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Buckinghamshire

Voluntary And Community Sector

Infrastructure Development Plan

Final Draft March 2006

This updates the BIG Business Plan April 2004, which was the first Infrastructure Development Plan for Buckinghamshire

Prepared by

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On behalf of the

ChangeUp County Consortium for Buckinghamshire

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Submitted by Aylesbury Vale Racial Equality Council on behalf of the
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1. FOREWORD: WHAT IS THIS PLAN?

This plan sets out the support needs of Buckinghamshire Voluntary and Community Organisations (VCOs) and how these can be better provided by the County's Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) infrastructure organisations. The County VCS Infrastructure organisations work together in a consortium – the Buckinghamshire Infrastructure Group (BIG).

The plan has been developed under the guidance of the Buckinghamshire ChangeUp Consortium, which is comprised of representatives from all parts of the VCS and the County's local authorities.

It represents a significant step in comprehending the breadth and depth of VCOs in the County and the support services they need in order to improve the services they all offer to the communities they in turn exist to serve.

Its production has enabled a significant increase in partnership working between all members of the Consortium which itself offers the potential for a more vibrant and cohesive VCS in the County.

This plan has been produced as part of the Government's ChangeUp project whereby all areas of the country are looking strategically at how to best support the frontline VCOs. The plans produced will identify areas for improvement but will also show the true costs involved in delivering the support services.

Buckinghamshire was the first county to develop such a plan. It did this as part of an early spend project that paved the way for ChangeUp. The BIG Business Plan 2003 was effective in bringing the infrastructure organisations together to produce a coherent plan for developing infrastructure across the county. However there were no funds to implement the recommendations. The lesson learned is that plans are impotent unless accompanied by resources to put them into practice.

Hence this new plan clearly identifies realistic actions that are needed for its execution, which should be fundable within the future ChangeUp programme. It also highlights the substantial overall funding challenge faced by the members of BIG and proposes a mechanism to address this in the years ahead.

Current support services to the frontline VCOs in the County are highly rated as delivering excellent value for money, even though they do not cover all areas of need and are under-resourced.

The plan has strong links to Buckinghamshire Local Area Agreements, the County Community Strategy and the Rural Social and Community Plan – see *Appendices XVII and XVIII*.

The plan describes the support, help and advice that frontline VCOs in Buckinghamshire need, and an agreed model for how this can be most effectively delivered. *See blue pages.*

It also incorporates specific support needs expressed by other communities.

- Rural – *see green pages.*
- Faith, Black and Minority Ethnic, Traveller and Refugee/Asylum Seeker communities – *see lilac pages.*

There were significant sub-projects covering the above communities. These have their own self-contained outputs as above, but are also being integrated into the main plan.

The sub projects are:

- The rural growth agenda in North Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes.
- The Additional Support Programme.

The plan is being developed with the inputs and feedback from:

- Representatives from communities themselves.
- Frontline VCOs who use the services.
- Infrastructure organisations that provide the services.
- Statutory agencies who part-fund some of the services.
- Other partners who wish help voluntary and community organisations in Buckinghamshire.

The target audience is expected to be:

- Key ChangeUp stakeholders – including Capacity Builders, the Hubs, Regional consortium, GOSE and local statutory agencies – who will use it to see where they can assist in the capacity building of the voluntary sector in Buckinghamshire.
- Infrastructure service providers – who will use it as a working document to implement and improve their service delivery.

A shorter version will be provided for frontline organisations and other local partners to promote the work of ChangeUp as it unfolds within Buckinghamshire.

2. OBJECTIVE OF THE DEVELOPMENT PLAN

- To specify what Buckinghamshire needs in order for its Voluntary and Community groups to be properly supported. This is to be based upon a shared understanding of the support needs which has the engagement of all partners. Output from the rural growth agenda project and additional support programme are being integrated into this work.
- To describe the support, help and advice that frontline organisations in Buckinghamshire need and identify a cost efficient model.
- To set out how the support needs will be implemented, including budget provision.

The Opportunity

Buckinghamshire has a wealth of VCOs, many offering excellent services. Volunteers contribute greatly to the support of community life and they are drawn from all sectors of society. See *Appendix V*. The voluntary sector includes a wide range of organisations ranging from those with many employed staff and financial turnovers of hundreds of thousands of pounds who have well-established systems and access to resources, through to groups comprising a handful of volunteers and a budget of less than £100. Their impact on society is also very varied: they engage with large scale environmental projects, supporting schools, police and health care services; they provide specialist self help and expert advice and support; they run community events, sports, culture and arts projects; they also provide localized resident support and activism.

This diverse array of organisations needs support to enable them to flourish. This is our opportunity to get the support right so that they can thrive.

They are supported by an infrastructure of which BIG comprises the major elements in Buckinghamshire.

There is a complex history behind the evolution of the current BIG component organisations. All the organisations are proud of their past achievements and reluctant to make changes which could jeopardize their unique qualities. However, they also recognize the importance of co-operation and collaboration in securing the best future for the whole voluntary and community sector.

There is also the opportunity for increased joint working with public sector partners. As the public sector is increasingly developing community focused services and improved customer access arrangements, there will be opportunities for joint working and shared resources, which could lead to efficiencies for the voluntary sector.

The prize is significant. It is the achievement of a wider and deeper VCS, supported by a consortium of infrastructure service providers delivering outstanding value for money effectively, efficiently and seamlessly.

3. INFRASTRUCTURE SERVICES NEEDED IN BUCKINGHAMSHIRE

Based upon the support needs agreed by the Partnership Group in April 2005, and the priorities set out in the BIG Business Plan of May 2004, a survey was compiled by the ChangeUp action group.

The survey was launched and given to all attendees at the May 2005 Buckinghamshire Strategic Partnership Conference on Building a Fit for Purpose Voluntary Sector. It was then mailed to all VCOs on the databases of the infrastructure organisations and the local authorities. Results can be seen at *Appendix X*.

The ChangeUp consortium based upon the workshops and surveys consultation described has agreed the following principles, objectives and list of needed services.

3.1 Principles

The following principles are a fundamental requirement if the support of VCOs in the county is to be effective:

1. **Independence** - recognising that voluntary sector organisations are independent organisations that determine their own futures;
2. **Needs led** - encouraging infrastructure bodies to link the development of their activities to clear evidence of need;
3. **Collaborative** - facilitating and promoting collaborative relationships between the voluntary and community sector, government and other key stakeholders;
4. **Outcome-focused** - encouraging infrastructure organisations to deliver outcomes report on their impact and demonstrate their achievements;
5. **Sustainable** - helping to create sustainable organisations and infrastructure capable of addressing the complex social issues that require public action;
6. **Delivered close to the point of need** - enabling services and activities to be delivered as close to the point of need as is economically viable and consistent with achieving quality;
7. **Diverse** - encouraging infrastructure bodies to respect, involve and meet the needs of the diversity of individuals and communities in England;
8. **Excellence** - enabling and encouraging frontline organisations to strive for excellence in all that they do, even if that sometimes means making fewer commitments;

9. Efficient - enabling and encouraging greater efficiency in frontline organisations' work and their relationships with government;

10. Accountable - enabling and encouraging frontline organisations to become more accountable and more responsive to their stakeholders;

11. Leadership and Representation - Infrastructure bodies should represent and offer support and development opportunities to front line organisations. This includes representing and lobbying at regional and national levels;

12. Full Cost Recovery¹ - enable organisations to understand and respond to the national move towards full cost recovery.

3.2 Vision and Aims

The shared county vision is of strong and cohesive local communities, built through the active participation and involvement of local people. At the heart of these communities will be vibrant and sustainable voluntary and community organisations delivering their mission effectively for the benefit of their communities.

The aim of voluntary and community sector infrastructure is to support the development of effective frontline VCOs, which are successful in this role.

3.3 Objectives

- A sustainable infrastructure function that delivers support and services to meet the needs of frontline voluntary and community organisations whilst delivering value for money.
- A minimum standard of service available to all voluntary and community organisations in Buckinghamshire, regardless of location.
- Targeted support provided to priority communities – both geographical and/or of interest – based on clear evidence of need.
- Diversification of income sources.

¹ This is defined as per the ACEVO model as "securing funding for - or recovering - all your costs, including the direct costs of projects and all your overheads. If you recover the full costs of a project, you get all the direct costs of that project, plus the relevant slice of the organisation's overheads so that there is no subsidy required in its delivery." Full Cost Recovery: A Guide and toolkit on cost allocation. ACEVO 2004
Buckinghamshire IDP March 2006 – main text

3.4 List of the agreed services

The VCOs have identified and endorsed the following services that they require: (see *Appendix X* for survey results.)

1. **Support and Development** - to provide frontline organisations with access to the knowledge and skills they need, either through direct delivery or through signposting.

a. *Information and advice service to voluntary and community organisations across the county:*

- Funding advice service;
- Financial Management service for smaller front line VCOs;
- Premises management;
- Governance/Management of organisation;
- Human Resources and workforce development;
- Performance Management and Improvement;
- Quality assurance;
- Project management – including marketing, promotion etc;
- Strategic planning – understanding needs of clients, developing vision and direction;
- Start-up help for new organisations;
- Community development;
- Information on national and local policy initiatives;
- Legal requirements;
- Improved communications systems.

b. *Training & Development – Boards, staff, volunteers*

- Encourage the take-up of training and learning opportunities across the sector;
- Undertake regular analysis of the training needs of the sector to identify priorities;
- Establish a structured programme for the delivery of training and development opportunities;
- Facilitate mentoring (especially for lone workers) and skill sharing;
- Encourage innovation and creativity;
- Accredited courses;
- Modular and short courses;
- Local provision of training.

c. *Volunteering*

- Brokerage;
- Marketing volunteering;
- Good practice development;

- Developing volunteering opportunities;
- Policy response and campaigning;
- Strategic development of volunteering;
- Volunteer Centres with volunteer points distributed across the county;
- Employer Supported Volunteering.

d. Office Services

e. ICT development

Mode of delivery should include telephone, email, website, surgery sessions, outreach sessions, casework, newsletters and workshops.

2. Co-ordination

- Signposting/facilitating/ brokerage;
- Front-line organisation forums, promoting networking and knowledge sharing;
- Encourage collaboration and partnerships
 - To gain access to funding opportunities;
 - To maximise resources;
 - To avoid duplication and repetition;
 - To recognise gaps and fill them.

3. Representation

- One voice
 - Represent the interests of the sector in partnerships and networks;
 - Engage with policy makers, service planners and funders on behalf of the local VCS;
- Act as a communication hub to ensure effective channels of communication between national, regional and local bodies and the voluntary and community sector;
 - Manage VCS consultative networks;
 - Undertake regular consultation with the VCS to identify needs, gather feedback etc;
 - Provide information and knowledge to the sector;
- Provide a source of information on the sector – maintain a database of VCS.

4. Promotion

- VCS capability and value is given a higher profile;
- Newsletter – good news stories — The major contribution of the VCS to local society - Why other agencies should support local VCOs;
- Promote national/regional campaigns to front-line.

3.5 Priorities for service delivery

According to the survey of frontline VCOs (see *Appendix X*) the services they found most important were:

1. Funding information and advice;
2. Volunteer recruitment;
3. Volunteer training;

When their responses for most useful as well as most important were added they also prioritized:

4. Networking;
5. Community Development;
6. Representation.

3.6 Levels of Service

- Infrastructure services should be available and accessible to all voluntary and community sector organisations across the county, although the support needs of different organisations will vary.
- Service delivery needs to be located to take into account that 70% of VCOs operate at district level and below (see ChangeUp reports).
- Targeted support should be directed at those communities where voluntary and community activity is underdeveloped- such as black and minority ethnic communities, inequalities groups, and areas of relative deprivation - to encourage more mainstream group participation in and inclusion by sustainable activity.
- Representation must include lobbying at regional and national levels.

3.7 Standards of Service Delivery

It was also agreed that infrastructure services should meet relevant quality standards. When the new quality standards framework for infrastructure is developed under the national ChangeUp programme, it will be the standard adopted by infrastructure delivery groups in Buckinghamshire. In the interim the following standards will be attained:

- PQASSO minimum level 2 for all organisations;
- Volunteering England Quality Accreditation for Volunteer Centres;
- ACRE Quality Standards for Rural Community Councils;
- VISIBLE for Community Matters;

- The Commission for Racial Equality Assurance for Racial Equality Councils.

4. CURRENT INFRASTRUCTURE PROVISION

4.1 Infrastructure Organisations in Buckinghamshire

There are currently 8 organisations in Buckinghamshire whose primary function is infrastructure service delivery to the Voluntary and Community Sector. They meet regularly as members of BIG.

Name	Geographical area covered	Type of infrastructure organisation
Buckinghamshire Community Action	Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes	Rural Community Council
Buckinghamshire Forum of Faiths	Buckinghamshire	Faith Forum
Community Matters Bucks	Buckinghamshire	Federation of Community Associations
The Priory Centre	Wycombe district	Council for Voluntary Service
Youth Focus	Buckinghamshire	Council for Voluntary Youth Service
Vale Volunteers	Aylesbury district	Volunteer Centre and Council for Voluntary Service
Voluntary Action (Chiltern & South Bucks)	Chiltern and South Bucks districts	Volunteer Centre and Council for Voluntary Service
Volunteer Focus	Wycombe district	Volunteer Centre

In addition to the above, the Racial Equality Councils (RECs) are also members of Buckinghamshire Infrastructure Group.

There is an ongoing debate about whether RECs are infrastructure bodies. It is acknowledged in Buckinghamshire that infrastructure delivery is not the primary focus of the RECs. However, as there is no other BME-led organisation for whom it is a primary focus, the RECs are an important player representing the interests of the BME voluntary and community sector. They have actively engaged with the ChangeUp process through the Additional Support Programme.

Name	Geographical area covered	Type of infrastructure organisation
Aylesbury Vale Racial Equality Council – representing all RECs in the county	Aylesbury Vale, Wycombe and Chiltern districts	Racial Equality Council

The infrastructure organisations work together in BIG under a signed Partnership Agreement. See BIG terms of reference at *Appendix VII*.

The BIG 2004 Business Plan noted certain difficulties, which still apply:

- Future funding of most BIG organisations is far from secure. Several Community Fund grants have ceased or are about to cease. Delays in

announcements of BIG Lottery Infrastructure grants led to gaps in continuity of service. Local Authority funding is inconsistent for historical reasons and through differing approaches by the Districts.

- Most organisations are smaller than ideal. It is difficult for organisations with staff of between 1 and 3 full-time equivalents to meet fully the needs of their members as well as playing an active role in the wider engagement of all stakeholders, funders, and other BIG members. The effort in seeking future funding from a variety of sources in order to maintain their core activities into the future tends to weigh disproportionately on smaller organisations. However, trustees and other volunteers meet some of the shortfall in resources.
- Filling the gaps to meet the full current and future needs of VCOs cannot be achieved without both additional funding and resource sharing.

4.2 Service Provision

Services across these nine organisations have been developed through historical need based on a combination of:

- Guidance from their national network and national bodies
- Local need and demand from their beneficiaries
- Resource constraints

This has resulted in a high quality service provision. However it is:

- A provision with some significant gaps in the type and spread of available services
- Lacking in a strategic view across the county, although BIG is starting to develop such a view
- Limited opportunities for developing more cost effective operations.

See *Appendix XI* for a list of the key infrastructure services that each organisation provides.

4.3 Other infrastructure provision in Buckinghamshire

It is recognised that there are other sources of infrastructure support to VCOs in Buckinghamshire that are extremely valuable:

- Specialist VCOs- some of whom provide infrastructure support alongside their frontline service delivery. E.g. Age Concern.
- National VCO umbrella agencies – e.g. National Association of Citizens Advice Bureau provide significant support to individual CABs;

- Peer provision of support services amongst frontline VCOs. The infrastructure agencies often act as a catalyst for this. For example through the ChangeUp networking pilot project it has been established that Buckinghamshire Association for the Blind will carry out Criminal Record Bureau checks for volunteers of other voluntary organisations for a nominal charge;
- Statutory sector provides advice and support to frontline VCOs e.g. on funding sources.

4.4 Services currently being provided.

Services currently being provided by each infrastructure organisation are listed at *Appendix XI*.

Collectively they include service provision in all the categories specified under 3.4 the list of agreed services. However in almost all cases these services are not available to all communities across the county. See *section 4.6 Gaps in infrastructure provision*.

4.5 Duplication in Current Infrastructure Service Provision

Though significant gaps have been identified in the service provision, the principal duplication that currently exists is that of **advice on constitutions and business planning**. In addition to each Council for Voluntary Service providing this for their specified districts, Buckinghamshire Community Action also provides this as part of their funding advice service across the county. There is also a risk that the advice given might not be consistent across the organisations. It was agreed by the staff of BIG members that this would be streamlined by producing a shared information pack and protocol for new and developing VCOs including models of constitutions etc.

The other area in which duplication has occurred up until ChangeUp has been in the information provided in **newsletters**. Most BIG members produced their own newsletter and countywide information was duplicated in each. A ChangeUp pilot project is addressing this by producing an integrated newsletter containing all information of general interest to VCOs in Buckinghamshire. Some BIG members still produce their own newsletter but with specialist and local information only.

Possible duplication with other providers e.g. statutory agencies who have funding advice officers and community development workers, has not been assessed fully. It is suggested that this is reviewed under the next phase of the IDP when areas of greater collaborative working with statutory agencies including support in kind and secondments could be considered.

4.6 Gaps in current infrastructure service provision

The following significant gaps in service provision were highlighted at the following consultation events:

- The Strengths/Weaknesses/Opportunities/Threats (SWOT) analysis at the Partnership Group Workshop in April 2004.
- The networking events for staff of infrastructure agencies held in July 2005 and January 2006.
- ChangeUp consortium away day. March 2006.

Full reports of each are available from the County Consortium.

- Individual feedback received during the consultation on the draft IDP has also been added.

They have been grouped under the six main themes for ChangeUp:

PERFORMANCE IMPROVEMENT		
ISSUE	GAP	ACTION NEEDED
1. PREMISES	Premises from which to offer services e.g. office support, meeting space, resource room etc, are inadequate across the county. Large areas such as South Bucks district and the north of Aylesbury Vale do not have any premises for infrastructure service delivery so lack a focal meeting point for local VCOs to access services or to network etc. The premises, which do exist, are not DDA compliant.	DDA compliant premises in locations across the county to form local Voluntary Sector "Hubs" or "One Stop Shops". To be addressed through the development of a single access point strategy. Action plan 1.2.
2. RACIAL EQUALITY	There is no Racial Equality Council serving South Bucks District	For one of the existing RECs to be resourced and agree to expand their coverage to include South Bucks. – see recommendations of Additional Support Programme (lilac pages)
3. BME COMMUNITY SUPPORT	Networks around the Equalities agenda are currently underdeveloped; there is insufficient support for BME communities. A project funded by the Big Lottery has just begun in Wycombe district, which might provide ideas for countywide initiatives.	To develop effective networks around the Equalities agenda, identify ways of increasing support to BME communities and resource this. – see ASP and its recommendations (lilac pages)

4. GEOGRAPHICAL COVERAGE	Services are not delivered comprehensively across all locations and so access to them is not equitable.	Address this through the joint local authority tender specification for locally delivered infrastructure services across Buckinghamshire, plus the development of the single access point strategy. Action plan 1.2
5. COMMUNITY TRANSPORT	Patchy availability of community transport across the county	Development and co-ordination of existing community transport schemes within each district while keeping their local identity. This coupled with additional funding would have the potential of addressing many aspects of social exclusion.
ICT		
ISSUE	GAP	ACTION NEEDED
6. COUNTYWIDE DATABASE	The lack of a single countywide database of frontline VCOs makes delivery of infrastructure services difficult. In particular, this leads to duplication of work when mail-outs are carried out by all infrastructure organisation on county-wide issues, e.g. Compact or integrated newsletter. Experimentation with developing a countywide database for mailing of the integrated newsletter has highlighted the value of a database.	BCA database to be further developed for use by all BIG members for countywide communication with frontline VCOs. All BIG members to have remote access and training on updating and retrieving info. Data protection exercise to be carried out annually. Action plan 1.3
FINANCING		
ISSUE	GAP	ACTION NEEDED
7. SOCIAL ENTERPRISE	Support and development of Social enterprise within the voluntary sector is embryonic. Links with the Buckinghamshire Social enterprise network are not formalized and there is currently no expertise within the voluntary sector infrastructure to train and support frontline VCOs in becoming social enterprises	Delegated members of the ChangeUp Consortium to meet with the Social Enterprise Steering Group to produce an action plan for taking this forward. Key people within VCS infrastructure organisations to be trained as social enterprise advisors – see workforce development. Action plan 1.11

VOLUNTEERING		
ISSUE	GAP	ACTION NEEDED
8. Incomplete reach of the volunteer centres throughout the county	This is due to insufficient time and resources at each volunteer center. Until January 2005 there were 4 volunteer centres in Buckinghamshire. This reduced to 3 due to cuts in funding. All 3 centres process a high number of volunteer enquiries. However their reach is not fully extended throughout the county so there are unmet volunteering needs and opportunities.	To increase the hours of work of the volunteer centres to a minimum of a full time manager and full time administrator for each. Action plan. Action plan 1.14
9. Employer supported volunteering	While each volunteer centre supports local employers in helping their employees to volunteer, they are only able to do so in a very limited way. It would be very beneficial to the local voluntary sector to mobilize this pool of untapped volunteers. The Local Strategic Partnerships and Community Plans endorse this.	A dedicated employer supported volunteering project across the county. Action plan 1.15
10. Support to enable people with additional support needs to volunteer	There is currently no supported volunteering project amongst the Volunteer Centres in Buckinghamshire. Each placement of a volunteer with support needs takes considerable time to set up, but the rewards for the individual and the organisation receiving them are great.	Supported volunteering projects as part of each of the volunteer centres in Buckinghamshire. Action plan 1.16
11. The demographics of those who volunteer does not reflect the demographics of the population of Buckinghamshire.	There are communities who are under-represented in local volunteering.	Volunteering outreach projects to promote volunteering amongst under-represented groups and work with frontline VCOs to breakdown the barriers to volunteering. Action plan 1.17
GOVERNANCE		
ISSUE	GAP	ACTION NEEDED
12. Recruitment and training of trustees	Frontline organisations report a difficulty in recruiting and training trustees yet they rarely register their trustee openings with the volunteer centres. The gaps in trustee boards and the lack of skills amongst some existing trustees impede the governance of the local voluntary and community sector.	Campaign of targeted trustee recruitment. Provision of trustee skills updating and targeted marketing of this. Action plan 1.18

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT		
ISSUE	GAP	ACTION NEEDED
13. SOCIAL ENTERPRISE ADVISORS	There is currently no expertise within the voluntary sector infrastructure to train and support frontline VCOs in becoming social enterprises	Key people within VCS infrastructure organisations to be trained as social enterprise advisors. Action plan 1.11
TRAINING	While there is significant one off training available in Buckinghamshire there still lacks a strategic plan for workforce development through training for the voluntary sector. Training of volunteers scored second out of 22 support needs articulated by frontline voluntary organisations	Continue to engage the Learning and Skills Council in funding the strategic development of training for the voluntary sector in Buckinghamshire, through development of the learning network, and securing funds for accredited training for volunteers. Action plan 1.16

5. RURAL NEEDS - INSIGHTS FROM THE CHANGEUP RURAL PROJECT

5.1 Background

This project brought together ChangeUp and the Growth Agenda, aiming to better understand the impact of the Milton Keynes Growth Agenda on rural communities and use this as a focus for identifying and understanding key needs and concerns for rural communities in the study area. The project was managed by a group of key stakeholders, including Buckinghamshire Community Action and MKCVO.

5.2 Current infrastructure support for rural communities

The current pattern of support organisations for the voluntary and community sector in Buckinghamshire is complex and changing. There are limited resources available for rural support in the county and currently rural delivery is patchy and shows a significant lack of integration. There is a Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Rural Strategy but the issue of infrastructure provision to the voluntary and community sector does not figure strongly within this document. This challenging context is made more difficult due to the limited capacity of infrastructure organisations across the county and the fact that infrastructure provision has not been guided by a clear strategy or integrated approach.

The organisations providing infrastructure support for rural communities in North Buckinghamshire are Buckinghamshire Community Action, Buckinghamshire Forum of Faiths, Community Matters Bucks, Youth Focus and Vale Volunteers.

Whilst effective work is currently being undertaken, there are clear gaps and weaknesses in the delivery of infrastructure support for rural communities. Although there is developed expertise and experience in the understanding of rural issues and the delivery of support to rural communities, this tends to be concentrated in a small number of organisations. With the currently limited level of joint planning and integration of support service delivery to rural communities, this means that the most effective use is not being made of the available resources.

5.3 Issues of concern

During the course of the research, the following were identified as issues of concern regarding the project:

The study area of North Buckinghamshire and rural Milton Keynes was too limited and it may be difficult to apply the findings to the wider county.

There is a very clear division between those communities where Milton Keynes growth is an issue of primary importance and those communities where it is a much less important issue.

Research coincided with very high levels of concern and anxiety in some rural communities around the issue of Milton Keynes development.

5.4 Research on infrastructure support needs of rural communities

In order to ensure the broadest level of engagement and to promote inclusion in the work, a range of research methodologies was used. In addition to desk research, focusing on previous work undertaken in this area, the following were utilised: survey, interviews, focus groups, workshops and events

5.5 Key findings from survey

- 39% of organisations had sought no advice or support during the past year.
- 22% do not attend any network, partnership or forum meetings.
- The most common requests for help were for advice relating to funding 16 (19%), legal advice 6 (7%), planning 5 (6%), disability 4 (5%) and finance 4 (5%).
- 'Significant problems' were 'getting the whole community involved (31%), recruiting and retaining volunteers (25%) and funding advice and support (19%).
- 51 different agencies and organisations had provided advice and support.
- 40% identified Aylesbury Vale District Council as a source of advice, 36% Buckinghamshire County Council and 15% Milton Keynes City Council.
- 27% had used Buckinghamshire Community Action to provide support.
- Over 30% of respondents considered the growth of Milton Keynes to have a 'radical impact' on their communities, with a further third expecting 'some impact'.

5.6 Key findings from interviews, workshops, etc.

- Low levels of awareness of the infrastructure support services available.
- Very limited links made between communities and between interest groups.
- Significant lack of clarity over role of infrastructure organisations.
- Varied levels of awareness of the Milton Keynes Growth Agenda.
- Wide range of organisations providing support, with no clear structure apparent.
- Limited awareness of future developments and low level of long-term planning.
- Limited awareness of issues and therefore of likely advice and support needs.

5.7 Key issues for rural communities

- Housing - affordable housing for locals;
- Young People - getting young people involved and engaged;
- Quality of life - increased traffic, 'rat-runs', loss of landscape and village character;
- Services - loss of services – shops, post offices, poor access to services;
- Communication - ensuring the whole community has a voice;
- Development - Milton Keynes Growth, local development concerns;
- Transport - loss of bus services, poor public transport provision, isolation.

The Rural Action Plan (*see green pages*) represents the key actions identified from a comprehensive research project carried out on rural community needs in the North Buckinghamshire and rural Milton Keynes. The full report will be published alongside this IDP. Note that the Rural Action Plan is designed to be read alongside that comprehensive document.

The recommended actions set out to address all of the key issues identified in the research.

It is important to bear in mind that it is highly unlikely that all of the identified actions could be implemented in the short term: there are complex inter-relationships between areas of recommended actions and many rely upon appropriate 'groundwork' being in place before progress can be made in these areas.

It is also important to acknowledge that while some existing resources are available to deliver some elements of the Action Plan and some could be delivered at minimal cost, many of the identified actions would only be feasible where additional resources become available.

The ChangeUp initiative is a long-term process and it is appropriate that a staged implementation process is used, ensuring that progress in improving rural infrastructure provision occurs in an integrated way, alongside other areas. Progress in implementation in the first few years may require this Action Plan to be reviewed and amended.

Therefore, it is intended that the Action Plan be used as a 'menu' of possible actions, and that appropriate priorities will be identified and agreed by the ChangeUp Consortium.

5.8 Key areas of support required for rural communities

From the research work carried out, recommendations to address the needs of, and improve the support available to, rural communities were developed in the following areas:

- Understanding rural needs through development of a rural evidence base;
- Generic support services based on funding advice, volunteering and trustee support (recruitment and retention), legal/personnel, health and safety, marketing, finance, training and ICT;
- Specialist support services based on community facilities, young people/children, transport, social and community enterprise, affordable housing and shops;
- Rural planning, co-ordination and delivery mechanism;
- Community development and community leadership development;
- Growth Agenda;
- Engaging young people;
- Networks and partnerships;
- Rural Forum and the rural voice;
- Communication and information including ICT;
- Cross border issues.

6. ADDITIONAL SUPPORT NEEDS - INSIGHTS FROM THE CHANGEUP ADDITIONAL SUPPORT PROGRAMME.

The Additional Support Programme was developed alongside the Buckinghamshire Infrastructure Development Plan to ensure that voluntary and community groups from BME backgrounds, Faith groups, Gypsy and Traveller communities, Asylum Seekers and Refugees were included in the ChangeUp Programme in Buckinghamshire.

Voluntary and community groups often develop from communities because of a need within the community. The groups are often in a position where they are able to more directly respond to the needs and concerns of their communities than mainstream service providers. It is important that these groups are valued and supported by both mainstream voluntary sector and service providers. The aim of the Additional Support Programme is to facilitate these groups, enabling them to access the infrastructure support available to mainstream organisations, such as information, training and networking.

The objective of the Additional Support Programme is to determine gaps in infrastructure support for the voluntary sector from minority groups, if and where there are gaps in infrastructure provision to the communities themselves and to consult with people from these communities to enable a plan for future delivery of infrastructure support to be developed.

Research undertaken across Buckinghamshire focused on Aylesbury, with some identification of needs in Wycombe and Chesham. Difficulties in accessing hard to reach groups has been identified and the findings of the research needs to be qualified by further research into the needs of the BME community including more on the needs of Gypsy and Traveller groups, Asylum seekers and Refugees.

Some research has been undertaken by the statutory authorities into the housing needs of BME communities and further research is currently on going. The research from the Gypsy and Traveller survey being conducted by the Buckinghamshire authorities in conjunction with Supporting People will identify further support needs that will need to be addressed by future drafts of the IDP.

The housing needs of the BME community in Chiltern and South Bucks identified that the BME community had difficulties in accessing housing accommodation and support ranging from general to specialist advice. There was also a poor awareness of the voluntary infrastructure within the community arising from the lack of outreach workers and meeting places.

By building on the information needs obtained from the additional support programme with research being undertaken by the statutory organizations, a clearer picture of community needs can be identified which will in turn inform the services required from the infrastructure organisations. It is proposed in the action plan the additional funding from the additional support programme and the capacity builders fund is used to further develop this research. The ASP

programme report being an initial step in assessing the needs of the voluntary and community groups supporting the BME, Faith, Gypsy, Traveller, Refugees, and Asylum seekers across Buckinghamshire.

The findings in the ASP report identify where further research and consultation is required and where the research from the statutory agencies can support the overview.

Some aspects highlighted in the ASP report are:

- Infrastructure providers in Buckinghamshire need to work more closely together to enable them to reach out to the wider community and they need to be aware of voluntary and community groups that are operating on the peripheries of mainstream activities to enable these groups to be drawn into the infrastructure support network.
- More research, consultation and community development work is needed in Buckinghamshire to build trust and engagement between the diversity of communities and faith groups across the county and to enable the ChangeUp Programme in Buckinghamshire to adapt and evolve to meet the changing infrastructure support needs of Buckinghamshire's communities.
- The Action Plan in the Additional report looks at ways of making the initial steps in the ChangeUp Programme and will need to be regularly reviewed and updated.
- A list of principles has been compiled as a direct response to statements made by individuals interviewed during the consultation process. It is hoped both that these will be noted and applied where possible and appropriate by all groups working in the voluntary and community sector, and that they will be refined and added to throughout the duration of the ChangeUp Programme to ensure that Good Practice is followed and that the Programme remains relevant.

7. CHANGEUP PILOT PROJECTS – INSIGHTS GAINED

Pilot project were carried out in the following areas:

- Volunteering
- Countywide Newsletter
- Networking
- Training

Details of each project and analysis for lessons learned are given in *Appendix XV*.

Some key insights are:

7.1 Countywide Newsletter

- Organisations value receiving a consolidated newsletter rather than several with information often duplicated. Hence the consensus is that the newsletter – BIG TIMES should continue.
- Challenges remaining to be overcome in future issues are:
 - Continuing purification of the County data base;
 - Addressing the needs of a few organisations for detailed information on local topics for which there is not space in BIG TIMES;
 - The insistence of some BIG members to continue to issue their own newsletters as well.

7.2 Volunteering

- The Buckinghamshire Volunteer Centre network has been strengthened by the joint undertakings of this sub-project.
- Working together has led to all new ideas being shared, and other joint initiatives (not included in the project) being undertaken e.g. the Arriva Bus publicity project.

7.3 Networking amongst the staff who deliver infrastructure services

- There is considerable good will amongst the staff of the infrastructure organisations to work together both operationally and strategically.
- Meeting each other to identify issues and share solutions was creative and extremely helpful.
- There were some quick wins in the early action plan, which have already been implemented and so do not appear in the IDP for the coming period. e.g. facilitating key frontline VCOs to open their CRB checking as a low-cost service to other VCOs within the county.

- Other actions have been built into the IDP action plan. e.g. the development of the shared database for better communication links with frontline VCOs across the county.
- A decision to continue to hold these networking events has been taken, and to use them:
 - As a place to focus on the operational outworking of specific collaborative proposals as delegated by BIG;
 - To enable informal networking and the spin offs that ensue, as this is the only venue at which the staff that deliver infrastructure services all meet each other.

7.4 Training

- Publishing a calendar of training as an insert to each BIG TIMES has been popular and will be continued.
- The training courses have not been fully subscribed. Simply informing local VCOs that training is available is not always enough to get them to engage with training and developing their volunteer workforce – e.g. training on committee skills and trustees responsibilities is clearly needed and yet uptake of places was poor. If we are to help develop the VCS workforce then a more creative approach than simply putting on courses needs to be found.
- It is recommended that a VCS training coordinator is appointed as a countywide post to develop, promote and deliver key courses accessible to all VCOs across the county.

8. HOW INFRASTRUCTURE SERVICES WILL BE DELIVERED

8.1 The Options

The consortium agreed that four models for delivery should be considered.

The four models were:

- Option One: BIG Organisations remain constituted as at present with Boards and Management Committees but with greater voluntary collaboration.
- Option Two: Consolidation of existing BIG member organisations into one single Infrastructure Organisation.
- Option Three: One County CVS/VC. Rural, Youth and Equalities remain as now.
- Option Four: BIG organisations continue under current structure with scope for bilateral mergers, two groupings would be established to implement greater operational collaboration.

Representatives on the County ChangeUp Consortium stated the following:

- Frontline organisations did not mind which model was adopted, but want a quick decision on the model so that work on the actual services delivery could be focused upon.
- Statutory partners agreed that it was not their role to specify the how of the delivery, and stated that they would work with Buckinghamshire Infrastructure Group on whichever model was chosen.

8.2 The agreed model

After long and careful debate the members of BIG decided that the existing infrastructure organisations will continue to deliver services as independent entities, but with increasing collaboration, where appropriate, and some may discuss possible mergers.

It was concluded that this independent but collaborative structure would, by maintaining and strengthening the vigour and integrity of the existing infrastructure organisations, be the most effective way of providing a rising standard of support to front-line organisations.

In particular, it was agreed that specific activities in:

- Volunteer Centres and CVSs
 - Specialist rural youth and equalities sectors,
- would be served best by the formation of specific groups of compatible infrastructure organisations (the groupings).

This would reduce the risk of one set of minority community interests, such as those of rural communities, being subordinated to others.

BIG will remain as a steering group for the delivery of infrastructure support to the voluntary sector in Buckinghamshire.

Its role will be to:

- Endeavour to bring about full engagement of the Voluntary Sector with the current national initiatives of ChangeUp and Local Area Agreements.
- Review future national initiatives and engage as appropriate.
- Facilitate co-ordination of partner programmes and projects to maximise effectiveness and avoid duplication.
- Act as a clearing house for issues such as consultations
- Oversee county wide initiatives including: Integrated newsletter, Database, and Website

2 Groupings will develop to focus on the streamlining of service delivery within their respective functions and to act as a point of contact for funders.

The roles of the two Groupings are as follows:

The Voluntary Sector Support Grouping – Comprised of the Volunteer Centres and Councils for Voluntary Services:

- Review their service delivery against the needs articulated by frontline organisations and identify gaps;
- Devise projects and extensions to current service delivery to ensure maximum coverage;
- Work with local authorities to ensure local delivery centres across the county;
- Be a focal point for issues on volunteering and the voluntary sector such as training for management committees;
- Represent the voluntary sector in local initiatives such as Compact;
- Liaise with sub regional and regional partnerships such as Regional Volunteering Assembly;
- Explore joint funding bids to lever in external funding to the county;
- Be a focal point for liaison with local statutory funders;
- Give the highest priority to achieving excellence of service to frontline organisations, not only through effective planning and implementation, but also by means of monitoring and evaluation of all activities.

Rural, Youth and Equalities Support (RYES) Grouping – Comprised of Buckinghamshire Community Action, Community Matters Bucks, Youth Focus and the Racial Equality Councils:

- Review service delivery in their specialist areas against the needs articulated by frontline organisations and identify gaps;
- Devise projects and extensions to current service delivery to ensure maximum coverage;
- Explore the sharing of facilities and premises;
- Represent their specialist field in local initiatives;

- Liaise with sub-regional partnerships in their fields e.g. BCA will join the sub-regional RCC partnership;
- Be a focal point for liaison with local statutory funders;
- Give the highest priority to achieving excellence of service to frontline organisations, not only through effective planning and implementation, but also by means of monitoring and evaluation of all activities.

The consensus amongst BIG members was that this model was the one that was:

- Most likely to retain the good will of existing volunteer support to infrastructure delivery – there was evidence that this was likely to decrease in the other models- by allowing the existing independent infrastructure organisations to pursue their specific missions (in collaboration with others) and by reducing the risk of one set of community interests being subordinated to others.
- Most likely to ensure no loss of existing service delivery and to bring about, through collaboration and greater professionalism, a higher level of service to frontline organisations.
- Least expensive and bureaucratic to implement.

For more detail of the model see *Appendix XII*.

8.3 What this model will ensure

Subject to resourcing the model for delivery will ensure that:

- VCOs and all other stakeholders will be able to interact with infrastructure support functions in an efficient and friendly manner.
- There will be pro-active help as well as responses to requests.
- The breadth of service offered will be considerably enhanced, particularly in areas that are seen as being in most need of enlargement.
- VCOs will be capable of delivering more public sector services.
- Infrastructure will actively encourage greater participation in the VCS and a greater role for VCOs.
- Infrastructure will work in close harmony with the statutory authorities and will be a leading and proactive contributor to the future VCS strategy.

9. KEY OBJECTIVES - THE PLAN FOR DEVELOPMENT

The key issue with the delivery of this plan is that of funding. It is vital that funding is secured and resources deployed in order to achieve the following objectives:

- All identified gaps in the current structure/provision must have their actions delivered – *see section 4.6.*
- To have streamlined the delivery of services through:
 - A countywide database of frontline VCOs, which all infrastructure organisations can utilize.
 - A single entry web portal for seamless point of contact for the frontline voluntary organisations.
 - Single countywide newsletter on issues of general interest to the sector with pages from each infrastructure organisation.
 - Development of a countywide specialist funding supplement to go out with BIG Times.
 - Development of the learning network and countywide training supplement to go out with BIG Times.
- To have streamlined the process for representation and consultation for the voluntary and community sector through:
 - Strengthening the role of BIG as the key point of contact for statutory partners and other stakeholders. BIG members to represent the whole sector on behalf of all infrastructure organisations and to report back to BIG.
- To have commitment to the ensuring the sustainability of the infrastructure set in place by establishment of a Funding group comprising members of BIG and statutory partners.
- The two groupings detailed in the delivery model to have been established and producing outputs; one to address voluntary sector support and the other the specialist rural, youth and equalities support across Buckinghamshire.
- To have established objectives relating to the findings of the rural project (see separate section – *green pages*).
- To have established objectives relating to the finding of the Additional Support Programme (see separate section – *lilac pages*).

A tabular action plan can be found in the *yellow pages* with the executive summary.

10. NEXT STEPS FOR THE COUNTY CHANGE UP CONSORTIUM

FOR 2006-7

Three Priorities:

1. Current organisations to remain in existence and increase collaboration;
2. Implementation of funded projects identified in the Action Plan;
3. Securing funds to initiate the new projects identified in the Action Plan.

April – September 2006

- Set up the funding group to address sustainability of the current organisations throughout 2006/7;
- Initiate all continuation funded projects;
- Statutory partners to work with BIG member organisations to provide support in kind to ensure local delivery points in each district;
- Set systems in place to improve the representation and consultation functions of BIG;
- Establish the 2 groupings on Voluntary Sector Support and RYES;
- Develop the protocol for shared working amongst infrastructure groups;
- Rural proof the IDP;
- Select rural recommendations to be implemented and initiate action;
- Select ASP recommendations to be implemented and initiate action.

October 2006 to March 2007

- Implement plans from funding group to draw down both internal and external funds;
- Review and modify the Action Plan and IDP.

11. ACCOUNTABILITY AND REVIEW

The ChangeUp consortium has overall accountability for the implementation of this plan. The sign up sheet at *Appendix III* indicates the agreement of each consortium member to this.

The action plan identifies which organisation is taking the lead on delivering each item – clearly they can only achieve this if they have the resources to do so. The Funding Group will assist in finding the resources to implement each action.

Lead agencies will report to the ChangeUp consortium, which will monitor the delivery of the plan.

The ChangeUp Consortium will review the IDP and modify it accordingly on an annual basis. The strategic directions will be shaped by the expressed needs of the frontline VCOs.

The ChangeUp reference group will continue to meet at least half yearly. All VCOs on the countywide database will be invited to attend. This will be used as a forum both for dissemination of information, but also for feedback and consultation as the Changeup programme rolls out.

12. FINANCIAL IMPACT – SUMMARY

12.1 Action Plan

This contains three levels of activities:

1. Costed actions that will be funded by the Changeup Continuation Fund.
2. Costed actions for which additional ChangeUp funds will be sought from Capacity Builders.
3. Other actions yet to be fully costed for which funding will then need to be sought.

All actions are aimed either at developing enhanced support services to frontline VCOs or enhancing and developing the scope and quality of the IDP.

The detail of the action plan is shown in the *yellow pages*.

12.2 Sustainability

An Infrastructure Development Plan based upon the current level of income to the infrastructure organisations across the county would not be a plan for development, but for continued piecemeal provision and an unsustainable future.

There was little difficulty in identifying the services needed in order to capacity build and enable the frontline organisations. If these services are not provided then the Buckinghamshire Voluntary and Community Sector will be inadequately supported and many VCOs will not be able to engage with the central government's agenda for the voluntary sector in the future.

The current funding situation for infrastructure providers is as follows:

2005/6 Funding Streams

	CMB	BCA	PC	VV	VF	YF	VA	TOTAL
County	22515	54000	29500	0	8200	74023	14276	202514
District	1125	18350	15000	10000	4100	0	27326	75901
Other	670	138495	25500	120000	34200	22000	78474	419339
TOTAL	24310	210845	70000	130000	46500	96023	120076	697754

CMB – Community Matters Bucks

BCA – Buckinghamshire Community Action

PC – Priory Centre

VV – Vale Volunteers

VF – Volunteer Focus

YF – Youth Focus

VA – Voluntary Action (Chiltern and South Bucks)

3 Year Funding Track

	2004/5 ACTUAL	2005/6 FORECAST	2006/7 OUTLOOK
INCOME			
County	195372	202514	195838
Districts	79676	75901	64550
Other	342169	419339	337280
TOTAL	617217	697754*¹	597668*²

*¹ Income for this year without Change Up (which was not aimed at improving current services but capacity building for the future) would have been less than income for last year.

*² Income for next year is lower even than it was last year.

The net effect is that funding for delivering infrastructure services has been on a downward track since last year.

This demonstrates why current funding issues dominate the agenda and workload of most of the Infrastructure organisations to the extent that their ability to deliver even the existing service is adversely affected.

Hence, the most important action from this plan is to build an increasingly sustainable funding base to lift the service provision to that which is required.

The prime action is to create a Buckinghamshire Infrastructure Funding Group to specifically research opportunities for funding on behalf of all infrastructure organisations, advising on the steps needed to be taken by the organisations themselves, the 2 Groupings or BIG in order to be able to exploit the identified opportunities.

The major opportunities are likely to include:

- BIG Lottery Fund;
- Partnerships with (for example) businesses and other infrastructure organisations in the south east;
- Establishment of Social Enterprise services;
- Re-innovating the infrastructure by reprofiling organisations and seeking to deliver additional frontline services.

Details of the terms of reference of this Group are contained in *Appendix XIV*.

13. RISKS

13.1 Funding for future work

The key risk that threatens the delivery of this plan is that of funding. It is vital that funding is secured and resources deployed in order to achieve the objectives. This was a lesson learned from the early spend project in which the considerable resources that were put into the BIG business plan bore little fruit because there were insufficient funds to implement the plan. Each time this happens there is a detrimental effect on the support of frontline VCOs in Buckinghamshire:

- Time is diverted from delivery of support services into developing the plan so current service delivery suffers;
- The frontline organisations yet again give their views but if nothing changes as a result they become consultation weary and are less inclined to engage in the future – there is a danger of morale and motivation declining and cynicism setting in amongst the VCS in Buckinghamshire.

13.2 Local Authority tendering

The decision of the local authorities to tender for infrastructure function delivery across the county presents both an opportunity and a risk. There is the opportunity of achieving more equitable service delivery across the county if the current disparity in funding to each of the districts is addressed. However there is also a risk of the services being reduced to a lowest common denominator unless incremental funding is obtained. There is also the risk that current service deliverers will not be successful tenderers leading to a discontinuity in service provision as it is transferred to the successful tenderer.

13.3 Sustainability of the organisations that deliver infrastructure services

Several of the organisations are facing a significant drop in their funding which brings into questions their very viability. Short term funding reduces their sustainability and distracts them from actual service delivery. Unless this can be resolved there is little chance of the action plan being successful. There is a danger of building a castle of proposed future work on a foundation that is rapidly disintegrating.

13.4 Success of the delivery model

The proposed delivery model will be implemented from April 2006. Its effectiveness in achieving better delivery of services will be reviewed after one year. If it does not prove an effective model then there is a risk of delay to the implementation of the infrastructure services.

14. CONCLUSION

This Plan has been produced as part of the Government's ChangeUp project. It sets out how the Buckinghamshire ChangeUp Consortium proposes to support the frontline VCOs in the County.

The production of the Plan has, in itself, resulted in a clearer and more strategic view of the support that VCOs need to improve the service they provide to local communities. The Plan has also led to a significant increase in partnership working within the Consortium, which offers the potential for a more vibrant and cohesive VCS in the County.

Our vision is of strong and cohesive local communities, built through the active participation and involvement of local people. At the heart of these communities will be vibrant and sustainable voluntary and community organisations delivering their mission effectively for the benefit of their communities. The VCS infrastructure will support the development of effective front line voluntary and community organisations and provide outstanding and value for money support services that are effective, efficient and seamless.

The key objectives of this Plan are:

- A sustainable infrastructure function which delivers support and services to meet the needs of front line voluntary and community organisations whilst delivering value for money.
- A minimum standard of service available to all voluntary and community organisations in Buckinghamshire, regardless of location.
- Targeted support provided to priority communities – both geographical and/or of interest – based on clear evidence of need.
- Diversification of income sources.

The principal outcomes that the Plan will help to achieve are:

- Voluntary activity to support the delivery of public services will be increased;
- The support needs of VCOs will be met;
- The cost of supporting voluntary sector activity, including the principle of full cost recovery, will be transparent;
- Service delivery, including the use of ICT, will be modernized;
- Service quality will be evidenced;

- A more equitable level of service across the County will be evident;
- Local priority areas will receive enhanced support.

Critical success factors for the achievement of these outcomes include:

- Sufficient and sustainable funding;
- Effective deployment of resources to meet the needs of VCOs;
- Flexible, responsive and local delivery of support to VCOs;
- Excellent two way communications between the Consortium and VCOs and the statutory sector;
- Close monitoring and review of the actions in the Plan.

The ChangeUp programme represents a major opportunity for the VCS in Buckinghamshire, the prize is significant.

This IDP sets out how this prize can be realized.