

# **VCS Strategic Representation and Engagement on London Children's Trusts April 2009**

## **1. Background information**

Just over halfway through central government's 10 year programme of change – Children's Trusts delivering the 5 Every Child Matters outcomes for children and young people across all local authorities in England – VCS Engage and Children England commissioned a survey to assess the progress across London on VCS Strategic Representation (and Engagement) on London's Children's Trusts. The aim of the 2009 research was to find out where we are in London and to assess progress against earlier reports.

In 2003, following the Laming Inquiry into the death of Victoria Climbié, central government made integrated, joined-up working across and within local children's services, a priority. Legislation and guidance, since then, has required all local public bodies to work together through children's trusts. It was expected that most areas would have children's trusts set up by 2006 and all areas by 2008.

### **The London Picture, September 2006**

From July 2006 to March 2008 the DfES provided £3m to fund a new programme to strengthen the engagement of the children's services' Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) in the planning and delivery of services. The overall aim of the programme was to strengthen the engagement of the children's services' VCS in the planning and delivery of children's services. The objectives were:-

1. Increase capacity of the VCS to engage in children's trusts at the strategic level, in needs analysis, planning and commissioning
2. Contribute towards the increased confidence and skills of the VCS to enter the children's services market and compete with other providers on a level playing field
3. Encourage collaboration and co-operation across the VCS and with strategic partners and providers in both the public and private sectors

The Third Sector Alliance (3SA) undertook a mapping exercise of the local borough based voluntary and community sector (VCS) infrastructure in

London. This aimed to identify local support structures for the VCS involvement in the Every Child Matters (ECM) agenda. 31 of the 33 London boroughs responded to this report – The London Picture (September 2006) - and the feedback noted that the ECM agenda had been a challenging one for the voluntary and community sector to keep up with, with many boroughs having a range of partnership groups, strategies and routes to involvement.

The report highlighted that structures worked well where there was:

- **An effective and wide ranging network** to support communication with local groups and to elect representatives
- **Support for representatives** on boards and forums, including policy support, training and briefings to help them to understand the agenda and to take forward VCS involvement, and
- **A dedicated staff resource** to support VCS involvement, support network development and communication and support

The report identified that some boroughs have well established and effective networks with good VCS involvement in the ECM agenda. Alongside this, there was support for local representatives and effective staff offering a good range of support to local groups. However, this was not replicated across all boroughs and while some boroughs were in the process of developing these structures; other boroughs had no defined plans in place for infrastructure development. Additionally, resourcing for this work was fragmented. In a few boroughs, statutory authorities (the Local Authority, PCT or both) recognised the value of this infrastructure and provided fairly stable and ongoing support for this work.

In October 2008, The Audit Commission Report – ***Are we there yet? Improving governance and resource management in children's trusts***, found that, although the structure and working of children's trusts was now more formally defined, they were having very little impact on outcomes for children. '*...there is very little evidence that children's trusts have improved outcomes for children.*'

The Audit Commission Report also stated that '*The private and the voluntary and community sectors are less engaged, despite their large contribution to children's services.*'\*

(\* 79 Although positive about participation, the voluntary and community sector (VCS) considers itself to be the least influential. While the sector's involvement varies in different areas, three key themes are common:

**Purpose of engagement** – local authorities and the VCS need to be clear about how the sector engages with children’s trust arrangements at strategic, executive and operational levels.

**Ways of working** – most members of children’s trust boards are from local authorities and other statutory agencies. This can set an overly formal tone that deters VCS representatives and stifles creative strategic thinking.

**Valuing the sector** – VCS representatives also fear that other partners do not understand the range of VCS contribution.’

The recommendation made within the report is as follows:-

80 The children’s trust board must make sure that all partners feel valued and able to influence the agenda. This means being clear about how partners should engage and work together, and valuing the different contributions each organisation can make to what the children’s trust is trying to achieve. Clear governance arrangements make this easier to achieve, and will help secure the engagement of the private and voluntary sector while avoiding conflicts of interest.

#### **Are We There Yet?**

**Improving governance and resource management in children’s trusts**  
**Audit Commission**  
**October 2008)**

#### **The Laming Report, March 2009**

The Laming Report, 12 March 2009 states that *‘Central government and local agencies are now at the halfway point in this ten-year programme of change. The first five years have seen sound progress in legislative and structural terms...However, despite this encouraging start, there are real challenges still to address in safeguarding and child protection if children are to have services they can rely on when their own lives are in crisis.’*

## **2. VCS Strategic Representation and Engagement on London Children’s Trusts - April 2009**

***VCS Strategic Representation and Engagement on London Children’s Trusts - April 2009*** reports on research undertaken by the CYP Together Network on behalf of VCS Engage and Children England on the current position of VCS Strategic Representation and Engagement on Children’s Trusts across London. Questionnaires were sent out to VCS strategic contacts at the 33 London Boroughs in February and March 2009.

The 2009 report focuses on the following areas:-

- Level of VCS representation on London’s Children’s Trusts

- LSCB representation
- Elections/choice of reps
- Local infrastructure organisation support
- Training
- Funding/backfill
- Evaluation
- The need for further support

28 of the 33 London Boroughs returned their questionnaires and the following figures are based on the number of responses we received – 28 being 100%.

### 3. Responses to Questionnaire

#### a) Is your Children, Young People and Families' (CYP&F) VCS represented strategically on your local Children's Trust?

<b>CYP Partnership</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>LSCB</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>78%</b>
<b>LSCB Training Group</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>82%</b>
<b>Workforce Development</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>71%</b>

All of the London Boroughs who answered do have VCS Strategic Representation on their local Children's Trusts. Some London Boroughs have VCS representation across many other strategic partnerships with some VCSs included on all their CYP&F strategic partnership boards and sub groups.

What stands out from the answers to this question is that in at least 6 London Boroughs there is currently no VCS representation on the Local Safeguarding Children Board and, as we have no current information from 5 other boroughs, the worst case could be that 11 – or a third - of the 33 London boroughs have no VCS strategic representation and engagement on Local Safeguarding Children Boards.

**This is a major concern and something which this report recommends the new Third Sector Safeguarding Unit picks up and brings to the attention of the Directors of Children's Services in the London Boroughs involved.**

#### b) How were your local VCS representatives elected?

In 18 boroughs (64%) VCS representatives had been elected by the local CYP Network or Forum although in some cases those reps had offered to take on the role and no one had objected so the election process wasn't rigorous.

Where reps hadn't been elected they had achieved their roles by the following:-

- Nominated by VCO trustees to represent for a fixed period
- Elected by the Local Authority

The benefit of elections is that they empower both the representatives – who feel confident that they have the backing of their VCS colleagues - and the represented - who have the power to dismiss if they feel that they're not being represented appropriately. The problem within the sector is one of time and capacity. Many organisations feel that they don't have the time to spend on representation and, when there is no funding for backfill, this feeling is enforced further.

**c) Do you have a job description for the role that your reps are doing?**

8 boroughs (28%) have a job description, one has executive terms of reference for the role and one has a protocol for representatives. 18 boroughs (64%) have no job description. Of the 8 boroughs that have job descriptions 5 of these had been agreed by the Local Authority.

The benefit of having a job description agreed by the local authority is that the partnership expectations of the local authority can be included within the role description. Copies of such job descriptions are included in the appendices at the end of the report.

**d) Are your reps supported by a 'local infrastructure organisation' (LIO) such as a CVS?**

In 24 boroughs (88%) VCS representatives are supported by a local infrastructure organisation. In two boroughs VCS strategic engagement is supported by the local authority and in two by an established voluntary and community organisation. The funding for Community Engagement Networks (CEN) within boroughs provides support for VCS reps across 5 London Boroughs.

**e) Do your reps receive any training for their role?**

VCS representatives in 16 (57%) boroughs received training for their role as reps. The kind of training offered includes:-

Induction  
Advocacy

Partnership working  
Effective Representation  
Negotiation Skills

12 (43%) boroughs don't have any training for representatives.

**f) Do your representatives receive any other support for their role?**

This was split almost 50/50 across the boroughs who replied to this question. 12 boroughs said that they provide other support and 13 said that they don't provide any further support.

The 'other support' provided included:

One to one induction  
Mentoring from experienced reps  
Representative handbooks or guidance documents

**g) Do you have a system in place for backfilling/funding VCS strategic representation?**

Of the boroughs that replied 6 (21%) said that they do – mostly through their local authorities - and 20 (71%) don't.

Where funding is in place the VCS appear to be much more strategically engaged with the local children's trust. This is probably due to the fact that where funding is in place from the local authority there has been a conscious decision to fund that strategic engagement. The VCS in these boroughs are being shown that their attendance at strategic meetings is seen as essential by their local authorities.

**h) Does representation reflect the diversity of the sector e.g. does it cover small and equalities-based groups?**

Of the boroughs that replied 17 (68%) felt that their representation did reflect the diversity of the VCS and 5 (18%) said that they didn't. The main reason given for the lack of representational diversity was that the people working for small and BME groups didn't have the time or capacity to attend meetings.

**i) How does the wider local VCO network feed into the work of the Children's Trust via their representatives?**

Via:	
CYP Local network/forum	23 (82%)
Email	18 (64%)

Other	4 (14%)
Newsletter, website, CEN	

**j) How do reps report back to the VCS?**

CYP Local network/forum	23 (82%)
Email	17 (60%)
Other	4 (14%)

As above

**k) How does the Local Authority consult with the VCS on issues?**

CYP Local network/forum	21 (75%)
Consultations	21 (75%)
Focus Groups	17 (60%)

**m) Do you have any systems for evaluating the effectiveness of VCS representation on your Children's Trust?**

Yes	2 (7%)
No	23 (82%)

Where organisations said that they did have a system for evaluating the effectiveness of VCS strategic representation in place this was in terms of attendance at meetings to meet SLA targets.

Evaluation in terms of the effect that representation is having on outcomes for London's children isn't being done.

**n) Would you be interested in finding out more about the support that VCS Engage and Children England can offer you in terms of strategic representation and engagement?**

Yes	22 (78%)
No	3 (10%)

**4. Recommendations**

- a) Following the findings of this report about the lack of VCS strategic representation and engagement on Local Safeguarding Children Boards it is recommended that this is taken up by \*\*\*\*\* with the Directors of Children's Services in the relevant London Boroughs.
- b) 78% of the London Boroughs who responded have said that they would be interested in finding out more about further support for their local VCS Strategic Representation and this should be developed and put in place as soon as possible.
- c) The findings of this report on the low level of local authority funding to enable effective VCS Strategic Representation should be used by both VCS Engage/Children England and local infrastructure organisations in future negotiations with their local Children's Trusts.
- d) Good practice should be shared across London by means of the CYP Together website on which VCS Representative Job Descriptions; Protocols; Handbooks; Guides etc will be uploaded for viewing.

## **5. Case Studies**

### **EALING**

#### **BACKGROUND**

Ealing has historically had good representation of the voluntary and community sector on CYP decision making bodies including the Children and Young Peoples Strategic Partnership (CYPSP) and the Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership (EYDCP). For over 10 years representation was from by invitation to larger groups.

#### **LOCAL STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP DEVELOPMENTS**

The Ealing Community Network was set up at the end of 2001 to bring together Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) groups to have a greater say in local decision making. This was at the same time that the Local Strategic Partnership was formed. From that time VCS reps have been elected onto the key Children and Young People structures – Change for Children Board, Children's Executive Group, CYPSP and the Safeguarding Board. Reps have also been nominated to work on sub-groups of the key bodies. This has meant that there has been a much wider range of representation including a number of small Black and minority ethnic groups.

We have also this year elected reps to work on a specialist Scrutiny panel around Children and Young People.

## CHILDREN'S WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL DEVELOPMENTS

When the CWDC development funding was first introduced in 2006, Ealing CVS was asked by the council would they like to use this money to develop the role of the VCS. The funding covered a part time development worker post and had facilitated an increase in participation, and in the VCS having a far greater role in work in a range of areas around Every Child Matters. This post is to be mainstreamed with funding for 3 years being included in the next commissioning round. Some of the key successes of the project include:

- Major Survey of the sector including training needs analysis. This will be updated in 2009.
- Participation of the VCS at strategic and workgroup levels of Children's Workforce Development
- Termly VCS Forum for reporting and consultation
- Monthly VCS newsletter to over 250 groups
- Participation of the VCS reps on all CYP grant and commissioning panels
- Partnership with the Safeguarding Board in developing Ealing Safeguarding Guidelines and the training in of the guidelines to the sector
- Development of VCS Safer Recruitment Guidance including launch event
- Creation of a Children's Workforce section on the Ealing CVS website including all guidances, up to date news and useful web links

These strong working relationships have lead to Ealing being able to respond quickly and easily to Government funding which requires fast turn around and partnership bids.

## Hillingdon

Hillingdon Association of Voluntary Services (HAVS) is the CVS which covers the London Borough of Hillingdon. HAVS is a large, CVS with established links with partners in the Local Authority, PCT and others. Because of these links, historically, HAVS have been able to ensure voluntary sector representation on the Local Strategic Partnership, its sub groups and other strategic planning groups in the borough. Seven years ago, children's social services agreed to fund a Children, Youth and Families Officer post in HAVS. Funding has continued year on year, now from children's services. Part of the post holder's role is to work with partners to ensure the voluntary sector organisations working with children and families are included in decision making processes. The post

holder also set up a forum in the voluntary sector. The forum is over 6 years old and meets regularly. Statutory partners provide regular presentations that are topical and reflect any change to services locally. Recent presentations include a draft disabled children's strategy to enable Hillingdon to implement the Aiming High Agenda, setting up of the Targeted Youth Support Team and developments in the extended services agenda. Presentations lead to increased awareness and referrals from and to VCS services, aid joint working and trust.

The Children, Youth and Families Forum is used as a vehicle for choosing representatives to sit on strategic partnerships. The representatives are chosen from the forum and there is an expectation that they will feed back to the forum, but also take issues and ideas to the strategic partnerships which arise from the forum and not just their own organisation. The Children and Families Trust Board currently has three VCS representatives and the Local Safeguarding Children Board has two. Underpinning these two main strategic groups are a range of sub groups, working groups etc. The range of groups constantly changes but currently numbers around 35, covering many issues such as teen pregnancy, CAMHS, safer recruitment/HR, training, workforce, extended services, youth service agenda etc. Most of these sub groups have one voluntary sector representative, although, in these cases it is not always possible to have a democratic voting system.

Representatives for the two main strategic groups are chose by appointment. Invitations to apply are sent to all VCS organisations and anyone interested is given a job description and application form. The job description makes responsibilities clear, such as:

- Ability to prioritise board and forum meetings
- Representative must make time to read papers and prepare feedback
- 3 year appointments
- No remuneration for role

For the sub groups, where representatives have not been appointed in the above manner, all VCS organisations are also given the democratic right to nominate someone to be a representative. If more than one person expresses an interest, names have been pulled out of the hat.

Support and training for representatives is available from the Children, Youth and Families Officer as needed. Some representatives need minimal support and others need more. In addition, the Children Youth and Families Officer acts as a conduit, to ensure the sector is informed of all relevant developments. Representatives are asked to make sure the post holder is told when there are items the rest of the sector need to know, and an electronic system is used to circulate information to ensure those who cannot attend forum meetings are updated.

We are fortunate in Hillingdon because the system was well established prior to the introduction of the Every Child Matters Agenda and Children's Trusts. We were able to build on what we already had. Also, positively, the same person has been in the Children, Youth and Families Officer post for the full 7 years of funding leading to strong, ongoing and positive relationships as well as a highly developed knowledge of the system and priorities. However issues and challenges do arise, including:

- Small voluntary organisations sometimes do not have the capacity to absorb large amounts of information at the speed change is happening.
- There is no money in voluntary organisations budgets for attendance at strategic or networking meetings. Groups with only one or two staff may have to close their office to do this and this builds inequality in to the relationship. We have tried to find funding for voluntary sector representatives to be paid for the work they do on strategic groups but had no success to date.
- Voluntary sector representatives attending meetings are more likely to be doing this in addition to a 'hands on' role therefore they have less time to commit to the actions arising out of a meeting than their statutory partners. This means it sometimes takes longer for voluntary sector partners to respond.
- Because of the small numbers of staff in voluntary organisations, we need more notice about meeting dates to enable us to arrange to be there.
- Sometimes the voluntary sector is treated as a single entity but we are different from other agencies because we are made up of a number of independent organisations. Statutory partners sometimes think they have communicated with the whole sector because they have told one organisation about their plans. It is sometimes difficult to get our partners to understand that the CVS does not 'control' their member organisations as each is independent. Representatives are often asked to ensure that a particular action or strategy is introduced in all organisations but we have to remind our partners that we can only advise other organisations that it would be a positive action for them to take.
- Since the introduction of ECM, changes in both staff and structures within our strategic partners has been frequent with many short term interim posts and complete restructuring of meetings happening around every 6 months. It is almost impossible to keep up.
- Some, though not all, individuals in our partner agencies still think the voluntary sector is made up of people who are volunteers and therefore not necessarily qualified to do the job.
- The children's VCS in Hillingdon is amongst the smallest in the country. Therefore the reality for representation is that there is sometimes no one with the time to carry out the role. The CVS post holder fills the gaps, but currently attends 24 strategic groups. This excessive workload is not sustainable in the long term.

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## **Lewisham**

Voluntary Action Lewisham's full time CYP Strategic Development Officer has been in post since December 2007, and is funded by Lewisham Council for three years. She supports a CYP Forum of over 500 voluntary and community sector (VCS) organisations working with children and young people.

Lewisham's Children's Trust arrangements operate through the CYP Strategic Partnership Board (CYPSPB), to which 14 boards and working groups report, including the Local Safeguarding Children Board.

In December 2008 the CYP Forum elected two VCS reps to each of these 15 boards and working groups, through nominations followed by a secret ballot. Elections are to be held annually in the first instance, but this will be reviewed.

The new reps attended an Induction Day, jointly led by Voluntary Action Lewisham (VAL) and Lewisham Council, and are supported by a handbook including terms of reference and a 'Jargon Buster'. They can also access a dedicated area of the VAL website and request ongoing support from VAL's Development Officer. A twice-yearly 'Parliament' is planned to bring together VCS Reps from across the Local Strategic Partnership. A summit for the chairs of each working party and board later this year will enable a discussion of the role, responsibilities and support required by VCS Reps.

Reps can claim up to £15 per hour for preparation and attendance at meetings from an expenses fund provided by Lewisham Council.

After each meeting, Reps return a brief feedback form to VAL's Development Officer. Each month this feedback is compiled in a briefing paper which is emailed to the CYP Forum and posted on VAL's website. Reps also attend quarterly meetings of the CYP Forum, where they hold discussions and take feedback. Forum members can offer further feedback and input, and obtain copies of all agendas and meeting papers through VAL.

As yet, there is no formal system for evaluating the impact of VCS Reps on the Strategic Partnership Board. There is space on the Reps' feedback form for them to record instances where they feel their input has contributed to or created particular outcomes. The large number of nominations in December 2008 certainly reflects the sector's enthusiasm and positivity towards engagement in the CYPSPB, and there has been positive feedback from Forum members about the greater accessibility of information as a result of Reps' work.

## **Richmond upon Thames Community and Voluntary Sector Strategic Representation – Richmond CVS**

In 2003 Richmond CVS was awarded the contract to manage the Children's Fund in the borough. The Children's Fund, with its overarching theme of prevention and early intervention, developed a portfolio of projects targeted at vulnerable children and their families delivered by providers from the voluntary and statutory sector. The partnership that developed laid the foundations for partnership working in Richmond when the Children and Young Peoples Strategic Partnership was formed in 2006. Key factors were

- Two places on the Children and Young Peoples Strategic Partnership from its inception
- An expectation that the VCS would contribute to the development of policy and strategy in relation to LBRUT children and cultural services, and to the governance design and delivery for the partnership
- A common understanding of each partners role, and the services they provided
- An appreciation of the "local" aspect of VCS services – services locally delivered to meet local need
- A jointly developed 3 year children and young peoples plan, with all partners contributing and a set of objectives and actions that could be jointly owned

In addition LBRUT recognised the importance of the strategic role to support the engagement of the VCS and has contributed funding to the post since 2006. The partnership was further strengthened in 2007 when Richmond received a Joint Area Review (JAR). This highlighted the effectiveness of the strategic role

- in building the needs of the VCS into policy
- in reflecting their ability to deliver professional and safeguarded services
- In matching VCS needs lead services to the delivery of the every child matters outcomes as expressed in the LBRUT Children and Young Peoples Plan

The local authority currently funds the post for 4 days a week which allows for the post holder to play a full part in the strategic representation of the VCS. This includes membership of

- The Children's Trust Board
- Local Children's Safeguarding Board
- Children's Centres and Extended Schools Steering Group

and supports the drafting, adoption and implementation of a range of policies including anti-bullying, the LBRUT children and young peoples plan 2009-13, and the LBRUT Cultural Plan.

Please note the role is not “elected” from the VCS constituency. There is an open bidding process to LBRUT, and RCVS currently hold the contract for strategic representation of the voluntary sector that deliver services to children and young people in Richmond.

Should you require further information please contact Heather Mathew Richmond CVS 0208 255 8558 [heatherm@richmondcv.org.uk](mailto:heatherm@richmondcv.org.uk)

## **Sutton**

In 2008 funding was secured from the Children’s Workforce Development Council (CWDC) to recruit a VCS Developme Worker for VCS Children, Young People & Families’ Services to be managed by Sutton Centre for the Voluntary Sector (SCVS). Part of the role of this position is to represent the VCS on the local Children’s Trust. In Sutton the overarching Children’s Trust forum is the Sutton Children & Young People’s Partnership which is responsible for the production of the Sutton Children’s Plan. The SCYPP is currently made up of 28 Children & Young People Partnership Boards and sub Groups. The Development Worker represents the sector on 6 Boards and sub groups and supports representatives from 14 other CYP voluntary organizations plus three other SCVS staff members on the other 22 Boards and sub groups.

Representatives are elected through an open process by members of the Children & Families Forum (CFF). Most reps are elected for two years. Reps receive a Reps pack which includes information about VCS representation (including research), a job description which has been agreed by the Local Authority, terms of reference for the board on which they are to represent. The role description also covers a commitment from the Local Authority of what they need to do in order to welcome any new representatives and to make them feel comfortable in meetings. Agendas and papers for meetings are circulated to the CFF so that any comments or issues that need to be raised can be taken to the meeting by the relevant reps. Reps use a meeting proforma to take notes during the meeting and to suggest action points for the Children & Families’ Forum. Feedback from reps is given at each CFF meeting which takes place every two months. Reps receive training from the Development Worker to ensure that they understand the role and the expectation of reporting back to other CYP groups

on issues that are raised and decisions made. The reps also receive information regarding on-going training relevant to their role.

Due to the wide range and consistency of VCS representation across the Sutton Children & Young People's Partnership the Local Authority both recognizes and appreciates the engagement of the sector and feels confident that decisions made on service delivery and policy are informed by consultation with the VCS.

The high level of strategic involvement has led to the VCS being regularly consulted on key issues such as: The Children & Young People's Plan; the London Child Poverty Pledge; The Children's Workforce Strategy; Extended Services and Early Years Workforce Strategy; Phase 3 Children's Centres; Parenting Support Strategy

The VCS was represented on the Children & Young People's Partnership Conference planning group and was asked to lead the table facilitation at the annual conference. The Development Worker was asked to lead on one of the three conference sessions.

Representation on the LSCB (Local Safeguarding Children Board) Training Sub Group has led to the VCS being joint organizers of the annual LSCB Training Day and being trained to deliver Basic Awareness Safeguarding Training to the VCS.

Representation on the Joint Training Sub Group of the Children's Workforce Strategy Group has led to the VCS being fully engaged in multi agency training specifically on the Common Core of Skills & Knowledge training. The Development Worker will deliver this training more widely to the sector.

SCVS receives no funding from the London Borough of Sutton for VCS representation and, as yet, has no system for evaluating VCS representation.

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