

Making Local Area Agreements Work for Children and Young People: the Role of the Voluntary and Community Sector

**Report of a workshop organised by the West Midlands
Voluntary Youth Sector Forum and financed by the
Government Office of the West Midlands**



GOVERNMENT OFFICE
FOR THE WEST MIDLANDS

ChangeUp



West Midlands Voluntary YOUTH Sector Forum

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1. Introduction

The workshop, held in Birmingham on March 31, 2006, was one of three events designed to explore how the voluntary and community sector (VCS) can best help meet the needs of children and young people by engaging with the national children and young people and other linked policy agendas. Funded by the Government Office of the West Midlands 'Change Up' monies, this first workshop focused on Local Area Agreements (LAAs). The workshop, organised by the West Midlands Voluntary Youth Sector Forum and facilitated by the Office for Public Management, was attended by members from the voluntary youth and community sector in the West Midlands (see Appendix 1). This report documents the discussions and points for consideration that resulted from the workshop.

2. The workshop

The workshop comprised four stages (see Appendix 2):

- A presentation by Clive Miller (OPM) on the scope and content of a Local Area Agreement followed by discussion
- A presentation by Joy Warmington of the experiences of BRAP, a Birmingham based voluntary sector organisation, and other voluntary sector organisations of engagement with the LAA process, followed by discussion
- An exercise to enable participants to identify how issues of concern to children and young people might fit within the four blocks and cross cutting themes of the LAA
- Group work to identify what approach to take to attain better outcomes for children and young people through voluntary and community sector engagement in LAAs

3. Local Area Agreements

A LAA is a three year agreement between central government and a local area represented by a local authority and local strategic partnership (LSP). The latest guidance ('Local Area Agreements guidance', June 2005, ODPM) requires local partners to agree a set of priorities grouped into four blocks:

- **Children and Young People** - focused on the five national Every Child Matters (ECM) outcomes
- **Safer and Stronger Communities** - crime, drugs, anti-social behaviour, improving public spaces, making public services more responsive to local needs, empowering local communities, encouraging active citizenship

- **Healthier Communities and Older People** - improving public health and promoting independence and wellbeing for older people
- **Economic Development and Enterprise** - improve the economic growth and productivity of a locality also crucial to improving health and reducing inequalities in health.

Other areas covered by LAAs include:

- Transport, Rural areas, Environment, Areas of low housing demand, Housing growth and European funding
- General duty under the Race Relations Act 1976 (as amended).

The aim of a LAA is to give local authorities and their partners the flexibility to find local solutions to local problems. This can include applying, via the LAA process and the relevant Government Office, for permission to:

- Pool separate funding streams and simplify central government performance management requirements
- Apply for freedoms and flexibilities, for example, in the use of targeted government funding

LAAs also include an extra incentive for collaboration by providing rewards for achieving stretch targets i.e. improvements in performance above and beyond those that have already been agreed locally.

The agreement is aimed at delivering a better quality of life for people through improving performance on a range of national and local priorities and comprises:

- outcomes
- indicators
- and targets

Building on the use of Local Public Service Agreements (LPSAs), LAAs were first piloted in 20 local authority areas in March 2005. A further 66 LAAs were negotiated and due to be signed off by March 2006. All 'top tier' LAs will be expected to have LAAs by 2007.

The process of negotiating a LAA should be characterised by:

- Involvement all key partners, including local people and the VCS in helping to identify, shape and deliver local services.
- focused on outcomes not funding streams

- and involve working with the relevant government office throughout

The LAA guidance requires that the voluntary and community sector (VCS) should be involved throughout the development, agreement and implementation of the LAA.

- the VCS should already be represented on the LSP.
- the LAA should exemplify the involvement of the VCS and local people in the design and delivery of the agreement through being:
 - informed
 - consulted
 - opportunity to participate in the LAA process
 - the delivery of outcomes
- the involvement of the VCS and local people should cut across the four LAA blocks.
- the LAA should also state how partners have considered the capacity of the voluntary and community sector to contribute effectively and how they can best facilitate the involvement of local people.
- capacity building may be the means to achieving other outcomes or be an outcome itself.

Getting LAAs up and running has not been straightforward:

- Central government, government offices and local partners are still working out their roles and relationships
- Some LAAs try to encompass all local cross sector agreements, others focus on particular priorities where LAAs are seen to provide greatest leverage. In many cases the focus is not clear.
- Some agreements have become very technocratic focusing on indicators and targets rather than outcomes and gaining full ownership from all local partners
- Negotiating freedoms and flexibilities has proved to be very challenging

4. The Birmingham VCS Experience

The Joy Warmington, chief executive of Birmingham Race Action Partnership (BRAP), described their experience of participating in the development of Birmingham's LAA during 2005 /6. BRAP is a strategic VCS organisation facilitating the work of VCS organisations across Birmingham and has occupied one of the VCS seats on Birmingham's Local Strategic Partnership for the last three years.

Each local authority will have its own structure and process for delivering a LAA that relates to particular local circumstances. Key feature of the structure and working process in Birmingham were:

- The local authority in Birmingham is devolved into several districts and the LAA's are delivered through the 11 districts.
- The LAA Programme Board is formed of the operational groups and district managers, underneath which the four blocks operate. The VCS occupies six of the thirty places on the LAA Board.
- There is a pool of Neighbourhood Renewal Advisers – contracted by ODPM – who also provided support to the LAA process.
- A local authority based Secretariat provides policy analysis, desk based research to the LSP and a mechanism to facilitate links with the LSP's constituent partnerships.

BRAP were aware of the outset that there was some uncertainty about the LAA process.

- There was the expectation that there would be a lot of synergy between the issues that the VCS would be raising and the aims of the LAA. This was not realised.
- The four blocks within the LAA did not easily equate to the existing structure of partnerships within the LSP. This presented an additional organisational obstacle.
- Whilst formally a rational planning process for identifying and progressing opportunities for cross sector collaboration the actual process was driven by personalities and the agendas of particular agencies.
- The local authority Secretariat was felt not to be independent and it was hard to influence what was placed on the agenda.
- The expertise of the VCS was not well used in the LAA process and insufficient support was provided to enable the sector to engage.

“Constructing the LAA should have informed the way partnerships are to be developed. To many this is a new way of working and therefore there is a need for lead in time. There is no objective process about what goes into the blocks, prioritisation is dependant on lobbying.”

The national evaluation of the pilot round of LAAs found that the success of the agreements was hampered by a number of issues:

- engaging with partnerships
- tight schedule
- a lack of communication.

All of these features were part of the VCS's experience of the Birmingham LAA process. The two significant challenges that the VCS experienced were working in

partnership with the voluntary and public sector and forming and maintaining partnerships within the voluntary sector.

- The development of the LAA involved cramming a large amount of work into a short period of time. The working groups for each of the four blocks met weekly for two to three hours. As the VCS was targeting all four blocks of the LAA this presented a major organisational challenge and represented a very large time commitment.
- The VCS itself had no infrastructure that aligned with the four LAA blocks. This created big problems of, within sector, communication and representation. It was difficult to engage all partners and this proved to be cumbersome. It was also sometimes unclear whether VCS organisations involved in negotiations were representing themselves or the wider sector.

5. Outcomes

A primary issue for all organisations in relating to LAAs is to be able to understand how the outcomes for those they serve relate to the four LAA blocks. During the workshop participants were therefore asked to identify issues they know to be of concern to young people that relate to each of the blocks. This map of issues (see Appendix 3) could be used by other groups of voluntary youth sector organisations to make the links between the concerns of young people in their local areas and the four LAA blocks. The map is also of use to both the Government Office and local partnerships in understanding the issues that young people would wish to have addressed by LAAs.

6. Making effective use of LAAs

At the workshop small groups were each allocated one of the four LAA blocks and asked to:

- Select a cluster of issues from the issues map
- Describe what collaborative action would be required to deliver on that issue
- Identify whether pooled funding or freedoms and flexibilities would help support effective collaboration
- Decide what the VCS should do and the support it might require from the local authority and the government office

The detailed results of this group work can be found in Appendix 4.

From the group work and the resulting plenary three key areas for further development were identified:

- The organisation and support that partnerships, local authorities and the government office should provide around the LAA and wider partnership processes
- For the voluntary and community sector:
 - The role individual voluntary organisations in delivering outcomes
 - Collaborative action that they should take to enable them to influence LAAs

6.1 Organisation and support of the LAA and wider partnership processes

The degree to which young people, the VCS and other partner sectors can influence and contribute to an LAA to some degree depends on how well both the LAA and wider partnership processes are organised.

Actions to consider are:

- **Partnerships**
 - Within the LSP, gain agreement about which of its sub partnerships should take the lead on which of the LAA blocks
 - Ensure engagement of all partners in the Children and Young People's Strategic Planning process so that the priorities from that plan are owned and can therefore form a solid basis for the LAA. Deciding priorities through the planning process would take some of the pressure off of the LAA process and allow a longer time during which the VCS and others can influence the priorities.
 - Produce an easy to read, user friendly LAA annual progress report
- **Local authorities**
 - Ensure the LAA process is transparently linked with wider strategic planning
 - Focus on outcomes and honestly appraise the effectiveness of current provision
 - Recognise the value of 'softer targets' and include them in the LAA from the beginning

- In line with the LAA guidance (CITE PAGE NUMBER), implement ‘full cost recovery’ for the VCS so that they have more resources available to engage with strategic activities such as the LAA process
- Develop a collaborative approach to involving the VCS by recognising its capacity to deliver services and offering facilities and resources to enable it to participate effectively in the LAA process
- **Government office**
 - Prompt local authorities to ensure that the VCS is involved in all parts of the LAA process and to negotiate VCS contracts on a ‘full cost recovery’ basis
 - Challenge LSPs to support capacity building especially that required to enable smaller VCS organisations to engage in the LAA process
 - Use the VCS to connect with the grassroots of communities

A list of Government Office of the West Midlands contacts is provided at Appendix 5.

6.2 The role of individual VCS organisations in delivering outcomes

The outcome-focused nature of the LAA places a premium on VCS organisations being able to evidence their relevance to, and impact on, outcomes within the LAA blocks.

Actions to consider are:

- **Focus on outcomes for young people** – as the LAA priorities for young people should be rooted in those identified within local Children and Young People’s Plans VCS organisations should be prepared to demonstrate the relevance of the information they hold and the services they provide to those priorities.
- **Evidenced effectiveness** – as targets are identified within the LAA , VCS organisations should identify the targets on which they are best placed to deliver and be able to evidence their effectiveness
- **Linked softer targets** – where VCS organisations are delivering on softer targets that are linked to the LAA targets, the linkage should be made explicit.

6.3 Collaborative action by the VCS to influence the LAA

The LAA process is time consuming and often difficult to influence and as the process is new the VCS is typically not well geared up to participate.

Actions to consider are:

- **Use existing VCS infrastructure** – work with existing VCS forums to identify on what issues, and how, to work with the LAA process
- **Establish a VCS, LAA secretariat** – use existing VCS co-ordinating resources to: build up a LAA knowledge base; enable VCS forums to be kept abreast of the LAA process; and to support VCS representatives.
- **Resourcing strategic engagement** – lobby to ensure that the LAA guidance recommendation on full cost recovery to enable strategic engagement of the VCS is implemented.
- **Effective lobbying** – develop an affordable, collective, approach to lobbying the government office, local partnerships and LA authority staff involved in supporting the LAA process
- **Collaborative bidding** – together identify on which outcomes and targets the VCS has most to offer and communicate that offer collectively
- **Links with the Government office** - develop collective working links with the government office so that there is a continuing collaborative dialogue on the issues facing young people and the role that the VCS can play in enabling them to be tackled.

7. Conclusion

The workshop provided an opportunity to discuss what approaches to adopt so that the VCS can operate effectively within this changing landscape. The VCS has to develop more effective and efficient methods of collaboration both within the sector and with statutory partner agencies at a regional and local level. This, in turn, will be enabled by local authorities and LSPs developing open and transparent LAA processes and proactively supporting the involvement of the VCS. Collaboration must be able to focus on outcomes both within Children and Young People's Plans and LAA's. The degree to which the VCS is able to play a full part will greatly depend on the resources it has available. Involving the VCS as service deliverers on a 'full cost recovery' basis and regional and local investment in local and regional VCS infrastructure is essential.

Appendix 1: Workshop Participants

Name	Organisation	Contact
Peter Hannah-Smith	DePaul Trust	Peter.hannah-smith@depaultrust.org
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Jim Jenkinson	YMCA	
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Yvette John	Kings Centre	Yvette.john@kccmembers.com
Ethelrene Sinclair	CHC Services Group	ethelrenes@aol.com
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Michael White	The Children's Society	Michael.white@childrenssociety.org.uk
Peter Norton	EMVY	

Appendix 2: Workshop Programme

West Midlands Voluntary Youth Sector Forum

Local Area Agreements: Opportunities and Threats for the Voluntary Youth Sector

A Change Up Programme Workshop

Priory Rooms, Bull Street, Birmingham, March 31, 2006

10.00

Arrival, registration and coffee

10.30

Welcome and overview of the workshop

10.40

LAAS: the basics (Clive Miller, OPM)

Presentation

11.00

LAAs: practical experience and tips for the future (Joy Warmington, BRAP)

Presentation and discussion

12.00

Targeting an LAA

Participative exercise

1.10

Plenary

- Feedback from each group on how to use an LAA to target a particular cluster of outcomes

1.30

Appendix 3: Outcomes

Below are the issues and outcomes for young people that were identified and clustered by workshop participants within the four LAA blocks.

3.1 Block: Older people and healthier communities (plus equality and diversity; rural area; housing – low demand and growth; environment; transport; European funding)

1. Specific health services

- Adequate access to teenage sexual advice/help provision
- Ensuring healthy lifestyles for young people
- YP specialised or focused services
- Increased education re: healthy lifestyles
- Nutritional information
- Support to address mental health needs
- Support and information
- Preventative services to enable healthy and longer life

2. Parenting

- Improving child well-being by creating greater understanding of the role of parents, especially fathers
- “Grandparent” child sitting service – every child should have one

3. Environment

- Young people have quality housing and housing choices
- Public transport infrastructure

4. Real engagement

- Children and YP have access to information and services
- Young people sharing experiences and cultural history with older people to improve cohesion within communities
- CYP constantly raise issues around the six issues but how are they listened to and made links to all sectors. VCS can contribute hugely to this issue
- C&YP engaged and part of the wider community and its social networks
- Engagement with young people leading to real changes for them and the community
- Rural areas – taking youth actually to young people

3.2 Block: Children and Young People (plus equality and diversity; rural area; housing – low demand and growth; environment; transport; European funding)

1. Health

- Young people developing healthier lifestyles and positive mental health through involvement in delivering and experiencing complimentary health therapies
- Healthy choices
- C&YP have always struggled to find a connection to public health and its plans. Sector needs to fill this gap, have many experts.
- Healthy choice being made by young people for lunch time food in schools

2. Activity/Participation

- The need to avoid public puppetry of young people
- Motivated young people willing to be involved in their community
- Increased level of local services and activities for young people – increase in variety
- A holistic approach – seeing the whole person
- Parent of young person – education/training
- Outcome – achieve high numbers of young people participating in 1 hour of physical activity twice a week
- CYP opportunities to participate in sport and other activity to reduce boredom and anti social behaviour
- Active participation both ways
- More sport facilities in order to promote health and reduce anti social behaviour

3. Decision Making

- Young people shaping the design and delivery of advice and information on mental and physical health
- Opportunities for a wider range of YP to actively participate in different services and at different levels
- YPs' involvement and influence on decisions as equal partners
- Recognise and reward YPs contributions to their communities
- Decision making should be responsive to children and YPs' needs and views (young people friendly not just boring meetings)
- Young people meaningfully involved in decision making/governance

- How do CYP engage with design of services?
- Development of a sectoral consultative mechanism and forum

3.3 Block: Economic Development (plus Housing – low demand/growth; environment; transport; European funding)

1. Transport

- Access to everything from a rural base
- Dealing with access to employment issues

2. Housing

- Affordable available quality housing
- Jobs market and housing market aren't so far apart. C&YP have prospects of living and working where they grow up
- Better conditions for YP to live in safer communities
- Affordable housing in areas where YP wish to live

3. Inclusion of disabled YP and the removal of barriers to opportunities

3.4 Block: Safer and Stronger Communities (Equality and diversity; rural areas; housing – low demand/growth; environment; transport; European funding)

1. Health

- Young people's participation in the carnival will project a positive image of young people
- Increase take up of fitness and leisure opportunities among ethnic minority young women (very few do any exercise)

2. Participation and cohesion/involvement and decision making

- Improved cross generational understanding and respect
- Communities valuing the role young people play in society
- Disabled young people supported effectively to take part in local decision making
- C&YP engaged directly in defining and prioritising local issues and responses

3. Bullying

- A raised awareness of methods of dealing with bullying
- Bullying support to reduce the incidence

4. Access and safe places

- Services are seamless i.e. CYP should experience joined up services irrespective of the organisation and sector that delivers them
- Dedicated children and youth clubs to engage children and YP to enable them to be active within their communities
- Drug awareness/health awareness/skills development
- Safe and welcoming meeting spaces for YP
- Rural isolation – increased and improved transport systems – increased services in rural areas
- YP have safe, secure and YP friendly places to go/meet each other

5. Crime and health / equality and diversity

- Improve mental health outcomes for young women in CJS and young Asian women who have 3x rate of suicide and depression of white counterparts
- Crime, drugs and anti social behaviour
- Re offending
- Better information on the negative role of drugs so reducing use of anti social behaviour and offending

Appendix 4: Making LAAs work for young people

Participants were asked to focus on one issue identified under the four blocks and consider the following points in relation to the identified issues:

- What services can the voluntary and community sector provide to improve the outcomes they have identified within the four blocks?
- What funding streams can be pooled to assist in attaining those outcomes?
- What opportunities and threats exist?
- What action should be taken by the voluntary and community sector, the local authority and regional government to contribute to the realisation of better outcomes?

Below are the flipchart reports produced by the groups.

4.1 Block: Safer Communities

Issue: Access (Safe Places)

- Youth Clubs
- Info and advice cars
- Informal education
- Tailored:
 - Women
 - Health
 - Parenting
 - Housing
- Children's Activities
- Elderly

Voluntary Sector Services (Characteristics):

- Diverse
- Flexible
- Innovative
- Responsive
- Community Involvement in Development
- Small and Local
- Privacy
- Expertise
- Cultural understanding
- Sensitivity
- Credibility
- Less likely to have an agenda – voluntary relationships

Pooled Funding:

- CYPSP's
- PAYP
- CXPS
- PVRF
- Mental health services
- Commission for health movers
- Education health Partnerships
- NSF

Opportunities:

- Partnership on Cross-cutting themes
- Potential consortium
- Look at outcomes and how we deliver them (not yet defined services)
- Engaging with the community

Threats:

- Small organisations' lack of information/capacity
- Constant Change
- Financial risk

Actions:

- Risk assessment
- Strategic approach from VCS
- Gain representation (quality)
- Befriending GOWM

4.2 Block: Healthier communities and older people

Issue: Health services

Voluntary sector services: mental health projects and physical health projects.

Services:

- personal development
- self esteem
- rehabilitation
- drug services
- sexual health
- gender specific
- parenting projects
- Behaviour managing
- Family meditation
- Mentoring
- Disability projects
- Complimentary therapy
- Stress management

Pooled Funding for a focus on teenage pregnancy:

- CAMHS, Connexions, Neighbourhood Renewal funding, NSF, Sure Start, Healthy Schools

Freedoms and Flexibilities:

- None listed

Opportunities:

- Better outcomes for deliverer and recipient, more opportunities to influence change and delivery, more co-ordination and collaborative working.

Threats:

- Complicated bureaucracy and a poor process. Lack of representation and “not in the communication loop”.

Actions:

- Voluntary and community sector - Be involved in discussions and act collaboratively. Share knowledge and intelligence. Develop champions and maximise what works.
- Local Authority – Listen and change. Be outcome focussed and have an honest evaluation of local service delivery.
- Regional government – Monitor, scrutinise and direct.

4.3 Block: Economic Development

Issue: Affordable housing in localities (access to...)

Voluntary sector services:

- Housing Association links to the VCS, supported housing projects, help/advice projects for young people (how to access to emergency accommodation) and on independent living support.

Pooled funding:

- Very difficult to find solution within this remit. However, there is scope for placing pressure and present evidence. Lobbying local government, regional government and others.

Freedom and flexibilities:

- key issue outside ability of a local authority?

Opportunities:

- All 'players' there to listen and act and lobby.

Threats:

- lose sight of the original issue and no actions are taken.

Actions:

- Voluntary and community sector: Co-ordinated and strategic lobbying, maintain a focus on the real issue.
- Local authority: respond to real evidence and review housing policy.
- Regional government: They must ensure that they connect to the 'grassroots'.

4.4 Block: Children and Young People

Issue: Activity participation

Voluntary sector services:

- Duke Edinburgh
- Uniformed groups (e.g. scouts)
- Faith groups
- Local community groups
- Drama
- Arts and Crafts
- Youth clubs

Pooled funding:

- to provide equipment, training, hire premises and employ specialist staff.

Freedoms and flexibilities:

- To reach a broader span of people ad this funding currently relates to young people that have engaged in crime related activities. Broaden the focus to reach a wider cross-section of young people.

Opportunities:

- Increased amounts of money
- Able to offer more to young people
- Increasing a range of activities available
- More joint working/ scoping what is available in local area
- More professionally delivered activities and sharing of expertise
- Access to previously unused spaces.

Threats:

- Competitiveness
- Limited to existing provision
- How to manage all the partners involved
- LA blocking.

Actions:

- Voluntary and community sector: Identify what services they can offer and co-ordinate an approach.
- Local authority: offer facilities and the resources to support meetings and a collaborative approach and recognise ability of VCS to deliver services.
- Regional government: How to support capacity building with smaller groups to be able to deliver on the above.

Appendix 5: A List of Useful Contacts in the Government Office of the West Midlands