


STRONG INDEPENDENT ROOTS

Supporting local voluntary action



Voluntary action and
public services

A living document
April 2010

This publication is a living document. It sets out NAVCA's current thinking about the future of local third sector representation, development and support. We would welcome the views of our members and stakeholders.

If you would like to comment on what you have read, please contact Neil Cleeveley, NAVCA's Director of Policy and Communications.

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Local support and development organisations

NAVCA is a membership body for local support and development organisations. Its members exist to champion and strengthen local charities, voluntary organisations and community groups. They:

- 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.



Fairer procurement

To procure the best services to meet local need, service users must be involved in all stages of commissioning. Local voluntary groups and charities have an essential role in reaching communities. They are uniquely placed to identify new and emerging needs for services and find innovative solutions to meet these needs. For the local third sector to fulfil its potential in designing and delivering high quality public services rooted in the local community, commissioners should remove barriers, harness the strengths and develop the potential of the local third sector. The aim should be for public services that fully address local need, which in the long run saves money.

- ***We call upon the Government to require public bodies to embed social objectives in procurement processes that sustain and strengthen good quality local voluntary services.***
- ***NAVCA will assist local public bodies to develop commissioning frameworks that value the unique contribution local voluntary organisations make to local service provision.***

Find out more about NAVCA's vision for the local third sector at www.navca.org.uk/publications/roots/





Voluntary action supporting efficient and effective public services

1. Local charities and community groups play an essential part in public service development, design and delivery. Many were set up to fill a gap in provision or because public or private sector providers failed to meet the specific needs of some people or communities; as a result they have a strong track record in user-focused provision. They contribute much to service delivery, including the knowledge, expertise and capacity to build users' trust, to meet complex personal needs and tackle difficult social issues. They offer flexible and joined-up services built upon the experience and independence that enables them to innovate.

Local voluntary and community action can make a considerable contribution to the commissioning of public services:

- Make sure service users are well-informed about service developments and kept aware of any changes that affect them.
- Campaign for new and improved services.
- Offer a voice to the most disadvantaged citizens and communities.
- Advise public service commissioners on matters of greatest concern to service users.
- Contribute to innovation and improvement across the public services by developing and promoting new forms of service delivery.
- Deliver high quality services to communities of place, communities of interest and communities of identity.

Organisations with no existing links with a community can build local social capital in a variety of ways:

- Put in place governance arrangements that involve local people.
- Take a community development approach to service delivery and development.
- Build relationships with local third sector organisations in order to work collaboratively.
- Explore partnership arrangements with local organisations, including sub-contracting.

Social objectives

2. Public services should be delivered by organisations that have the appropriate expertise, knowledge, skills and capacity. However, public services are central to the creation of a decent society and cannot be treated as mere business transactions; consequently the providers of public services need to go further – they need to be committed to building stronger communities, equality and social justice.
3. In recent years we have seen local services provided by Citizens Advice Bureaux, Home-Start organisations and Women’s Aid groups undermined by the use of competitive tendering processes. There is a growing trend for them to be replaced by organisations that have no roots in the local community, weakening social capital whereas locally owned services tend to strengthen it. We believe this represents a failure both of local political leadership and of public policy.
4. There is already a considerable amount of work being undertaken to improve the measurement of social objectives. One approach is through the assessment of the social return on investment (SROI), which seeks to apply a wider and longer-term value-for-money test instead of the usual crude market-based assessment. This work is already well developed and NAVCA believes that public bodies should be adopting this approach to secure the best services for the communities they serve. Social return on investment:

“translates both short- and long-term social and environmental outcomes into tangible monetary values, helping organisations and investors to see a fuller picture of the benefits that flow from their investment of time, money and other resources.”¹

5. SROI was developed from social accounting and cost benefit analysis, and has a lot in common with other outcomes approaches. However, SROI is distinct from other approaches in that it places a monetary value on outcomes, so that they can be added up and compared with the investment made. This results in a ratio of total benefits (a sum of all the outcomes) to total investments. The Cabinet Office commissioned the SROI Network to produce a guide to using social return on investment, which offers advice on how to use this approach.²

1 *A Better Return*, new economics foundation, London 2009. p9. See www.idea.gov.uk/idk/aio/9410371. For more information see also www.proveandimprove.org/new/tools/sroi.php

2 See www.sroi-uk.org/content/view/5/65/

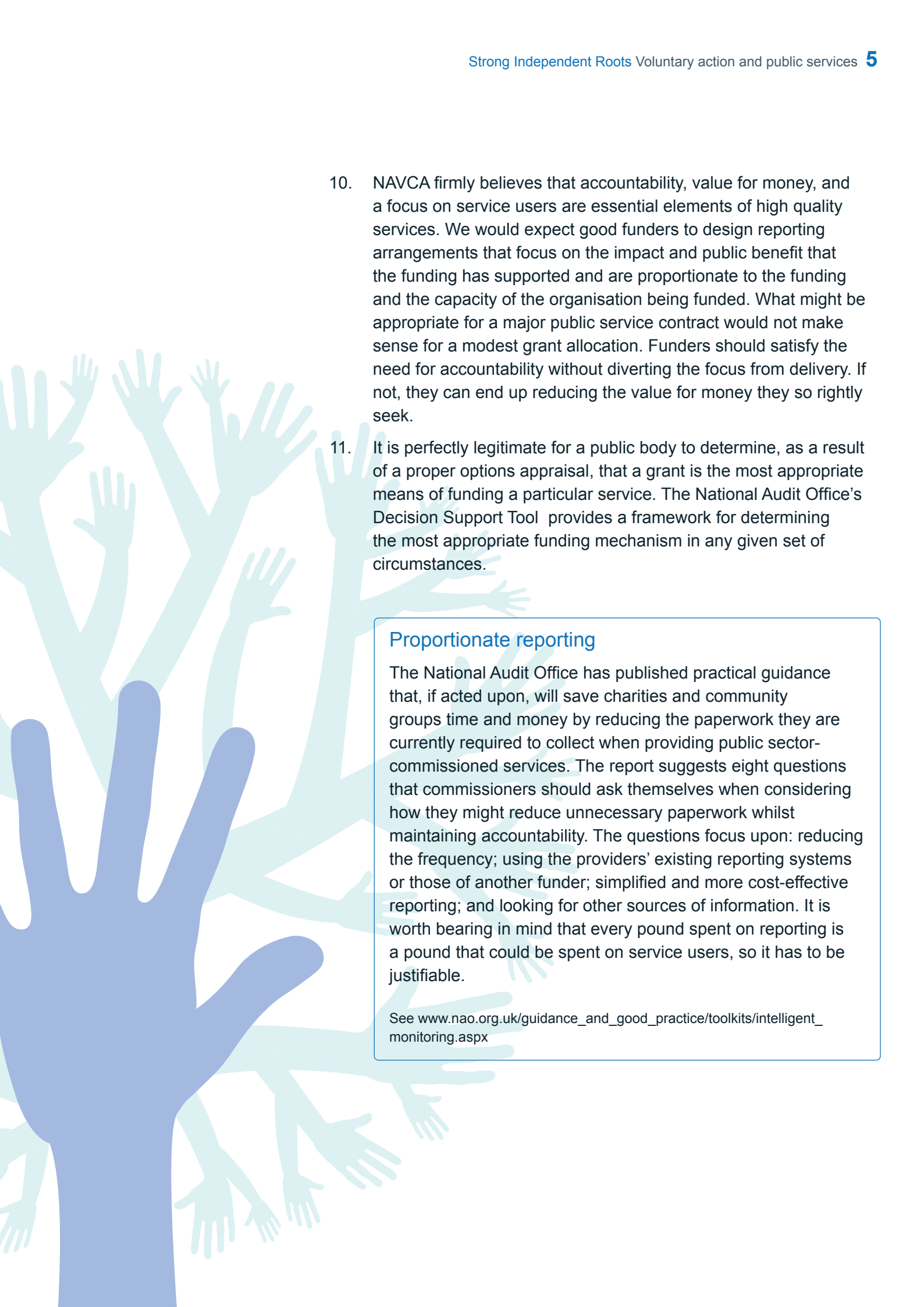
Intelligent commissioning:

- understands local provider base;
- encourages collaboration;
- builds capacity; supports civil renewal – social capital & cohesion;
- looks for efficiency gains not saving; considers service design and delivery;
- takes a strategic view;
- includes grants as part of the mix.

Intelligent commissioning

6. Commissioning is the means by which public bodies can ensure that the right services are in place to produce the best outcomes for the people who use those services. If it is to be successful, commissioning should involve the people who use services at all stages in the process. Local charities and community groups have an essential role in reaching communities of place, identity and interest – particularly those from whom commissioners seldom hear – and supporting their engagement in commissioning. They are uniquely placed to identify new and emerging needs for services and to find solutions to meet these needs. It is, therefore, essential that commissioners work with local charities and community groups to ensure the involvement of communities and people who use services in all parts of the commissioning process.
7. It is not enough for commissioners to seek the views of those with whom they are in regular contact; they need to hear from all sections of the user community. They need to remove any barriers that may prevent particular groups or communities from shaping services; in doing so commissioners need to develop arrangements that harness the potential of local charities and community groups to engage those whose voices are seldom heard in the design and delivery of services. A good starting point would be to adhere to the eight principles of good commissioning³ as the basis of local good practice.
8. Commissioners ought to have a good knowledge of the local charities and community groups operating in their service area. They need to consider how the commissioning process can contribute to building stronger communities and how it can encourage collaboration between local organisations for the benefit of service users and the whole community. They should also consider all available options for sourcing services and use methods that are appropriate, proportionate and encourage local organisations to engage in all aspects of the commissioning process.
9. Monitoring procedures should be streamlined and simplified without losing proper accountability for service delivery. The information that public agencies require should be proportionate to the size of contracts and organisations. The emphasis should be on the quality of experience for service users.

³ national programme for third sector commissioning – see www.idea.gov.uk/idk/aio/6617745

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10. NAVCA firmly believes that accountability, value for money, and a focus on service users are essential elements of high quality services. We would expect good funders to design reporting arrangements that focus on the impact and public benefit that the funding has supported and are proportionate to the funding and the capacity of the organisation being funded. What might be appropriate for a major public service contract would not make sense for a modest grant allocation. Funders should satisfy the need for accountability without diverting the focus from delivery. If not, they can end up reducing the value for money they so rightly seek.
 11. It is perfectly legitimate for a public body to determine, as a result of a proper options appraisal, that a grant is the most appropriate means of funding a particular service. The National Audit Office's Decision Support Tool provides a framework for determining the most appropriate funding mechanism in any given set of circumstances.

Proportionate reporting

The National Audit Office has published practical guidance that, if acted upon, will save charities and community groups time and money by reducing the paperwork they are currently required to collect when providing public sector-commissioned services. The report suggests eight questions that commissioners should ask themselves when considering how they might reduce unnecessary paperwork whilst maintaining accountability. The questions focus upon: reducing the frequency; using the providers' existing reporting systems or those of another funder; simplified and more cost-effective reporting; and looking for other sources of information. It is worth bearing in mind that every pound spent on reporting is a pound that could be spent on service users, so it has to be justifiable.

See www.nao.org.uk/guidance_and_good_practice/toolkits/intelligent_monitoring.aspx

Personalisation ... requires that services are designed and delivered from the starting point of an individual's needs and wishes, rather than from the perspective of the commissioner or provider.

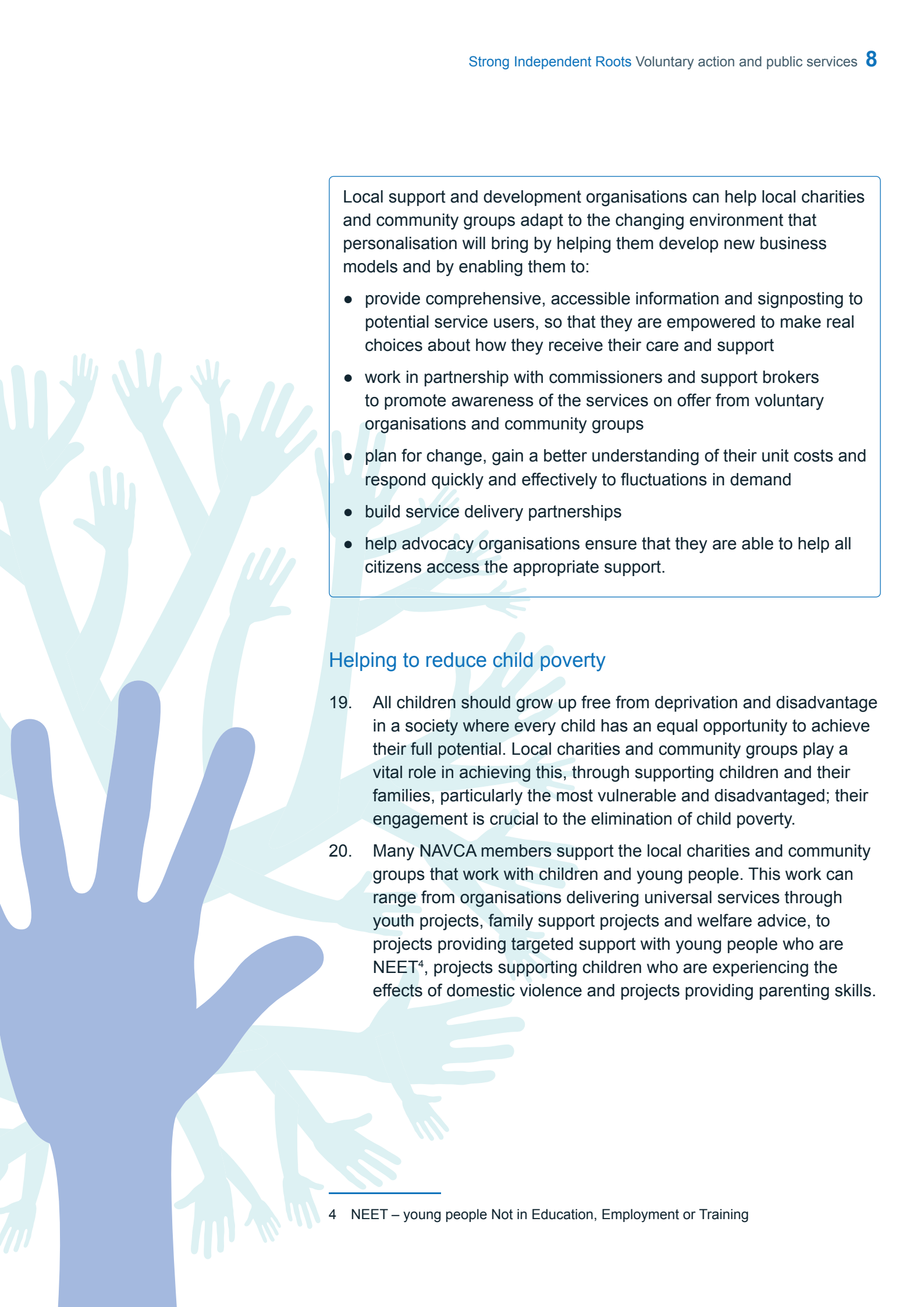
Personalisation – transforming services and communities

12. We strongly support the principle of public services that are tailored to the needs of the individual citizens who use them. Personalisation does precisely this because it requires that services are designed and delivered from the starting point of an individual's needs and wishes, rather than from the perspective of the commissioner or provider.
13. There are a number of factors currently driving the move to personalised services:
 - A government commitment to deliver public services of the highest possible quality.
 - A policy imperative that requires greater citizen empowerment.
 - The failure of many existing services to meet citizens' expectations and aspirations.
 - The demographic 'time bomb' of an ageing population and the projected deficit between citizens' needs for services and the state's capacity to deliver, both financially and operationally. The pressures are particularly acute in health and social care services. A philosophy that challenges the traditional assumptions embedded in the welfare state.
14. The concept of offering the users of public services greater influence over the nature of the service they receive has the potential to transform public services. It represents a fundamental shift in the relationship between citizens, communities and the state, challenging the notion that the provider or commissioner knows best. It therefore has important implications for the local charities and community groups.
15. Personalisation has the potential to open up new opportunities for smaller, local voluntary organisations and community groups. Commissioners are responsible for ensuring that service users have a wider range of options to meet their needs. Services delivered by local voluntary organisations are responsive, led by service users themselves, embedded in the local community and tailored to the needs of individuals because they tend to focus on the person not the service. It is therefore likely that personal budget holders and direct payment users will want to use the resources available to them to purchase services from small, local voluntary organisations and community groups. Commissioners

NAVCA agrees with those who advocate the strengthening of communities and social networks so that people who need services are able to lead full lives as citizens, rather than becoming disempowered and disconnected from communities by their dependence on service systems.

will therefore need to ensure that their commissioning processes and market development strategies do not drive out smaller, local community groups.

16. Whilst we support the ambition for services that reflect people's individual needs and circumstances, we reject the notion that service users can be treated simply as consumers. We believe that the application of market principles and a consumerist model of public services would lead to a more personalised version of the existing public service model that would respond well to empowered consumers – generally those with higher incomes and educated to degree level – but would do very little for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged.
17. We would prefer an approach that fully involves service users as citizens with rights and where those who wish it get the support of a community advocate to support them to co-design services alongside professionals. This requires public services to be more participative so that people are able to devise their own, bottom-up solutions. The role of support brokers is key to this and we would envisage a significant role for local voluntary organisations in delivering support brokerage and advocacy services.
18. We believe that transforming service systems and processes is not enough. NAVCA agrees with those who advocate the strengthening of communities and social networks so that people who need services are able to lead full lives as citizens, rather than becoming disempowered and disconnected from communities by their dependence on service systems. We believe there is an inextricable link between public services, citizen equality, empowerment and strengthening communities.



Local support and development organisations can help local charities and community groups adapt to the changing environment that personalisation will bring by helping them develop new business models and by enabling them to:

- provide comprehensive, accessible information and signposting to potential service users, so that they are empowered to make real choices about how they receive their care and support
- work in partnership with commissioners and support brokers to promote awareness of the services on offer from voluntary organisations and community groups
- plan for change, gain a better understanding of their unit costs and respond quickly and effectively to fluctuations in demand
- build service delivery partnerships
- help advocacy organisations ensure that they are able to help all citizens access the appropriate support.

Helping to reduce child poverty

19. All children should grow up free from deprivation and disadvantage in a society where every child has an equal opportunity to achieve their full potential. Local charities and community groups play a vital role in achieving this, through supporting children and their families, particularly the most vulnerable and disadvantaged; their engagement is crucial to the elimination of child poverty.
20. Many NAVCA members support the local charities and community groups that work with children and young people. This work can range from organisations delivering universal services through youth projects, family support projects and welfare advice, to projects providing targeted support with young people who are NEET⁴, projects supporting children who are experiencing the effects of domestic violence and projects providing parenting skills.

4 NEET – young people Not in Education, Employment or Training

NAVCA's 2007 report *Frontline Hopscotch** provided evidence to confirm anecdotal information that a combination of the Every Child Matters framework, budgetary pressures on local authorities and the advent of local area agreements had created significant obstacles for organisations involved in children's services. The report cited a growing trend amongst commissioners of children's services to seek in-house solutions as a means of reducing risk. We believe that there is a danger that this will lead to an irreversible loss of preventative services for children and young people. Public commissioning arrangements at all levels must create a level playing field for third sector organisations that intervene early to prevent young people and their families from entering the cycle of deprivation that can ruin young lives and costs the state dearly.

* See www.navca.org.uk/publications/hopscotch/Home.htm

21. Real and lasting improvements in child poverty can only be achieved through local activity in communities and neighbourhoods. Public bodies need to engage directly with the grassroots organisations that are supporting children and families day in, day out to ensure that strategy translates into practical action. Partnerships between local organisations providing services and support to children and families need to be developed and strengthened so that they can effectively mobilise the resources of partners to improve children's life chances.

Health and social care

22. Building the capacity of local voluntary organisations and community groups to engage in the planning, commissioning and delivery of health and social care services is a priority for NAVCA. As a Department of Health strategic partner, NAVCA will aim to ensure that local voluntary organisations and community groups have a stronger voice at a local and national level and that they are able to play their part in improving the health and well-being of their local communities.
23. The personalisation of services and the emphasis on prevention in the Social Care Green Paper, *Shaping the Future of Care Together*, envisage a key role for local voluntary organisations and community groups. However, without proper support and capacity building from local support and development organisations, this potential could be lost. High Quality Care for All, the NHS Next Stage Review, states that every primary care trust will commission comprehensive well-being and prevention services in partnership with local authorities, with the services offered personalised to meet the specific needs of their local populations. It will be important to ensure that short-term pressure on public spending does not undermine this policy commitment.
24. Our members support many local advocacy organisations, user-led and self-help groups. They work to ensure equally good health outcomes for those patients who are least able to make informed choices, or those who do not have the resources to travel for their elective care. We are concerned that the promotion of patient choice could have unintended negative consequences, by exacerbating existing health inequalities.

Local third sector organisations are well placed to deliver services and support that can help reduce crime and bring valuable local knowledge, expertise, specialist skills and a fresh approach to working with offenders.

25. NAVCA would like to see a much sharper focus on prevention and an associated transfer of care into local community settings, with more integrated services that are convenient for patients and their families. However, we feel that GPs need to work in partnership with PCTs to shape how resources are invested, with PCTs providing relevant data and support.
26. It is important that commissioners of primary care do not simply focus on clinical models, but on the wider social determinants of ill health. We believe it is particularly important that primary care commissioning creates new opportunities for local community organisations that focus on tackling the wider determinants of health, such as poverty and social isolation.

Supporting ex-offenders

27. The local third sector provides vital services for offenders, ex-offenders and their families. Local voluntary organisations and community groups are well placed to deliver services and support that can help reduce crime and bring valuable local knowledge, expertise, specialist skills and a fresh approach to working with offenders. This work benefits the offender, their family and communities and reduces the cost to the public purse associated with crime.
28. There has been a growing recognition within the Prison and Probation Services of the importance of the third sector and the range of services they can provide for offenders, ex-offenders and their families. Many voluntary organisations and community groups are now at the forefront of helping to address the issues that may lead offenders to re-offend and offering services to support offenders in custody through to their re-settlement in the wider community.
29. Voluntary organisations and community groups are involved in a wide range of services across most areas of public policy. However, NAVCA takes the view that charities should not run prisons. Indeed, we would go further and say that the responsibility and accountability for the administration of criminal justice must reside with the state and should not be sub-contracted under any circumstances. This does not mean that the third sector cannot offer a wide range of support services to prisoners, simply that it should not run prisons.

Sport

30. Sport can play an important part in reducing crime, improving health and economic wellbeing and fostering cohesion. It can also help create active cohesive and empowered communities, as well as being enjoyable and rewarding in its own right. Sport's capacity to engage those whose voices are seldom heard is increasingly being seen by NAVCA's members as a means of tackling social exclusion. Many local voluntary organisations and community groups that are not exclusively sports groups use sport as a tool to engage people.
31. Community sports clubs are often seen as outside the mainstream third sector and can find it difficult to benefit from the wide range of support and advice NAVCA and its members offer. NAVCA is committed to working with community sports clubs and organisations to help them access services from local support and development organisations in order to improve their effectiveness and reach.

Sustainable development

32. Climate change will disproportionately affect disadvantaged communities; for example, as fuel costs rise, the poor and vulnerable pay an even larger proportion of their incomes in energy bills. Voluntary organisations and community groups are uniquely placed to reach the most disadvantaged and to empower them to play their part in creating sustainable communities.
33. Voluntary organisations and community groups also have a central role in promoting sustainable development as the issues that concern the local third sector such as health, housing, transport, waste, food production and equality are issues that are linked with environmental conditions. In particular, voluntary organisations and community groups can help the poor and vulnerable access energy efficiency programmes that will reduce their costs and cut emissions.
34. Local support and development organisations have a key role to play in supporting and leading local voluntary organisations and community groups in promoting their own sustainable development plans and ensuring that their activity is environmentally sustainable.

NAVCA is an active member of the TSNLA and ensures that the interests and needs of local support and development organisations and their members are understood and prioritised.

Learning and skills

35. Third sector learning and skills providers face challenges and barriers within the commissioning and contracting environment. A new national organisation, the Third Sector National Learning Alliance (TSNLA), will act as the co-ordinated voice on learning and skills issues. NAVCA is an active member of the TSNLA and ensures that the interests and needs of local support and development organisations and their members are understood and prioritised. We will do this by developing new mechanisms for NAVCA members to feed in the views of local learning providers.
36. The restructuring of learning and skills provision can leave third sector interests vulnerable as new structures tend to have a 'default setting' that does not include the sector. There have been genuine steps forward through the LSC Third Sector National Advisory Group e.g. in developing data systems that capture sector data, demonstrate the effectiveness of sector providers, ensure more access to capital funding and improve online tendering processes.
37. The transfer of significant funding streams to be more locally focussed will mean that it is essential for local third sector representation to be strong in local 14-19 partnerships. There are also structural changes to come as a result of the Sub National Review – the advent of regional Work and Skills Boards to replace Regional Skills Partnerships.
38. The Government's consultation on adult informal learning attracted the highest number of responses of any similar consultation – an indication of just how important this issue is. The subsequent White Paper sets out how the Government intends to support vibrant and diverse opportunities for adult learning. In the White Paper NAVCA was asked to "*spearhead a new forum for third sector organisations with an interest in informal adult learning to encourage joint working, build new partnerships and develop new delivery models to widen participation and reach out to new learners*". NAVCA leads this new forum and will develop its relationship with government to ensure that the voice of local infrastructure and the organisations they support is heard. We will also use the opportunity to promote the sector's roles within adult informal learning and related funding programmes.

The value of early intervention

39. Third sector services are heavily concentrated on early intervention and prevention; supporting people before a problem becomes a crisis. The primary motivation for this approach is concern for people, but the benefits are felt more widely in the impact on communities and in the long term cost to the public: “[t]he most significant value is often created by interventions that are preventative”⁵. Some of the best examples of personalised, early interventions are the result of the activity of local voluntary organisations and community groups which are rooted in their communities, have grown up in response to a particular need and are often established and run by individuals who have been personally affected by an issue. They tend to be user led and offer holistic services which cut across traditional boundaries. They rely on volunteer effort and have a strong value base.
40. Voluntary and community action plays a key role in delivering early intervention and preventative support. It tackles social exclusion, strengthens communities and reduces the amount of public spending on acute services like hospitals and prisons. However, long-term investment is needed in the vital preventative work that small groups do amongst the most disadvantaged communities. This sort of local community action is central to sustaining local social, economic and environmental well-being and to helping manage the cost of public services.



5 A Better Return. Op. Cit p 12



navca

local focus national voice

NAVCA is the national voice of local support and development organisations in England. We champion and strengthen voluntary and community action by supporting our members in their work with over 160,000 local charities and community groups. NAVCA believes that voluntary and community action is vital for vibrant and caring communities.

We provide our members with networking opportunities, specialist advice, support, policy information and training. NAVCA is a vital bridge between local groups and national government.

Our specialist teams take a lead on the issues that matter most to local support and development organisations. We influence national and local government policy to strengthen local voluntary and community action.

For more details about the full range of ways that NAVCA can help you please go to www.navca.org.uk or call us on 0114 278 6636.

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