

KENT RURAL INFRASTRUCTURE CONSORTIUM

KENT RURAL COMMUNITY COUNCIL
(charity number 212796)

**REPORT TO GOSE RURAL TEAM
ON
PREPARING FOR MAIN SPEND ACTIVITIES**

**ENHANCING CAPACITY BUILDING AND RURAL INFRASTRUCTURE
IN
RURAL KENT AND MEDWAY**

CONTENT	
INTRODUCTION	Page 2
CONSORTIUM DETAILS	4
APPLICANT AND ACCOUNTABLE BODY DETAILS	9
CONTEXT AND ASSESSMENT OF NEED	10
"MAIN SPEND" ACTIVITIES	14
FINANCE AND SUPPORT	21
EVALUATION OF CONSORTIUM ACTIVITIES	22
SHARING THE LESSONS ACROSS KENT, THE SOUTH EAST AND ENGLAND	22
APPENDICES:	
1 Organisations contacted and interest shown	23
2 Consortium membership	24
3 Budget for main spend activities	25

KENT RURAL INFRASTRUCTURE CONSORTIUM

INTRODUCTION

1 As part of the Government's commitment to strengthening voluntary and community action throughout England (the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra), and the Active Community Unit (ACU) in the Home Office, are committed to ensuring that support for voluntary and community organisations in rural areas is available to a similar standard to that available in towns and cities. To progress this aim Defra and the ACU launched parallel reviews in early 2004 by commissioning, or letting, pilot work prior to "main spend" work from summer 2004 to the end of March 2006.

2 This Defra programme is also seen as an important contribution to its work on modernising rural delivery, by taking forward a principle recommended by Lord Haskins' review – namely that the community and voluntary sector should play a bigger part in policy design and delivery.

3 Only at the end of June 2004 was an announcement made by the ACU about the parameters of its "main spend" programme. No announcement had been made by Defra on its detailed response to Lord Haskins' review. Both announcements will have a significant bearing on the "main spend" activities of the consortium. Details of the ACU announcement have yet to be assessed in detail in a wider voluntary and community sector (VCS) context across Kent and Medway. This consortium has agreed the principle of working within this wider context and not in a narrow rural context – despite the clarity this would bring.

4 The Consortium covers all of rural Kent and Medway. There is no definition of "rural" in this proposal. Hereafter Kent refers to both administrative Kent and Medway.

5 The population of "rural" Kent is 441,200 (1999 estimates). There are no major cities in Kent but there are a number of major towns that make up the total population of 1,550,000. In addition to the county council and the Medway unitary council there are 12 District Councils and 311 Parish and Town Councils in Kent – some of which are very urban in nature.

6 The background to the infrastructure bodies in the voluntary and community sector is different to other counties in the south east region. There are 19 independent volunteer bureaux (Vb) and only 6 Councils for Voluntary Service (CVS). Two CVSs cover a single district council area, two CVSs cover just over 2 districts, one CVS covers almost 3 districts and the other CVS covers almost 4 districts. There is only one instance, in Swale, where the volunteer bureau is part of the CVS organisation. In addition there are a number of specialist support organisations that cover the ceremonial county (Kent and Medway) including Kent Rural Community Council (Kent RCC).

7 A variety of organisations, both from the voluntary and statutory sectors, work with and support voluntary and community groups in rural Kent. These include all the 6 CVSs, most but not all of the 18 Vbx, Kent RCC, and a number of specialist organisations in the voluntary sector. Some of these specialist voluntary organisations provide a full range of support services to their members but not to non members. In addition a number of the statutory bodies in Kent have community development teams or individual members of staff who provide, or signpost, support services from the statutory sector to voluntary and community organisations (VCOs) in rural Kent.

KENT RURAL INFRASTRUCTURE CONSORTIUM

8 Kent RCC was commissioned at the end of February by GOSE's Rural Team to initially take the lead in drawing together suitable partners to establish a county consortium. The consortium needs to:

- consist of all known generalist organisations within the voluntary sector as well as specialist infrastructure organisations and ensure that an inclusive and broad range of organisations from across Kent are included (eg LSC, Groundwork, PCTs, LSP at county level, etc).
- decide who should be the lead body and accountable body within the consortium.
- consider the main objectives for the proposal for further funding from the main spend. This proposal will need to be in line with the Defra guidance and show harmonisation, not duplication, with the ACU infrastructure programme.

9 The timescale is for this "main spend" proposal to be with GOSE by Friday 16 July 2004. The "main spend" programme will run from summer 2004 to the end of March 2006.

10 £60,000 per county is available to county consortia for main spend proposals that meet Defra criteria. Additional funding may also be available from the ACU infrastructure programme. Funding in excess of £60,000 will be available to consortia that are able to show local need, including overlap with Defra's target areas for economic productivity and service delivery as included in Defra's PSA4 agreement with HM Treasury. In Kent these "indicator districts" are Dover, Shepway and Swale districts. In addition Canterbury and Thanet districts are on the margins of the list.

11 Kent RCC has attempted to engage with a wide variety of relevant voluntary and statutory organisations. A list of all contacted, and their interest during this preparatory period, is shown in Appendix 1.

KENT RURAL INFRASTRUCTURE CONSORTIUM

CONSORTIUM DETAILS

- 12 The name of the consortium is Kent Rural Infrastructure Consortium (KRIC).
- 13 By 14 July 2004 the Consortium consisted of 23 organisations as follows:
- Voluntary and Community Sector
 - BTCV (Kent)
 - Church in Society
 - Kent Association for Disabled People *
 - Kent Community Foundation *
 - Kent Council for Voluntary Youth Service *
 - Kent Farmline
 - Kent Rural Community Council
 - Maidstone Volunteer Bureau
 - Malling Area Volunteer Bureau *
 - CVS Medway *
 - Mid and South East Kent CVS
 - North West Kent Racial Equality Council
 - Shepway Volunteer Centre
 - Swale Volunteering and Community Development Centre
 - West Kent CVS
 - Whitstable Volunteer Centre
 - Statutory Sector
 - Ashford Borough Council
 - Ashford Primary Care Trust
 - KCC Rural Regeneration Team
 - Kent Association of Parish Councils
 - Kent Downs AONB Unit *
 - Medway Council
 - Shepway Primary Care Trust
- 14 Letters of support from 17 organisations are attached as Appendix 2. These include all contact details. Letters of support are awaited from the 6 organisations marked by an *.
- 15 Some consortium members have signed up in principle having seen this document but confirmation of membership will depend upon a formal decision of the organisation at a later date. It is expected that the Consortium will grow in size and influence after July 2004.

CONSORTIUM VISION

- 16 The Kent Rural Infrastructure Consortium will provide, by the end of March 2006 or earlier, a better co-ordinated support service to VCOs in Kent's rural communities. The consortium acknowledges that it is an integral part of the VCS across Kent and Medway as a whole and needs to operate in that wider context.
- 17 The needs of "frontline" VCOs and the needs of villages in rural Kent is seen as:
- Access to a co-ordinated support network of information
 - Access to generic community development workers

KENT RURAL INFRASTRUCTURE CONSORTIUM

- Access to specialist development workers
- A "village voice" that is assumed to be the Parish Council with, or attaining, "quality status"
- A community building open to all
- A young persons' facility where this is not part of the community building.
- An outdoor recreation space
- A holistic vision for the village (eg a "Parish Plan" or similar) that feeds into the District/Unitary "Community Strategy"

OPERATION OF CONSORTIUM

18 The consortium, to be as effective as possible, will not divide into sub groups but will operate as a single collective body. It is acknowledged this is an additional task for which no organisation has the time unless it brings noticeable benefit to rural communities – but not necessarily to participating bodies. This noticeable benefit on the ground needs to be clearly demonstrated and the evaluation in 2005 will be essential to demonstrate the success, or otherwise, of the consortium.

19 Meetings will be held quarterly to monitor consortium progress, to network, to share current activities, to inform and to make decisions to improve the operation of the consortium.

20 Activities in-between meetings will be as, or even more, important. These exchanges will be by e-mail across the whole of the consortium. Information and advice to support rural communities will be placed on www.voluntarykent.org.uk or similar.

21 The management of consortium projects has yet to be discussed and agreed in any detail by the consortium.

DETAILS OF CONSORTIUM MEMBERSHIP

22 *Ashford Borough Council's* mission is to protect and improve the quality of life of every resident in the borough, now and in the future. The borough of Ashford covers 58,100 hectares and is the largest of 12 districts in Kent comprising Ashford and the smaller town of Tenterden plus many villages and small rural settlements. The area contains attractive countryside with extensive areas designated as areas of outstanding natural beauty. There are 39 parishes. Currently standing at 102, 661, Ashford has the fastest growing population in Kent. Its growth is set to continue with Government's announcement in February 2003 that it is one of four locations chosen for extensive future housing development, in excess of 30,000 homes. This presents a major challenge for the Council and the borough as a whole, working closely with other partners. Ashford Borough Council has 43 members and is led by an executive committee under Conservative control. The council is a key partner in the Ashford Borough Compact.

23 The *Ashford Primary Care Trust* is the local NHS body which is responsible for the health of and healthcare provision to the population of Ashford.

24 *BTCV (Kent)* specialises in working with people within their communities to bring about positive environmental change in both rural and urban settings. Working through a wide range

KENT RURAL INFRASTRUCTURE CONSORTIUM

of partnerships we have 40m years experience of managing volunteer programmes, developing and delivering community support and running employment and training initiatives. A bigger picture is now emerging where conservation volunteering is also becoming a focus for the achievement of wider social goals c- tackling social exclusion, encouraging personal development and lifelong learning.

25 *Church in Society* enables the church's effective contribution to community, economic and political transformation, so that the full potential of all communities may be realised and experienced. Our strategy is to engage with issues in the public arena that impinge on our purpose, equip the church locally to bring hope and transformation to society, and deliver practical action complementing and beyond the scope of individual churches. We work with partners from faith, voluntary, public and private sectors. We engage with rural concerns through a dedicated diocesan Rural Officer, support of specific church and community led rural projects, close involvement with KRCC and membership of other rural partnerships.

26 *Kent Association for Disabled People* is (awaiting details)

27 The *KCC Rural Regeneration Team* aims to provide a strategic and focused approach to activities where the County Council can lead or work with partners to support the development of the rural economy and improve the quality of life in rural communities.

28 The *Kent Association of Parish Councils* represents 92% of the Town and parish Councils in Kent in both rural and urban areas. It provides advice, information, training and representation for its members. It holds a complete and up to date address database of all Councils in Kent.

29 *Kent Community Foundation* is a new approach to local philanthropy. It provides a framework to support donor's own specific local causes whilst retaining distribution of funds as donors wish. KCF also manages grant funds from Government sources for the benefit of the community of Kent and Medway as a whole.

30 *Kent Council for Voluntary Youth Service* is the only umbrella organisation to which all the countywide voluntary youth organisations belong. The primary role of KACVS is that of an advocate. The secondary role is as a hub of a growing network. KCVYS, a voluntary organisation, is works in close partnership with KCC Youth and Community and Medway Youth Services.

31 The *Kent Downs AONB Partnership* is set up to conserve and enhance the landscape of the Kent Downs. The partnership comprises a Joint Advisory Committee (JAC) which has representatives of land owning, political and statutory interests. Supporting the JAC is an Executive which is a smaller body made up of representatives of the JAC and from farming and landowning interests, business charities and parishes. The AONB unit is a small team of 4.6 full time staff who are working with partners to achieve positive change on the ground and ensure that this nationally important landscape is conserved and enhanced. Each year there is a forum – a wide meeting of organisations and individuals who have a stake in the future of the AONB. The meetings of the forum provide a broad input into the priorities for and management of the AONB.

KENT RURAL INFRASTRUCTURE CONSORTIUM

32 *Kent Farmline* is a registered charity operating across all of Kent and Medway and having some contact with rural parts of neighbouring counties. Its aim is to provide a telephone helpline and information service for the rural community, understood in the widest possible sense. There are at present 13 helpline volunteers who include 2 office staff. There is a management committee of 9 trustees with a Finance and General Purposes Sub Committee. Kent Farmline operates a main website which includes a news service based on press releases from farmers' unions and similar bodies, and also a separate website containing a large database of other organisations and individuals willing to help rural dwellers.

33 *Kent Rural Community Council* is a registered charity operating across all of Kent and Medway and is a partnership with local authorities and voluntary and community organisations involved in rural communities in Kent. Kent RCC exists to improve the quality of life of local communities and to facilitate the development of thriving, diverse and sustainable communities throughout Kent and Medway (hereafter Kent). Kent RCC is proactive in the provision of information and funding to foster action with communities in Kent. It is a membership organisation with some 300 subscribing community organisations and membership from all principal local authorities and others. Kent RCC is a member of many partnerships in Kent.

34 The mission statement of *Maidstone Volunteer Bureau* is to promote volunteers and volunteering and develop services in response to local needs.

35 *Malling Area Volunteer Bureau* promotes and develops volunteering in rural parts of Tonbridge and Malling Borough – an area of 71,000 population. We offer advice and support on volunteering and act as a central recruitment agency for voluntary and statutory bodies recruiting and placing volunteers with organisations and individuals needing help. We are an accredited local development agency in membership of Volunteering England and many partnerships in Kent including Kent RCC.

36 *Medway Council* is a unitary authority with a population of c. 250,000, with responsibility for providing a broad range of local government services across rural and urban communities. The council recognises the distinct needs of its rural areas and is working with rural communities in developing a rural action plan. This work seeks a sustainable rural area based on vibrant and confident communities. The council promotes the role of the community and voluntary sector within its core values and the Medway Community Plan. The community plan identifies the need to build the capacity of the voluntary and community sector and ensuring appropriate resourcing and support.

37 *CVS Medway* works towards providing effective support to over 350 organisations in Medway's voluntary and community sector. In 1999 CVS Medway obtained approval from City and Guilds to be an NVQ Assessment Centre, an achievement to be proud of as we are only the second CVS in the country to obtain this status. In addition, the CVS received the IIP award and has now adopted the PQASSO standard.

38 *Mid and South East Kent CVS* is a charitable company limited by guarantee which operates across the local authority areas of Ashford, Dover, Maidstone and Shepway to support, develop and promote charitable voluntary and community organisations and members of the community who wish to establish these. We do this by providing information; advice; training; access to facilities and equipment; opportunities for liaison. Over 500 organisations on our

KENT RURAL INFRASTRUCTURE CONSORTIUM

mailing list and our membership is made up of voluntary organisations that elect the CVS trustees.

39 The two Racial Equality Councils in Kent, including the *North West Kent Racial Equality Council*, tend to provide support services to frontline BME organisations.

40 The *Shepway Primary Care Trust* is the local NHS body which is responsible for the health of and healthcare provision to the population of Shepway.

41 *Shepway Volunteer Centre* is a registered charity operating within the Shepway District Council boundary. The aims of the organisation are to promote volunteering, to recruit and place volunteers in a wide variety of volunteering opportunities with charities within Shepway, to develop volunteering and to enable everyone who wishes to volunteer to do so. Shepway Volunteer Centre believes that voluntary activity can improve the lives of individual volunteers and also assist the development of sustainable communities. Shepway Volunteer Centre is a member of Volunteering England.

42 *Swale Volunteering and Community Development Centre* is both the volunteer bureau and the CVS for Swale Borough – a local development agency. SVDC also runs a number of projects for the benefit of the Swale community.

43 *West Kent CVS* exists to promote, develop and support voluntary and community sector organisations in the districts of Sevenoaks, Tonbridge and Malling, and Tunbridge Wells. West Kent CVS provides an opportunity for the voluntary sector to make its voice heard through the West Kent Voluntary Sector Forum and other local and county partnerships. We also bring various groups and networks together who share common interests. Services include: an extensive training programme, regular newsletter, directory of VCOs, resource library, funding advice and information, start up assistance for new groups, project management and community development activities.

44 *Whitstable Volunteer Centre* is a registered charity operating in partnership with local authorities, voluntary and community organisations in the Whitstable area. WVC promotes volunteering by recruiting, placing and supporting volunteers and by providing information and encouraging good practice in volunteering. WVC also tries to improve the quality of life in the local community by providing Voluntary Transport and Gardening Services.

KENT RURAL INFRASTRUCTURE CONSORTIUM

APPLICANT AND ACCOUNTABLE BODY DETAILS

45 Kent RCC was appointed to be both the applicant body and the accountable body at a consortium meeting on 6 July 2004. A copy of Kent RCC's constitution and most recent Annual Report and Accounts are attached to this submission to GOSE. Kent RCC is a registered charity. Kent RCC's contact details are:

Kent Rural Community Council
15 Manor Road
FOLKESTONE
Kent CT20 2AH

Telephone: 01303 850816
Fax: 01303 850244
E-mail: info@kentrcc.org.uk
www.kentrcc.org.uk

46 Kent RCC's main funders are the Countryside Agency and Kent County Council's Rural Regeneration team. The KCC Rural Regeneration team is represented on the consortium. Kent RCC receives funding from a number of other partners such as Medway Council, a number of District Councils, Business Link Kent, Mid Kent LEADER+ Programme, CASK SRB Programme and from subscribers.

CONTEXT AND ASSESSMENT OF NEED

47 There is a major concern of partners and potential partners about the rural delivery landscape as follows:

- Government is to make significant changes to delivery arrangements and to the content of its rural programmes. Margaret Beckett was to make a detailed statement in "the spring". This statement is now expected before Parliament rises for the summer recess.
- Government support for the Countryside Agency, which has a service level agreement with Kent RCC to support community led activities in rural Kent, is also due to change in April 2005. It is not clear how, if at all, this support for Kent RCC will continue. It remains unclear how, if at all, Government's social and community programmes, currently delivered through the Countryside Agency, will be delivered in the future.
- The Government's response to its consultation paper "Building Civil Renewal" is due for publication this summer. This is particularly relevant to community capacity building.
- SEEDA is devolving its programme delivery to Area Strategic Partnerships in most of Kent through "Area Investment Frameworks" that, initially, sidelined the voluntary and community sector, including the rural element, of the sector.
- Kent County Council has commissioned a review, in conjunction with SEEDA, entitled "Strategic Policy and Investment Framework for Rural Kent". The consultant's report is complete but not yet in the public domain. This is likely to have an effect on the work of the consortium.

48 The proposals that follow are based on the following recent pieces of work:

- RAISE led "mapping and gapping" of the voluntary and community sector in the South East undertaken in late spring 2004 as part of the ACU Infrastructure Review.
- Kent RCC undertook a survey, in conjunction with the KCC Rural Regeneration Team, in autumn 2003 of "rural community opinion".
- A survey of selected voluntary organisations as part of this Defra Rural Infrastructure Review.

49 The main conclusions of the RAISE led "mapping and gapping exercise" in Kent and Medway were:

- CVSs and Vbx are the main VCS generalist support organisations for "frontline" voluntary and community organisations (VCOs). There are no gaps in or duplication of areas.
- Only one specifically rural organisation was interviewed.
- Lack of consistent core funding, particularly of the CVSs, results in different levels of support available to beneficiaries in different geographical areas.
- Most VCS support organisations garner further core income by running projects and by direct service provision – thus weakening their concentration on support functions to "frontline" VCOs.
- The emergence of other local initiatives, development trusts, etc, is beginning to cloud this picture in parts of Kent.
- **Volunteering** - Vbx play different roles. Some offer a quasi CVS role; some provide volunteers for "frontline" VCOs and some merely recruit volunteers for Vbx services. There needs to be greater consistency in promoting good practice in the management and recruitment of volunteers.

KENT RURAL INFRASTRUCTURE CONSORTIUM

- The two Racial Equality Councils in Kent tend to provide support services to frontline **BME** organisations but mainly in north Kent. There is an ACU “early investment programme” considering a Kent wide support network.
- There is no support structure for **social enterprise** in Kent. The concept of social enterprise is not well understood.
- **Community development** involvement and its support are well developed in Kent but delivery on the ground is related to funding availability.
- **Rural issues** are dealt with by Kent RCC but there is concern that it concentrates its work closest to its base with less emphasis elsewhere.
- Support for **ICT** is inadequate.
- There appears to be support for a central hub for ICT support and some other “**back office functions**” such as personnel and legal functions.
- **Quality issues**, both within VCS support organisations and advice from VCS support organisations, needs to be given greater priority.

50 The preliminary conclusions of the Defra capacity building and infrastructure review interviews include:

- The interview sample was 49 from 58 invited to participate – a mix of generic and specialist VCS and statutory sector organisations. A full list is attached in Appendix 1.
- There is some confusion within the VCS about who delivers what services, where, to whom and with what frequency. How can this be made clearer to the frontline VCOs?
- There are some localised “VCO support” reviews being undertaken (west Kent, Ashford, Dover, Maidstone and Medway) that need to be captured and connections made.
- Any geographical overlaps or gaps appear to be related to availability of funding. There were operational boundary anomalies identified.
- The creation of new administrative structures – particularly Kent Thameside and Ashford as “growth areas” and area strategic partnerships – with their funding programmes will increasingly cut across existing remits and activities.
- Service gaps were identified as including ICT support; personnel support; community building support; BME and traveller support; and, support for social enterprise. There was confusion and lack of clarity over who delivered what in rural Kent with a perception that Kent RCC was strongest around its Folkestone base. Quality of service was questioned with less than 24% of respondents felt it was excellent or worked well. There was some overlap identified between voluntary and statutory advice – particularly on community capacity building and on funding. Some overlap between CVSs and Vbx services perceived.
- There was general support for greater co-ordination and cooperation over future service delivery to VCOs in rural Kent but in a way “to avoid turf wars and a feeding frenzy when a new funding programme is announced”. This should be achieved in a way that, where possible, builds upon the existing provision in a co-ordinated way.
- Funding of “frontline” VCO support short term giving rise to the need to achieve funding for the support organisation itself in addition to service to beneficiaries
- The effect of promotion of volunteering in rural areas was patchy as the effort sometimes exceeded the results. Different methods of rural volunteering have been tried and, in general, “piggybacking” on a community event has brought best results for the effort. Vbx, in general, saw themselves as having a role in information, quality and standards on volunteering. The need for more trustees in rural VCOs emphasises the continued need for effective volunteering outreach.

KENT RURAL INFRASTRUCTURE CONSORTIUM

- Specialist **BME** services in rural Kent were non-existent.
- The concept of **social enterprise** is not widely or fully understood. Support services in rural Kent are non-existent.
- Comments on **community development** centred on the need to improve the quality of leadership in “frontline” VCOs but cost was a factor.
- Lack of provision of support for **community buildings** was identified.
- **Rural.** Parish councils not seen as always accurately reflecting the real needs of the community especially on social inclusion issues. Potential overlap identified on village design statements between Kent AONB Unit and Kent RCC – protocol solution? Specific geographic rural funding for VCO support was rare but where it existed it was time limited with most finishing in March 2005 or 2006. There are several examples of successful, but short-term, rural volunteering projects. Several respondents raised the issue of access to service provision – physical transportation of the service to beneficiaries or beneficiaries to the service or, even, electronic solutions.
- **ICT** was seen as a means of overcoming the isolation of some rural VCOs and communities with the acknowledgement that ICT support needed enhancement.
- Overall **quality of support services** – no respondent felt service quality was excellent, but high perception for volunteering and community development. Rural communities and overall quality of service from infrastructure organisations was judged poorest. A feeling that infrastructure organisations “could do a lot better”.
- Where **forums** existed for networking, disseminating good practice, etc these were mainly at a local (district) level. There is little cross-organisation, or cross-district, networking in rural Kent.
- **Protocols** were felt to be included in service level agreements and these made roles and responsibilities clear – but only between funders and recipients. Protocols between VCOs were rare. There was willingness to enter into further protocols between organisations with no funding relationships.
- There was some sharing of **back office functions**. More sharing was, in principle, welcomed by most respondents – particularly criminal record checks and personnel advice.
- Most **training** was open to non-members and most providers would welcome involvement from a wider pool of providers/specialists to widen the scope of training provision. There was some concern about attendance from outside the provider’s area for funding reasons – re-negotiation of funding agreements?
- Provision of **rural funding** information and advice is a critical element of community capacity building and development. A single portal for the myriad of small (why just small?) grants specific to rural Kent was considered beneficial. But there was much less certainty about administration and appraisal by a single organisation despite that question not being asked. There was much support for help in writing funding bids being provided for the “frontline” VCOs that do not have the experience or skills.
- A variety of methods of **dissemination of good practice** were mentioned but these are specific to individual organisations but not disseminated more widely.
- Very few VCS organisations represent the rural voice on **partnerships and local strategic partnerships** (LSPs). Very few of the VCS organisations responding were represented on rural partnerships or on LSPs. Disappointingly there was a noticeable level of ignorance about LSPs and community strategies within the VCS.
- Suggestions from respondents on **how support services could be improved** included many suggestions around the themes of better partnership working –

KENT RURAL INFRASTRUCTURE CONSORTIUM

particularly between statutory authorities and the VCS; stability and continuity of funding agreements allowing support organisations to concentrate on their job of supporting beneficiaries; more funding; allowances for small rural VCOs to attend networking events; a clearer understanding of what support was available; some specific geographical comments; many detailed comments on the need to improve and coordinate existing services; improvements to the quality of service from support organisations; provision of better "business planning" in the VCS; the need for more effective rural volunteering outreach; and, better use of ICT as one way of overcoming the isolation of some rural VCOs.

- Finally **there were no objections to membership of a Kent Rural Infrastructure Consortium – in principle.**

51 The reports of both the consultants for this Defra review are available from the lead body – Kent RCC whose contact details are shown in paragraph 45.

52 In addition Kent RCC undertook a survey, in conjunction with the KCC Rural Regeneration Team, in autumn 2003 with 170 responses from community groups that included questions on "difficulties in developing community initiatives". Over 34% of the grass roots rural respondents referred to grant and funding difficulties and a further 13% referred to lack of local involvement in community projects.

MAIN SPEND ACTIVITIES

53 In working up "main spend" activities in detail the consortium was aware of the need to work within a wider VCS framework and the opportunities that provided for a more cohesive service; the amount of Defra grant availability; the lack of matching funding identified at this stage; the need to ensure that the activities will make a significant difference by end March 2006; sustainability of the activity after March 2006.

54 Since the last formal meeting of the consortium Kent RCC, as the lead body, met with representatives of Volunteering England and vbx in west Kent. There is considerable interest in west Kent becoming one of only 4 national pilot areas for ICT led local delivery of volunteering using ICT. This link with objective 6, on page 17, needs to be firmed up in the next few weeks.

55 Since the last formal meeting of the consortium Kent RCC, as the lead body, has discussed the implications of the independent Medway review with CVS Medway. The discussions agreed that the additional ICT development and support suggested in the Medway review could feature as a well researched ICT project in the overall VCS support structure recommended to Kent CAN in the following paragraph.

56 The consortium recommends to Kent CAN (the new overarching co-ordinating VCS body in Kent and Medway) that it takes the lead in preparing a Kent and Medway "sub regional Infrastructure Development Plan" for ACU main spend in conjunction with all the main players in the VCS in Kent and Medway. This Infrastructure Development Plan would include:

- A clear **co-ordinated vision** for VCO support services across Kent.
- Achievement of a **stable and sustainable financial future** for VCO support services across Kent.
- **Collaboration** in provision of existing support services – particularly into rural areas.
- **Improved working relationships** via protocols.
- **Communicating and promoting** co-ordinated support services to funders and VCOs.
- **Improved quality** of the co-ordinated support services.
- **Development of new, or improved, co-ordinated VCO support services with stable long term funding including:**
 - Easy access index of VCO support information
 - New BME support unit
 - New social enterprise support unit
 - New ICT support unit
 - New HR support unit
 - New "innovative service delivery" fund – to fund pilot initiatives
 - Improved networking of both generic and specialist community development workers
 - Improved community buildings support
 - Improved quality of VCS support organisations
 - Improved support for achieving quality VCOs
 - Improved portal for Kent funding opportunities
 - Improved support for bid writing by VCOs
 - Improved collaboration on publicity for training opportunities
 - Sharing other back office facilities
 - Increased pool of knowledgeable and effective trustees and community leaders

KENT RURAL INFRASTRUCTURE CONSORTIUM

57 The activity tables below set out the selected activities that the consortium has agreed that are necessary to make a significant difference in the quality and co-ordination of support services to voluntary and community organisations in rural Kent. The activities in italics are those for which application to Defra is being made for funding as the core of this bid.

58 **Action Plan to achieve the framework**

Objective	Actions	Milestones	By Whom	Resources	Timing
1 A clear co-ordinated vision for VCO support services across Kent	Development of embryo vision in paragraphs 16, 17 and 56. Output of Kent wide vision with outcome of co-ordinated VCS support structure in Kent	Vision agreed by end September 2004	Kent CAN	Self funding from Kent CAN. Total £1.5k	July 2004 to September 2004
2 Achievement of a stable and sustainable financial future for VCO support services across Kent	Kent wide initiative upon agreement of vision engaging all LSPs at county, unitary and district level. Output of secure and long term funding for VCS support organisations with outcome of stable support structure concentrating on support services	New long term funding arrangements for VCS support organisations effective April 2006	All VCS representatives on LSPs	Self funding from within VCS Total £6k	From September 2004

59 Action Plan to “do better with existing”

Objective	Actions	Milestones	By Whom	Resources	Timing
3 Collaboration in provision of existing support services – particularly into rural areas.	Achieve agreement of organisations to participate and to dedicate sufficient resource. Identify a “collaboration champion” in each organisation. Output of committed organisations accepting cost implications with outcome of co-ordinated delivery of support services	Agreement of trustees and identification of champion by end March 2005	All partners	£20k total to VCS partners participating to “backfill” senior staff time on a basis yet to be agreed. (Defra £10k)	From September 2004 to end in March 2006
4 Improved working relationships via protocols.	Additional 50% person resource, @ £20k pa, to draft protocols, both voluntary to statutory and voluntary to voluntary, and to broker deals between partners. Output of written protocols adopted by trustees with outcome of improved working relationships between organisations	Additional resource operational starts October 2004. Minimum of 10 protocols agreed by end August 2005	To be decided via Kent CAN	Total £20k (Defra £10k)	From September 2004 to August 2005
5 Communicating and promoting the co-ordinated support services to funders and VCOs.	Combined generic and specialist support publicity leaflets to supersede existing publicity. Output of co-ordinated area publicity and marketing campaign with outcome of 24/7 awareness of support available.	Minimum of 6 area co-ordinated leaflets by end September 2005	To be decided via Kent CAN but Kent wide template to be used locally	Contribution of £250 per area for co-ordinated leaflet. Thereafter VCS self-funding. Total £3k (Defra £1.5k)	From September 2004 to March 2006 and after

60 **Action Plan to improve and develop support services**

Objective	Actions	Milestones	By Whom	Resources	Timing
<i>6 Easy access index of VCO support information</i>	<i>Investigate collaboration with Volunteering England in a west Kent national pilot. Design and implementation of "web based 1 stop shop" for VCO support services with update facility. Output of clear, concise web based index with outcome of easier 24/7 access to VCO support services.</i>	<i>Designed by end December 2004. Implemented by end March 2005.</i>	<i>To be decided via Kent CAN</i>	<i>Start up £17.5k (Defra) Update £12.5k pa Total £30k</i>	<i>From September 2004 to March 2006 and after</i>
7 New BME support unit	Await evaluation of ACU "early investment programme" project now underway	To be decided	NW Kent REC	Total £40k pa	From April 2005 to March 2006 and after
8 New social enterprise support unit	Await outcome of RAISE autumn conference at Gillingham on 23 September 2004	To be decided	To be decided via Kent CAN	Total £40k pa	From April 2005 to March 2006 and after
<i>9 New ICT support unit</i>	<i>Kent wide initiative of single ICT support unit serving whole of Kent perhaps piloted in Medway Output of single support unit with outcome of increased access to support services particularly in rural areas</i>	<i>Unit to commence April 2005</i>	<i>To be decided via Kent CAN</i>	<i>Total £40k pa (Defra £20k)</i>	<i>From April 2005 to March 2006 and after</i>
10 New HR support unit	Kent wide initiative of single HR support unit serving whole of Kent. Output of with outcome of	Unit to commence July 2005	To be decided via Kent CAN	Total £20k pa	From July 2005 to March 2006 and after

KENT RURAL INFRASTRUCTURE CONSORTIUM

Objective	Actions	Milestones	By Whom	Resources	Timing
11 Sharing other back office facilities.	Investigation of need and production of delivery plan. Output of delivery plan with outcome of greater specialisation of services	Delivery plan by end March 2006	To be decided via Kent CAN	Total £5k pa	From September 2004 to March 2006
12 New "rural innovative service delivery" fund.	<i>Develop fund criteria, application and decision process, and obtain funding. Output of fund with outcome of innovative pilot delivery methods of VCO support in rural communities in Defra indicator districts in east Kent</i>	<i>Fund operational in April 2005</i>	<i>To be decided by KRIC</i>	<i>Total £25k (Defra £10k)</i>	<i>From April 2005 to March 2006</i>
13 Improved community buildings support.	<i>Improve Kent RCC's existing service. Output of increased and better publicised service with outcome of better managed and used community buildings</i>	<i>Increased publicity by end September 2004. Increased service from April 2005</i>	<i>Kent RCC</i>	<i>Publicity £1k. Total £20k pa (Defra £6k)</i>	<i>From September 2004 to March 2006 and after</i>
14 Improved quality of co-ordinated support services	Additional 100% person resource to help VCS support organisations to achieve agreed quality standard. Output of quality assured VCS support organisations with outcome of quality service delivery	New resource operational in January 2005	To be decided via Kent CAN. Potential from vbx network	Total cost £40k pa	From January 2005 to end in March 2006
15 Improved support for achieving quality VCOs.	Kent wide co-ordinated initiative. Output of co-ordinated support service with outcome of better quality frontline VCOs	Co-ordinated service available from April 2005	To be decided via Kent CAN	Total £40k pa	From April 2005 to March 2006 and after

KENT RURAL INFRASTRUCTURE CONSORTIUM

Objective	Actions	Milestones	By Whom	Resources	Timing
16 Improved portal for Kent funding opportunities.	Build upon existing KCC Rural Revival website or similar. Output of comprehensive website for Kent grants with outcome of better accessibility of information	Site fully updated by December 2004	All partners and KCC Rural Regen Team	Total £5k pa	From September 2004 to March 2006 and after
17 Improved support for bid writing by VCOs.	Co-ordination of existing service across Kent, identification of gaps and gap filling. Output of comprehensive service with outcome of better access to funding by "frontline" VCOs	Gaps identified and plan for gap filling by end March 2005.	To be decided via Kent CAN	Total £40k pa	From April 2005 to March 2006 and after
18 Improved collaboration on publicity for training opportunities.	Integral part of objective 3 on collaboration. Output of co-ordinated and comprehensive training programme with outcome of more effective organisations, trustees and staff	Fully operational in April 2005	To be decided via Kent CAN	Total £1km pa	From September 2004 to March 2006 and after.
19 Increased pool of knowledgeable and effective trustees and community leaders.	Training programme to make trustees more effective. Recruitment of potential community leaders and "up skilling" recruits. Outputs of comprehensive trustee training package and recruitment programme with outcomes of more effective trustees and more community leaders	Training package agreed by April 2005. 100 community leaders recruited by March 2006	To be decided via Kent CAN	Total £10k pa	From April 2005 to March 2006 and after
20 Evaluation of vision implementation	External evaluation exercise. Output of external evaluation with outcome of long term sustainable vision	Evaluation complete by end September 2004	To be decided via Kent CAN	Total £5k	From July 2005 to September 2005

KENT RURAL INFRASTRUCTURE CONSORTIUM

FINANCE AND SUPPORT

61 The estimated cost of the total programme of activities is set out in Appendix 3. This includes anticipated sources of additional funding.

62 Evidence of support from local authorities, LSPs and other partners will not be sought until the vision for the VCS across Kent as a whole has been agreed by the end of September. This vision will be a main item at Kent CAN's annual meeting on 16 September 2004 at Buckmore Park.

63 Thus there has been no attempt to confirm with existing funding partners that there will be no funding substitution. This confirmation will be sought as part of the process described in the paragraph below.

64 Relationships with statutory and public funding providers will be developed over the period from September 2004 in line with objective 2 on sustainable funding on page 16 which is part of a wider vision for the VCS support network in Kent and Medway as a whole to be agreed by September 2004 led by Kent CAN.

65 The consortium has recognised the need to widen its agreed rural vision (paragraphs 16 and 17) into a Kent and Medway VCS support vision. This wider vision of the consortium, contained in paragraphs 58, 59 and 60, is recommended to Kent CAN to develop. Its implementation will need to be in conjunction with funding partners and in steps over a period of time as opportunities allow.

66 The consortium's rural vision is consistent with all the aims and objectives of the Kent Compact recently agreed between Kent CAN and the County Council. The Kent Compact is available at www.kent.gov.uk/compact/aims The rural vision has been tested against the latest district compact to be launched – the Ashford Compact – as a sample district compact basis. The rural vision complies with the Ashford compact principles. Copy is available from Kent RCC as the consortium lead body.

67 The consortium has recognised the need to mesh with other strategic initiatives in the VCS in Kent and Medway. The consortium is directly linked into Kent CAN through joint memberships. Kent CAN has the task of co-ordinating the VCS in Kent and Medway as well as delivering two ACU early investment programmes. The consortium is also a partner in the west Kent volunteering initiative that is responding to Volunteering England's new strategy.

ENGAGEMENT WITH SPECIALIST BODIES

68 Appendix 1 provides clear evidence of widespread contact with specialist bodies including BME, disabilities and youth – including children.

69 The consortium acknowledges that, in the fullness of time, it needs to engage specifically with representatives of both children's and social enterprise support networks. The later will be difficult as there is not such a network in Kent to date but the RAISE September 2004 conference will be helpful in developing that network. (Refer to objective 8 on page 17)

EVALUATION OF CONSORTIUM ACTIVITIES

70 The approach to securing sustainability for the overall plan beyond March 2006, in part, will depend upon the usefulness of the concept to potential funders which can only be tested from September 2004 when there is an agreed vision and programme of activity that can be considered by statutory and other partners. In part sustainability also will depend upon increased enterprise of the VCS support organisations in increasing fees and charges to frontline VCOs.

71 The consortium has budgeted for an evaluation in 2005 in order to use the evaluation report to influence funders, and potential funders, in the budget round for funding in the year commencing April 2006. The evaluation report will be available to funders and will be in the public domain.

SHARING THE LESSONS ACROSS KENT, THE SOUTH EAST AND ENGLAND

72 The consortium will participate in best practice exchanges with similar consortia within Kent, the south east region and England. The consortium acknowledges that it has much to learn from these exchanges.

**APPENDIX 1
ORGANISATIONS CONTACTED AND INTEREST SHOWN**

In the period from late February to early July 2004 Kent RCC, as the lead body, held a total of 4 consultative meetings with wide invitations to all meetings, held one to one discussions, used other networking meetings (such as Kent CAN, Kent CsVS and Kent Volunteer Bureaux managers) and telephone interviews to promote the concept and elucidate views.

The following is a list of those involved in the above process:

Attended meetings:

Voluntary Sector: Ashford and District Vb; Ashford YMCA; Church in Society; East Kent CVS; Groundwork Medway Swale; Herne Bay Vb; Kent Assn for Disabled People; Kent Assn of Parish Councils; Kent CAN; Kent Community Foundation; Kent County Playing Fields Assn; Kent Council for Vol Youth Services; Kent Downs AONB Unit; Kent Farmline; Kent RCC; Kent Rural Towns Group; Kent Wildlife Trust; Maidstone Vb; Malling Area Vb; Mid and SE Kent CVS; Shepway Vb; West Kent CVS; and, West Kent Fed of Wis.

Statutory and Quasi Statutory: Ashford BC; Business Link Kent; GOSE Rural Team; KCC Rural Regeneration Team; Maidstone BC; Medway Council; Mid Kent LEADER+ Partnership; and, Shepway DC.

Telephone interviews:

Voluntary Sector: Age Concern (Elham Rural); Ashford Vb; BTCV (Kent); Canterbury Vb; Church in Society; Dartford Vb; East Kent CVS; Gravesham Vb; Groundwork Kent Thameside; Groundwork Medway Swale; Herne Bay Vb; Island Partnership; Kent Assn for the Blind; Kent Assn for Disabled People; Kent Community Foundation; Kent Fed of Young Farmers' Clubs; Kent RCC; Maidstone Vb; Malling Area Vb; Medway CVS; North West Kent CVS; Sevenoaks District Vb; Shepway Vb; Stour Valley Countryside Project; Swale Volunteering and Community Development Centre; Swanley District Vb; Thanet Vb; Tonbridge Area Vb; West Kent CVS; West Kent Fed of WIs; and, Whitstable Vb.

Statutory and Quasi Statutory: Ashford BC; Ashford PCT; Business Link Kent; Dover DC; KCC Rural Regeneration Team; Kent and Medway LSC; Medway Council (Rural Strategy Manager); Mid Kent LEADER+ Partnership; Sevenoaks DC; Shepway DC; Swale BC; and, Tunbridge Wells BC.

APPENDIX 2
CONSORTIUM MEMBERSHIP

Letters of support have been received from:

- Ashford Borough Council
- Ashford Primary Care Trust
- BTCV (Kent)
- Church in Society
- KCC Rural Regeneration Team
- Kent Association of Parish Councils
- Kent Farmline
- Kent Rural Community Council
- Maidstone Volunteer Bureau
- Medway Council
- Mid and South East Kent CVS
- North West Kent Racial Equality Council
- Shepway Primary Care Trust
- Shepway Volunteer Centre
- Swale Volunteering and Community Development Centre
- West Kent CVS
- Whitstable Volunteer Centre

These are enclosed.

Letters of support have been promised by the following organisations but had not been received by submission date:

- Kent Association for Disabled People
- Kent Community Foundation
- Kent Council for Voluntary Youth Service
- Kent Downs AONB Partnership
- Malling Area Volunteer Bureau
- CVS Medway

KENT RURAL INFRASTRUCTURE CONSORTIUM

**APPENDIX 3
BUDGET FOR DEFRA MAIN SPEND ACTIVITIES**

Action plan to achieve the framework

Objective	Other anticipated funding sources	Defra funding			Total Cost
		04/05	05/06	Total	
1 Vision	Kent CAN volunteer time				1,500
2 Sustainable funding	Kent VCS paid + volunteer time				6,000
TOTAL					7,500

Action Plan to "do better with existing"

Objective	Other anticipated funding sources	Defra funding			Total Cost
		04/05	05/06	Total	
3 Collaboration	ACU Modernising Infrastructure	3,000	7,000	10,000	20,000
4 Protocols	ACU Modernising Infrastructure	5,000		5,000	20,000
5 Communicating	ACU Modernising Infrastructure	750	750	1,500	3,000
TOTAL		8,750	7,750	16,500	43,000

Objective	Other anticipated funding sources	Defra funding			Total Cost
		04/05	05/06	Total	
6 Easy access index	ACU Modernising Infrastructure	17,500		17,500	30,000
7 BME support	ACU Quality and Reach				40,000
8 Social Enterprise	ACU Quality and Reach Business Link Kent				40,000
9 ICT	ACU Quality and Reach		20,000	20,000	40,000
10 HR	ACU Quality and Reach				15,000
11 Back office	ACU Modernising Infrastructure				7,500
12 Rural Delivery fund	ACU Quality and Reach		5,000	5,000	25,000
13 Community halls	Local Authorities ACU Quality and Reach	1,000	5,000	6,000	21,000
14 Quality support	Existing VCS (Vbx?) resources				50,000
15 Quality VCOs	ACU Quality and Reach				40,000
16 Funding portal	Existing KCC Rural Revival				7,500
17 Biding support	Existing Local Authorities				40,000
18 Training publicity	Existing VCS resources				1,500
19 Increasing trustees and leaders	KCC ACU Quality and Reach				10,000
20 Evaluation	ACU Modernising Infrastructure				5,000
TOTAL		18,500	35,000	53,500	372,500

GRAND TOTAL		27,250	42,750	70,000	423,000
-------------	--	--------	--------	--------	---------

kric main spend bid v11