

Engaging the Voluntary and Community Sectors in Children's Trusts



Every Child Matters
Change For Children

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Introduction

1. The purpose of this advice is to support local authorities, other public sector agencies and voluntary and community organisations in developing effective arrangements for involving the voluntary and community sectors in children's trusts.

2. The Department for Education and Skills recognises that local partners have a great deal of experience of partnership working in support of improving outcomes for children and young people, on which children's trusts can draw. This document, developed in consultation with voluntary and community sector partners, aims to distil some of that experience into a brief guide that will help ensure children's trusts can make the most of voluntary and community sector involvement. It does not prescribe a model for engagement, but suggests several principles for local partners to consider when developing their relationship with the voluntary and community sectors. It also addresses the issue of the need to build the sectors'

capacity to be involved in local arrangements for improving outcomes.

3. The Department for Education and Skills is committed to working according to the Compact on relations between government and the voluntary and community sectors in England and expects that local partners will work according to the Local Compacts that most local authorities put in place by April 2005. The Home Office is currently consulting on proposals for *Compact Plus*, a model for strengthening the Compact. Details can be found at www.activecommunities.homeoffice.gov.uk The consultation closes on 12 July 2005.

Children's trusts

4. Children's trusts are made up of five essential building blocks:

- *Child-centred, outcome-led vision:* the formulation of a compelling outcome-led vision for all children, young people and their families.

- *Integrated front line delivery*: delivery organised around the child, young person or family rather than professional boundaries or existing agencies.
- *Integrated processes*: effective joint working is sustained by a common language and shared processes. This includes a Common Assessment Framework used across agencies, effective information sharing arrangements, and the re-engineering of other local processes and procedures to support, rather than inadvertently distort, joint working.
- *Integrated strategy (joint planning and commissioning)*: joint assessment of local needs; integrated planning to prioritise areas for action; and joint commissioning of services from a range of providers supported by pooled budgets.
- *Inter-agency governance*: the cornerstone must be the creation of a strong integrated governing board or structure representing all key delivery partners who work to improve the outcomes of children and young people.

Why work with the voluntary and community sectors?

5. Children's trust working is based on a vision of improving outcomes for children and young people that is shared by many in the voluntary and community sectors. These sectors are not only major

providers of services to children, young people and families, they have significant expertise to offer in developing strategy and planning these services. They have a distinctive contribution to make that grows from particular characteristics common to many voluntary and community organisations, which include:

- strong community roots – meaning that they are in a good position to spot and address emerging needs and gaps in provision;
- the ability to be flexible and responsive to need;
- expertise in support for particular client groups, because of their ability to provide very specialised services;
- that they are trusted and valued by local communities and able to reach groups that public sector bodies may find it more difficult to reach;
- experience and expertise in providing preventative services;
- experience and expertise in encouraging the active participation of service users, including children and young people;
- skill and experience in collaborative and cooperative working; and
- the ability to draw on a range of funding sources that are not accessible to public sector bodies.

6. **Section 10 of the Children Act 2004** places a duty on local authorities and their

relevant partners – district councils, the police, the probation service, youth offending teams, strategic health authorities, primary care trusts, Connexions and the Learning and Skills Council for England – to co-operate to improve children and young people's well-being. It also specifies that co-operation should extend to other bodies that are involved with delivering services to children and young people – a description that clearly includes voluntary and community organisations. Statutory guidance on interagency co-operation will be published shortly. It will make clear the Government's expectation that voluntary and community organisations should be involved at every level of children's trust arrangements.

7. In addition, how well local partners – including voluntary and community organisations – work together to improve outcomes will be a key indicator of effective services under the new **integrated inspection framework for children's services**. The inspectorates have consulted on arrangements for the new integrated inspection framework for children's services, which will be published in summer 2005.

8. The Children's Workforce Strategy makes clear the Government's expectation that local authorities will engage voluntary and community sector partners in the preparation of strategies for developing the local workforce in support of Children and Young People's Plans. The strategy has been issued for consultation, and

comments are welcomed on its proposals for the steps children's trusts should take to ensure the effective engagement of voluntary and community organisations in workforce development, as well as suggestions for further steps and identification of any particular issues for these organisations. The consultation document and response form are available from www.everychildmatters.gov.uk. The closing date for the consultation is 22 July 2005.

Principles for engagement

9. Arrangements for the engagement of the voluntary and community sectors in children's trusts should ensure that:

- a **diverse** range of organisations, reflecting the voluntary and community sectors in the locality, has the opportunity to be involved in the children's trust arrangements;
- organisations contribute on a '**fit for purpose**' basis, so that the best use is made of their experience and expertise;
- those organisations that participate are clear about whom they are **accountable** to for their involvement, and share their participation and relevant information with the wider voluntary and community sectors; and
- the arrangements by which voluntary and community organisations come to participate in different aspects of the children's trust are **transparent** and widely communicated.

Diversity and inclusion

10. The voluntary and community sectors are made up of a wide range of organisations – from national charities staffed almost entirely by paid professionals to community groups run by a single volunteer. There are voluntary organisations that work with young people, ones that work with children and families and ones that work with all three groups. Some voluntary and community organisations have a faith base; others are rooted in interest groups or particular cultures.

11. Some organisations will see their activities as clearly aligned with the Every Child Matters: Change for Children agenda and will wish to be closely involved in all aspects of the children's trust. Some organisations will wish simply to have the opportunity to tender to provide services.

12. Voluntary and community organisations also fulfil different functions. Some concentrate exclusively on service delivery. Others, usually larger organisations, also undertake capacity building activity, such as training and development. Umbrella bodies focus on capacity building, and on representing the views of their members.

13. It is clear that no one organisation can be expected to 'represent' the voluntary and community sectors, any more than a single agency could represent the whole of the public sector. The children's trust will need to take account of the diversity of the sectors when it involves

voluntary and community organisations in its activities. This is likely to mean that local partners develop their children's trust arrangements in discussion with a wide range of partners from the voluntary and community sectors. Local Strategic Partnerships and local voluntary and community sector-owned representative bodies such as Councils for Voluntary Service or Councils for Voluntary Youth Services are two potential routes to reaching a diverse range of organisations. However, local partners will want to consider the best way to ensure the widest possible engagement: it may be necessary to strengthen existing arrangements, or to use more than one route, to ensure that the full diversity of the sectors is engaged. Compact Codes of Good Practice on working with black and minority ethnic voluntary and community organisations and working with community groups are available from www.thecompact.org.uk.

Key question for children's trust partners:

Does an appropriately diverse range of the locality's voluntary and community sector perspectives contribute to every level of children's trust arrangements: inter-agency governance, and integrated planning, processes and delivery?

Have steps to ensure the effective engagement of voluntary and community sector partners been built into the children's trust's activities from the earliest stage?

Fitness for purpose

14. The diversity of the voluntary and community sectors means that other local partners need to recognise that it will be appropriate for different organisations to engage with different aspects of the children's trust.

15. For example, some organisations may not have the capacity to be engaged in governance arrangements. Measures will be needed to guard against any apparent or real conflict of interest issues arising. On the one hand, there can be no question of any interested provider, including in-house providers, being party to commissioning decisions (as opposed to being party to earlier discussions) about broadly how and from whom services are to be purchased, or to the procurement process itself. On the other, it would be wrong to involve one group of providers (for example, in-house only, voluntary and community

sector only, private sector only) in the planning and commissioning processes, but not others - which would potentially give an unfair advantage to the involved group. In all cases, it must be apparent that representatives are sharing any knowledge gained with all interested parties in their constituency. The Department for Education and Skills and the Department of Health plan to develop support materials for local partners engaged in joint planning and commissioning as part of a strategy to build the market for children and young people's services. Organisations that focus on service delivery may be best placed to contribute to the development of multi-agency working and shared processes. It may also be appropriate for different organisations to be involved at different stages of the trust's development.

Key question for children's trust partners:

Are the most appropriate organisations engaged in each aspect of the children's trust: inter-agency strategy, and integrated planning, processes and delivery?

Accountability

16. Being clear about the accountability of local partners involved in the children's trust is crucial. Voluntary and statutory organisations are legally and financially accountable to different bodies, and this must be acknowledged when they are working in partnership. However, in this

context we are not referring to legal or financial accountabilities, but to the degree of responsibility that voluntary and community organisations involved in children's trusts can or should take on for acting as the voice of the voluntary and community sectors locally.

17. An organisation involved in children's trust arrangements should discuss and agree with other local partners and the wider voluntary and community sectors what their responsibility is to share their participation and relevant information with the wider sectors. Thought will need to be given to how to deal with the competitive environment of the children and young people's services market – where voluntary and community organisations may be competing against each other in contracting processes – in this context.

18. It is likely that there will already be arrangements at local level that would assist with this process, in the shape of more or less formal groupings of voluntary and community organisations, and children's trust partners will want to make the best use of these. They may include loose alliances around a particular issue or more formal networks that have membership structures and paid staff members. The latter could include Councils for Voluntary Service and Councils for Voluntary Youth Services. Formal umbrella bodies will have a mandate to speak and act on behalf of their members. However, at local level, these members may not

include larger, national organisations, which may prefer to act for themselves. Children's trust partners will need to take account of the different representative natures of the organisations and groupings that exist and to work together to ensure that they are used to enhance diversity and inclusion.

Key question for children's trust partners:

Are arrangements in place to ensure that voluntary and community organisations who participate in cooperation arrangements take responsibility for sharing their participation and relevant information with the wider voluntary and community sectors, whether or not they have a formal mandate?

Transparency

19. It is very important that the arrangements by which voluntary and community organisations come to participate in the different aspects of the children's trust are clearly and widely communicated. One of the concerns of voluntary and community organisations is that opportunities to participate in partnership arrangements are not always offered to organisations with which the lead body does not already have a pre-existing relationship.

20. Effective communication should ensure that other partners are clear about whom voluntary and community organisations are accountable to for their

participation in children's trusts. It should also mean that the wider voluntary and community sectors are clear about who is involved in what aspects of the children's trust, and with what mandate, and understand how they can feed their views in. It is an important part of building trust between partners.

Key question for children's trust partners:

What arrangements are in place to ensure that all local partners are clear about the processes through which voluntary and community organisations can get involved in the children's trust?

How are these processes supported and developed by the children's trust?

Building voluntary and community organisations' capacity to be involved

21. A significant barrier to voluntary and community organisations' participation in local partnership arrangements can be their lack of capacity to devote resources to activities beyond the direct delivery of services to children, young people and families.

22. Local authorities will be concerned to develop a market for children and young people's services that includes a diversity of providers from the public, private, voluntary and community sectors and allows these providers to participate on an equal footing with each other. In working with voluntary and community sector partners to ensure their effective engagement in the children's trust, a local

authority will want to consider what steps it can take to enhance their ability to participate. For example, smaller organisations may need backfill funding in order to release staff to attend meetings, and meeting times should be accessible for volunteers. Many local authorities already provide funding for umbrella bodies, whose roles include representing their members in local partnership arrangements.

23. Local authorities will also want to contribute to building the capacity of voluntary and community organisations in the locality as part of the children's trust's strategy for shaping and developing the market for children and young people's services. Capacity building activity could include financial investment (the Department for Education and Skills will make clear in the conditions of children's services grants that these resources can be used to build capacity and infrastructure in the voluntary and community sectors in pursuit of the objectives of the grant) or support in kind, such as access to workforce development opportunities.

24. For example, in one children's trust Pathfinder, where the Children's Fund is being integrated into the children's trust budget under the local authority from April 2005, the management fee previously paid to the voluntary sector accountable body will be redirected into investment in voluntary and community sector capacity building through a local infrastructure body.

25. Voluntary and community organisations will want to consider what they themselves can do to grow capacity. This could include larger organisations working in partnership with, or mentoring, smaller ones to enable them to participate in contract arrangements. It could also mean larger organisations participating in and supporting local network bodies.

Key question for children's trust partners:

What more can the children's trust do to build the capacity of voluntary and community organisations to participate in children's trust arrangements?

Useful documents

Compact on Relations between Government and the Voluntary and Community Sectors in England (Home Office, 1998)
www.thecompact.org.uk

Funding and Procurement Compact Code of Good Practice (Home Office, 2005)
www.thecompact.org.uk or
<http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/comrace/active/compact/publications.html>

Working with voluntary and community organisations to deliver change for children and young people (DfES, 2004)
www.everychildmatters.gov.uk

Children Act 2004
www.hmso.gov.uk/acts/acts2004/20040031.htm

Consultation documents on new arrangements for the inspection of services for children and young people are available on
www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications

Useful terms

Infrastructure bodies

Infrastructure bodies exist to support and develop, coordinate, represent and promote service delivery organisations, thus enabling them to deliver their missions more effectively.

Voluntary and community sectors

As used in this guidance, the phrase 'voluntary and community sectors' is intended to be wider in scope than general charities or the voluntary sector, inclusive of organisations reflecting the characteristics of social enterprise, but narrower in scope than non-profit, the third sector or social economy.

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