



Worcestershire
Infrastructure Consortium

WORCESTERSHIRE INFRASTRUCTURE CONSORTIUM

**GROWING A STRONG AND DYNAMIC
VOLUNTARY AND COMMUNITY SECTOR**

TEN YEAR STRATEGY

2006-2016

Prepared by:

Alison McLean 01432 830116
Vicki Murray 01432 268455

alisonmclean1@btinternet.com
vc Murray@btinternet.com

**active
communities**

ChangeUp
Funded by the Home Office

defra
Department for Environment
Food and Rural Affairs

CONTENTS

	PAGE
Executive Summary	3
Background and Purpose	5
Local Infrastructure – the starting point	7
The Strategic Context	9
The Role of the Consortium	10
Consortium Membership and Links	11
Shared Principles	11
Strategic Vision and Objectives	14
Key Areas of Activity	15
Glossary	16

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Worcestershire Infrastructure Consortium is a group of voluntary sector organisations that are working together to make sure that all voluntary organisations and community groups in Worcestershire can access the support and services they need to achieve their aims.

All the organisations involved in the Consortium offer some or all of the following services:

- Start up and development support
- Information, advice and assistance
- Advocacy and representation
- Partnership building and brokerage
- Policy research

The Consortium has been working on a number of collaborative projects over the past year, which have been funded through the government's ChangeUp programme. This strategy has been developed in consultation with the sector and other stakeholders to put in place a longer-term vision for the Consortium. It describes the role of the Consortium and what it is trying to achieve. The Consortium is working on a detailed Action Plan to define the activity it will undertake to achieve the objectives described in this strategy.

The Strategy identifies three key roles for the Consortium

1. **Co-ordinator of advice and support** – acting as the co-ordinating body for voluntary sector infrastructure organisations, working together to maximise available resources to meet identified needs of the sector.
2. **Advocate** – helping strengthen and support the 'voices' of the sector and contributing to the development of strategy and policy.
3. **Partnership Builder and Broker** – ensuring that the right structures and links are in place to deliver the Advocate and Co-ordinator roles.

The members of the Consortium share a commitment to

- ∅ Valuing voluntary action and community involvement
- ∅ Valuing an independent and diverse voluntary and community sector
- ∅ Striving for accountability, openness and honesty in its work
- ∅ Developing a co-operative and collaborative approach to its work
- ∅ Promoting equality and diversity
- ∅ Encouraging and supporting best practice

VISION

Worcestershire Infrastructure Consortium believes that a strong and dynamic Voluntary and Community Sector is an essential part of making Worcestershire a great place to live.

The Consortium's contribution to building a strong and dynamic sector will be to:

Objective 1 – Ensure that voluntary organisations and community groups can access the infrastructure services and support they need to achieve their aims.

The Consortium will achieve this objective by:

- **Helping Communities and Groups to identify and meet their own needs**
- **Co-ordinating the delivery of information, advice and assistance to meet identified needs**

Objective 2 - Ensure that Voluntary and Community Groups can influence local and regional strategy and policy.

The Consortium will achieve this objective by:

- **Supporting and strengthening the 'voices' of the sector**
- **Contributing to strategy and policy development**

Objective 3 - Build and maintain collaborative mechanisms to deliver the other two objectives.

The Consortium will achieve this objective by:

- **Building and maintaining a Consortium fit for purpose**
- **Establishing and maintaining strong links with partners and stakeholders**

BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

Voluntary organisations and community groups are an essential part of what makes Worcestershire a great place to live. They range from very local groups of volunteers organising activities and events in their own communities to county-wide organisations, employing many staff and delivering key public services. All these organisations seek advice, information and support of one kind or another at some time. They also often look for ways in which they can influence and contribute to how public services are designed and delivered now and in the future.

This strategy, developed in consultation with the sector and other stakeholders, describes the role of the Worcestershire Infrastructure Consortium. It also describes the activities it will undertake to ensure that support services are in place, are easily accessible across the County, make the best possible use of the resources available and are responsive to the needs of the voluntary organisations and community groups that they are there to serve.

For the purpose of this strategy, 'infrastructure' is defined as

“The physical facilities, structures, systems, relationships, people, knowledge and skills that help frontline organisations and community groups to achieve their aims ”.

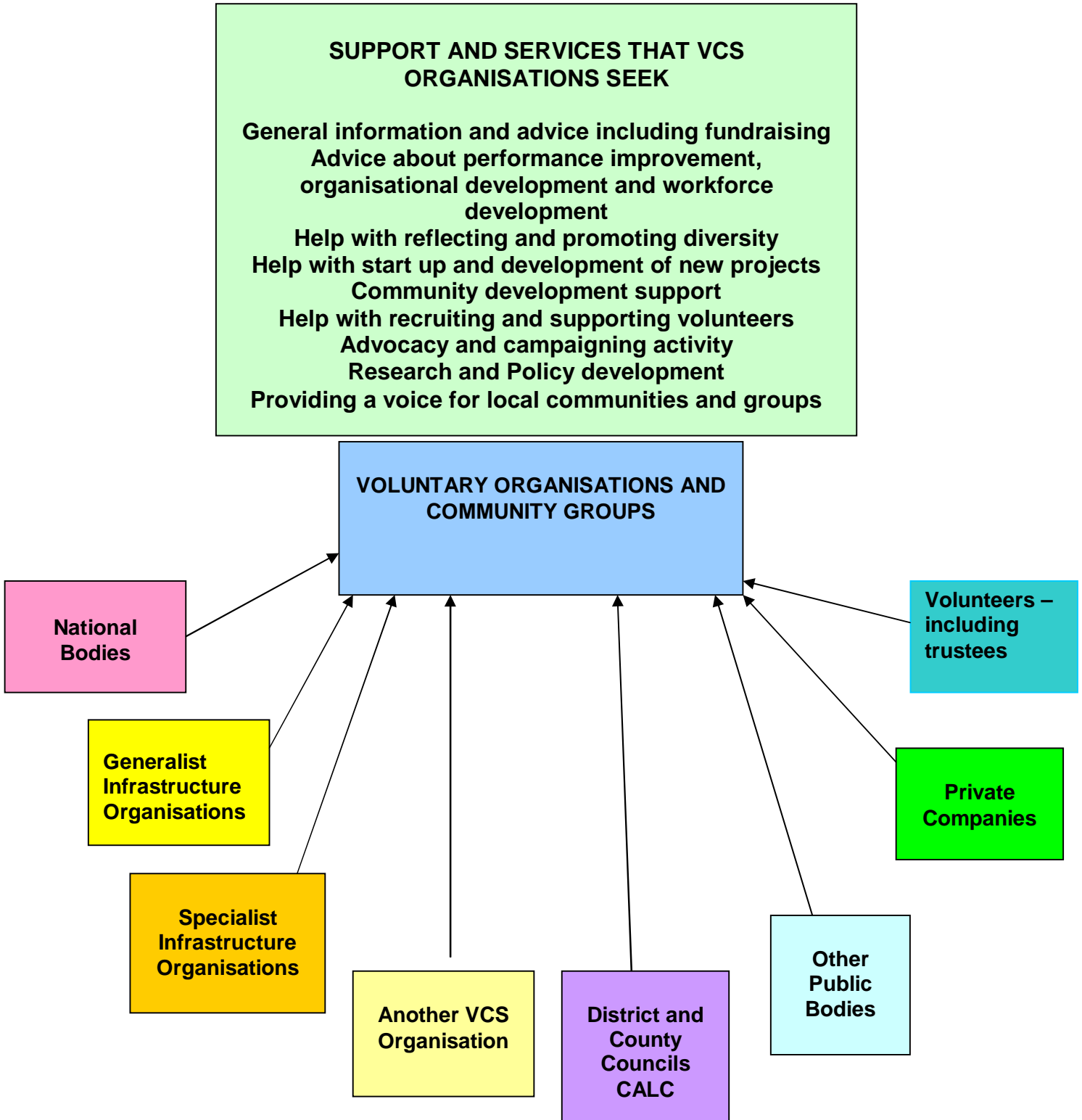
The diversity of the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) means that many different routes are used to access these infrastructure services and to influence decision-makers. VCS organisations use national bodies, regional and local networks, local public sector partners and the commercial sector as well as local infrastructure organisations to access the support they need (Diagram 1 below illustrates this).

The Consortium welcomes this diversity and sees it as source of a great strength. There is however, work to be done at a County level to ensure that the support needs of the Voluntary and Community Sector are adequately met and that we are making the best use of the resources available. The focus of the work of the Consortium therefore, is

- To bring together those voluntary sector organisations that deliver infrastructure services in Worcestershire
- To co-ordinate the delivery of those services
- And to drive forward improvements in the level, spread, range and quality of the support services that are available within the County.

DIAGRAM 1

VCS INFRASTRUCTURE SUPPORT SERVICES IN WORCESTERSHIRE



LOCAL INFRASTRUCTURE – THE STARTING POINT

Voluntary Sector infrastructure organisations in Worcestershire are both generic (offering general support and advice to all comers) and specialist (offering services to specific groups, such as those organisations focused on older or younger people or black and ethnic minorities, or focused on specific activities, such as the environment). They may operate County wide, across a single district, or within part of a district. Many of these organisations also act as frontline organisations themselves, delivering services directly to the community. Most district-based Local Development Agencies as well as specialist agencies such as Age Concern, for example, run services for the community – whether it is lunch clubs, or transport schemes, or playgroups - as well as providing support and advice to local voluntary organisations and groups.

The Consortium has undertaken a number of pieces of research to build up a picture of the support needs of voluntary organisations and community groups and the current level of services that are available in the County. This research has provided a baseline of infrastructure needs in the County and reveals some important starting points for this strategy.

- ∅ In general terms the level of resources are not adequate to meet the support needs of the sector. In many cases infrastructure organisations are subsidising their infrastructure functions from the money they make delivering services.
- ∅ Despite high levels of knowledge and expertise within infrastructure organisations, the level and quality of infrastructure services is not consistent across the County. Some areas (both urban and rural) are better served than others, often as a result of the different levels of resources available in different localities.
- ∅ Locally based services are important to local groups, particularly smaller groups with fewer resources or those in rural areas.
- ∅ There is a striking difference between the support needs of an increasingly professional sector and the large numbers of small/voluntary/community/rural groups.
- ∅ There is little evidence of any duplication of infrastructure services. There is however, still confusion about which organisations deliver what and underdeveloped mechanisms for sign posting between organisations. There is particular confusion around routes and mechanisms for representation.
- ∅ The activity funded under the Change-Up programme has strengthened the relationships between the infrastructure organisations and has resulted in some good examples of collaborative projects. These have been both strategic (e.g. the development of a Volunteering Strategy) and practical (e.g. joint appointment of a community development worker in the Wychavon District).
- ∅ There are good examples of collaborative work with public sector partners and many examples of representatives from infrastructure organisations being

involved in decision making mechanisms. There is however, lack of clarity about the way these representative mechanisms interact.

THE STRATEGIC CONTEXT IN WHICH THE CONSORTIUM IS WORKING

Over the last few years a great deal of activity has taken place nationally, regionally and locally to build the capacity of the voluntary and community sector within the UK.

The Compact is a framework for partnership working between government and the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS). It recognises the contribution the sector makes to our society and is the result of consultation. There is a Local Compact, which has been developed in consultation with the sector and public sector partners in Worcestershire.

In **2002 HM Treasury** held a **Cross-Cutting Review** of the role of the VCS in service delivery. This explored how central and local government could work more effectively with the sector to deliver high quality services. The review was underpinned by recognition of the substantial contribution that the VCS makes to the delivery of services, the core independence of the sector and the mutual interest of the sector and government in building the capacity of the sector to deliver a full range of co-ordinated high quality services.

In response the **Home Office** published **ChangeUp**, a cross-government framework for capacity building and infrastructure in the VCS, developed in partnership with the sector. Its aim, backed up by 8 objectives, is that by 2014 the needs of frontline organisations will be met by support, which is:

- ∅ Available nation-wide
- ∅ Structured for maximum efficiency
- ∅ Offers excellent provision
- ∅ Accessible to all
- ∅ Reflects and promoting diversity
- ∅ Sustainably funded

It describes the architecture of support needed by frontline organisations and launched a programme of investment in the sector at national, regional and local levels – it includes the recommendations for setting up local infrastructure consortia to lead the co-ordination of infrastructure services at a local level.

Much has been achieved, particularly in terms of raising awareness of the importance of infrastructure services, but key challenges remain. These include a lack of focus for sector ownership of the ChangeUp programme, complex fund management and strands of investment, a lack of a strong evidence base or clear mechanisms to turn the commitment to diversity into tangible results.

In order to address these concerns, the **Capacity Builders** Agency has been established with further investment for 2006 –2008. The agency will

- Provide a sector-led focus for the accountability and ownership for ChangeUp and take ownership of the fund management
- Ensure programme co-ordination and joined-up working
- Mainstream diversity issues into the design and delivery of activity
- Ensure real time action and longer term evaluation

Capacity Builders started work in the West Midlands on April 1 2006.

THE ROLE OF THE CONSORTIUM

Worcestershire Infrastructure Consortium was formed in 2003 in response to the government's ChangeUp agenda and with the initial purpose of drawing together and implementing an Infrastructure Investment Plan funded through the ChangeUp programme. This programme has been running since the Plan was agreed in June 2005 and has focussed on the following areas of activity:

Strengthening the capacity of Infrastructure Support – initially by research into the needs of the sector, mapping current services, and developing and promoting the Consortium. Two of the Consortium projects have been focussed on raising standards – one which aims to increase the number of VCS organisations undertaking relevant quality standards, providing training courses in procurement and supporting the development of Quality Champions. The other involves four agencies working together to support good practice in representation of the VCS on strategic partnerships.

Increasing Volunteering in Worcestershire – the Volunteering sub-group of the Consortium focuses on improving quality and quantity of Volunteering activity in the County. It has established a Volunteering Forum and developed a Countywide volunteering strategy. The group has also helped develop the measures in the Local Area Agreement in relation to increasing volunteering activity in the County.

Improving support to Social Enterprises in Worcestershire – by increasing the level of advice to voluntary organisations and promoting the benefits of social enterprise to the VCS and statutory bodies. The Consortium has also contributed to the renewal of the social economy research “Valuing the Voluntary Sector” which was completed in 2000 and has been very useful as a resource document since.

Develop ICT capacity of voluntary and community sectors in Worcestershire – by building the ICT capacity of VCS infrastructure organisations to improve their effectiveness and efficiency in delivering services. This includes developing a Consortium website and extranet, researching the potential for a joint database, upgrading equipment and providing support.

Develop collaborative working in Learning and Skills - by supporting the VCS in understanding and engaging with the learning and skills agenda and increasing its role in service delivery through support of the Voluntary Sector Learning Network.

Develop collaborative infrastructure support in weaker areas – by running a number of pilots where infrastructure organisations collaborate to deliver a new service to areas where there are gaps, or to particular groups (BME communities, younger people and older people). A particular feature of these pilots has been specialist and generic providers working together.

The focus of the work so far has been on developing and delivering these strategic and practical projects. The Consortium has also worked to develop sound processes for commissioning work and monitoring progress, for managing and accounting for funds, and for developing its membership. It is now ready to move to the next stage and has developed this longer-term strategy for ensuring

a more coherent and collaborative approach to the future delivery of infrastructure functions in the County.

The Consortium has three key roles:

4. **Co-ordinator of advice and support** – acting as the co-ordinating body for voluntary sector infrastructure organisations, working together to maximise available resources to meet identified needs of the sector.
5. **Advocate** – helping strengthen and support the ‘voices’ of the sector and contributing to the development of strategy and policy.
6. **Partnership Builder and Broker** – ensuring that the right structures and links are in place to deliver the Advocate and Co-ordinator roles.

SHARED PRINCIPLES

The members of the Consortium share a commitment to

- ∅ Valuing voluntary action and community involvement
- ∅ Valuing an independent and diverse voluntary and community sector
- ∅ Striving for accountability, openness and honesty in its work
- ∅ Developing a co-operative and collaborative approach to its work
- ∅ Promoting equality and diversity
- ∅ Encouraging and supporting best practice

CONSORTIUM MEMBERSHIP AND LINKS

Consortium membership is open to any Worcestershire focussed voluntary sector organisation that provides at least 3 of the following 5 services to voluntary organisations and community groups:

1. Start up and development support
2. Information, advice and assistance
3. Advocacy and representation
4. Partnership building and brokerage
5. Policy research

Current members are:

Age Concern Herefordshire and Worcestershire
Bromsgrove and Redditch Network (BARN)
Community Action Wyre Forest
Community First in Herefordshire and Worcestershire
Droitwich Spa and Rural Council for Voluntary Service
Community Action Malvern and District
Pershore and District Voluntary Help Centre
Evesham Volunteer Centre
Welcome to Our Future
Worcester Volunteer Centre

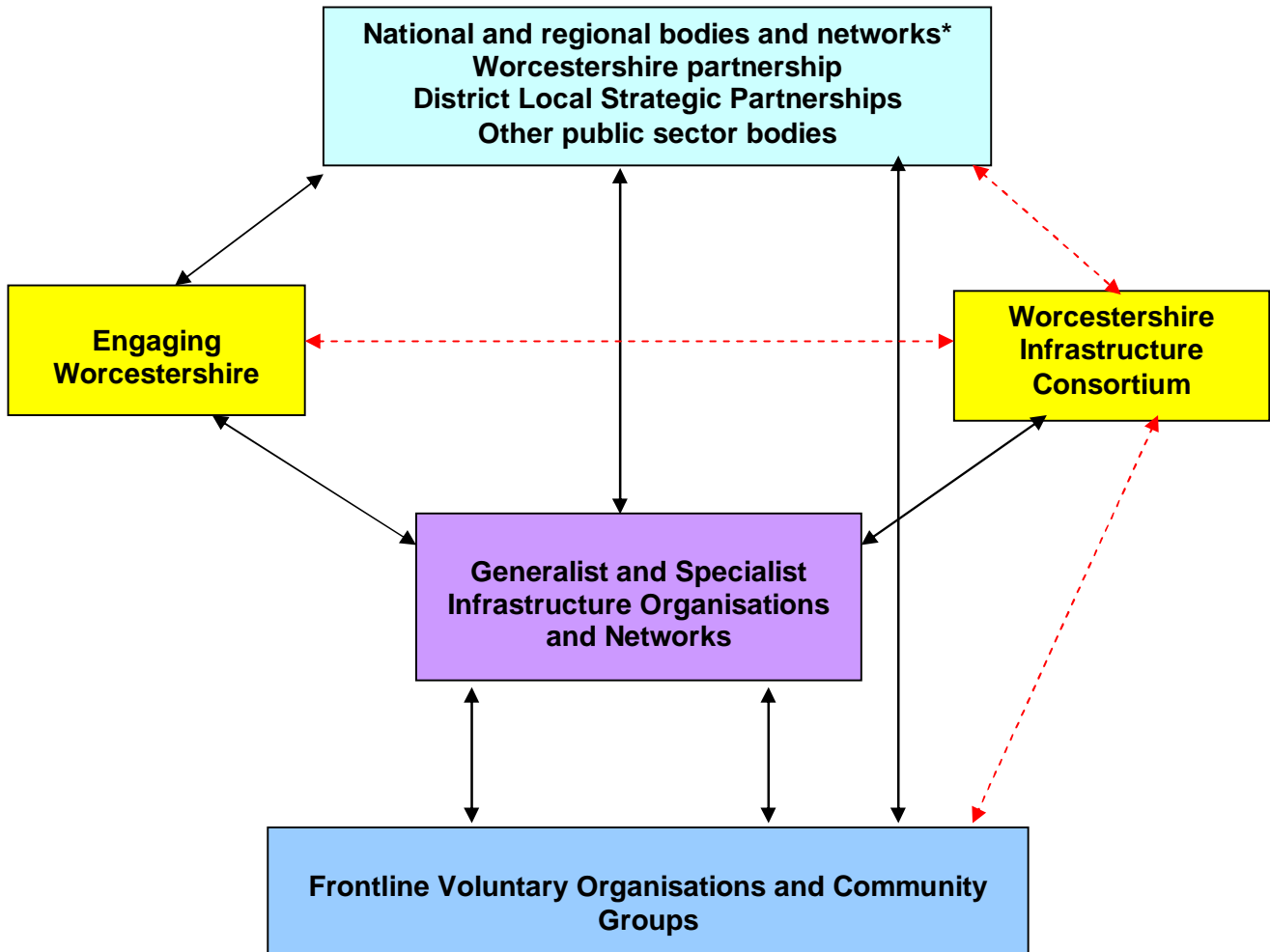
Worcestershire Association of Voluntary Organisations in Community Care
Worcestershire Council for Voluntary Youth Service
Worcestershire Racial Equality Council

The role of the Consortium in representing and promoting the Voluntary and Community Sector will be developed in the context of the existing structures in the County. It will take particular account of those mechanisms, including the 'Engaging Worcestershire' group, that link the VCS into the District and County Local Strategic Partnerships and the Compact, and the work on the Local Area Agreement. There is already common membership between the Consortium and these structures. The Consortium will focus on adding value to existing arrangements, acting as a trouble shooter when relationships are weak or not working as they should be, but not cutting across existing relationships where these are working well. Diagram 2 (below) illustrates the complexity of the 'representational' structures in the County and the variety of routes that VCS organisations have to influence at local, regional and national level. The job of the Consortium is to make sure these routes are working well, so that the 'voices' of the sector are strong and clear. It is not the job of the Consortium to act as a single voice. It will however, take the lead on identifying and promoting the need for appropriately designed and resourced infrastructure services.

DIAGRAM 2

VOLUNTARY AND COMMUNITY VOICES IN WORCESTERSHIRE

CURRENT CONTEXT



←-----→ Denotes relationships that Consortium needs to clarify and develop.

* VCS organisations communicate with and seek to influence many regional and national bodies. These include voluntary sector networks and membership organisations (e.g. Volunteering England, NCVO, NAVCA, ChangeUp National Hubs, RAWM, ACRE etc.), voluntary sector national bodies, Government bodies (GOWM and individual government departments), and many other public bodies including Non Departmental Government Bodies (e.g. English Heritage, Commission for Rural Communities).

See Glossary of Terms and Abbreviations

STRATEGIC VISION AND OBJECTIVES

VISION

Worcestershire Infrastructure Consortium believes that a strong and dynamic Voluntary and Community Sector is an essential part of making Worcestershire a great place to live.

The Consortium's contribution to building a strong and dynamic sector will be to:

Objective 1 – Ensure that voluntary organisations and community groups can access the infrastructure services and support they need to achieve their aims.

Co-ordinating the access to infrastructure services is the key focus for the Consortium. Despite the fact that there is a growing recognition of the importance of these services for the well being of voluntary organisations and community groups and for achieving the aims of statutory partners to improve the range and quality of local services, resources remain scarce. Consortium members are committed to making the most of what is available by working collaboratively, co-ordinating services and delivering jointly or delivering from a single point, (whichever is most appropriate). Increased access to ICT is providing new opportunities for infrastructure organisations to share information, signpost between organisations and provide more coherent and more accessible services to frontline organisations and community groups.

Objective 2 - Ensure that Voluntary and Community Groups can influence local and regional strategy and policy.

Part of the infrastructure function is to support voluntary and community groups to influence both local and regional strategy and policy. The Consortium will articulate issues and concerns of VCS organisations, local communities and beneficiary groups where it is best placed to do so, or support other networks if that is the most appropriate route. It will contribute to the identification of needs and solutions through research and by drawing on the VCS experience on the ground. It will also work to raise the profile of the VCS, including contributing to the evidence base of the VCS role in the achievement of others' strategic objectives.

Objective 3 - Build and maintain collaborative mechanisms to deliver the other two objectives

The Consortium needs to ensure that it has the right structures, membership and working practices to fulfil its role and achieve its objectives. It will put in place robust mechanisms to measure its performance and impact. It will also develop a communications strategy that will ensure that its work is focussed on the needs of the voluntary organisations and community groups and that will build strong relationships with public sector partners, particularly those involved in the Local Strategic Partnerships and the Local Area Agreement.

KEY AREAS OF ACTIVITY

The Consortium has put together a detailed Action Plan (*being developed*) to take forward these objectives. The Action Plan contains the following key elements:

Objective 1 – Ensure that voluntary organisations and community groups can access the infrastructure services and support they need to achieve their aims.	
We will do this by:	What we are aiming to achieve over the next 10 years
Helping Communities & Groups to identify and meet their own needs ‘Community Development’	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ∅ Communities and groups will find it easier to identify their own needs and access the support they need to respond. ∅ There will be county-wide access to support services for community planning and support for communities and groups to develop their own solutions to identified needs and/or for them to influence others to respond to identified needs.
Co-ordinating the delivery of information, advice and assistance to meet identified needs ‘Infrastructure Service Delivery’	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ∅ Infrastructure services will be reliably and consistently accessible to front line organisations equally (in terms of range and quality) across the county and responsive to needs. ∅ There will be absolute clarity about who delivers what and excellent information systems so that front line organisations can access the help they need easily. ∅ Infrastructure organisations will have the resources and capacity to meet these needs effectively and efficiently. ∅ There will be easy cross-referrals between agencies. ∅ There will continue to be a ‘local’ aspect of infrastructure delivery. ∅ There will be an increase in the volume and quality of volunteering activity in the County.
Objective 2 - Ensure that Voluntary and Community Groups can influence local and regional strategy and policy.	
We will do this by:	What we are aiming to achieve over the next 10 years
Supporting and strengthening the ‘voices’ of the sector ‘Campaigning’	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ∅ There will be better co-ordination of the ‘voices’ of the sector, which will be clearer and stronger as a result. ∅ The Consortium will be a respected and influential voice for the sector articulating its views where it is best placed to do so. ∅ The Consortium will be supported by excellent VCS networks.
Contributing to strategy and policy development ‘Policy Analysis’	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ∅ The Consortium will be contributing, and helping others to contribute to the identification of needs and solutions through research, drawing on VCS experience on the ground. ∅ The Consortium will have helped to raise the profile of the VCS (and volunteering) and its role in the achievement of the strategic priorities of the County.

Objective 3 - Build and maintain collaborative mechanisms to deliver the other two objectives	
We will do this by:	What we are aiming to achieve over the next 10 years
Building and maintaining a Consortium fit for purpose	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ∅ Infrastructure services will be strategically and jointly planned. ∅ There will be a high level of openness and trust between infrastructure agencies. ∅ The Consortium will have excellent mechanisms for measuring and improving its performance and impact. ∅ The Consortium will have a strong and committed membership, clear working practices (incl. Protocols about dealing with conflicts of interest)and excellent communication mechanisms.
Establishing and maintaining strong links with partners and stakeholders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ∅ Infrastructure organisations will be valued by funding organisations and therefore resourced adequately and sustainably (for the long term). ∅ The Consortium will be valued and have excellent relationships with VCS organisations and networks, as well as other stakeholders and partners.

KEY RISKS AND BARRIERS TO SUCCESS

The 10 year outcomes for the strategy are ambitious and challenging. The Consortium has identified a number of high level risks that it will address as part of its activity planning. These are:

1. **Lack of resources and capacity** among the Consortium member organisations to take forward the strategy and action plan.
2. **Resistance to change** among Consortium member organisations, especially where the achievement of Consortium collective ambitions could have a negative impact on individual organisational ambitions in the short or medium term.
3. **Lack of support from partner organisations**, especially potential funding agencies.
4. **Changes in national or regional context**, especially if these result in the demise or reduction of funding to Capacity Builders.
5. **Failure to secure increased or stabilised funding** for the delivery of infrastructure services.
6. **Damage to Consortium reputation and/or credibility**, especially if there are perceptions of conflicts on interest in either the setting of priorities or commissioning of work.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

§ **VCS (voluntary and community sector)**

For the purposes of this document the voluntary and community sector is not tightly defined. It is intended to be wider in scope than general charities or the voluntary sector, inclusive of small, informal or community based organisations or those reflecting the characteristics of social enterprise, but narrower in scope than 'not for profit' or 'third sector'.

§ **Voluntary and Community Sector Infrastructure**

The physical facilities, structures, systems, relationships, people, knowledge and skills that help frontline organisations and community groups to achieve their aims.

§ **Generic Infrastructure**

Infrastructure organisations which provide support to all front line organisations within a particular geographic area.

§ **Specialist Infrastructure**

Infrastructure organisations that provide support to a particular "sub-sector" of the voluntary and community sector, or offer a specific area of expertise.

§ **Front line organisations**

Voluntary and community organisations that work directly with individuals and communities in order to provide services, offer support and campaign for change.

§ **Social enterprises**

Businesses with primarily social objectives whose surpluses are principally reinvested for that purpose in the business or in the community rather than being driven by the need to maximise profit for shareholders and owners.

§ **Public services**

Services that are wholly or partly publicly funded and are delivered by public, voluntary and community or private sector agencies.

§ **Resources**

Includes physical, financial, human and in-kind resources.

§ **Community Development**

Community Development Exchange definition:

"Community development is about building active and sustainable communities based on social justice and mutual respect.

It is about changing power structures to remove the barriers that prevent people from participation in the issues that affect their lives."

ABBREVIATIONS

ACRE	Action with Communities in Rural England
BME	Black and Minority Ethnic (communities)
CALC	County Association of Local Councils
GOWM	Government Office of the West Midlands
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
NAVCA	National Association of Voluntary and Community Action
NCVO	National Council for Voluntary Organisations
RAWM	Regional Action West Midlands