



The voluntary sector guide to children's centre management

By Suzanne Murray

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The voluntary sector guide to children's centre management

The information in this guide has been collated from the experience of voluntary and community sector (VCS) organisations managing children's centres in the London borough of Islington. Of the sixteen children's centres in Islington five are managed in whole or part by VCS organisations and, of particular note, these organisations are primarily local, community-based service providers, not large national agencies.

It is hoped that by sharing the experience and learning of these VCS-led children's centres and highlighting the constructive ways the local authority and children's centre providers can work together on the development of high quality, sustainable children's centres, other VCS organisations that are currently managing, or considering managing, a children's centre will benefit from their experiences.



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1

Should you take on the management of a children's centre

Questions that you should ask before entering into children's centre management:

- How is running a children's centre compatible with your organisation's constitutional aims and strategic objectives?
- Could managing a children's centre affect and/or change the nature of your organisation?
- Will taking on the management of a children's centre be in your stakeholders' interests?
- How will your organisation ensure it has the skills and capacity to manage a children's centre?
- How can you ensure that the risks will be shared fairly between you and the local authority as the accountable body?
- What happens if you struggle to deliver? Will you be supported? Do you have an exit strategy?
- Are some factors in success beyond your control?
- Will taking on the management of a children's centre require any initial investment on your part?

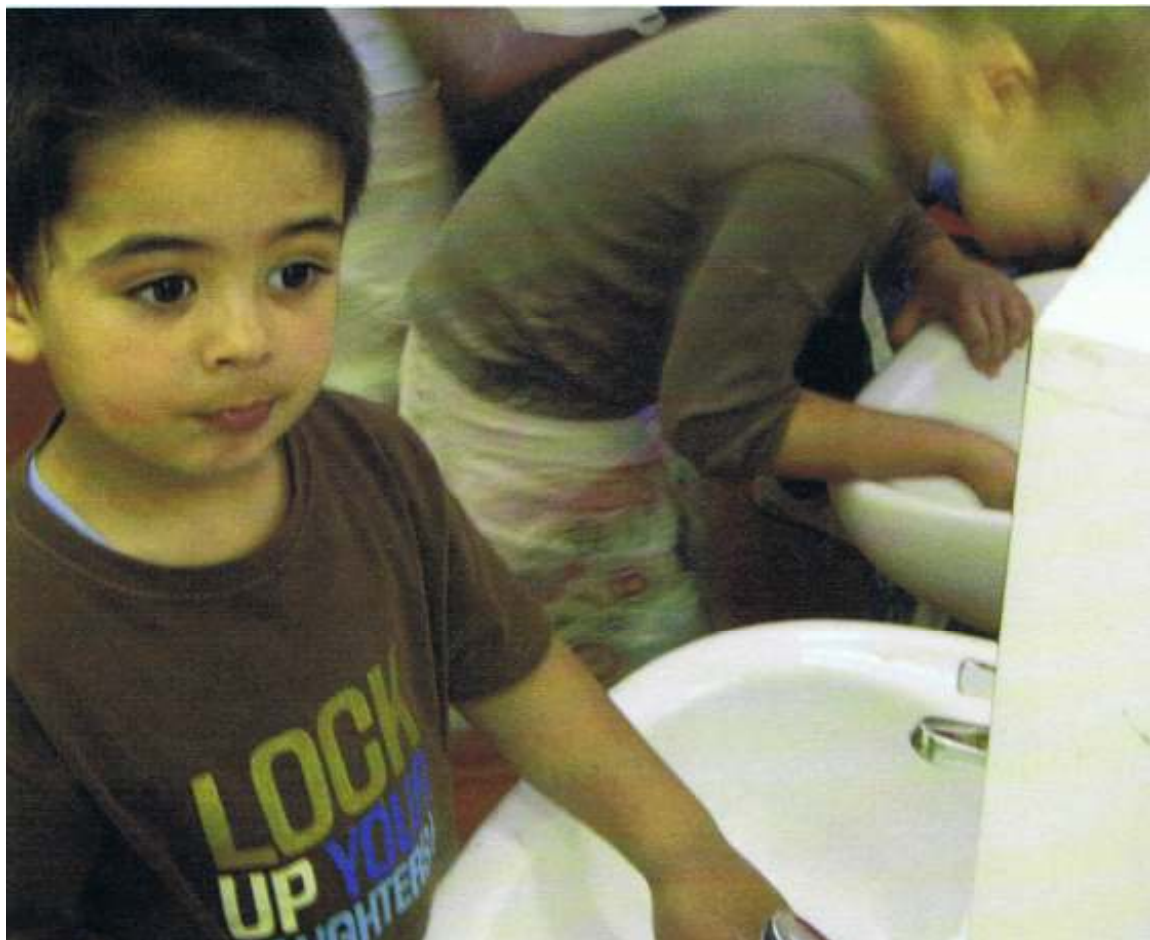


2

A closer look at issues for VCS-led children's centres

- 2.1 Independence and the ability to innovate
- 2.2 Multi-agency working
- 2.3 Governance
- 2.4 Costing
- 2.5 Capacity
- 2.6 Teacher recruitment
- 2.7 Statutory sector champions for VCS organisations

The development of the children's centre programme has brought with it many distinct challenges, some of which impact specifically on VCS organisations managing children's centres. This section considers key challenges that VCS organisations can face in children's centre management. Although not always exclusive to VCS organisations, these challenges often have particular implications for the VCS.



2.1 Independence and the ability to innovate

Independence

As a VCS organisation it is essential that you retain your independence when taking on the management of a children's centre. You need autonomy to develop and deliver responses to children and families' needs that draw on your organisation's experience and knowledge and the expertise of your trustees and advisors, and to do this in a way that best suits your organisation. Being armed with evidence to demonstrate that your methods are effective for achieving the desired children's centre outcomes will help you to do this.

See

- Section 3, *Outcomes: considering your full value* for more details on understanding and demonstrating your outcomes

Innovation

Recent findings¹ suggest that the innovative capacity of the VCS has fallen and that this relates to government funding for public services shifting from a previous strong emphasis on innovative delivery to the current focus on meeting strict performance targets.

Children's centres are one of these services with strict performance targets. The local authority as the accountable body should focus on securing improved outcomes for children, ensuring that you deliver core services in accordance with your service level agreement and that you meet performance targets, but they should not be over-prescriptive in the detail of how this is done.

There are a variety of ways that you can help to ensure innovative practice continues to be developed and delivered to better meet children and families' needs. You can gather and present the evidence that led to the development of the innovative practice. Where the management of children's centres is going to be put out to tender, you could highlight to the local authority models of commissioning that focus on outcomes and promote innovation in an attempt to best meet public need. It is essential that you work to emphasise the value for local authorities in commissioning the VCS to deliver key outcomes for children and families.

See

- Impact Briefing: Putting impact at the heart of the tendering process (Acevo, 2007) www.acevo.org.uk/procurement
- Unintended consequences: How the efficiency agenda erodes local public services and a new public benefit model to restore them (New Economics Foundation, 2007) www.neweconomics.org/gen/unintendedconsequences.aspx

¹ From the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) Working Paper *The Innovative Capacity of Voluntary Organisations: Survey Evidence from a Replication Study* (Osborne, 2006) www.esrcsocietytoday.ac.uk/ESRCInfoCentre/PSZ/Research/summaries/index7.aspx?ComponentId=18604&SourcePageId=18551

2.2 Multi-agency working

Having people from different organisations working together in an integrated way is of course an essential feature of children's centres but it is also one of their greatest challenges.

You will need to make sure that the expectations and responsibilities of the various partners are clear, otherwise there is a risk of confusion and disillusionment with collaborative working. There must be clear and reasonable governance structures, with lines of accountability and guidance for the management of staff employed by partner agencies where appropriate. In order to achieve this you may need to establish more formal local partnership agreements about the services to be delivered through the children's centre, covering decision making, recruitment, management, finances, and what happens if something goes wrong.

See

- Working with the private, voluntary and independent sectors toolkit (Together for Children, 2007) for sample agreements, principles for joint working and communicating effectively www.childrens-centres.org/learningsystem/eView/Customers/tfc/Page_images/Library/pvi_complete_set_v1.doc

Where people from different sectors work closely together there is a risk of tensions arising, eg. pay and terms and conditions within a VCS-led children's centre – including holiday, pension and redundancy entitlements, and maternity and sick leave – are often not as generous as the statutory sector. Any tensions will need to be closely monitored and managed to ensure this does not impact on the quality of service provision. As far as is possible it is important to develop internal structures and job descriptions that reflect the needs and characteristics of the individual centre, not the local authority or partner agencies.

See

- 4Children have developed a two-unit training programme designed to support practitioners working in early years and childcare in the area of Integrated Practice www.4children.org.uk/integratedpractice

2.3 Governance

Trustees liability

As a VCS-led children's centre your organisation's trustees are ultimately liable for the delivery of the children's centre. You will need to ensure your trustees understand the key issues involved in running a children's centre and, if your organisation is new to public service delivery, you will need to support your trustees to fully understand their liability and governance responsibilities.²

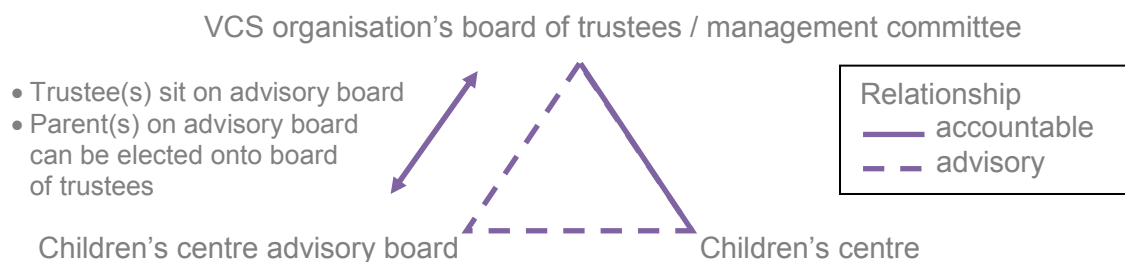
See

- Charities and public service delivery (CC37): a practical guide to the legal and good practice issues that charities need to be aware of if they are planning to deliver services under a funding agreement with a public authority www.charity-commission.gov.uk/Library/publications/pdfs/cc37text.pdf
- Before Signing on the Dotted Line: all you need to know about procuring public sector contracts (NCVO, 2006) www.ncvo-vol.org.uk/uploadedFiles/Sustainable_Funding/Publications/Procurement_Guide.pdf

Governance structures

It is important to ensure that children's centre governance structures are clear and appropriate. (See figure 1 for an illustration of governance in a children's centre managed by a single VCS organisation)

Figure 1. Illustration of a governance structure in a children's centre managed by a single VCS organisation



If your organisation is small and community-based, you are likely to have existing strong parental involvement with local parents represented on the organisation's board of trustees. A key priority for all children's centre managers will be to encourage and enable parents to engage in the highest levels of decision making so that their involvement is not simply tokenistic.

² A review of children's centres carried out by the National Audit Office found that only 30% of children's centre governors or steering group members understood the key issues involved in running a children's centre and less than 17% of steering bodies had received training on governance specific to their role: *Sure Start Children's Centres* (National Audit Office, 2006)

http://nao.gov.uk/publications/nao_reports/06-07/0607104.pdf

See

- Sure Start Step into Learning: a programme enabling early years and childcare staff to identify and guide parents and carers with language, literacy or numeracy skills needs www.surestart.gov.uk/stepintolearning
- The Parent House *Confidence on Committees* accredited training course www.theparenthouse.co.uk

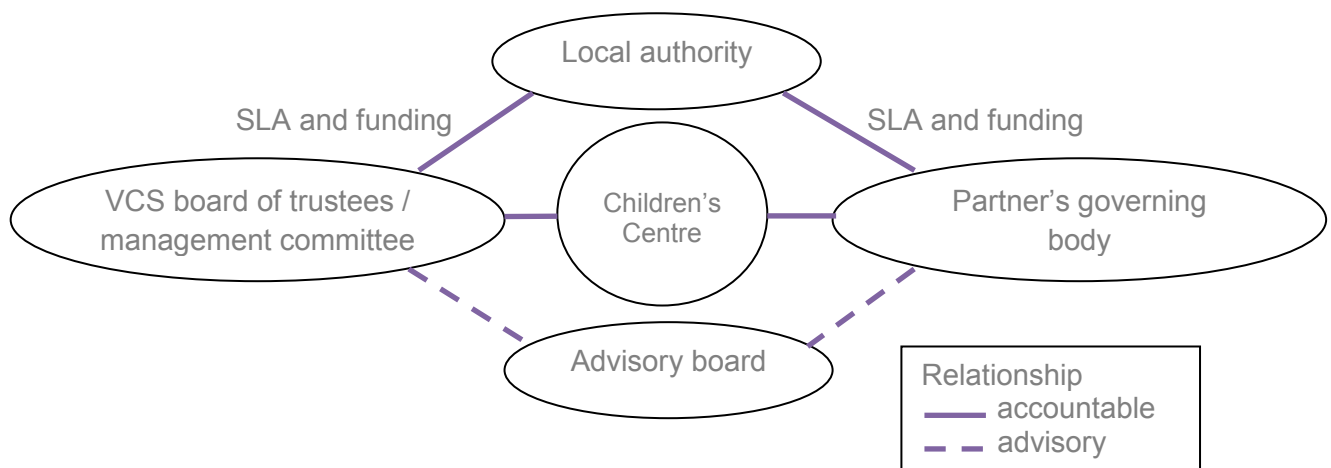
Governance structures can be more complicated in centres managed by more than one organisation (see figure 2 for an illustration of a partnership model). If you are going to be a partner in the management of a children's centre, you will need to devise governance structures that are acceptable to all partners, whatever sector they are from, where there is adequate consideration of the liability of VCS trustees and where no individual organisation has the majority or final vote. The independence of a VCS organisation can be encouraged through each partner having a separate service level agreement (SLA) with and distinct funding from the local authority.

Each partner, including members of both organisations' governing bodies and the heads of the children's centre settings, needs to be fairly represented on an advisory board alongside representatives from the wider community, including parents and service providers. The advisory board would make recommendations that each partner's governing body could consider during their regular meetings, but the advisory board could have some powers delegated to them from the governing bodies as long as they are strictly outlined within their terms of reference.

See

- Working with the private, voluntary and independent sectors toolkit (Together for Children, 2007) for case studies of children's centres where VCS organisations are partners in management www.childrens-centres.org/learningsystem/eView/Customers/tfc/Page_images/Library/pvi_complete_set_v1.doc

Figure 2. Illustration of a governance structure in a children's centre managed by multiple organisations



2.4 Costing

It is vital that you come to a decision on whether to manage a children's centre in full knowledge of the financial implications for your organisation. Under costing the children's centre budget could have serious consequences for the sustainability of your organisation and for the quality of service provision. However a key challenge will be to keep your prices competitive with other providers whilst still recovering at least the full costs of delivering the service.

Costing is also an issue for local authorities, with regard to having a clear understanding and application of full cost recovery. A recent examination of public service delivery found that third sector organisations are often forced to accept below cost pricing and their work is subjected to excessive monitoring³.

See

- Full cost recovery: A guide and toolkit on cost allocation (Acevo, 2004)
www.fullcostrecovery.org.uk
- Mind the gap: A funder's guide to full cost recovery (Acevo, 2006)
www.acevo.org.uk/uploads/pdfs/FCRfundersmanual.pdf
- Training on full cost recovery is available from Acevo and NAVCA
www.acevo.org.uk www.navca.org.uk

Transfer of Undertakings, Protection & Employment (TUPE)

If you are bidding to take on the management of an existing children's centre, you may need to take on existing staff, retaining their current employment conditions (this is called the Transfer of Undertakings, Protection & Employment or TUPE). You will need to ensure their employment terms and conditions are costed as part of your bid. This can be a complex area, with a high risk of hidden costs, so legal advice is essential.

See

- Department of Business Enterprise and Regulatory Reform's guide to The Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations (TUPE)
www.berr.gov.uk/employment/trade-union-rights/tupe/page16289.html

Generating a surplus

The government tells commissioners to "allow VCOs [voluntary and community organisations] the freedom to determine their own price in competition in the same way as private sector companies"⁴. Although it is uncommon for a VCS organisation to generate a surplus through public service delivery, if this is your intention, you will

³ From *Local Area Agreements and the Third Sector: Public Service Delivery* (National Audit Office, 2007) http://www.nao.org.uk/publications/nao_reports/06-07/NAO_Local_Area_Agreements.pdf

⁴ From *Think Smart... think voluntary sector: Good Practice Guidance on Procurement of Services from the Voluntary and Community Sector* (Home Office Active Communities Unit, 2004) <http://commercial.homeoffice.gov.uk/documents/thinksmart.pdf?view=Binary>

need to check how a surplus-generating contract sits with your charitable status. You may need to establish a subsidiary.

The Compact

The Compact's *Funding and Procurement Compact Code of Good Practice* sets out some useful principles that cover all kinds of funding arrangements. Government undertakes to:

- Recognise it is legitimate for voluntary and community organisations to include the relevant element of overhead costs in their estimates for providing a particular service
- Make payments in advance of expenditure (where appropriate and necessary) in order to achieve better value for money
- Implement longer term funding arrangements where these represent good value for money
- Give enough notice of the end of grants or contracts

See

- Funding and Procurement Compact Code of Good Practice (Home Office Active Communities Unit, 2004) www.thecompact.org.uk



2.5 Capacity

Unless the delivery of a children's centre fits in with your organisation's constitutional aims and strategic objectives, there is a strong danger of mission drift for your organisation. Managing a children's centre is a substantial undertaking, and if this activity does not fit with your organisation's charitable purpose, it is likely to impact on your organisation's capacity to deliver to its stated aims.

When taking on the management of a children's centre you should expect three-year funding based on the principle of full cost recovery, payment in advance, the ability to budget for contingencies and to expect a minimum of three months notice for a change in the level of funding. In this way, organisational capacity and stability can be increased, allowing you to better plan and deliver services.

Running a children's centre requires a range of skills, including business and financial management and skills in managing diverse relationships. You will need to have robust personnel, finance, ICT, quality assurance, data and risk management systems in place before you take on the management of a children's centre.

The government's timescales for completion of the three phases of the children's centre programme have been quite ambitious, and you will need to ensure that you have sufficient time and resources to develop and implement any new systems necessary to your role in managing a children's centre. If these resources are not available, it is likely to impact negatively on the timescale for children's centre development and is also likely to impact on any other work carried out by your organisation.

See

- The National Support Services (NSS), funded by Capacitybuilders between 2008-11, for support to third sector organisations in the following nine areas: campaigning and advocacy, responding to social change, collaborative working, marketing and communications, equalities and diversity, leadership and governance, income generation, performance management, and modernising volunteering www.improvingsupport.org.uk
- The National Hubs, funded by Capacitybuilders between 2005-8, for support, information and services in the following six areas: finance, governance, ICT, performance, UK workforce and volunteering www.nationalhubs.org.uk

2.6 Teacher recruitment

If you are taking on the management of a children's centre that provides early years provision (integrated early learning and care) you will need to recruit a qualified teacher. If the centre has not yet been designated, you will need to recruit a teacher on a half-time basis, but within 12-18 months of designation, you will need to have a full-time teacher working in the centre.

Recruiting a teacher can prove to be a challenge for VCS organisations as pay and terms and conditions of employment are often very different in the teaching and VCS sectors. Options available to you for recruitment of a teacher include coming to an agreement with neighbouring schools to buy-in teacher input, recruiting a teacher through a secondment from the local authority, or recruiting a teacher directly into your organisation.

If you intend to recruit a teacher directly into your organisation there are a few issues to be aware of. The offer of employment will need to be made suitably attractive to entice a teacher from a typical educational institution into working for a VCS organisation. This could involve offering teacher terms and conditions, including a 14.1% employer pension contribution. Your organisation will need to be accepted into the Teachers' Pension Scheme before this benefit can be offered, and entry into the scheme is considered on a case by case basis. You may need to discuss with the local authority the need for additional resources to cover these enhanced terms and conditions.

You will also need to ensure, if you have recruited a teacher directly into your organisation, that they are strongly linked into local education systems for support purposes and their continuous professional development. You could make arrangements with the local authority to link the teacher into their early years foundation stage team.

By 2010 all children's centres offering early years provision are also expected to employ someone with Early Years Professional Status (EYPS). There are four pathways to achieving EYPS. These are available to qualified teachers and others at Level 5 and above in children's centres. You will need to have a commitment to the development of your existing staff to achieve this.

See

- Teachernet for information and resources for teachers and education managers www.teachernet.gov.uk
- The Teachers' Pensions website for guidance for employers and detailed information for teachers www.teacherspensions.co.uk
- The Training and Development Agency for Schools (TDA) for information on the training and development of the school workforce www.tda.gov.uk
- The Children's Workforce Development Council for information on and training to achieve Early Years Professional Status www.cwdcouncil.org.uk/projects/earlyyears.htm

2.7 Statutory sector champions for VCS organisations

Having someone embedded in the local authority team leading on the children's centre programme, who has an understanding of charity law and regulations placed on voluntary organisations registered as charities, can ease the process of local authorities charging VCS organisations with the management of a children's centre. This person, who should have influence in local authority decision making, could act as a champion for VCS organisations, working to identify any specific implications for and impacts on VCS organisations managing children's centres (such as those detailed in the previous pages), and facilitating discussions between the VCS and local authority where necessary.

A champion could promote the benefits of involving VCS organisations in the management of children's centres, co-ordinate effective implementation and review progress by:

- Ensuring familiarity with charity law and regulations affecting charities
- Being able to identify the implications for VCS organisations taking on the management of a children's centre and any impact on both the individual VCS organisations and the local authority
- Monitoring the progress of VCS organisations managing children's centres, with the intention of reporting on good practice and identifying and facilitating the resolution of problem areas
- Being the initial point of contact for advice and support regarding VCS children's centre management and sharing learning and experience to guide the development of other children's centres
- Seeking the views of VCS organisations managing children's centres in order to represent those views to the local authority team leading on the local children's centre programme

See

- Charity Law www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/third_sector/law_and_regulation.aspx
- Charity Commission www.charitycommission.gov.uk

3

Outcomes: capturing your full value

3.1 Values matrix

3.2 Capturing your organisation's full value

The success of each children's centre will be judged on its outcomes, which will be tracked by how well it meets both national and local performance indicator targets. This section details typical values that VCS organisations can offer in service delivery and provides you with tools to capture the full range of outcomes that your organisation can contribute to through children's centre management.



3.1 Values Matrix

This table contains values frequently ascribed to the voluntary sector. A selection of sources for these values, from both the statutory and voluntary sectors, has been provided and these sources are listed on the following page.

Values	Source	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
	A strong focus on the needs of services users		✓	✓		✓				✓			
Knowledge and expertise to meet complex personal needs and tackle difficult social issues		✓	✓	✓		✓			✓			✓	
An ability to be flexible and offer joined-up service delivery		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓				
The capacity to build users' trust		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓				
The experience and independence to innovate		✓	✓	✓	✓			✓		✓		✓	
An ability to involve local people to build community 'ownership'		✓	✓									✓	
An approach that builds the skills and experience of volunteers		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓
An ability to increase trust within and across communities / social capital		✓	✓					✓		✓		✓	✓
An ability to provide independent advocacy for services users engaging with statutory authorities			✓							✓			
An ability to represent the needs of service users to government			✓					✓	✓	✓			
The knowledge and local networks to engage people that government finds 'hard to reach'			✓		✓	✓		✓	✓				
An ability to identify new and emerging needs more quickly than government through having strong community roots			✓		✓	✓		✓	✓				
An ability to address people's needs in a more holistic way			✓		✓				✓				
A commitment to involve service users and to support them to become volunteers and workers, thereby delivering services that are non-stigmatising and appropriate			✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
Independent of the statutory sector and can operate with fewer political restraints / less bureaucracy					✓				✓				
An ability to fundraise					✓	✓							
An ability to work across professional boundaries					✓								
Experience and expertise in providing preventative services						✓							

Values Matrix: Sources

1. HM Treasury (2006) Improving Financial Relationships with the Third Sector: Guidance to Funders and Purchasers www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/media/9/4/guidncefunders1505061v1.pdf
2. Baring Foundation (2007) Submission to the Inquiry on Third Sector Commissioning, House of Commons Public Administration Select Committee (p296-309) www.parliament.uk/documents/upload/TSCWrittenEvidence3.pdf
3. NCVO (2007) Rethinking Efficiency and Value www.ncvo-vol.org.uk/uploadedFiles/NCVO/What_we_do/Sustainable_Funding/SFP_Resources/Rethinking_efficiency_and_value.pdf
4. London Development Agency, IDeA, Connaught Group, NCH and NCVCCO (2004) Commissioning Children's Services and the Role of the Voluntary and Community Sector www.navca.org.uk/NR/rdonlyres/093421F9-CD8D-4321-9179-80A8F3E75EFE/0/VCS_Commissioning_report.pdf
5. DfES (2005) Every Child Matters: Engaging the Voluntary and Community Sectors in Children's Trusts <http://publications.everychildmatters.gov.uk/eOrderingDownload/1570-2005PDF-EN-01.pdf>
6. Leeds Metropolitan University (2004) Impact of the Voluntary and Community Sector in Greater Nottingham www.nottinghamcvs-changeteam.co.uk/refdocs/impact.pdf
7. Cabinet Office (2002) Private Action Public Benefit: A Review of Charities and the Wider Not-for-Profit Sector [www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/strategy/work_areas/~media/assets/www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/strategy/strat%20data%20pdf.ashx](http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/strategy/work_areas/~/media/assets/www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/strategy/strat%20data%20pdf.ashx)
8. Women's Resource Centre (2006) The Economic and Social Impact of the Women's Voluntary and Community Sector: A Pilot Study www.londoncouncils.gov.uk/upload/public/attachments/829/FINAL%20REPORT%202.doc
9. HM Treasury and Cabinet Office (2007) The Future Role of the Third Sector in Social and Economic Regeneration: Final Report www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/media/9/8/pbr06_3rd_sector_428.pdf
10. Newcastle CVS (2005) The Voluntary Sector in Newcastle upon Tyne www.cvsnewcastle.org.uk/publications/papers/research_sector2005.pdf
11. DfES (2007) Third Sector Strategy and Action Plan www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/files/4D482270776DF5B8DB1D4CEA419AAE9D.pdf
12. Department for Communities and Local Government (2007) Third Sector Strategy for Communities and Local Government Discussion Paper www.communities.gov.uk/documents/communities/pdf/324564

3.2 Capturing your organisation's full value

With children's centres being multi-agency vehicles for supporting children and families across a wide range of areas including education, health, care and support, it is important to capture the full value that the VCS can offer through children's centre management. Full (often referred to as added) value relates to the specific impacts, achievements, results, outcomes (whatever term you use) of your service, taking into consideration the nature of your organisation. This includes all economic, environmental and social benefits that you offer.

You will use the children's centre self-evaluation form annually, in collaboration with the local authority and your partners in the children's centre, to give a holistic picture of your centre's outcomes, use of resources, good practice and progress over the previous year, together with your goals and plans for the future.

Your centre's outcomes will be judged against both national and local performance indicators and any recent Ofsted inspection. Local performance indicators will come through the Local Area Agreement, based on the local authority and local strategic partnership's community strategy or, if it has been developed, sustainable community strategy. You will also self evaluate against the Every Child Matters outcomes (be healthy, stay safe, enjoy and achieve, make a positive contribution, achieve economic well-being) and in other specific areas such as access for excluded and disadvantaged groups, parental and community involvement, leadership and financial management and partnership working.

There are various tools you can use to help you work out your full value. One recent guide from the Performance Hub includes exercises to help you identify and build on your full value and communicate it to different audiences. In this model, you need to consider your effect on your stakeholders, looking specifically at four elements when working out your full value: the benefits you bring to both service users and non-users in terms of both outcomes and satisfaction.

See

- Every Child Matters outcomes framework
<http://publications.everychildmatters.gov.uk/eOrderingDownload/2063-2005PDF-EN-01.pdf>
- The New Performance Framework for Local Authorities & Local Authority Partnerships: Single Set of National Indicators (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2007)
www.communities.gov.uk/documents/localgovernment/pdf/505713
- Children's centres self-evaluation form
www.surestart.gov.uk/_doc/P0002410.doc
- Performance Hub (2008) Full Value: Public Services and the Third Sector
www.performance-improvement.org.uk/displaypagedoc.asp?id=5214 and
True Colours: Uncovering the full value of your organisation
www.performancehub.org.uk/fullvalue

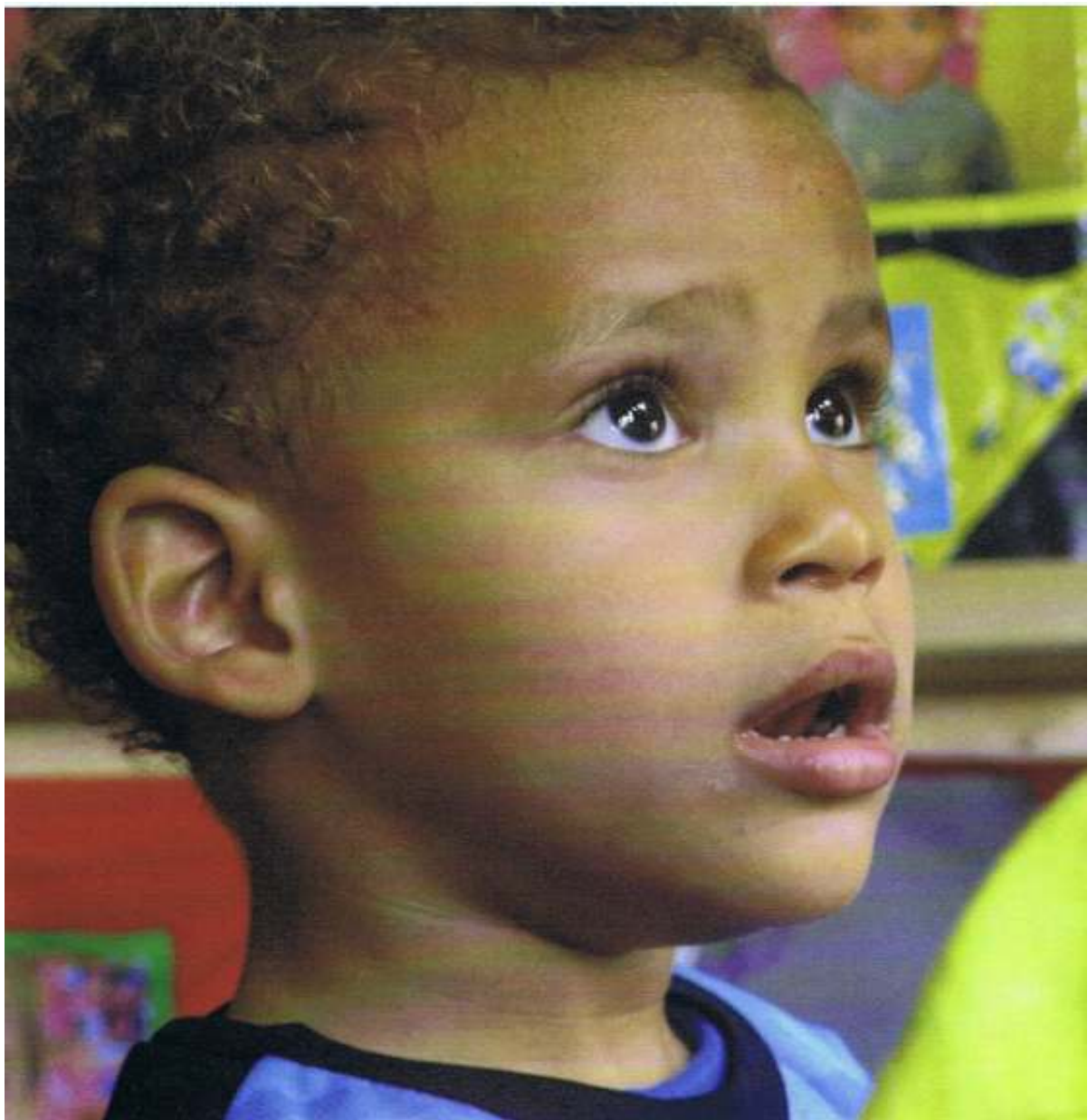
4

Collaboration

4.1 Benefits of children's centres working together

4.2 Recommendations for VCS and local authority joint working

Collaborative working can support VCS organisations to deliver children's centres that respond to and meet children's needs. This section looks at the merits of organisations managing children's centres working together to benefit from each others' expertise and experience and makes recommendations for joint working between VCS organisations and local authorities.



4.1 Benefits of children's centres working together

Forming a consortium of local children's centres or of VCS organisations managing children's centres locally can ultimately benefit the children and families using these centres by enabling more effective information sharing between centres, which can facilitate centres to learn from each others' experiences and exchange good practice.

Where centres are facing similar challenges in the development or management of children's centres, in reaching a particular area of the community or in meeting the expected outcomes, a consortium could work through these issues together and liaise jointly with the local authority or delivery partners where necessary.

A consortium could explore opportunities around pooling individual centres' budgets to buy-in services or expertise that one centre by itself would have been unable to provide in a cost effective manner. This could include buying in finance or marketing expertise, a cook or premises manager, or a course for supporting parents to engage more effectively on a centre's advisory board or managing body's governing board.

Where VCS organisations managing children's centres form a consortium, this group could jointly investigate and follow up on charitable funding streams that enable them to deliver a project or service that ties in with their charitable aims and complements the work of the children's centres. However you should be aware that subsidising core children's centre services through charitable funds could lead to local authorities becoming dependent on charitable funds to fill gaps in public funding, jeopardising the future of the organisation managing the centre and the welfare of the children and families using the centre.

See

- NCVO's Collaborative Working Unit for resources and support around VCS organisations working together www.ncvo-vol.org.uk/collaborativeworkingunit/index.asp?id=2038
- NAVCA's Improving Local Partnerships Unit for resources on developing local partnerships involving the VCS www.navca.org.uk/localvs/infobank

4.2 Recommendations for VCS and local authority joint working

The following recommendations look at how VCS organisations and local authorities, as children's centre accountable bodies, can work together to develop sustainable VCS-led children's centres that meet the needs of local children and families, drawing on the expertise of the managing VCS organisation.

- Local authorities should commit to three year forward funding agreements
- VCS organisations should develop their skills in costing service delivery before taking on the management of a children's centre, and local authorities should commit to a full cost recovery approach to children's centre budgets
- Local authorities should focus on outcomes when monitoring and evaluating children's centres so that VCS organisations have flexibility wherever possible to use their expertise and demonstrate their ability to plan and deliver services
- VCS organisations should work with local authorities to understand any constraints that affect how local authorities charge VCS organisations to manage children's centres, and where there are constraints there should be as much dialogue as possible in order that both sides understand these restrictions and can devise appropriate solutions
- Local authorities and VCS organisations should work together to ensure that the level of risk in taking on the management of a children's centre is acceptable for VCS organisations, including ensuring that responsibilities are clearly defined and that provisions are made for contingencies
- Local authorities and VCS organisations need to set up communication systems to ensure that all information pertinent to children's centre management is relayed in a clear and consistent fashion to all relevant parties
- Local authorities and VCS organisations should discuss mechanisms for local authorities to listen and respond to any issues VCS organisations' have with children's centre management
- VCS organisations should be prepared to work with local authorities on any support needs they may have, and local authorities should help enable VCS organisations to access support around these needs
- Local authorities and VCS organisations need to develop trusting relationships where they can engage in dialogue about all pertinent issues, in the knowledge that the priority for all parties is achieving the best results for children and families

See

- NCVO's Public Service Delivery Network for information and support on VCS organisations delivering public services www.ncvo-vol.org.uk/psdnetwork

5 Key recommendations

Below are recommendations from VCS organisations currently managing children's centres for other VCS organisations taking on the management of a children's centre.

Be prepared for and embrace change

Share with other children's centres in the same position and try to work collectively

Talk to those who have gone through the whole process and learn from their experience

Arm yourself with as much information as possible, do your research and don't lose sight of your own agenda

Build a relationship with your local school(s) and get involved

Set up systems for communicating with the local authority

Be brave and stand by your values and aims as early years workers

Request the additional resources that you need in order to enable your organisation to effectively manage a children's centre

Be firm with your views and fight your corner

Remember what you do is always for the children

6

Resources

Primary sites for children's centre support resources

www.everychildmatters.gov.uk

Government programme for a national framework to support the "joining up" of children's services - education, culture, health, social care and justice.

www.surestart.gov.uk

Sure Start is the Government programme to deliver the best start in life for every child, bringing together early education, childcare, health and family.

Website includes comprehensive guidance including:

- Governance Guidance for Sure Start Children's Centres and Extended Schools (May 2007)
- Sure Start Children's Centre Practice Guidance (November 2006)
- Sure Start Children's Centres: Phase 2 Planning and Performance Management Guidance (November 2006)
- Sure Start Children's Centres: Phase 3 Planning and Delivery Guidance (November 2007)
- Capital buildings and facilities guidance
www.surestart.gov.uk/resources/general/capitalbuildingsfacilities
- Delivering health services through Sure Start Children's Centres (June 2007)
http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH_076333
- Children's Centre Communications Toolkit (March 2008)
<http://www.surestart.gov.uk/doc/P0002522.pdf>
- The Sure Start Journey: A Summary of Evidence (March 2008)
www.dfes.gov.uk/localauthorities/documents/content/2102080002_FINAL%20The%20Sure%20Start%20Journey.pdf

www.childrens-centres.org

Together for Children's Children Centre site is an interactive, one-stop-shop for local authorities (but information on the site is also of interest to those managing children's centres) and provides resources, tools, guidance, best practice and communities of interest.

Website includes case studies, links to DCSF support products and the following Together for Children support products

- Child poverty toolkit (March 2008)
- Reaching priority and excluded families toolkit (August 2007)
- Improving links with Jobcentre Plus (December 2007)
- Supporting the successful delivery of rural children's centres toolkit (October 2007)
- Working with the private, voluntary and independent sectors toolkit (September 2007)

- Governance: exemplification of models (September 2007)
- Improving health and local authority joint working toolkit (July 2007)
- Business planning toolkit (July 2007)
- Project management toolkit (October 2007)

Support for children's centre leadership

National Standards for Leaders of Sure Start Children's Centres (DfES, February 2007)

http://publications.teachernet.gov.uk/eOrderingDownload/National_Standards_CC_Leadership.pdf

The National Professional Qualification in Integrated Centre Leadership (NPQICL) is the first national programme to address the needs of leaders within integrated, multi-agency settings. NPQICL is recognised as the qualification for leadership of multi-agency and multi-disciplinary environments across education, health and social services. It offers leaders of Children's Centres the opportunity to collaborate across the community to provide seamless high quality services for babies, children and families. www.ncsl.org.uk

Support for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Getting The Best Start (DCSF / 4Children, 2007) [www.childrens-](http://www.childrens-centres.org/learningsystem/eView/Customers/tfc/Page_images/Library/4children_getting_the_best_start.pdf)

[centres.org/learningsystem/eView/Customers/tfc/Page_images/Library/4children_getting_the_best_start.pdf](http://www.childrens-centres.org/learningsystem/eView/Customers/tfc/Page_images/Library/4children_getting_the_best_start.pdf)

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- Share experience nationally

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