

Recommendation 10 – To develop VCS Infrastructure Support (including identifying the support needs for communities of interest and localities) as a strategic commissioning area to support partnerships needs for a thriving Third Sector within a pre-determined resource envelope identified by the relevant partners.

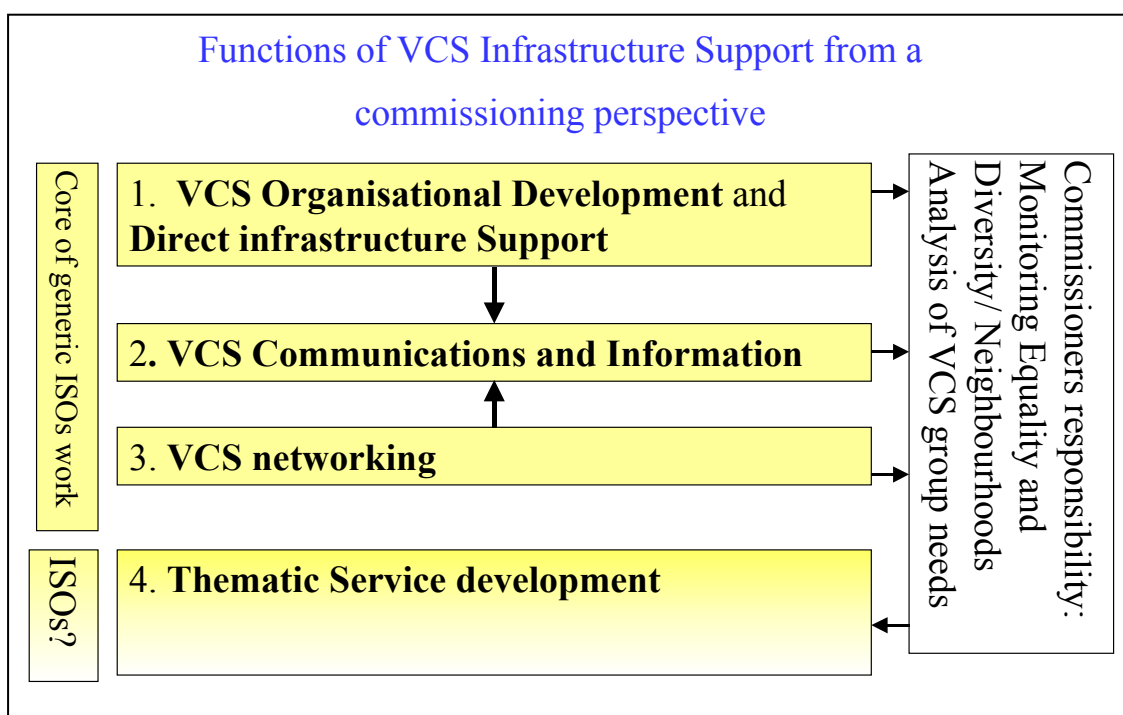
VCS Infrastructure Support is integral to developing the wider VCS/ Third Sector. Investment into Infrastructure helps increase the contribution of the wider sector in the delivery of Bradford District Partnership outcomes.

Currently there are overall reasonable levels of investment going into infrastructure support (based on national comparators). However funding is fragmented and part of several separate funding streams and a diverse range of commissioning processes. The proposal advanced here is to bring the decision making together (where possible) into one strategic commissioning body that will be able to provide a much more coordinated approach to funding VCS Infrastructure (mapping to include external funding supporting this area of work within the District).

The complexity of the Third Sector in the Bradford District is paralleled by the corresponding complex support needs. For example

- 3,000 Third Sector organisations may seek some support from commissioned services
- Every thematic service area has a number of Third Sector organisations contributing to their outcomes
- Groups cover most equality and diversity areas (or Communities of Interest)
- To groups in most neighbourhoods
- Groups are at all stages of development from new emerging to large well developed organisations
- Some groups deliver services (often as social enterprises) others contribute to outcomes in other ways for example, Self-help and campaign groups.

The functions of VCS Infrastructure Support that the District needs to enable a well functioning and thriving Third Sector is highlighted in the following diagram:



Function 1: VCS Organisational Development – basically supporting organisations to develop their organisational capacity e.g. human resources, financial management, research, quality assurance development, business planning, management committee development, legal and constitutional support, group development skills, organisational health checks etc.) **Direct infrastructure Support** (e.g. Payroll, volunteer recruitment and placement)

Function 2: Communications and Information. Keeping the wider sector informed of developments etc. Examples Briefing Bradford, ISOG directory, support to the Diva database of VCS groups, Cnet email network.

Function 3: VCS networking – Two related dimensions: **a) Working together** – bringing groups together with a common purpose to develop joint working and sector development approach to issues. **b) Facilitating the Voice of VCS groups** within the Partnership structure – organising forums/ networks to represent VCS within the strategic partnerships as an equal partner within the LSP

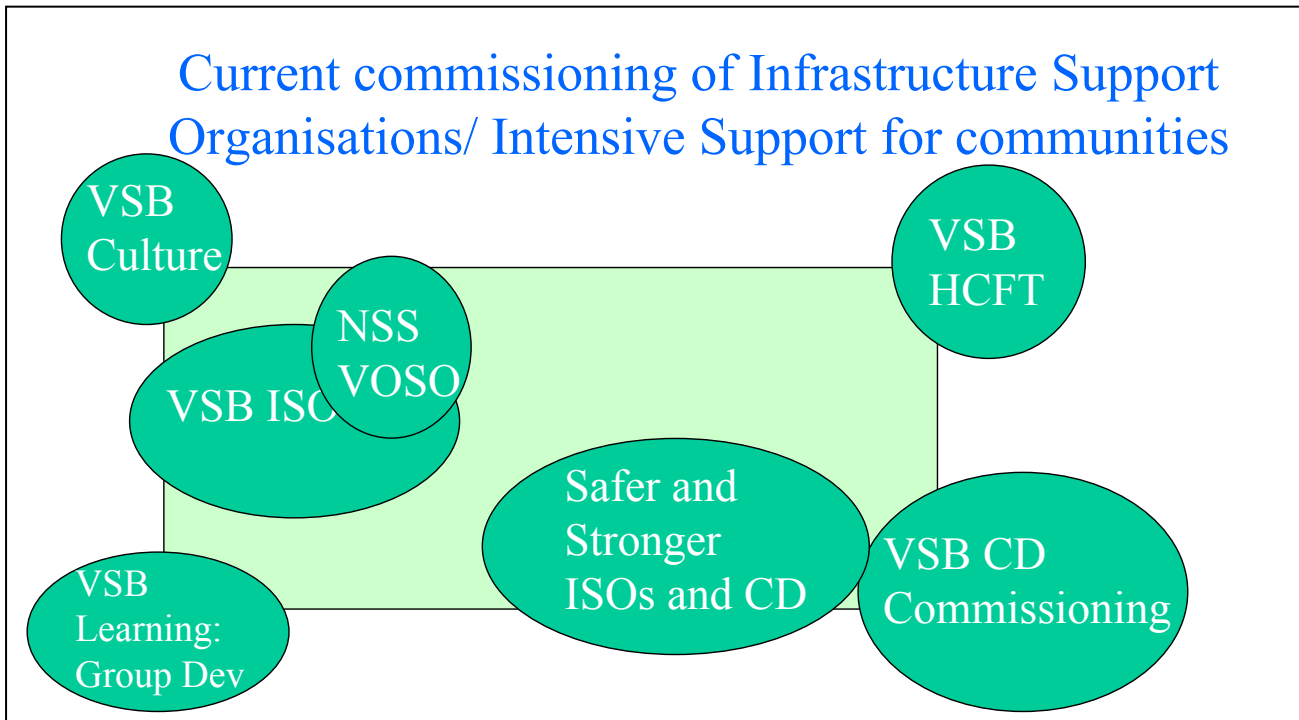
Function 4: Thematic Service Development – for example a) support to VCS youth service providers on how to work as youth workers more effectively, b) Advice Service providers to maintain their level of professional knowledge of the legal and benefits systems.

Delivery agents of VCS Infrastructure Support

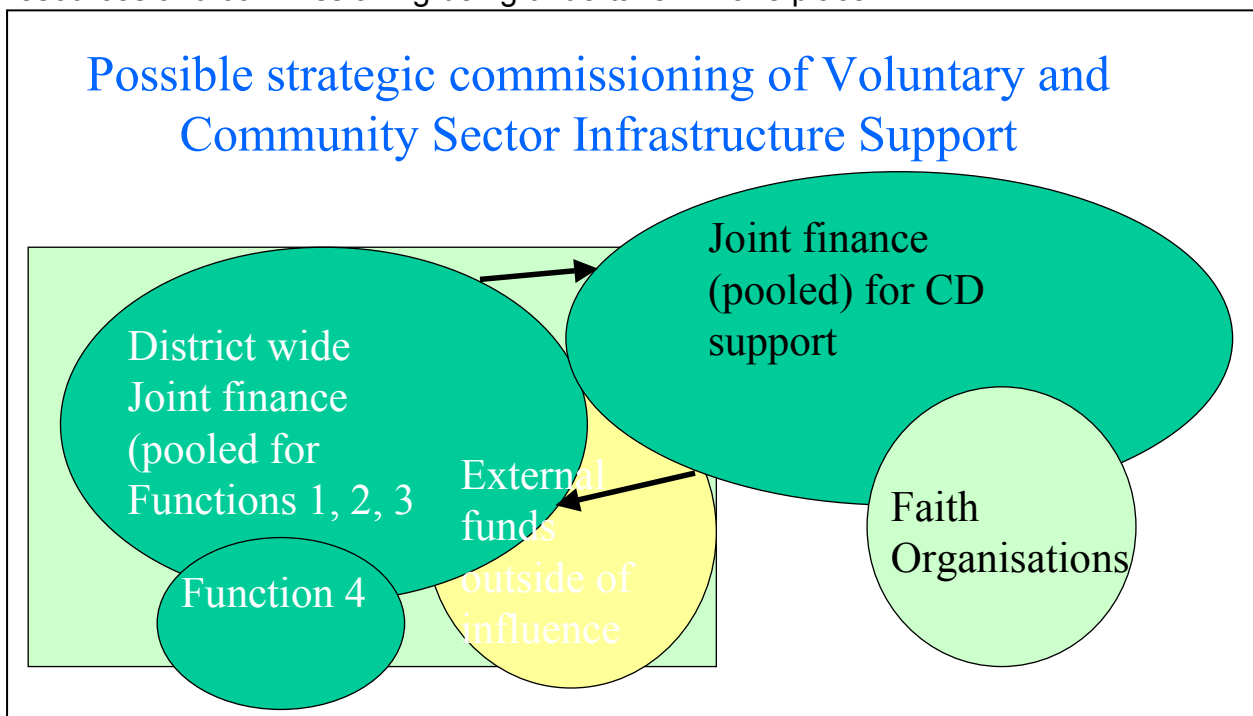
In terms of Functions 1-3 the vast majority of these services are delivered directly by a group of VCS Organisations called ISOs (Infrastructure Support Organisations). The Council did deliver some support to VCS group as part of the Community Development Service and a unit called the Voluntary Sector Support Unit. However following a Council decision in 2005 this Service and Unit were disbanded. Function 4 however remains a function that is delivered by a mixture of providers.

In terms of developing a commissioning framework it is important to stress that the proposal is for VCS Infrastructure Support and not ISO commissioning. Whilst the primary purpose of ISOs is Functions 1-3 the work undertaken by them goes beyond VCS Infrastructure Support into what can be termed Community Infrastructure. This proposed strategic approach is concerned with VCS Infrastructure Support. However the close relationship with community infrastructure is recognised and it is important that there are links made between these two interrelated areas.

The first graphic depicts the current 'commissioning' arrangements for VCS Infrastructure Support. As can be seen there are the minimum of seven separate places where some VCS Infrastructure Support is funded from. VSB =Voluntary Sector Budget



The second graphic is of the proposed new commissioning arrangement based on pooled resources and commissioning being undertaken in one place.



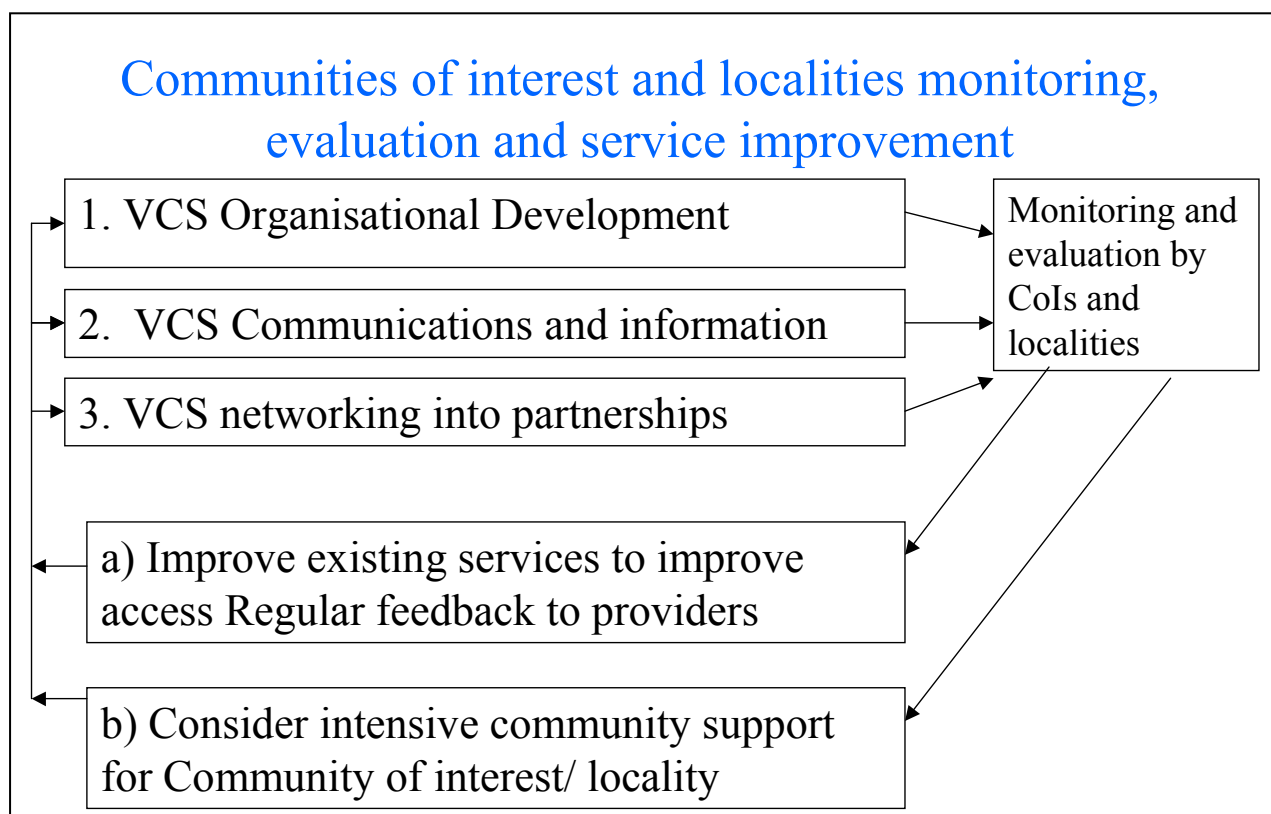
Note VCS Infrastructure is the part set within the 'green' box.

VCS/ Third Sector Strategic Needs Analysis

A robust strategic needs analysis outlining what is needed to ensure a thriving Third Sector would be a central instrument of the new commissioning arrangement. This analysis would also have an important link to identifying the wider community support needs.

The primary part of the needs analysis will be the assessment of District wide needs for a thriving third sector. This would include reviewing Council and partnership priorities within strategies and plans that could benefit from a stronger sector.

The diagram below depicts how the constant monitoring and periodic evaluation would feed into identifying necessary improvements to VCS Infrastructure Support and future community support development needs. The evaluation of whether a particular Col and/ or locality is receiving adequate support would firstly explore the extent that there might be some barriers to access that can be resolved through improving an element of an existing Infrastructure service (=a) in diagram). If following this intervention there remained a lack of access then this would trigger a consideration of the need for intensive community support (=b) in diagram).



Equalities and Diversity Monitoring is critical to ensure that ALL groups are being able to access support

A further mechanism for identifying the need for intensive support could be an analysis of small grants. The distribution of small grants could help identify need by both Col and locality. Small grants are useful as if no groups exist in a locality/ Col able to access these it is probably due to a lack of groups. This would suggest the need to focus intensive community support in these communities to build capacity.

The new national survey of Third Sector organisations could also provide a useful information base for the needs analysis that can build on the already existing Diva Survey of VCS groups.

Current resourcing of VCS Infrastructure Support (2008-9)

	Council Base	Council initiatives	tPCT/ Council Joint Fin.	VCS externally raised	Total
2008-9					
Totals Functions 1-3	£697,011	£363,020	£91,150	£330,446	£1,481,627
% Function 1-3	47%	25%	6%	22.3%	100%

Moving forward the proposal

If this proposal gets adopted, further work detailing the approach will need to be undertaken as part of the wider Partnership Commissioning proposal. In the interim period between the establishment of new partnership commissioning arrangements, the preliminary work could be overseen by the existing ISO Commissioning Group that is currently responsible for the element of the Voluntary Sector Budget that is allocated to this commissioning area.