



Evaluation of the South Yorkshire Social Infrastructure Programme

Report I: Partnership, voice, engagement and influence

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Yorkshire Forward: South Yorkshire Social Infrastructure
Programme

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Executive Summary

Introduction

The South Yorkshire Social Infrastructure Programme (SYSIP) was supported by Yorkshire Forward, the South Yorkshire Objective 1 Programme and the South Yorkshire Learning and Skills Council which committed investment funds of around £37m to voluntary and community sector infrastructure in South Yorkshire between 2006 and 2009.

During the scoping phase of the evaluation many respondents highlighted the importance of whole array of partnership activities.

This research report focuses on the following rationales for partnership working:

- greater partnership working to effectively influence decisions
- advocacy and Influence: enabling organisations to more effectively influence local policy processes (led by infrastructure bodies or neighbourhood organisations)
- networks: developing networks between organisations so as to increase sustainability

Case Study Research

The research focused on case studies of four networks or partnerships:

- *Barnsley Association of Community Partnerships*; contracted by BMBC, Barnsley Community Infrastructure
- *Doncaster CVS partnership of sub contractors*; contracted by DMBC, Doncaster Social Infrastructure
- *Rotherham Ethnic Communities Network*; Rotherham Social Infrastructure, contracted by Voluntary Action Rotherham and delivered by Rotherham Ethnic Minority Alliance
- *Rotherham Women's Network*; Rotherham Social Infrastructure, contracted by Voluntary Action Rotherham and delivered by GROW.

The report explores the differences between partnerships and networks, the key skills requires and the outcomes from partnership working.

Main Findings

This programme has been significant in providing the resources necessary for partnership and network development. In the DCVS example, partnership was the mechanism by which agreed outputs were delivered – in the other three examples partnership development and networking were the *raison d'être* to achieve greater voice, influence and relevant service delivery.

The following were found to be common factors for success:

- partnership working needs commitment both from individuals and from organisations
- the funding imperative ensured a clear purpose and explicit outcomes
- bureaucracy can lead to complications and the most successful partnerships appear to be those where the 'rules of engagement' are simple
- flexibility, adapting, responding are all words used to describe successful practice
- all four case studies were clear that partnerships and networks are about more than talking
- shared understanding, culture, behaviour and values are perceived to be important though the extent to which this is ever possible is questionable
- learning from other examples of partnership working is useful
- a partnership or network is the sum of its parts
- capacity building support to develop effective governance structures is crucial.

Funding organisations play crucial roles and have responsibilities in funding partnership. Whilst the funding has allowed BACP, DCVS, RECN and RWN to evolve their own mechanisms and structures – and this is praised, **there may have been some benefit from greater / more direct dialogue between the projects and Yorkshire Forward** (rather than just with the accountable bodies in each area)

The level of resourcing for infrastructure was significant – as compared to ChangeUp funding for example. However, connections between Capacitybuilders as the ChangeUp funding delivery agent, the ChangeUp sub-regional consortium and Yorkshire Forward could have been more coherent.

The relationship between the individual project and the accountable body is important and the closer this is the more likely it is that broader programme activities and benefits trickle down.

Conclusions and Learning

Against each of the original rationales for the investment we have found the following:

- **there is greater partnership working** – in terms of numbers participating but also in terms of the range of individuals and organisations participating
- advocacy and influence: enabling organisations to more effectively influence local policy processes, led by infrastructure bodies or neighbourhood organisations. **In all four examples, there is evidence that this has been realised**
- developing partnership/networks between organisations so as to increase sustainability. **The nature of partnership working often changes in response to the funding environment.** Responses from partners can be influenced by the availability of resources and it can be difficult to sustain initiatives after the initial funding. This is particularly the case where organisations feel forced into competition with each other.

In all four case studies we found that partnership enabled organisational sustainability. This was also appreciated and recognised by statutory organisations. There was a sense that policy development had improved. Nonetheless, the organisations studied require core funding and as infrastructure organisations this is not necessarily straight forward, with local commitment varying.

1. Introduction

1.1. Background to SYSIP

The South Yorkshire Social Infrastructure Programme (SYSIP) was supported by Yorkshire Forward, the South Yorkshire Objective 1 Programme and the South Yorkshire Learning and Skills Council which committed investment funds of around £36.8 million (with £24.1 million from Yorkshire Forward, £11.6 million from the South Yorkshire Objective 1 Programme and £1 million from the Learning and Skills Council) to voluntary and community sector infrastructure organisations in South Yorkshire between 2006 and 2009. This funding has now ended. A key aim of the programme was to increase the sustainability of the organisations supported.

During the scoping phase of the evaluation many respondents highlighted the importance of whole array of partnership activities. These included providing a voice to individuals and communities often marginalised from mainstream local policy making, engaging residents in local planning activities and influencing decisions. We therefore undertook research to explore what difference this has made: to the delivery of SYSIP but also to outcomes.

1.2. Scope of the Evaluation

This is one of a series of reports produced on the different themes of SYSIP. These theme reports include:

- investment in volunteering
- acquisition and utilisation of assets
- core infrastructure services
- AfCL
- neighbourhood infrastructure
- partnership: voice, engagement and influence.

This research report focuses on the following rationales:

- greater partnership working to effectively influence decisions
- advocacy and Influence: enabling organisations to more effectively influence local policy processes (led by infrastructure bodies or neighbourhood organisations)
- networks: developing networks between organisations so as to increase sustainability.

The research asked a series of questions:

- what forms do voice, engagement and influence take?
- what are the outcomes of this activity?

- what approaches to engagement are used?
- who is included/excluded in partnership?
- what is the role and significance of networks in delivering the objectives of infrastructure organisations?
- do certain models of engagement appear to be more effective than others?
- what are the key components of successful partnerships and are these present in the activities funded by SYSIP?

The research focused primarily on a series of in depth case studies around different forms of partnership working. These were complemented by district level workshops. We also sought to track through decision making processes.

1.3. Structure

The report is structured around the following sections:

- Section 2: About SYSIP and its Evaluation
- Section 3: Understanding partnership and networking
- Section 4: Barnsley Association of Community Partnerships
- Section 5: Doncaster CVS
- Section 6: Rotherham Ethnic Communities Network
- Section 7: Rotherham Women's Network
- Section 8: Conclusion

The use of four case studies illuminates the development and respective roles of networks and partnerships.

2. About SYSIP and the Evaluation

2.1. Introduction

The **aim of SYSIP** is to increase the sustainability of the voluntary and community sector (VCS) in South Yorkshire through support to infrastructure organisations. Through helping frontline VCS organisations become more effective, this is intended to bring wider economic and social impacts. The programme consists of six elements, each with complementary aims:

1. Barnsley Community Infrastructure
2. Doncaster Social Infrastructure
3. Rotherham Social Infrastructure
4. Sheffield Community Infrastructure
5. Sheffield Community Action Plan Programme
6. Academy for Community Leadership.

The programme was **evaluated** by researchers at Sheffield Hallam University, working in partnership with consultants mtl and COGS, in order to:

- estimate the impacts of the activities over time on VCS infrastructure and the economic regeneration of South Yorkshire
- help build monitoring and evaluation capacity in South Yorkshire
- capture learning and inform future action during the course of the programme.

The evaluation ran in three phases from **March 2007 to June 2009** and involved:

- reviewing the context, development and delivery of the programme
- assessing the impacts of the programme on the development of VCS organisations in South Yorkshire
- considering whether the programme is effectively meeting the needs of VCS organisations - particularly those from 'hard to reach' groups
- identifying good practice developed by the programme and individual elements
- assessing the sustainability of activities developed by the programme
- making recommendations for the future development of social and community infrastructure building programmes.

2.2. Rationale for SYSIP

The core costs of the SYSIP projects were met by Yorkshire Forward, South Yorkshire Objective 1 Programme, and the Learning and Skills Council. The

investment in the SYSIP projects was made jointly by these organisations and funding from each (largely) runs concurrently.

The funding provided was in a range of voluntary and community sector 'infrastructure' activities and associated projects. Investment in VCS 'infrastructure' has been part of economic development programmes in the region since 1995 (as part of the EU Objective 2 programmes and linked SRB programmes of this period). Investment under the South Yorkshire Objective 1 programme extended investment, by seeking to invest funds more equitably in deprived neighbourhoods, through the support of communities of interest (e.g. organisations working with black and minority ethnic groups, and people with disabilities), as well as support to district and sub-regional level infrastructure organisations (e.g. local infrastructure organisations such as Councils for Voluntary Service - CVSs and to groups such as the AfCL and the South Yorkshire Open Forum).

Funding under SYSIP was made at a time when VCS organisations faced a reported 'funding cliff edge' with significant declines in UK and EU regional and regeneration funding going to VCS organisations. The **rationale** for SYSIP was therefore very much to provide support for a transitional period which allowed VCS infrastructure to be supported at an appropriate scale (for the funding available) and to seek sustainability without EU Structural Funds and SRB funding. Such sustainability it is suggested would be through VCS organisations attracting funding locally through new commissioning and procurement opportunities, through charging for services, and in some cases reconfiguring the scale/scope of organisations, through for example merger.

Under BERR (now BIS) evaluation guidance, RDAs may intervene for the following rationales: market failure (including provision of public goods, externalities, imperfect information and market power) and equity. The SYSIP projects can be seen to address these in different ways:

- *equity*: this is the main rationale for the SYSIP investments - namely that the RDA investment helps to reduce disparities between areas or different groups. Measures of the performance of SYSIP should therefore be derived from this
- *market failure*: investment in VCS organisations working in deprived areas and with disadvantaged groups can be seen to be seeking to address myriad market failures. Under the BERR framework, investment in VCS infrastructure does contain public good elements (e.g. advice and guidance available to all residents of a community) and externalities (e.g. neighbourhood effects from increasing employment or wellbeing)
- *investment in volunteer centres*: the interventions of the RDA have been to establish/continue support for volunteer centres. The work of the volunteer centres has primarily been in disadvantaged communities or hard to reach groups (including workless individuals). The justification for support here is therefore very much on *equity* grounds
- *acquisition and utilisation of assets*: this theme covers asset management and purchase physical assets (buildings). The rationale for RDA intervention includes *equity* arguments (e.g. for asset management), but also seeks to address perceived market barriers faced by VCS organisations (for example in bringing together a critical mass of infrastructure activities in one place), and therefore address issues of *market power* and *imperfect information*
- *core infrastructure services*: these are primarily justified on *equity* and *public goods* grounds

- *neighbourhood infrastructure*: these are primarily justified on equity grounds through increasing resources going to disadvantaged neighbourhoods and the focus on stimulating economic related activities
- *partnership*: this was seen as a cross-cutting theme and could be justified on *public goods* grounds.

These issues are considered further in the thematic sections and more extensively in the section on impact.

2.3. Undertaking the Evaluation

The evaluation proceeded in three phases in 2007, 2008 and 2009 respectively. The research in 2007 focused on the development of an evaluation framework, interviewing stakeholders and an initial review of data. The research in 2008 undertook to complete the substantive research tasks around five separate themes and to run a programme of masterclasses. The research in 2009 focused on the primary fieldwork around core infrastructure services, an extensive round of stakeholder interviews, analysis of final monitoring data, and analysis of an array of other data sources (notably the NSTSO and financial account data). Judgements to inform the estimate of impact have also been made.

3. Understanding partnership and networking

3.1. Some Definitions

Both partnership and networking are significant features in how public agencies and the third sector operate¹. Working across agencies is common though the degree of formality varies, and despite the terms partnership and networks often used interchangeably, they are essentially quite different.

Partnerships tend to be formal arrangements with clear membership and boundaries. **Networks** are more dependent on fluid relationships, often built on a shared sense of identity. They are more open to people coming and going. Through a series of case studies we find how networking has resulted in effective partnership with others to meet a strategic goal. In this way they are complementary and can exist side-by-side.

Recent international work 'Understanding Partnership Working' carried out by the University of the West of England with the New Bulgarian University and the Universidad Centroamericana,² suggests that :

- rights to participation are important in giving local third sector organisations a sense that they have a voice and ensuring that partners provide opportunities for them to exercise it
- it is important for community and third sector actors to develop their own independent spaces
- governance and partnership arrangements themselves should allow more opportunity for dialogue and debate if they are to contribute to democracy rather than being simply a mechanism for delivering services
- experience and leadership help to get results but investment is needed in a variety of forms of participation and engagement
- external funding has been essential both in opening up opportunities for community and third sector organisations to participate in governance spaces at local level and in supporting them to engage effectively.

Interviews with staff at Voluntary Action Rotherham suggest that there is a need to create space for social interaction and a contextual understanding in order that individuals and groups can have a perspective and a voice. And in order to do this, skills need to be built. The SYSIP investment has contributed to the process of networking development and thus to partnership outcomes.

¹ See partnerships and networks – an evaluation and development manual, McCabe et al, YPS for JRF 1997

² University of the West of England *Training Towards 2012*

Mitchell and Skinner³ illustrate the range of skills required to be a voice, influence decisions, build partnerships and promote sectoral interests and perspectives:

- people skills – e.g. acting assertively, solving problems and supporting others
- practical skills – communicating well, using information and being organised
- partnership skills – joint working for different organisations, representing and feeding back.

A key point about networking: networking is often seen as ‘just what happens’. In the context of this piece of work, we are looking at networking as ‘strategic opportunism rather than serendipity’.⁴ In other words, networking is a conscious act requiring thought, being in the right place at the right time, care and support for those participating, a longer term ambition i.e. it requires a degree of resourcing.

This is reinforced in ‘Learning the Lessons’.⁵

All of the interviewees questioned recognised the importance of networking and keeping up a profile within key partnerships and forums, locally, regionally and nationally. “Networking was seen as essential to winning influence and making links with key players, though many smaller organisations lacked the capacity to engage. ‘Another described networking opportunities as “essential to making links with key players – I couldn’t do the job without it”

3.2. Investing in partnership and networking

This research strand explores how capacity has been built through the process of partnership and networking as well as the development support required to make partnerships and networks effective. We are interested in the value of the funding investment, its impact to date and what remains as its legacy.

Four case studies have been selected to illustrate the evaluation:

- *Barnsley Association of Community Partnerships*; contracted by BMBC, Barnsley Community Infrastructure
- *Doncaster CVS partnership of sub contractors*; contracted by DMBC, Doncaster Social Infrastructure
- *Rotherham Ethnic Communities Network*; Rotherham Social Infrastructure, contracted by Voluntary Action Rotherham and delivered by Rotherham Ethnic Minority Alliance
- *Rotherham Women’s Network*; Rotherham Social Infrastructure, contracted by Voluntary Action Rotherham and delivered by GROW.

A feature of the SYSIP programme has been the support for inter-sectoral partnership and networking. This was made explicit in the tender documentation between VAR and GROW⁶:

³ Mitchell and Skinner ‘Skilling Up for Stronger Voices’ NAVCA 2008

⁴ A Gilchrist, Community Development and Networking 1995; CDF

⁵ D Burnby & Associates (2006), Learning the lessons: A snapshot of high performing VCS organisations in South Yorkshire, (for Objective 1 Programme Directorate)

⁶ Specific organisational tender for delivery of part of the Yorkshire Forward Single Programme agreement relating to Rotherham Social Infrastructure – YF project ref: 901726 between Voluntary Action Rotherham (VAR) and Grow Ltd (delivery subcontractor)

This sub tender builds on the foundations developed in the voluntary and community sector mainly due to public sector investment over recent years. This is confirmed by the SRB6 mid-term evaluation (ECOTEC, Mar 04) which states that SRB and Objective 1 funding has 'provided a good job in kick-starting community development and capacity building activity...

.... The investment from Yorkshire Forward will contribute to the development of networks to enable voluntary and community sector organisations with common issues across the borough to come together, understand key policy and its impact on the VCS, link into decision making partnerships and make their voice heard.

The following gaps in support have been identified (Needs Analysis, 2003):

....Opportunities to network and share experiences with organisations engaged in similar activities and influence decision making.

The four case studies illustrate very different models and characteristics of partnership and networking. See annex 1.

- Barnsley Association of Community Partnerships (BACP) can be seen as a **consortium model** e.g. community partnerships clustering around thematic areas such as health and social care with backroom support from the Association
- Doncaster CVS (DCVS) is an internally focused partnership – created as a **functional partnership** for the purposes of SYSIP funding, aiming to generate some sustainability for those involved
- Rotherham Ethnic Communities Network (RECN) sees **partnership working as route to survival** and is looking at potential of consortium model in order to support its aims around strategic representation
- Rotherham Women's Network (RWN) is about creating **an environment that supports women's individual and collective capacity building** – providing a network resource for service providers and supporting partnership working.

On a spectrum where partnership is defined by organisational relationships, formal membership, clear boundaries, stable composition and high formality, and networks are characterised by individual relationships, informal membership, indistinct boundaries, a fluid composition and low formality the case studies could probably be mapped as follows:



However, there are aspects of networking and partnership in all four projects – indeed networking can be seen as an outcome of the partnership development and partnership working as an outcome of network development.

“This (is about) those skills needed for networking and entering into partnership formally and informally – inter sector as well as between sectors.” (RWN)

In each case study we have explored the extent to which the partnerships and networks have build skills, equality, organisation and involvement⁷.

⁷ S Skinner and M Wilson 'Assessing Community Strengths' 2003; CDF

4. Barnsley Association of Community Partnerships

4.1. Introduction

The Barnsley Association of Community Partnerships (BACP) was established in 1997 to provide a discussion group for a small number of community partnerships. In July 2002 the BACP, funded by SRB, recruited its first staff to support the Community Partnerships by providing a secretariat, information and communication network. The development of BACP provided a structure for the operation of the community partnerships and assisted them to become more professional through the development of a network to offer help and support and to act on a more strategic level. Since 2002, BACP has supported up to sixteen community partnerships and their voluntary and community groups through capacity building initiatives and the development of larger projects including the Neighbourhood Learning Net and Healthy Living Barnsley.⁸

BACP aims to:

Share best practice through support, direction and co-ordination of individual community partnerships and so assist and enable them to deliver the regeneration agenda for the collective benefit of the communities within the Barnsley Borough.

Its objectives include:

- to enable community partnerships to access the expertise of the BACP staff and to gain skills and thus increase their own capacity
- to equip community partnerships with the knowledge and skills to develop and successfully implement their own business plans
- to establish joint working between community partnerships to improve efficiency, reduce overheads and improve the competitiveness of community partnerships in bidding for projects and service delivery
- to enable community partnerships to identify needs and gaps in market/services and develop projects/service delivery programs to meet those gaps
- to promote the expansion of the 'enterprise culture'
- to share and disseminate knowledge and support.

The fifteen partnerships have their own broad range of aims and objectives which reflect the needs of their respective local communities and the capacity of partnerships to deliver.

A review commissioned by BACP in 2006⁹ identified a need to provide infrastructure support to community partnerships and to provide a coordinated voice on their behalf in the wider arena in order for them to engage in the regeneration of their local communities. The review also confirmed the need to develop strong and

⁸ Future Directions Study, 2006

⁹ Future Directions

independent community organisations capable of delivering real change locally and, with support, meet the future role of the sector in shaping and delivering services.

In preparation for the Yorkshire Forward Investment Plan, Barnsley Community and Voluntary Network commissioned a study¹⁰ that produced four main options for the provision of infrastructure support services. The study recommended – and the VCS and accountable partners selected - the ‘subsidiarity’ model: providing services at the most efficient point of delivery. This model was then used as the basis for the submission to Yorkshire Forward. Under the theme of **Increased delivery of public services and quality infrastructure support** the component elements were:

- support for the Association of Community Partnerships and its constituent members
- support for Barnsley’ umbrella wide BME organisation – BBEMI
- infrastructure services support through the VAB/ACP partnership, with statutory support from the central community development and social enterprise delivery teams.

While the overall bid was successful, the availability of revenue funding was reduced. The resources allocated to BACP were substantially less than anticipated and the emphasis shifted from growing activity to sustaining the existing.

4.2. What does partnership look like in practice? Structures and ways of working

Partnership working has operated at two levels:

- between borough wide infrastructure bodies
- district wide partnership between the community partnerships.

The South Yorkshire Investment Plan has led to joint working between local actors including BACP, Voluntary Action Barnsley, Barnsley Black Ethnic Minority Initiative, Social Enterprise Barnsley and Barnsley MBC. This has provided the community partnerships with a link through BACP to VAB and BBEMI. VAB links the whole partnership into the wider sub-region. Networking between organisations has grown alongside this.

“Partnership working ranges from the strategic (e.g. LSP) to the operational. Networking complements it. What happens in between is what oils it – individual networking.”

SYSIP funding to BACP (£160k from Jan 2008 – March 2009) was useful in order to safeguard BACP core team of three workers. In addition it acted as leverage for a successful BASIS bid in 2008. BACP offers the following services to community partnerships:

- human resource support: linked to a Human Resource Specialist
- hot desk facilities: available Mon - Fri
- recruitment services: from advertisement to appointment
- training: various courses throughout the year

- staff support: admin, finance etc
- quick books: finance package training
- colour photocopying
- promotion of events and vacancies via the Website and our Newsletter.

The Wombwell **childcare project** was established by Wombwell Community Partnership in partnership with DWP. Objective One funded an intermediate labour scheme and provided training for childcare workers. The project achieved 100 per cent success rate on qualifications and employment. The project needs to be overseen – the chair of the community partnership (volunteer) manages the Manager. BACP help the manager to manage the finances. Although BACP are not directly responsible for the establishment of the project, they provide essential support structures that enable it to keep going.

4.3. Skills and support

For many of the community partnerships access to funding has involved a challenging journey - from being a small scale group to becoming an organisation applying for and managing substantial sums of complex funding and employing and managing staff. Much of this was undertaken by a 'volunteer' workforce. A survey undertaken in 2006 revealed that volunteers on average contributed a cumulative estimate of 1,905 hours a week in terms of volunteer time.¹¹

“There has been a terrific building of knowledge, experience and understanding. This has been mostly informal and ad hoc. Community partnerships had to manage money, people, buildings. We learned on the job, one step at a time.”

The services provided by BACP have been invaluable in underpinning the work of the individual community partnerships. The support often fills a gap around payroll and finance for a community partnership where there is no paid worker. BACP have adopted a practical approach to delivering support to community partnerships – it is hands on and ongoing.

“People want it on their own patch and in terms they can understand. When someone rings we go out to them.”

Centralising these support functions is cost effective and avoids duplication between organisations in servicing the different aspects of volunteering and community activity. They have achieved the Customer First standard for their services.

As funding streams have drawn to a close, the community partnerships have had to learn how to close projects and deal with redundancy. BACP organised a workshop on employment law to enable community partnerships to follow good practice as employers.

4.4. Who has benefited from partnership working

The partnerships comprising BACP are grassroots community organisations who are close to the issues on the ground. They are often working with groups of people who have missed out e.g. older people, young people. The volunteers, many of whom

¹¹ Future Directions Study 2006

are retired, have taken on a lot of responsibility. The practical support from BACP has been key in enabling the community partnerships to deliver services and activities that meet the needs of their communities.

There has been a lot of learning around partnership and cooperative working: *“Somebody had to take the lead”*. Without BACP, the community partnerships would be isolated, more inward looking, focusing on their own areas and problems. In all likelihood, there would be duplication of backroom services such as payroll, finances management etc. BACP has worked with the ethos that its role as an infrastructure organisation is as a conduit to ensure that resources and support reach communities.

Partnership between the borough wide infrastructure organisations has fostered greater understanding which has encouraged collaboration rather than competition. Links with BACP have enabled partner organisations to reach further into the communities and to deliver services through community venues.

Development at the neighbourhood level has supported the local authority in delivering a community engagement strategy linked to the LAA empowerment indicators. Partnership working has helped to build trust and vertical relationships between the Council and community organisations. SYSIP resources have provided the means to sustain the progression of third sector infrastructure following on from previous funding.

4.5. Benefits from partnership working

Increased voice

- BACP is now in evidence around more tables regarding the delivery of services and strategic planning
- a BACP presentation at One Barnsley and launch at the Town Hall has led to greater understanding of the work of the community partnerships
- there has been a change on the part of some elected members; an increase in understanding of the contribution of the community; better understanding of the value of participation and greater recognition amongst some members of their changing role in supporting the community as community champions.

Capacity building

- community partnerships have supported volunteer development
- BACP believes it acts as a step back to work. The community partnerships have been heavily involved in supporting the Learning Net development which has been taken up by the local authority through Learning Partnerships. This has led both to changing attitudes to learning on the ground, and has managed the placement of individuals with partner organisations - including community based placements. The restructuring of the Neighbourhood Learning Nets has been enabled by BACP's building of effective relationships and partnership working. The reduction of the Learning Nets from 15 to 9 has involved consultation and negotiation to manage staff redundancies
- increased capacity of groups to carry out an 'employer' role
- partnerships have formed clusters and identified leadership roles within them – the cluster groups are a step towards income generation and there is evidence of asset development.

Increased resources

- the funding from Yorkshire Forward has helped build a stronger relationship within the voluntary and community sector, and with the council. This has levered in additional resources.

Local service delivery

- the community partnerships provide a route for agencies to reach people - they can provide access to premises/venues and to community networks. For example, the Breastfeeding Link Worker works through the community partnership infrastructure
- the community partnerships deliver their own projects e.g. childcare, gardening, healthy food projects. The innovative nature of some of these has strengthened relationships with agencies such as the PCT.

Infrastructure function

- initial partnership working with the PCT for 'Healthy Living Barnsley' built positive working relationships and BACP established a good track record. BACP now manages two Community Development and Health workers as part of the Altogether Better programme
- BACP provides hands on financial and back room support to partnerships, particularly to those without a paid worker.

Added value

- sharing ideas – the whole is greater than the sum of the parts – partnerships are not working in isolation
- greater complementarity of activities and aims.

4.6. Contributing factors

The contextual environment has been supportive - Barnsley has a good track record in partnership working:

Coming to work in Barnsley from Sheffield has been a “breath of fresh air” regarding partnership working.

This has ensured that BACP has been seen as part of the whole borough strategy and supported to carry out its role e.g. the Community Engagement Team has provided mentoring support. BACP also value the understanding they reached with Yorkshire Forward that social regeneration isn't just trickle down – it starts at the grass roots too.

The local base of the partnerships enables greater community engagement and supports local delivery but there is also general agreement that the core support structure of BACP is essential:

“The Partnerships wouldn't have survived without the Association”.

4.7. What has got in the way?

Funding issues have been a continuing cause for concern.

Firstly, the process with the funding agreement is still seen as having a detrimental effect on the project. Partners were engaged to help shape the Barnsley programme but the late decision to change the revenue/capital split restricted the revenue funds available for the Barnsley plan. The fall out from this has been described as 'challenging' with disappointment creating 'partnership baggage'. BACP's subsequent search for funding has dominated its work:

"The collapse of the financial model initially developed has resulted in organisations tending to plough their own furrow."

Secondly, the requirements of Objective One funding were perceived as a minefield. Partnerships are now shy of tackling future challenges – they feel a lot has been asked from volunteers and many have had enough.

Leadership and representation have surfaced as issues - BACP has strong accountability to the membership which can make it hard to demonstrate leadership and there around who has a mandate to represent others. Partnership working can be compromised by a perceived conflict of interest between the responsibilities of trustees to their organisation e.g. VAB and BACP, and there has been some initial resistance to working more closely with VAB and joining its Board as this could be seen as according VAB leadership status. A fear of losing identity is strong across locally based partnerships within a large borough boundary.

4.8. Conclusion: sustainability

On the whole, the community partnerships have not planned for the end of funding and there seem to be just a handful who can see the future. This has a knock on effect - it is difficult to attract new members when there is not a lot of positive development, people do not wish to get involved in winding up the partnerships.

A lot of responsibility is expected from community partnerships and their trustees and there therefore needs to be a good reason for it. More work is needed to have real partnership – it's not just about being around the table and talking. Short term funding and short term contracts do not provide the support needed for long term development. The future sustainability of BACP is linked to building the membership. The BACP model is one of coordinating and supporting local community activity, sharing information and expertise. The contribution of volunteers needs to be sustained. The need for capacity building is ongoing in order to retain the learning and experience of existing volunteers while encouraging and supporting new volunteers to get involved.

"Objective One was only supposed to be pump priming. The need doesn't go away in such a short time."

Any plans for expansion must maintain a local focus, knowledge and identity; they also require trust and honesty:

"Fear gets in the way. Risk taking will deliver."

BACP is committed to recognising and supporting the independence and autonomy of the member partnerships. This is seen as key to maintaining the benefits to grassroots communities and the most marginalised groups. It is a challenge to strike

a balance between this commitment and the commitment needed from the community partnerships to enable BACP to be effective.

BASIS funding has cushioned the gap left by the shortfall of revenue funds but the partnerships are in transition with many losing their paid staff. The task now is to build capacity to support the development of clusters and provide brokerage to build understanding between partnerships and other partners. The Baseline Project aims to strengthen and develop the community partnerships. The project is introducing organisational development expertise and offering strategic and operational support including the identification of opportunities to develop targeted social enterprises. The overall aim is to develop sustainable robust organisations that effectively and economically deliver services that meet the needs of the local community.

This shift towards employability and social enterprise can be difficult to deliver at neighbourhood and community level at the best of times. In the current economic climate the challenges are great. BACP will need to partner up with other organisations in order to respond to both this challenge and the requirement for larger, consortium based approaches.

5. Doncaster CVS

5.1. Introduction

Doncaster Council for Voluntary Service is a support organisation which provides support to other third sector groups that are based in or provide a service in Doncaster. They do this by:

- providing resources, information and training to third sector organisations
- helping to link the third sector with useful networks and sources of support and/or shared interest
- representing or co-ordinating the voice of the sector
- delivering a range of development and capacity building services.

With DMBC as the Accountable Body, £3.2m was awarded to Doncaster CVS over a three year period, April 2006 – March 2009. The programme has focused on building the capacity and sustainability of third sector organisations in Doncaster through a range of different support mechanisms designed to encourage a more business like approach.

Approximately 50 per cent of this funding has been used by Doncaster CVS to pay for direct service delivery in the areas of:

- ICT support
- Legal Advice
- Human Resources Advice
- Social Enterprise business Support
- Learning and Group Development
- Volunteering
- Community Accountancy.

The remaining 50 per cent has enabled 13 sub-contracts to seven individual third sector organisations to deliver services at neighbourhood level. These services include:

- Business Planning
- Financial Planning/Community Accountancy
- Business Entrepreneur Support
- Funding and Fundraising Information
- Procurement and Commissioning Awareness/Support.

Planned outputs centred on employment support (195), business support (178), skills (190), volunteer placements (75) – leading to anticipated outcomes of:

- accelerated economic and neighbourhood renewal
- a mixed economy of VCS income streams to support community regeneration
- refined procurement processes amongst major public sector contracting bodies
- improved contract readiness amongst voluntary and community organisations and the development of procurement partnerships
- robust community partnerships with strong governance on local service delivery and regeneration activities
- a climate of realistic enterprise and asset development which contributes towards the sustainability 'tipping point' for the VCS through reduced grant dependency
- improved third sector funding and finance bases to substantially enhance project sustainability
- greater social, physical, environmental, human and financial capital amongst the voluntary and community organisations assisted.

5.2. What does partnership look like in practice – structures and ways of working

DCVS used its reserves and its capacity to act as a financial conduit for the Third Sector. In recognition of the need for partnership working to draw down the money and deliver outputs, Doncaster CVS developed a model that moved away from being a grant funder to sub-contracting and buying outputs. A post of Business Development Manager was established, reflecting a cultural shift towards partnership working both within the CVS and externally with the wider sector.

Contracts were awarded on a tendering basis that involved negotiation to ensure that the number of outputs agreed was realistic and achievable. Once this had been agreed the sub-contractors could keep any surplus funding as long as they were delivering the outputs. This reduced the level of bureaucratic monitoring requirements and enabled sub-contractors to effect some full cost recovery. This model has allowed for collaboration and referrals to be made between sub-contractors in order to achieve overall targets. The December 2008 Monitoring Return shows an overall 97.5 per cent achievement rate on the delivery of outputs by the sub-contractors.

While partnership was based on contractual relationships, this opened up networking opportunities, information sharing and the development of closer relationships between the sub-contracting organisations and with Doncaster CVS. DCVS convened quarterly meetings to bring the sub-contractors together. These meetings have been used to evaluate elements of the contracts and the outcomes. Workshops have been held on Forward Planning and Exit Strategies. In addition, regular meetings have been held to discuss the Business Planning and Community Accountancy contracts.

5.3. Skills and support

The range of skills that the different sub-contractors brought to the programme has been positive in enabling an exchange of expertise. The regular meetings between the sub-contractors have helped to identify training needs.

Two sub groups - business planning and community accountancy - have operated as quality circles. An external facilitator has been engaged to work with the partnership in preparation for the end of the programme and in shaping the brief for external evaluation. Future training needs include support on consortium working that reflects the differing exit needs of the sub-contracting organisations.

For the partner, or sub-contracting, organisations, partnership working has encouraged the **sharing** of practice, the development of new skills and contacts.

“We’ve gone from strength to strength.”

The skills that have been transferred have also been **cascaded** to smaller community groups (the client group) e.g. one-to-one support for working with different accounting packages, and there is a wider awareness of the training opportunities available through DCVS. This has also served to identify some of the barriers for small community groups in taking up of training opportunities – anxiety about travelling outside their immediate vicinity and lack of confidence about learning in a group. One sub-contractor has become aware of the need to record training needs more systematically and has introduced a client filing system. One-to-one support for community groups on their accounts has brought a wider understanding of the range of challenges that groups face such as the need to include an application for planning permission when drawing up a funding application for a hut.

5.4. The benefits of partnership working

The client group – small community organisations – has benefited from an improved overall service. The contractual model has reduced competition and fostered professionalisation. A business planning template has been developed which ensures a more consistent service for customers. Client groups have been brought **closer to the ‘mainstream’** of the third sector, they are part of the DCVS database and have become more involved through the Volunteer Centre.

Partnership has also brought a **stronger collective voice** and presence with external funders. Local needs have been fed through to the Coalfields Regeneration Trust and SYFAB. The SYSIP programme has been delivering across the whole of Doncaster and as such has more ‘speaking power’ than the constituent partners who are delivering in specific areas. DCVS has also been able to negotiate effectively with DMBC on behalf of the partnership. The partnership has also provided **protection** where an organisation might have been vulnerable delivering on its own.

There is now a greater **awareness** between the partners of what each other does and what events are taking place, and also of the gaps that need to be filled. This has enabled useful signposting of client groups to available training programmes and there is a higher level of user satisfaction. It has also stimulated partners to use each others services e.g. Terrace Recruitment run by Conisbrough Development Trust. Greater familiarity across organisations has increased understanding of who makes decisions and key organisational contacts. These partnership relationships are now ongoing and include greater dialogue with DCVS. This has enabled a more **strategic** approach to planning the delivery of services and to funding opportunities.

This has encouraged a **culture shift** in DCVS - it has been drawn into more joint working.

The experience of the SYSIP partnership has built **trust and confidence** in partnership working by providing a demonstration of the benefits. It has opened discussions on effective working in other situations e.g. WNF Key Worker Support contract.

“SYSIP built trust and relations with other contractors. It proved we can work together and deliver. We ring each other up for advice and networking. We’re now looking at using the SYSIP model to develop a West Doncaster Partnership in order to develop a consortium approach to upcoming contracts. It will be more localised and bring in groups who weren’t involved in SYSIP”.

Delivering outside of their own immediate geographical areas has raised the **profile** of the sub-contracting partners.

The sub-contracting model has enabled some of the partners to build their **reserves** – for one community organisation this has safeguarded 2 jobs for a further twelve months.

5.5. Defining characteristics – what has made this partnership work?

The box below outlines some of the main characteristics as to why the partnership worked. Below it we summarises the findings from the case study.

Box 5.1: Perceptions from evaluation focus group, August 2008

What Works

- shared experience between the sub-contractors
- destination Doncaster 'brand'
- communities and team work
- DMBC – importance of process and protocols
- effective relationships between DMBC staff and VCS staff
- the macro is crystal clear and flexibility in the micro
- Yorkshire Forward flexibility has been significant (better than other programmes)
- value of one point of contact (CVS) from DMBC perspective
- dialogue between contractor (CVS) and sub-contractor – beyond the formality
- CVS flexibility – collective delivery of outputs and review as necessary
- partnership and trust between CVS /DMBC helps to get over bureaucratic barriers
- DMBC willingness to listen and have dialogue
- open mindedness

Clarity of purpose: the over-riding principle was the benefit to the client groups involved.

Development of the contracting process: developing the right business models and establishing processes in the first place. This was undertaken through dialogue and negotiation between DCVS and the sub-contractors.

Design of the sub-contracting model: boundaries were clear. This removed an element of competition and encouraged joint working and referrals; encouraged more focus and awareness of outputs; easy to see potential duplication and overlap. Was undertaken in an inclusive way with all sub-contractors involved in planning the programme and discussing the outputs.

Flexibility: customised tendering and contracting at the outset with negotiation around outputs left groups room to build sustainability by leaving capacity available for other streams of work.

Monitoring reports have been used as the means of capturing successes from sub-contractors and communicating these upwards to DMBC. Information was produced that allowed the sub-contractors to compare themselves with others and to see how they linked into the delivery of the whole programme.

Enabling leadership: DCVS took responsibility for the delivery of the outputs and undertook the interface with DMBC. Sub-contractors were reassured by the overall model of sub-contracting - DCVS could have taken the money and delivered the services itself.

Building the partnership: regular communication through quarterly partnership meetings with an opportunity for equal participation from all sub-contractors.

5.6. What has got in the way

Unfortunately there have been barriers to the partnership's success and these include:

Timing: initial slow progress on the development of systems was frustrating for those sub-contractors who had systems in place; this engendered a perception on 'being dictated to'. Slow start up resulted in rushed timescales.

Organisational barriers: there has been a history of mistrust between the sub-contractors and DCVS. DCVS was seen to have a monopoly on resources and a strong relationship with DMBC. Also a perception of bureaucratic responses from DMBC – 'gate keeping' the rules, when Yorkshire Forward is more flexible.

In addition, there has sometimes been a lack of understanding between partners around roles and a potential conflict if potential or actual overlap. This is particularly the case if there is a lack of knowledge of how other organisations operate e.g. the nature of advice offered.

Core costs: networking costs should have been built into the tendering process with recognition of the core costs involved in partnership working

Outcomes are hard to demonstrate: the levels of need and support required to work with small groups many of whom are representing marginalised groups e.g. unemployed, people with disabilities, people with low levels of skill and confidence, are not always appreciated by strategic partners. The handholding nature of this work is difficult to demonstrate in terms of outcomes.

Sub-contracting: can result in a diversity of approaches which can dilute the overall impact.

5.7. Lessons from the programme

The following box sets out some of the main lessons which can be drawn from the SYSIP investment.

Box 5.2: Key Lessons

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Need to firm up the delivery plan / the structure for delivery must be clear ■ Need to be interventionist with some groups ■ The model of sub contracting works ■ The sector is <u>very</u> diverse ■ Working relationships need to be established early ■ Start evaluating early ■ Develop start to finish records for evaluation ■ Working together can be hard ■ Need to record groups' starting points. ■ Need to keep funders on board. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ A clearer specification for the contracting process ■ Simplify the outcomes ■ Have systems in place before the project start ■ Pull all the tenders together ■ Better monitoring ■ Have joined up data and information exchange ■ Central guidance and support needs to be personalised ■ Engagement with groups needs to be simple and smart
Messages for funders and commissioners	Messages for the voluntary and community sector
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Give more time ■ Ban the use of the word "innovation" ■ More long term thinking ■ Play a more strategic role – an investor not funder. ■ Be realistic ■ Invest in the start ■ Negotiate outcomes ■ Don't oversell social enterprise 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Stop being sorry all of the time – be more assertive ■ Be realistic ■ Take some risks ■ Prioritise the needs of the client ■ Think strategically ■ Keep to your aims ■ Know what you do well ■ Not everything can be sustainable

5.8. Conclusion: sustainability

The SYSIP programme laid the foundations for the delivery of a better service. However, without the focus of the programme the contact between partners may be ad hoc and momentum may be lost over time. On the other hand, the improved working relationship between DCVS and the sub-contracting organisations may lead to a further collaboration on any overflow of work from the Doncaster Community Accountancy Service.

The impact of the ending of the SYSIP programme will be felt differently by different sub-contracting partners. Larger organisations have a more diverse funding base and may be able to retain staff to work on other contracts although this may not be delivering the same services as the SYSIP programme.

There has been an attempt to replicate the SYSIP sub-contracting model in the DCVS tender for a WNF programme. However, the tender was awarded to an organisation that is undertaking all the delivery in-house. Many feel that there needs to be an understanding and commitment from DMBC and other contracting bodies of

the value of sustaining the partnership approach and that this should be transferred across into DMBC tendering processes and promoted with sub-regional bodies such as SYOF. It can provide a framework for including and resourcing neighbourhood infrastructure and enabling them to contribute beyond their immediate boundaries.

6. Rotherham Ethnic Communities Network

6.1. Introduction

RECN's development is supported by Rotherham Ethnic Minority Alliance (REMA), which as the support agency for BME voluntary and community sector organisations aims *“to ensure participation in, and influence at, all policy development and strategic levels relevant to Rotherham's Black and Minority Ethnic communities, by those communities”* (The Future of REMA, REMA 2007).

RECN aims to make a difference to BME communities in Rotherham by providing a strong and united voice for BME communities and to champion their needs at a strategic level in Rotherham. The two stated aims are to:

- to ensure the strategic engagement of Rotherham's Black and Ethnic Minority voluntary and community organisations within mainstream regeneration so that policies, programme developments and services address the needs of BME Communities and reduce inequalities
- to contribute to the outcomes of the South Yorkshire Investment Plan in partnership with other agencies by providing a BME voluntary sector perspective and supporting their effective engagement.

The objectives are:

- to build an active and inclusive BME network to improve the way in which BME communities are consulted and involved in decision making, service delivery and regeneration
- to ensure the BME sector is represented at a strategic level in regeneration structures and mainstream services
- to identify gaps in current service delivery and maximise opportunities for increasing BME sector engagement and employment as ways of addressing gaps in services
- to promote information sharing, collaboration and signposting as part of the process of encouraging organisations to work more effectively together
- to work with others to ensure a programme of training and support is available to the Network members and representatives to enable them to engage effectively with public sector agencies.

6.2. Project outcomes

In the Rotherham Social Infrastructure contractual relationship document between VAR and REMA, the specific outcomes sought through effective use of this funding are listed as:

- the BME VCS will have elected representatives attending relevant strategic meetings and will influence policy development and service delivery at a strategic and local level
- public sector agencies will have access to the network for consultation purposes to help ensure their services and future plans integrate the needs of BME communities
- the vehicle for change will be the establishment of a strong and unifying BME Network for Rotherham and will lead to greater involvement of BME communities in Rotherham's social and economic future
- BME organisations and individuals will be supported to build their capacity and skills.

In its 'Future' document (above), REMA sets out its approach to supporting the delivery of action which contribute to a whole range of LAA priorities. The BME strategy highlights three national indicators which are specifically pertinent to RECN:

- ensuring effective community consultation and involvement through for example BME contributions to scrutiny reviews
- BME participation at strategic level (related to NI3 and NI4)
- providing support for representation and accountability of BME VCS organisations through amongst other things the development of a BME network (NI7).

6.3. What does networking look like in practice - structures and ways of working

The appointment of a network coordinator was seen as critical to the implementation of the above delivery plan. Investment in this post was to enable the development work necessary to establish the network and maintain its activity e.g. maximising opportunities for information sharing, and to support statutory bodies to more effectively engage with BME communities through voluntary sector engagement.

A key achievement has been the representation of the BME voluntary and community sector on strategic decision making and operational bodies. This is seen as a positive outcome of the BME strategy – and RECN is providing co-ordinated, supported, sustained structures and dialogue. Representation being taken up which was not happening before. RECN provides a source for representatives but also ensures they are supported to carry out this role effectively – building knowledge, communicating back to the sector, feeling confident to play an equal part. Since November 2008 BME representatives have sat on the LSP – and on the Proud, Safe and Live Boards (they have yet to be involved in the Learning and Achieving Boards). For all involved, this is described as the most strategic environment in which they operate.

The following box sets out the development of RECN over a two year period. It shows how partnership working underpinned its development.

Box 6.1: The Development of RECN

October 2006: Consultant employed to carry out preparatory work

November 06: Stakeholder discussions held to ascertain the role of the network, membership, participation etc

December 2006: NRF funding secured, draft delivery plan for RECN drawn up

January / February 2007: Unable to appoint to Co-ordinator post (due to quality of applications) network members develop terms of reference and REMA provides interim support

April / May 2007: Network Co-ordinator appointed; Chair and Vice chair elected. Branding as 'RECN'. Key priorities agreed

- Focus on representation at strategic level
- Advocacy and funding support provided to a number of member organisations

August 2007: The LSP agrees to ring-fence a place on its board for a BME representative. The network coordinates BME consultation on a number of local authority policies. Engagement of BME businesses begins.

September 2007: Supports Housing Strategy consultation events

October 2007: RECN launches LSP recruitment drive. BME directory ready for web publishing. Work with LEGI task group

January 2008: A BME LSP representative is selected and joins the partnership board - a significant step to achieve the main objective of the network – “To ensure the BME sector is represented at a strategic level in regeneration structures and mainstream services” RECN works with the CEN to ensure the selected candidate is fully prepared and supported to take up the role. Member organisations undertake ‘effective tendering’ training

February 2008: The coordinator successfully supports a member organisation to secure a £10K grant from Awards for All - the first time Rotherham Irish Society has secured funding.

March 2008: RECN works closely with RMBC and Rotherham PCT on BME Health Awareness. Home visits to BME families to discuss access to health services culminate in a consultation event. The findings from the exercise will feed the proposed BME Health Needs Study

April 2008: The coordinator represents the BME sector on the Working Neighborhoods Steering Group. RECN has appointed representatives to four LSP Theme Boards. All reps are given induction and the RECN representative to the main Partnership Board is supported in terms of research and preparation for meetings.

May 2008: Representatives from RECN meet Lord Patel who is conducting a study into “Preventing Violent Extremism.” The findings from the study feed into CLG. The RECN Coordinator works with the Children and Young Peoples Consortium to develop a Safeguarding self-audit tool for the sector. The Network works with RMBC to ensure BME representation on the appointment panel for the LINKs managing body. RECN supports the Local Development Framework and Rotherham Renaissance consultation. Over 80 people from diverse BME backgrounds including take part. Noted by the local authority that this was the largest and most diverse BME consultation event they have been involved in.

June 2008: RECN works with the Adult Services Consortium to develop a tender for the PCT Adult Weight Management Service.

July to September 2008: RECN members create a subgroup to focus on the Rotherham Renaissance programme. RECN provides an opportunity for all the BME representatives on the LSP Theme Boards to provide feedback to wider sector members. Support a number of community groups - Roma Khamoro (Roma community group) , St Ann’s Leisure Forum, Wah Hong.

November / December 2008: RECN delivers BME sector workshop, “BME Sector and LAA Targets”, to raise awareness of managers of BME voluntary and community organisations around:

- LSP structures
- RMBC BME priorities
- meeting Rotherham’s LAA/CS priorities
- performance management / assessing BME sector impact

RECN works with Rotherham Hospital and RMBC to organise and deliver a consultation workshop with older BME people who attend the Park Lea Centre. Rotherham African Communities Group is supported to deliver its first open meeting and community workshop

6.4. Skills and support

LSP Board representatives are provided with the 'intelligence' they need to participate fully in debates e.g. key facts (such as around demographics), are prepared beforehand on cards so that representatives have the background information necessary to make a valuable contribution and can pick up on significant issues as they arise. Support is available prior to meetings to go through the agenda and prioritise the most useful RECN contributions and the RECN meetings allow people to feed back and debrief.

Outside of the meetings, people in communities are supported to come together to get their voices heard – either directly or through board representatives e.g. women's voices about (lack of) opportunities to use local sports and health facilities were heard directly by service providers but also via a LSP rep on the Live Board, from where the issue went to a Democratic Scrutiny Board. Also, in recognition that this was a women's issue rather than a BME issue, links have been made with the RWN thus broadening the networking opportunities of the women involved, and helping them see the connections with the Women's Strategy. RECN is trying to get this networking message across to service providers "each woman knows another 10 women, what a valuable resource".

6.5. Benefits of this investment in networking

The benefits of partnership working can be summarised as follows:

- a BME Network for service providers established
- 30 Frontline BME voluntary and community organisations supported to participate in the development of the Network.
- Terms of Reference, representation and accountability policies developed for the Network, Steering Group, Task Groups and Representatives
- appointment of Network co-ordinator
- election of Steering Group, Chair and Representatives to agreed strategic bodies
- 16 Network meetings for the whole membership
- network representatives receive briefings, training and support to fulfil their roles
- individuals assisted in their skill development
- online and hard copies of directory produced and updated annually
- a website set up for the Network and annual update
- monthly bulletins and quarterly news sheet produced
- organisations supported to work collaboratively
- annual review meeting with statutory partners on implementation of BME strategy
- agreed process with statutory agencies for monitoring employment and contractual opportunities for BME VCS organisations in regeneration with agreed targets
- a forward strategy and identification of sustainable funding for the Network.

6.6. Outcomes of partnership working, voice and influence

There are still gaps, for example RECN sees the need for BME involvement in Rotherham Renaissance project but there are also examples of improving practice. For example, BME groups involvement in the Children and Young People's consortium has enabled discussions around the sexual exploitation of women which had not previously been addressed. There have also been changes to the way the Children's Fund was operated by RMBC, and Grassroots (BME) communities consultation as part of the BME strategy took place through support of the network. VAR as the contractor believes that

"RECN has done more than what set out to do; to create a viable network of BME organisations to discuss issues and represent interests; it has more than achieved this".

Observed networking and partnership outcomes

- agencies reaching out together
- co-ordination and alignment of services for BME communities
- raised understanding
- respond to borough related strategy and targets - BME strategy via BME network coming together
- synergy
- referrals / shared response to needs
- two-way dialogue – integrated working between statutory and voluntary sector
- constructive challenge to power holders
- CYP consortium – sexual exploitation issues
- working collectively to address BME community needs
- sharing good practice
- representing shifting and changing population
- link partnerships to what's happening at grassroots level making a difference
- create best structures to engage with service users, widening reach
- meet organisations' needs at a strategic level
- strengthening voice
- highlight grassroots issues for grassroots service delivery
- democratic process that reflects diversity and difference in BME communities
- increased involvement in Rotherham Renaissance EMBO.

6.7. Conclusion: sustainability

There is now more reach and greater scope for involvement and influence. The SYSIP investment has meant three years sustainability for RECN and its strategic representation role. This provided the potential to make a really serious difference. The funding meant a full time worker for RECN and has contributed to the investment of £134,000 transitional money (WNF) for BME strategic representation and involvement over 3 years. Even if REMA wasn't able to carry on, RECN could be self sustaining - picked up and located somewhere else.

Current funding is used for support and co-ordination - sessional workers are targeted to particular communities e.g. 6 hours a week for a limited time to get more involvement in the Chinese community and plant the seeds of representation.

It could be argued that RECN has been funded two and a half years and is a success. But there is still a lot of work to do, including work around the council's BME strategy. REMA – the infrastructure body for BME voluntary and community organisations receives very little funding and yet without it RECN wouldn't be what it is today. RECN also provides a route in to communities that historically have not connected with REMA – it provides another way in (in the same way perhaps that community groups connected with Community empowerment networks in a way they didn't with CVS type organisations). RECN could have survived but possibly as a different type of group (other networks had been proposed – one around business /social enterprise and one around community engagement /community representation)

This is now the time to explore greater partnership with other networks. For example, VCS reps sit on LSP theme boards and BME reps sit on the same boards – there is an opportunity here to join up the preparation and debriefing, to provide information and training sessions to all. Greater links could be made between the RCN sessional workers and the community network staff. RECN believes that Yorkshire Forward however needs to ensure that local authorities understand the need for such organisation and promote further funding.

RECN has enabled representation from across BME communities, it has reversed the trend of BME representatives always being from the Kashmiri Muslim community. The more visible BME network is now recognised by some individuals and agencies in Rotherham as a place to connect and secure BME representation. VAR believes that RECN is recognised for its worth – it has not been going that long, and the best is yet to come.

7. Rotherham Women's Network

7.1. Introduction

The Rotherham Women's Network (RWN) is a project of GROW - a support, advocacy and training organisation for women in Rotherham. The rationale for the network rests on the knowledge that women have a key interest in becoming involved in shaping Rotherham's future, ensuring equality of access to services and to influencing their shape. RWN aims to represent the views and aspirations of Rotherham women, providing opportunities for women to define the issues of concern to them and work with partner agencies to tackle them.

GROW has been established for 20 years and has increasingly faced requests to take the lead on various Rotherham based strategies and activities e.g. Rotherham Women's Strategy. GROW however is primarily a support and training agency and didn't feel in a position to do this without a greater voice from the women of Rotherham. SYSIP offered the opportunity for GROW to develop a network to provide women with a voice – a conduit from and to Rotherham women and public agencies.

The aims of RWN are to:

- develop a network that offers opportunities for local women to become involved in operational and strategic developments
- provide a vehicle for local women to be meaningfully involved in the consultation process
- recognise and celebrate women's achievement
- identify and challenge the barriers that prevent women from achieving their true and full potential
- provide training opportunities that support and maximise the potential of Rotherham women
- build networks and partnerships where knowledge, experience and expertise will be shared
- give Rotherham women a voice.

Outcomes sought include tackling and further reducing inequalities, volunteering development and influence over services.

“Through the network Rotherham women will have a greater influence over decisions that are made in developing Rotherham's social and economic future.”

7.2. What does networking look like in practice - structures and ways of working

The funding has covered the costs of a Co-ordinator and some of the networking functions and expenses, (although in the final year there been a 50 per cent

reduction in funding and match funding has not been available). This means that the network is facilitated and there is someone with the responsibility to make the connections with service providers and ensure they become more responsive.

A lot of effort went into forming the Network and then positioning it. The network began with a visioning exercise involving women of different backgrounds. This was followed by specific training events and women have since been linked into different activities, campaigns and conferences. The Network Coordinator provides the support and mentoring necessary for by members of RWN to engage in forums and boards to ensure that the specific needs of Rotherham women are being voiced and also that women are actively involved in the embedding of the priorities outlined in the Rotherham Community Strategy.

The pulling together of women and groups to develop the borough women's strategy is an example. And over 100 women were consulted on maternity services through RWN and a survey, resulting in women's voices informing an appropriate model for maternity services and contributions through the Maternity Services Liaison Committee – through listening to women, hospital consultants have already made some service changes. In addition, agencies and officers such as the NHS Trust and the Area Assembly have come out to the network to meet with women.

Over 246 have engaged with RWN to date, (this is an over achievement of 37 per cent the requirement of the three year programme being 180, indeed this is probably an underestimate as many more have feedback on consultations without being registered with RWN). The women represent a wide variety of backgrounds including: Disabled women, Black and Minority Ethnic women and women from geographically isolated areas in the borough, teenage mothers, economically inactive, self employed, retired, those working full time and also those in part time employment.

RWN has been a key partner/lead in engaging over 600 women in a variety of consultations and events, to influence change that impacts directly on their lives and the lives of their families.

Box 7.1: A Summary of RWN Development

December 2006: Three Women's Strategy consultation events engaging with thirty women from three different areas of Rotherham (Dinnington, Central + Catcliffe).

The first meeting of the Marketing Strategy group, action plan developed.

March 2007: The Rotherham Women's Network launched to both service users and also service providers. Over a 110 women attend and over 30 register an interesting in becoming involved further. First full network meeting takes place, creating a vision for the network. 81 women engage with the Network between December 2006 and March 2007. Six women get involved in volunteering.

May 2007: Confidence on Committees course is run

July – Sept 2007: 25 women are engaged with the Network. The Maternity Services consultation makes contact with over a hundred women and of those approx 46 engage in the network. Sixteen women attend the Women's Network meeting, discussions include the Department of Work and Pensions 'In work, Better off ' consultation document, and Women's Network representation at the Rotherham Town Centre Planning Group. The Network Co-ordinator supports marginalised women from the Dinnington area to take part in an Area Assembly Planning Consultation.

December 2007: Representation on the Rotherham Town Centre Planning group and also the Town Team Group. Active representation at the Rotherham Women's Strategy Working Together group, and also as Lead for the Proud theme. Undertake Family Engagement Consultation on behalf of the Kimberworth Park Community Partnership, to enable more parents having a say in the planning of services in the area. Developing a Rotherham Maternity Services Liaison Committee, which will involve service users in ensuring that Maternity Matters is embedded within Maternity Services.

May 2008: Supporting a group in Dinnington to be active in the consultation work of Rother Valley South Area Assembly. In discussions with Yorkshire Forward to develop a Women and Enterprise pilot; linking with South Yorkshire Business Links, Jobcentre Plus, and Children's Centre's to develop employment opportunity road show events. Maternity Services Liaison Committee - in discussions with senior NHS professionals to identify appropriate structures and representatives. Workshop looking at the Draft Public Realm Strategy- network members decide to invite key individuals to speak with the group re 'how Rotherham works'. Representation at the Rotherham Play Strategy group and the consultation sub group. RWN facilitates a Public Law - Gender Equality Duty training event, delivered by the Public Law Project and supported by the Women's Resource Centre - London. Active at the Northern College Gender Equality Forum, which guides the college in the development of it's Gender Equality Scheme.

July 2008: Work with the PCT to finalise the arrangements of a Maternity Services Liaison Committee. Planned meeting with the Head of Midwifery and a tour of hospital Maternity Services. Contracting with Business Links South Yorkshire to deliver a Women and Enterprise national pilot, that will raise the profile of self-employment and entrepreneurial activity as an opportunity for women. The RWN is represented at the Democratic Renewal Scrutiny Panel.

Autumn 2008

Over 70 people attend the Women Working for Change event in partnership with RMBC — the day provided women from the communities of Rotherham and women who work in Rotherham to come together for the official launch of the Women's Strategy.

March 2009: Women's equality conference – 'Democracy, community cohesion and interfaith working' (70 participants).

Themed Network meetings take place bimonthly to inform women of local developments and plans for services in Rotherham, and also highlight ways to become involved. For example, meetings have focused on:

- Maternity Services Consultation
- DWP Welfare Reform consultation
- Rotherham Renaissance

- RMBC - Childcare Sufficiency Plan
- Rotherham Learning Champions
- Credit Union
- RMBC - Public Realm Strategy
- RMBC - How Rotherham Works (Area Assemblies)
- How to be a School Governor
- Community Learning Forums.

Box 7.2: Activities of RWN

Consultation responses include:	RWN is currently represented at the following groups/boards:
<p>DWP Welfare Reform Green Paper (specifically focussing on the proposed changes to Lone Parent benefit entitlement the majority of whom are women)</p> <p>Rotherham Women’s Strategy - together with RMBC the RWN has played a leading role in its development and also implementation.</p> <p>Rotherham Renaissance (women’s engagement with the town centre economy and development)</p> <p>Maternity Services (RWN as a result now leads on the development of the Maternity Service Liaison Committee)</p> <p>Kimberworth Park Community Partnership</p> <p>Public Realm Strategy</p> <p>Childcare Sufficiency Plan</p> <p>Area plans</p>	<p>Teenage Pregnancy Support Group (PCT)</p> <p>Maternity Matters Strategic Board (NHS/PCT)</p> <p>Women’s Strategy Working Group (also leading on the Proud and Planning sub groups)</p> <p>Children, Young People and Families Consortium (VCS)</p> <p>Parents Voice/Influence group (RMBC)</p> <p>Gender Equality Forum (Northern College)</p> <p>Parenting Strategy Group</p> <p>Parenting Strategy Child Workforce Development Group</p> <p>Maternity Services Liaison Committee</p> <p>Rotherham Town Centre Planning Group</p> <p>Democratic Renewal Scrutiny Panel</p> <p>Rotherham North Area Assembly</p>

7.3. Skills and support

Confident residents sitting comfortably around a board table assertively making informed contributions do not just happen. It requires a whole system of support behind the scenes. RWN has therefore provided members with team building skills, ‘confidence on committees’ and assertiveness training and information seminars. Peer mentoring has also been implemented alongside a recognition that women need space to build their skills and knowledge in a more local, smaller space first. For this reason, women have been supported to get involved in neighbourhood based forums before going straight to the maternity services liaison committee for example.

RWN has also supported other voluntary and community sector organisations with capacity building and learning opportunities. For example, contact was made with a Sheffield law firm that provided free training around public law, the Women’s Resource Centre in London provided free training re public law and equalities, the time of a pro bono lawyer was negotiated. This ‘sharing’ approach is perceived as a responsible way of working

7.4. Who has benefited from this networking?

“Ordinary community women sitting alongside paid workers – feels very comfortable and safe.”

The members have been supported to attend and to take risks. The learning gained from participating in network meetings can then be transferred to other broader settings such as participation in Area Assemblies. Structured meetings like this can be daunting yet with network support approximately 20 women have gone to Area Assemblies who hadn't been before. Moved from women saying “area assembly – what's that”, to being fired up to go. Involvement in scrutiny panels is a current target.

The Women's Network illustrates that capacity building and confidence development work enables women to get involved at a strategic level. Thus everyone gains – strategies are more appropriate to women's needs, agencies can provide more relevant services, and 'ordinary everyday' women have a route through which they can express their voices.

It's not just about the local either – links have been made sub regionally, regionally and nationally – RWN persuaded the Women's Resource Centre to hold its gender equality training outside London and in Rotherham! And in October 2007 RWN was invited to be a keynote speaker at the Why Women? annual conference in London:

“Links are importantwe were asked to share our experience of developing a network, working in partnership to develop a Women's Strategy and encouraging Women to have a voice.”

7.5. Meeting the policy agenda

Active learning, active citizenship are current policy buzzwords and RWN is operating within a policy context of new statutory duties – to inform, to promote democracy etc. WRN illustrates how a relatively small amount of investment can make this language real.

Active citizens: social capital has been built by providing informal and formal learning opportunities with the backup support required to enable participation (crèche, one to one support, signposting to specialist provision).

Stronger communities: social capital has been bonded through the network development and subsequent involvement in structures that will challenge, support and process information either to agencies or to service users.

Partnership with public bodies: social capital has been bridged through joint working with strategic bodies, raising awareness of the needs of this community and supporting individuals to become more involved.

Box 7.3: Defining characteristics – what’s made this partnership work?

1. Networking is about sharing – partnerships are more about doing something together with another agency e.g. a conference with the Council’s Equalities Unit
2. The network has an identity
3. GROW gave it credibility
4. The model is what is appropriate for the women of Rotherham – *‘it can operate at the working level best has worked at the right level’*
5. This is the third attempt at a women’s network – it has only had short term funding in the past. SYSIP provided the resources to enable dedicated time to plan, respond and adapt.
6. The development of the network was very timely – *‘the town plan needed to be consulted upon, and the women’s strategy was underway’*
7. GROW is keen that the network is more than a ‘talking shop’. Things have happened as a result. e.g. agendas around support for lone parents and welfare reform. People can make informed comments about things that matter. For example, members of the Network are represented on the town centre planning strategy group – a sub-group of Rotherham Town Team, and have ensured that town centre developments and designs are subject to gender impact assessments

7.6. What has got in the way?

The following have hampered the development of RWN:

- gatekeepers: networks rely on communication commitments but information is not always passed on
- resources: the lack of availability of match funding once the NRF stopped has made further development work difficult, at a time when there was further work necessary around the maternity services developments.

‘Backroom’ resources are also limited, for example it is not possible to fund the childcare needed to enable women to go to meetings, as well as it being difficult to cover travel costs and venue hire.

Meeting some of the outputs has been hampered by resources too. Women have been encouraged and signposted to further training opportunities but unless they have been free, they have been unable to take up the activity.

As the contractor, VAR offered some part time administrative support to RWN. In practice however, this proved difficult as the support was based in the VAR offices – using technology not compatible with that at GROW. As a result, what should be very valuable information, such as a database, has not been. The separation also meant that the administrator was not really part of the project.

7.7. Conclusion: sustainability

SYSIP investment enabled the appointment of a co-ordinator who could play a strategic role, without which the RWN would not have happened as it has (in retrospect a slightly higher level of resourcing would have been more appropriate – ideally 1.5 staff members and resources for events and activities).

The momentum of RWN’S impact is a result of this committed worker time. This resource has not only enabled all milestones and outputs to be achieved but has impacted upon individual women and their communities - resulting in meaningful and

sustainable involvement in the development and rollout of Rotherham's core Strategies, for example the Transport Plan and Teenage Pregnancy Strategy.

There is still a lot of *unfinished business* and the network's development opens up opportunities for potential future contracts. RWN now aspires to have appropriate representation at LSP Theme Boards and to continue to be a conduit for further consultation and information to women in the community. In addition, it is recognised that any future development plan should include not just individual representation from women but community group membership too. A future aim is to increase the numbers of women being represented at decision making forums, promote positive citizenship and community cohesion, and encourage individuals to learn more about local/national democracy and support them to take part. Funding for networks is often difficult to find though the empowerment policy agenda embodied through programmes like the Take Part pathfinder of which RMBC is a part share almost exactly the same aims as RWN. The investment made through SYSIP could end up being much more spot on than ever envisaged.

8. Conclusion

8.1. The SYSIP investment

This programme has been significant in providing the resources necessary for partnership and network development. In the DCVS example, partnership was the mechanism by which agreed outputs were delivered – in the other three examples partnership development and networking were the *raison d'être* to achieve greater voice, influence and relevant service delivery. SYSIP resources have enabled greater participation on the part of individuals and organisations and the space for strategic thinking around the implications of this. In the cases of RECN and RWM particularly, there is a sense in which the investment has helped to create greater equality – more voices can now be heard.

8.2. Partnership and networking success factors

The following were found to be common factors for success:

- **partnership working needs commitment both from individuals and from organisations.** This implies effective leadership, strategies for member involvement and a degree of trust
- **the funding imperative ensured a clear purpose and explicit outcomes**
- **bureaucracy can lead to complications and the most successful partnerships appear to be those where the 'rules of engagement' are simple.** On the other hand, there needs to be some protocols of engagement and this must be clear to other partners – too often loose guidelines are open to misinterpretation
- **flexibility, adapting, responding are all words used to describe successful practice.** For example, GROW prides itself on its openness to projects evolving – *“don't know at the start how it will look”*
- all four case studies were clear **that partnerships and networks are about more than talking** – they need to link strategy and operation i.e. they need to have a clear task on which they are delivering
- **shared understanding, culture, behaviour and values are perceived to be important though the extent to which this is ever possible is questionable.** It is more likely to be apparent in a network – as the basis on which people associate but the very nature of partnership implies the coming together of different bodies – albeit to work on a common purpose
- **learning from other examples of partnership working is useful** e.g. Rotherham Children and Young Peoples Network has engaged in mutual learning with RECN
- **a partnership or network is the sum of its parts** – it enables perceptions about individual agencies and individual agendas to be left to one side
- **capacity building support to develop effective governance structures is crucial.**

8.3. Funders roles and responsibilities

Whilst the funding has allowed BACP, DCVS, RECN and RWN to evolve their own mechanisms and structures – and this is praised, there may have been some benefit from greater / more direct dialogue between the projects and Yorkshire Forward (rather than just with the accountable bodies in each area). **Several of the DCVS sub-contactors appear happy with this but in both Barnsley and Rotherham there is a sense of disengagement with the programme overall.**

The level of resourcing for infrastructure was significant – as compared to ChangeUp funding for example. And it is interesting to note that there was very little involvement in the sub-regional ChangeUp consortium or even knowledge about the nature of the resource from those participating in the case studies. In this context, the perceptions from some respondents that this funding could have been used more strategically are upheld – **connections between Capacitybuilders as the ChangeUp funding delivery agent, the ChangeUp sub-regional consortium and Yorkshire Forward could have been more coherent.** The infrastructure purpose of these funding streams was very similar and perhaps there could have been more added value during the programme and greater sustainability following it.

The relationship between the individual project and the accountable body is important and the closer this is – the greater the degree of trust afforded – the more likely it is that broader programme activities and benefits trickle down. For example, in Rotherham, REMA (supporting RECN) and GROW (supporting RWN) have been able to access the community accounting, commissioning and volunteering projects and to benefit from VAR's performance management framework, customer satisfaction surveys etc.

8.4. Understanding the elements

Against each of the original rationales for the investment we have found the following:

- **Greater partnership working to more effectively influence decisions**

There is, without doubt, greater partnership working – in terms of numbers participating but also in terms of the range of individuals and organisations participating. RECN has reached and involves a wide range of BME communities and BACP has built on its existing base not only to provide inter community partnership working but also to forge closer relationships with service providers at the local level. The list of working groups and boards on which RWN sits is impressive and in Doncaster it is unlikely that the particular mix of organisations represented on the sub contractors partnership would have happened without the funding imperative.

In one focus group, partnership was described as *“Like a marriage – a collective approach to needs”*. This doesn't preclude however, a falling out. Several people commented on the fact that the *“relationship worked as whole but individual relationships sometimes get in the way”*. This is apparent in the case study examples but clearly the partnerships are strong enough to get over this – they all still exist and want to continue despite financial concerns in some cases.

Indeed, whether or not there is a ready pot of money on the table for partnership working, the networks built do provide some potential sustainability and therefore structural longevity

“Partnership is about services and improvement – contracting / commissioning culture – partnership the only option for smaller groups”.

- **Advocacy and influence: enabling organisations to more effectively influence local policy processes, led by infrastructure bodies or neighbourhood organisations**

In all four examples, there is evidence that this has been realised.

In the cases of BACP and RECN, there is a clear aim to influence those with most power to make strategic decisions and therefore to ensure representation at this level. RWN also identifies this need but has recognised that there is a journey to get there. The jump for local women may be too great and stepping stones need to be found, e.g. locally based service user maternity forums have been established so that women can gain some confidence before representing the network at the maternity services Liaison Committee.

It is important to recognise that the networks – whilst funded, haven't done all of this own their own and that existing organisations and structures have been significant. BACP had received previous investment and was therefore building on a reasonably developed infrastructure base; RECN and RWN both benefited from the umbrella bodies that identified the need for a network in the first place – REMA and GROW respectively.

“Success of the network is down to the relationship with GROW and it's other projects. The embedding of the Women's Network within GROW has been crucial – workers and the women come up with complex issues and need to get support from within GROW”

The networking function of RECN has allowed more voices to enter partnership structures. But this outcome is dependent upon those with the most power in decision making understanding the role of VCS partnerships and networks. Those interviewed were not always confident:

“Do partners understand the remit of the network and who it represents?”

In part this is down to the ephemeral nature of networks – even their members don't always see the whole picture:

“women don't always recognise that it's the RWN that has led them to where they want to be”.

- **Developing partnership/networks between organisations so as to increase sustainability.**

The nature of partnership working often changes in response to the funding environment. Responses from partners can be influenced by the availability of resources and it can be difficult to sustain initiatives after the initial funding. This is particularly the case where organisations feel forced into competition with each other:

“Community organisations are often at the mercy of other organisations - that's not partnership”.

There are issues here around where the demand for services is coming from – those with need or the suppliers of services.

Partnership is about dialogue and this requires a different mindset – perhaps sustainability therefore rests on the degree to which this mindset has been built.

VAR identifies that women need the network to co-ordinate action around issues

Without SYSIP funding BACP may not have developed to the point it has – its success in attracting BASIS funding has been directly attributed to BACPs previous experience of project and financial management. The subsidiarity model in Barnsley has also been influential in developing a four way locality based strategy – between the council, VAB, BBEMI and BACP. Sustainability is likely to rest on such a strategy and BACP will need to find a way to overcome any perceived tensions and to work closely / alongside these partners – it can't influence if it isn't in there.

In Doncaster, there are some concerns that the larger and more powerful VCS organisations will succeed with or without the smaller ones – and will enter into competition with them, and this has caused some resentment. The DCVS partnership of sub contractors worked well to deliver the SYSIP project but arguably hasn't changed mindsets.

In Rotherham, the two networks featured have very specific constituencies though there is some overlap. RECN identifies that joint working with other networks and partnerships has been useful and understanding what a useful relationship with RWN might look like, and vice versa, could contribute to the longevity and degree of influence of both. It would be easy in a shrinking economic environment to find themselves competing – for people, for outputs and for money. There is however experience to build on - within a group of Asian women who are lobbying around health facilities, some identify with RWN and some with RECN, and their concern can be seen as BME specific or it can be seen as a women's issue. In this case, RECN believes it to be the latter though both networks have played a part.

The partnerships developed so far – and supported through SYSIP investment, need to be strong enough to withstand fragmentation. The key message is that the statutory sector need community partnerships and community networks, and these need resourcing if they are to be meaningful.

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Evaluation of the South Yorkshire Social Infrastructure Programme - Report I: Partnership, voice, engagement and influence

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