

Facilitator's Report from a
DEVELOPMENT WORKSHOP
carried out on behalf of
**Northumberland Voluntary and Community
Sector Consortium**

The Round House, Ashington, 4th February 2011

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INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

The workshop took place at The Roundhouse, Lintonville Parkway, Ashington from 9.45am until 2pm on Friday February 4th 2011. It was attended by 34 participants from a broad range of infrastructure support and front line service organisations including 18 members of the Consortium. (The attendance list and agenda appear as *Appendix 1: Workshop Attendance List and Programme*). The meeting was also attended by a representative from Northumberland County Council in her capacity as Observer to the Consortium. The aim of the workshop was to consider the Consortium's future post March 2011. In particular, the workshop focused on which of the Consortium's functions are valued by the sector most and need to be continued and, with the impending expiry of the current "ChangeUp" funding, how these could be delivered.

The Chair of the Consortium, Rodney James, welcomed participants and introduced the independent facilitator for the event, David Burnby. David commented on the high number and diverse mix of organisations present which he suggested was a good indicator for the strength of the sector in Northumberland. He stressed the need for participants to be forthright in challenging group consensus and avoid a "Group Speak" scenario where decisions are recorded as consensus simply because no one was prepared to challenge them. He added it would not serve the reputation of the Consortium or the credibility of the broader sector if individual participants undermined the conclusions reached outside of the meeting rather than challenging within it. David also warned against trying to find "the perfect solution" which he suggested did not exist. Given the nature of the sector and the lack of development funding, any solution would inevitably be less than perfect and would always require a degree of compromise.

To provide an introduction and context for the event, George Courtice, Sector Development Officer for the Consortium, spoke to two papers tabled: "The Northumberland VCS Consortium" ("thoughts paper") and "Infrastructure Support to the Voluntary and Community Sector, January 2011". The first paper (reproduced in this document as *Appendix 2: "Thoughts" Paper*) summarises the best thinking from the existing Consortium Board on future options. The second paper (*reproduced as Appendix 3: Grants Commission Outline (Northumberland County Council)*) summarises Northumberland County Council's outline commissions for voluntary and community sector infrastructure support post March 2011. George made reference to a report published by the Social Futures Unit at Teesside University¹ commissioned by Northumberland County Council. This had influenced the Council's decision to progress a two-part "Grant Commission" outlining two outline specifications for Voluntary and Community sector infrastructure support in the County, one of which covers the type of functions the Consortium currently carries out (*Appendix 3: Grants Commission Outline (Northumberland County Council)*). He stressed the need for the workshop to move the Consortium forward in a practical way to enable the sector to respond credibly to the Commission.

David Francis, for Community Action Northumberland, the current host organisation for the Consortium, confirmed his organisation's intention to continue basic Consortium functions in the short term post March 2011 until a longer term solution had been agreed.

¹" Report on a Consultation Exercise on Future Infrastructure Support Investment for the Third Sector by Northumberland County Council" by Professor Tony Chapman and Dr Victoria Bell, Third Sector Development Unit, Teesside University, 5th November 2010

CONFIRMING THE VISION AND MISSION STATEMENTS

The Consortium's current Vision and Mission statements were presented for comment and confirmation:

Vision

For the Consortium to develop a responsive leadership, to engage strategically on behalf of the voluntary and community sector and to nurture supportive partnerships to help deliver excellent services.

Mission

To have a vibrant, independent and sustainable voluntary and community sector working collectively and in collaboration with others to secure the best interests of all those working and living in Northumberland.

The Facilitator took the view that the Vision statement was in fact the Mission, and vice versa. The Vision is the organisation's description of the kind of world it would like to see; the Mission, the organisation's contribution towards it.

Participants sought clarity on the definition of "Voluntary and Community Sector" and whether or not this included 'Social Enterprise'.

The Facilitator offered the following definition accepted by the meeting: 'Non-statutory organisations providing social benefit which apply surpluses to further social aims (as opposed to private gain) and are governed on a voluntary basis'. This definition was seen to encompass the Social Enterprises represented in the room.

FUNCTIONS AND PRIORITIES

The Consortium had prepared a list of ten functions which it considered represented its core and most valued activities:

1. Promote the sector
2. Encourage similar organisations to work together in networks
3. Represent the sector & influence policy
4. Help enable organisations to work more effectively with public bodies
5. Maintain up-to-date records and intelligence on the sector
6. Develop better two-way communication with the sector
7. Facilitate collaboration within the sector
8. Supply a lead to the sector's perspective over a range of interests and strategies
9. Evidence the sector's value and impact
10. Identify the support needs of the sector and help facilitate the provision of resources

Each function was represented on a card. Participants were first invited to seek clarification on any function represented by the cards. The facilitator suggested that potential Consortium functions are

those which could only effectively be carried out by a generic County wide and/or sector wide organisation as opposed to an organisation representing an individual community of interest and/or geographical area. Key points raised were as follows:

(3) Represent the sector & influence policy

Some concerns were expressed around “representation” with the fear that the Consortium could compromise the interests of individual organisations or networks by expressing an inappropriate or ill informed view. On the facilitator’s suggestion, the card was amended to “Bring a sector perspective and influence policy” on the basis that it was impossible to represent such a broad and diverse group of organisations in a single view. It was stressed that the Consortium had to be open and accountable to the broader sector in any view it expresses and that statutory bodies should not always see any view expressed by the Consortium as being the exclusive position of the wider sector. It was confirmed that the existence of the Consortium does not preclude any member organisation making its own representation to third parties in circumstances where it considers the wider sector view could compromise the interests of its beneficiaries.

(4) Help enable organisations to work more effectively with public bodies:

This was amended to read “with other sectors” so as not to exclude facilitating work with the private sector.

(5) Maintain up-to-date records and intelligence on the sector

It was clarified that this function does not necessarily mean that the Consortium is the sole provider of records and intelligence, but acts as a depository on behalf of the sector providing a single, accessible source to the sector and third parties.

(7) Facilitate collaboration within the sector

In a similar vein to previous contributions, it was noted that there are other organisations, not necessarily labelled “infrastructure support organisations” that facilitate collaboration within their own sub-sectors or communities and the consortium should not claim the exclusive collaboration facilitation function.

(10) Identify the support needs of the sector and help facilitate the provision of resources

This was amended to read “Collate” instead of “Identify” following views expressed that the Consortium should not be in a position to make representations on support needs of individual organisations.

As a general principle, it was reinforced that anything the Consortium does should not compromise the sovereignty of any individual organisation.

Following the clarification exercise, participants were invited to rate each function against a horizontal and vertical continuum, based on a show of hands.

On the horizontal: The importance of each function to the sector where 1 = unimportant, 5 = “useful”, 10 = essential

On the vertical: The extent that the function could only effectively be carried out by a county/sector wide organisation such as the Consortium where 1 = “happens anyway”, 5 = “could be delivered by others” and 10 = “needs Consortium”

This was reflected on a large flip chart (*Figure 1 (Flipchart grid)*) with the two continuums forming a four quadrant grid. The top left hand quadrant was identified as “The Priority Zone” with all functions having to score 5 or above on both horizontal and vertical scales for inclusion.

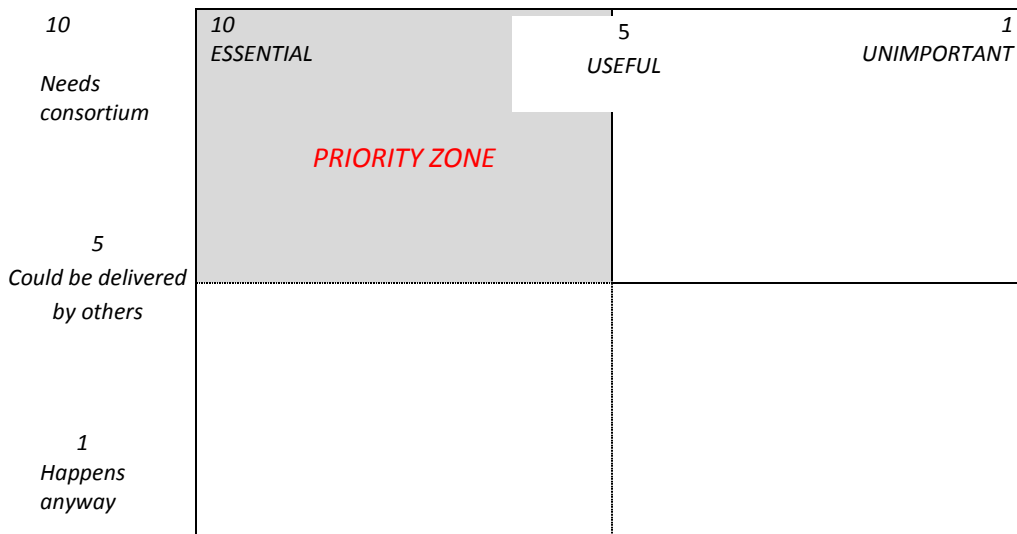


Figure 1 (Flipchart grid)

Consensus was reached on all of the functions being inside the “Priority Zone” (top left hand quadrant) scoring at least five points on both continuums. Cards were placed initially based on the view of the majority of participants, then subject to challenge and eventually placed to reflect the consensus. The final positions cards were placed within the Priority Zone are represented in *Figure 2 (Priority Zone and card positions)* below:

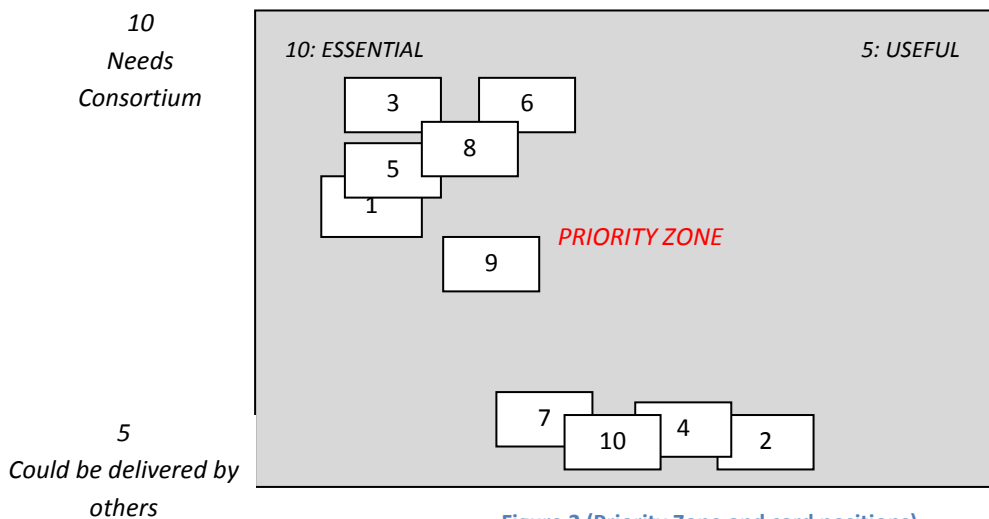


Figure 2 (Priority Zone and card positions)

KEY to CARDS

1. Promote the sector
2. Encourage similar organisations to work together in networks
3. Bring a sector perspective and influence policy
4. Help enable organisations to work more effectively with other sectors
5. Maintain up-to-date records and intelligence on the sector
6. Develop better two-way communication with the sector

7. Facilitate collaboration within the sector
8. Supply a lead to the sector's perspective over a range of interests and strategies
9. Evidence the sector's value and impact
10. Collate the support needs of the sector and help facilitate the provision of resources

From this, we can conclude that the meeting considered the most important Consortium functions to be (in order of priority)

1. Bring a sector perspective and influence policy
2. Develop better two-way communication with the sector
3. Supply a lead to the sector's perspective over a range of interests and strategies
4. Maintain up-to-date records and intelligence on the sector
5. Promote the sector
6. Evidence the sector's value and impact

This aligns closely with the six functions featured in the second part of Northumberland County Council's Voluntary and Community Sector Infrastructure Support outline commission (below) with the exception of *a): delivering efficiencies through collaboration and rationalisation*. This function was partly reflected in the Consortium functions identified as numbers (2) and (7) in *Figure 2 (Priority Zone and card positions)* above, both of which (by the placing of the cards in the "Priority Zone") were considered less of a priority for the sector and not necessarily fitting comfortably with the Consortium's remit.

Infrastructure Support for the Voluntary and Community Sector (January 2011)
Northumberland County Council

Outline Commission (Extract)

To strengthen the VCS network and representation of VCS with external stakeholders, to include:

- a) delivering efficiencies through collaboration and rationalisation*
- b) maintaining up-to-date records and intelligence on the sector*
- c) effective two way communication between the sector and private and public agencies including through the local Compact*
- d) representing sector interests*
- e) network facilitation*
- f) influencing policy*

THE FUTURE OF THE CONSORTIUM

With the functions and priorities of the Consortium agreed, participants were next tasked to consider what the Consortium might look like in the future. In particular, participants were asked to consider governance, structure and staffing and hosting arrangements. In an effort to capture the broadest possible range of views, participants split into four groups reflecting their closeness to mainstream infrastructure provision in the County and the Consortium. Participants were asked to form a line reflecting from those whose sole role is infrastructure service provision (either as a staff member or trustee) at one end through to those organisations that have little understanding or

history with the consortium and have no involvement in infrastructure services, at the other. On this basis, four groups of eight were formed, group 1 made up of the eight participants closest to the existing consortium and infrastructure service provision, through to group 4 being the furthest away. The reports that follow are based on the notes produced within the respective groups.

GROUP ONE

The functions discussed and agreed

- lend themselves to a range of membership.
- lend themselves to a dedicated resource

There was doubt expressed by a minority as to whether sufficient resource would be available to provide for “dedicated resource”. In those circumstances the tasks would have to be allocated to willing & committed members. (But by whom? - the Consortium as a whole, or its criticised Steering Group?)

It was pointed out that all present in Group 1 had a vested interest in how any support money was likely to be allocated. All are likely to lose out in the next round given the Council’s intention to reduce grant funding, so the Consortium must design a structure to deliver its purposes that is affordable.

It was felt by some that some functions were shareable and that perhaps we could go down the route most likely to be chosen by the NSP – less representative: more task orientated. But this does nothing to address the current criticism that the Steering Group is unrepresentative...assuming it is the steering group, or something like it, which determines the sub-commissions by agreeing who gets what function and how much they should receive for it.

A contrary view was that when money was short, the last thing that is required is multi-commissions and the additional costs of going down that route. Most of the functions were interrelated; moreover they feed off each other, hence the need for a single co-ordination role.

There was a view that within the two main commissions

1. Advice and Support to front-line: the bulk of the £301k, currently on offer for 2011-12, would be allocated to this. Similarly the £283k offered the following year. The bread and butter support services appear to be particularly favoured by the Council, so specialist services, currently funded by it, and open to criticism of duplication could well be squeezed – CRB checks for volunteers, youth/children’s networks, some disability activity, some website activity etc.
2. Consortium Activity: given the financial constraints, it was thought this would be a maximum of £30k and some members thought even less. It was vital to spell out benefits for Consortium members if there was to be general support. Equally it was essential to convince the likely recipients of the bulk of the funding of the value of the Consortium because every pound allocated would be a pound less for them to spend. A major concern, picked up by the Chapman report, was the way in which the Steering Group was appointed and this would have to be transformed. Perhaps a “Board” answerable to the wider membership

through a standing conference (perhaps virtual?) of the wider Consortium open to all VCOs in Northumberland.

Because it was unlikely that the commissions will be finally resolved before about June, in the interests of continuity, there was plea for Rodney James to reconsider resigning at the end of March and to continue for 3-4 months until a new arrangement had been agreed.

It was assumed that “representatives” from the Consortium would be invited to advise on both the Consortium and the “front-line” commission. The unknowns were:

- whether the value of each commission would be predetermined by the Council or open to influence. If the latter, it might open a can-of-worms if a fast consensus could not be reached.
- If the desire was to spread the Consortium functions to a wider group of suppliers, who/what would determine who won these sub-commissions and on what basis - given that the credibility of the current Consortium had been challenged.

Membership

The make-up of the central Board/Forum as outlined in the green “thoughts” paper was generally agreed as the best way forward. Each member organisation would have a special responsibility for feeding information from and to the Board/Forum and VCOs with similar interests. The development of network members (disability, care & health, employability & learning, area based) would often find this easier than single-organisation members and give additional reason for ensuring that they were active members.

Dedicated worker and host

There was agreement that there needed to be a coordinator particularly if a number of organisations took on different functions. If the post involved an employee (most likely part-time) as opposed to a self-employed person, the role of the host could be limited to formal employer duties. Line-management could even be provided by another, agreed, organisation. It was important that the post was answerable to the Consortium as a whole. Alternative hosts, which once might have been considered, like the NSP, were not longer practicable.

Champions

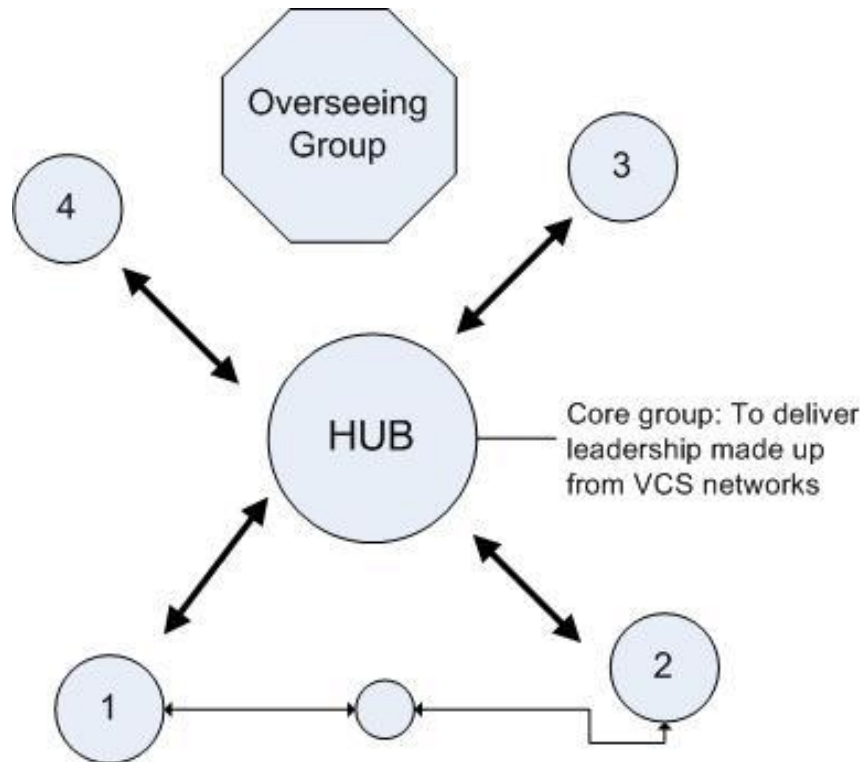
If the work of the Consortium were to be devolved then the “champions” model would be worth considering. Champions with specialist knowledge would be identified and would reflect the interest of the VCS/Consortium on relevant bodies and act for the Consortium as influencers. These champions might often arise from network members. What resource was available to the Consortium would co-ordinate the activities of these champions who would be answerable to the Consortium.

Do less – better

There was strong support for this approach. Not only because it recognised the financial constraints but because by doing 3-4 things really well, it would place the Consortium in a much better position to do more things equally as well by convincing potential funders that there was good sense in further investment. This was not a slavish following of funders needs. It was recognition that the interests of the Council, for instance, often substantially coincided with those of the sector.

GROUP TWO

- Group two considered possible governance arrangements and questioned whether the future Consortium should sit under the governance of another organisation, or be independent. Whilst it was recognised that there are benefits from being within another organisation (such as additional support) it was felt the Consortium should be placed independently to avoid domination by a single host.
- This was seen as being a hub with various hosts around it, each involved in different activities. The Consortium would therefore be a “network of networks”.
- The term “infrastructure” was questioned as a worthwhile term.
- There should be mechanisms for feeding information up and feeding back.
- All members of the consortium should have equal status and the choice of leads for each function should be determined by the consortium membership. The structure should be based on team approach with specialists leading each team
- Duplication should be avoided



- The benefits of involvement in the consortium should be evident. Noted as an example that private sector organisations would not invest in any organisation or activity unless there was clarity over the benefits of involvement.
- The group favoured a target setting approach with a smaller group to lead focussing on three key priorities, reporting back to the wider membership on progress against targets and goals. (In feeding back, the group stressed the need for a strategic plan to be in place with clear aims and focus)
- Staffing: No single person directly employed – organisations tasked to deliver functions.
- Need clarity for outside world as to how leads can be contacted, enables choice of access through trusted individuals. “When you are representing VCS, communication critical to success”.

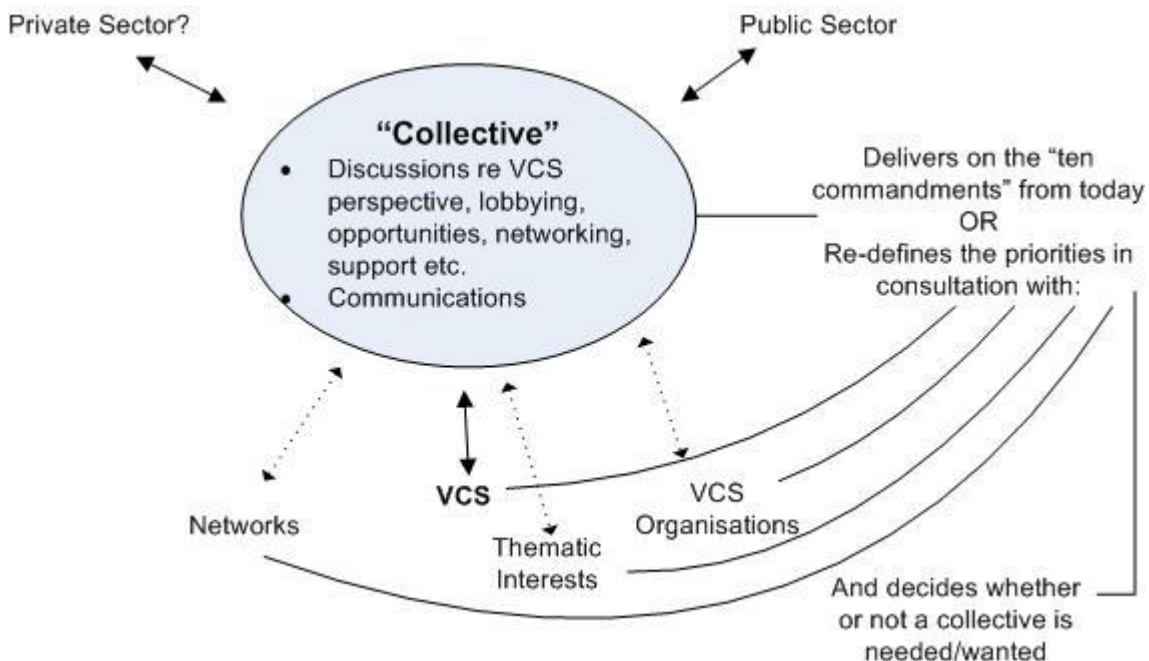
GROUP THREE

Governance and Structure

- Noted that there was no reference to disability in the green paper tabled (*Appendix 2: "Thoughts" Paper*) in the list of themes that could supply the consortium Board.
- Group agreed that discussions should not be based on the existing arrangements, or existing suggestions. First questions addressed: How can locality groups be sure their voice is contributing to county wide overview? Discussion about how any collective grouping can relate to organisations.
- Felt it was necessary to know what the body will do in order to establish governance arrangements, but felt that governance needs to be away from infrastructure groups. This could possibly involve elected members (in an information/awareness raising role) but would need individuals with experience of the sector.
- The group went on to discuss functions, reaffirming the list of functions agreed by the full group earlier in the workshop. These should be monitored by a Board with formal links and accountability to networks and organisations through stakeholder events and newsletters.
- It was suggested that there would be a role for an independent facilitator to enable discussions amongst sector organisations and develop a sector "voice". (Noted that all suggestions lead to resource requirements!)
- The current consortium structure, although not seen as functioning well historically, could work better and might be a reasonable model if re-visited to establish proper protocols and mechanisms.
- It was felt there is potential for existing networks to nominate individuals to attend a collective meeting, but this needs effective and wide-reaching communications to be able to reach communities of interest, other networks and individual organisations in order to be able to collate information/issues/feedback on themes across the sector (via focus groups?) to ensure input from more than just those around the table.

Hosting

Who does the administration? Who sends out the e-mail?



GROUP FOUR

The overriding theme for Group Four was that “All voluntary and community organisations should feel part of it.”

- This doesn't necessarily mean having to go to meetings
- Needs to be networking outward; open door of engagement
- Recognition that all organisations have a part to play and have value to contribute – should feel empowered, and not controlled
- Governance needs to reflect the needs of different communities, both geographical and by identity
- Thematic perspective also important; (e.g. Groundwork – Environmental)

Infrastructure Organisations

To help VCS organisations to deliver; ‘by the sector, for the sector’. Infrastructure organisations need to:

- Clarify their role with each other and their role within the Consortium
- Have stronger communications channels with the front line across Northumberland (current tendency is to find out by default rather than by design – this needs improving). A network of networks is important within this; though it is appreciated that this will be imperfect and will still rely on individuals making connections. There is often a mindset with meetings and forums that information exchange is one dimensional. There needs to be space both for listening and understanding
- Feeling involved is critical. Membership should be open to all VCS organisations. Retention of the status quo is not an option

Public agencies need to have a place or forum to initiate the debate. It has to be credible and span the spectrum of perspectives. The sector has to have confidence that this is happening and that it has that level of reach.

Openness and trust are paramount, and there is a need to guard against vested interests (e.g. Voices represents a local network that has achieved this: need to capture such examples of good practice within Northumberland). The consortium should strive for continuous improvement.

The sector has to value what it has created, reflected in attendance at meetings, healthy election processes and good governance. Accountability is key.

Community Forums represent an untapped resource that adds value to the work of the sector.

FACILITATOR'S OBSERVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The workshop has provided some very clear messages around core principles for future Consortium activity, such as:

- Open membership
- Accountability (to the wider sector)
- Effective and transparent lines of two way communication
- Diversity of sector reflected in membership and governance arrangements
- Clear leadership and effective management

All four groups in the “Future of the Consortium” discussions were calling for change in the structure and governance of the Consortium – no one was advocating the status quo. The groups furthest away from the Consortium organisations appeared to be distrustful of existing governance arrangements – a view not lost on group 1, made up those closest to the current Consortium. Accordingly, most participants are resistant to the idea of a single host and see instead different variations of a collective of different interest groups overseeing delivery by specialist teams. This is broadly in line with the “Thoughts” paper tabled (*Appendix 2: “Thoughts” Paper*)

There is some ambiguity reflected in the use of the term “Infrastructure Support”; some participants seemed to be referring to infrastructure *organisations*, others to the infrastructure *function*. Some participants said they found the label wholly unhelpful, not least because some groups present carry out infrastructure functions as well as providing front line services. NAVCA (the National Association for Voluntary and Community Action, and the national membership body for local support and development organisations) prefers to use the term “Local support and development” to describe what has been traditionally understood to be second tier or infrastructure support. NAVCA defines these functions² as:

- *provide specialist expertise, information and support and develop the skills local people need to run successful organisations and groups*
- *spread good practice, prevent duplication of effort and support joint working*
- *help groups find funding and make effective use of resources*
- *promote equality and diversity by fostering a wider understanding of the needs of disadvantaged and under-represented groups*
- *make sure policy makers understand the needs of local voluntary organisations and community groups*
- *help public bodies engage effectively with local voluntary organisations and community groups*
- *provide a forum for local voluntary organisations and community groups*
- *encourage more people to volunteer and get involved in voluntary and community action.*

It was pointed out on more than one occasion throughout the workshop that there are many organisations, not necessarily labelled “infrastructure support organisations” or “local support and

² <http://www.navca.org.uk/about/whatisanlio.htm>

development organisations” that carry out some or all of these functions either on a geographical basis or amongst a community of interest. Many of the functions in the list above require specialist expertise and will traditionally be carried out by a Council for Voluntary Service (CVS), Voluntary Action Centre, Volunteer Centre or Community Council (the latter in predominantly rural areas). It should not be the function of the Consortium to replace, duplicate or undermine any of these functions. The role of the Consortium is to add value to all of the support and development activity that goes on in Northumberland to provide a county and sector wide voice that it would be inappropriate for any neighbourhood/district focussed or individual community-of-interest organisation to carry out. Northumberland County Council appears to have appreciated this in the way that it has put forward the two “Grant Commissions”, the first containing practical support functions that could be carried out at a neighbourhood/district and/or sub-sector level, the second, the type of strategic and representation functions the Consortium has been carrying out to date (see *Appendix 3: Grants Commission Outline (Northumberland County Council)*).

One of the evaluation form comments (*Appendix 4: Evaluation Forms: Comments and Scores*) refers to the unnamed “elephant in the room”. This expression usually refers to a significant issue that everyone in the room is aware of, but for whatever reason is not identified. For me, the elephant is merger. A County Wide support and development organisation could carry out all of the functions described in NAVCA’s list above and included in Northumberland County Council’s “Grant Commission” outline document. It could also lead on the ten functions identified and prioritised in the workshop exercise. It makes absolute sense for the voluntary and community sector to be developed and supported by an organisation whose members (i.e. front line organisations) operate across an area co-terminus with the main local authority administrative boundary. This does not necessarily compromise access at a district level, but does present the opportunity for greater cost effectiveness and consistency of service delivery across the County. That said, merging existing district and/or sub-sector level development and support organisations would not in the short term result in significant cost savings and this should not be seen as the major driver. There are one-off costs associated with the merger process which require additional investment and economy of scale savings will only be realised in the longer term. The drivers for merger should be to increase efficiency, improved service delivery and clarity.

A recurring theme across the plenary and group sessions was accountability. Although not explicitly said, it was clear that some groups distrusted the main infrastructure organisations to represent their interests fairly and others were suspicious of their intentions. Northumberland Consortium is to be congratulated for being one of the very few ChangeUp funded consortia that from the very beginning opened membership to some front line service providing organisations rather than exclusively to infrastructure support organisations. Despite this, there were contributions from participants that suggested that the Consortium had undermined the interests of particular communities of interest through less than adequate communications and failure to consult. Given the limited resource available to the Consortium, this is hardly surprising but it does demonstrate that effective networking, representation, strategic partnership involvement and communication are resource intensive activities that cannot effectively be handled on a piecemeal basis. A voluntary and community sector development and support organisation with a remit coterminous with the local authority and, crucially, owned and controlled by the local sector (and therefore accountable to it) would in the view of the author, represent the most practical way forward for the support and

development of the sector in Northumberland. This would require time and investment to enable the necessary 'due diligence' processes to be carried out, but would in the longer term serve the interests of both voluntary and community organisations and their statutory sector partners.

There is no reason why such a county wide organisation could not take on the Consortium function along the lines of how the workshop groups suggested, servicing a "network of networks" and/or open forum with accountability to an elected or appointed group of people. This model provides a single body for accountability to funders purposes and provides the basis for "pay and rations" type functions including statutory employer responsibilities and staff supervision. Such a body could discharge its strategic representation, network and policy development functions through a County Wide, Sector Wide VCS network open to all VCS organisations with a role in Northumberland, accountable to an elected steering group of member representatives. It makes sense that the host body for this Network would be the single infrastructure support organisation for the County, as the network could help inform its other activities (those suggested by the first part of the Northumberland County Council grants commission statement (*Appendix 3: Grants Commission Outline (Northumberland County Council)*)). This does not preclude of course any other organisation providing development and support services to its members. But in the interests of consistency and transparency, a lead organisation owned and controlled by the sector and representing the merged interests of the other infrastructure support bodies in the County could be the acknowledged and respected provider of the "voice for the sector". The problem with other models suggested (i.e. no single host organisation with functions delegated to teams of specialists) is that they could result in fragmented service provision with diluted accountability (in that potentially everyone and no one is accountable). The win-win situation is to reflect the values that have emerged from this workshop in the remit for a Northumberland VCS Forum whilst benefitting from the stability and economy of scale that a merged, County/Sector wide infrastructure support organisation, as the host, would provide.

Several references to poor communications were made at the workshop and some suggestions that the Consortium had not always adequately consulted with the broader sector when presenting a view to statutory partners. It is beyond the scope of this report to evaluate the Consortium's performance on consultation, through it does need to be said that VCS organisations need to take some responsibility to be pro-active in its dealings with the Consortium. Open membership and improved channels of communication would help facilitate this, but it will require active rather than wholly passive engagement by member organisations to maximise the benefit.

David Burnby
February 2011

APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Workshop Attendance List and Programme

Thom	Bradley*	CVA Blyth Valley
David	Burnby	Facilitator
Cath	Carnaby*	WHAC
George	Courtice*	Sector Development Officer
Andrew	Davidson	North East Equality & Diversity (NEED)
Julie	Dodson	VoiCeS
Sandi	Downing*	Carers Northumberland
Lorraine	Dryden	NCBA
Mike	Dungworth*	Comm & Vol Action Blyth Valley (CVABV)
Brenda	Fordy-Scott	ATAC
David	Francis*	Community Action Northumberland
Andrew	Gooding	Lynemouth Community Trust
Mike	Gowland	North Northumberland Village Hall Consortium
Paul	Harrison	Bell View
Lesley	Hill *	Northumbria Youth
Adrian	Hinchcliffe	West Northumberland Comm Building Consortium
Rodney	James*	Chair of Northumberland VCS Consortium
Bob	Langley*	Chair of NSP
Anne	Lyall*	Wansbeck Centre for Voluntary Service
Julia	Lyford*	Northumberland Comm Development Network
Moira	Macfarlane*	CABx Northumberland
John	McGough*	Northumberland Comm Development Network
Lynn	McIntosh	Watbus
Janet	Murphy	Escape Family Support
Sam	Palombella*	Groundwork NE
Peter	Robinson*	Church of England
Vee	Robinson	North East Equality & Diversity (NEED)
Janice	Rose*	Northumberland County Council
Carol	Southam*	VoiCeS
Sharon	Spurling	Escape Family Support
Ian	Stappard	Watbus
Donna	Stott	Stroke Association
Monica	Tighe	Blyth Valley Disabled Forum
Charles	Tremeer*	Volunteering Northumberland
Lynn	Whitehead	Turning Point

* Consortium Members

Northumberland VCS Consortium

Friday 4 February Age UK Northumberland, The Round House,
Lintonville Parkway, Ashington, NE63 91Z

Programme

9.15am	Arrival and Refreshments
9.45am	Welcome and introductions
10.00 am	Status Report — where we are
10.15am	Confirming the Consortium's Vision, Mission and Core Aim
10.30am	Life Without the Consortium <i>This exercise is designed to identify which of the Consortium's priority functions are;</i> <i>a) Most Important (and therefore would be most missed to the detriment of the sector) and</i> <i>b) Could only be carried out by the Consortium</i>
11.30am	Refreshment Break
11.45am	The Future of the Consortium <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Governance arrangements</i>• <i>Structure and staffing</i>• <i>Hosting arrangements</i>
12.45pm	Lunch Break
1.15pm	Resourcing the Consortium
1.45pm	Conclusions
2.00pm	CLOSE

Appendix 2: "Thoughts" Paper

The Northumberland VCS Consortium

These thoughts are a compilation of the discussions Consortium members had back in October as well as at its meeting in December.

Vision

For the Consortium to develop a responsive leadership, to engage strategically on behalf of the voluntary and community sector and to nurture supportive partnerships to help deliver excellent services.

Mission

To have a vibrant, independent and sustainable voluntary and community sector working collectively and in collaboration with others to secure the best interests of all those working and living in Northumberland.

Purpose

The overarching purpose is to serve the sector in the county. In doing so the Consortium will:

1. promote and celebrate the diverse views of Northumberland's VCS
2. facilitate collaboration within and with the sector
3. supply a lead to the sector's perspective over a range of interests and strategies.
4. inform the sector through the dissemination of information
5. evidence the sector's value and impact
6. identify the support needs for the sector and facilitate the provision of resources
7. create spaces for pro-active dialogue in decision making
8. act at county level and beyond

It is recognised that the diversity of the sector (size, structure, values, interests, capacity etc) is one of its major strengths but that this makes life difficult for those finding themselves performing a representative role. There must be clear lines of accountability and structures in place to allow for a two-way flow of information. A range of sector perspectives sitting on the Consortium's decision making body would also provide for greater legitimacy.

Basis of Consortium Membership

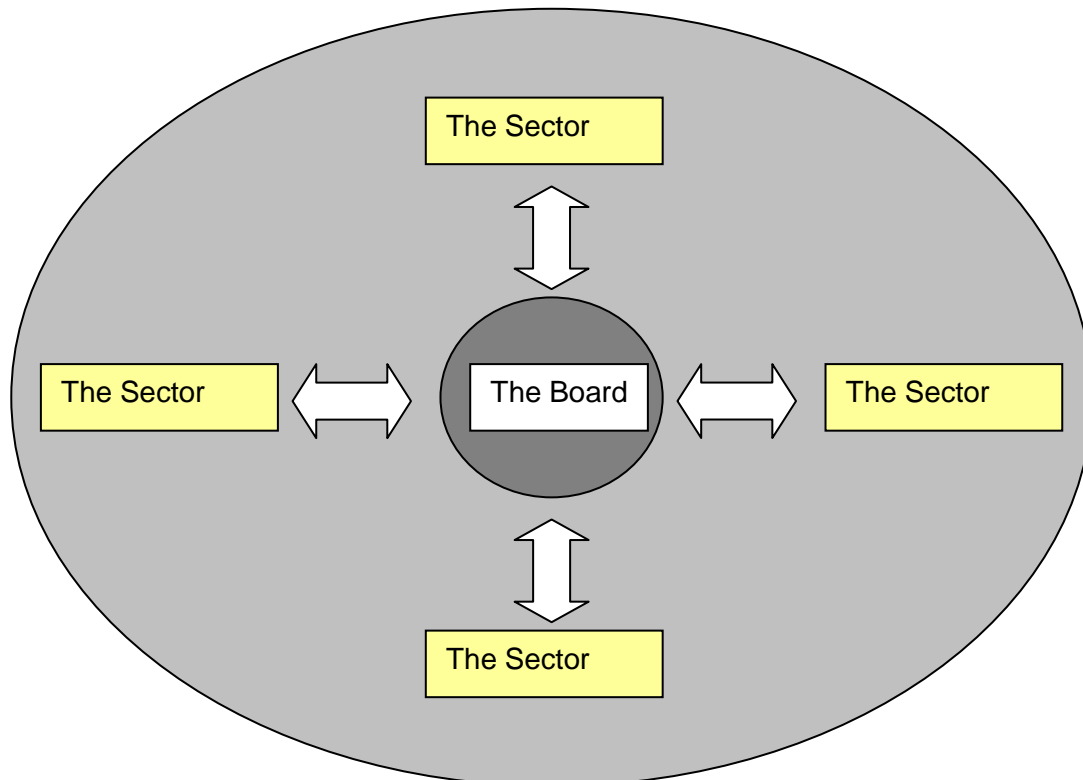
It was agreed that membership is to be open to all voluntary and community organisations active in Northumberland. Most members would primarily engage with the Consortium by being on the receiving end of regular, relevant, information and attending network meetings or standing conferences to allow them to feed back their ideas and views. This approach recognises that the bulk of members want to be reassured that someone, somewhere is acting in their interests.

The core work of the Consortium would be directed by a Board made up of members working over a number of themes, with often more than one person in

each theme. A person specification for members defining their role, responsibilities and commitment required was considered to be a useful starting

point in identifying Board members. Rather than have a standing, smaller executive-type body, the Consortium would appoint task groups to take responsibility for delivering specific pieces of work. This would match the intention to be more flexible in relation to changing needs as well as reduce any potential duplication/substitution that an executive might be tempted to perform. It would leave the Board firmly in the only driving seat but being responsive to the whole sector.

The Consortium



The Board could be drawn from the following:

Themes, networks and interests	Public sector observers/advisers
Infrastructure including volunteering support	Local Councils
Employability & learning	Northumberland County Council
Regeneration	Jobcentre Plus
Advice & support to individuals	GP Commissioners/NHS Care Trust
Health, wellbeing and care	
Climate change & environment	
Children and young people	
Older people	
Faith	
Community Buildings	
Sporting activities	

Equality and diversity	
Culture & heritage	

Activities

It is important to cement purpose to activities. It is also important to enable the Consortium to be highly flexible in its response to fast-changing circumstances. But prioritising activities in a resource tight era is a pre-requisite. To help this process of selection I have listed, as a guide, the main activities of the present Consortium and its support worker in fulfilling current purposes:

1. provides information: first-stop shop
2. interprets new reports/policies/strategies/initiatives
3. co-ordinates meetings of Consortium and Steering Group
4. co-ordinates & supports representation of VCS perspectives on range of county and area partnerships.
5. researches sector affecting change
6. co-ordinator of engagement in influencing new policies/strategies
7. monitors and promotes aggregate impact of sector
8. identifies gaps in sector's support needs
9. manages & edits website and database
10. provides secretariat for Compact Reference Group; liaises with signatories, deals with breaches
11. represents sector on regional VCS bodies & sign-posts to regional training provision
12. produces policy documents for Consortium, responds to consultations and facilitates engagement of sector by outside bodies.

The first four activities were identified by the meeting (October 19) as having high priority. It was further recognised that number 11 might decline in importance as regional public bodies wither. However VCS engagement in LEPs and the vacuum created at regional level might increase the demand for regional collaboration to ensure Northumberland's messages are delivered.

Resources

Because Capacitybuilders have been funding the Consortium for the last 3 years, and ceases to exist on April 1 2011, we need to seek a different source or method of funding. An obvious source might be the County Council but the chance of increasing its present £354,190 allocation to infrastructure services appears remote. Indeed we might have to cope with a further reduction of 20%. There are no mechanisms in the present framework to accommodate the circumstances where external funding dries up without reducing the allocations for current recipients.

Some options

1. **County Council** Consider a collaborative bid in response to the Council's invitation for Consortium activity
2. **Third Sector Capacity Fund** There might be case for an application by the Consortium for funding between April 1 – November 30th 2011. It

would depend on how convincing we were that the Consortium contributed significantly to the economic sustainability within the sector.

3. **Central Government.** The Office for Civic Society is currently reviewing its plans for funding support bodies having recently invited comments for consultation. The conclusions are expected late spring/summer. The possibility of additional support for specific infrastructure services cannot be ruled out although support for consortia appears unlikely.

Managing resources and activities

Background: For the last 3 years support (£48,000/y) for the Consortium has been provided by Capacitybuilders (a non-departmental government body). This ceases at the end of March 2011. The current accountable body for the VCS Consortium, which was a requirement of Capacitybuilders for all consortia it funded, is Community Action Northumberland.

Options:

1. Continue with a single host arrangement – agree which single host
2. Divide the activities between a number of different hosts

Governance

The consensus reached at meetings where organisational type was discussed, was that the potential difficulties arising from turning the Consortium into an incorporated body would outweigh any advantages that it might bring. Furthermore, the agreed purposes do not lend themselves to limited company or registered charity status.

Suggestions:

- The terms of reference would be revised to accommodate the new purposes and structure.
- Each member organisation of the Consortium and Board would be limited to one vote.
- The quorum for the Board would be eight voting organisations.
- There would be an agreed way in which members of time-limited task groups would be appointed and how they would report back etc.
- The roles, responsibilities and obligations of members representing the Consortium on outside bodies would be clarified and agreed.

Appendix 3: Grants Commission Outline (Northumberland County Council)

Infrastructure Support to the Voluntary and Community Sector January 2011

Proposed Commissioning Approach for 2011/12

This change of approach to the funding of infrastructure support is designed to support a vibrant and sustainable sector. It is underpinned by national aims that have been embedded into the local direction of travel for the VCS infrastructure support. The flavour of which include:

- Ensuring the support services to the sector are driven by frontline needs
- Demonstrating that support services present good business skills, entrepreneurial approaches and strong governance
- Accessing support by the sector is coherent and through improved technology
- Rationalising and reducing duplication at a local level will realise efficiencies

Outline commissions

To provide practical support, expert advice and capacity building that frontline/delivery VCS organisations need and require to ensure a vibrant sector in Northumberland, to include:

- a) providing advice for start-ups and organisations which are closing down
- b) backroom support (for example, communications support, printing, space for events, incubation space, pay roll, etc.)
- c) expertise on practice (legal, safeguarding, employment law, etc.)
- d) fundraising information, guidance and practical support
- e) training and staff development
- f) volunteering programmes

To strengthen the VCS network and representation of VCS with external stakeholders, to include:

- a) delivering efficiencies through collaboration and rationalisation
- b) maintaining up-to-date records and intelligence on the sector
- c) effective two way communication between the sector and private and public agencies including through the local Compact
- d) representing sector interests
- e) network facilitation
- f) influencing policy

Principles

The aim is to foster better working relationships with the VCS and address the issues outlined by the sector in previous reviews. Therefore, the commissioning process will:

- focus on collaborative bids to rationalise delivery and remove duplication
- give effective countywide coverage – hub and spokes model
- process organisations have to undergo an assessment of competency such as the Northern Rock Foundation assessment “What makes a successful organisation tick”
- have specific requirements regarding use of technology
- be clear about measures and key outcomes and how it intends to measure progress and success

Appendix 4: Evaluation Forms: Comments and Scores
Northumberland Voluntary and Community Sector Forum
Development Workshop
The Round House, Ashington, 4th February 2010

PARTICIPANTS' COMMENTS

As taken verbatim from Evaluation Forms

Comments about the workshop itself; things you'd have liked to say but couldn't/didn't; any final thoughts about the future shape of NVCSC

It was nice to be included on such an important issue. Good use of networking too!

A good day, hopefully well spent and productive. Thanks very much.

More sets of cards with statements on should have been used as a large number of people had to gather around a small table to view cards which meant it was a little chaotic

I feel that the commissioning and resourcing of consortia services will lead to a healthier atmosphere. My fear is that it will be a long road to infighting and eventually lead to some self destructing tendencies.

Provided an opportunity to reflect on thinking to date. External facilitation and wider involvement gave the thinking greater credibility which would have been in danger of being lost within internal 'politics'

Essential that the Consortia is seen as the VCS rather than a consortium of infrastructure groups, which one has to wonder why they do not pair/merge and pursue a more equitable [?] across the County

I think that, once the 'dust has settled', and we have new resourcing and constitutional arrangements in place, we will need to address and define more clearly how the consortium will work: i.e. its values and its modus operandi.

I have strong views on the future and shape, but being an organisation that is less important, I did not necessarily make my views known. I honestly believe that if the NVCSC is to survive and be effective it needs:

- 1. Strong leadership*
- 2. Good direction*
- 3. Excellent communication*
- 4. Being seen to achieve its role*
- 5. A strong core that manages the core business*

Some of these views were not necessarily reflected in the discussion.

- *Importance of openness, transparency, inclusivity, of ensuring that the relevant organisations/people are invited in relation to specific issues*
- *Importance of identifying limited deliverable priorities*
- *Importance of keeping momentum: the sector to appreciate the value of participation and the collective arrangements.*

I would have liked more time to talk around the resourcing of the consortium.

I think we need to appeal to the 'Northumbrian Pride!' If opened up we can do a lot for ourselves in terms of identifying, seeking and providing services if we have the confidence and encouragement to work together.

The groups represented had a wider range of experience/qualifications of the Consortium and did their best to educate others. Without that experience, coming from a very vibrant organisation that delivers hands on services, support and activities, I came away with a better understanding of what the Consortium or whatever the name will be in the future, and our role in its future.

Bit to close to it all to add anything very useful. Everyone was very polite! I think it is always useful to start from first principles and it will provide strong evidence of consortium thinking for future arrangements.

Very interesting. As a relative 'newcomer' to Northumberland VCS, very informative however feel there is some way to go yet in developing the future of the consortium with regard to governance, structure etc. Involvement and fluent communications absolutely necessary.

Not naming the 'elephant in the room' isn't helping 'us' collectively move forward.

The consortium development has to be something that everyone involved has to feel responsible for. It's not something other people will do.

It's incumbent upon members of/contributors to any consortium/collective not to see or promote it as the only route to/from the sector. This is not primarily an NCC responsibility, as seemed to be suggested by one delegate – the sector must be pro-active in relationships.

Now need to time plan and agreement to undertake changes. Don't tackle everything at once. Pick small number of priorities to start – do it well, then phase in changes in agenda.

The NVCS must become more inclusive and a bottom-up approach where the NVCS is shaped by grassroots groups is imperative if it is to be of value. Also, essential for marginalised people and groups to be involved.

Helped tease out that there was a lot of consensus about future "consortia" arrangements – challenge now is to build from this platform to create a way of working that the sector values and supports.

Quite obvious that the 'infrastructure' organisations all have somewhat hidden agendas and very different ideas of how they will tender for any commissioned work around this.

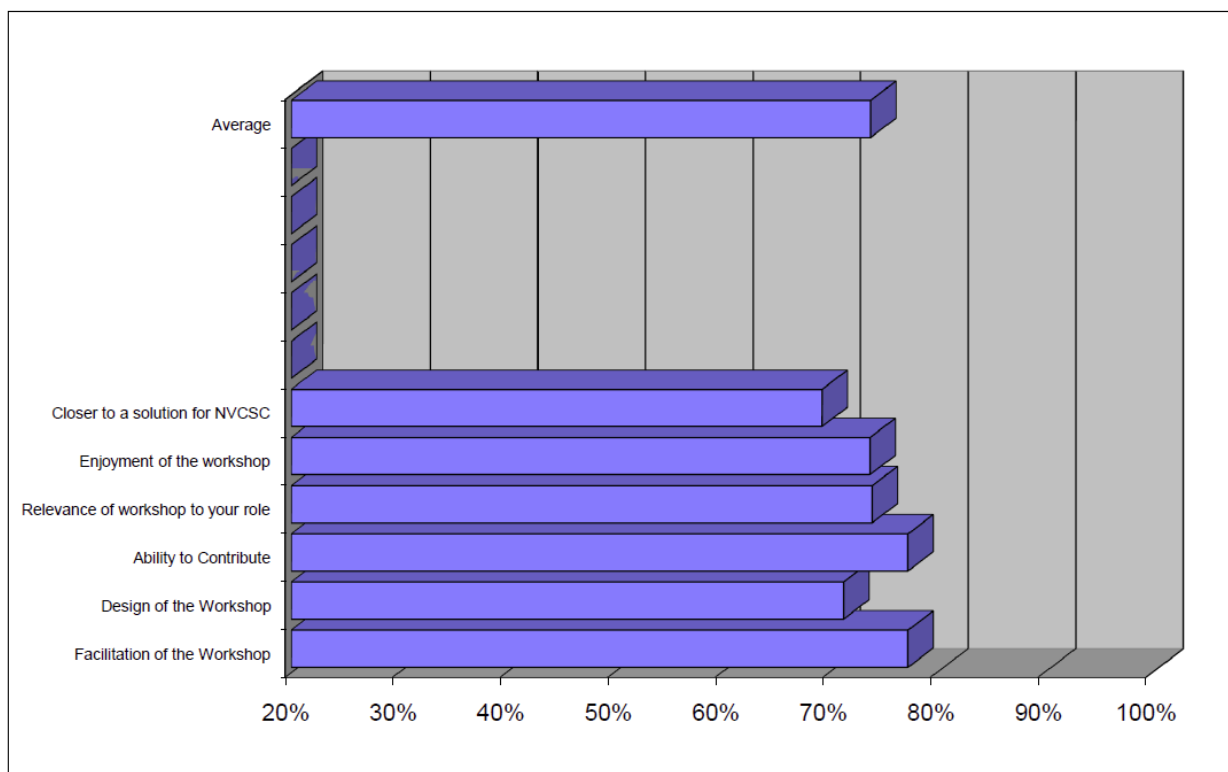
What next?

A strong consortium requires commitment and trust from its members – how this can be achieved will be paramount to its success.


Still not clear on what happens next!

EVALUATION SCORES (30 EVALUATION FORMS COMPLETED)

The Bar Graph below is derived from a spreadsheet used to record the scores 1 to 5 as per the tick boxes on the evaluation form. The bar chart displays the average scores for each question as a percentage with the overall average indicated on the top bar line (an average of 1 would score 20%, an average of 5, 100%).



The average score across the six questions is 74%, equal to a score of 3.69. It is encouraging to note that the average score recorded for question 6 (*“How much closer did the workshop bring the group towards a solution for the Consortium”* where 1 = ‘no way’, 3 = ‘some way’ and 5 = ‘long way’) is 3.47 suggesting some progress was made. It is also gratifying to note that the average score for *“Your ability to contribute”* was 3.87, suggesting the conclusions of the workshop reflect representative views .

	David Burnby & Associates 209 Park Avenue Hull HU5 4DE www.davidburnby.co.uk
EVALUATION FORM	

Name: (optional) _____

Northumberland Voluntary & Community Sector Consortium Workshop

Please indicate with a tick in the appropriate box, your level of satisfaction on a scale of one to five with each of the elements listed:

	1	2	3	4	5
1 = Very Poor, 2 = Poor, 3 = OK, 4 = Good, 5 = Excellent	☹	➤	☺	➤	☺
The Facilitation of the workshop	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The Design of the workshop	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Your ability to Contribute	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The Relevance of the workshop to your role	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Your Enjoyment of the workshop	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
How much closer did the workshop bring the group towards a solution for the Consortium? (Where 1 = No Way; 3 = Some way; 5 = Long Way)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Additional Comments...	☹	➤	☺	➤	☺

Comments about the workshop itself; Things you'd have liked to say but couldn't/didn't; Any final thoughts about the future shape of the NVCSC

Thank you!