

CHANGEUP PROGRAMME

INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENT PLANS

COLLATION AND ANALYSIS OF DATA

REPORT FOR CAPACITY BUILDERS

SECTION 2: MAIN REPORT
INCLUDING AIMS, SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

NIGEL SIEDERER
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The Good Foundations Consultancy

Third Sector Strategy and Governance

www.goodfoundationsconsultancy.org.uk

“...effective infrastructure support [for Frontline organisations] ...will require the contribution of a range of providers and includes greater emphasis on collaboration, developing consortia including linking larger organisations with smaller ones and ... more face-to-face support that is not resource intensive (such as mentoring). It will be difficult but essential to ... improve access to support for small voluntary and community organisations operating at neighbourhood level, for organisations working with disadvantaged ... and ...rural communities.”

“Current infrastructure has developed piecemeal and overall coverage is variable in quality and fragile. Existing infrastructure has some important strengths but provision in some areas and fields is highly fragmented and lacks stable funding, particularly at local levels. There is an extraordinary range of bodies, many of which are small and under resourced. ...this degree of fragmentation prevents infrastructure providers from achieving maximum impact with the available resources. In addition, front line organisations are confused about where to go for support and advice.”

“Voluntary and community sector infrastructure should be made available nationwide, structured for maximum efficiency, offering excellent provision which is accessible to all while reflecting and promoting diversity, and is sustainably funded.”

Extracts from:
ChangeUp
*Capacity Building and
Infrastructure Framework
for the Voluntary and
Community Sector*
Home Office, June 2004

CHANGEUP PROGRAMME

Collation and analysis of Infrastructure Investment Plans

Report for Capacity Builders

SECTION 2: MAIN REPORT

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AIMS, SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Aims of the study

In Spring 2006, Capacity Builders, on taking over the ChangeUp programme from the Home Office, commissioned the Good Foundations Consultancy **to collate data and analyse what had been funded and achieved through ChangeUp to date**, including:

- a review (by a team of analysts) of all infrastructure investment plans – local, sub-regional, and regional – in a consistent framework, particularly eliciting what the planning consortia were identifying as key themes/activities/gaps in provision;
- a commentary on the variety of approaches to ChangeUp funding across the regions the mechanisms set up to deliver ChangeUp ie consortia (temperature check);
- a series of structured regional interviews.

It was also hoped to be able to:

- identify examples of innovative projects/activity funded through ChangeUp which could be written up as case studies at a later stage;
- comment on the effectiveness of different types of infrastructure that has been generated through ChangeUp (temperature check).

The work was to be done by 31 July 2006, with an interim oral report to the Capacity Builders Board on 22 June. On receiving the interim report, the Board asked for the full report to be brought forward to its next meeting on 13 July, and for recommendations to be made in the light of the findings. The timetable set limits on what could be achieved, so the report makes recommendations as to the future approach to collating examples and measuring the effectiveness of infrastructure, together with those on other issues.

The report is being published in a spirit of transparency, so as to place the analysis in the public domain. But **there are several qualifications which readers should note**:

1. The analysis is based on new infrastructure investment plans which were produced in most areas and regions to a deadline of 31 March. A few plans were being developed to later deadlines, so older or draft plans for these areas were used instead (except for the urban parts of the West Midlands, for which plans were unavailable within the timetable). The omissions are not seen as not affecting the general conclusions.
2. Complete financial information about what has been funded through ChangeUp was not fully available, but the collation is currently being finished. The best feasible summary of ChangeUp budget allocations is in Appendix 2 (in Section 4).
3. The analysis (conducted mainly in May and June 2006) is not a full evaluation or audit of the ChangeUp programme, nor a full survey of all capacity building work being done regionally and locally. Nor does it cover the Hubs (which have since been reviewed separately) and other national capacity building work, although it does survey perceptions of the Hubs as they appeared to local consortia in the early part of 2006. The Hubs' work has been growing and developing during the year.
4. The recommendations are not Capacity Builders' policy, but are currently (from September 2006) being considered by Capacity Builders' Policy Committee, which will make recommendations to its Board.

Summary

1. ChangeUp has made good progress considering it is a 10-year programme and that barely two years have passed since the ministerial launch announcement in July 2004 – the plans on which this report was based being nearly all prepared in, or running to, March 2006 at the latest.
2. The programme's achievements include funding more than 700 capacity building projects, and more than 800 projects and plans combined.
3. Infrastructure investment plans have been drawn up for every part of England (creating well over 100 plans), a process which has in many areas brought about genuinely new dialogue within the local sector, the first-ever assessment of local need, and the first serious involvement of statutory authorities.
4. There have been many projects reflecting the hub themes, with support projects in the volunteering and ICT fields being particularly widespread, though the work of the hubs themselves has not yet (ie, in the period covered by the plans) made itself strongly felt in local areas.
5. Other support needs (eg for social enterprise support, advice on bidding for statutory sector procurement, and finding affordable premises) have been expressed in the planning processes.
6. There has been widespread development of BME infrastructure, both in towns and cities with large BME populations and in rural areas where BME populations are widely dispersed, though there are ongoing challenges to find appropriate infrastructure in different circumstances.
7. There are many examples of pioneering projects and good practice in infrastructure planning, but these are largely undocumented.
8. There are also several regionally and locally commissioned evaluations in train.
9. The first two years have been fraught with short-term difficulties about payments and the need for consortia to secure funds before financial year-ends; there have also been difficulties because the timetables for the Defra programme for rural infrastructure and the main ACU programme were not fully aligned; the timetabling difficulties were a serious distraction from the strategic nature of the ChangeUp programme, which should now be reasserted.
10. The devolved administration to regions has given the programme good vantage points in most regions; but it has led to inconsistent administration and guidance, and differences in broad approach to infrastructure development (beyond those which could be justified by genuine regional differences), and has made horizontal learning between similar areas more difficult.
11. The sub-regional level of planning is showing itself to be sensible, but there is a need for more work on the best way (and the most appropriate 'tier') of organising and developing VCS infrastructure in the contexts of population levels and demography and of VCS size and scope.
12. It is too early to assess the outlook for sustainability of developments, but dialogue needs to start or continue with other funders and national bodies.
13. There is a need for confidence building, developing planning skills, and judging when consortia genuinely need external help and support.

Recommendations

Making plans in future

1. In future rounds of planning, there is a need for consistent nationally-developed guidance and a plan template showing the ground that plans are expected to cover, who should be involved, and how to design proposals that are viable at likely funding levels; such a template should be backed by training and consultancy in plan-writing.
2. Good practice in planning should be shared by making use of good examples of plans and their authors.
3. Consortia should continue to seek involvement of local authorities, Primary Care Trusts, and other active local funders and foundations; and Infrastructure Investment Plans should be aligned wherever possible with Local Area Agreements.
4. Consortia should be encouraged to review their representativeness, so as to include active but hitherto uninvolved sub-sectors, eg arts and sports organisations.
5. Consortia should be encouraged to review local client and population needs and to try to address gaps in VCS provision rather than simply respond to the expressed support needs of already active VCOs.
6. Judgements need to be made about when consortia genuinely need external help and support, eg consultancy, skill development, fund management.

Learning

7. Capacity Builders should develop a means for consortia to share products rather than reinvent them, eg course templates and design, quality standards, toolkits.
8. A ‘horizontal learning’ method should be developed to pick up examples of replicable success of similar types of capacity building initiative in areas of similar demography irrespective of region.

Documentation

9. Capacity Builders should create a central database of CB-supported projects: numbers, sizes, characteristics, funding levels, area demographics – for promotional, research, and audit purposes.
10. Capacity Builders should develop a system of reporting from consortia and regions which is proportionate to amounts of funding provided and operates at sensible intervals.
11. Capacity Builders should keep a central record of evaluations and their results.
12. A process should be developed for writing up ‘case study’ examples of consortia and project for promotional and dissemination purposes – using a journalistic approach, with photographs etc.

Responding to needs identified in plans

13. Consortia’s positive embracing of the Hub themes alongside their poor connection with the Hubs (including the mismatch between detailed needs and what some of the hubs offer) should be made known to the Hubs review.
14. Capacity Builders should review how to develop – perhaps by working with appropriate national voluntary organisations – a response on ‘non-Hub’ support issues emerging from several consortia, eg social enterprise, affordable premises, public sector procurement, involving and working with local authorities, human

resources / employment function, diversity issues including (but not limited to) work with BME, faith-based, and rural organisations.

Mapping

15. Capacity Builders should involve itself in ‘mapping’ studies of the VCS and should commission mapping of existing infrastructure provision across England (including organisation numbers and types, income, staffing levels, funding sources) in relation to official data on population numbers and demography and to VCS size and scope.
16. Capacity Builders should develop, through mapping and evaluation, standard and target levels of infrastructure provision in similar types of area, an informed assessment of what type of infrastructure is likely to work best in responding to different needs, and a view of which tier (regional, sub-regional, district) infrastructure is best developed at, so as to avoid spreading funds too thinly and achieve critical mass with service levels and client numbers.
17. It should direct part of its resources to address under-provision and areas of weakness.

Evaluation

18. Capacity Builders should develop, at this early stage of the ChangeUp programme, a means of assessing the programme’s overall outcomes against its strategic objectives.
19. Particular capacity building themes should be selected for possible evaluation from a national perspective.
20. Capacity Builders should develop through evaluation a perspective on the relative effectiveness in different circumstances of generic and specialist infrastructure (both ‘themed’ and ‘client-group-based’) so as to judge which best serves the needs of the general VCS and of marginalised groups.
21. An evaluation template for consortia, projects and regional plans, should be developed, so as to provide means of assessing (appropriately to the levels of funding) their effectiveness against standard criteria.
22. The successes in developing BME infrastructure and in BME groups’ use of generic infrastructure should be evaluated, so as to draw more lessons about what works best in different circumstances, with different ranges of BME groups, and in rural and urban areas.

Strategy issues

23. Capacity Builders should continue to develop ‘confidence building’ aspects of its work, so as to encourage consortia to move away from ‘short-termism’ in their planning, and to develop their work on the basis that planning ahead is worthwhile and will lead to resources and stability.
24. To improve the prospects of sustainable funding and partnership working, dialogue should be extended with statutory funders, foundations, Lottery distributors, and representative bodies such as the Local Government Association.
25. Capacity Builders should work with other organisations to develop income generation skills and programmes appropriate to infrastructure organisations.
26. Capacity Builders should discuss with central government ways of enhancing the long-term success of the programme, by developing funding streams and investment frameworks that match its 10-year aims.

INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE OF THE WORK

In February 2006, the Home Office Active Communities Directorate, which was then responsible for implementation of the ChangeUp programme, invited tenders to produce, by the end of June, a paper on the theme: ChangeUp collation and analysis, summarising the activities and achievements of ChangeUp to date. This would be “...*primarily a monitoring paper, a ‘temperature’ check of the programme to date, and ...not a formal evaluation exercise*”.

The Good Foundations Consultancy (GFC) responded positively in spirit to this tender invitation, producing an outline plan and methodology for the main elements of the work, while pointing out that the full work could not feasibly be completed in the timescale envisaged.

Discussion between the Home Office, Capacity Builders and GFC led to agreement that Capacity Builders would engage GFC to carry out a programme of work covering:

Collation of data and undertaking an analysis of what has been funded and achieved through ChangeUp to date, including:

- a summary of what has been funded to date across the programme;
- an assessment of what has been achieved (recognising it is early days) towards reaching the ChangeUp aim (temperature check).

At regional/sub-regional level

- a review of all infrastructure investment plans (said to number 127) particularly identifying what consortia are identifying as key themes/activities/gaps in provision within their plans;
- a commentary on any differences in approaches to ChangeUp funding across the regions and why particular approaches were adopted ie in response to specific regional gaps or building on existing infrastructure models (this should include both projects funded and the mechanisms set up to deliver ChangeUp i.e. consortia) (temperature check).

At national level

- a commentary on differences in approach between hubs and why these were particular approaches were adopted (temperature check);
- an assessment of the extent to which national projects have been co-ordinated with each other and the regional/sub regional work (temperature check).

A more detailed description of the original aims of the work, together with those subsequently agreed, is in Appendix 1. (The Appendices are in Section 4.)

A summary of the local and sub-regional aspects of the ChangeUp programme, with an overview of the allocation of funds, is in Appendix 2.

The work, now to be completed by the end of July with an oral report to the Capacity Builders Board on 22 June, would entail recruitment and co-ordination by GFC of a team of consultants who would read and analyse the local/sub-regional infrastructure investment plans. Some of the team would also undertake analyse of the regional plans and structured interviews. The methodology is described in the next chapter, and a list

and brief description of the team members is given in Appendix 3. Their help and hard work, to short deadlines, is gratefully acknowledged by GFC.

The work has proceeded roughly as planned. However, not all the Infrastructure Investment Plans were immediately available when analysis commenced in mid-April. A few were not available at all within the timetable, so the survey is not absolutely complete. Full financial information also became available piecemeal, region by region and in different formats, so the summary information is less complete than desirable.

As noted above, the oral report to the Capacity Builders Board brought a request that the timetable for the final report should be brought forward so that the report would be available in time for the Board's next meeting on 13 July. To achieve this, it has been necessary to dispense with some interviews which were included in the national stage of the work. The need for these had in any case been to some extent superseded by the decision of the Capacity Builders Board to commission a review of the Hubs.

What this work is not

It should be understood that this work is not:

- a full evaluation of the ChangeUp programme
- an audit
- a full survey of all capacity building work done locally and regionally
- a review of the Hubs and other national capacity building work, although it does survey perceptions of the Hubs as they affect local plans.

The timescale also means that some parts of the picture, though relatively small, were missing at the time the report was completed.

The effect is that the analysis, though as thorough as possible in the time available, is necessarily to some extent impressionistic. Its value lies in giving an overview rather than an assessment which is guaranteed to be correct in every detail. Nor has there been time to check all reported views and impressions back with everyone who contributed them through writing and interviews. And the methodology has had, as anticipated, to be adapted as the work progressed.

The constraints should not be regarded as detracting from the overview. The aim has been to produce a broad assessment, a 'temperature check' of the programme, recognising that 'it is early days' (as the original brief said). This, within the limits of the time and documentation available, has been achieved. It is hoped that the result will be useful to the Capacity Builders Board and to other observers of, and participants in, the ChangeUp programme.

METHODOLOGY AND SCOPE OF THE SURVEY

The task was to analyse local and regional infrastructure plans drawn up by consortia. These were expected to number 127, of which were 118 local and sub-regional and 9 regional.

A team of six experienced readers and analysts was brought together during March and April by Nigel Siederer of the Good Foundations Consultancy, who acted as co-ordinator and team leader.

The analysis framework

An analysis framework was devised in the format of a multi-page spreadsheet. This was discussed and refined by email and at a meeting of the team at the Home Office on 5 May, also attended by Capacity Builders Board member (and now Policy Committee Chair) Margaret Bolton. The final framework covered eight areas so information could be abstracted from each plan on:

1. The area covered – region, local authority type, population, urban-rural type*, and other important demographic characteristics
2. The Voluntary and Community Sector covered by the plan – such information as was available on the number of organisations, total income and staff numbers, main funding sources, plus a three-point *Funding overview rating* (assessing if possible whether the sector was perceived to be:
 - a. relatively active and well funded
 - b. normal, with key organisations having basic but not generous funding
 - c. underdeveloped and lacking key organisations/ resources)
3. A profile of the existing VCS infrastructure – the number and types of the main infrastructure organisations, their total income, staff numbers and main funding sources, and an assessment (using a three-point rating) of whether infrastructure was:
 - a. relatively strong and well funded
 - b. having key orgs with basic but not generous funding, and some gaps
 - c. under-developed and lacking key orgs/resources
4. The plan and those involved in preparing it – the page-length, date and period covered, authorship, servicing of the consortium, non-VCS partners sitting on planning group, and comments on the representativeness of planning group and quality of planning
5. Themes – whether generic, and/or focussing to some extent on geographical gaps and under-provision, services for particular client groups, or specialist support for all or parts of the VCS; also the different strengths of relationship between the plan's themes and the Hubs and their themes
6. Implementation – whether this was the first, second or third plan, how much funding had been received so far, further cash likely to be needed, and an assessment of the current stage of development (whether implementation had just started, was about to start, or had been under way for a year or longer). However, information about funding to date was only available sporadically in the plans themselves, and as explained below was not available in time for use by the readers. Information was added at a later stage as to the number of projects funded within each consortium and the amounts given. The most useful source of this additional information was the ChangeUp portal.

7. Sustainability – whether other funders had made commitments to help fund the plan, and an assessment of the outlook towards 2014 (are other funders involved and likely to take over from CB or significant new income streams likely to develop, or if infrastructure funding is likely to be long-term dependent on Capacity Builders at the same level as in 2005/6 or at a reduced level)
8. Needs and comments – an assessment of the overall quality of the plan (using a four-point scale and comments), and notes on any continuing geographical or thematic needs identified.

* Using the *Defra Classification of Local Authority Districts and Unitary Authorities in England*, a 6-fold typology developed by the Rural Evidence Research Centre, Birkbeck College, University of London, July 2005.

Availability of the plans

The available plans were obtained by the Home Office and distributed to the team members (direct or via the co-ordinator) in batches that were mixed as to region and type of area.

Sub-regional plans from regions	Distributed to readers
South East, North East and two from the North West	Immediately on 5 May
East, South West, London	Over week beginning 8 May
Yorkshire & the Humber, rural parts of the West Midlands	Became available early in week beginning 15/16 May
East Midlands, Merseyside	Obtained on 18 May after help sought from Capacity Builders staff
Greater Manchester	23 May, but it was ascertained that a new plan was currently in production

Some plans were only available on the (excellent) ChangeUp portal. New plans were expected for 2006/7, though there is some confusion as to whether all regions had been given a deadline of 31 March 2006. Missing plans for the urban parts of the West Midlands were understood to be under revision, and (it was eventually ascertained) due to be launched within a new regional plan on 14 July - too late for analysis within this report, though some elements of preparatory information for the plan were obtained in late June; it is understood that after further consultation the final plan will be issued in October or November 2006. The revised Greater Manchester plan was also due in late July but the full version did not become available until September. This exercise therefore used the 2004 sub-regional plans for the five rural West Midlands counties and the 2005 plan for Greater Manchester and its districts.

Notwithstanding the small limitations on the availability of plans for this study, the ChangeUp planning process has covered the whole of England apart from the Scilly Isles. The study has covered:

- 8 regional plans and a preparatory information for the 9th regional plan
- 113 local and sub-regional plans, of which:
 - 99 are full plans
 - 4 is initial information about new plans for the urban parts of the West Midlands
 - 10 are district ‘strands’ (March 2005) within the Greater Manchester sub-region
 - 33 are London borough plans for areas also covered by five sub-regional plans
 - 6 are district plans within Berkshire also covered by a plan for the former County.

Collation of information

A further meeting of the readers' team was held on 26 May. Overall comments and views were collated, of which a note was agreed, the contents of which have been reproduced at various parts of this report. The readers' returned spreadsheets analysing each report were collated together by the co-ordinator in a composite document, from which totals, counts, and highlights were abstracted to give an overview of the local and sub-regional plans.

Regional stage

The co-ordinator and two members of the team (Des Palmer and Kamila Zahno) undertook the next stage during June. This involved:

- analysis of the regional plans
- structured interviews (by email or phone) with regional personnel.

The plans differed considerably, so the analysis was not done in a common framework but with the aim of reporting the main features of each plan and assessing its quality in conjunction with the interviews.

An interview framework was prepared and refined.

Interviews were sought with:

- key personnel responsible for the programme in each regional Government Office
- key personnel in the regional voluntary sector consortium
- Capacity Builders' new regional co-ordinators.

The organisational arrangements differed across the regions and are described in the regional reports. Most but not all of the voluntary sector consortium and government office staff were keen to discuss the programme and interviews (mostly conducted by phone but some face-to-face or by email) generally took about an hour. 26 such exchanges were conducted in all. Consortia did not exist in every region, but other contacts were made where appropriate. Several of Capacity Builders' own regional staff were new and had less to offer than other contacts. The team members record their thanks for all help given. Time does not allow for full checking back of interview contents, so the team members are responsible for any errors. However, there has been an effort to maintain a consistency of analytical style so that readers of the report will gain an overview of the regions. This is more important than the detail.

Financial information

Financial information also became available from the Government Offices, passed on by the Home Office during April and May, with some additional information from Capacity Builders. The information was provided on spreadsheets in different formats. It generally focussed on payment details rather than strategic allocations, with varying levels of detail as to spending in different years (and virtually none on the Early Spend). The quality of information varied considerably across the regions as to the allocations of funds between consortia/projects, Defra/ACU funding, capital/revenue, and different objectives of the programme. On analysis (which was only possible during June, too late for use by the readers' team), the overall information was found to be incomplete. Home Office staff intended to correct this by the end of July, seeking further information from the Government offices.

ABOUT THE PLANS AND THE PROJECTS THEY HAVE SUPPORTED

Full coverage

The 353 local authority districts in England (excluding the Scilly Isles) have been grouped into VCS planning consortia at regional, sub-regional and district/borough levels. The consortia cover the whole of England, and each one has produced a plan. This full coverage is in itself a considerable, and a new, achievement.

Projects

Each consortium and plan has involved funding to a series of projects, mostly at local and sub-regional levels, but with significant numbers of regional projects in London, South East, South West, and West Midlands. Although it is not part of this review to look at the projects in any detail, the array and the sheer numbers are significant. So it should be said that it is one of the achievements of the ChangeUp programme to have funded more than 700 capacity building projects, and more than 800 projects and plans combined.

The number of projects undermines the notion that the ChangeUp programme has enabled the VCS to ‘plan’ rather than to ‘do’. However, many projects have not been funded into the ‘Continuation Funding’ period beyond March 2006.

Region	No of Local and sub-regional consortia/plans	Local plan areas also covered by sub-regional plans	Regional plans and projects 2005/6 ^c	Local / sub-regional plans and projects 2005/6 ^c	Total projects and consortia 2005/6 ^c	Regional population
East	6		26	118	144	5,388,805
East Midlands	6		23	99	122	4,172,055
London	38	33	^d 49	41	90	7,173,836
North East	4		3	35	38	2,514,681
North West	15	^a 10	8	110	118	6,729,722
South East	20	^b 6	21	33	54	8,002,280
South West	11		16	117	133	4,928,379
West Midlands	9		10	80	90	5,268,319
Yorks & Humber	4		9	48	57	4,964,053
Total	113	53	165	681	846	49,142,130

a. Greater Manchester district strands

b. Berkshire districts

c. Data sources: ChangeUp Portal and some regional plans and financial spreadsheets supplied by Government Offices

d. Includes all capital projects, whether regional, sub-regional, or borough-based

More information is given in Appendices 1 and 2. The dilemma about whether to fund at regional, sub-regional, or local level is discussed later in the report.

Length of plans

The 109 local and sub-regional plans were an average of 48 pages long, the range being 2 to 193 – over 5200 in all. The shorter plans were not full plans, but were the district strands within the Greater Manchester sub-regional plan. The four ‘missing’ plans are those for the urban sub-regions of the West Midlands (Birmingham Black Country, Solihull, and Telford & Wrekin); these plans were due out in draft in mid-July 2006, and

in final form in October or November; some data has been abstracted from other information available during the preparation of the new West Midlands regional plan.

Period

The start date and period covered varied. This is mainly because rural areas had begun planning at the behest of Defra in the first half of 2004. This was some months sooner than many urban areas, where planning began after the announcement of the ChangeUp plan in mid-2004 followed by a 'prompt' and guidance from the Government Offices or the Regions towards the end of the calendar year (for example the Government Office for the South East's *Consortia Guidance paper*, December 2004).

Some funds (including ACU 'Early Spend' and Defra funds) needed to be spent during the financial year 2004/5.

Plans of some sort for nearly all areas and regions were in place for 2005/6, but the urban area plans in particular had had to be rushed. Apart from the 2004/5 budgets, there was pressure to take up available funds at the beginning of 2005/6 (ie April 2005), so that none of the annual budget would be lost.

New plans were expected for 2006/7, but as described on page 10, not all were available.

The dates and periods of the plans used were:

Plans produced in		Plans expiring in	
2004 or earlier	13		
2005	62	2005 or earlier	5
2006	24	2006	33
		2007	5
		2008	4
		2009	6
		2014 or later	34
Undated	10	Silent	16

ChangeUp is a programme which is intended to last ten years, until 2014, which is why about a third of the plans have some level of aspiration or vision which lasts until at least then. However, few plans have targets for the intervening years, and, as will be seen few have plans for sustainable funding other than continued support from Capacity Builders. It is, however, early days.

The regional differences are these:

Region	Plans were mostly made in	Region	Plans were mostly made in
East	^a Sept 2004	South East	March 2006
East Midlands	Sept 2004	South West	March 2005
London	Sept 2005	West Midlands	^c July 2004
North East	March 2005	Yorks & Humber	^d June 2005
North West	^b June 2005		

- a. except one in Jan 2005 & one in May 2006
- b. currently re-planning in Greater Manchester
- c. rural areas, but currently re-planning for all areas
- d. except one in March 2006

The 2004 plans are being updated generally. In the ‘Implementation’ chapter, the start dates are mapped, as far as possible, against progress.

Planning: a new experience

A very large proportion of the plans were produced by consortia who were meeting for the first time for the purpose. In many areas, this was the first time the group had met for *any* purpose. In many counties and regions, organisations are not used to working together, having traditionally based themselves in single districts, and tending to meet, if at all, at national conferences and events. Bringing together new consortia in many areas is another achievement of the ChangeUp programme.

Was this the first plan?	
Plans said to be first for the area (or not saying)	95
Second plan	12
Third	2

Who drafted it?	
An existing consortium	18
A new consortium	66
A consultant	6
Other or difficult to tell	19

Who serviced the consortium?	
One member (often a CVS/RCC or a county CVS network, but mostly unstated)	75
Consortium’s own staff	7
Members in rotation	4

Although the explicit involvement of consultants has been found in only 6 cases, there were hints that they were involved in a greater number of cases (presumably some of those counted as ‘Other or difficult to tell’, above). When consultants were engaged, it was for want of capacity in existing infrastructure, and there were mixed results. As long as a consultant listens to consortium members, difficulties arise do not arise in the quality of the planning or writing. But consultant-written plans tend to be less ‘owned’ by a consortium because the members have not been involved in the engaging process of having worked the plan through. So the commitment to implementation may be correspondingly weaker.

Statutory sector and other funder involvement in planning

Despite the short timescale, there was some evidence of statutory involvement. 63 areas reported that at least one local authority was involved in the planning consortium. The total number of local authorities involved was 101, 86 first-tier or unitary authorities, and 15 second-tier. In many cases, this meant that only one or two out of several district councils in a county were involved, while the county council was not. As will be seen, there were few cases of forward funding commitment by the local authority. There were 35 cases where a health authority or primary care trust was involved. Learning and Skills Councils played a part in 13 cases, presumably with a prospective role in workforce development. Other statutory bodies were occasionally involved, for example the police in 5 cases. Local foundations took part in 8 cases (mostly community foundations) and Lottery distributors in two.

At least 26 areas reported no statutory involvement in the planning; (some plans were silent, so no involvement has been assumed). Statutory involvement in the North East and South West regions seemed to be particularly weak.

The ChangeUp programme draws attention to the quality of the relationship between the Voluntary and Community sector and the statutory sector at local level. The history is very varied, from areas where there has been policy involvement in one or more fields, a Compact, and a history of strong funding relationships based on grant-aid, service level agreements, or contracted funding (or any combination of these); while in others the relationship is weak and distant. The ChangeUp programme demands a planning process that creates an opportunity for the local VCS to strengthen existing relationships with the statutory sector and to try to create them where they do not yet exist. At national level, Capacity Builders can facilitate and encourage better relations and more mature relationships through dialogue with the Local Government Association, as well as developing its working relationships with central government departments that fund locally and with the Government Offices for the Regions.

Quality of plans

The readers were asked to rate the plans for quality. Inevitably this introduces an element of subjectivity, which was mitigated through a process of discussion and comparison.

The rating scheme and ratings were as follows:

1 High quality – clear, realistic plan, with implementation under way or imminent:	10
2 Good quality – being implemented or largely implementable, but some gaps and unanswered questions:	33
3 Moderate or mixed quality – some good insights and implementable projects, but significant gaps and unanswered questions:	49
4 Poor quality – could not be backed without independent review of needs/options:	17

Quality by type of area

By region: The number of consortia per region varied considerably, so it is difficult to draw general conclusions, but the four plans from Yorkshire and Humber were all rated 1 or 2, and the South West (which had the strongest plan template) drew no ‘4’ ratings, and six plans (out of 11) rated 1 or 2. South East, again with strong guidance, drew no 4s but no 1s either. None of the other regions went against the general pattern, though the plans for the West urban Midlands and Greater Manchester were harder to rate because only brief summaries were available.

By local authority type: County plans and sub-regional plans were slightly better overall than district/borough plans but this again is mainly because of the problems in obtaining full plans for Greater Manchester and the West Midlands.

Urban/rural distinctions: The numbers are low, so again one must be wary of drawing general conclusions, but the quality of plans in rural areas was slightly better than in urban areas. Looking closely, there was a greater proportion of 1-rated plans and fewer 4-rated ones, but the middle ratings were about the same. This suggests that when rural planning is tackled in a determined way, it goes very well. Mixed urban/rural areas did

notably worse than areas which were predominantly urban or predominantly rural, suggesting that it is difficult to bring the different cultures of urban and rural VCOs together.

Even allowing for the subjective nature of the rating scheme, the overall impression is that there are many weaknesses in the plans, with 66 out of 109 plans having been given one of the lower two ratings.

Common criticisms:

- Missing information on the size and scope of the local VCS and on the existing infrastructure – see next chapter
- Short term focus – lack of clear 1-3 yr implementation aims (with SMART objectives, based on evidence, and projected outcomes) to support realisation of 5-10 year vision statements
- Lack of clarity about audience(s)
- Signs of excessive rushing, with many plans dominated by anxiety to meet deadlines and secure available funding
- Second-round plans being unclear about money already received and what has been achieved with it – often small amounts (50K) but sometimes larger
- Signs of poor ability and skill at planning – particularly worrying in support organisations
- Drafting problems: inconsistency of format, unstated dates of plans and periods covered, no version numbers or statement of ownership/authorship, unexplained acronyms and jargon, and variable length largely unrelated to quality.

These are four reasons for the poor quality of the plans:

- a. In many geographical areas, this is the first experience of this form of collective planning, and, for some organisations, of any attempt at strategic planning
- b. Planning and drafting skills are underdeveloped in the VCS generally
- c. There was inadequate guidance from most of the regional offices
- d. The timetable placed near-impossible constraints on the process.

Building confidence

The ChangeUp programme, having succeeded in reaching across the whole of England, has touched many areas where front line voluntary and community organisations, together with their second line support organisations, are unused to:

- Meeting together outside single districts (and often not even *within* districts)
- Planning jointly, thinking about and expressing needs in common
- Preparing and drafting long-term strategies
- Raising funds jointly (and may well be lacking in fundraising skills generally)
- Receiving and managing funds
- Dealing with central government programmes, with their operational and timetable requirements
- Dealing with processes for securing renewed funding annually
- Dealing with local authorities and other statutory funders at a strategic level.

Management of this pan-England programme was substantially devolved to the Government Offices for the Regions, many of whom set about supporting it with care and enthusiasm. Unfortunately, the guidance from Government Offices to consortia was

uneven and often inadequate. The example cited above from the Government Office for the South East is perhaps the best, but an extensive internet search has not turned up guidance from every region. In further rounds of planning, there is a need for a template showing the ground that plans are expected to cover, who should be involved, how to design proposals that are viable at likely funding levels. This probably needs to be backed with workshops and tuition or consultancy in plan-writing.

Consortia need to be encouraged to move away from ‘short-termism’ – to continue to meet, and to develop confidence that planning ahead is worthwhile and will lead to resources and stability. Plans need to develop a reality which lies between the ‘church newsletter’ (ie all small-scale, non-strategic implementation) and the grand vision (all strategy but little real development).

Problems between timetable and strategy

That said, consortia and capacity building infrastructure have been expected to plan and implement at the same time. Programme announcements, though welcomed and well thought through, have been made some time into the financial and planning year, leaving reduced time for implementation and full take-up of funding. Failure to take up full allocations has then appeared to carry the danger that funds will be lost and future budgets permanently reduced because it will be inferred that funds are not needed or cannot be used effectively. Timetables for claiming and paying have started to take precedence over strategy. New staff have been appointed hurriedly and sometimes recruitment difficulties were reported because of the impression (and perhaps the reality) that long-term funding is not secure.

These problems are not unique to Capacity Builders but second-stage plans repeatedly mentioned told that they have been a serious difficulty in the ChangeUp programme. The signs of over-hurried planning were also apparent in very many of the plans.

The rushed planning and implementation left little time for objective-setting, in due course making it harder to assess outcomes against objectives. In any case, the next round of funding applications (for Continuation Funding) arrived before work had produced assessable outcomes, leaving an impression that the programme (and the projects it has funded) have under-achieved – having focussed too strongly on processes of planning, intra-sector and internal discussions, setting up (such as staff recruitment and finding premises), and initial contact-making.

If there is a single message from this analysis, it is that the ChangeUp programme needs to be less driven by short-term timetables, and to set medium-term objectives that look towards its longer-term goals. Good capacity building, indeed good work in any voluntary organisation (or perhaps any organisation in *any* sector), takes time to reach maturity.

Much has been achieved in coverage, and in basic planning and dialogue. Many projects have been started, involving many organisations and areas for the first time. Improving the quality of the programme will take longer. But this is being said two years into a ten-year programme. So, provided that the habit of short-termism can be broken, and participating organisations can gain confidence and develop their skills, the programme should be regarded as on course, with its glass filling up at the proper rate.

Capacity Builders in turn faces the challenge of persuading Government to take a more strategic approach to funding of voluntary sector infrastructure. Other infrastructure funding (science, transport etc) benefits from ten-year investment frameworks, but although ChangeUp is a ten-year programme, it has barely achieved stable year-on-year planning, let alone the forward-looking medium-term processes that it needs.

Good plans

Despite the difficulties, 10 plans were rated as high quality, and 33 as good quality and very largely implementable. These show that the VCS *can* plan. Lessons need to be learnt from these good examples.

WHAT THE PLANS SAY ABOUT THE VOLUNTARY AND COMMUNITY SECTOR

The size of and scope of the VCS is an indicator of its capacity. It was hoped that the plans, viewed together, would give an overview of the sector and the relative needs across consortia planning areas, taking into account population levels etc. This has been possible only to a limited extent, albeit an interesting one.

75 of the 113 areas reported the size of their VCS, a total of 121,000 organisations, the average per area being 1623 (giving preference to districts in areas where information was duplicated between districts and sub-regions. Most areas are counties, but some are districts and unitary areas. Population levels vary enormously. The largest number of organisations was in Hampshire: 8400 (population 1,240,386) and the smallest in Rutland: 110 (population 34,444). Reportage of VCO numbers was nearly complete across the Greater London boroughs, the South East consortia, the North West districts and counties, and the rural West Midlands, though caution is needed. Many of the figures were no more than educated guesses. Where more accurate counting was done, the basis of the count sometimes differed; it may or may not have included, for example, churches and religious organisations, uniformed youth organisations (scouts, guides), or sports clubs. The array of reported infrastructure (see below) suggests that arts and sports organisations may have been undercounted.

Density of VCOs

A calculation of the number of organisations per 1000 population produces interesting results. Excluding the obvious exception of the City of London (with its very low resident population), the average across 74 consortium areas, using district data only, was 3.07 organisations per 1000 population. The median was 3.80. A few figures seemed abnormally high: Wiltshire & Swindon at 13.05 (based on an apparent guess of 8000 VCOs), Dorset at 12.80 (guessed at 5000 VCOs), and perhaps Isle of Wight (13.17, 1750) and Cumbria (10.25, 5000). There were also a few low 'outliers', suggestive of undercounting of VCOs: Barnet (0.32 VCOs per 1000 pop'n, 100 VCOs), Cheshire & Warrington (0.34, 294), and Havering (0.89, 200).

Excluding areas where the result was less than 1 or greater than 10, left 59 areas. The average number of organisations per 1000 population for these areas was 4.60. The median figure was 3.79, which tends to suggest that there are still some high guesses in the mix. But the highest figure was for Hackney, with 9.86 organisations per 1000 population, a borough which is known to have a very active voluntary and community sector (the reportage being 2000 organisations in a population of 202,908). The lowest was Croydon, which reported 400 organisations in a population of 330,409, a borough which, although having some active organisations also has significant 'dormitory suburb' areas where community activity might be expected to be relatively low. 41 consortium areas reported figures between 2 and 5 organisations per 1000 population. Warwickshire and Coventry, known to have done a good mapping exercise, reported 3.01.

Notwithstanding the limited quality of the data, this survey is believed to be unique in covering reportage of the VCS across most of England through the eyes of consortia who know the sector well. The figures are probably the most comprehensive such collation of figures ever. They are sufficiently consistent to suggest that more survey work could usefully be done to develop norms of levels of VCS activity and organisation in relation

to population levels and to other demographic data such as the population age structure and BME population.

Other indicators of VCS size

Figures of total income and staff numbers may be reasonable proxies for sector activity levels and capacity. Comparisons would therefore be interesting in working towards benchmarks and norms which Capacity Builders could use to set long-term targets for desired activity levels, and directing funds and developmental resources accordingly. Only 18 consortia gave figures for the total local VCS income, too few to give usable figures, some of which were of dubious credibility (eg the highest Southwark at £655M, in an area known to include the headquarters of many national VCOs). Only 13 plans identified the sector's main funding sources.

19 consortia estimated the total number of staff, but gave wildly varying figures variously including volunteers or not. It is frustrating that few plans cited employment figures known to have been collated by Learning and Skills Councils, though some did make use of previous mapping exercises (which were compiled in various formats in about 60 districts in the late 1990s). A few plans made new mapping exercises one of their priorities, notably in the West Midlands region.

Generally, the infrastructure investment plans do not provide sufficient data for many conclusions to be drawn. But where an area has very low numbers of VCOs in relation to its population, and the numbers cannot be explained away by poor mapping, there is a prima facie case for intervention.

WHAT THE PLANS SAY ABOUT VCS INFRASTRUCTURE AND ITS CAPACITY

The plans contained information about the array of organisations in the local VCS infrastructure. The typical move to form a consortium involved bringing together all known infrastructure organisations in an area. In many cases these organisations simply constituted themselves as the consortium. In larger areas, the number of organisations was simply too great, and a smaller group was tasked with drawing up the plan. In sub-regions comprising several districts, a frequent pattern was for a steering group to be formed comprising the main sub-regional organisations plus the CVS from each district. Where infrastructure was more sparse, organisations such as legal advice centres joined the consortium, in their specialist capacity building role as advisers to other VCOs (eg in employment matters). In some cases race equality councils joined as specialist advisers on promoting diversity and elsewhere they played a representative role in the absence of a BME forum.

The readers attempted to count the number of infrastructure organisations of different types in an area. This would indicate the main sources of capacity building. Some plans however only listed the organisations belonging to the consortium or its steering group, which may have been a smaller number. The analysis (covering 113 consortia areas) used the largest number of organisations stated in a plan.

Type of infrastructure organisation	No of consortia reporting at least one organisation of this type	Total no of organisations of this type reported
Council for Voluntary Service or Rural Community Council	109	346
Disability umbrella	30	42
BME network	72	120
Age Concern / Council on ageing	48	50
Advice network	30	38
Volunteer bureau/centre	69	152
Youth network/Council of Vol Youth Services	51	59
Federation of Community Organisations	36	54
Training consortium		20
Faith or churches umbrella		11
Race equality council		10
Social enterprise support organisation		10
Community Foundation		7
Care forum or alliance		7
Community accountancy project		6
Environmental network		6
Others including: Play associations, development trusts, law centres, community empowerment networks, housing associations, tenants federations, womens forums, arts consortia, sports umbrellas, co-operative development agencies, partnership associations, Groundwork, carers networks, ICT support organisations		311

The total number of infrastructure organisations reported was 1342. This exceeds the

number of ‘plan areas’ because many areas cover several districts, so that an area contains multiple organisations of the same type on (or aspiring to) a ‘one-per-district’ basis. This is particularly true of BME networks, volunteer bureaux and federations of community organisations. Also, multiple BME networks may spring up within a district or ‘plan area’, representing different BME communities. But the range of infrastructure organisations per plan area ranges from 1 to 50, suggesting that there has been undercounting, that infrastructure provision genuinely varies a great deal, and that there is no standard basis for counting an organisation as infrastructure.

The heavy dependence on CVSs and RCCs will be noted. Very few consortia have functioned without one. (They have been counted together because some counties have a single organisation playing both roles. Volunteer bureaux within a CVS/RCC have however been counted separately. If these figures do not correspond with the membership numbers of the relevant national networks, this is probably because consortium membership was not always comprehensive – for example there were volunteer bureaux which did not belong – or was not fully reported in the plans.)

Relationship between the number of infrastructure organisations and the size of the sector

This relationship shows the number of organisations supporting a given VCS in relation to its size. It should, in theory, be consistent across areas. It should enable benchmarks to be created that would act as a prompt to show when an area’s VCS is under-resourced in terms of infrastructure and capacity building organisations. However, the data is weak. Too many areas have guessed the numbers of VCOs and recorded incomplete numbers of infrastructure organisations. Even where better mapping has been attempted, the basis of counting has varied across areas.

Across 82 areas where both figures were available, the average number of VCOs per infrastructure organisation was 216, and the median 136. But the range, from 12 to 909 indicates that these numbers are virtually useless. However, within some regions, there are clusters where both the component numbers are credible. 16 London boroughs have a ratio of infrastructure organisations serving between 100 and 200 VCOs. Frustratingly, the five (out of ten) Greater Manchester districts giving figures show a consistently different ratio from the London boroughs: of each infrastructure organisations serving between 50 and 100 VCOs.

Nor are there other, more helpful, figures in the plans. Only 12 plans could estimate the total income of infrastructure organisations in their area, and only 10 the total staff – both figures far too low to be useful.

But even the very loose London and Manchester figures show that some consensus may be possible.

This is very important. There are known to be wide variations in the levels of provision of infrastructure. This is partly indicated by differing levels of quality of the plans. In some areas, the VCS was barely able to meet together, and needed consultancy help to produce a plan. In others, high quality plan was produced in a short timescale. But there is little data to back up these impressions of wide difference in capacity.

The need for baseline mapping

The importance lies in the implications for planning infrastructure. The base level of existing infrastructure needs to be known in order to ensure that new resources are directed where they are most needed. Otherwise, there is a danger that resources will go to areas which already have the greatest ability and capacity to apply for funds.

Until now, ChangeUp resources have been allocated to areas in proportion to population and other demographic factors. This may or may not correlate to areas where infrastructure most needs development. Within consortia, as will be seen there has been some direction of funds to projects that meet greatest need. The new Consortia Projects Programme directs funds in response to applications from consortia.

But little attention has been paid to directing resources to areas where consortia themselves are weak, their weakness very often reflecting under-development in the VCS generally. This requires an understanding of the existing levels of provision which is barely coming through the data in the plans. Capacity Builders needs to attend to this if it is to achieve the aim of improving reach. It points towards:

- mapping infrastructure (including organisation numbers, income and staffing levels) in a consistent framework so as to understand the current level of provision
- understanding the differences in funding levels, possibly measurable in orders of magnitude, and in long-term commitment of strategic funders such as local authorities
- directing resources, both funds and developmental support, to areas of weakness, especially where inadequate support has been available from regional consortia and national organisations.

THE PLANS' THEMES

Plans were analysed for their main themes and priorities. These represented each consortium's view of the local VCS's support needs. This was the most extensive part of the analysis.

A matrix was created in which readers could assess needs of different types, and rate them according to whether:

- the plan had a strong focus on the need, and gave high priority to meeting it
- the plan gave moderate focus to the need, proposing some developments
- the plan gave little or no identifiable focus on the theme indicated.

Generic needs

Generic needs are those which apply across the whole sector, and where meeting them does not involve supplying services of a particular type or to an identified sub-sector. Examples are:

- promoting the sector's interests with the general public, gaining broad publicity and encouraging public giving and volunteering
- advocating the sector's interests with the statutory sector and funders, including such work as negotiating compacts, and terms of grants and contracts, and advocating positive policies
- mapping and research on the sector's scope and capacity
- general information services to the sector, bulletins, websites, open 'resource centre' type services, toolkits, etc.

97 plans indicated that they had a generic focus, 78 of them strongly so. This meant that, in this overwhelming majority of plans (the total being 113), the generic interests of the sector were not seen as being overridden by any local, service or sub-sector priorities.

Geographical deficiencies

A significant number of plans (42: 37%) highlighted geographical parts of their areas where the VCS was seen as being under-developed, 27 of these giving this as a strong need. This may have been because a county plan recognised that the VCS was much stronger in towns or had been underdeveloped in particular districts. Or it may have been a more local, neighbourhood, focus. The identified needs would be generic within the geographical area identified, ie suggesting that a range of support was needed to develop the sector generally (though this did not preclude more specialised needs being identified too).

Client or user group focus

Readers were asked to identify any focus in the plans on several sub-sectors: BME groups, children and young people, older people, disability, community development, and the advice sector. There was an opportunity to identify other sub-sectors. These were the results:

Client or user group	Strong focus	Moderate focus	Total with this focus
Black and minority ethnic groups (see below)	46	26	72
Children and young people	5	12	17
Older people	2	0	2
Disabled people	3	4	7
Community development sub-sector	18	6	24
Advice sub-sector	5	4	9
Other client groups	19	8	27
In particular:			
Rural organisations, including rural infrastructure and general capacity building, outreach working with rural communities, meetings with rural stakeholders, tackling transport exclusion, data and rural proofing, work in market and coastal towns, rural social enterprise			15
Religious communities			6
Small groups and medium-sized groups in general			5
Children and families sector			1
Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and transsexual organisations			1

Children and young people, older people and disabled people

The readers were surprised that so few plans reflected any focus on the needs of children and young people, older people, and disabled people, even though umbrella organisations representing these sub-sectors were strongly represented within the VCS (noted respectively in 51, 48 and 30 of the plans). This was the case even where the local demography might have suggested some focus (eg inner city areas with a large proportion of young people in the population, coastal retirement districts). Possible explanations are that:

- services for these groups are seen as already having some focus within existing services and funding and are not seen as rating further priority
- the representative organisations of these groups, despite their numbers, are not active participants in the plan-making process.

Arts and sports organisations

Similar comments apply in respect of arts and sports organisations, except that these are represented in very few consortia, so their under-representation in the plans' assessment of the VCS's developmental needs is less surprising. Their near-absence both from consortia and plans, despite their known numbers and their importance in voluntary activity and community participation, indicates that arts and sports organisations are not strong participants in the VCS as it is known to and represented by consortia convenors such as CVSs and RCCs. This may be because, rightly or wrongly, arts and sports organisations are not perceived as tackling disadvantage. ChangeUp, so far, is a programme which has barely touched arts and sports infrastructure.

Infrastructure in the BME sector

By contrast, as the numbers indicate, there was widespread focus on the development of BME infrastructure, even in areas where the BME population is small. This was presumably partly due to the stress that Defra placed on this. There was strong evidence of developmental work and attention to the needs of different groups. Some plans focussed particularly on the needs of refugees and asylum seekers, and others on migrant workers (eg people from Eastern Europe or Portugal working in rural areas). These groups have different needs from long-term Black and minority ethnic populations who tend to be based in cities. Different infrastructure is needed, though there are issues in common, such as a need for advocacy work in tackling racism and promoting diversity.

Particularly within towns and cities, different structures had grown up, variously representing particular minorities or the BME sector as a whole. This depends on the local demography, and it is not always correct to assume that BME groups from different minorities need specific BME services. There was some demand (in 3 plans) for ICT services tailored to BME groups' needs, and some for encouraging diversity within the VCS (6 plans), but BME groups were often apparently strong users of generic infrastructure services. More attention is needed to developing BME infrastructure formats that work well, and to whether (taking into account population numbers and VCS organisations' 'reach' to otherwise disconnected groups), these are best developed at district, county/sub-region, or regional levels.

Focus on support services

Very many plans focussed on services of particular types for the whole of the VCS in their area. This may have been because of the nature of the consortia (which were convened within invitations across the whole sector), but the demand and focus on service-related support was much higher than for client-related support.

Readers were asked to identify needs which matched the six 'Hub' themes, whatever nomenclature was used:

- Performance Improvement
- Workforce development and staff training
- ICT (Information and communications technology)
- Governance and board/trustee support
- Volunteer recruitment and development
- Finance (funding and accountancy).

They were also asked to note other support needs which emerged from the plans, and to comment on the strength of the relationship between the plan themes and those of the Hubs (and on evidence of practical links with the Hubs).

Support service elements in plans	Strong focus	Moderate focus	Total with this focus
Performance Improvement	36	30	66
Workforce development and staff training	49	30	79
ICT	60	27	87
Governance and board/trustee support	23	34	57
Volunteer recruitment and development	54	27	81
Finance (funding and accountancy)	49	29	78
Other services	37	19	58
In particular:			
Affordable premises / premises management			17
Social enterprise support			16
Stronger links with statutory sector, involvement in local strategic partnerships, and commissioning/tendering support			15
Human relations and employment support			8
Partnerships, timebanks, collaborations and mergers			6

This prompts the following comments:

- The strong focus on ICT is notable, with many practical initiatives, some related to Hub work such as ‘circuit riders’, but many having been developed purely in response to demand.
- Interest in promoting volunteering appears to be high, including some areas where it is under-developed (eg Lambeth, some Greater Manchester districts). Volunteer bureaux (unlike Age Concerns or youth/disability umbrella organisations) appear to have used the planning process to express the need for development in their area of work.
- Several plans suggested (and regional interviews also mentioned) that the interest in performance improvement is widely related to the need to demonstrate standards in relation to tendering and procurement of public services.
- The interest in workforce development reflects in part a demand for subsidy for established staff training programmes, but there is also demand for support with for the VCS employer/HR function.
- The strong demand for funding support is expressed in few practical projects. The strong interest in social enterprise support suggests that the sector is open to income generation initiatives and looking for support in developing them. In this area there are some ChangeUp-funded local initiatives eg in the West Midlands.
- The slightly lower interest in governance also shows few practical initiatives and the high number of ‘moderate focus’ ratings suggests that, while the need is recognised, there is some regret that not more is being done to meet it.
- The need for affordable premises came strongly through the plans, particularly in London, and there were also some ChangeUp initiatives which addressed it (eg in Camden, Ealing and Leicestershire).

Hubs and hub themes

The analysts were asked to rate the strength of the plans' relationship with the Hubs and hub themes on the following scheme:

Relationship with Hubs and hub themes	Strong focus
The Plan's strategy aims to develop one or more new Hub-themed organisation(s) locally/regionally. Has good contact with one or more Hubs.	8
The Plan the Hub themes quite closely and aims to develop Hub-themed activity within generic organisations. Likely to have some contact with Hubs.	36
The Plan has defined its themes with partial similarity to Hub themes. May have a little contact and develop some activity on at least one Hub theme locally/regionally.	40
The Hubs have little or no relevance. Plan has defined its themes without relationship to Hub themes (eg has chosen generic and sub-sector themes).	21
Impossible to judge.	4

The Hub themes are widely but not universally seen as relevant. They may have been 'adopted' (or hub nomenclature used) in anticipation of funding, though there is genuine demand and uncertainty in some fields about how to make progress (eg governance, finance). Contact with the Hubs has been patchy.

There is genuine demand for support in areas being worked on by the Hubs, though their actual work is only just beginning to penetrate through. Conflicting complaints were heard about Hubs seeming to 'parachute' in to local areas without checking what work was already being done in their fields, and conversely not developing their 'own work but borrowing local examples wholesale. Some needs do not match in practice, eg 'Performance Improvement' and the demand for support in meeting required standards for public service tendering, 'Finance' and the demand for supporting developing social enterprise. Some issues coming through from the plans are not reflected in national support, eg the demand for affordable premises, so there may be a need for national projects which address this (though not necessarily in the form of an 'accommodation hub').

The weaknesses, though they need addressing, are not necessarily ground for serious concern. The Hubs are new national enterprises which have grown up in parallel with the local consortia planning processes, so a lack of local-national connection is inevitable (because it takes time to build), and it is early days.

Avoiding duplication

The readers also expressed that, because of the fast pace of local development, the need for capacity building tools was expressed in many plans, and their actual production was being wastefully invented from scratch rather than shared and replicated across areas. Examples are:

- training course design and templates (on frequently arising themes)

- quality standards
- toolkits on various topics.

Some of these problems will be answered by the development of the Hubs' work, but there is also in many areas a reluctance to use tools which have not been locally developed. This is a real challenge in building local national-regional-local links. Good developmental intervention, such as regional and sub-regional workshops and 'training the trainers' work, may help ensure that good practice and tools are shared rather than being reinvented.

IMPLEMENTATION

The Home Office and Capacity Builders are anxious to know how far the programme has progressed so far (the ‘temperature check’). The evidence of the plans is not an ideal source for this, because the plans do not necessarily show implementation. Clearly, second-stage plans should show implementation of the first stage, but the general hurry with which plans are produced, and the different timetabling of the early Defra and ACU programmes, mean it is difficult to judge.

Readers were asked to mark plans according to four stages of progress:

1. Significant change has happened since 2003
2. There has been some progress – mainly over last year or so
3. The most significant implementation is starting now
4. Little or no implementation yet – plans are still aspirational and seeking funding.

The results (by region), are as follows. The few missing results (for 11 consortia) are because the up-to-date plan was not available or it was not possible to tell from the plan how far implementation had progressed.

Region	Plans were mostly made in:	No of plans with an indication of progress	Significant change has happened since 2003	Some progress – mainly over last year or so	Significant implementation is starting now	Little or no implementation yet
East	Sept 2004, except 1 in Jan 2005 & 1 in May 2006	6	1	4	1	–
East Midlands	Sept 2004	6	1	1	1	3
London	Sept 2005	35	–	17	6	12
North East	March 2005	4	1	1	–	2
North West	June 2005, but currently re-planning in 1 sub-region	18	–	7	–	11
South East	March 2006	19	3	8	1	7
South West	March 2005	9	2	4	2	1
West Midlands	July 2004, but currently re-planning	8	1	4	1	2
Yorks & Humber	June 2005, except 1: March 2006	3	1	2	–	–
Total		108	10	48	12	38

This shows that in most areas the programme is under way but still at early stages, and it should be repeated that these results come from *plans* – which necessarily precede implementation. It is early days.

It is too early to assess outcomes, though not too early to set measures for assessing them – see the chapter on Evaluation.

SUSTAINABILITY

The readers were asked to indicate whether the plans showed indications that the ChangeUp developments would be sustainable with other long-term funding. This produced the following results:

Sustainability outlook	
Other funders involved, with a prospect of taking over from Capacity Builders and significant new income streams developing	8
Infrastructure funding probably long-term dependent on Capacity Builders but at reduced level	3
Infrastructure funding probably long-term dependent on Capacity Builders at much same level as in 2005/6	17
Difficult or impossible to tell at this stage	79

Even where there was some indication of other funder involvement, this was mostly without firm commitment.

It would be surprising if, at this stage, better results had emerged. It is very early days. The ChangeUp programme has eight years to run.

The focus so far has been on planning and starting implementation. Deadlines have been short, so the longer term perspective has been sacrificed in order to get plans complete and secure funding in first three financial years of the programme so far (covering barely two years of elapsed time since the ministerial launch announcement in July 2004).

The capacity developed with ChangeUp funds will include capacity to develop dialogue with other potential funders, and to develop work, outcome measures and reportage that can demonstrate the benefits of improved infrastructure.

Moving forward

In order to move forward, the programme needs to:

- move away from short-termism
- encourage medium- and long-term planning towards 2014 and beyond
- to encourage confidence among infrastructure providers
- to help providers build up their skills in planning and in developing sustainable funding sources
- to develop dialogue with LAs and other funders, nationally and locally, about their willingness to help build capacity in the VCS.

OBSERVATIONS FROM THE REGIONAL PLANS

The English Regions are dissimilar in size, demography, and regional identity, so generalisation is not fruitful, though regional personnel have good insights into ChangeUp programme and its local successes. The regions appear to offer good vantage points for taking an overview of the consortia. Many issues emerging from regional analysis are identified under other headings.

Nine summaries appear in Appendix 4, based on the regional plans and structured interviews with regional personnel.

Different regional patterns

- Three regions (East of England, East Midlands, Yorkshire & Humber) have allocated funding to a regional consortium as if it were (and on roughly the same scale as) a sub-region. Most regional and sub-regional plans have been reasonably successful, notably high quality ratings being given Yorkshire & Humber where there are only four sub-regions.
- The South East (the largest region by population) has this pattern too, and has also invested in locally-based additional support projects.
- In London, regional VCS planning and organisations are strong, as are most boroughs, but sub-regional capacity is only recently emerging. Borough funding may have been too low (£69K) to have much impact in already well-funded boroughs, and in the few under-developed boroughs may not have been enough to start significant development.
- Despite the geographical difficulties, the South West has developed a reasonably coherent regional plan by setting out expectations of counties/sub-regions and allocating significant funding at regional level (to both local and regional projects), though provision is still uneven.
- Planning in the North West has been largely devolved to the five sub-regions, of which Greater Manchester is strongest, with more than half the VCS orgs. There is no regional consortium.
- The North East has similar devolution and weak regional planning, but there *is* a regional consortium; of the four sub-regions, one is very under-developed and another has notable district-level rivalries.
- West Midlands is working hard to balance rural and urban areas and to achieve sensible recognition of the needs and perceptions of Birmingham, the regional capital. Some urban plans are thematic rather than geographical. A new regional plan will be published in July.

Some regional statistical differences

- Plans per million population in regions: EA EM NE WM YH: less than 2, SW: 2.4, NW: 3.9, SE: 4.3, London: 5.4
Urban areas: 3.1, Rural: 1.9, Mixed: 1.5.

This largely reflects the fact that planning in London and parts of the North West and South East has been three-tier, but in other regions it has been two-tier. The West Midlands can be expected to join the ‘three-tier’ group when its new regional and sub-regional plans are published. There is little basis for judgement as to whether two- or three-tier planning is better. (See next chapter.)

- Projects per million population in regions: SE: 11.0, YH 11.5, London: 12.6, NE 15.1, WM 17.1, EE 26.7, SW 27.0, NW: 28.7, EM 29.2.

It is difficult to draw any systematic conclusions from the differences as the regional basis for commissioning and selecting projects varies across the regions.

Some issues recurring across the regions

Several issues came up repeatedly in regional analyses and interviews, some but not all of them the same as those that emerged from the analysis of consortia infrastructure investment plans:

- The enthusiasm for, and strength of, regional planning varied, as did levels of delegation from regions to sub-regional consortia, but only in the North West was regional planning rejected by the sub-regions.
- Sub-regional consortia were very widely seen as effective in bringing VCOs together, often for the first time, to talk about the sector's support needs and to discuss a strategy for meeting them.
- The timescales for the early stages of the ChangeUp programme were widely seen as having been constraining, only met at a price of poor planning, and often made worse by poor payment procedures.
- ICT support was identified as a need across every region, and there were many projects and initiatives – perhaps indicating that the ringfencing of funds had been effective, though there is real evidence of demand.
- Volunteering was also widely supported, though the relative strength of existing volunteering infrastructure in many areas makes it difficult to judge whether this is a new development fostered by ChangeUp.
- Other 'hub' themes also arose across all regions as noted in the chapter on Plans' themes.
- The development of BME forums had gone well (a Defra requirement in rural areas), even in areas where the BME population was low, and there is a need for study of the complex challenges serving BME communities' needs brings.
- There were some notable successes in rural areas where VCS infrastructure has been traditionally weak, as well as some areas of continuing weakness, suggesting that good practice might be usefully shared.
- There were some successes in increased statutory sector involvement, but in general this needs strengthening, along with links to other funders such as foundations and the Lottery, if progress towards sustainability is to be achieved.
- The interest in social enterprise funding is widespread and demands a response.
- The need for affordable premises should also be recognised as a capacity issue.
- A system is needed for sharing good practice and avoiding the reinvention of toolkits and training modules.

HORIZONTAL LEARNING

Regional planning is not without its benefits, not least that the whole of England is too large a planning unit and on some issues the sub-regions are too small. But a clear disadvantage of regional planning is that it makes it harder to spot similar challenges which emerge across regions, between areas of similar demography and same capacity building challenges. Regional structure means that lessons are not learnt except perhaps at workshops at generic national conferences. Examples of this began to emerge from this study, some of them spotted by readers - who had been given batches of plans from across several regions – but some only becoming visible from a pan-England overview. They include:

- The need for affordable premises was flagged up as a capacity building need in many areas, with initiatives being taken in a few areas, eg Leicestershire, Camden.
- Development with migrant workers from Eastern Europe and Portugal emerged in some in rural agricultural areas in sub-regions of different regions, eg East Anglia, Lincolnshire.
- Capacity building in counties with many low-population districts suggested that lessons can be learnt from the relative success of Cornwall and Cumbria to similar areas such as Northumberland, Shropshire and Suffolk.
- Outer suburban districts in Greater London show similarities with those in Greater Manchester, Merseyside and the West Midlands: a relatively affluent population with a large commuter population but resident pockets of deprivation among residents, and an under-developed voluntary and community sector.
- Industrial town unitaries with large BME populations, with very different demographic characteristics from their historic county and thus little in common between the voluntary and community sectors, but with infrastructure which is nonetheless weaker than it might be, because services lack critical mass of potential users; examples: Peterborough/ Cambridgeshire, Telford/Shropshire, Blackburn/Lancashire, Luton/Bedfordshire.
- Coastal town unitaries (some of which have their own IIPs) such as Torbay, Brighton and Hove, Blackpool.

It should be possible to map infrastructure against Office of National Statistics classifications of local authority areas with similar population characteristics (ie the *National Statistics 2001 Area Classification**). This would enable Capacity Builders to:

- identify and bring together areas which are most likely to be able to share good practice
- create a basis for judging, as between similar areas, which approaches to infrastructure development work best, and which do not work well
- judge whether resourcing levels are adequate as between areas of similar need
- compare quality of work, given similar areas and resourcing levels, and judge whether intervention is required.

* See: http://www.statistics.gov.uk/about/methodology_by_theme/area_classification/default.asp

SELECTING THE BEST TIER FOR PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT

District level planning

VCS infrastructure has traditionally been planned with the aim of establishing one capacity building organisation per district. This may not be viable within available resources and does not take account of the very varied levels of population.

The populations of local authority districts in England range from Teesdale at 24,352 to Birmingham at 977, 364 (excluding the wholly exceptional districts of the City of London and the Isles of Scilly). The 14 districts with populations below 50,000 are all areas where infrastructure development has been weak and where there has been difficulty in creating and implementing plans (eg districts in Northumberland, Shropshire, Dorset). Among such small districts, where infrastructure exists in any viable way the district has looked to a strong county focus (eg Cumbria).

It is necessary to look to districts with much greater populations (at least 100,000) before one finds any where infrastructure exists to support a reasonably diverse and independent voluntary and community sector.

It should also be said that the smallest districts are all strongly rural areas (where more than 80% of the population lives in rural settlements), so there are other factors at work, eg transport issues.

More work is needed to map population levels and VCS numbers and diversity against infrastructure provision, but the aspiration of 'one organisation per district' does not appear sensible. Even if were achieved, it would intrinsically create small generic organisations that lack specialist capacity, with multi-skilled generic staff. Notwithstanding the achievements of such staff, they cannot expect to provide everything that the local VCS needs.

County and sub-regional vs district planning

Consortia mostly work at county and sub-regional levels, but where unitary local authorities exist, some VCS consortia have followed suit, and some have always organised on a district basis, even in two-tier areas where personal social services are organised at county level. But what constitutes a viable area for organising local authority services is not the same as what works for planning the capacity and development of the VCS.

The consortia population levels range from Rutland at 34,444 to Greater Manchester at nearly 2.5m. Unitary Rutland, notwithstanding its independent traditions, recognises the limits of size and sensibly looks to Leicestershire for higher tier VCS infrastructure. But the next largest district consortia still have problems.

Several of the next largest districts are those in Berkshire, with populations around 120,000, which still plan jointly. Then there are London boroughs, with populations generally in the 150,000 to 300,000 range, which, after years of planning purely at borough and regional levels, are now creating sub-regional consortia to enable support services to be shared. In much the same category are Greater Manchester districts, and Telford & Wrekin, which is increasingly looking to West Midlands regional links for support. This suggests that isolated unitary districts like Torbay and the Isle of Wight may be anomalous for their 130,000 population levels. Such smaller unitaries, even with

their independent local government identity, may not be large enough to support capacity building for their voluntary and community sector, and so may need to share with the surrounding county or region. Even the smallest counties, with populations under 400,000 (Shropshire, Northumberland, Bedfordshire, and Dorset), coincide with areas where the VCS infrastructure is relatively weak.

But in general, county/sub-regional VCS infrastructure appears to be developing more successfully than at district level. At county/sub-regional level, it is possible to achieve economies of scale, development of some specialist services, and good developmental relations with smaller dispersed client groups.

This is not universally true. Some districts are large enough to develop the full range of services, and it should be noted that the sub-regional consortia for South and West Yorkshire, each bringing together several large districts with well over 300,000 population per district, were rated high quality in this study. On the other hand, plans were not generally well rated for larger counties where the district VCS was less active. This tends to suggest the best planning happens where there are large districts and good co-operation between them at county/sub-regional level.

There are other factors besides sheer population numbers, for example the ethnic diversity and needs of an area's population and the complexity of the VCS it has created. But these factors, like population, are measurable and mappable against the quality and scope of the VCS. This sort of exercise would enable Capacity Builders to set outline targets for desirable levels of infrastructure provision in relation to population factors and VCS size/scope. In turn this would create a basis for directing resources to areas of underdevelopment, and providing developmental support to improve the reach of the VCS.

Regional level planning

The regions too vary in size. The smallest, the North East at 2.5m population, is less than a third the size of the largest, the South East (8m), and much the same size as the Greater Birmingham, Greater Manchester and West Yorkshire sub-regions. The differences between regions are also discussed in the regional chapter and the reports in the separate 'Regional Perspectives' section.

But the differences in success in regional VCS planning seem less related to regional populations than to the traditions and diversity of the sub-regions and to the approach taken by the regional offices. Relatively successful regions such as the South East and South West may have lessons to share with others. London has been successful too, but the London VCS is used to regional planning, and unlike other regions has had to develop infrastructure at *sub*-regional level. By contrast, regional planning in the North West, with its strong Greater Manchester and Merseyside conurbations, is bound to be challenging. The balance between urban and rural parts of a region is another cause of problems, as shown in the West Midlands. Relatively even distribution of population has made regional planning easier, albeit low-key, in the East Midlands, Yorkshire and Humber, and most parts of the East of England.

Organising viable VCS support services at regional level again depends on population numbers, diversity, economies of scale in providing specialist services and reaching

widely dispersed minority groups. And there are transport issues if a region has no natural centre of physical communication where meetings can easily be held.

Again, the reasons for relative successes and weaknesses of VCS organisation at regional level merit further study.

EVALUATION

In principle, planning involves setting objectives against which outcomes can be assessed and results evaluated. Little attention was paid to this in the early days of the ChangeUp programme, but a flurry of evaluations seem to have been commissioned by consortia in Spring 2006. It is not possible to document these in the time available, but it is recommended that Capacity Builders should do so, by:

- Keeping a central record of evaluations
- Creating centrally a ‘good practice’ list of issues and outcomes which it is good practice to assess in regional/ local evaluations
- Selecting capacity building themes for possible evaluation from a national perspective
- Developing a means of assessing overall outcomes against ChangeUp’s strategic objectives.

Four Government Offices have commissioned evaluations, which are mentioned in the regional reports in Appendix 4:

- South East – published in June¹.
- South West – due end June². There is also a report on consortia approaches to equality/diversity issues, to be published by Equality South West, probably in July.
- West Midlands – due July³.
- East Midlands – due September (but possibly delayed).

Finally, attention is drawn to an early evaluation of the Defra Infrastructure Investment Programme, completed and published by Defra in 2005.⁴ The evaluators concluded:

“The programme is innovative and the consortium approach appears to offer a better, more sustainable and permanent solution to improving support for tackling social exclusion in rural areas than a traditional grant funding programme would have. It has the potential to change culture within the VCS, moving it away from damaging competitiveness between infrastructure providers to a collaborative focus on users of services. The VCS will be better placed to deliver a raft of future Defra programmes, with strong collaborative partnerships between organisations and sectors in place, and the knowledge and relationships with communities to ensure that [future Defra-funded] activities ...are appropriately tailored to reach those whom Defra wishes to benefit most.”

Inspired by the evaluation, a diagnostic toolkit *‘Progression through partnerships’* has been produced and, with joint Defra-ACU funding, disseminated to consortia via the GOs.⁵

1. *ChangeUp in the South East: An evaluation - A report prepared for the Government Office for the South East, by Gordon Morris and Claire Nichols, June 2006 (with stories by Philippa Tipper and Katy Cawkwell of ‘A Word in Edgeways’).*
2. Commissioned from Bridge Consultants by the South West Forum.
3. Commissioned by the GO for the West Midlands from Aston University Centre for Voluntary Action Research, research led by Hans Schlappa
4. *Evaluating the VCS Infrastructure Investment Programme*, Jennie Jordan, Frances Newbury, and Philippa Morley, Defra, March 2005.
5. *Progression through partnerships – A diagnostic toolkit*, by Jennie Jordan, Frances Newbury, and Philippa Morley, Defra, March 2005.

RECORDING SPENDING, ACHIEVEMENTS AND EXAMPLES

It is intrinsically difficult to keep full records of a programme which operates at four levels. ChangeUp is a national programme when administration is delegated to the Government Offices for the Regions, who in turn fund consortia, who plan a strategy and commission local projects. Complaints about compressed timescales are legion, heard in every regional study, and implicit in the limitations of the plans. Reportage back to the centre has suffered too:

- Previous quarterly reports by GOs to the Home Office have not been used, and did not connect with normal GO reporting mechanisms nor fully with sub-regional level where most ChangeUp developments were happening.
- There is no central record of ChangeUp projects, though many of them have been documented regionally and lists published. Numbers and amounts are available for most regions on the ChangeUp Hub portal, www.changeup.org.uk
- Records may not have been fully kept centrally for regional Early Spend and for 2004/5, but it is understood that information is now being collected in.
- Central records for 2005/6 and 2006/7 (so far) have focussed on payment arrangements, and outsourcing of payment arrangements in the East of England and London (which brought dividends in efficiency) has meant that an unnecessary extra tier of records was kept and that lists were kept in a different format from other regions.
- Outcomes, including successes, have therefore not been adequately documented.

It is understood that ACU is now seeking information to complete its financial records of projects for 2005/6. In future, Capacity Builders will need (and will presumably be able) to keep more consistent central records in order to produce a report and accounts for past years in public body / charity format, as it will no doubt wish to do. It needs to:

- develop a system of reporting and evaluation, proportionate to the amounts of funding provided, at regular (usable) intervals, with emphasis on what is being *achieved*
- create a central database of CB-supported projects: numbers, sizes, characteristics, funding levels, area demographics.

This exercise has also identified many examples of good practice in plan-making and pioneering work in capacity building, and these too need documenting centrally for promotional and dissemination purposes, in a 'case study' approach, with photographs etc. These are listed in the Section 3, Regional Perspectives.