



## STRONG INDEPENDENT ROOTS

Supporting local voluntary action



NAVCA members: leading voluntary action

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.

Tel **0114 289 3954**; email **[neil.cleeveley@navca.org.uk](mailto:neil.cleeveley@navca.org.uk)**



## 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.



## Quality leadership

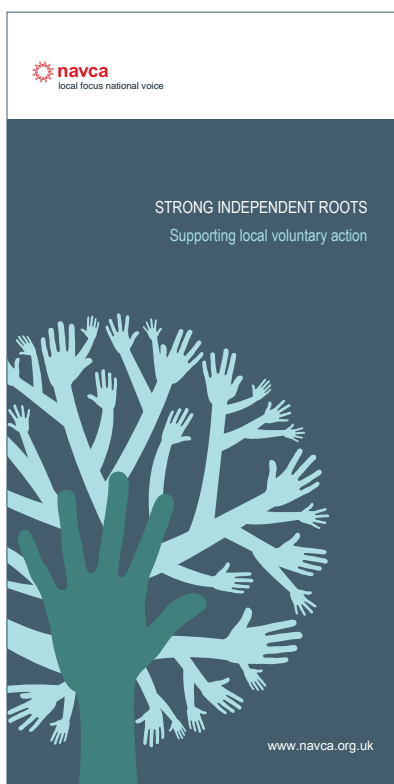
Voluntary and honorary trusteeship makes the charity sector distinct from the public and private sectors. This is why we believe that trustees should not be paid, other than the reimbursement of expenses. It is vital to protect the independence and distinctiveness of local charities. Paying trustees would undermine direct ownership by the local community of local voluntary and community groups and weaken public support for charities. Trustees must be “voluntary but not amateur”.

- ***We call upon the Government to take action to encourage and strengthen local trusteeship to raise the standard of local voluntary action.***
- ***NAVCA commits its members to recruiting and developing more trustees to give local voluntary action strong and sustainable leadership.***

## Stronger infrastructure

Evidence shows that the third sector’s capacity to engage with local public bodies is directly related to the quality and level of resources available for local infrastructure. It is no coincidence that local authority areas that have the most thriving third sector also have strong local support and development organisations . This demonstrates the clear link between investment in local infrastructure and strong support for a healthy local third sector. It also shows why local authorities, PCTs and other public bodies should provide sustainable funding in return for quality infrastructure.

- ***We call upon the Government to focus resources on areas where voluntary sector infrastructure is weakest or non-existent and use their resources to lever in local match funding.***
- ***NAVCA commits to helping members rationalise infrastructure services so that local voluntary action gets the best possible support. We will provide practical assistance to help local support and development organisations demonstrate effectiveness and value for money.***



Find out about more NAVCA’s vision for the local third sector at [www.navca.org.uk/publications/roots/](http://www.navca.org.uk/publications/roots/)



## Local voluntary and community action

1. Local charities and community groups are at the heart of voluntary action. They combine service delivery, volunteer and community involvement and campaigning and advocacy work. They enable people to play an active part in their community, both individually and collectively, particularly those whose full participation in society is limited by economic disadvantage or institutional discrimination.
2. Local charities and community groups are a vital element of a thriving third sector. Whilst a thriving third sector is independent of the state it is, nonetheless, a key partner of local public bodies, able to engage on its own terms. It gives citizens the opportunity to associate freely and offers a forum in which they can come together to exert a strong influence on local public bodies. A thriving third sector supports community action for its own sake, promoting social justice, cohesion and equality. It helps communities<sup>1</sup> establish a sense of belonging and identity and enables them to develop the strength and confidence to reach out to other communities.
3. There is broad agreement across the political spectrum about the importance of a thriving local third sector. A recent NAVCA survey<sup>2</sup> found that councils controlled by all the main parties shared an enthusiasm for working with the third sector. Indeed, in recent years the third sector has become an increasingly valued partner of many public bodies, with considerable public investment in the infrastructure services that support it.

### The value of voluntary action

4. The level of local voluntary and community action is an important indicator of a healthy and inclusive society. It finds expression in the huge variety of voluntary and community groups that reflect local people's concerns and represent their interests. Voluntary action is firmly rooted in the community; at its heart local groups run by local people, bringing citizens together, building the bonds that strengthen communities. They are not motivated by the availability of public funding but by a commitment to their community, its aspirations and to addressing its needs; their commitment is long term. Small organisations are fundamentally

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1 We use the word in its broadest sense to mean communities of place, interest and identity.

2 See NAVCA LAA Survey at [www.navca.org.uk/news/navcalaasurvey.htm](http://www.navca.org.uk/news/navcalaasurvey.htm)

## The Compact – supporting voluntary action

We strongly support the principles of the Compact. However, we believe that it currently lacks the robust and challenging implementation and monitoring framework that will effect lasting change. Whilst the work of the Public Law Project and Compact Voice is effective, the Commission for the Compact could and should have the power to do more. We would expect the Commissioner to take robust steps to press any public body found to be in breach of the Compact to take remedial action and to compensate any third sector organisation that has suffered loss as a result of Compact breaches.

We take the view that the Commissioner for the Compact should have the powers to monitor, investigate, intervene and make recommendations. NAVCA believes that a stronger Compact will offer more protection to local third sector organisations that need it and provide a mechanism for a more transparent and honest debate between public and third sector partners. We hope that these proposals are given the necessary government support to ensure the changes to the Compact take place.

democratic – an expression of our freedom to form new associations for community benefit.

5. Voluntary and community action offers a platform for people who wish to participate – formally and informally – in the governance of local public services. It enables the experience and passion of local people to shape local services, making sure they address people's needs. It also offers public bodies a route into the most disadvantaged communities because voluntary action is often born out of the direct experiences and frustrations of people in those communities.
6. Voluntary and community action also cultivates social capital<sup>3</sup> and widens citizen participation in the governance and delivery of services, giving disadvantaged citizens and communities the confidence to speak up. It means local people feel more able to influence the services that matter to them, where previously they had little or no say. Developing social capital is also an end in itself, increasing people's confidence and feeling of belonging and building a greater sense of community; neighbourhoods become better places to live.
7. The support of local support and development organisations helps local voluntary organisations and community groups network and collaborate more effectively. NAVCA believes that a strong network of independent organisations with local roots:
  - gives local communities a voice;
  - offers public bodies real local experiences of the impact of policy and practice changes;
  - builds social capital by bringing people together;
  - links neighbourhoods and communities;
  - contributes to the social, environmental and economic wellbeing of the community;
  - helps design services around the needs of people not providers;
  - provides community leadership;
  - supports citizen engagement through volunteering;
  - links communities to local strategic partnerships;
  - reduces inequality; and
  - promotes the inclusion of the most disadvantaged communities and most vulnerable citizens.

<sup>3</sup> The Cabinet Office offers a definition of social capital. See [www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/media/cabinetoffice/strategy/assets/socialcapital.pdf](http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/media/cabinetoffice/strategy/assets/socialcapital.pdf)

## The value of volunteering

Volunteering is integral to voluntary action. It gives people a sense of belonging and well-being and offers the opportunity to contribute to the community. It can also help to tackle labour market exclusion by offering people a route into employment – building social capital and helping socially excluded individuals engage with the wider community. However, levels of volunteering are lowest in the most deprived areas\* and concerted support is needed to make sure those most at risk of exclusion are able to benefit from volunteering.

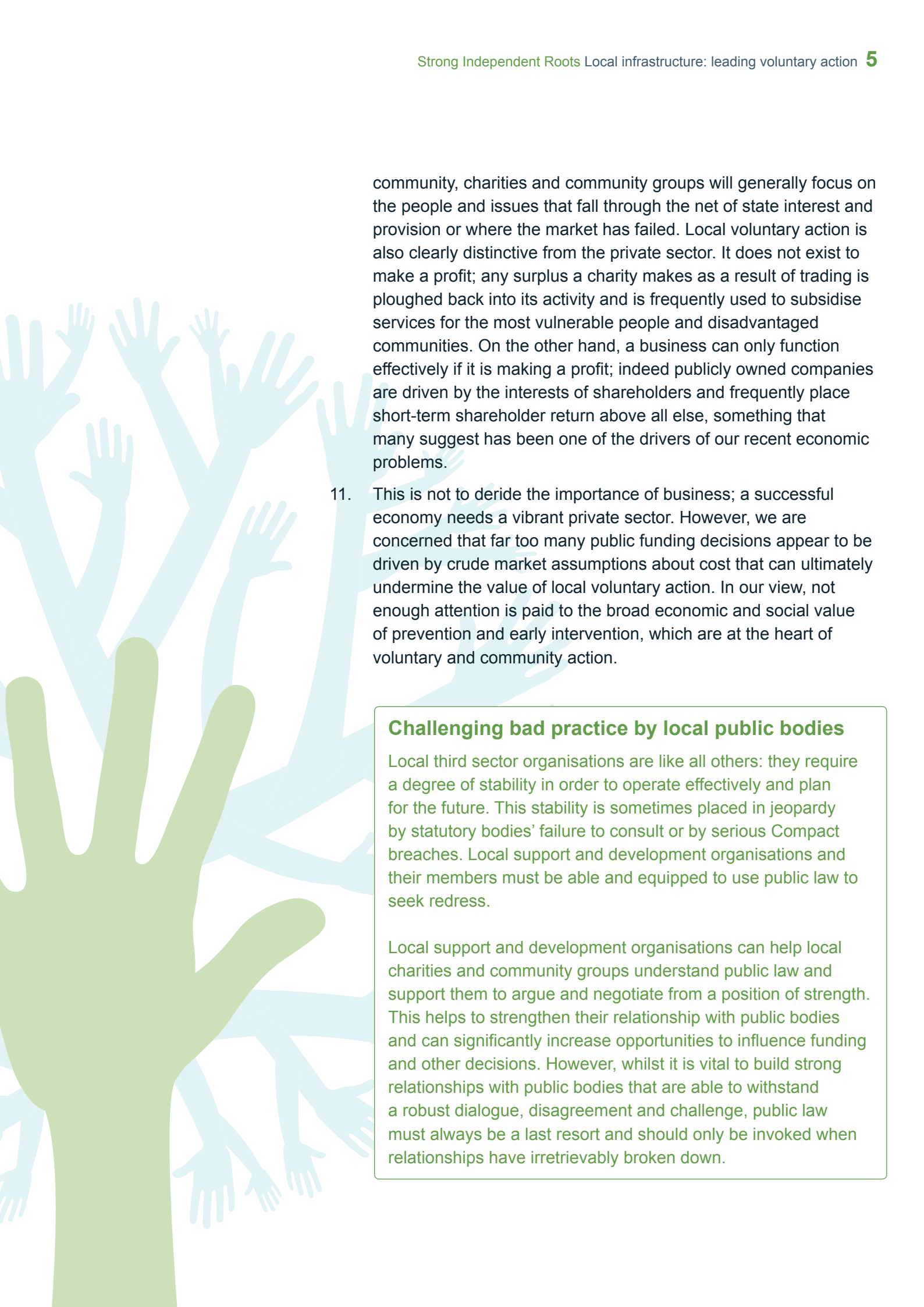
*\*Helping Out – A national survey of volunteering and charitable giving, Cabinet Office, 2007. Table 3.6, p22*

## The value of local

8. Local charities and community groups are independent organisations; value driven, with missions founded upon charitable objectives and a commitment to social justice. They are not agents of the state and do not exist simply to manage public service contracts, although where they do, it is values-based. Volunteering, innovatory services, partnerships across all sectors, community mobilisation, but above all compassion, responsiveness to local need and a commitment to social justice lie at the heart of local voluntary action. Voluntary action is by its very nature local; we believe that its greatest strength is the value of the local solutions:
  - Addressing local aspirations in a variety of ways – helping local people develop their skills by tailoring training to their needs or enabling the community to own and control vital local assets.
  - Long-term commitment to the local community distinguishes local charities and community groups; they are more willing than others to challenge authority on behalf of local communities.
  - The deep roots that many local organisations have in the community and the close relationship that they often have with service users means that they will often provide extra value that goes beyond strict adherence to a grant agreement, contract or service level agreement.
  - Local charities and community groups offer a focus for civil renewal that can be the engine for wider civic engagement and increased citizen participation in local affairs.
  
9. The New Economics Foundation has developed a means of measuring the economic impact, which illustrates the multiplier effect<sup>4</sup> of local investment. It also demonstrates the added value associated with locally based services that build social capital and address multiple needs. Investment in local organisations retains resources in the area and helps to build the local social and economic fabric, which is in stark contrast to the potentially detrimental economic and social impact of ‘parachuted-in’ services, with the consequent leaching of resources out of the area<sup>5</sup>.
  
10. In summary, local voluntary action plays a unique role. Whilst public sector bodies have broad statutory responsibilities that require them to take account of the interests of the whole

4 See nef, *LM3*, at [www.proveandimprove.org/new/tools/localmultiplier3.php](http://www.proveandimprove.org/new/tools/localmultiplier3.php)

5 See nef, *Plugging the Leaks*, at [www.pluggingtheleaks.org/](http://www.pluggingtheleaks.org/)



community, charities and community groups will generally focus on the people and issues that fall through the net of state interest and provision or where the market has failed. Local voluntary action is also clearly distinctive from the private sector. It does not exist to make a profit; any surplus a charity makes as a result of trading is ploughed back into its activity and is frequently used to subsidise services for the most vulnerable people and disadvantaged communities. On the other hand, a business can only function effectively if it is making a profit; indeed publicly owned companies are driven by the interests of shareholders and frequently place short-term shareholder return above all else, something that many suggest has been one of the drivers of our recent economic problems.

11. This is not to deride the importance of business; a successful economy needs a vibrant private sector. However, we are concerned that far too many public funding decisions appear to be driven by crude market assumptions about cost that can ultimately undermine the value of local voluntary action. In our view, not enough attention is paid to the broad economic and social value of prevention and early intervention, which are at the heart of voluntary and community action.

### **Challenging bad practice by local public bodies**

Local third sector organisations are like all others: they require a degree of stability in order to operate effectively and plan for the future. This stability is sometimes placed in jeopardy by statutory bodies' failure to consult or by serious Compact breaches. Local support and development organisations and their members must be able and equipped to use public law to seek redress.

Local support and development organisations can help local charities and community groups understand public law and support them to argue and negotiate from a position of strength. This helps to strengthen their relationship with public bodies and can significantly increase opportunities to influence funding and other decisions. However, whilst it is vital to build strong relationships with public bodies that are able to withstand a robust dialogue, disagreement and challenge, public law must always be a last resort and should only be invoked when relationships have irretrievably broken down.



## NAVCA members – leading voluntary action

12. Local support and development organisations exist to support and promote local voluntary and community action and NAVCA's role is to help them in this endeavour. Many local charities, community groups and social enterprises rely on the support and services they receive from Local support and development organisations. We believe that a vibrant and thriving local third sector creates a sense of community, helps people exercise more control over their own lives and improves the overall quality of life.

### The value of local infrastructure services

13. A key task for local support and development organisations is to help local charities, community groups and social enterprises improve their effectiveness. They offer a wide range of services to third sector organisations and their public partners in the area.
  - NAVCA members create and share knowledge of local needs – they identify needs in the local community and identify gaps in services. They establish and incubate new groups to address unmet needs and help existing organisations tailor their services to changing needs. As a result, local organisations are better able to respond to new and emerging challenges.
  - NAVCA members raise standards through development work – they improve the knowledge, skills and confidence of volunteers, trustees and staff of local third sector organisations through development work interventions such as training and impartial, expert advice. This support can be general, such as supporting better leadership and management in local organisations, or specialised, such as building the capacity of organisations that work in health and social care or those that work to reduce re-offending.
  - NAVCA members enable communication and collaboration – they provide a focal point for local voluntary organisations and community groups to come together to share ideas and intelligence and address issues of common concern. They facilitate partnership between organisations with shared or

*Local support and development organisations are instrumental in helping local charities and community groups articulate the needs of the most vulnerable people who often lack the confidence to exercise choice that market-based solutions require.*

similar interests. Local support and development organisations offer a forum for local organisations to learn about promising solutions from each other's work, share and pool resources and use them more efficiently.

- NAVCA members provide a voice for the local third sector – they represent the views of local organisations to agencies such as local authorities and PCTs. They also help statutory bodies consult local voluntary organisations and community groups. They are instrumental in the development of local Compacts. Local voluntary organisations and community groups benefit from being able to get issues affecting service users, constituents and members heard by public decision makers and are able to influence development of public services.
- NAVCA members promote equality and diversity – they work in partnership with other support and development organisations providing specialist services to disadvantaged and under-represented groups. Where there is no specialist provider, local support and development organisations will fill the void, ensuring that the needs of all groups and communities are met. They also promote a wider understanding of the needs of disadvantaged groups and advocate their engagement by local public bodies. Local support and development organisations are instrumental in helping local charities and community groups articulate the needs of the most vulnerable people who often lack the confidence to exercise choice that market-based solutions require.
- NAVCA members promote strategic involvement in local public policy – they are powerful advocates of local voluntary action on local strategic partnerships, making the case for all local voices to be heard. A local support and development organisation provides an ideal hub around which effective involvement can be built – addressing local concerns and helping representatives keep abreast of local issues. Local organisations and public decision makers benefit from the local support and development organisation's experience of promoting and organising democratic and collective models of engagement and ensuring that seldom heard groups get a chance to have a say.
- NAVCA members promote volunteering – they promote volunteering across all three sectors and many run a volunteer centre. They have a strong commitment to encouraging

### The local support and development organisation offer

- NAVCA members offer high quality, accessible and affordable services tailored to the identified needs of the organisations and communities they support
- NAVCA members promote volunteering and foster the development of good local volunteering infrastructure services
- NAVCA members have a good understanding of the knowledge and skills required by their workforce to be effective and invest in developing their people
- NAVCA members have a commitment to continuous improvement and demonstrating effectiveness through the use of outcomes-focussed evaluation
- NAVCA members specialising in different areas of work operate in partnership with each other for the benefit of their local third sector
- NAVCA members are well networked, making the most of their connections with public sector partners and other local support and development organisations through national, regional and sub-regional networks

more people to volunteer or become involved in community action. Those that do not run a volunteer centre service will still work with volunteers as part of the general organisational development and training work, supporting the many small organisations that are entirely volunteer-led.

### The organisation of infrastructure services

14. There are different models for the organisation of local infrastructure services, reflecting local circumstances and the evolving and enduring role these organisations have played in their communities over many decades. Regardless of the specific model, we believe there are significant benefits if services are delivered through a local support and development organisation that is owned by, and accountable to, local third sector organisations and the communities they serve, contributing to community cohesion and the building of social capital.
15. Local infrastructure services combine a wide range of functions in support of local charities, community groups and social enterprises. They also include support organisations working with specific client groups and areas of interest. In some places this will be offered by specialist staff working for a NAVCA member; elsewhere it will be a separate organisation.
16. We believe there may be significant merit in organisations delivering a range of infrastructure functions. There is often an intrinsic value in being able to use their experiences of one activity to inform practice of another, for example development work informing voice work. Those that do fulfil the full range of functions still need to work in partnership with infrastructure bodies providing services for specific client groups and areas of interest to ensure a coherent and seamless service to the local third sector.
17. Where support services are located is less relevant than the need for them to be complementary, well co-ordinated and communicated effectively to their potential users; although there is a wider debate to be had here. Regardless of how infrastructure services are organised, NAVCA believes that local support and development organisations should collaborate to provide a fully rounded service to all local groups. It is the role of NAVCA members to facilitate local collaboration. This can



The NAVCA Quality Award is a rigorous, externally audited evaluation of the quality of services offered to voluntary and community groups by local third sector support and development organisations that are members of NAVCA. The NAVCA accredited award is assessed against the NAVCA Performance Standards and once awarded, the Quality Award is valid for three years.

For more information see [www.navca.org.uk/services/quality](http://www.navca.org.uk/services/quality)

include consideration of everything from networks where members mobilise each other's resources efficiently and effectively to sharing back-office services or full merger. We believe there is a strong case for support and development organisations in counties to consider the opportunities for collaboration and increased efficiency, which in some circumstances will include exploring the case for merger. This takes on greater urgency as public spending tightens and the need to demonstrate efficiency increases.

### Demonstrating the value and effectiveness of infrastructure services

18. In April 2009 research by Charities Evaluation Services (CES) explored the challenges local support and development organisations face when trying to demonstrate effectiveness<sup>6</sup>. It found that many services, projects and organisations can demonstrate that they make a difference, highlighting significant challenges they face in doing this. It is clear many organisations have the processes and organisational culture required to systematically collect performance data but require support in articulating the value of this to their local public funders.
19. An important element of any service evaluation must be the experience of service users, and local support and development organisations need to give serious consideration to how they collect feedback from service users.
20. Indeed, the National Audit Office report<sup>7</sup> found limited understanding of the term 'value for money' and that most performance frameworks did not focus on measuring efficiency. NAVCA believes that its role is to support local support and development organisations to demonstrate effectiveness and value for money and draw out key messages for policy makers and funders that make the case for the effectiveness of investing in local support and development organisations.
21. NAVCA has a strong track record of supporting its members in this way. The NAVCA Quality Award encourages members to improve the quality of their work by focussing on outcomes, supported by a strong performance management framework. NAVCA believes that all local support and development organisations must be able to

<sup>6</sup> *Demonstrating the Difference*, Charities Evaluation Services, 2009. See [www.ces-vol.org.uk/downloads/demonstratingthedifference-392-400.pdf](http://www.ces-vol.org.uk/downloads/demonstratingthedifference-392-400.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> *Building the Capacity of the Third Sector*, National Audit Office, 2009. See [www.nao.org.uk/publications/0809/building\\_the\\_capacity\\_of\\_the\\_t.aspx](http://www.nao.org.uk/publications/0809/building_the_capacity_of_the_t.aspx)



demonstrate the quality of the services they provide by achieving the NAVCA Quality Award.

22. In circumstances where an appropriately resourced local support and development organisation is unable to demonstrate that it meets a satisfactory standard, NAVCA will recommend that core funding from the local authority is provided on condition that the local support and development organisation works towards these standards. We would expect the funding for the local support and development organisation to reflect the need to support the work necessary to achieve an agreed quality standard.
23. Where there is evidence that a local support and development organisation is performing poorly, NAVCA's initial response will be to offer assistance to the staff and trustees in order to help them make the necessary improvements. Where such an approach proves unsuccessful, NAVCA will work with the local authority and the local sector to resolve the situation, setting out a clear plan of action for the local support and development organisation to follow.

If a NAVCA member fails to address its own poor performance, we will work with the local third sector and the local authority to set up a locally owned support and development organisation that has the resources to effectively meet the needs of the local sector and work cooperatively with partners in the public and private sectors.

## Investing in infrastructure services

### Local investment in infrastructure services

24. The prerequisite for a healthy and thriving third sector is the availability of high quality infrastructure services in every area; whilst we would consider local ownership, knowledge and provision to be preferable, quality is paramount. Consequently, we believe that funding should be in place to ensure that every local third sector organisation in England has access to high quality infrastructure services.
25. It is important that public bodies recognise the benefits of investing in local support and development organisations as a

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means of developing a strategic long-term relationship with local charities and community groups. In our view this can only be achieved through grant making and service level agreements with local support and development organisations. We believe that when infrastructure services are put out to tender, these strategic benefits are diminished as they only come as a result of ongoing relationships and trust building and cannot necessarily be purchased in an open market. Indeed, market-based solutions can lead to undesirable consequences; the provider will pay more heed to the contract than to the changing needs of either the local community or the funder.

26. The notion that the private sector might be better placed to meet the needs of local third sector organisations is not born out by the evidence. Pro bono assistance, for example, performs a very useful function, but capacity is often very limited and is frequently not there where and when it is required. From time to time there is speculation that Business Links could provide support and capacity-building services for the third sector. Many NAVCA members have working relationships with their local Business Link and their experience suggests that there is a general misunderstanding of the third sector. Indeed, it has been suggested that some Business Links appear to consider any cultural or social activity to fall within the third sector even when the objective may be clearly commercial. Business Links can offer commercial advice and support to organisations from all sectors, but that is a long way from being able to offer the expertise that local support and development organisations provide.
27. The notion of transferring funding to local groups to commission their own support is gaining some traction. This idea is being floated, amongst others, by national organisations that claim they can provide better services to local charities and community groups than local organisations. Although national charities and private businesses can provide services to local charities and community groups, the idea that they can provide these services better than an organisation rooted in a locality is wrong and would result in a diminished service to individuals and local communities.
28. A good local support and development organisation will turn a moderate investment into a greater sum for local groups by helping them to find funding and making their existing money go further. They provide specialist expertise, information and

professional support that small groups could not afford to purchase. They also save the sector money by preventing groups from duplicating efforts and supporting joint working and mergers. More than anything, they are the ideal vehicle to provide support across the whole of an area and ensure groups and organisations benefit together rather than at each other's expense.

29. Allowing organisations to purchase support in an open market is a short-term expedient that risks damaging the local third sector. The benefits gained from ongoing relationships would be lost to a series of individual commercial transactions. We would see a weakening of the collective voice of local voluntary action. Local support and development organisations' ability to represent the diverse views of local groups to their local authority and other public bodies would be reduced, as would the influence of local charities and community groups over public policy.
30. Most importantly if local charities were to buy their own services directly, there would be no support available for new and emerging groups. Innovation would be stifled by reducing the potential for local support and development organisations to help the local sector develop and grow. National organisations would not be able to anticipate and plan for future support needed by local charities and community groups. They could not ensure that existing groups are equipped to tailor their services to changing community needs. They would fail to identify new or unmet needs and then support the development of new and emerging groups to meet this need. By funding only existing groups there would be no capacity to identify gaps in provision and develop solutions. There could be no support for new groups and the third sector would be more static and less responsive.

### Government investment in building better infrastructure support

31. NAVCA believes that it is very important that the public debate about the future of the Government's capacity-building investment programme draws a distinction between the ambitious change agenda of ChangeUp and the performance of Capacitybuilders. Whatever the structural arrangements, NAVCA believes that there must be a restated commitment to ChangeUp. The aim to deliver

*NAVCA's approach has always been to promote collaboration between generalist and specialist organisations to achieve more together than they could individually.*

consistent and high quality infrastructure support across England, although challenging, has the potential to transform support services for the local third sector. It is important to bear in mind that ChangeUp is a ten-year programme launched in 2004 and it needs to be fully funded for the entire period if it is to achieve the challenging goals set for it.

32. ChangeUp resources must be deployed where they are most needed; it makes no sense to fund consortium arrangements where infrastructure is strong. Support must be targeted at local and sub-regional consortia in areas where infrastructure is weak and partnership would not happen without it. Learning from the success of BASIS Round 2, ChangeUp should define a limited number of priority geographical areas for investment in 2010-14. This will produce the greatest improvement in support services for local third sector organisations and community groups.
33. There is also a strong case in the current climate for funding to support mergers and collaboration, where the long-term benefits can be demonstrated.
34. Capacitybuilders must recognise that consortia are autonomous partnerships, often with a remit beyond ChangeUp, rather than delivery arms of the agency. We believe that, whilst Capacitybuilders has a right to safeguard its financial investment, it should take a developmental approach to consortia rather than expecting one model to be effective in all areas.
35. We believe that the business case for the Big Lottery Fund taking on the ChangeUp programme should be explored but it is important that this does not result in a decline in service to local voluntary organisations and community groups. We believe that this could build on the success of the Fund's BASIS programme and reflects the fact that it now has the power to make loans to third sector organisations.

### Future of local infrastructure services

36. The last ten years have seen significant growth in the number and types of organisations providing local infrastructure support and services. For most, competition and choice have not driven up the quality or driven down the price of support and services for frontline organisations. In fact the market approach has weakened

and fragmented the sense of collective endeavour that should be at the heart of locally owned and accountable infrastructure services.

37. We are concerned that by adopting and accelerating a perception of innovation that favours 'new' over 'change', a new orthodoxy has emerged that holds the view that 'new needs can only be met by new organisations'. Some programmes, such as ChangeUp, have sought to foster innovation through change in existing organisations' practices and relationships with each other but they have failed to challenge the proliferation of new agencies or to promote a more rational approach to the provision in infrastructure services, which has led to unnecessary duplication and waste.
38. NAVCA's approach has always been to promote collaboration between its members and those providing infrastructure services to specific client groups, in the belief that they achieve more together than they could individually. There is, however, a growing trend for the providers of infrastructure services to specific client groups to bid for work beyond the scope of their experience rather than seek to develop effective relationships with organisations already offering a broad range of infrastructure services. The way many have bid for LINKs contracts, outside of their area of benefit or experience, illustrates the point.
39. This leaves us with some choices about how infrastructure services can be best configured to address areas of weakness and gaps in support and service in some areas and the over-supply elsewhere. We can allow policy makers and commissioners to decide on the future shape of infrastructure in accordance with their own set of rules and rationales or we can redraw our own boundaries and relationships to work out what fewer but better support and development organisations might look like. This is not just about optimum size to enable a more efficient and effective distribution of resources, but about how to support and represent the interests of local voluntary action most effectively and offer the quality of leadership the local third sector needs to thrive and survive.
40. The pressure on public finances coupled with the demand for continuous improvement gives rise to a number of pressing questions.
  - In rural counties do we need rural community councils and a



county-wide local support and development organisation as two separate bodies; indeed, can they survive?

- Would volunteering be better supported and organised if independent volunteer centres became part of a local support and development organisation?
- Can separate district-level organisations be sustained in the new unitary authorities or should they receive capacity-building money from the new authority to bring about a merger?
- How can organisations providing a broad range of infrastructure services develop and deliver services for specific client groups without undermining the 'run by and for' principle at the heart of equalities working and tackling discrimination?
- Can national bodies mediate in local competitions so infrastructure services being put out to tender does not mean a fight to the death?
- National organisations are not exempt from these discussions about rationalisation. Do we need to work differently and consider either mergers or de-mergers of certain functions to more appropriate bodies?

NAVCA is clear that during a period of tightening resources such issues can no longer be ducked. We cannot afford to allow others to make these decisions for us, risking damage to local voluntary action. NAVCA will offer strong support and encouragement to those who want to grasp the nettle, but we are clear that it is for local support and development organisations to take the lead.



**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](http://www.navca.org.uk) or call us on 0114 278 6636.

NAVCA  
The Tower  
2 Furnival Square  
Sheffield S1 4QL

Tel 0114 278 6636  
Fax 0114 278 7004  
Textphone 0114 278 7025  
Email [navca@navca.org.uk](mailto:navca@navca.org.uk)  
[www.navca.org.uk](http://www.navca.org.uk)

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