

**An infrastructure for the
future
harnessing the Web for
communications and support**

a proposal to

Government Office for the South East

**submitted on behalf of the
voluntary and community sector by**

Community Council for Berkshire

July 2004

An infrastructure for the future – harnessing the Web for communications and support

Summary

This proposal recognises that Berkshire is unusual in not having a county council, being administered by 6 unitary councils each with its own unique characteristics.

The proposal has four key parts. Each is potentially stand-alone, but collectively they serve to strengthen the voluntary and community sector infrastructure within Berkshire and position it to support the sector in its future role in relation to public service planning and delivery.

In preparing this proposal we have been mindful of the need to consider the limitations of funding between now and March 2006 and, of course, the question of sustainability beyond that date. It is our belief that implementation of the proposal will help to secure the committed funding streams that the infrastructure, and indeed the sector as a whole, so badly needs.

The proposal:

- Develops membership and the role of the new Berkshire Voluntary Sector Forum to play an important part in the sector's future. In particular it will help broker relationships, establish and clarify roles of the various public and voluntary sector organisations in the future, engage the private and public sectors in the work of the voluntary sector as never before, 'educate' all partners to value the work of the sector and help pull through funding.
- Creates an environment in which the commissioning agencies – key to the future – and the voluntary sector infrastructure develops an increasingly positive working relationship, perhaps including agreed protocols. This will simplify the processes of commissioning and help the sector create the 'fitness for purpose' that will be demanded.
- Considers the feasibility of a more comprehensive register or database of the sector organisations within Berkshire, together with the facilities available to the sector. This will help organisation identify resources, identify and approach potential partners, simplify brokerage arrangements for commissioning of services and encourage membership of local infrastructure bodies, thus contributing to their sustainability.
- Works towards launch of a Web-based support services to supplement – not replace – local provision of generalist and specialist advice and support. The key areas of weakness are well recognised, but they may not be exhaustive. Research into the real needs of frontline organisations will play an important part in this element of the proposal.

The benefits and potential benefits of the proposal are Berkshire-wide. However they recognise that differences in actual or perceived support provision occur between the rural and urban areas, and between the unitary authority centred infrastructure bodies.

Nothing in this proposal is intended as a threat to the current broad structure of infrastructure bodies. Indeed most of them deserve greater financial support. The good relationships that the infrastructure bodies generally enjoy with local authorities is recognised and welcomed. Nothing in this proposal will serve to undermine these relationships in any way, indeed they should be strengthened. The proposal has been designed to be complementary to the ACU proposal that will follow.

Nor is a 'one size fits all' solution proposed. The deprivation and disadvantage that many frontline voluntary and community sector organisations strive to counter is far from homogeneous across the county or even within a local authority area. Indeed, there is great disparity between the areas. In practice there is a need for delivery at ward, parish, town, local authority and county area levels. Some minority communities are geographically spread throughout Berkshire and beyond. In rural areas identification of problems such as social exclusion and isolation is particularly difficult and the cost of support especially high – at 2.1 people per hectare West Berkshire has half the population density of the South East region.

This document sets out the background and rationale to the proposal, describes the components in more detail and the benefits expected to be secured. It addresses risk, costs and sustainability. There are real countryside needs.

Context

Berkshire is a relatively small county both in area and population. Local government services are administered by 6 unitary councils. It is understandable that, except in West Berkshire, the local authorities might concentrate resources on their predominantly urban centres. West Berkshire is more obviously rural in character with many villages and hamlets, some of which are surprisingly isolated. Each unitary council area has a Council for Voluntary Service operating exclusively in its area. Three of these CVSs are relatively new organisations.

On reorganisation of local government within the county, the former Berkshire County Council was disbanded. It had been a major source of core funding for voluntary sector infrastructure, not just Community Council for Berkshire (the Rural Community Council). That funding has not been fully replaced by the unitary councils and no county-wide funding is provided. Outside the main urban centres of Reading and Slough, some unitary councils provide relatively little financial support to the sector.

Berkshire's voluntary and community sector support infrastructure is therefore struggling. This limits resources, including knowledge/skill/experience, available to the sector's many local organisations and to disadvantaged communities.

At a project level there has been some joint working between the rural community council and some of the Councils for Voluntary Service. However there is no real history of joint planning or cooperation at a strategic level, as there is in some counties. Because each CVS has boundaries which are co-terminus with their local authority, there is relatively little opportunity for effective joint working between CVSs, although there is some joint training delivery. The benefits of cooperation need to be more clearly understood.

It is believed, although it cannot be verified, that there are about 3,000 voluntary and community organisations active within the county. This is probably underestimated.

Despite substantial BME populations in Reading and Slough (both have a local Racial Equality Council) and other urban areas, there is no dedicated BME infrastructure. The rural areas have largely 'hidden' minority populations including dispersed immigrant groups and travellers. Again, these are not specifically catered for by the support infrastructure.

Berkshire has a growing (except Windsor and Maidenhead which was virtually static between 1991 and 2001 – Census 2001) and an aging population with high and increasing house prices, heavily influenced by London commuting. Despite obvious evidence of wealth, there are pockets of relative and real deprivation in both urban and rural locations. Four of the unitary authorities have rural communities.

Needs

With the possible exception of Reading and Slough there is a chasm in understanding between the voluntary and community sector and the local authorities. There are perhaps historical reasons, but continuing severe financial pressure on local authority budgets, coupled with a perception that the voluntary and community sector is primarily concerned with seeking funds, does little to help. From interviews conducted in the autumn of 2003, some local authority Chief Executives appeared unclear of the sector's role and unaware (at that time) of the Cross Cutting Review and government's plans for the sector. This needs to be addressed.

If the objectives of the Cross Cutting Review and the programmes flowing from it are to be achieved, the sector will need to be supported in becoming 'fit for purpose' to deliver public services.

Even when that aspiration is achieved, relationships and protocols will need to be developed between the statutory and non-statutory commissioning/procurement agencies and the sector. This will take time and is likely to impact on the sector's infrastructure itself if local authorities and other agencies are to contract services with confidence to voluntary and community organisations. There are particular challenges in Berkshire when/if cross-boundary (unitary council boundaries) and/or 'county-wide' services are required or commissioned.

The generalist infrastructure bodies (Councils for Voluntary Service, Volunteer Bureaux and the Rural Community Council) actively support voluntary and community organisations in their areas with information, funding advice and other services including start-up support for new groups. The various specialist infrastructure bodies are similarly active within the sphere of their own interest or speciality. Inevitably the scope, quality and availability of support services varies.

There is no comprehensive or up to date record of the voluntary and community organisations within Berkshire. Each infrastructure body has its own record of member organisations and of those organisations it has dealings with. There are also some public records of, for example, registered charities. Anecdotal information from other areas suggests that organisations that are 'known' and can be supported may represent as little as a third of actual organisations within the sector. Although not

exclusively a rural problem, the geography and isolated nature of many rural communities means that it is more difficult and demanding on resources to reach local groups that may not even be aware of the support available to them and may not operate outside their '30 mph limit'..

Unless a more comprehensive and reliable live 'register' of the sector can be established, the ability of many organisations to participate in the delivery of public services, and/or to benefit from infrastructure support available, will be severely handicapped. Of more immediate benefit to organisations would be a register of available resources – such as meeting rooms, photocopying facilities – that are available to them. This does not exist.

However strong and sustainable the infrastructure within Berkshire becomes, there will still be limits to the specialist services that can be made available locally. High quality and up to date ICT, HR, legal and other services are examples of those that will always struggle to be delivered from local resources. There are ways in which these could be put in place at a sub-regional or regional level.

Of more early potential for Berkshire, and to relieve the stress on resources at local and county levels, the Internet could be used to provide a readily accessible source of information and sign-posted advice. Although beneficial to all, there is particular potential and relevance to the rural areas where limited public transport is a real obstacle, making face-to-face contact both time-consuming and expensive.

Vision

The vision shared by the infrastructure bodies is of an efficient and vibrant voluntary and community sector providing high quality services to Berkshire residents, and supported by infrastructure services determined by need. Given the changing role that the sector is being asked to play in the future planning and delivery of public services, those infrastructure services are themselves likely to change over time.

In a practical sense the vision will demand a number of tangible and non-tangible elements to be put in place. These include:

- A new rapport between the public and voluntary and community sectors and also the private and voluntary and community sectors.
- Perhaps a sub-regional brokerage service providing sub-contracting, quality assurance and delivery mechanisms between the commissioning bodies and the potentially numerous small organisations jointly undertaking service operation. This could be a Social Enterprise or Community Interest Company.
- A commitment to quality standards by the sector as a whole. Individual organisations will be supported in this and other facets of their activities through a well-structured voluntary and community sector infrastructure, providing local access and/or sign-posting to the services they need.
- Sustainability should not be the challenge it currently is because the sector will be seen to offer value for money and will be recognised as a key part of the social and community fabric of the UK.

This vision will take time to realise. It will require some dedicated funding, much of it seed corn in nature, and it will require a great deal of education and culture change on all sides.

Proposal components

The Berkshire proposal is concerned with components that individually and collectively serve to deliver key parts of the longer-term vision as well as meeting elements of solutions to the needs outlined above. Some are intended to help build upon relationships for the long term and need to be viewed as part of an on-going process of change. Others are specific deliverables that, we believe, can become sustainable in their own right.

The components are:

Develop the Berkshire Voluntary Sector Forum

The Berkshire Voluntary Sector Forum is the consortium envisaged by Defra and established at a wide and inclusive meeting on 1st April 2004.

Given historic low levels of cooperative planning and strategic cooperation in the county by infrastructure bodies, and the virtual absence of such activity extending to local authorities and other partners (except in some individual unitary authority areas), a slow start was envisaged. However the Forum already has generalist and specialist infrastructure body, local authority, private sector and funding body membership.

It is vital to the well-being of the voluntary and community sector, and success of the government's strategy, that this Forum grows in influence. It is, arguably, the only mechanism available to provide a coherent and 'joined up' approach to development of the sector and delivery of results on the ground across Berkshire. It is therefore a key partnership. A strong relationship with the Local Strategic Partnerships is vital.

An expected non-tangible deliverable of the Forum is a process of education of all parties, whether from the public, private or voluntary sectors, so that past suspicions and misunderstandings can be faced, dealt with and left behind.

The infrastructure bodies have a responsibility to support front line voluntary and community sector organisations, although some also act as delivery agents for specific projects. There are currently obstacles to the ability of some commissioning agents and others who wish to engage with communities via the voluntary and community sector in identifying partners of substance and/or those with required attributes and focus.

Unless these obstacles are addressed the expressed wish of government to plan and deliver public services in partnership with the sector might be thwarted. At the very least it will be only the larger and more prominent voluntary and community sector organisations that will become engaged.

A process of consultation is proposed, via the Forum, to prepare the sector for its new role and to create the climate of confidence and trust needed for success.. This will

include the 6 unitary councils, the primary care trusts and commissioning/funding agents such as the Learning and Skills Council.

It is envisaged that initially individual discussions with these agents will take place, involving local infrastructure bodies. This will allow and encourage local relationships and solutions to be evolved, and will uncover common ground. Further collective discussions/workshops are expected. It is most unlikely that a 'one size fits all' solution is appropriate, but there may be common ground which will improve efficiency and benefit all parties..

Key outputs are expected to include agreed protocol(s) and mechanism(s) for the commissioning of services to the sector, an agreed programme of sector capacity and qualitative development and the embryo of a growing relationship. A series of working 'compacts' or similar documented agreements would be a positive outcome.

Voluntary and Community sector database

We are aware of developments in neighbouring Hampshire and the Isle of Wight to create an inclusive database of sector organisations – the EVOLVE project. Although not necessarily mirroring that project, we see the mapping and recording of voluntary and community sector organisations as important to the ability of those organisations that wish – and not all will – to be able to participate fully in the service planning and delivery roles.

It will also bring together, for the first time, a register of the resources available to front-line voluntary and community organisations. These struggle to find anything from a meeting room to a minibus, or even a photocopier they can use. There are early paybacks from such simple information.

This part of the proposal is initially for a feasibility study to consider the technical, logistical, data protection and financial management/administration factors involved, and to identify the added value expected to be generated.

Web site

Each of the major infrastructure bodies in Berkshire has its own Web site, although they vary greatly in format, function and content. This probably reflects the level of financial and therefore technical investment put into each site as much as it does local circumstances.

After funding, ICT is the area of greatest concern to many voluntary and community sector organisations. Paradoxically there is anecdotal evidence that use of ICT is growing within the sector, confirmed by researched evidence from Early Spend projects within the region. Most organisations will have access to the Internet either from a dedicated office or, for the smaller organisations, via a volunteer or trustee.

None of the infrastructure bodies in Berkshire has sufficient resources to deliver the full range of information and advice services required from within its own staff resources, although some are better equipped than others. The changing role of the sector will place increasing demand on support, not just information and advice relating to ICT, HR, legal and similar professional services, important through these are, but increasingly access to quasi-commercial information and opportunities as

well. Berkshire's CVS network rightly highlighted some of this need in their Early Spend project bid.

This part of the proposal is initially concerned with researching and scoping the requirements for a Web-based service providing up to date information, advice and hot link access (sign-posting) to other Web sites at regional or national levels where necessary and appropriate. Following an agreed specification the project will move into technical feasibility and final costing, with the intention of delivering initial parts of a fully maintained site by March 2006.

Benefits

Each component of this proposal forms part of an integrated and inclusive plan. However each component could, if necessary, stand on its own. This section considers the benefits of each component and indicates how it fits into the overall vision.

The Berkshire Voluntary Sector Forum will provide the vehicle for considering the role of the voluntary and community sector and its relationship with other sectors, particularly local authorities. This does not jeopardise individual relationship between a local infrastructure body such as a Council for Voluntary Service or a Volunteer Bureau and its unitary council, but it does allow a wider perspective. It should, for example:

- facilitate a focus on specifically urban – or specifically rural - issues within the county
- identify issues best tackled by cooperation between 2 or more unitary areas
- highlight cross-area needs best dealt with on a county basis, and so on.

Such a mechanism does not currently exist. It is difficult to see how the benefits of the sector's involvement in public services to the communities of Berkshire can be secured without this perspective.

The delivery of public services, focussing particularly on social cohesion, education and learning, and health & social care (in the widest sense) are priority areas for government and a good fit to the voluntary and community sector's positioning within Berkshire. There is, for example, already much good work being undertaken in community development, basic skills learning for travellers and other minority groups and support for the infirm.

Given the willingness of all sectors to work together to a common vision there is every reason to believe that Berkshire could be a model of service delivery in a collaborative and effective manner. This is the purpose and benefit of the consultation with key agencies. If the voluntary and community sector demonstrates its capability to play a full part, then it might be reasonable to expect the statutory sector to recognise the benefits of ensuring the sustainability of what will become key partners. This does not necessarily imply substantial core funding, but it does imply full cost recovery by voluntary and community organisations, allowing them to grow and become sustainable.

A comprehensive register or database of both the sector constituents and the resources available to them will, subject to security controls and data protection considerations,

be an invaluable tool for the sector and other authorised users. Such information is not currently available:

- in a common and therefore readily usable format
- in a searchable manner for analysis
- as a complete record of the sector
- in one place

There are many benefits of a comprehensive record acknowledging that much data capture will be necessary, particularly in the rural areas. Benefits include:

- identifying gaps in front line community support groups
- identifying service delivery partners for contracts in specific areas and/or with a specific target community
- widening access to support and therefore capacity building
- identifying local resources
- helping in the identification of partners, e.g. for joint project/funding bids
- encouraging membership of local infrastructure bodies.

These benefits accrue to all levels, from very small front line community groups through to the largest infrastructure bodies.

The proposed Web site should provide major benefits to front-line organisations. Provided the site is well designed, properly maintained and the sources of expert advice can be identified, it will be a virtual one-stop shop for certain types of support, giving access to information that is generally not available now from any readily available source.

This does not and must not detract from the local role of infrastructure bodies such as Councils for Voluntary Service and Volunteer Bureaux. Rather it will relieve them of some resource pressure enabling them to take a more proactive role, e.g. hands-on help to individual organisations prepare funding bids, business plans and so on.

If the site is well designed it will allow the user to obtain a 'local' view or a 'layered' view, e.g. an 'urban' view, a 'rural' view, a sub-county (but multiple locality) view, a county view or a subject/interest view of the information available. This has real potential benefits to communities isolated by geography or those with minority bonds determined for example by faith or ethnicity, or to common interest communities that are fragmented and scattered over a large area. By enabling data to be 'cut' in different ways, each group can create their own perspective and virtual web site. This will help to combat social exclusion.

Subject to security and data protection considerations, access might be given to selected datasets in the database of voluntary and community sector organisations. This could be on a subscription basis.

Risks and obstacles

Key risks to delivery and implementation of the proposal's components are believed to be as shown below. The table shows current perception of the likelihood of the risk being encountered, and also outlines actions that can be planned into the work programme to avoid or at least minimise the impact of these particular risks.

Risk	Likelihood	Risk avoidance action
Change in government policy leading to a change in emphasis or direction in the support and future role of the voluntary and community sector	Low	None
Lack of support by the statutory sector within Berkshire, particularly the unitary councils.	Low/medium	Involvement and transparency. Encourage working towards a joint vision of the future.
Reluctance by infrastructure bodies to provide data/information, e.g. for the proposed database of organisations	Medium	Encourage active participation. Reassure about independence and role of individual infrastructure bodies.
Risk that the financial revenue streams do not materialise to make maintenance of the on-going facilities viable.	Medium/high	Research thoroughly and test for sensitivity.
Copyright/IPR/data protection issues, particularly in relation to the information about voluntary and community sector organisations and the transfer of data held by infrastructure bodies.	Medium/high	Understand and document the issues. If necessary seek professional legal and/or IPR advice.
Concern and perceptions of competitive threats by some voluntary sector organisations leading to lack of cooperation.	Medium	Involvement and transparency at all stages.

Dependencies

There are a number of factors on which this proposal relies for success. These dependencies are likely to vary during the life of the projects(s) and the list set out below is not therefore exhaustive. Nevertheless it gives an indication of the nature of the factors on which the proposal depends. For simplicity dependencies are shown in a simple table with an outline of the actions required to underpin success.

Dependency	Proposed actions
Availability of adequate and suitable project management resources throughout the project(s)	Identify requirements, select resources and contract for appropriate period(s)
Availability of necessary and appropriate expertise for research elements of project upon which key decisions rely	Identify requirements, select resources and contract for appropriate period(s)
Preparation of realistic, agreed and suitably detailed project plan(s)	Make this a key deliverable before other financial commitments are made
Co-operation of partners and sector organisations as necessary	Excellence in communications and involvement from the beginning. Creation of a 'Project Board' which oversees progress and includes senior representatives of key partners
Ability to secure involvement of adequate and appropriate technical resources as required and at reasonable cost (e.g. database skills)	Identify requirements and work with and through potential partners such as Thames Valley Chamber of Commerce to encourage sponsorship by local businesses
Continuation of adequate funding streams	'Marketing' of the proposal to potential funders and sponsors to be a key on-going part of the project
Avoidance of project drift through over-ambition and contradictory agendas	Strong leadership required from the start. The role of the Project Board is paramount in keeping the project(s) on track
Availability of information systems that provide suitable and timely information	Needs to be identified up front how this is to be done

Outline work plan

We have assumed a decision on this proposal by the end of August 2004.

A more detailed (but still an outline) project plan is provided in Appendix 1. Set out below is an indicative high level work plan showing the range, nature and focus of activities expected to be required to deliver the proposal in full.

Activity	Indicative timeframe
Forum activities	
Draft and agree a constitution	November 2004
Establish common vision of the future role of the voluntary and community sector, e.g. via workshops	January 2005
Work towards an agreed strategy	By March 2005
Establish contact with commissioning agents	May 2005
Face to face discussions to establish common ground and identify obstacles	By July 2005
Work towards a common protocol	By December 2005
Database	
Set up a steering group	September 2004
PR to raise awareness within sector	September to December 2004
Research requirements, potential usage, data protection issues, standards	By March 2005
Specify database design	July 2005
Identify host arrangements	October 2005
Data capture	November 2005 to March 2006
Web	
Research requirements	By May 2005
User Specification of requirements	August 2005
Technical design	October 2005

Establish host arrangements

October 2005

Build and test

By March 2006 (first phase)

Marketing

December 2005 onwards

Funding sources

Consultation with potential funders

From August 2004

Financial plan

The figures in the financial plan set out in Appendix 2 are best estimates of the costs implied by the proposal and its constituent components, together with estimates of revenues receivable.

The proposal is structured in such a way that early deliverables, such as research and feasibility studies, are predominantly skill/experience/knowledge and time based and do not themselves impose continuing costs. Rather they produce plans for investments of a more capital nature that can be implemented immediately or as and when financial circumstances allow.

Even so, the figures suggest that the proposal might be self-financing from year 4 onwards.

As with any project, the figures shown are best estimates as at 30th June 2004. Although believed to be realistic given knowledge and experience of other projects, it will be part of the project management role to continuously review and update both costs and projected revenues as new/improved information is available.

Sustainability

We understand that funding will be available for approved projects from July 2004 until the end of March 2006 and that the total expected to be made available will amount to £60,000. We also understand, but have ignored for planning purposes, that more might be made available during that period.

It follows that the proposal will need to be self-funding or have committed sources of financial support from 1st April 2006 onwards. It will be an on-going part of the project to engage with potential funders and to identify possible revenue streams that could flow directly from the operation of the project deliverables. At this stage, and in the time actually available, it has not been possible to identify and secure such longer-term funding commitments. The thoughts and ideas set out below need to be viewed in this light, but serve to highlight prospective opportunities.

There are 5 main potential sources of continuing revenues to the proposal. Each is considered in turn.

Grants

It is expected that grant funding from Defra will provide the base level of funding necessary to launch the proposal and permit most of the research and planning activity to take place. Other potential funders will be approached with the intention of identifying and securing a broadly match level of funding to allow the proposal to be implemented.

Although costs have yet to be firmly estimated, the capital costs are expected to be quite low, although the project will incur continuing revenue costs post April 2006.

Subscriptions

Added value services such as the voluntary and community sector database and parts of the Web site may be suitable service products to generate a subscription income stream. Although it would need to be researched, voluntary and community organisations may consider that access to some of the expertise based services accessible via the Web site is worth an annual subscription. Such services can easily be password controlled to limit access to subscribers.

Advertising

Although potentially a mixed blessing, the availability of a Web service that is directed to a specific market sector can attract advertising revenues from suppliers to that marketplace. It is evident from unsolicited approaches that there is no shortage of companies keen to promote their products and services to or through the voluntary sector.

Sponsorship

Berkshire is fortunate in being the home base of many household name companies, particularly those specialising in high technology and pharmaceuticals. As greater awareness of the benefits of overt social responsibility transpires, it should prove

possible to secure sponsorship for some long-run aspects of the proposal. There is of course a cost attached to this, usually by naming the project or otherwise recognising the contribution made by the sponsoring company. Sponsorship is not like a grant. In a sponsorship contract both parties benefit in a material sense from the relationship.

Chargeable services

There will be chargeable services that can be built on the back of the proposals operational deliverables. In some cases the opportunities will not become apparent until the service has been operating for some time. However, possible examples include:

- A chargeable mailing service to voluntary and community organisations (similar services are available from the private sector for composite mailings to schools and businesses selected by segmentation, for example).
- Delivery of chargeable services via the Web site – on-line compound ordering of supplies to secure discounts, for example.

Moving forward

Early tasks to deliver this proposal and its benefits are set out above and in the project plan in Appendix 1.

The infrastructure bodies in Berkshire are progressively working together to ensure that this, and other, proposals and projects can be effectively managed and implemented with collective responsibility and to the benefit of Berkshire communities.

We are ready to move forward quickly when approval to funding is given.

PROJECT PLAN

FINANCIAL PLAN

Commentary on the Financial Plan

The rationale behind the financial plan is described below.

Berkshire Voluntary Sector Forum

The figures are broad estimates of the costs associated with the hire, where necessary, of meeting/conference facilities and ancillary costs such as refreshments. The envisaged tasks to establish working relationships and agreed protocols with service commissioning agencies are likely to require external consultancy support.

It is a key role of the Forum to create an environment within which future roles of the relevant sectors and partners can be explored, agreed and implemented. This is not only concerned with the future commissioning arrangements for delivering public services, but involves a medium term 'education' process of the partners themselves. This may require external facilitation.

Information base

This is a key operational deliverable. A Steering Group will be formed and will require servicing. Both research into needs, benefits, added value, logistical and other obstacles will need to be commissioned.

There will be a need for technical, legal and possibly intellectual property rights (IPR) advice at a professional level.

Data capture costs will be heavily influenced by the nature of the data to be collected and the method of capture. If much of the data can be transferred electronically from existing data sources (acknowledging that re-formatting will need to take place via software) then data capture costs will be contained to a minimum. At the other extreme if data has to be sourced from scratch and entered into the database then relatively substantial external (agency) costs are likely. The broad estimates given are based on a mid-point, e.g. that there will be a mixture of file transfers and new data collection/entry.

Marketing is important, both to potential users and to encourage use of the data for added value services for revenue earning purposes.

There will be on-going data maintenance and data management issues to be resolved. In the belief that there may be c. 4,000 to 5,000 records with a maintenance rate of 10% (new records, changes of name/address, etc.) then the figures shown seem reasonable. There will be logistical issues to be resolved.

In our view the availability of such an information base opens up opportunities for subscription and other chargeable services. Token revenues are shown. Note that 'subscriptions' amount to only £1 per voluntary and community organisation. In practice many will not subscribe (at least initially) but others will find much higher subscriptions good value in terms of saved time and effort, and/or the added value they derive from access to information hitherto unavailable.

Web support service

The Councils for Voluntary Service, together with Community Council for Berkshire, have documented their views on the most pressing needs of the voluntary and community organisations for support and advice and, importantly, the extent to which these needs cannot currently be met.

This work needs to be supplemented with research to define more closely what is required, how it can best be delivered, the interface and usability issues and associated matters. This will result in a detailed specification of user/business requirements that will inform and guide the technical design. It is most likely that virtually all of this work will need to be commissioned externally.

Building, testing and commissioning the web site will need to be outsourced. Marketing activities will be necessary to identify and secure revenue streams.

General

Consultation with potential finders and sponsors (possibly private sector sponsors) will be an important part of the project to ensure that the necessary additional funds are forthcoming to allow completion of the project and to deliver benefits.

Project management, probably but not necessarily provided externally to the sector, will need to be in place. The figures shown broadly provide 2 days a month from September 2004 onwards.

It has been assumed that Defra will contribute £60,000 during 2004/2005 and 2005/2006.

Other sources of funds will need to provide an estimated £53,000 during 2004/2005 to 2006/2007. This could be by grant, donation, sponsorship or, for example, by a company providing specialist services such as database design at no cost to the project.