

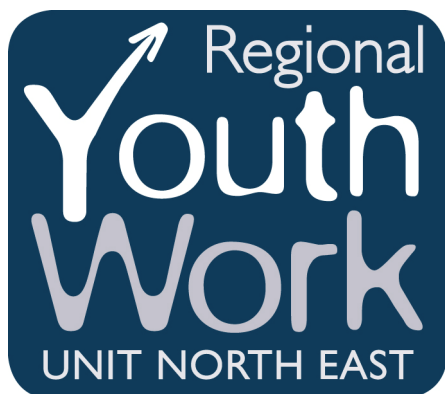


# The State of Play

**An audit of the children and young people's  
voluntary and community sector in the North East  
Region**

**Regional Youth Work Unit—North East**

**April 2009**



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## Glossary of Terms

VCS	Voluntary and Community Sector
LDA	Local Development Agency
VDA	Voluntary Development Agency
VCSC&YP	Voluntary and Community Sector Children and Young People
ECM	Every Child Matters
DCSF	Department for Children, Schools and Families
CAF	Common Assessment Framework
GONE	Government Office North East
IYSS	Integrated Youth Support Service
TYS	Targeted Youth Support
YWRP	Youth Work Reform Programme
CWDC	Children's Workforce Development Council
CWN	Children's Workforce Network
LLUK	Lifelong Learning UK
NOS	National Occupational Standards
QCA	Qualification and Curriculum Authority
SSC	Sector Skills Council
NVQ	National Vocational Qualification
VRQ	Vocationally Related Qualification
ABC	Awarding Body Consortium
SVSYF	Sunderland Voluntary Sector Youth Forum
CAF	Common Assessment Framework
LSCB	Local Safeguarding Children's Board
VODA	Voluntary Organisation Development Agency (North Tyneside)
Ofsted	Office for Standards in Education
ALI	Adult Learning Institute

## Executive Summary

- This report was commissioned by the Regional Youth Work Unit – North East to gauge the impact of current changes taking place in local authority services to children and young people across the region.
- The report is written in four parts:
  - The environmental and cultural context of change
  - Research methodology
  - The main drivers of change:
    - Networking
    - Children’s Trust arrangements
    - Integrated Youth Support service
    - Workforce development
    - Safeguarding
  - Findings
- The report compliments work that is being developed through the VCS Engage project. This project is seeking to strengthen the role of the VCS in delivering the Every Child Matters agenda. The VCS Engage Project has developed a self-evaluation tool kit for local authorities to test the level of engagement of the VCS in current developments. Throughout the report parts of this tool-kit are included as a reference.
- The report recognises the extent of the cultural and environmental change that has taken place over the past decade in the delivery of services to children and young people in local authorities. This has, inevitably had an impact on the way in which VCS agencies operate and participate in service delivery.
- However, over the past two years that pace of change has increased rapidly with a number of policy drivers being introduced to shape the way services are delivered:
  - Every Child Matters
  - Youth Matters
  - The Children’s Plan
  - 2020 Children and Young People’s Workforce Strategy
  - Aiming High for Young People
  - Children’s Workforce Strategy
  - Youth Work Reform Programme
  - Sector Skills Council Development
  - National Qualifications in the Youth Sector
  - Changes to local authority governance from being a service provider to a facilitator, specifically through commissioning
- These and other developments have impacted on the VCS with quite specific issues arising:
  - Government policy, which seeks to increase the involvement of the VCS in delivering services in communities.

- Increased competition within the sector and between sectors, in particular the private sector.
  - The speed and volume of change.
  - The capacity of VCS organisations to engage as fully as it is expected.
  - The readiness, of particularly small and medium sized locally based VCS agencies, to engage in commissioning.
- This research project employed a variety of methods to access the data contained in the report. However, the main source of information came from one-to-one interviews between the researcher and the contributors.
  - Five key themes were investigated that affect the sector:
    - Networking
    - Children’s Trust arrangements
    - Integrated Youth Support Services
    - Workforce development
    - Safeguarding

#### **Networking:**

- In the region dedicated forums for VCS children and young people’s organisations to meet together. However, this is a minority at present, with more being developed.
- More common is the inclusion of the VCS in multi agency forums focussing on specific interests or issues.
- Where forums exist, there is a large mailing list but a small cohort that regularly attends. The small VCS agencies are experiencing real capacity issues around participation.
- There is little local authority financial support being made available to agencies to co-ordinate the work of forums for children and young people’s organisations. It relies on goodwill.
- There is little evidence of VCS agencies working together to create strategies for the joint delivery of services in local authority areas.

#### **Children’s Trust Arrangements:**

- The development of Children’s Trusts/Services is a significant change for all agencies and individuals involved.
- The VCS is represented on all Children’s Trust boards, but there are local variations about how that representation is achieved.
- The most controversial issue emerging out of the new arrangements is the question of the commissioning of services by the local authority and how this will be done. There is a concern about the level of competition that will emerge and the impact of larger, national organisations winning contracts to the detriment of smaller, locally based agencies.

### **Integrated Youth Support Services:**

- In most parts of the region the development of integrated services is embryonic. Only two local authorities have them in place and operational now.
- There has been good to significant engagement of the VCS in most local authorities in the development of the strategy.
- Throughout the region the most significant development has been the common assessment framework (CAF), and there are some examples of the sector acting as lead professional.
- Furthermore, most local authority areas are developing work on the common core skills and its requirements. There is, though, some concern about how aware the sector is about this development and its impact on the workforce.

### **Workforce Development:**

- The 2020 workforce strategy sets out the government's ambitions for workforce reform in the children's and young people's sector.
- There is specific support being developed for the youth work workforce to ensure capability to deliver the integrated youth support strategy.
- There is also a requirement for each local authority to have a workforce development strategy.
- The Regional Youth Work Unit is currently developing a strategy for workforce development in the region, which build son national expectations.
- The engagement of the VCS in the development of local plans has been sporadic, usually they are asked to comment on the plan, rather than contribute to its development.
- For the VCS a key issue is the impact of short term funding and the development of its workforce, many of whom are temporary.

### **Safeguarding:**

- Safeguarding Boards exist in each local authority area. In the Tees Valley, Middlesbrough and Redcar and Cleveland have a single joint board.
- In most cases there are VCS representatives on the Boards, although this is not uniform.
- All local safeguarding boards (LSCB) have websites which include their business plans.
- There is an emphasis on training: e-learning; child care; safeguarding and safer recruitment.

- Emerging Issues for the Voluntary and Community Sector
  - There is a need to develop a more strategic approach to developing networks for the children and young people's sector. Where these exist, and where there is local authority support to an LDA or a key agency, there is better engagement.
  - There needs to be greater inter-agency collaboration at a local level to increase the potential for delivering commissioned services.
  - Commissioning is seen as a key threat to small and medium sized locally based agencies; there is a fear that local authorities will favour fewer contracts with large organisations that have the infrastructure to deliver, rather than supporting local organisations.
  - A key part of the government's expectation for the development of an integrated youth support service is that the voluntary and community sector will be an equal partner in the delivery of services. How this will be achieved has yet to be worked out.
  - There is a mixed picture across the region of the progress being made towards integration and of the involvement of the sector in the planning.
  - The issues relating to workforce development present particular problems for the sector. This is because there is generally a lack of career structure or planned progression because so many of the workforce are employed on short term contracts, or agencies lack the resources and time to release staff to access training.
  - The development of comprehensive safeguarding strategies has had a substantial impact on all agencies that work with children and young people. VCS agencies that are linked to a national organisation or to the local authority in some way have policies and procedures in place. There was concern expressed about the very small, independent, locally based agencies and how they accessed safeguarding support.
  - The sector feels some level of frustration about the lack of understanding of its size and diversity. This means that the capacity to engage, to represent and to participate is limited usually to the larger agencies. The issue of the capacity of the sector is keenly felt and is one that has been an historic issue.
  - Communication is vital to successful participation and inclusion. Within the sector itself and between the sector and the local authority, there was a mixed picture about the quality of communication.
  - There was also concern about what the role of the VCS is. There is an increasing conflict between the independence that has been enjoyed under previous funding regimes and the new contract culture that will have a legal framework. There is debate about how this new culture compromises the very basis of the charitable sector.
  - The whole issue of funding and support for the VCS was a common theme and anxiety throughout the research. Whilst, locally the fact that no new money would exist when the commissioning strategies are in place, some funders are withdrawing support with a recommendation that agencies should go down the commissioning route.

- This research provides a snap shot of the regional picture in March 2009. Most VCS agencies feel that they exist in a 'shifting sands' environment and are uncertain about what the future is going to be like.
- All recognise that there are big changes ahead, but are questioning just how ready the sector is to accommodate these changes and whether there is an infra-structure to support them through the change.
- What is critical is that the sector seeks to develop greater co-operation and collaboration between itself and with the local authority, so that potential opportunities can be delivered by local agencies, which have the structure and capacity to meet contractual requirements.
- What is most critical is that the VCS remains flexible and is able to adapt to change without compromising their founding principles.

## Introduction and Context

This research project has been carried out on behalf of the North East Regional Youth Work Unit. It builds on a number of reports that have been written over the past five years focussing on issues affecting the voluntary and community sector in the region and is intended to provide a snapshot of the 'state of the sector' in 2009.

The research is in four parts. The first part is a contextual report about developments taking place nationally and regionally in children's and youth work. The second part has focussed on a number of key issues that have been part of the VCS Engage Project's Self-Evaluation Tool Kit for local authorities and includes: Networking, Children's Trust Arrangements, Integrated Services, Workforce Development and Safeguarding. A questionnaire, which was used as the principal research tool, was modelled on the Self Evaluation Tool Kit for Local Authorities, covering the areas contained in it. Throughout this report there are extracts taken from the assessment tool following narrative describing the outcomes of the research, which reflect information captured from the respondents.

*'The VCS Engage programme aims to strengthen the engagement of the voluntary and community sector (VCS) in the Every Child Matters (ECM) agenda (more details can be obtained at [www.vcsengage.org.uk](http://www.vcsengage.org.uk)). The Self Evaluation Toolkit (SET) is designed to be completed in partnership with statutory and voluntary sector representatives. Within each section, there are a number of questions for discussion which require partners to consider their progress, provide evidence for their judgements and then establish ratings of green, amber or red as a baseline. The SET then provides a template for establishing agreed further actions and a communications proves to disseminate this within wider stakeholders. The programme is funded by the DCSF.'*<sup>1</sup>

The third part of the research picks up and highlights issues that have emerged from the research and reflects the concerns of the sector in the region on the impact that these will have corporately and on individual agencies. In the fourth part there case studies of some examples of good practice that were highlighted during the research process.

Children's and Youth Services have undergone major transformation over the last decade and over the past five years, in particular. Change began with the introduction of the Connexions service in 2001, which sought to provide a comprehensive service for young people providing information, advice, guidance and support. Through multi-agency working, Connexions aimed to provide young people with a range of services and opportunities that would help remove barriers to learning and progression and ensure young people make a smooth transition to adulthood and working life. Since 2001, however, Government policy has moved on and the policy context which affects services to children and young people is much more complex and fast moving. The following section provides a brief description of the policy drivers for change.

<sup>1</sup> Extract from the VCS Engage Project Self Evaluation Tool Kit

## Policy Context

Following the tragic death of Victoria Climbié the Laming Report (2003) made 108 recommendations to reform services for children and young people. One of the key messages was to implement a multi-agency approach to children's care to ensure children and young people in the future do not fall through the net of service providers. Following the report from Lord Laming there has been a raft of Government policy aimed at improving outcomes for children and young people and ensuring their safety.

### Every Child Matters (ECM): Change for Children Programme

ECM<sup>2</sup> provided a national framework for the reform of services for children and young people to be delivered through local change programmes. Underpinning everything is that children and young people should be central to, and their views implicit in, the services which are provided to improve the five ECM outcomes:

- be healthy
- stay safe
- enjoy and achieve
- make a positive contribution
- achieve economic well-being

ECM laid the foundations for the establishment of Children's Trusts, giving local authorities the responsibility to ensure co-operation between statutory agencies, the third sector and the private sector in the provision of services for children, young people and families. New arrangements to support co-operation between partners aimed at achieving greater integration at four levels have been introduced:

- front-line delivery processes (e.g. Common Assessment Framework (CAF))
- information-sharing databases and arrangements
- strategy (joint assessment of needs, planning and commissioning)
- governance

### Youth Matters

Youth Matters has been described as ECM for young people. Youth Matters is for young people aged 13 – 19 years old (or up to 25 in the case of young people with special needs or disabilities). It outlines four strands of work to support young people in achieving the ECM outcomes and thereby reducing the gap between the most disadvantaged and others. Youth Matters places a duty on Children's Trusts to oversee and/or deliver the four key strands:

- Things to do and places to go, including the Youth Opportunity and Youth Capital Funds
- Information, advice and guidance
- Community and volunteering opportunities

Targeted Youth Support

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.everychildmatters.gov.uk>

Regional implementation of the national policy is supported by Government Office for the North East (GONE) Children and Learners Directorate. Government Office works with partners to implement both Youth Matters and ECM across the region.

Youth Matters is the direct policy driver for the establishment and roll-out of integrated youth support services (IYSS) and targeted youth support (TYS) under Children's Trusts. Integrated youth support is a universal entitlement for all young people; while targeted youth support is offered to young people with additional support needs.

## Children's Plan

In the first line in the Children's Plan<sup>3</sup> Ed Balls (Minister of State for Education at the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF)) says, 'we want to make this the best place in the world for our children and young people to grow up'.

The Children's Plan outlines five principles:

- Government does not bring up children – parents do – so government needs to do more to back parents and families;
  - All children have the potential to succeed and should go as far as their talents can take them;
  - Children and young people need to enjoy their childhood as well as grow up prepared for adult life;
  - Services need to be shaped by and responsive to children, young people and families, not designed around professional boundaries; and
- It is always better to prevent failure than tackle a crisis later.

The Children's Plan sets out a ten year plan to achieve these reforms.

## 2020 Children and Young People's Workforce Strategy

The 2020 Children and Young People's Workforce Strategy sets out the vision of the Government and an Expert Group that everyone who works with children and young people should be:

- **ambitious** for every child and young person;
- **excellent** in their practice;
- **committed** to partnership and integrated working;
- **respected** and valued as professionals.

Specific support to the youth work workforce is outlined. Commitments in Aiming High for Young People have begun by providing leadership and management training for those running integrated youth support services, workforce support to the third sector and in establishing a skills and knowledge framework, including a youth professional status, and testing a fast-track graduate recruitment programme. The government intend to develop a longer term comprehensive plan to build on existing work to provide the youth sector workforce with the continued support and improvement it needs to ensure it can provide support to meet challenges facing young people.

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/childrensplan/>

## **Aiming High for young people: a ten-year strategy for positive activities, July 2007**

Aiming High<sup>4</sup> is a strategy to transform facilities and support services for young people in England. It aims to ensure all young people, and particularly those in more deprived areas, have the opportunity to take part in positive activities with the aim of developing their skills, confidence and aspirations.

The strategy recognises the key role youth work can play in supporting young people to achieve their potential:

*'Youth workers and other professionals clearly play a central role. Often they are able to build relationships with young people that other professionals may find challenging. The best youth work challenges young people to have high aspirations and provides them with the skills to succeed in and out of education.'* Aiming High, July 2007

The Aiming High Implementation Plan, published on 18 March 2008 by the Department for Children, Schools and Families, sets out arrangements for implementing Aiming High for Young People. It highlights what has been achieved, and lays out key actions to be addressed during the next 12 months. The Implementation Plan underlines the need for partnership working in overcoming barriers and delivering improved opportunities and services for young people.

## **Children's Workforce Strategy: Building a World-Class Workforce for Children, Young People and Families**

The Children's Workforce Strategy<sup>5</sup> presents the government's vision and sets the priorities for the developing a 'world-class' children's workforce to deliver the ECM objectives throughout children's, young people's and families' services.

It confirms the children's workforce as all those working with children and young people across all age ranges within the statutory, private and third sector. The strategy calls for reforms across all services to implement 'integrated solutions' to service delivery across the 0 – 19 age range.

It stresses the need for local workforce strategies to support local partners in defining the workforce and its skills in order to reform and continue to develop the workforce to meet the ECM requirements and the changing needs of children, young people and families.

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/youthmatters/aiminghigh/>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/deliveringservices/workforcereform/childrensworkforcestrategy/>

## Youth Workforce Reform Programme (YWRP)

The Youth Workforce Reform Programme published in January 2009 builds on the recommendations from Aiming High for Young People and the 2020 Children' and Young People's Workforce Strategy and feedback from the youth workforce, to continue workforce reforms. The YWRP aims to achieve further improvements in the youth workforce by:

1. providing support to strengthen leadership and management across the workforce;
2. further improving the skills of the third sector youth workforce through a capacity-building programme and developing a common platform of skills and competencies.

The Children's Workforce Development Council (CWDC) is working in partnership with the Children's Workforce Network (CWN) and supported by DCSF and a range of youth sector and sector skills organisations to ensure these three aims are advanced. CWDC and its partners expect reforms to deliver a youth workforce better equipped to deliver positive outcomes for young people through:

- an increase in skills and a better and more consistent quality of practice across the youth workforce, in particular supporting recruitment and performance management;
  - better training and qualifications across the youth workforce;
  - elevating the youth workforce to the same level as other professions to increase morale, status and career aspirations;
  - a workforce better equipped to deliver positive outcomes for young people;
  - a clearer career and development path for those wanting to, or currently working within, a workforce able to deliver Integrated Youth Support Services;
- a stronger professional identity bolstering future recruitment and retention, in turn creating a sustainable workforce which does the very best job they can, improving the lives and outcomes of those they work with.

## Lifelong Learning UK (LLUK)

Lifelong Learning UK is the Sector Skills Council responsible for the professional development of all those working in community learning and development; further education; higher education; libraries, archives and information services; and work-based learning.

As the SSC responsible for the youth work sector, LLUK completed a review of National Occupational Standards (NOS) for youth work in February 2008. To see the full list of professional and NOS and values for youth work go to [www.lluk.org](http://www.lluk.org).

## National Qualifications in the Youth Sector

The Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) is the government body responsible for the regulation of standards in education and training. It accredits qualifications against the National Qualifications Framework (NQF).

The QCA works with Awarding Bodies, SSCs and others to accredit and monitor qualifications offered in schools, colleges and work-based learning settings. Such accredited courses sit on the

NQF, giving nationally-accredited qualification status.

National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) are work-based qualifications that are competency and skills based. Vocationally Related Qualifications (VRQs) are classroom-based taught programmes, often involving academic study, linked to practice.

City and Guilds, ABC (Awarding Body Consortium) and Open University are Awarding Bodies accrediting youth work NVQ and/or VRQ qualifications. Any training provider may apply to become an Award Centre in order to deliver courses nationally accredited by Awarding Bodies<sup>6</sup>.

As well as these policy changes, which have resulted in changes to the way in which local authority and the voluntary and community sector services operate, there is also the major change being implemented in the way in which local authorities operate. The move for local authorities away from being service deliverers to service facilitators signals the greatest change in their role since their inception. As Chancellor of the Exchequer, Gordon Brown began to raise the profile of the voluntary and community sector as a key contributor to the delivery of public services. His assumption was that the VCS often provided a cheaper service than either the local authority or private suppliers; that they were effective as providers and that his long-term goal was to see the VCS in the front line delivering services on behalf of the local authority. This has resulted in a rapid move towards developing a commissioning strategy within local authorities and will signal a significant change in the relationship between the sector and the authority, as well as introducing a much more competitive environment as local authorities come under pressure to introduce efficiency savings and make progressive reductions in expenditure.

Commissioning will bring about a sea change in the voluntary and community sector that is not just about financial resources but, because commissioning will create a legally binding contractual arrangement between the parties involved, there will need to be significant changes to systems, policies and quality assurance for those VCS agencies which wish to be part of the commissioning strategy. The major impact for voluntary and sector agencies is the change in purpose that contracting will bring about; the underlying ethos and the essential essence of the sector will change. Some people suggest that a VCS agency which undertakes commissioned work through contracts will no longer be a true voluntary organisation, because its freedom and flexibility will be compromised by the funding requirements.

The other major issue for the VCS is whether they are commission ready. Throughout the research, respondents commented on the fact that the large national organisations had been gearing up for commissioning for some time and were ready to move into a new market place. Indeed, some saw the large nationals as predatory organisations which would have the capacity to helicopter in to local authority and sweep up all the available commissioning funding, particularly given that they will have economies of scale by virtue of their organisational infrastructure.

<sup>6</sup> The entire section of 'policy context' has been extracted from the report 'Regional Youth Work Workforce Strategy 2009—2012' and included with permission.

Significantly, what is emerging is an environment nationally which is becoming increasingly competitive, is outcomes driven and which will take no 'hostages to fortune' in ensuring that high quality appropriate services, which meet the needs of the client group, are in place. The voluntary and community sector, as individual agencies and as a sector, will need to consider how they will respond to this; which agencies can buy in to the new culture and which can afford to stay outside; which will be prepared to act as sub-contractors to larger organisations and which have the infra-structure in place to act as lead agencies.

What is significant in this is that there are very few examples of agencies working together to create a structure in which the VCS in a locality could together commission for a contract. This is going to be an issue as the commissioning process is rolled out. This new environment and context may be a wake up call to the sector to undertake a thorough review of itself and develop new ways of working that will ensure that they fulfil their objectives and provides appropriate services to their client groups.

This report has stayed faithful to the information given by respondents during the research process. Whilst it may seem that there is a lot of criticism levelled at the local authorities, there were many instances in which people praised the level of engagement that existed between the authority and the sector. There was also a recognition that the sector needed to take responsibility for itself, that it should not always rely upon the local authority for support, but that a greater level of co-operative working would lead to a better understanding of what the sector is able to deliver and the contribution that it makes. With one exception the research interviews that informed this report were with people employed in the sector. This may be seen as an omission or a weakness in the report, which the author accepts. There may be a potential for a similar report from a local authority perspective of the 'health of the voluntary sector', which would contribute to the debate.

## Research Methodology

The data that has been captured as a contributor to this report has been obtained in xx ways.

### i: Desk top research:

a: A review of all the local Children's Trust strategies and safeguarding plans that are posted on local authority and other websites. This has established the base line from which authorities are developing their children and young people's support services and their intentions for the development of the workforce, which is engaged in providing services to children, young people and vulnerable adults.

b: E-questionnaires to individuals following a telephone conversation which explained the project and the information required. This information was additional to a research questionnaire conducted within each of the voluntary development agencies in each of the local authority areas.

### ii: Research interviews:

The researcher developed a research questionnaire as an interview prompt which was used with 27 individuals representing 24 organisations. Each of the individuals and organisations was seen to have an infrastructural role within the local authority area dealing with children and young people's agencies or delivered front-line services.

### iii: Telephone interviews.

Interviews were conducted by telephone with some individuals to cross check information or to gather additional data.

### iv: Case studies.

Case studies illustrating examples of good practice have been collected from various agencies and included in the report.

## VCS Children's and Young People's agency networking

This part of the research sought to establish the range of networking opportunities in which the voluntary and community sector children's and young people's agencies (VCSC&YP) engaged with each other and with the local authority. Across the region there is a diverse range of networks. In 5 local authority areas there is a generic voluntary children's and youth sector forum, whilst in a sixth there has been one, but it is now on hold pending the development of the integrated youth support strategy. These forums exist to exchange information, liaise with the local authority children's and youth service workers and to provide mutual support. The voluntary sector in these six authority areas also access other more specialised forums which focus on specific issues, as do the voluntary sector in the other six local authority areas.

Each of the overarching network groups is an informal body, which is usually supported with secretarial services by the local voluntary development agency, although in two cases the co-ordination is undertaken by a county based youth service agency. They operate on an informal basis with terms of reference, meeting at least 4 times a year.

In the Borough of Sunderland the voluntary youth sector forum is organised differently. This was established five years ago as a charity and a company limited by guarantee and employs 2 staff. The Forum exists to support small, local voluntary sector agencies having a membership of about 27 organisations as well as associate members, which are either locally based projects of national organisations, or agencies that work with young people, but in non-traditional settings (e.g.: the Education Business Partnership). The forum focuses specifically on agencies working with young people in the 10 – 19 (20 – 25) age group. Its principle activities include: advocacy and representation at a strategic level in the Borough on behalf of its members and a support function to those in membership.

An example of the type of services and support offered to members of the Sunderland Voluntary Sector Youth Forum is a scheme negotiated on behalf of forum members to access human resource advice and support. This covers the whole range of human resource advice, ranging from recruitment through to dismissal. There is also legal advice and guidance available for agencies when dealing with difficult human resource issues.

The forum was able to negotiate a competitive price for its members due to the economies of scale achieved.

In very few cases did the Local Authority provide financial support to the lead agency and in one case where this has happened over the recent past years that support is being withdrawn from April 1<sup>st</sup> 2009. In two local authority areas there is a dedicated lead officer with responsibility for liaising with the voluntary sector, and in both cases the individual attended most forum meetings. However, elsewhere a number of local authority staff have liaison with the sector as part of their remit and regularly attend strategic network meetings.

One respondent, a chief officer of a VDA, stated that funding was being sought to appoint an individual to have a specific brief across the borough supporting the voluntary children and young people's sector because the pace and volume of change affecting work with this age group is making it difficult for someone who has responsibility as part of the brief to provide appropriate support.

What is surprising is just how few agencies are seeking to develop consortium arrangements to deliver services either across a borough or within a specific locality given the development of commissioning, the vulnerability of small organisations and the difficulties in attracting funding. There were two examples cited by respondents, one was in a response to a successful 'My Place' bid, the other was focussing on the delivery of children's and youth services in a specific locality within an authority. In one local authority area a significant amount of work had been undertaken to develop a consortium arrangement as a way of gearing up to commissioning and providing support to some small voluntary sector agencies, but it had developed some serious stumbling blocks in its development and had been abandoned. However, respondents from LDA's believed that in the future more consortia arrangements would be a necessity if local agencies were to successfully contract to deliver services. Many local authorities are seeking to contract with only a small number of agencies to reduce the bureaucracy of multiple contracts.

A major issue of concern regarding the networking process and the support for forums or networks, which sought to be as inclusive as possible, was the capacity of small voluntary sector agencies to release staff to attend. For example, in Newcastle the CVS has a mailing list of 180 organisations that receive invitations to forum meetings and events, as well as other information that is circulated through its regular mailings, but only about 30 people regularly attended the forum meetings. One respondent suggested that organisational decision-making impacted on representation and, unless it was seen as of value to the organisation and prioritised by both the management committee and staff team, then it took second place to the direct delivery of services.

This is a crucial issue for the voluntary sector to give serious thought to. Local Authorities are in a transition period moving from being a deliverer of services to a facilitator of services. Government policy favours the greater involvement of the voluntary, private and independent sectors as the deliverers of services in local authority areas. What local authority officers (commissioners) will be looking for is to build a network of contacts with agencies that can deliver services, and, crucially, they will be looking for a single point of contact. This is where forums and consortium arrangements of local VCS agencies will play an important part in working together to deliver services. Furthermore, local authorities are seeking to improve the level of inclusion of the voluntary sector at a very strategic decision-making level. Unless there is a single point of contact through which representation can be delivered democratically, there is a danger that 'cherry picking' will occur, and the sector will be represented by those people that officers within the authority know and trust.

## Children's Trust Arrangements

Children's trust arrangements are becoming embedded in each of the local authority areas throughout the North East Region. The impact of children's trusts on all agencies delivering services to children and young people will be significant in the coming years. The expectation of government is that the voluntary sector will be part of the delivery mechanism and will contribute to the shaping of children's trusts as they evolve. Across the region the voluntary sector is represented on the Children's Trust Boards, however, the process of selection differed markedly from 'cherry picking' on the one hand to a democratic election process run by the voluntary sector on the other. The issue raised some important points regarding the nature of representation of the sector, where there was just a single presence or more than one representative on each board. Respondents did not provide a clear view of what representation really meant, believing at best that it was more about having a voluntary sector perspective at board level. Big issues exist regarding ways of communicating with the sector; how one or two people could actually feed information back to the constituent members. Where the representative is either an employee of the local VDA or an elected representative, the level of communication to the sector appears to be better than where representatives have no 'point of reference', and furthermore, ongoing consultation about developing strategy seems to be better where good communication within the sector exists.

Each children's trust board has established a set of sub-committees. These were described by many respondents as the 'doing groups'. The sub-committee structure has also enabled representatives from VCS agencies to become engaged with the work of the local Children's Trust and contribute to the ongoing evolution of the services which it is required to deliver.

However, the most controversial issue raised in the research are the processes involved in the development of the commissioning strategy. Very few local authorities have a strategy in place and ready for roll out. Almost all of the respondents expressed huge reservations about what the strategy would be like and how it would impact on the sector. The big question is whether the voluntary sector, itself, is commission ready an issue that will be dealt with in greater details in the concluding section of the report. It is acknowledged that commissioning is going to change the nature of the relationship between local authorities and the voluntary sector. It is also recognised that local authorities do not have complete freedom in the way in which they commission services but are bound by a legal framework. There is, however, a universal fear that small, very locally based organisations will not be able to meet the commissioning requirements. These organisations would be better served through a system of grant aid or service-level agreements. However, most authorities are winding down or have ceased using grant aid as a way of supporting voluntary sector agencies and the sector is waiting to see whether the new commissioning strategy will unlock any funding. Where grant aid continues the basis on which it is awarded is being reviewed.

In one local authority area a decision has been made to establish a two tier system for procuring services from the VCS. For the provision of services up to the value of £50k a preferred provider route will be used, beyond that a competitive tendering process will be put in place. This decision was taken because the local authority recognises that some VCS agencies do not have the capacity to tender for work, but provide important and valuable services to local communities.

The chart below is taken from the VCS self assessment tool kit for local authorities who wish to undertake an audit of the quality of their engagement with the voluntary and community sector. This section looks at engagement in children's trusts. In section one local authorities' across the region would be placed in each of the three boxes, whilst in sections two and three only one authority would appear in the green, with most in amber. One authority in the region would appear in the red box in all three.

### Inter-agency governance

NB: These are examples of practice and are not aimed to be all-inclusive.

<b><i>To what extent does the children's trust/partnership ensure meaningful engagement of the VCS?</i></b>		
<b><i>Green</i></b>	<b><i>Amber</i></b>	<b><i>Red</i></b>
<p>The authority and other partners actively promote the role of the VCS in the trust/partnership.</p> <p>There is effective representation of the VCS in partnership arrangements.</p> <p>Resources are allocated to support the appropriate representation of the VCS.</p> <p>A strategy is in place for consulting a range of VCS organisations about partnership decisions and priority setting.</p>	<p>The VCS has representation on the partnership and a mechanism is in place to consult other VCS organisations about the work of the trust or partnership.</p>	<p>VCS representation is intermittent and/or has not been agreed with the range of local VCS organisations.</p> <p>Larger VCS organisations or one VCS representative tend(s) to dominate.</p>
<b><i>How does the trust/partnership ensure the diversity of representation of the VCS in both the vision and priorities for the CYP Plan?</i></b>		
<b><i>Green</i></b>	<b><i>Amber</i></b>	<b><i>Red</i></b>
<p>The trust/partnership's practice is to seek involvement of a wide range of VCS organisations in updating the vision and the priorities.</p> <p>The authority or partnership has funded a VCS Link/Development Officer.</p> <p>Elected members as well as officers seek the views of local VCS organisations.</p>	<p>The VCS was consulted about the vision for Every Child Matters (ECM) and some VCS representatives have had opportunities to participate in decisions about priorities.</p> <p>The lead member for children and young people is aware of need for VCS involvement.</p>	<p>The involvement of the VCS in the vision for ECM has been limited and there have not been any planned opportunities to engage with the VCS about priorities for the CYP Plan.</p>
<b><i>How does the trust/partnership ensure the diversity of representation of the VCS in both the vision and priorities for the CYP Plan?</i></b>		
<b><i>Green</i></b>	<b><i>Amber</i></b>	<b><i>Red</i></b>
<p>The children's partnership has developed shared partnership principles and the VCS has participated in the development of the values and ethos for the partnership.</p> <p>Agreed values and ethos are communicated to all known VCS organisations.</p> <p>There is a key senior management contact or 'champion' for the VCS</p>	<p>VCS representatives have been involved in developing the shared values and ethos as set out in the partnership standards/principles.</p> <p>Communication of shared values and ethos has included key VCS organisations but not a wider cross-section</p>	<p>The VCS has had little or no involvement in the development of shared values and ethos.</p> <p>Main VCS contacts have received information about values and ethos, but not been asked to comment</p>

## Integrated Services for Children and Young People

Only two local authority areas have an integrated service in place to deliver services to children and young people. The rest are in various stages of development from planning to have a strategy document in place. Most respondents suggested that it was still at the 'rhetoric' stage, with no clear idea of what the final outcome was going to be, or what the model would look like.

However, with the exception of two local authority areas, the VCS organisations feel that there has been good to significant engagement in the consultations that have taken place thus far on the development of an integrated strategy. In the case of two local authority areas respondents suggested that the VCS had been involved both in the borough wide developments and in locality discussions. In contrast, however, another respondent felt that, although the VCS had been invited to participate in consultation and had received the plan, the local authority was focussing on the internal re-organisation of departments that will deliver the services so that, at present, the VCS feels excluded or on the periphery.

All authorities were implementing the common assessment framework (CAF). Each had delivered a series of training workshops and most had equally included the VCS alongside their own staff team. However, in some cases the authority had allocated only two places per training session to the voluntary sector, which has led to a feeling that the authority's expectation was that the sector would only be involved peripherally in the roll out of the application of the CAF. It was felt that CAF has not been embedded enough yet in general practice for a lot of VCS organisations to engage and embrace it.

One respondent reported that in the case of their authority there had been '*strong representation for the development of the CAF and there was now a fully developed model in place. The sector is a strong partner in this and has been involved in the policy discussion leading up to its implementation and beyond to the delivery of CAF's.*' Whilst another suggested that 20% of CAF's which are carried out in the local authority begin in the VCS and there are VCS agencies that have take on the lead professional status.

As to the common core skills for professionals working with children and young people there seems to be a high degree of potential engagement of the voluntary sector across the region. However, a number of respondents felt that the VCS in their authority area had not '*woken up to the fact that this has implications for them and for their organisations and did not participate as fully as they should*'. This has serious implications for staff in the VCS as the common core skills become the bench mark for the professional status of those who work with children and young people. However, in one case the VDA is leading the development of training on behalf of the local Children's Trust board, whilst in another the VDA has received funding from the CWDC to offer programmes of training free to the sector on the common core skills.

In general most people were positive about the outcomes of the development of more integrated support services for children and young people, feeling that this provided an opportunity for the VCS to be included.

The pages that follow highlight the three levels of engagement of the VCS in the development of integrated services as suggested by the VCS engage project.

**How has the VCS been involved in updating the Children and Young People's Plan (CYPP) through**

<b>Green</b>	<b>Amber</b>	<b>Red</b>
<p>The trust/partnership seeks the full involvement of a cross-section of the VCS in agreeing objectives and targets for updating the CYPP and monitoring progress.</p> <p>Needs analysis work has fully involved the VCS.</p> <p>Resource mapping has been based on identifying and contacting a wide range of local organisations offering provision.</p>	<p>The VCS has contributed to original and updated CYPP through a representative on the relevant group.</p> <p>Larger VCS organisations or representatives of a VCS forum were asked to and contributed to the overall needs analysis work.</p> <p>Some local VCS providers have been identified in the resource mapping work.</p>	<p>The VCS has had little or no involvement in CYPP preparation and updating.</p> <p>The needs analysis activity did not involve the VCS on a planned basis.</p> <p>The resource mapping work has not contacted local organisations to check lists of local providers.</p>

**Integrated front line delivery**

NB: These are examples of practice and are not aimed to be all-inclusive.

**How does the trust or partnership actively encourage the VCS to play a role in the delivery of integrated children's services?**

<b>Green</b>	<b>Amber</b>	<b>Red</b>
<p>The trust/partnership has a transparent process for commissioning.</p> <p>Support is available to smaller/medium sized VCS organisations to put together bids for new commissioned work.</p> <p>Larger VCS organisations or VCS umbrella organisations/ infrastructure organisations have been commissioned/ funded to help smaller ones.</p> <p>The development of transparent processes for monitoring value for money takes into account of different sizes of VCS organisations.</p> <p>Service specifications and contracts reflect the 'value added' that VCS organisations can bring.</p>	<p>The VCS has received information about new commissioning/tendering processes from the partnership/authority.</p> <p>Briefing sessions have explained what is required of VCS organisations.</p> <p>It has been suggested that VCS organisations can work together to prepare bids.</p> <p>Transparent processes for monitoring value for money are in place, but with little account of the different sizes of VCS organisations and VCS capacity.</p>	<p>Little or no support has been offered to VCS organisations to help them to respond to new requirements for contracted/commissioned services.</p> <p>No account has been taken of the ability of small VCS organisations to complete bids for service delivery.</p>

<b>What action has been taken by the partnership to support the VCS to improve the sustainability of their services?</b>		
<b>Green</b>	<b>Amber</b>	<b>Red</b>
<p>The partnership/authority has consulted with the VCS and agreed to offer commissioned contracts over a three-year period.</p> <p>Contracts prioritise prevention/early intervention.</p> <p>The VCS staff involved in the delivery of commissioned contracts have access to workforce development opportunities.</p> <p>VCS providers are encouraged and supported to collaborate with each other over back office functions, IT, premises, shared posts and also to collaborate with other partners, including the authority.</p>	<p>The partnership/authority is seeking to extend the length of new contracts beyond the one-year grant-aid period.</p> <p>VCS providers are informed of some workforce development opportunities.</p> <p>The advantages of collaboration across VCS providers are highlighted to encourage more efficient delivery.</p>	<p>The partnership/authority has not yet reached agreement about the duration of new contracts.</p> <p>Consideration has not been given to developing the skills of VCS staff over the length of a contract.</p> <p>Little or no work has been done on encouraging VCS organisations to share resources/functions.</p>
<b>What role has the VCS taken in locality working and the development of area-based networks?</b>		
<b>Green</b>	<b>Amber</b>	<b>Red</b>
<p>VCS organisations are an active component of multi-agency arrangements on the basis of neighbourhoods or clusters.</p> <p>VCS practitioners are encouraged to become lead professionals and have access to training and support to fulfil this role.</p> <p>VCS involvement has been integral to the development of children's centres and extended services for schools</p> <p>Locality-based commissioning and services reflect the full range of VCS providers in the area.</p> <p>VCS representatives are involved in the management of locality teams.</p>	<p>VCS representative are included in each locality teams, and are resourced.</p> <p>VCS organisations have some involvement in the development of children's centres/extended services.</p>	<p>VCS representatives are involved in some locality teams, but not in others.</p> <p>There is not a consistent rationale for their involvement.</p> <p>Some local organisations or their partners are unclear why they should be participating at this level.</p>

## Workforce Development

The 2020 Children and Young People's Workforce Strategy sets out the vision of the Government and an Expert Group that everyone who works with children and young people should be:

- **ambitious** for every child and young person;
- **excellent** in their practice;
- **committed** to partnership and integrated working;
- **respected** and valued as professionals.

Specific support to the youth work workforce is outlined: Commitments in Aiming High for Young People have begun by providing leadership and management training for those running integrated youth support services, workforce support to the third sector and in establishing a skills and knowledge framework, including a youth professional status, and testing a fast-track graduate recruitment programme. The Government intend to develop a longer term comprehensive plan to build on existing work to provide the youth sector workforce with the continued support and improvement it needs to ensure it can provide support to meet challenges facing young people.

The Children's Workforce Strategy<sup>7</sup> presents the government's vision and sets the priorities for the developing a 'world-class' children's workforce to deliver the ECM objectives throughout children's, young people's and families' services.

It confirms the children's workforce as all those working with children and young people across all age ranges within the statutory, private and third sector. The strategy calls for reforms across all services to implement 'integrated solutions' to service delivery across the 0 – 19 age range.

It stresses the need for local workforce strategies to support local partners in defining the workforce and its skills in order to reform and continue to develop the workforce to meet the ECM requirements and the changing needs of children, young people and families.

The CWDC<sup>8</sup> is part of the Sector Skills Council (SSC) for social care, children and young people: 'Skills for Care and Development'. It is the national strategic body with responsibility to take forward the children's workforce reforms outlined in the CWS. It shares this responsibility with the Children's Workforce Network, a strategic network of organisations working with children and young people, and other stakeholders with an interest in workforce reform in the sector. It also works with its sister organisation within the SSC, Skills for Care, on relevant social care reforms and with Lifelong Learning UK (LLUK), the SSC for community learning and development.

Support for the development and implementation of local workforce strategies is one of CWDC's continuing priorities; its toolkit, Developing and Implementing an Integrated Local Children's Services Workforce Strategy, aims to support local workforce planning through advice, support and guidance to partners and stakeholders including the third sector, community and faith sectors and integrated training.

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/deliveringservices/workforcereform/childrensworkforcestrategy/>

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.cwdcouncil.org.uk>

## Regional Youth Work Workforce Strategy - Aims

Given the current change agenda within the recent policy context of the Children's Plan, 2020 Children and Young People's Workforce Strategy and the development of targeted and integrated services for young people, the Regional Youth Work Unit has allocated resources to produce a Regional Youth Work Workforce Strategy for the North East setting out the following aims:

1. To highlight and reinforce the critical contribution of youth work within the developing Integrated Services Workforce.
2. To improve the quality and provision of youth work training and to enhance the professional status of youth work.
3. To improve the co-ordination of youth work training in the North East.
4. To maintain and improve youth work standards within the context of service delivery to the 0 – 25 age range group.
5. To develop a strategic role within workforce reform in the North East for youth work agencies in both statutory and third sector organisations.
6. To increase opportunities for joint initiatives in both training and workforce development<sup>9</sup>.

The respondents to this research project all confirmed that workforce development was high on the agenda of each local authority Children's Services strategy plan. The engagement of the VCS in developing the local workforce strategy was sporadic with many authorities developing the plan and then asking for comments, rather than engaging the sector in the development stage of the plan. Many respondents felt that the focus within local authorities was too internalised with examples being given of very limited access for the VCS on workforce development training opportunities offered by the local authority and, some commented that, in the light of funding cuts by the local authority greater access to free training would be a way of providing 'funding in kind'. Whilst written strategies are in the process of being developed there is evidence throughout the region of the VCS being engaged in work force development programmes facilitated by the local authority. Much of the focus of this work has been around the safeguarding issue, with CAF and Safer Recruitment training being the most common opportunities to be offered. There is also evidence of VCS agencies being commissioned to develop work around the 'common core skills for youth work', with one Local Development Agency receiving CWDC to promote this amongst the sector in their area.

On a positive note some VCS organisations in local authorities are either contributing to the overall workforce strategy through the provision of training, or have been engaged in skill assessment projects that will shape workforce development in the future.

<sup>9</sup> The introduction to this section is taken from the draft North East Regional Workforce Strategy Plan and reprinted with permission.

## The West View Project

In Hartlepool the West View Project is the workforce lead for the voluntary and community sector in the borough. The Project has been funded by the CWDC for one day a week to develop the workforce strategy and have undertaken a workforce audit among 8 of the key sector agencies. The work to gather the audit data was paid for by the local authority. The funding enabled the Project to liaise with VCS agencies in Hartlepool to ensure their engagement and they were able to pay the agencies to take part (£1k per agency and £35 per participant). The managers of the projects were trained to undertake the audits with individual staff members and the data captured through the process provided base line information which has been used to inform the workforce strategy. In addition to being trained to carry out the audit, managers were also required to undertake 'safer recruitment training'. About 120 people from the 8 agencies participated in this exercise.

An issue that was raised, which will be covered in more detail in the section on 'Issues Arising', is the whole context of workforce reform and workforce development in the VCS. In too many cases real *workforce development cannot become a reality due to short term funding, short term contracts and a lack of career pathways in the sector.*

The following tables highlight the levels of good practice in Local Authorities in the development of the workforce strategy.

<b><i>What role has the VCs had in developing a shared workforce strategy?</i></b>		
<b><i>Green</i></b>	<b><i>Amber</i></b>	<b><i>Red</i></b>
<p>VCS has participated in the development of the Children's Workforce Strategy.</p> <p>Skills audits of current workforce include a wide range of VCS organisations.</p> <p>Comprehensive inter-agency training is open to VCS and includes training for leaders.</p> <p>Flexible access to qualifications for VCS staff is being considered/developed.</p>	<p>The Children's Workforce Strategy has been developed by the authority and health with some VCS consultation.</p> <p>Some VCS organisations have been involved in the skills audits of current workforce.</p> <p>VCS staff have access to some inter-agency training.</p>	<p>VCS has not been involved in development of Children's Workforce Strategy.</p> <p>Skills audit of current workforce has not included VCS.</p> <p>Training opportunities for VCS staff have focused on safeguarding only.</p>

## Safeguarding

There are 11 local safeguarding children's boards in the North East region taking responsibility for the development of policies, procedures, systems and training in each of the areas. In all cases the voluntary and community children and young people's sector is represented on the local safeguarding children's board (LSCB), usually by one of the large national charities (NSPCC and Barnardos). In the case of Darlington LSCB the local council for voluntary services (eVOLution) has a seat on the Board in its role as the local development agency, and in Northumberland the local Action 4 Children project is represented and feeds into the VoiCeS network, a VCS forum which provides significant information and guidance to members through a variety of communication processes. Communication through the VCS network of safeguarding information was felt to be better where a representative from the sector who sat on the board had a networking role.

Each of the LSCB's has a sub-group structure comprising 'special interest' focus task groups. The membership of these tends to be broader, with greater representation of local voluntary sector agencies.

A key issue that arises for the VCS and the independent and private sectors is how the LSCB filters information to agencies in the community. At present this seems to be more reliant upon good will than any structured approach and is best where the VCS representatives are also part of the wider network of voluntary agencies and take responsibility for sharing information or where information is filtered to the local voluntary development agency for circulation through their mailing lists.

In each case the LSCB has posted its business plan, training programme and other relevant information on the internet, thus easing access for organisations and individuals to the detail of the safeguarding policy and strategy of the local board. In most cases this is by way of a dedicated LSCB web site with links to various information sections, however, in some accessing the information is made more difficult because it is not an easily identifiable component of the website. An alternative access point is through the 'safechild' web site that has links to each of the local safeguarding boards and thus their plans.

The sections that follow provide more detail of how the third sector is engaged in developing safeguarding procedures and their access to training and workforce developments through initiatives instigated by the local safeguarding children's boards.

Two significant factors raised were:

- The re-organisation of local government in two LSCB areas from district councils to unitary authorities and the impact of this on structures. Inevitably there were changes in personnel and the general uncertainty created at a time of change has impacted on the implementation of plans for services for children and young people including that of safeguarding.
- That most LSCB's had been in existence for two to three years and were going through a process of periodic review. This was, inevitably, leading to changes in the way in which the

Board's and safeguarding practices were operating. It was anticipated that once the changes had worked through and new business plans developed the procedures, processes and application of safeguarding would become more stable.

## Training

Each of the Local Authority areas has developed a training programme as part of its business planning process. This training is being rolled out by the local safeguarding boards in each area and is being offered on a multi-agency basis; open to the voluntary and community sector and to independent organisations for whom safeguarding is part of the business responsibility. In some areas the voluntary and community sector has developed specific and appropriate training for its constituents, particularly those which are very locally based and led by volunteers, or part time paid staff.

In each local authority/LSCB area, CAF (Common Assessment Framework) training has been a high priority. In most cases the training events offered by LSCB's has been delivered on a multi agency basis, with the voluntary and community sector being actively encouraged to participate. However, respondents reported that the number of places made available to the sector was limited to two or three per training occasion. Despite this, the evidence would suggest that a large number of VCS staff have participated in the training and are now able to work within the CAF framework. In the case of Northumberland, the lead professional in a number of cases dealt with through the CAF has been a VCS employee, being identified as the most appropriate person. CAF training in Northumberland has been offered free to the participants and has been delivered in local community centres to ease access to it.

Other examples of training opportunities that have been provided either in all local authority areas or in specific areas are:

- E-learning level one:  
There has been a significant take up in larger local authority areas where there are scattered communities; an e-learning tool on domestic violence is being developed in Newcastle.
- Child care training:  
In Northumberland child care training is taking place in six centres.
- Safeguarding self audit:  
The development of a safeguarding self audit tool kit, which identifies organisational need.
- Safeguarding tool kit:  
The development of a tool kit on developing safeguarding procedures.
- Safeguarding Road show:  
In Northumberland the VoiCeS project is using a safeguarding road show to raise awareness. This will be taken to six locations in the County to ease access for the scattered communities.

- **Safeguarding Market place:**  
In North Tyneside a safeguarding market place was organised bringing together all agencies that are involved in the lives and children and young people and inviting representatives from agencies providing services to young people in the community. The purpose of the market place was to give those who attended ‘tasters’ of what exists within the authority.
- **Children’s Workforce Development Council:**  
North Tyneside is in receipt of funding from the CWDC to offer child protection, recruitment and selection and common core skills and knowledge training aimed at those who work with children and young people. The funding is also being used to carry out a training needs analysis to inform future training plans.
- **Safer Recruitment Training:**  
Hartlepool Local Authority provided bursaries to VCS organisations to enable them to participate in safer recruitment training.
- **Introduction to Youth Work:**  
Redcar and Cleveland VDA has developed an initial basic training programme aimed at part time and voluntary workers to enable them to gain basic knowledge and skills. This includes safeguarding training.

The VCS engage project self evaluation tool kit suggests that the following are indicators of good practice for the inclusion of the VCS in local safeguarding strategy developments.

<b>How is the VCS engaged in local safeguarding children’s boards (LSCB)?</b>		
<b>Green</b>	<b>Amber</b>	<b>Red</b>
<p>VCS representation on the LSCB covers both large and small organisations.</p> <p>There is a systematic approach to ensuring that all VCS providers receive guidance on roles and responsibilities.</p> <p>Subsidised/free training is offered to all small VCS providers appropriately.</p> <p>VCS Development Officers have the capacity to ensure the sector is fully engaged and contributing to the safeguarding /staying safe agenda.</p>	<p>The LSCB has a nominated officer who advises partner organisations on safeguarding/welfare matters.</p> <p>The VCS is represented on the LSCB.</p> <p>LSCB policies and guidance on roles and responsibilities of all agencies is available to VCS organisations.</p> <p>Training is advertised to VCS at low costs.</p> <p>Each VCS provider has a nominated person responsible for safeguarding.</p> <p>Consideration is being given as to how to facilitate information sharing across all VCS providers.</p>	<p>The VCS has no regular representation on the LSCB, and/or the LSCB has not been proactive in seeking VCS involvement.*</p> <p>VCS organisations have not received clear guidance about their responsibilities for safeguarding and welfare.</p> <p>Small VCS providers do not have access to affordable training.</p> <p><i>* where NSPCC is present their role is not normally about representing the VCS</i></p>

## Findings

This section of the report considers the main issues that have arisen out of the research undertaken to compile this report. A main issue is one that was consistently raised across the region by a majority of respondents. It is not possible to provide details of all the issues that have been raised, although most are captured under the umbrella of those recorded below. The key issues that have arisen are: Networking; the development of Children's Trust (Children's Services) arrangements; the development of an integrated services model; issues arising out of workforce development strategies; safeguarding and a section on general issues.

### Networking

Whilst all respondents suggested that there were a variety of networking arrangements in each of the local authority areas in which the VCS could engage, what seems to be lacking, except in three authorities, is a specific forum which caters for the children's and young people's agencies. A place where people working to provide services to children and young people in the VCS can meet regularly to share information, engage in debate, receive updates from the local authority about current developments and contribute to ongoing consultation about these developments.

A number of issues were raised:

- Where networking was most successful there was a lead VCS agency, or a local authority lead person, that took on the administrative and secretarial role.
- A major block to support for a VCS forum was the capacity of any agency to take this on without any funding support to offset administrative costs. Most respondents felt that, if the local authority wants a strong VCS and a route to consultation with it, then some level of funding needed to be made, either to a local development agency or to a suitable co-ordinating body.
- It was reported that one authority, which had, hitherto, given a small grant to the LDA to support the forum has withdrawn this from March 31<sup>st</sup>. In the light of this the LDA feels that it is unable to maintain support, which risks the future of the forum.
- In situations where there is a single local lead supporting the VCS, rather than it being a part of a portfolio of responsibilities, the communication flow and levels of participation in all aspects of policy and strategic development were greatly enhanced.
- The problem perceived where a local authority officer had VCS liaison as a part of a remit, too often meant that authority issues overrode the commitment to the sector.
- In one case a chief officer of a local development agency reported that they were hoping to identify funding that would enable them to appoint an individual who would have responsibility for the children and young people's agenda. This is because there is such a volume of change that unless someone has a sole responsibility, developments can get lost.
- In some parts of the region it is felt that engagement of the voluntary sector is tokenistic, and that too often VCS agencies, or personnel, were 'cherry picked' so that the authority could tick a box saying they had consulted.
- A lot of suspicion and reserve seems to exist between the VCS and the local authorities. This is felt to act as a barrier to engagement as a strategic partner in the new environment of children's services.

## Children's Trust Arrangements:

The big issue arising out of the children's trust arrangements that are being developed in the region is the commissioning and procurement strategy. Of all the topics raised in the research this was most often referred to, and there was a great deal of concern expressed about how local authorities would deal with the whole commissioning process. There seems to have been little engagement with the sector in the development of the strategy. Where there has been consultation it has been about the strategy rather than about principle; the sector is asked for an opinion in what is seen to be 'a done deal'.

The issues that were of greatest concern are:

- The potential for a local authority to choose to deal with either a single provider, or with the bigger providers that have the infra-structure to manage contracted work.
- Anecdotal evidence that big national voluntary organisations are already meeting with Directors of Children's Services to 'scoop up' contracts to the detriment of smaller, locally based organisations.
- That going down the single provider route, or using one or more of the bigger national organisations will lead to the loss of some local agencies that have built up a reputation in a particular community, or developed a specific service, and the principle of voluntary sector agencies will be lost.
- In one authority area two voluntary agencies had funding bids turned down by big funders. Feedback suggested that the service was one which should be part of the commissioning strategy. This was in an authority where the commissioning strategy is embryonic.
- Whether there was a level playing field and what agencies and organisations would have to do to become commissioning ready. Few respondents felt that any serious work had been done to prepare organisations for this new environment. (*The author of this report can recommend a course run by Project North East which is about becoming commissioning ready*).
- That the sector itself was not negotiating with Children's Services to ensure that they were built in to the strategy. If an authority chooses, or due to 'best value' constraints, has to award a commission to a large organisation, there may be a way in which a requirement of the contract is that there will be work sub-contracted to local VCS agencies.
- The capacity and capability of VCS organisations, particularly small ones, to meet the requirements for delivering commissioned and contracted work. In Co. Durham a commitment has been made to maintain a pool of money to make awards of up to £50k through a preferred provider route and for sums above that to go to competitive tendering.
- That commissioning is not going to release new funding but integrate existing funding. This is going to impact on organisations that may, hitherto, have received funding from more than one local authority service.

A recent article in the Third Sector journal, Kevin Churley the Chief Executive of Navca told delegates at a Children England conference that:

*'Local politicians must rein in commissioning officers, whose use of 'crude competitive tendering' has resulted in the unintended destruction of local organisations'*. He said that it was wrong to assume competitive tendering automatically improved services. He described competitive

tendering as a 'very blunt instrument' to improve standards which has led to the destruction of local community based voluntary organisations<sup>10</sup>.

<b>How have the VCS been involved in shaping the commissioning process?</b>		
<b>Green</b>	<b>Amber</b>	<b>Red</b>
<p>The trust/partnership involves the VCS in the development and maintenance of the new commissioning framework.</p> <p>VCS representatives have participated in decision-making about resource allocation, pooling budgets, joint risk taking and bidding.</p> <p>The VCS is fully involved in the design of the move from grants to commissioning and the preparation for potential de-commissioning.</p>	<p>The VCS is involved in some aspects of the commissioning framework.</p> <p>The VCS has had some involvement in the planning to move from grants to commissioned services.</p>	<p>There has limited involvement of the VCS in designing the commissioning framework.</p> <p>There has not been adequate involvement of the VCS in the planning to move from grants to commissioned services, nor the design of arrangements to assist small VCS organisations in coping with this transition.</p>

## **Integrated Services**

The implementation of integrated services for children and young people is a critical development within local authority children's service strategies. The expectation of government is that the integrated services structure and strategy will bring together all agencies that work with children and young people and that the VCS will be an integral part of this.

A mixed picture is emerging across the region regarding the progress of developing a model for the delivery of the integrated services. In one local authority a structure and strategy is in place, which has brought together the various local authority services, whilst in other places the development is restricted to a document setting out the process. There was also a mixed picture of VCS engagement in the development process from some who felt that there had been full consultation at one end of the spectrum, to those who know the broad principles, but the local authority was concentrating first on getting the internal authority structure in place before including the voluntary sector. In cases where this was happening the VCS attitude was somewhat cynical about just how much integration there would be of all services and questioned why the sector was not being engaged in the design; only being asked to comment on the developing strategy.

However, most respondents felt that the sector had been integrated well into the development of the Common Assessment Framework. All authorities had offered CAF training and had included the voluntary sector in this. There are examples of the sector taking the role of lead professional and, in one case, delivering training on behalf of the local authority. The evidence would suggest that those agencies which focus more on work with children (under 13's) are more involved with CAF than predominantly youth work organisations.

<sup>10</sup> Third Sector daily news bulletin 23rd March 2009

A lot of work is going on regionally around the common core skills for work with children and young people. Voluntary sector agencies in three authorities have received funding from the CWDC to develop training around the common core and in one case the local VDA is leading the work, on behalf of the local authority for the VCS. One respondent working in an LDA suggested that personnel in voluntary agencies needed to do more themselves to ensure that they understood the requirements that were being placed on them and took advantage of training that was available. There had been a disappointingly low attendance at a training event, particularly from small agencies.

## **Workforce Development**

All local authorities in the region have, or are in the process of developing, a children and young people's workforce development strategy. The Regional Youth Work Unit has developed an overarching strategy, which has been agreed by partners in local authorities and the voluntary sector. There was recognition that there is an increased expectation of developing a more highly trained workforce including provision for volunteers. However, a number of key issues were raised by respondents which need to be raised for consideration:

- Career development in the voluntary sector is accidental rather than planned. Most people make a journey through various levels in the sector not through planning but through happenstance and opportunities that arise. There is also a ceiling beyond which individuals cannot go because organisations tend to be small, particularly those that are locally based.
- The way in which the VCS survives on short term funding, typically annual funding, means that often training is job specific to meet contract requirements and not about the strategic development of the workforce.
- Very often the agencies within the sector have little or no funding for workforce development. Unless this is built into funding bids, which will mean it is job specific; few have the core funding available to pay for training opportunities. Often, therefore, the sector relies on access to free training.
- Training opportunities are not always delivered at times which are suitable for a part time or volunteer work force, which means that the development of this sector, which has historically delivered much of the face-to-face youth work, is sadly neglected. The e-learning model, currently being developed for safeguarding training is seen as a real option for improving work place learning.
- The capacity of small organisations to release staff for training was raised as an issue of concern. Sometimes this presents a choice between delivering a service for which the organisation is funded or being closed, so that employees can participate in training.

## **Safeguarding**

There are a substantial number of initiatives across the region being developed to ensure that children, young people and vulnerable adults are able to be kept safe and secure. There is evidence that in every local authority area safeguarding training and procedures are in place to ensure compliance with current legislation. The VCS has been encouraged to access safeguarding training that has been offered by the local authority and there are examples of LDA's receiving funding (from the CWDC for example), to deliver safeguarding training.

A number of respondents felt that it was now up to the sector, and agencies that are contained within it, to understand the expectations that safeguarding strategies require and to ensure compliance with existing and emerging legislation. All LDA's reported that all their briefing bulletins to the sector contained information about safeguarding initiatives or information. In some cases specific bulletins (both e-based and paper based) are sent to agencies in the sector providing them with information.

Clearly, it is the responsibility of the board of trustees, management committee and senior staff member (s) to ensure that their agency complies with all the requirements placed on it, including the registration requirements that will come from the Independent Safeguarding Authority.

## **General Issues:**

### **Size and Diversity of the Sector**

Throughout the research interviews respondents raised the issue of the size and diversity of the voluntary and community sector as a whole, and of that working with children and young people. The sector makes a significant contribution to the economy of the North East of England through the services provided to communities, people employed or who volunteer in the sector and the funding that is levered into the region.

However, the concern that was being expressed was the fact that, in general, the workforce of local authorities did not understand the size or diversity of the sector. This was felt particularly keenly with regard to representation on various bodies in the authorities' structures. Respondents felt that it was impossible for one person to represent the sector, even if they came from within one of the local development agencies. At best they could bring a voluntary sector perspective to the table, but that real consultation with the sector was a complex and lengthy process.

This has been an issue for both the sector and for local authorities for many years; on the one hand local authorities are required to seek representation and to consult, but in most cases there is no mechanism for that consultation process to take place. This is where, it was felt, forums focussing on the work of children and young people and which brought personnel from the sector together played an important part in ensuring that strategic developments taking place in children's services are the subject of consultation. Some people felt that, in itself, this was worthy of local authority financial support to facilitate this process.

A further area of concern is that, in the present financial climate, it is only the larger organisations that have the capacity to release staff to attend meetings and to participate in strategic development groups; too often the smaller organisations simply weren't able to do this. This created an imbalance in the consultation process.

### **Capacity**

Another issue that was raised in almost every interview was that of capacity; to engage; to consult and to be part of the strategic developments that are taking place. For local authority officers participation in the wide range of meetings and strategy groups that exist now is an expectation of role. For the voluntary sector it is an add-on to an individual's role and a cost to the organisation which employs them. The resistance or inability of local authorities to

recompense organisations which released employees to participate through backfill is seen as a major barrier to true VCS involvement. This is a critical issue for the sector as the requirement placed on local authorities to include it becomes greater there is pressure to comply, but finding individuals who are able to do so is becoming increasingly difficult.

### **Communication**

The development of good communication systems has always been a difficult task to achieve. Respondents to the interviews felt that there was a mine field developing across the region both within the sector's own communication systems and those which flow from the local authority. Many felt that, in the case of the local authority, information flow was dependent upon individuals rather than strategic policy. Sometimes important opportunities for the sector, for example funding potential, was not communicated and there is a feeling that funding that could be shared with the sector is kept within the authority; there was almost a feeling of deception and a 'cloak and dagger' kind of mentality.

Work to develop improved systems of communication and a commitment to openness and transparency would go a long way to alleviate the issues that were raised.

### **The role of the Voluntary and Community Sector**

Emerging from the research is the question of what role the voluntary and community sector has in the delivery of services in local authorities. If commissioning is simply going to produce a competitive environment with the outcome of a tendering opportunity resulting in a national organisation being contracted to deliver services as opposed to contracts going to locally based agencies, with a history in the community, then that is going to have a long term impact on the type of voluntary sector that exists. If there is not a level playing field, or even some way in which local agencies can ensure inclusion in service delivery, a new landscape will emerge.

One respondent commented that it always felt that the VCS was something of a 'Cinderella service', invited to the party last and inclined to be left out. This impression was checked out with others who confirmed that there were occasions when it was felt that local authorities did not always act inclusively, which creates feelings of resentment and disappointment.

### **Funding**

When asked what the main issues facing the sector in 2009 are it was not surprising that all respondents mentioned funding. Whether this was the inability to attract new sources of funding to develop new work or to sustain existing examples of good practice, there was unanimity that the funding scene had become, and was becoming, much tighter. The impact of this is felt in many ways; increasingly funding is only available for one year, which makes the recruitment of good quality staff difficult; the expectation of less being able to deliver more; the insecurity surrounding a change to a more competitive contract culture, with no new money being available, leaves the sector feeling extremely vulnerable.

However, a number of individuals made the comment that the sector had always been good at using the resources they had well and having the dynamic and flexibility to be able to deliver services despite being cash strapped. The rider to this was that most felt that this was the harshest environment in which they had operated in their careers in the sector.

## Conclusion

This research project has taken a snap shot of where the children and young people's voluntary and community sector feels itself to be in March 2009. The views of the respondents who took part in the research reflect their perception of the 'state of the sector'; others will have a different view and may feel that the sector is in a different position to that which is portrayed here.

What has come through very clearly is that the sector feels itself operating in a 'shifting sands' environment, in which they seem to have little control, but a lot to lose. The dramatic reduction in the availability of funding in the region; the changes impacting on the local authorities' as they develop new ways of delivering services to children and young people, and the uncertainty about just what the outcome of commissioning will be, is creating a lot of uncertainty. Add to this the increasingly bureaucratic funding regimes and more onerous governance requirements that is creating concern that the principles upon which the voluntary sector was established and their philanthropic objectives are being more and more eroded.

Clearly, there are still a lot of big changes that will impact on the way in which the sector plays its part in service delivery in communities. The rhetoric of government, which sees the sector increasingly becoming the deliverer of services on behalf of the authority and how this will work as a reality is the key to how the sector will evolve in the coming years. This is a difficult cultural shift for many. To participate in service delivery through contracts is to compromise independence. The contract culture will bring with it compliance requirements and the expectation of delivering quite specific services which local authorities are required to do. The traditional culture in which the voluntary sector has worked is one where a need has been identified, a project developed, funding sought and the project delivered. Contracting will change this and organisations may find themselves delivering on both the traditional method and one which has a legal basis and a requirement to deliver. The impact of this cannot be underestimated and must be given serious consideration by those responsible for individual organisations. Certainly, from the position of developing sustainability the current move away from non-outcome focussed delivery seems to be leading to an environment which is mostly contract based with organisations being held accountable for providing the services they receive funding for.

Critical to the future of the sector are the relationships which are developed within it through joint working and co-operative delivery as well as maintaining and developing the relationships it has with elected members and officers of the authority, particularly those responsible for Children's Services. It is for the sector to ensure that local authority representatives recognise and value the current work that is being done, and commit to supporting the sector build its capacity to deliver work under the new and emerging service frameworks.

The culture of change that is being faced by the VCS is one which is going to continue over the coming years. Those that survive will be the ones that can change and adapt to the new operating environment and which recognise the importance of complying with the requirements that will be placed upon all those agencies that deliver services to children, young people and vulnerable adults in order that 'world class' services are a reality for beneficiaries.

## Case Studies

The case studies which follow highlight some examples of good practice that were identified during the research process. They are included here because each is capable of replication in other contexts and also shows that there are these and many other examples of excellent practice that is contributing to very high levels of service for children and young people in the region.

### Northumberland's Safeguarding Road Show

Northumberland is a large rural county with a population that is spread throughout, many living in quite small communities. The most populated conurbation is South East Northumberland, but otherwise there are scattered centres of population. The road network and transport links reflect the rural nature of the county. The VoiCeS project, (a networking body) recognise the difficulties many of their members have accessing information, support and training which is not delivered quite locally. They have prepared a roadshow that will go to six locations around the County to try to encourage those who work with children and young people in the villages and hamlets to access information and the e-learning packages that are available.

### North Tyneside Workforce Development Training

This project is funded by the Children's Workforce Development Council and is aimed at the children's workforce in North Tyneside. A programme of training opportunities has been developed by the voluntary development agency (VODA) on child protection and recruitment and selection. There are two training opportunities in each; a short refresher or a more in-depth programme aimed at managers or case load practitioners.

In addition a training course around the common core skills and knowledge for the children's workforce is being delivered aimed at front line workers in children's and youth work agencies.

The CWDC funding will also enable an assessment of training needs and gaps to be undertaken. This will support and inform the future plans for workforce training and support.

The funding means that VODA can offer these courses free and employ staff resources to support the development and delivery of the training.

### Redcar and Cleveland introduction to work with children and young people

This training programme has been developed by the Redcar and Cleveland VDA. Redcar and Cleveland has a diverse geographical spread, from small rural communities to a significant conurbation, which is part of Tees Valley. Within this there are pockets of serious deprivation as well as places where residents enjoy a very high standard of living.

The training programme is aimed at part time and volunteer staff, particularly those just beginning work in the voluntary sector. The programme is a basic introduction to work with children and young people and is offered over 8 weeks (evenings). It covers topics such as: Every Child Matters, CAF, data protection, child protection, safety and risk, diversity, the development

of children, emotional well-being and personal development plans for participants.

The programme is offered free and is accredited.

### **Darlington CVS (eVOLution)**

Darlington CVS has two development workers whose role is to work with the smallest organisations that affiliate to the CVS. They have a 'health check' process, an exercise which, through self-assessment, enables the organisation to check that it has all the necessary governance arrangements, policies and procedures in place to ensure that it is 'fit for purpose'. Within the health check is a section on safeguarding and enables the development workers to offer support and guidance, if required, to up skill the organisation.

### **County Durham. Area Action Partnerships**

County Durham is undergoing a governance change from a district base to a unitary authority. Part of the new organisation that will focus on local communities are Area Action Partnerships. Each of the nine partnerships across the County will have a staff team attached to it. One of the posts will be focussing on community partnership and the post holder will be expected to work and support the local voluntary and community groups in the area. It is anticipated that this will support the engagement of small voluntary and community groups in training, particularly the safeguarding agenda.

### **Barnardos e-learning induction pack**

Barnardos has developed an e-learning safeguarding induction training programme which is used throughout the organisation nationwide. This is a mandatory component of the induction process for all staff that joins the organisation.

The programme is also being marketed outside Barnardos and has been purchased by some local authorities for use with their staff.

### **Sunderland 14 – 19 quality mark**

Following a joint Ofsted/ALI area-wide inspection of the provision for 16 – 19 year olds in Sunderland carried out in May 2002 a need was identified to establish a common approach to quality assurance to lead to improved provider performance. A framework was developed which reflects the Common Inspection Framework for FE, schools and work based providers. The framework provides for 3 levels of standard, bronze, silver and gold and provides a mechanism for the recognition of good practice in education and training for 14 – 19 year olds.

The Sunderland Voluntary Sector Youth Forum believed this was a good opportunity for its members to be part of the process, principally because it is believed that having the quality mark will be a requirement for the commissioning process. The local authority agreed to provide free training to SVSYF members and each has worked to achieve the silver standard.

## Middlesbrough Induction Programme

The Middlesbrough Voluntary Development Agency has developed an agreement with the local authority that anyone being employed either in the authority or in the VCS to work with children and young people will participate in an induction programme which covers a variety of topics essential for workers, including safeguarding and the common core skills.