – Approximately 90,000

Context

Pendle is an area of many contrasts. Extending over 65 miles, it is comprised of former textile towns and small villages. Pendle has a substantial BAME community, including 14 per cent of the population from Pakistani origin. The population of Pendle has changed in the last few decades and the changes have implications for cohesion. Areas of affluence sit alongside areas of deprivation, creating concerns about 'parallel lives'. Worklessness is also an issue, which measured at 18.2 per cent in 2007, compared with an average of 15.2 per cent overall for England and Wales[66].

In the 2008 Place Survey only 52 per cent of residents agreed that people from different backgrounds get on well together, with 66 per cent reporting satisfaction with their local area as a place to live, compared with 79 per cent for Lancashire County Council and 80 per cent of England as a whole[67].

Pendle has defined community cohesion as "the glue that holds communities together... in its broadest sense. It is about respecting one another, valuing diversity and celebrating differences of age, faith, race, gender, ability / disability, culture, sexual orientation, place of residency and other differences in our backgrounds. It is about recognising and building on the common values that we

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66 'Our Future, Our Pendle', Sustainable Community Strategy, available at: www.pendle.gov.uk/ourpendle

67 Taken from Lancashire County Council's area summary for Pendle available at: www.lancashire.gov.uk/office_of_the_chief_executive/lancashireprofile/areas/summary.asp?ar=pe

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share. In short, it is about building confident communities"[68].

New ways of working

Cohesion and equalities have shifted thinking about the delivery of services in Pendle, changing the way strategic planning is done. As Philip Mousdale, Executive Director of the Citizen and Community Services noted,

"At one time when we were doing our strategic plan we used to differentiate between equality, diversity and cohesion and in recent years we have rolled them up together. We have realised that in many ways it overlaps and they are all fundamental aspects of each other and of customer service"[69].

Cohesion has a strong link to equalities in Pendle and in Lancashire in general. Focusing on the new Equalities Framework for Local Government (EFLG)[70] has helped the council to move away from the usual approach of ticking boxes and onto a much wider approach that values partnership working.

Bridging, bonding and linking

The role of the VCS has been important in relation to accessing the grassroots, building contacts and developing trust – or in other words, vital to bridging, bonding and linking. The county and district councils are committed to working with the VCS to deliver key initiatives and projects around cohesion. In Pendle, the VCS is particularly important for shifting negative perceptions about authority structures, especially among new communities.

Improving the accessibility of the local authority

Pendle Community Network (PCN) is leading on making connections to new communities. As Angela Ansell noted, "with most new communities, there are barriers to authority. PCN is leading on this work because they are the right ones to do it and we are happy to take the back seat"[71]. PCN has two migrant community workers across East-Lancashire supporting migrant and rural communities through their 'Improving Reach Project'. Part of this work has entailed creating welcome packs for new arrivals and challenging harmful myths and assumptions.

Interview, Angela Ansell, Cohesion and Prevent Officer, Pendle Borough Council

Funding

Pendle, like many other areas, is moving towards a commissioning based approach for services delivered by the VCS. The way in which the council provides support to the sector is shifting towards a more structured footing, with the Sustainable Community Strategy helping to drive the process forward, in terms of grant funding, commissioning and procurement. Addressing historic funding relationships is one part of this process.

As our interviews highlighted, the VCS has concerns about how the shift towards commissioning and tightening budgets will affect the ability of smaller and local organisations to access funding. Some infrastructure organisations are already noticing an up-take in help with funding, as councils have reduced grant aid budgets.

While difficult, the move towards more strategic engagement with the VCS is also beneficial, in some cases particularly for addressing cohesion

68 'Our Future, Our Pendle', Sustainable Community Strategy, available at: www.pendle.gov.uk/ourpendle

69 Mousdale, Philip, Executive Director (Citizen and Community Services), interviewed 28 April 2009

70 www.idea.gov.uk/equalityframework

71 Ansell, Angela, Cohesion and Prevent Officer, Pendle Borough Council, Interviewed 31 March 2009

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related issues. For example, robustness and transparency of funding is necessary to help reduce perceptions of unfair treatment of some groups, an issue the British National Party (BNP) has exploited in the past. In order to counteract perceptions that one community is benefiting to the detriment of another, the council is ensuring that organisations are meeting a genuine need that has been evidenced. The council is also working with councillors, the community and the VCS to establish commissioning priorities and communicate those widely.

Additionally, the council and VCS are working together to reduce the dependence some parts of the sector have developed on council funding. Much of this is about encouraging innovation towards sustainability. Across East Lancashire, community enterprise boards are being set up to help entrepreneurial people develop business plans to deliver projects in the area. The community enterprise boards are part of the culture change Pendle and Lancashire councils hope to develop by encouraging partnership working, being more rigorous about identifying the needs of communities and working with the sector to narrow gaps in existing provision.

Partnership working

Creating and sustaining networks and partnerships with grassroots organisations is helping Pendle Council communicate and work more effectively with communities. The People and Communities Group has been the central driver for Pendle's cohesion and community engagement strategy. This group is part of the LSP and oversees a range of projects such as financial inclusion, migrant workers and employment.

In creating and implementing these strategies, the council has developed much stronger links with the VCS and Pendle Community Network (PCN) in order to identify and map existing VCS organisations. The council is also coordinating neighbourhood management, which is located

in patches across the district. In places where neighbourhood management doesn't exist and there are few VCS organisations, the council is encouraging new groups to form eg rural issues and migrant workers groups were set up in 2009.

Partnership working, particularly in two-tier areas, can be challenging. This has ramifications for Pendle's ability to deliver the cohesion agenda. Matching the LAA targets from the county with those at a district level can be difficult because of the significant variation in needs across the county. At the time of our interviews, it was clear that front-line providers were often feeling the effects of this mismatch most acutely.

To try and address these challenges, Pendle Borough Council and Lancashire County Council are working increasingly closely together. The county and districts are developing their own system for closer partnership working through Lancashire Locals, a system that brings county representatives down to the district level. Jan Styan, the county council's District Partnership Officer in Pendle, is helping reduce duplication of work funded by the council and increase partnership working between the council and the VCS, as well as within the VCS itself.

Capacity building

Pendle Borough Council believes that building a strong VCS is vital to the health of its community. According to Assistant Chief Executive, George Dodds, "to be able to tackle (worklessness and cohesion) you need a strong voluntary sector"[72]. From the council's point of view, delivering on the cohesion and equalities agenda means building a strong VCS and it has funded PCN to do capacity building around issues like good governance.

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72   Dodds, George, Assistant Chief Executive, Pendle Borough Council, interviewed 29 April 2009

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Pendle Borough Council also takes responsibility for building capacity within the VCS, and is doing so by using ABG to fund work on cohesion and Prevent. Both cohesion and Prevent funds were allocated in 2008/09. VCS organisations applying had to evidence how their work would deliver the outcomes listed in the cohesion action plan, and also agree to work towards PQASSO (the Practical Quality Assurance System for Small Organisations) accreditation in six months, which the council and PCN will support them in achieving. For those unsuccessful in their applications, or those who would like to get funding next year, Angela Ansell is holding mid financial year workshops to make sure groups have the documentation in place, making the application process less of a struggle.

Capacity building to engage the sector in strategic decision making around areas such as cohesion is a positive step. However, a number of our interviewees criticised county-wide approaches to cohesion and regeneration as being dominated by statutory agencies and, in the case of economic development, the private sector. As one interviewee noted, "What is the point of this cohesion partnership if it is not a true partnership?"

Empowerment and the role of councillors

For Pendle Borough Council, delivering services that promote cohesion depends on knowing the needs of communities and providing mechanisms for residents to easily access the council – it is a question of empowerment. As Philip Mousdale noted, "like a lot of local authorities we assumed we knew what customers needed"[73]. In 2008, Pendle opened a contact centre, where members of the public can provide feedback and access help in relation to any council delivered service.

Additionally, the council is working with the

VCS to get local residents more involved in increasing access to services. In 2008, the council developed a community researcher scheme, recruiting, training and paying local residents to collect information of their local area. This program helps the council gain a greater understanding of local perceptions and access to services.

The council also recognises the importance of empowering communities to solve their own problems. The council is working energetically with the VCS through cohesion funding and local area grant schemes towards this end.

Using community resources

One of the issues identified through the high level action plan for cohesion was that of leadership and development. To address these issues, the Pendle Community Safety Partnership has launched a small £3,000 grant scheme to help groups develop initiatives that tackle crime and anti-social behaviour. The scheme is now entering its fourth year and previous success has helped to build up leadership skills in young people by supporting a youth forum, helping to build future leaders and bring young people of different backgrounds together to work towards common goals.

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73   Mousdale, Philip, Executive Director (Citizen and Community Services), interviewed 28 April 2009

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Finally, the role of councillors is increasingly important in empowering individuals and communities, as well as stressing the importance of partnership working. Pendle Borough Council and Lancashire County Council are utilising Lancashire Local grants to fund 27–28 VCS organisations on three-year contracts. These small local councillor grants are helping to keep councillors connected to what is happening on the ground. Additionally, councillors are an important part of making relationships more strategic and can help the sector by "reinforcing the message about working together, sharing venues and resources"[74].

Additionally, in Pendle, ward councillors are involved with Neighbourhood Action Groups (NAGs) where a range of partners work together to deal with issues and concerns of residents, such as anti-social behaviour and enviro-crime[75].

Conclusion

Partnership working is at the heart of making cohesion more sustainable in Pendle. Part of this is about shifting the overall relationship between the sector and the council away from historical funding arrangements and duplication and towards a more strategic and shared vision. Rather than just changing things overnight, the council and VCS are working together to set and reach achievable targets over time. Our research found a real commitment to building cohesive communities in Pendle, a goal which, while challenging, should be possible given the increasing commitment to joined-up ways of working.

74   Styan, Jan. District Partnership Officer, Pendle Borough Council, interviewed 29 April 2009

75   'Our Future, Our Pendle', Sustainable Community Strategy, available at: www.pendle.gov.uk/ourpendle

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Haringey Council case study

Location – North London
Type of council – London Borough
Political control – Labour
Population – 224,700

Context

Haringey has been referred to as, "an outer London borough with inner city problems", and is ranked as one of the most deprived boroughs in the country with unemployment a particular concern[76]. The employment rate was 62.2 per cent in the year to March 2009, the lowest since the year to March 2005 and unemployment rates are higher than the averages for London and England[77]. Additionally, Haringey is a place of diversity – nearly half of its population of 224,700 come from BAME backgrounds including people from the Caribbean, Africa, Asia, Eastern Europe, Ireland, and Turkey. Almost half the students at Haringey's schools speak English as a second language[78].

The Haringey Strategic Partnership and the people of Haringey agree that a cohesive Haringey would be a place where:

• there are equal opportunities and a borough-wide commitment to work together to achieve equality and justice

• young people have hope and ambitions and the opportunity to realise them

• there are positive relationships between the people of Haringey

• everyone, regardless of background, belief or circumstances, feels part of the wider Haringey community, is respected and valued

and has the opportunity to contribute to the life of the community

• there is a trust and a sense of belonging across all communities

• people are safe from harassment and crime and are free from fear of crime.[79]

New ways of working

There is a convergence of agendas in Haringey at the moment. The council is considering new ways of working, a big part of which is through increasing communication and consultation, as well as a larger role for the VCS in a range of activities, including service delivery. According to former Labour councillor and lead for community cohesion Matt Cooke, empowerment and cohesion are coming together under the reform of social services.

At the time of our research, Haringey Council was shifting towards an area based approach to working, creating an evidence base to deliver high quality services, improve efficiency and create cross-cutting solutions. A key part of this shift is the move towards more robust monitoring and evaluation against outcomes and outputs, which has resulted in efficiencies and also had positive impacts on cohesion. In particular, Equality Impact Assessments (EqIAs) have helped the council to monitor its policies, and reallocate services to areas of need. For example, while the council had a domestic violence strategy, the EqIA found a significant under-reporting from the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) community, and increased marketing resources to this community as a result.

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76 Haringey Unitary Development Plan, July 2006, available at: www.haringey.gov.uk/council/strategiesandpolicies/udp-2.htm

77 Employment and Skills Policy and Research Bulletin, Issue 7, December 2009

78 Taken from: www.haringey.gov.uk/index/news_and_events/fact_file.htm

79 Taken from: www.haringey.gov.uk/index/council/how_the_council_works/equalities/community_cohesion.htm

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Cohesion and value for money

Translation services in Haringey have cost the council significant amounts of money. They also found that sending translated information to citizens was often dissatisfying because it rarely answered the question, and resulted in an endless 'ping-pong' of information. As a result, when the council currently receives a translation request, a call is made by someone who speaks that language so they can determine the individual's needs.

Interview with (former) Councillor Matt Cooke, Haringey Council

Bridging, bonding and linking

Like many other boroughs, shifts in ways of working have helped Haringey Council and the VCS to move towards a more strategic relationship. Our research found that the council is starting to link more effectively into successes happening at the grassroots and is tying such objectives to achieving LAA goals, like building more sustainable communities through projects such as Living Under One Sun[80].

Additionally, positive relationships between the Haringey Voluntary Sector Liaison Team and the VCS have helped the borough connect with marginalised communities and tap into the expertise of the VCS to solve problems. A number of our interviewees noted that Haringey Council does a good job of understanding their needs:

"Haringey understands the way BAME groups operate and the needs of BAME groups in general, including refugees and asylum seekers. This entails several things. Firstly, it is about awareness of what the BAME community organisations are already doing; secondly, what their service users look like and thirdly, an understanding of why people come to us and not the mainstream providers"[81].

Funding

At the time of our research, Haringey was addressing issues of historical funding, in part by moving towards an increased focus on commissioning. While some interviewees noted particular risks for smaller VCS organisations in relation to shifts from grant funding to commissioning, Haringey is including the VCS in this process to ensure a smoother transition. For example, Haringey Association of Voluntary and Community Organisations (HAVCO) and other organisations have been involved in Compact-proofing the commissioning framework.

In a borough with as much diversity, flux and change as Haringey, ensuring that services are meeting needs is an important part of creating cohesive communities, as is utilising local providers with knowledge of the community. As Robert Edmonds, Chair of HAVCO noted, "there needs to be a recognition politically that 'trading local' is a long-term investment, building the capacity of the VCS and enhancing the diversity of the sector"[82].

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80 Living Under One Sun Community Allotment Project is based on the East Hale Allotment Site, adjoining Tottenham Marshes. The project is inspiring local residents to grow and cook their own produce – while building friendships, skills and communities. www.haringey.gov.uk/index/community_ and_leisure/greenspaces/greenflag/greenpennant. htm#onesun

81 Laskari, Leyla, Neighbourhood Management Project Officer, Haringey Council, interviewed 25 March 2009

82 Edmonds, Robert, Chair, HAVCO, interviewed 4 April 2009

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Partnership working

Shifts in the landscape of local government have been met with genuine attempts at partnership working between the council and the VCS. Our interviews found that while interaction and communication between the sector and the council is increasing, relationships and engagement remain patchy in some places. For example, the VCS has representation on all parts of the LSP, including the performance management board but there remain challenges in accessing representation on other boards, a problem the Community Link Forum is seeking to address. Positively, interviewees noted that shifts towards area based working are creating stronger partnerships between frontline council officers, such as those in neighbourhood management, and levels of strategic decision-making.

In Haringey, the local Compact is an important mechanism for embedding principles that drive a more productive and equal relationship between the VCS and the council. Haringey's award winning Compact, called 'Working Better Together' seeks to:

"Encourage better partnerships that fundamentally value diversity and equality so that Haringey can strive to sustain local services through clearer and fairer decision-making arrangements, which will benefit all sectors and improve the wellbeing of all of Haringey's residents."[83].

The Compact is overseen and developed by the Haringey Compact Implementation Group, and Compact Champions are key to training the sector and council on how to implement its principles across sectors. Local Compacts can be important mechanisms to formalising partnership working, as Haringey has recognised.

Capacity building

Haringey is currently undergoing a period of significant transition, as are many local authorities. The council is committed to capacity building the sector and recently commissioned HAVCO to complete a mapping exercise of the VCS to assess levels of capacity and development of the VCS, as well as to determine the spread of volunteers and level of funding across the borough. Such exercises will help target capacity building where it is most needed, an important aspect of maintaining a diversified VCS.

Our research found the need for specific capacity building in relation to a number of different areas. Particularly, our interviews highlighted a need for capacity building on preparing organisations for consortia and partnership working and commissioning. Additionally, for smaller VCS organisations, guidance and support on adhering to output and outcome monitoring and evaluation is important, particularly as performance management becomes more rigorous. Space and infrastructure to run programmes was also raised as a concern by frontline council staff as well as members of the VCS. As one neighbourhood manager noted:

"While we were setting up panels and consultative frameworks in order to get the third, private and statutory sectors involved, there was something fundamental lacking, there was no access to a place where people could organise. This remains one of the key issues for communities in Haringey. There isn't a place to meet"[84].

83 Haringey Council, Local Compact, available at: www.haringey.gov.uk/index/community_and_leisure/ voluntary_sector/localcompact.htm

84 Neighbourhood Management, Haringey Council, interviewed 25 March 2009

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Empowerment and the role of councillors

Haringey, like most other local authorities, is confronting an environment of economic constraint. However, the need to create efficiencies provides opportunities for partnership working, which can create connections between different communities and build cohesion. Councillors in Haringey are an important part of driving this agenda. According to Councillor Lorna Reith, there is a need for creative thinking in relation to allocating resources to the VCS:

"So if there are several groups providing women only, it is about getting them to work together, and there isn't a problem with that, even though they are women only. We have to be imaginative about bringing groups together"[85].

Additionally, our research found that councillors are helping to promote cohesion and empowerment through involvement at the grassroots. Haringey's Living Under One Sun project is an example of such success. According to Leyla Laskari, the Neighbourhood Manager leading this initiative, councillors have embraced the programme, "despite conflicts of interest," building trust and helping residents see positive outcomes from their involvement[86]. There is a general commitment in Haringey to more joined-up working and better, more transparent communication and decision-making. Councillors are a central part of that shift.

Conclusion

Haringey Council is clearly interested in utilising this period of transition to embed consistency of practice and set the focus on meeting strategic needs within their communities. The VCS is an essential partner in facilitating this shift and cohesion benefits will no doubt be a result of this commitment to joined-up ways of working.

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85 Cllr. Reith, Lorna, Haringey Council, interviewed 30 March 2009

86 Laskari, Leyla, Neighbourhood Management Project Officer, Haringey Council, interviewed 25 March 2009

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Sheffield City Council case study

Location – South Yorkshire
Type of council – Metropolitan District
Political control – Liberal Democrat
Population – 534,500

Context

From early industrial roots, Sheffield has grown to encompass a wide economic base. After years of decline, Sheffield is a thriving city undergoing an economic resurgence. In 2004, Sheffield's economy was worth £7.8 billion. Sheffield is now the third largest metropolitan authority in England.[87]

Sheffield has a number of demographic and population issues that are also an important part of the cohesion debate. Inequalities in relation to income, lifestyle and wealth are prominent. Some of the most affluent areas in the country sit alongside 'ten wards and a number of smaller areas that have high levels of multiple deprivation'. Additionally, international migration has been a significant driver of population change, increasing the overall population as well as raising the birth rate and changing the age structure[88]. Finally, Sheffield has been a battleground for extremist sentiments and, until recently, had two BNP councillors.

Sheffield Council sees community cohesion as "recognising, supporting and celebrating diversity". The council aims to create an environment where there is "mutual respect and appreciation of the similarities and differences that make people unique". Sheffield believes that a cohesive community is one where:

- there is a common vision and sense of belonging for all communities
- the diversity of people's different backgrounds and circumstances are appreciated and positively valued
- those from different backgrounds have similar life opportunities
- strong and positive relationships are being developed between people from different backgrounds in the workplace, in schools and within neighbourhoods.[89]

New ways of working

The political leadership and structure of Sheffield City Council have changed substantially in the last few years. At the time of our research, it was clear that these shifts and changes had affected the relationship between the VCS and council and also shifted the council's approach to promoting cohesion. For example, significant changes were taking place within the corporate equalities and cohesion team and the community cohesion position was soon to be mainstreamed across the council. A number of interviewees raised concerns about this shift and, in particular, the effect it would have on cross-directorate working and maintaining nascent relationships the council had developed with some parts of the VCS, and in particular the BAME VCS.

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87 Sheffield City Council, Council meetings, available at: www.sheffield.gov.uk/your-city-council/council-meetings/full-council

88 'State of Sheffield Population', 2009 update. Available at: www.sheffield.gov.uk/your-city-council/sheffield-facts-figures/state-of-sheffield/population

89 Taken from: www.sheffield.gov.uk/your-city-council/policy--performance/equality-and-diversity/community-cohesion

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Bridging, bonding and linking

Sheffield's diversity makes utilising the VCS in the provision of services an essential strategy towards combating perceptions about unfair treatment and providing services to disparate groups. The VCS serves as an important mechanism to bridge and link the council to diverse communities: "in some situations, the voluntary organisations play a role as the ones who can talk to people, relate to people and challenge rumours"[90].

Sheffield addresses issues of cohesion by having close networks and partnerships with the VCS and neighbourhood management. Sheffield Council has found that some cohesion challenges can be addressed quickly and cost-effectively by having an 'ear to the ground', such as providing extra bins to avoid rubbish lying around, a simple task for frontline council officers or tenant and resident association groups. These bridges between the council and communities can help address small problems before they become issues of greater concern.

The council and VCS also work together to solve issues of inter-community conflict. For example, the neighbourhood management team works closely with Mediation Sheffield to resolve conflicts with different sides of the community when tensions flare and, due to the area based approach to working, can quickly assemble a range of agencies and individuals to address situations and plan a response. This has been particularly important in areas where new communities of migrants have settled.

Funding

Shifts in funding are forcing the council to examine how it funds the VCS to deliver services and promote cohesion. Our interviews highlighted differing opinions across the local authority about how best to fund the VCS to

deliver their key work.

As the council shifts towards a funding strategy based increasingly upon commissioning and procurement, grant aid is under pressure to deliver. Procurement is often seen as more open and transparent than grant aid in this respect. Yet grant aid can be delivered transparently through the use of SLAs, and such flexibility remains crucial to supporting the most vulnerable parts of the VCS, as well as fundamental to promoting cohesion and ensuring sustainability. Flexibility to involve a range of grassroots providers can be important to ensuring outcomes are met and benefits maintained:

"Our whole angle is that we need to get adults into the community taking responsibility for their children. We need to get grassroots organisations to recruit adults to engage with young people; do the football, take them swimming. And it would be good to give people the skills to get them back into work and training – it has many benefits. If necessary, we would have 100 contracts with 100 different organisations to make that happen"[91].

The overall funding picture in Sheffield has changed significantly in recent years following the end of European funding and tight financial constraints within the Council. However, partners are committed to changing the culture of dependence between the council and VCS by encouraging the sector to become more diverse and representative of the communities they serve. While challenging, these changes can be important for spurring innovation within the VCS.

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90 Milne, Evelyn, Directof of Neighbourhood Renewal and Partnership, Sheffield City Council, interviewed 22 April 2009

91 Sheffield City Council Officer, interviewed 22 April 2009

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Innovation and the VCS

Woodthorpe Development Trust is an example of a VCS organisation that has a new type of relationship with the council. Rather than relying upon council funding, the Trust has developed a powerful hybrid model that is 30 per cent grant funding, with the remainder of income generated through trading and contracts. From this model, the Trust has developed a social enterprise called Three Rs – regenerate, refresh and renew ltd. that works with schools, specialising in the extended schools provision.

Interview with Karl Barton, Head, Woodthorpe Development Trust, Sheffield

Partnership working

At the time of our research, partnership working between the VCS and council was developing and growing stronger. However, a number of our interviewees highlighted issues around communication and culture as main areas of conflict between the local authority and the VCS. In particular, past ways of working have meant that the Compact was frequently seen as a weapon of the VCS, rather than a tool for mutual engagement.

However, the Compact is serving an important purpose in facilitating more productive relationships between the VCS and Sheffield's PCT. As an outcome of a budget review in the PCT, health authorities recognised that many of the health and wellbeing targets set for Sheffield could not be reached without the underpinning grassroots work of the VCS. To facilitate more productive engagement, Sheffield created a health Compact, funded by the PCT, to clarify roles and responsibilities between the sector and PCT. The Compact is helping to put these relationships on a more strategic footing, and the VCS has gained as a result, with funding contracts now offered in three year cycles.

At the time of our research, the LSP had undergone significant restructuring, and both the council and members of the VCS were adjusting to the new environment. Concerns were raised in some of our interviews about the structure of LSP meetings. In particular, there were concerns that the focus on performance management was keeping VCS organisations not engaged in service delivery from fully participating. However, the council and VCS are working to capacity build the sector to contribute more effectively at the LSP.

Capacity building

Despite the challenges, processes and systems are being put into place to address issues between the council and VCS. Our research found positive relationships between the VCS and the corporate equalities and cohesion team, who were essential to capacity building the BAME VCS, and had set-up strategic liaison meetings between the BAME network and council leadership on a monthly basis. Additionally, to address issues of under-representation of the BAME VCS on the LSP, the council decided to hold direct meetings between the LSP boards and the BAME network while it develops.

OFFER, one of Sheffield's main infrastructure organisations, is also an important advocacy and capacity building body for the VCS in Sheffield. As mentioned above, the structure of LSP meetings can make VCS involvement difficult, particularly for organisations not in a service delivery role. OFFER is helping to address this issue, and has a shadowing scheme in which VCS organisations are trained in how to contribute more effectively to the LSP.

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Empowerment and the role of councillors

As the local authority and VCS move towards a more strategic relationship, the role of councillors has become increasingly important in helping the council achieve strategic goals and deliver services that are responsive to different sets of need, from rurality to disability and poverty. At the time of our research, the council was in the process of setting-up area assemblies, comprised of three councillors in four wards. These twelve councillors will be responsible for producing community plans based on existing data about poverty, demographics, and customer feedback. They hope to incorporate all key partners in these plans, including the VCS, to agree on the needs to be addressed and the means of addressing them. According to Evelyn Milne, Director of Neighbourhood Renewal and Partnerships,

"We are demanding a lot from services within the council and it is about providing the information on a locality basis, so that the councillors are then provided with the information to make decisions about redirecting services"[92].

While a number of our interviewees raised concerns about these shifting mechanisms of empowerment, such changes also bring benefits. And in particular, new relationships based more firmly on the needs of communities can help Sheffield City Council move away from a more paternalistic culture, towards one that rewards and incentivises innovation. As Karl Barton, noted, "We want to be successful so we need the VCS and local authority working together. That is where you get your best results. We want a facilitating, not paternal, local authority"[93].

Conclusion

Sheffield's diversity has brought benefits and innovative ways of working, in addition to presenting challenges. There are many areas of best practice, part of the work ahead entails continuing the work evident at the time of our interviews – including moving towards more joined-up ways of working and creating a culture from top to bottom that values contributions from all parts of the VCS and works to ensure that governance structures are flexible enough to accommodate and facilitate that diversity.

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92   Milne, Evelyn, Directof of Neighbourhood Renewal and Partnership Sheffield City Council, interviewed 22 April 2009

93   Barton, Karl, Woodthorpe Development Trusts

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Norfolk County Council case study

Location – East of England
Type of council – County Council
Political control – Conservative
Population – 832,400 – expected to increase to 860,800 by 2012

Context

Norfolk's population is increasingly diverse, with rises in migrant communities from newly acceded EU countries such as Lithuania, Poland and Portugal[94]. Norfolk has a number of demographic factors that are issues of cohesion. In particular, the ageing population is a concern. Indeed, the largest percentage of the population is over the age of 60 (24.19 per cent), closely followed by those in the 45-64 age bracket (23.32 per cent). Additionally, one fifth of residents has a chronic or limiting illness and issues of rurality can make service delivery challenging. Finally, despite areas of affluence, certain parts of Norfolk have high levels of deprivation. Norfolk has 27 Lower Super Output Areas (LSOAs) that fall within the 10 per cent most deprived in England, out of a total of 530 (5 per cent).[95]

'Norfolk Ambition' sets out the Sustainable Community Strategy for Norfolk between 2003/23. It is run by the Norfolk County Strategic Partnership, an umbrella organisation which pulls together several themed and geographically based partnerships, for example Norfolk Children and Young People Partnership, Norfolk Health and Wellbeing Partnership and District Local Strategic Partnerships. The priorities for community cohesion strategy in Norfolk are:

- developing a sense of shared future – what holds communities together rather than what differences divide
- developing new model of rights and responsibilities
- achieving a new emphasis on mutual respect and civility
- visible social justice[96].

New ways of working

Norfolk County Council has developed a strong understanding of what cohesion means in relation to service delivery. The council has made a commitment to understanding its community's needs, and relies upon evidence-based policymaking in the design and delivery of services. These ways of working have helped create a stable and positive foundation for the relationship between the local authority and VCS. In particular, the council and the VCS have worked collaboratively to create strong links between the cohesion and equalities agendas. For example, the council and Norwich and Norfolk's Race Equality Council (NNREC) worked together to create a cohesion and equality impact assessment.

Additionally, the relationship between the council and VCS has been important in the allocation of services, particularly in identifying

94 Norfolk Ambition, 2008, 'A Sustainable Community Strategy for Norfolk 2003-2023', available at www.norfolkambition.gov.uk/Consumption/groups/public/ @norfolkambition/documents/article/ncc063698.pdf

95 Norfolk Ambition, 2007, 'Key Facts Sheet: Further analysis of the English Indices of Deprivation 2007', available at: www.norfolk.gov.uk/consumption/groups/public/documents/ general_resources/ncc060306.pdf

96 Norfolk Ambition, 2008, 'A Sustainable Community Strategy for Norfolk 2003-2023', available at www.norfolkambition.gov.uk/Consumption/groups/public/ @norfolkambition/documents/article/ncc063698.pdf

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and representing the needs of marginalised groups. The BAME Inclusion Project is an example of such partnership. The Inclusion Project resulted in a structured appraisal of BAME communities, helping to create a more holistic picture of need from which the allocation of resources could be more effectively planned. At the time of our interviews, it was clear these findings were proving important to delivering services in support of cohesion objectives.

Bridging, bonding and linking

Our interviews demonstrated a strong relationship between the council and organisations in the Norwich area. There is a clear recognition of the benefits the VCS brings, particularly in their capacity to bridge, bond and link the council to many of the most marginalised. These relationships are important for building trust within statutory agencies. In addition to providing links between the council and communities, our research found that the VCS is helping to build essential intra and inter community bonding.

Linking to marginalised communities

New Routes initially provided non-accredited English classes for migrant women who couldn't access other courses due to a lack of crèche facilities. The service is now open to all BAME communities, and serves as an important bridge between different migrant communities who share similar challenges, such as low English proficiency, but who often have little opportunity to connect with one another. The success of this programme has attracted the attention of local service providers, who rely on New Routes to access hard to reach communities.

Interview with New Routes, North Norfolk[97]

Funding

As in our other case study areas, the most room for improvement frequently noted by the VCS was in relation to funding and commissioning. However, Norfolk is working very closely with the VCS to develop an intelligent commissioning approach that is sensitive to delivering services that meet the evidenced needs of clients in a way that builds cohesion and promotes equalities. This approach necessitates flexible ways of working and various types of funding mechanisms including grants, SLAs and commissions.

Norfolk County Council has worked proactively with the VCS to capacity build the sector during this time of transition. Specifically, they have funded several projects to ensure local organisations are not sidelined in the shift towards increased professionalisation and performance management, and are working with the VCS on issues such as delivering LAA targets, consortium and partnership working and commissioning and procurement. Additionally, both the council and the VCS itself are working to prepare organisations to compete for tenders. For example, Voluntary Norfolk, the main infrastructure organisation, employs a commissioning manager who works with VCS organisations and commissioners to establish and utilise the VCS commissioning framework. The commissioning manager also builds stronger relationships between organisations and commissioners by demonstrating the capacity of VCS organisations to comply with performance management requirements.

97   Robinson, Dee, New Routes Project Coordinator, interviewed 15 May 2009

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Partnership working

The community cohesion agenda has helped create a stronger impetus for engagement between the VCS, district councils and the county council. Our interviews also indicated wide representation of the VCS on a majority of the LSPs and within sector specific partnership boards with the exception, in some cases, of the BAME VCS. The VCS also takes its responsibilities seriously and has numerous forums where information is widely disseminated, helping organisations stay ahead of changes. As a result of this engagement, the VCS has a range of opportunities through which to influence decision making, creating a more strategic and positive relationship between the VCS and the council. As Linda Rodgers, Head of Partnership Development, Voluntary Norfolk, noted: "we won't knowingly stand on the toes of any other organisation who is a better provider of that service than us. We will back off. There has to be an acknowledgment that conflicts of interest are a part of life for us now" [98].

Despite positive working, challenges remain. At the time of our research, several interviewees noted difficulty in establishing relationships between the VCS and district councils, and, in particular, with medium to larger VCS organisations who are typically more focused on relationships at the county level. Additionally, while the VCS has a fairly robust role in decision making structures, a number of interviewees noted a desire to make the structures of decision making more interactive and public facing. In particular, the structure of meetings and lack of pre-set agendas can disable VCS organisations from coming prepared to LSP meetings with data and evidence from their work.

Capacity building

Norfolk County Council and the VCS are committed to capacity building the VCS in order to maintain the diversity of providers necessary for delivering the cohesion and equalities agenda. Voluntary Norfolk offers a range of capacity building services including, as mentioned above, services for funding, commissioning and consortia working. The LAA reference group in Norfolk is a good practice example of how the council and sector work together to enhance understanding of the LAA. Following a secondment from the council to Voluntary Norfolk, a reference group of key VCS bodies was established to increase the capacity of the sector to directly respond to and shape LAA targets. As a result, the LAA Engagement Project was established, and has helped VCS organisations in Norfolk better understand the targets and their role in contributing to them.

Capacity building for the whole of the VCS remains a challenge. In particular, a number of our interviewees noted the need to achieve equality in capacity building for the VCS. For some, there is a fear that the smallest grassroots organisations will be disadvantaged in the move towards more rigorous performance management and a culture of targets. As Linda Rogers, Head of Voluntary Norfolk, questioned: "how do you reach the smallest group that will be hit by the LAA whether they like it or not?" [99]

During our interviews, members of the VCS recommended that capacity building duties be shared between organisations with reach into different communities. This is of particular concern for the BAME VCS. While Norfolk boasts a prominent race equalities council and BAME forum comprised of 26 different organisations, a number of our interviewees noted the need for stronger relationships

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98   Rogers, Linda, Head of Partnership, Voluntary Norfolk, interviewed 14 May 2009.

99   Rogers, Linda, Head of Partnership, Voluntary Norfolk, interviewed 14 May 2009

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between the mainstream and BAME VCS, which is particularly important for capacity building purposes.

Empowerment and the role of councillors

Empowerment is a cornerstone of the cohesion agenda in Norfolk. Broadening and increasing the diversity of volunteers in the VCS is part of Norfolk's strategy to make the VCS more representative of the communities it serves and establish buy-in from under-represented or unrepresented groups. The county has also developed a community engagement framework that serves as a tool to help the bodies in charge of delivering on the LAA and SCS understand and implement changes with, rather than for, communities.

The engagement strategy aims to increase involvement or opportunities for citizens in decision making structures, empowering citizens to get involved in shaping their local services. The framework identifies five levels of community involvement: informing, consulting, involving, collaborating and empowering, with different mechanisms for empowerment corresponding to each level of involvement. For example, circulating brochures would fall under the 'informing' level of engagement. This engagement strategy will help the council and responsible bodies share a common vision for empowerment and work to deliver those with the community and VCS.

At the time of our interviews, while empowerment strategies were developing, the role of councillors in the cohesion agenda was less clear. However, both Norfolk County Council, through County Community Cohesion Officer, Claire Bailey, and the VCS organisations we spoke with, recognised the need for councillors to be more visible and tapped in to making things work on the ground, encouraging diversity of participation and strengthening ties between groups working on common issues. According to Bailey, councillors could add the most benefit by coming together across party

lines with the VCS to address flash points and combat misconceptions and myths. The VCS also recognises the need for increased engagement with councillors in order to raise awareness of the sector and its contributions. Voluntary Norfolk is beginning to accomplish this through the creation of an action plan for supporting an environment for a thriving third sector, in which they hope to have significant councillor involvement and buy-in.

Conclusion

Norfolk has a developed a comprehensive cohesion and engagement strategy designed to empower communities and individuals. A significant amount of work has gone into making cohesion relevant across the county and the strong leadership by the County Community Cohesion officer and buy-in from the VCS will no doubt continue to strengthen Norfolk's commitment to partnership working towards achieving both equalities and cohesion.

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