Voluntary and Community Sector Infrastructure Support

Consultation Feedback

June 2017

Contents

a) Introduction

During June 2017 the Council undertook stakeholder consultation to review the Voluntary Community Sector (VCS) infrastructure support that it invests in, and what this infrastructure support should look like in the future.

The consultation built on the findings from VCS 2020, a review undertaken by NCVS and SkillsBridge on behalf of the Council in 2015 which looked at what infrastructure support local VCS organisations were using, and what they thought they would need in the future. The consultation also built on the recent review of the Council's Newcastle Fund.

The scope included:

- A service currently provided by Newcastle Council for Voluntary Service (NCVS), offering organisational support, networking and representation to a range of voluntary and community sector organisations across the city, including registered charities, community groups, social enterprises, foundations and CIC's;
- A service currently provided by Volunteering Matters and delivered from the Newcastle Volunteer Centre, which supports individuals to find volunteering opportunities, and organisations to find volunteers.

Two VCS stakeholder events were held, 7th and 8th June 2017, and people were given the opportunity to send in their views via Let's Talk Newcastle, or email between the 7th June 2017, and the 23rd June 2017.

A total of 34 people took part, representing 25 organisations. Some individuals and organisations attended more than one workshop, and some also submitted written responses as well as attending the workshops. The breakdown is below:

25 organisations

Action Foundation, Age UK, Alzheimer's Society, Clean Slate, Crossings Community Group, Friends Action, Ground Work, Healthworks Newcastle, Its Life Stile, Leonard Cheshire, NAPI, NCC, NCVS, Newcastle Carers, Quality of Life Partnership, Rape Crisis Tyneside and Northumberland, Riverside Community Health Partnership, Scotswood Natural Community Garden, Sported, St Vincent De Paul, Success4all, Tyneside Outdoors, Volunteering Matters, Volsag, YHN

7th June Workshop
8 Attendees
6 Organisations

8th June Workshop
15 Attendees
11 Organisations

Email and Let's Talk
11 Responses
10 Organisations

b) Responses

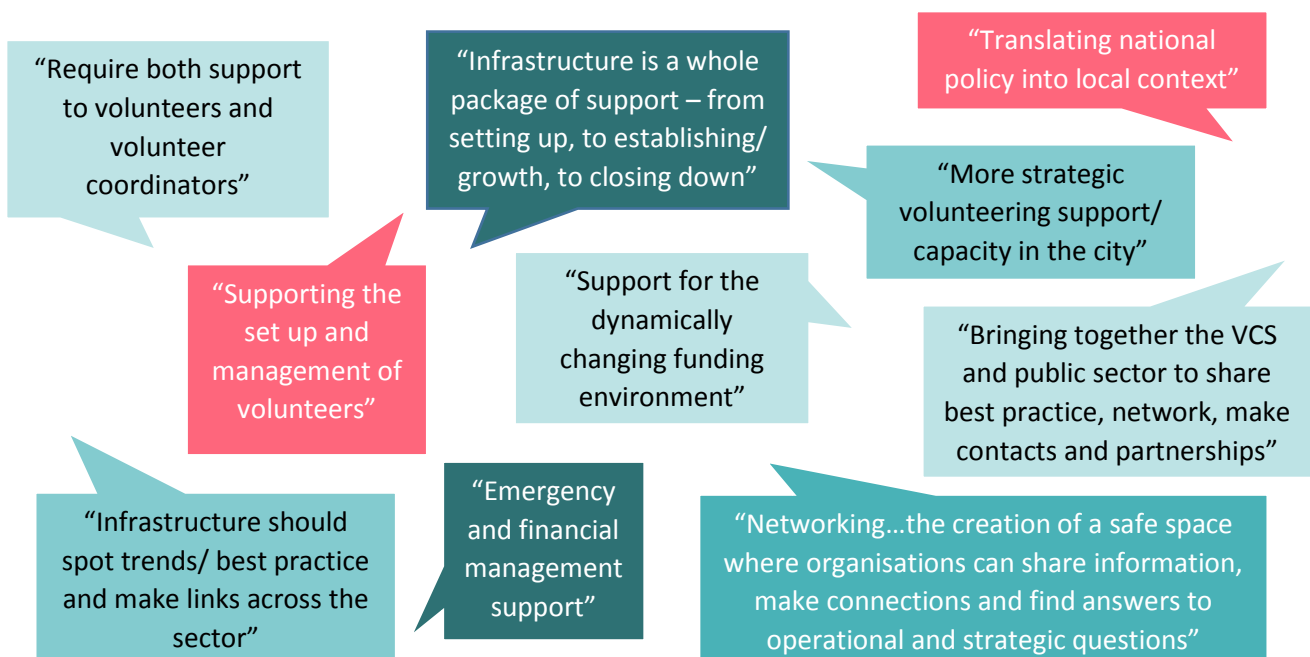The consultation centred around 5 main questions:

1. Thinking about the future, which service areas do you think should remain a priority, and what areas do you think are not currently identified?
2. What are the top 3 things you want to see from the service?
3. How do you want to access the support?
4. How should our infrastructure contract link with other support within the sector?
5. Would you target the infrastructure contract? E.g. to proactively target smaller groups, or focus on themes such as children and young people?

The sections below provide a summary of the responses received during both workshops, and via email and Let's Talk responses. This document does not attempt to draw conclusions from the feedback received, rather it aims to summarise the points raised for further consideration.

---

1. Thinking about the future, which service areas do you think should remain a priority, and what areas do you think are not currently identified?

Participants were asked about what elements of the current service are likely to be important to them in the future, and what services should be added so that the service can remain fit for purpose in the future.

People cited a whole range of infrastructure support services as being a priority to them. Some of the areas mentioned were:

"Require both support to volunteers and volunteer coordinators"

"Infrastructure is a whole package of support – from setting up, to establishing/ growth, to closing down"

"Translating national policy into local context"

"More strategic volunteering support/ capacity in the city"

"Supporting the set up and management of volunteers"

"Support for the dynamically changing funding environment"

"Bringing together the VCS and public sector to share best practice, network, make contacts and partnerships"

"Infrastructure should spot trends/ best practice and make links across the sector"

"Emergency and financial management support"

"Networking…the creation of a safe space where organisations can share information, make connections and find answers to operational and strategic questions"

Overall, the priorities received can be grouped as either existing support services, or areas for development.

Existing support services

- Professional support: financial advice, organisational set up and close down
- Representation and networking for the local sector: pulling together the sector for working opportunities, partnerships, and providing a voice
- Policy advice: translating national policy into local context
- Volunteer support: training in recruiting and retaining volunteers, support in set-up and management of volunteers, reducing the barriers to volunteering e.g. risk assessments and time constraints, advertising volunteer opportunities, recruiting volunteers
- Research and best practice: gathering and sharing of research and relevant information, including through the provision of newsletters and networking events

Areas for development

- New funding models: support for medium sized organisations around new funding opportunities and funding models
- Review of existing forums/ networking arrangements: to ensure they are still fit for purpose
- Evidencing impact: more training on how to evidence impact, particularly evaluation and monitoring
- Representation: better two way communication between the VCS and public sector
- Support to Trustees: particularly supporting trustees to change and adapt to new ways of working
- Volunteering: more operational capacity re volunteering in the city, including one to one mentoring and coordination capacity. Development of strategic volunteering, seeking out opportunities to join up volunteering programmes in the city and region

---

2. What are the top 3 things you want to see from the service?

Of the areas noted within question 1, respondents were then asked to set out their top 3 priorities for the future service.

These priorities could include services that are currently delivered, and/or services which are not currently being provided within the existing contracts.

The overall results are displayed in the chart overleaf.

Top 3 Priorities from Infrastructure Support
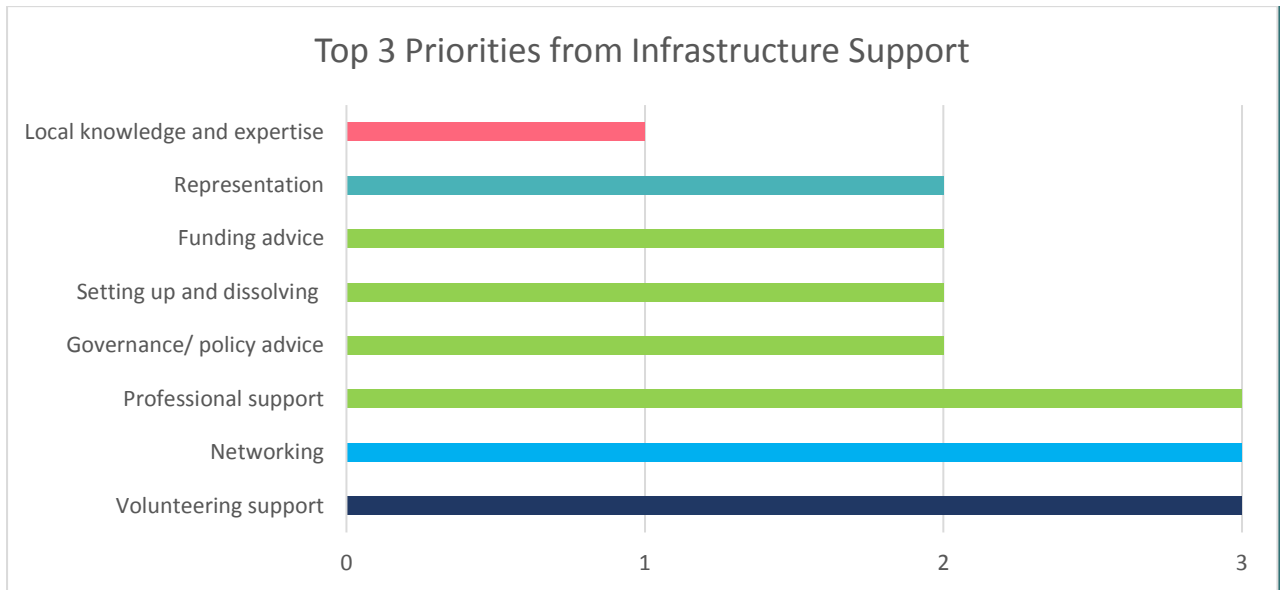
The chart shows the priorities that people put forward against the number of people that cited each as a top 3 priority. This chart represents the views of 18 people as not all respondents felt able to prioritise 3 areas.
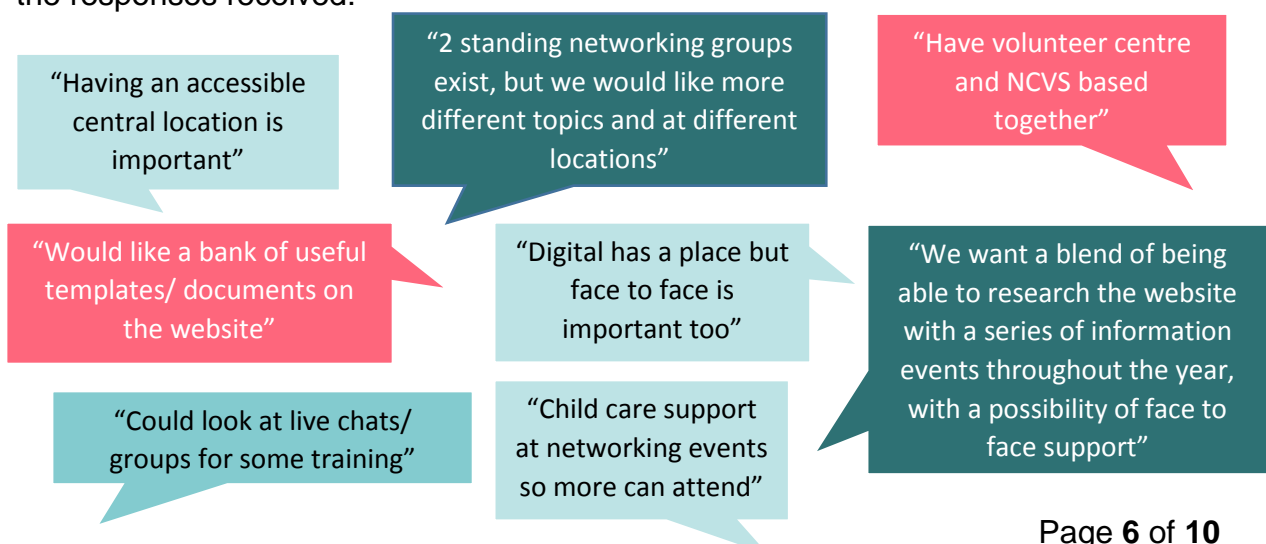
A number of the areas put forward could be classed as 'professional support'. These have been grouped together and highlighted in green on the chart above.

The 3 most common priorities for the service were therefore:

- Professional support, including: governance and policy advice, setting up and dissolving an organisation, and funding advice
- Networking
- Volunteering support

---

3. How do you want to access the support?

Participants were asked how they wanted to access the support in future, this included both physical access and virtual access considerations. Below are some of the responses received:

"Having an accessible central location is important"

"2 standing networking groups exist, but we would like more different topics and at different locations"

"Have volunteer centre and NCVS based together"

"Would like a bank of useful templates/ documents on the website"

"Digital has a place but face to face is important too"

"We want a blend of being able to research the website with a series of information events throughout the year, with a possibility of face to face support"

"Could look at live chats/ groups for some training"

"Child care support at networking events so more can attend"

The common themes emerging from the responses received came under two broad themes:

- **Digital**
  Approximately half of respondents said that they found the provision of digital information useful. These respondents welcomed being able to find factsheets and information online whether because they want to self-serve, or because they are accessing outside of traditional office hours. However, it was clear that digital should be seen as part of the overall package of support, and that human contact was just as important
- **Location**
  Approximately a third of respondents said that an accessible location was important to enable people to come into the office – this included being located near child care facilities and public transport.
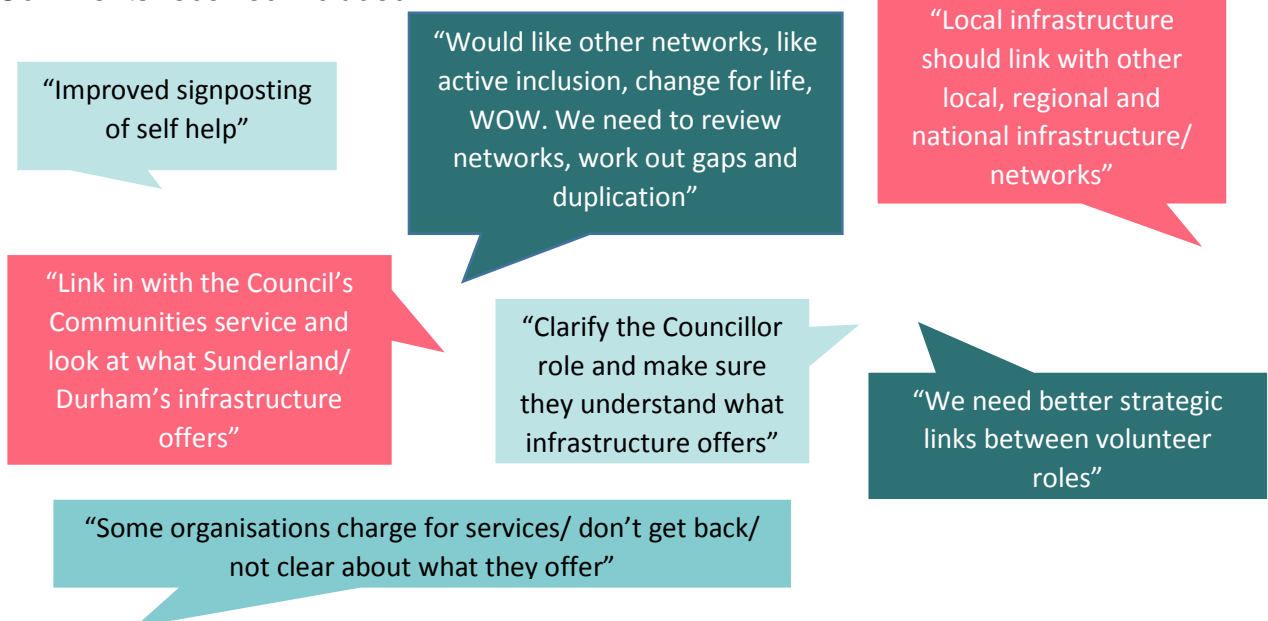 The majority of these respondents said that it was important for volunteering and infrastructure support to be located close together so that they didn't have to travel between sites to seek support.
  Almost a third of respondents told us that a central office location was important, while a smaller subset of these respondents said that they would also like to see more networking taking place at different locations across the city to enable more people from smaller groups to attend

4. How should our infrastructure contract link with other support within the sector?

Participants were then asked how infrastructure support should link with other relevant support services available within, and outside of, the sector.

Comments received included:

"Improved signposting of self help"

"Would like other networks, like active inclusion, change for life, WOW. We need to review networks, work out gaps and duplication"

"Local infrastructure should link with other local, regional and national infrastructure/ networks"

"Link in with the Council's Communities service and look at what Sunderland/ Durham's infrastructure offers"

"Clarify the Councillor role and make sure they understand what infrastructure offers"

"We need better strategic links between volunteer roles"

"Some organisations charge for services/ don't get back/ not clear about what they offer"
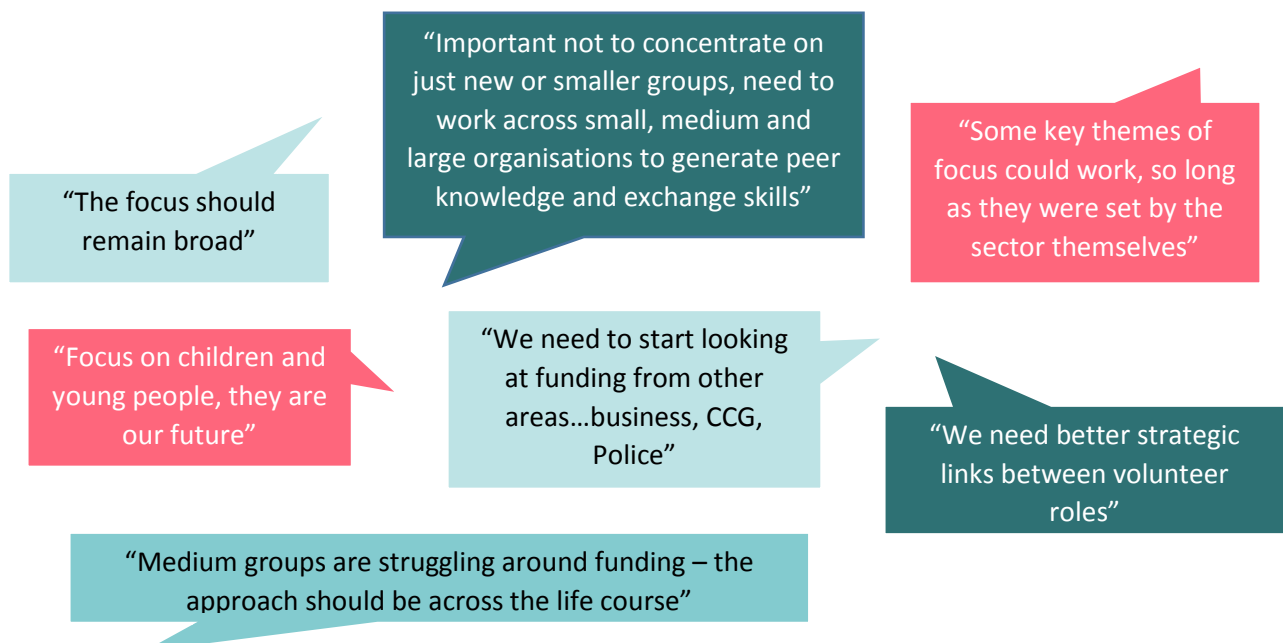
The majority of the comments received advocated for effective signposting between services and reducing duplication/ identifying gaps.

It was clear from the responses that people and organisations valued a local offer which had knowledge and expertise rooted within the community.

All respondents who answered this question welcomed greater visibility of where to go to access the different types of help and support they needed, and half said that they would welcome greater collaboration between services, whether between VCS infrastructure services, or between the public/ private sector and VCS infrastructure.

5. Would you target the infrastructure contract? E.g. to proactively target smaller groups, or focus on themes such as children and young people?

Participants were asked whether the service should be targeted e.g. towards particular themes of interest, or to organisations of certain sizes in order to use the resource most effectively.

"Important not to concentrate on just new or smaller groups, need to work across small, medium and large organisations to generate peer knowledge and exchange skills"

"Some key themes of focus could work, so long as they were set by the sector themselves"

"The focus should remain broad"

"Focus on children and young people, they are our future"

"We need to start looking at funding from other areas…business, CCG, Police"

"We need better strategic links between volunteer roles"

"Medium groups are struggling around funding – the approach should be across the life course"

There were a range of different views expressed for and against targeting of the infrastructure support services. However, the majority favoured keeping the remit broad to enable sharing of best practice, skills, knowledge and resources, while perhaps focussing on some key themes set by the sector. Examples included: funding for middle sized organisations, children and young people, or getting older people into volunteering.

6. Additional comments

Space was provided for participants to provide additional comments that they didn't feel had been covered within the consultation questions.

Below is a summary of the comments received:

"Voluntary sector in the city is really diverse"

"More information about boards that infrastructure support sits on"

"I find the volunteer centre invaluable"

"We welcome the Council investment in infrastructure support…it is an invest to save"

"Local knowledge is essential"

"What are the links with the information hubs?"

"The knowledge of the sector that these organisations have is key to the success of this provision"

"Volunteer centre is specialised and important to the city"

"Volunteer centre and other VCS offer added value by sharing resources"

"I would be interested to know how future commissioning would support the role of my organisation to provide support for volunteers doing a specialist role"

"Good quality, reliable services provided through VCS infrastructure are more needed than ever"

"This is an invaluable support in these trying times of reduced funding and increased reliance on the voluntary sector to take over services"

"Volunteering key to general health"

"NCVS provides wrap around advice considering all options available"

"Often money is wasted [through procurement]…should invest locally"

"It would be better use of time and resources to work with current provider to make necessary changes"

Many comprehensive responses were received, and valuable verbal input was offered as part of the consultation workshops, all of this feedback is greatly appreciated. It is clear from this feedback that organisations of all sizes and disciplines really value the provision of infrastructure support.

c) Next Steps

The responses received are now being used to inform what the future service should look like. By the end of the summer we will publish our proposed future service model for consultation on Let's Talk. Those who have taken part in the consultation to date will be notified of this directly.

d) Contacts

For additional information, please email Laura Choake, Commissioning Programme Manager at laura.choake@newcastle.gov.uk