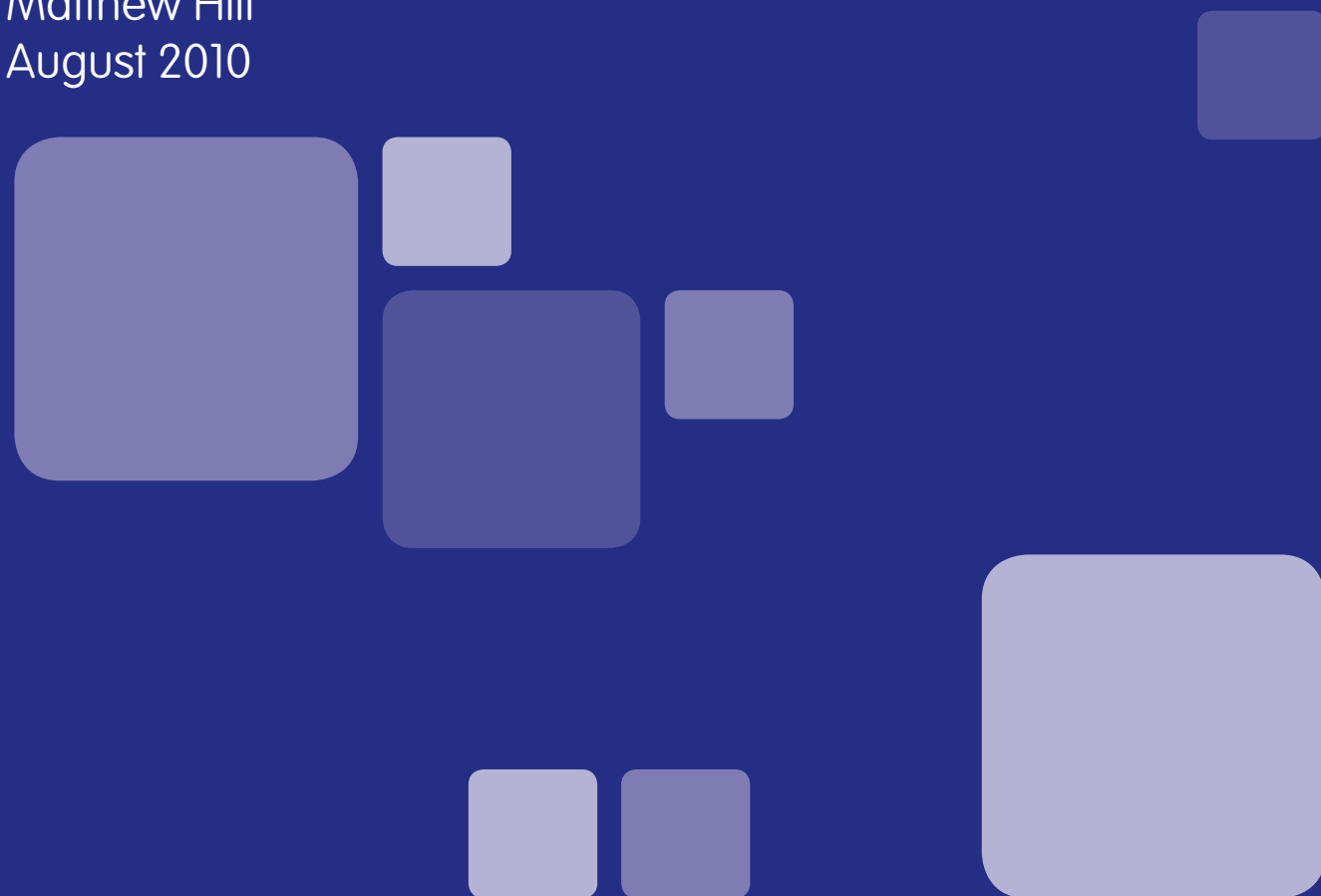


# Exploring the relationship between Volunteer Centres and local authorities

Institute for Volunteering Research  
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Institute for  
Volunteering  
Research

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# Foreword

**From Sir Bert Massie CBE**

The national Compact is over twelve years old and has been used as the model for Local Compacts around the country. There has been much written about the Local Compacts but there is little analysis on the extent to which they are effective and result in improved working relationships between local authorities and the local community and voluntary sector. There are varying views on what the Government's flagship policy of the Big Society means but it is clear that in part it means ordinary citizens taking a more personal responsibility for the provision of services as the tide of the welfare state slowly ebbs.

We will depend increasingly on volunteers, and the role of Volunteer Centres will become more important, as will the quality of their relationship with the various arms of local government. The Compact is an important tool in framing that relationship.

The Commission for the Compact believes that public policy should be based on evidence rather than supposition. For that reason we asked the Institute for Volunteering Research (IVR) to investigate the relationship between Volunteer Centres and local authorities. This report is the result and, although it demonstrates that much positive work is taking place and that many value the framework of the Compact, it also contains more disturbing findings. In some cases there is a lack of trust. Some local authorities believe that Volunteer Centres are not as efficient as they might be and, in turn, some Volunteer Centres believe their local authority does not take the time to learn what the centre is doing. These and other issues could easily be addressed by applying Compact principles. There is also a belief that the Compact needs some enforcement mechanism.

IVR has not just analysed the strengths and weaknesses of the relationship between local authorities, but also made recommendations for improvement. In the age of austerity that lies ahead we should all read those recommendations carefully.

I should like to thank IVR for undertaking this work. It is now for each of us act on it.

Sir Bert Massie CBE  
Commission for the Compact

# Foreword

From Dr Justin Davis Smith

The strength of the relationship between local government and third sector infrastructure has a clear impact upon the strength of local communities and the quality of services available to them. We know that the strength of volunteering in a local community plays a crucial role in promoting opportunity, community cohesion and delivering responsive and person-centred services.

Within this context the detailed examination of the relationship between local authorities and Volunteer Centres, in all their diversity, is both very welcome and timely. At Volunteering England we are committed to the belief that both 'sides' can be a key strategic partner to one another and that, by working together effectively, can help unlock the potential of volunteering to meet local authority objectives and transform society. Indeed, the effective working of these relationships will become even more important as local government and the voluntary and community sector are being asked to work together in community development and local service provision.

The findings of this report explore funding agreements, partnership working, strategic engagement and the perceptions that both sectors have of each other - all vital for broadening and deepening our understanding of the nature of these relationships. The analysis of factors which underpin and shape these relationships is crucial for developing them in the future.

The particular focus upon the role of Local Compacts in these relationships is also welcome as are the recommendations for taking these agreements forward. The recent refresh of the National Compact represents a great opportunity for local authority areas to refresh their own local agreements and build on the recommendations of this report.

Dr Justin Davis Smith  
Volunteering England

# Executive summary

Local authorities are a key strategic partner of the Volunteer Centre network and its largest single funder. The Institute for Volunteering Research was funded by the Commission for the Compact to systematically explore the nature and strength of the relationships between local authorities and Volunteer Centres. The research also explored the factors which impact on these relationships, with particular focus on Local Compact agreements.

## Summary of the nature of the relationships

*The complexity of the relationship:* the relationships exist on an operational and a strategic level and are often affected by a range of related relationships such as the Council for Voluntary Services' (CVS') relationship with the local authority, relationships between Volunteer Centres and CVSs and the two tiers of local authorities. This complexity is compounded by the variety of relationships in different local authority areas due to differing structures in volunteering infrastructure, differing structures in the local authority, differing funding arrangements and differing historical contexts.

*The asymmetry of the relationship:* the first type of asymmetry was in the importance placed upon the relationship. It was seen as a relatively low priority for local authorities but crucial for the success and survival of Volunteer Centres. There were also many of the asymmetries often associated with a funder-fundee relationship, which was in turn augmented by the general disparity in resources between the two players. As such, the local authorities largely dictated the nature of the relationship in terms of the type and amount of funding, means of communication and the level of strategic consultation.

*The fragility of the relationship:* The fragility of the relationship between Volunteer Centres and local authorities came across very clearly from the case studies. The relationships were compared to a 'house of cards'. Indeed it seemed that, even when the relationship appeared relatively sound, a small incident could have a potentially dramatic impact upon it. For example, where the Volunteer Centre had been unable to participate in a small project with the local authority or where a Volunteer Centre had seen their approach to a local councillor rebuffed.

*Independence of Volunteer Centres:* The research provided many examples of the independence of Volunteer Centres being compromised by the local authority. This was seen in terms of funding arrangements, means of communication and the strategic engagement of the Volunteer Centre. In one extreme case, the local authority had made the merging of Volunteer Centres with CVSs an explicit condition of funding.

## **Factors which impacted on the relationship**

The Local Compact was not seen to be a central factor. There were a range of factors outside of the control of the Local Compact that could supersede its aims and principles; for example, personalities, historical context or the council leadership. The impact of the Local Compact was also seen to be diminished due to lack of enforceability, low awareness, few concrete implementation plans and low credibility, especially among Volunteer Centres. However, many participants in the research felt the Local Compact was an 'admirable' document that had the potential to have a positive impact in the future if developments were made.

## **Summary of recommendations**

Both Volunteer Centres and local authorities are likely to see decreasing resource levels and increasing demands on their services over the coming years. These recommendations aim to strengthen relationships within this context and help both Volunteer Centres and local authorities to 'do more for less'.

### **Recommendations for local authorities**

- Increase awareness and understanding of the role of Volunteer Centres. In particular, do not assume that volunteering will carry on regardless without proper engagement and resourcing
- Invest staff time and resources in the relationship
- Recognise the independence of Volunteer Centres
- Develop clear but flexible funding arrangements
- Offer non-cash support, such as premises, joint events or links on the local authority website.

### **Recommendations for Volunteer Centres**

- Get the local authority to value the Volunteer Centre through developing a more rigorous evidence base for activities, more effective marketing, running small discrete projects with the local authority, engaging strategically with the local authority and working in partnership with other Volunteer Centres and voluntary and community sector (VCS) organisations
- Seize 'windows of opportunity', such as a change of council leadership or third sector reviews
- Engage directly with the local authority, such as getting a councillor on the board of trustees
- Deliver small projects with the local authority; for example, the local authority's own employer supported volunteering scheme
- Be strategic when engaging with the local authority. In particular when deciding whether to resist or acquiesce to the wishes of the local authority
- Meet the responsibilities outlined in the Compact
- Get tender ready.

**Recommendations for Local Compacts**

- A clear implementation plan for the principles and activities outlined in the Local Compact
- Embed the Local Compact (or at least its principles) in contracts and funding agreements
- Develop an effective means of recourse when partners in the Local Compact feel that the principles have been breached
- Increase the profile of Local Compacts; for example, Compact champions or including the Compact in staff inductions.



# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Background

At a local level, the generic volunteering infrastructure is primarily provided by a network of Volunteer Centres. Their activities revolve around the six core functions of brokerage: marketing, good practice development, developing volunteering opportunities, policy response and campaigning and the strategic development of volunteering.

Volunteer Centres have relationships with a range of stakeholders across the voluntary, public and private sectors. Local authorities are a very important strategic partner for Volunteer Centres but much of the evidence relating to the relationship between the two was only anecdotal. The lack of hard evidence regarding these relationships motivated this research project to explore them in more detail. In particular, the lack of evidence was highlighted by the Public Sector Action Group, established as part of the Commission for the Future of Volunteering and chaired by Baroness Joan Hanham.

In this context, the Institute for Volunteering Research was funded by the Commission for the Compact to explore the relationships between Volunteer Centres and local authorities.

## 1.2 Research objectives

- a. Explore the relationships between Volunteer Centres and local authorities.
- b. Explore the awareness, use, relevance and impact of Local Compacts (or the principles underlying them) in the relationships between Volunteer Centres and local authorities.
- c. Explore current levels and types of support from local authorities to Volunteer Centres (including funding) and the effectiveness of that support.
- d. Explore the forms of contribution made by Volunteer Centres to local authorities, such as supporting employer supported volunteering schemes.
- e. Identify the key factors which have influenced the development of relationships.
- f. Explore the impact of the differing relationships between local authorities and Volunteer Centres, specifically the implications of poor and positive relationships on the functioning and effectiveness of Volunteer Centres.
- g. Provide recommendations for the development and continuation of relationships between local authorities and Volunteer Centres with a view to informing a way forward for the Volunteer Centre network and local government. Specific recommendations will be made concerning the role of Local Compacts which will help to inform the work of the Commission for the Compact.

## 1.3 Methodology

This section provides an overview of the methods used in the research. The methods are outlined in more detail in the appendix.

A mixed methods approach was applied to the research, including a literature review, a telephone survey, secondary analysis of statistical data and in-depth case studies of four local authority areas.

### 1.3.1 Literature review

The existing literature on Volunteer Centres and local authorities was reviewed. This review discovered little hard evidence (although a relatively large amount of anecdotal evidence) relating to the relationships between local authorities and Volunteer Centres.

The findings from this literature review can be found in the context section of this report (chapter 2) although some of the wider themes are also referenced throughout the report.

### 1.3.2 Telephone survey

A structured telephone survey of Volunteer Centres in England was designed by the Institute for Volunteering Research and delivered by BMG Research in March 2009. The short survey asked questions around the perceived quality of the relationship, funding, other types of relationship, factors that impact the relationship and the challenges faced by Volunteer Centres in the relationship.

The survey focused on Volunteer Centre managers. It was beyond the scope of this survey to consult the perceptions of local authorities around these issues. The telephone survey received responses from 220 Volunteer Centres out of 310 Volunteer Centres in England (a response rate of 71 per cent).

A second survey was carried out in August 2009, completed by 152 Volunteer Centres (a response rate of 49 per cent). Questions relating to the Local Compact were added to this survey. Analysis of the data from the two surveys was then carried out, including combining it with data from Volunteering England's Annual Return for Volunteer Centres<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Volunteering England's Annual Return for Volunteer Centres is an online survey that is sent to all Volunteer Centres in England. It contains questions relating to funding levels and sources, activities around the six core functions and some questions on the perceptions of Volunteer Centres about their work. The data is compiled and analysed by the Institute for Volunteering Research and disseminated by Volunteering England.

### 1.3.3 In-depth case studies

The quantitative fieldwork was followed by in-depth case studies of four local authority areas.

The case study areas were selected to ensure a variety of contexts, informed by the following factors: geographical area, local authority structure, the number of Volunteer Centres in the area, funding level, Local Compacts and the prioritisation of National Indicators. There was also a focus on Volunteer Centres who characterised the relationship with their local authority as positive in the telephone survey (to provide the richest good practice recommendations), although some Volunteer Centres who saw their relationship as negative were also included. See Table 1 for a detailed breakdown of the characteristics of the case study areas.

**Table 1: Characteristics of the case study areas**

	Case study area 1	Case study area 2	Case study area 3	Case study area 4
Local Authority (LA) structure	unitary	unitary	two-tier	two-tier
Volunteer Centre (VC) structure	integrated	independent	integrated	Mix of independent and integrated
Level of funding from the LA	0-100%	0-24%	0-100%	0-24%
Population density	rural	urban	Urban/ rural mix	Urban/rural mix
VC perception of the relationship	Very positive	Neither positive nor negative	Very positive/ positive	Range from very positive to negative
Number of VC in the LA area	5-10	1	10+	5-10
LA area has a Local Compact	yes	yes	yes	yes
LA has prioritised NI6*	yes	no	no	no
LA has prioritised NI7**	no	no	yes	yes

\* National Indicator 6 (NI6) relates to 'participation in regular volunteering'

\*\* National Indicator 7 (NI7) relates to 'an environment for a thriving third sector'

Each case study involved semi-structured interviews with a range of stakeholders involved in the relationship, including: Volunteer Centre staff, Council for Voluntary Services (CVS) staff, local authority staff, councillors and some other voluntary and community sector and local authority stakeholders, such as network coordinators and Compact officers. The majority of interviews were carried out face-to-face but for practical reasons some were carried out over the phone.

At the request of the organisations who participated in the research, the content of the interviews is confidential and therefore no experiences, attitudes or quotes have been attributed to any individual or organisation in this report. The case study areas will not be named in this report. Where necessary to explain a point, some general details may be given regarding a particular case study area.

## **1.4 Scope of the research**

Before embarking upon the findings it is important to clarify the scope of the research. Firstly, the research did not aim to exhaustively characterise the relationships between all of the Volunteer Centres and the local authority in these areas. We did not consult every Volunteer Centre within each area, nor did we speak to every staff member in the local authority who has some relationship with the Volunteer Centres. Instead, the research aimed to utilise certain characteristics within the case study areas to gain general insights into the relationships.

Neither did the research aim to explore the merits of different Volunteer Centre/CVS structures (some Volunteer Centres are integrated with their CVS and some are independent). The report will discuss some implications of differing configurations and explore the different experiences and challenges within different structures; however, it will not recommend one structure over another.

## **1.5 Report structure**

The report begins by discussing the challenging context in which Volunteer Centres find themselves generally (chapter 2). In chapter 3, the report discusses the perceptions that Volunteer Centres and local authorities have of one another. The report goes on to examine in detail the different types of relationships that they have with each other including funding, communication and strategic level relationships (chapter 4). Chapter 5 explores the factors which impact upon the relationship with special focus on Local Compacts and the new performance framework. Chapter 6 draws out some of the key conclusions from the research regarding these relationships, and chapter 7 makes a series of recommendations to local authorities, Volunteer Centres and other stakeholders as to how the relationships can be strengthened and developed.

## 2. Context

This chapter gives an overview of the context within which Volunteer Centres are operating. It then gives a brief overview of the context in which local authorities are operating and ends by outlining the development and principles of Local Compact agreements.

### 2.1 Volunteer Centres

There are over 300 Volunteer Centres in England. All of the literature on Volunteer Centres stresses the marked variation across the network. This can be in terms of funding levels and sources, geographic coverage, relative engagement with all six core functions (Hill, 2010), the support provided to volunteers (Gaskin, 2009) and the extent of embrace of modernisation agendas (Coombs, 2007).

This variety makes generalisation difficult; however, when the network is taken as a whole, the picture painted by the existing literature is one of perpetual flux and under-resourcing. Indeed, many of the challenges confronting the volunteering infrastructure in Osborne's 1999 study – such as under-funding, under-staffing, lack of consistency over their key role, and the increasing insecurity of funding relationships – have not gone away. In fact, one recent study not only reaffirms these findings but argues that the situation for many Volunteer Centres is becoming increasingly precarious, even bringing into doubt the sustainability of a nation-wide infrastructure in its current form (Rochester et al, 2008). The authors argue for the need for the network to usher in change in response to the increasingly challenging environment in which they operate. In particular they stress that partnership working is one of the key means to success. The need for change is largely borne out by data from Volunteering England's Annual Return for Volunteer Centres (ARVC), which suggests that it is those Volunteer Centres who have successfully diversified their activities beyond brokerage (which remains the primary function of many Volunteer Centres) that have managed to seize the greatest and most diverse funding opportunities (Hill, 2010).

The Annual Return for Volunteer Centres 2008/09 shows that Volunteer Centres have a median income of £50,000. Local government is the largest funder of Volunteer Centres, accounting for 39 per cent of the total funding in the network, with 84 per cent receiving some funding from their local authority. In addition to this direct funding from local government, 30 per cent of the network also receives funding from either the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) or the Local Area Agreement (LAA). See table 2 overleaf.

**Table 2: Volunteer Centre income by source (taken from the ARVC 2008/09)**

Income stream	The percentage of total Volunteer Centre network income that comes from each source	The percentage of Volunteer Centres across the network that received funding from each source
Central Government	7	14
Regional Government	2	10
Local Government	39	84
LSP or LAA	9	30
Euro	2	4
Grant-making body	27	56
Individual donations	2	27
Fees and services	6	32
Other	7	35

The existing literature leads to a set of disconcerting paradoxes for the network. It needs to expand and diversify its activities in order to expand and diversify its funding sources yet it needs to expand and diversify its funding in order to resource the expansion and diversification of its activities (ibid). Similarly, in those places where the need for collaboration and change is greatest, the capacity of local Volunteer Centres to engage in collaboration and change is at its weakest (Rochester et al, 2008).

Currently these structural challenges are interacting with a key cyclical factor. The recession, precipitated by the global financial crisis in 2008, and the anticipated 'aftershock' in the form of dramatic cuts in public expenditure between 2011 and 2014 is expected to place increased financial pressure on Volunteer Centres. This increase in resource constraints is likely to interact with a continued increase in the demand placed upon their services, for example, in 2008/09 Volunteer Centres saw the number of enquiries for their brokerage services increase by 31 per cent on the previous year.

## 2.2 Local authorities

The context of local authorities has generally been more favourable. Over the last decade there has been an increased focus on the delivery of local services and the management of local budgets by local authorities. This has led to substantial increases in funding for local authorities, although it has been matched by increased demands upon them to deliver services. In 2009/10 the total amount of central government revenue for local authority services was £73.1 billion - an above inflation increase of 4.2 per cent on 2008/09. The budget for 2010/11 is £76.4 billion, a further increase of 4.4 per cent (CLG website, 2010). The budgeted total net current expenditure by local authorities in England for 2009-10 was £115.6 billion (ibid).

However, this funding context is likely to change significantly between 2011 and 2014. The new Coalition government's commitment to dramatically reducing the public sector spending deficit means that central government revenue for local authorities is almost certain to see dramatic cuts, with over £1 billion already shaved off the 2010/11 budget (LGA website, 2010).

However, the focus on the local delivery of services will likely continue under the Coalition government. There is a feeling among many commentators that, as with Volunteer Centres, the next few years will see them being asked to carry out 'more for less' as the demands on their services continue to increase in the face of resource contractions.

Local authorities have also seen a relatively large amount of reconfiguration over the last ten years with nine new unitary authorities established in 2009 alone. This reconfiguration is not necessarily a bad thing and is welcomed by many, but it does represent short term upheaval for many local authorities (and those organisations who are partnered with them).

## 2.3 Local Compacts

The Compact is an agreement between the government and the third sector in England. It sets out commitments on both sides to improve the way in which the Government and third sector work together for the benefit of communities and citizens. It also provides a framework for negotiating Local Compacts. Since the inception of the Compact, the government have encouraged the adoption of Compact principles at a local level. The aim of Local Compacts is to strengthen partnership working between statutory agencies and voluntary and community sector organisations locally. They are developed to fit local circumstances but they generally share the principles of the national Compact. Local Compacts are now widespread and clearly play a role in the relationship between local authorities and Volunteer Centres.

The national Compact was signed in 1998 and refreshed in December 2009, with the following key principles (largely the same as the original Compact):

- Respect: Government and the third sector are accountable in different ways, but both need to act with transparency and integrity. Effective partnerships are built on mutual understanding and an appreciation of the differences between partners of the Compact
- Honesty: It is only through open communication that strong partnerships can be built and maintained. Full and frank discussions should be the basis for resolving difficulties
- Independence: The independence of the third sector is recognised and supported. This includes its right within the law to campaign, to comment on and to challenge government policy (whatever funding or other relationship may exist with government) and to determine and manage its own affairs
- Diversity: The government and the third sector value a thriving civil society, which brings innovation and choice through a multitude of voices
- Volunteering: The energy and commitment of people giving their time for the public good contributes to a vibrant society, and should be recognised and appreciated.

There is an expectation that the national refresh of late 2009 will precipitate the refreshing of Local Compacts in many local authority areas.



# 3. Perceptions of the relationship

This chapter explores the differing perceptions of the relationships between Volunteer Centres and local authorities that were found in the research. It begins by discussing how relationships were defined by the research (section 3.1.1) and it goes on to examine some of the related relationships (3.1.2). Section 3.2 explores the perceptions that Volunteer Centres and local authorities have of the relationship and the final section (section 3.3) discusses the perceptions they have of one another.

## 3.1 Definition of the relationships

### 3.1.1 A conception of the relationship

The project had a broad conception of what the relationship between a voluntary and community sector (VCS) organisation and a local authority entails. This included direct forms of the relationship such as funding relationships, other types of practical support, strategic relationships and other forms of communication, as well as indirect relationships; for example, through Councils for Voluntary Service (CVSs) or local networks. The research also included any other actions by one party that affected the other (for example, activities of the Volunteer Centre that impact the local authority's ability to meet its targets).

### 3.1.2 Related relationships

The research also uncovered a range of related relationships, which have a direct impact upon the relationship between Volunteer Centres and local authorities. The research highlighted the most important 'six degrees of separation' as relationships between:

- The CVS and the local authority
- The Volunteer Centre and the CVS
- The network of Volunteer Centres and the local authority
- The network of CVSs and the local authority
- The network of Volunteer Centres and the network of CVSs
- The two-tiers of local government (county council and district councils).

These relationships had a different degree of importance in different case study areas.

Where the Volunteer Centre was integrated with the CVS, the relationship between the Volunteer Centre and the local authority was often indirect at the strategic level. In such a structure, the relationship is better characterised as being made up of the relationship within the CVS (i.e. between the Volunteer Centre and the CVS) and the relationship between the CVS and the local authority. However, these relationships also differed in nature.

The structure of the VCS infrastructure is best understood as a spectrum. At one end there is a fully independent Volunteer Centre, which has very little contact with the local CVS (in some areas there is no CVS). At the other end there is a fully integrated Volunteer Centre that is indistinguishable from the CVS, without its own discrete budget and where the six core functions of the Volunteer Centre are delivered across the CVS. With examples at this end of the spectrum the distinction between the CVS and the Volunteer Centre is extremely blurry.

In this research, the Volunteer Centre has been defined by the six core functions it delivers (see section 1.1) rather than a discrete organisational entity. As such, when we refer to the Volunteer Centre it may be that we are describing the CVS, as they could be delivering some of the Volunteer Centre functions (for example, the Chief Officer of the CVS will often deliver the strategic function for the Volunteer Centre). However, when it is an important consideration for the findings, a distinction between the Volunteer Centre core functions and the CVS core functions will be made.

The situation is also more complex where there are two-tiers of local authority government. Two of the case studies involved two-tier local government. There can be significant differences between the behaviours and attitudes of county and district councils. That said, when the term 'local authority' is used it refers to both the county council and the district council; as the cases we explored showed, there were general similarities between the dynamics of the relationship between Volunteer Centres and county councils, and Volunteer Centres and district councils. However, where significant differences do exist, the report will distinguish between the two tiers of the local authority.

### **3.2 Perception of the relationship**

The telephone survey showed that the relationship between Volunteer Centres and their local authority was generally perceived to be 'positive' by Volunteer Centres. The survey found that 83 per cent of Volunteer Centres felt that their relationship with their local authorities was either 'very positive' (35 per cent) or 'positive' (48 per cent). Three per cent felt that it was 'negative' and none felt that it was 'very negative'. These positive findings are at odds with the more negative findings when we examined the relationships in more detail in the case studies.

This could be an anomaly as we only explored four areas in detail. However, it is more likely to demonstrate the result of using different methodologies and the impact of the research process upon perceptions.

It was common in the in-depth interviews to hear the participant say they had never thought about the relationship in this amount of detail. Respondents often reported that the process of discussing it had developed their thinking considerably and had brought into sharper focus the many challenges that are faced in the relationship.

### **3.3 Perceptions of one another**

In the case studies, we found that there was some level of understanding and recognition between Volunteer Centres and local authorities. In particular, actors in the relationship acknowledged some of the constraints that other actors were operating under, such as limited resources and pressures from other stakeholders. There was also considerable variety between different participants in the case studies as to how they viewed the other sector. However, the majority of individuals we spoke to had somewhat unfavourable perceptions of the other sector.

#### **3.3.1 Local authority perceptions of the Volunteer Centre**

Some actors from local authorities had almost no knowledge or awareness of the Volunteer Centre, little or no understanding of their functions, and little or no understanding of how the functions of the Volunteer Centre related to the targets of the local authority. They therefore held a perception that the Volunteer Centre was not an important partner for the local authority.

Some local authority actors, however, had an understanding of the Volunteer Centre. In such cases, some felt that it had a positive impact upon volunteering in the local area. However, the overwhelming perception was that the Volunteer Centre was not an important partner for the local authority. In particular, many felt that the Volunteer Centres were “inactive”, “unprofessional”, “didn’t bring ideas to the table”, were not output driven and were to some extent “lagging behind” other VCS organisations in their practices and impact.

#### **3.3.2 Volunteer Centre perceptions of the local authority**

Generally the perception that the Volunteer Centre has of the local authority was also somewhat unfavourable. Almost all of the Volunteer Centre actors in the case studies viewed the local authority as “overly target driven”. They felt that there was a strong culture within the local authority of focusing on the numerical outputs of particular policies rather than their deeper impact. For example, Volunteer Centres often lamented the focus of the local authority on the numbers of volunteers rather than the quality and impact of the volunteering experience).

Almost all of the Volunteer Centres in the case studies also felt that the local authority acted in a “domineering” way to them in their relationships and that they were not treated as an equal partner.

### **3.3.3 Reflections upon each other's perceptions**

Significantly, there was general awareness amongst actors from Volunteer Centres and local authorities that they were unfavourably perceived by the other sector. In some cases they felt this perception was partly deserved, however, actors generally felt that they were misperceived by the other sector. In particular, the Volunteer Centre felt that they were wrongly perceived as unprofessional and that this was an outdated view of the VCS generally. Similarly, the local authority felt that they were wrongly perceived as having a limited understanding of the volunteering infrastructure and thought that they understood the needs of the sector well.

## **Summary**

This chapter discussed how the relationships between local authorities and Volunteer Centres are affected by a range of related relationships. It also discussed how Volunteer Centres generally had a positive perception of their relationship with local authorities when questioned in the telephone survey. However, when these perceptions were discussed in more detail during the case studies we found that both Volunteer Centres and local authorities had relatively unfavourable perceptions of each other (although there was some variety in perceptions). Moreover, both sectors were generally aware that the other sector viewed them unfavourably, although they felt that this was unjustified. In this sense, actors felt that the other sector not only had unfavourable perceptions of them but didn't fully understand their culture, aims and general way of doing things.

## 4. Components of the relationship

This chapter explores the actual components of the relationships in terms of funding (sections 4.1 and 4.2), communication (section 4.3) and strategic engagement (section 4.4). It ends with a brief discussion of some other types of relationship (section 4.5).

### 4.1 Funding relationships

In the case studies, the funding relationships between Volunteer Centres and local authorities were seen by respondents as the most important and certainly the most tangible of all the types of relationships they have with each other.

Volunteering England's Annual Return for Volunteer Centres (Hill, 2010) shows that local authorities are the largest source of funding for the Volunteer Centre network, accounting for 48 per cent of the total funding in the network (local government, Local Strategic Partnership and Local Area Agreement combined). The telephone survey revealed that the majority (61 per cent) of Volunteer Centres were confident that they would continue to receive some funding from their local authority for the next two years; however, 13 per cent were not very confident and four per cent were not at all confident.

The funding relationships were explored in much greater detail in the case studies. We saw a number of different types of funding relationships including grants, service level agreements and contracted funding.

#### 4.1.1 Grant based funding

In one case study the Volunteer Centre received conditional grant funding. They were awarded a grant by the local authority but there were some broad conditions attached to it (although these generally mirrored the core functions of the Volunteer Centre). Crucially, this funding was a contribution to the organisation's core activities. The funding had been received for the previous eleven years and accounted for one-fifth of the Volunteer Centre's total income.

#### 4.1.2 Service level agreements

In two of the case studies, the Volunteer Centres were funded through a service level agreement. In both cases the Volunteer Centres were integrated with their Council for Voluntary Service (CVS) and therefore the funding went directly to the CVS and the Volunteer Centre received funding indirectly. There was no discrete budget for the Volunteer Centres in these cases. These types of arrangements were attached to specific outputs that the CVS had to deliver around the Volunteer Centre function.

#### **4.1.3 Contracted funding**

In the fourth case study area, the Volunteer Centres received no funding from the corporate centre of the county council although some of them did receive core funding from their district council. The Volunteer Centres in this area also received some contracted funding for specific projects such as from the Children and Younger Adults Department. This funding was attached to the delivery of a specific project with clear outputs upon which receipt of the funding was dependent.

In other case study areas, Volunteer Centres also received some small levels of funding for delivering discrete projects such as the local authority's employer supported volunteering scheme.

### **4.2 Issues around funding**

There were a number of issues that emerged around the funding relationships between Volunteer Centres and local authorities. Furthermore, different types of funding raised different issues.

#### **4.2.1 Targets**

For grant funding it was commonly thought that the targets were too flexible. Both the local authority and the Volunteer Centre argued that the relationship would be strengthened by having clearer targets around funding. From the local authority's perspective it was felt that this would ensure that they were getting value for money and could clearly justify the investment. From the Volunteer Centre's perspective this would allow them to demonstrate more clearly their impact on volunteering and their ability to deliver around the local authority's targets.

At the same time, many within Volunteer Centres and some operational staff within local authorities felt that the more stringent and specific targets attached to contracted funding (and to a lesser degree service level agreements) could lead to the Volunteer Centre becoming a delivery arm of the local authority and the potential distortion of its core functions. Indeed some Volunteer Centres felt that these types of funder-fundee relationships compromised the freedom of the Volunteer Centres to act independently, tangentially or even adjacently to the local authority. That said, there was wide acknowledgement that the funding resources from the local authority were essential for the survival of the Volunteer Centres in question.

#### **4.2.2 Conditionality**

As discussed previously, all of the funding arrangements explored in the case studies had some level of conditionality, however, one extreme condition of funding related to the Volunteer Centre/CVS infrastructure. In this case the structural readjustment of the Volunteer Centres/CVSs was an explicit condition of the funding agreement by requiring that the organisations merge. This has serious implications for the independence of the volunteering infrastructure and is a clear breach of Compact principles.

This threat to independence appears to be acknowledged by some local authorities but not by others. In another case, even though the local authority had an explicit desire to see merger between the CVSs in the area (the Volunteer Centres were already integrated) it did not attach any structural conditions to its funding agreements. Rather, the local authority had acknowledged that this was a matter for the organisations themselves.

#### **4.2.3 Short-term funding**

For some Volunteer Centres in the case studies, funding arrangements only lasted for one year. This could contribute to fear and uncertainty about future funding, making planning more difficult for the Volunteer Centre. This was seen as unnecessary by Volunteer Centres in the context of local authorities now receiving three year funding agreements from central government.

However, local authorities that only offered one-year funding agreements felt that this allowed them to be more flexible and responsive to changing needs and circumstances in the local authority area. At the time of the fieldwork in autumn 2009, the Volunteer Centres in one case study had not yet received the funding for 2009/10 even though they were already delivering the targets.

There were also positive examples, where longer term funding had been secured as the funding arrangement had moved from a one-year to a three-year agreement. These longer term agreements not only improved the security of the Volunteer Centre in terms of local authority funding, but it was also thought to improve their chances of gaining wider funding as they could demonstrate that the organisation was stable and sustainable. The Volunteer Centre also felt that longer term funding allowed them to plan more effectively and enact some of the vision that they felt was so necessary in the current environment. It was recognised that this was a very positive move by the local authority.

#### **4.2.4 Spectre of tender**

In some of the case studies, there was a very serious threat of change in the funding relationships to more procurement, tendering and contracting. There was considerable fear that the local authority may opt for alternative service deliverers such as other volunteer-involving organisations or private sector agencies. From the evidence we gathered, there appeared to be considerable risk of this happening due to the relatively unfavourable perception many local authorities had of Volunteer Centres and the lack of trust some had in the ability of Volunteer Centres to deliver outcomes for the local authority. Furthermore, as specialised organisations (i.e. their sole focus is on volunteering), Volunteer Centres felt that if they cannot win contracts around volunteering there is “nowhere else for them to go” to gain funding.

However, the level of fear surrounding this was not universal. Some Volunteer Centres felt confident operating in this environment and were already preparing themselves to become 'tender ready'. Others felt this switch could deliver "the final nail in the coffin" for volunteering infrastructure as other types of organisations would enter the market place and the focus would be even more upon numbers and targets rather than the quality and impact of volunteering.

#### **4.2.5 Recession**

The current recession and the expected dramatic cuts in public sector funding between 2011 and 2014 will clearly place limitations and stricter constraints on the ability of local authorities to provide funding for all of their priorities in the statutory sector and voluntary and community sector (VCS). In addition, this is a time when the demand on services is potentially increasing as a result of the recession such as financial advice, housing services, employment advice and so on. Participants from both sectors in the case studies acknowledged that the local authorities will focus these limited resources on 'core frontline' services, such as education, at the expense of the VCS. There was a concern that this could potentially lead to the provision of volunteering infrastructure services by the local authority as the pressure to retain staff becomes more intense, and therefore local authorities may bring volunteering infrastructure services in-house and cut external funding for such services.

It is important to note that within this generally uncertain environment increases in funding were possible. In one case study, for example, the amount of funding for the Volunteer Centre had increased dramatically over the previous year. For some Volunteer Centres in this area it was the first time that the core costs of the Volunteer Centre had been directly funded by the local authority. It was thought that this increase was due to a range of complicated factors, including the prioritisation of National Indicator 6 ('participation in regular volunteering'), a local authority leadership that was committed to VCS infrastructure and coordinated and concerted strategic engagement from the Volunteer Centres and the CVSs (by whom they were hosted).

### **4.3 Communication**

Communication will play a role in all facets of a relationship. A number of key points emerged about the forms and strength of communication between the Volunteer Centre and the local authority.

Firstly, there was a difference in perception of the openness in communication between the two sectors. The Volunteer Centres we spoke to tended to feel that they could not speak openly to the local authority on matters of policy as it may have a detrimental impact upon their funding. Local authorities, however, generally felt that the relationship was an open one where both sides could speak freely about their concerns.



Secondly, in all cases the local authority dictated the nature of communication. This included the mechanics of communication, the control of strategic forums such as the Local Strategic Partnership, and the dictation of the nature of communication by demanding a clear and unified voice from the VCS, CVS and Volunteer Centres.

The local authorities felt that this demand for a clear and unified voice was a practical need. The local authority has to consult many varied stakeholders in its policy making and it was felt that clarity and unity make this process easier. However, there were a number of concerns from the Volunteer Centres around this. Firstly, in all the in-depth case studies, the Volunteer Centres/CVSs had acquiesced to the local authority and had come together in a network to communicate with them. Further, there was the concern that the VCS was being homogenised by the local authority whereas in reality the sector is one characterised by diversity, divergence and disagreement. Any demand to speak with one voice could compromise this diversity.

The lack of direct communication between the Volunteer Centres and the local authority was another key feature of the relationship. In the majority of the cases we explored, the local authority had not invested resources in this relationship. For example, there was no clear point of contact for the Volunteer Centres in the local authorities involved in the case studies. If there was a point of contact, the human resources given to this particular relationship were extremely small. There was general frustration among Volunteer Centres that they had 'nowhere to turn' within the local authority and didn't feel they had a clear point of contact.

#### **4.4 Strategic relationships**

The telephone survey explored the strategic relationships that Volunteer Centres have with their local authority. The results of this can be seen in Table 3, overleaf. The survey showed that the vast majority of Volunteer Centres have relationships beyond funding. These relationships included strategic engagement with local authority policies, general recognition and general support and advice.

**Table 3: The types of relationship VCs have with their LA**

Type of relationship	Percentage of Volunteer Centres that have the relationship
The local authority sees us as having an important role in local volunteering	92%
The Volunteer Centre sits on a Local Strategic Partnership	77%
The Volunteer Centre sits on other committees, partnerships or forums with the local authority	85%
The Volunteer Centre inputs into the volunteering policy/ strategy of their local authority	76%
The local authority promotes the Volunteer Centre	72%
The Volunteer Centre receives support and advice from the local authority	61%

These figures paint a more positive picture than was reflected in the case studies. This is perhaps because it was beyond the scope of the telephone survey to distinguish between 'access' and 'influence'.

Where Volunteer Centres had access to local authority policy through sitting on LSPs, committees, partnerships or forums with the local authority, they could nonetheless still feel that their influence over policy decisions was very low. This was in part due to the relatively low level of influence of the VCS generally, but at times the influence of the Volunteer Centre was especially low, even compared to other VCS organisations. This distinction between 'access' and 'influence' is an important one for Volunteer Centres (and the VCS more widely).

There were important differences for Volunteer Centres between the independent and integrated structures of the VCS in terms of strategic relationship. Where independent, Volunteer Centres struggled to gain a loud enough voice to represent their interests. They were either drowned out by larger VCS organisations or simply not consulted by the local authority. Where integrated, the CVS did have some limited strategic influence with the local authority but the Volunteer Centre voice was often muffled by the differing interests of Volunteer Centres and CVSs.

In some cases Volunteer Centre managers felt that the CVS Chief Officer represented their interests well at a strategic level but in other cases Volunteer Centre managers felt that the specific interests of the CVS were given priority over the Volunteer Centre functions. For example, in one case study the Volunteer Centre felt that the CVS, with whom they were integrated, campaigned for National Indicator 7 ('an environment for a thriving third sector') over National Indicator 6 ('participation in regular volunteering').

This already complex picture is further complicated by the expectations of the local authority. In some cases it seemed that the local authority had made a strategic decision to engage with CVSs at the explicit expense of Volunteer Centres by either making the integration of the Volunteer Centre and CVS a condition of the funding arrangement (see section 4.2.2) or not giving the Volunteer Centre representation on strategic groups independent from the CVS. In other cases, the local authority expected the Volunteer Centre to engage strategically but felt that they were not being proactive enough to make their voice heard.

## **4.5 Other types of relationship**

There were a number of small discrete projects that were undertaken by the Volunteer Centres on behalf of the local authority, such as an employer supported volunteering scheme. This scheme was undertaken by the local authority for its staff but administered and steered by the Volunteer Centres, although no payment was received for this work. The scheme was seen to be a success by the Volunteer Centres and the local authority although the uptake was relatively small and the scheme has temporarily been placed on hold. The scheme represented one of the few direct relationships between the Volunteer Centre and the local authority, and helped to increase the profile of the Volunteer Centre and the familiarity of some key local authority staff with its functions.

## **Summary**

This chapter explored the different components of the relationship between local authorities and Volunteer Centres in turn. It first discussed the different types of funding relationships between the two sectors and went on to discuss a number of issues of concern surrounding these funding arrangements including targets, conditionality, short-term funding, the spectre of tender and the recession. It went on to discuss the nature of communication and strategic relationships between the two sectors. There was seen to be a lack of direct one-to-one communication. Instead the majority of communication was carried out between the local authority and a network of VCS organisations of which Volunteer Centres were only one part. This type of arrangement was largely dictated by the local authority and in all the case studies the VCS had acquiesced to the local authority's demand for a clear and unified voice.

This homogenisation of the VCS was an issue of concern for the Volunteer Centres we spoke to. Moreover, in some cases the voice of Volunteer Centres was being drowned out by other VCS organisations and they were generally struggling to engage strategically with the local authority; either because they were ineffective at proactively grabbing the authority's attention or, more worrying for Volunteer Centres, the local authority did not see them as a key strategic partner.

## 5. Factors which impact on the relationship

This chapter explores some of the additional factors that impact on the strength of the relationship between Volunteer Centres and local authorities. In particular, the research explored the impact of Local Compacts (sections 5.1 and 5.2) and the new performance framework (section 5.3). This chapter also explores some of the other factors which affect the relationships.

### 5.1 Local Compact

In the telephone survey, the Volunteer Centres were asked whether they had been involved in the development of the Local Compact between the local authority and local voluntary and community sector (VCS) organisations. Eighty-two per cent had been involved, thirteen per cent not involved, and five per cent didn't know whether they were involved or not. The vast majority of Volunteer Centres in the case studies also played some role in the continuing development of the Local Compact.

The majority of case study participants spoke fairly positively about the origin of the Local Compact. It was generally felt that the creation of the document had involved wide consultation in the local authority and the VCS and that the document was consequently launched with fairly high expectations and a relatively high profile. However, a number of actors had little or no awareness of the existence of a Local Compact agreement. Surprisingly, this included senior actors from the local authority, VCS and Volunteer Centre at operational and more senior levels.

We also asked respondents to the telephone survey what impact they felt the Local Compact had on the relationship between the Volunteer Centre and local authority. Here the respondents were split. Forty-one per cent felt that it had no impact on the relationship and 59 per cent felt that it had a positive impact upon the relationship. This split was largely seen in the case studies yet there was a further split amongst those who felt the Local Compact had a positive impact. The majority of these felt it was an admirable document that had some small positive impacts but ultimately represented a missed opportunity. A small minority of respondents felt the impact had been substantially positive and there were some important examples where it had been utilised in funding relationships and in consultations on volunteering policy.

However, there was also a divergence of perception between the local authorities and the Volunteer Centres, with the latter having a generally more negative perception of the impact of the Local Compact. There was also a difference in emphasis upon who was responsible for driving forward the Local Compact among those who felt the Local Compact had a relatively low impact. Those from the local authority tended to place responsibility with the VCS and those from the VCS were more likely to place responsibility on the local authority.

## **5.2 Challenges faced by Local Compacts**

### **5.2.1 Little follow up promotion**

In many cases the pomp and ceremony associated with the launch of the Local Compact was not backed up by continued and deeper promotion of the document and the specific principles within it. This lack of continued promotion of the document and its principles was highlighted by local authority staff, councillors and by VCS staff. This led to low levels of awareness among key stakeholders, especially where actors had begun their role after the initial promotion of the Local Compact. This meant that the Local Compact was associated with a 'point in time' rather than being the living document that it was intended to be.

### **5.2.2 Inadequate implementation mechanisms**

It was widely thought that the Local Compacts were not directly linked to actual agreements between the local authority and the VCS. This meant that the principles had inadequate implementation mechanisms; i.e. the document was created but it was not linked to any specific actions. Furthermore, the commitments made were often too vague to resonate across the details of the funding relationships, communication relationships and wider local authority policies that might impact upon the independence of the VCS.

### **5.2.3 No enforceability**

The lack of 'teeth' to the document was perhaps the greatest single challenge to its impact and this feature has been cited in previous research (Zimmeck, 2009). In this sense the Local Compact was seen as a vague set of aspirational principles rather than a set of binding commitments. This meant that there was no accountability where Local Compact principles were breached. Furthermore, it was considered that the principles were not sufficiently embedded in concrete agreements such as funding arrangements and contracts.

### **5.2.4 Other factors**

Related to the lack of enforceability was the belief that the Local Compact was unsuccessful in fully impacting upon the relationship between local authorities and Volunteer Centres because there were so many other factors which impacted the relationship – factors beyond the control of the Local Compact.

Factors such as the economic constraints of the local authority and party political changes within local authorities were all seen to supersede the Local Compact principles. However, there was also an argument that the Local Compact provides some stability in what is an unpredictable and dynamic relationship.

#### **5.2.5 Reduced credibility**

There was a general feeling that the Local Compacts had reduced in significance since their establishment. Their continued low profile, breaching at a local level and the perception that the principles had been ignored at a national level, left an increasing number of actors feeling it had little relevance at a local level.

#### **5.2.6 Looking forward**

Despite these challenges it is worth restating that many participants felt that the Local Compact was an admirable document, which had the potential to play an important role in the relationships between Volunteer Centres and local authorities. Looking towards the launch of the refreshed National Compact in late 2009 (most participants had been involved in the consultation) and anticipating a similar process at the local level, many participants were optimistic that a strengthened document with better implementation mechanisms and stronger powers of account would have a positive impact on the relationship. The level of optimism for the future was, however, largely relational to the level of positivity towards the existing Local Compact.

One concern that was consistently raised regarding the national refresh was that it focused too heavily on funding arrangements and did not adequately address relationships that didn't revolve around funding, such as wider local authority policies that impact the VCS and in particular those that impact the independence of the VCS.

### **5.3 New performance framework**

The current set of National Indicators was published as part of the Chancellor of the Exchequer's Comprehensive Spending Review in October 2007, and came into effect in April 2008. This saw a radically reduced number of indicators from around 1,200 to 198 (CLG, 2007b). Each local authority area designates 35 priorities from this list which they will actively pursue. These priorities are decided by the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) and are enshrined in the Local Area Agreement (LAA). The LAA is then signed off by the Government Office. Despite the selection of these priorities, each local authority will be measured against all 198 indicators. Where there is a two-tier area the LAA is developed in partnership between the County and District Council but is ultimately signed off by the County Council as only they are the 'responsible local authority' (ASA, 2008). This research explored the Volunteer Centre and local authority experience for two key National Indicators and examined the impact upon their relationship.

### 5.3.1 National Indicator 6

National Indicator 6 (NI6) relates to 'participation in regular volunteering'. Almost two-thirds of respondents to the telephone survey said that they were working with their local authority in the delivery of NI6. However, only one of the case study areas had adopted NI6 as a priority.

Respondents to the telephone survey were asked to rate the impact of NI6 upon the relationship with the local authority. Forty-one per cent said the impact had been 'positive' or 'very positive' on their relationship whereas only seven per cent said that the impact had been 'negative' or 'very negative'. However, 34 per cent felt that it had no impact on the relationship.

As could be expected, Volunteer Centres who were not working with their local authority to deliver NI6 were considerably more likely to say that it had no impact upon the relationship. Those who were working with the local authority were considerably more positive about its impact with 58 per cent saying it had a 'positive' impact compared to only nine per cent of those who were not working directly with the local authority.

In the case study area that had adopted NI6 as a priority, it was felt to have had an important impact upon the relationship. Indeed, it was thought to be linked to increased funding and increased engagement from the local authority in terms of resources devoted to the relationship in staff time.

In those areas where NI6 was not adopted as a priority, this was seen as a 'blow' for the Volunteer Centre as there was a belief that it showed that volunteering was a low priority for the local authority. This view was not always shared by the local authority as some senior local authority staff and councillors felt that this actually represented the strength of volunteering locally. They argued that it was its very strength that meant it did not need to be adopted as a policy focus. The view among Volunteer Centres was that if prioritised, NI6 could potentially have a positive impact upon the relationship.

Some more general concerns were also raised around NI6. Most notably it was felt to reduce volunteering to the number of regular formal volunteers as measured by the Place survey<sup>2</sup>. Volunteer Centres had concerns with this 'reductionism' as they felt it ignored the quality of the volunteering experience and its impact upon the volunteer and the community.

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<sup>2</sup> The Place Survey has been developed by the Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG) in order to measure the performance of local authorities around 18 of the National Indicators, which are informed by citizens' views and perspectives. The first results of the survey were available in 2009.



There was also a concern that the reduction of the strength of volunteering in a local area to numbers militates against volunteering infrastructure in particular as local authorities may feel that they can meet these short term targets more easily by engaging with large volunteer involving organisations that can perhaps mobilise ‘bums on seats’ faster and more easily. There was also concern that NI6 does not necessarily recognise the work that Volunteer Centres do to engage volunteers with extra support needs and develop good practice in volunteer management.

### **5.3.2 National Indicator 7**

We compared the results from the telephone survey about the quality with which the Volunteer Centres view their relationship to the published measure for National Indicator 7 (NI7) (an environment for a thriving third sector). The measure used in the indicator is the percentage of third sector organisations that rate the influence of the statutory bodies in their local area on their organisation’s success as either ‘positive’ or ‘very positive’. There was a correlation between the NI7 score for the local authority and the Volunteer Centre’s perception of the relationship. Where Volunteer Centres characterised the relationship as ‘positive’ or ‘very positive’, the NI7 score was slightly higher than for those Volunteer Centres who characterised the relationship as ‘neither positive nor negative’.

However, this correlation was slight and it is perhaps the weakness of this correlation that is most surprising as it suggests that the relationship between the local authority and Volunteer Centre may not necessarily reflect the experience of the ‘third sector’ generally. The results from the case studies also suggested that infrastructure has a particular relation to the local authority and that this often differs from the relation between the local authority and the ‘third sector’ more generally.

In the two case studies where NI7 had been prioritised, we observed no link between the adoption of NI7 and a development in the relationship between Volunteer Centres and local authorities. Perhaps this was related to the conflict between ‘access’ and ‘influence’ (see section 4.4). NI7 encourages local authorities to provide more access to the VCS but it is very difficult to see whether or not it leads to an increase in influence on local authority decisions.

There were also some interesting findings around how the local priorities were decided. Many local authorities and Volunteer Centres felt that NI6 and NI7 were the two indicators that applied directly to the VCS. As such, it was felt extremely unlikely that a local authority would prioritise both indicators but it was also seen as very likely that they would prioritise at least one of them. This potentially raised some tensions between the CVS and the Volunteer Centre as NI7 fits more readily with the CVS functions and NI6 fits more readily with the Volunteer Centre functions.

There was some evidence of this from the case studies as in some areas the CVSs had campaigned strongly for the prioritisation of NI7 and the integrated Volunteer Centres subsequently felt excluded. However, in other areas where the CVS and Volunteer Centres were integrated, NI6 had been prioritised.

## **5.4 Level of funding**

Funding is a constituent of the relationship, a symptom of the relationship and a factor affecting the strength of the relationship between local authorities and Volunteer Centres. In the telephone survey we saw that there was a link between the level of funding and the positivity with which Volunteer Centres perceived their relationship with their local authorities.

Those Volunteer Centres that received funding from their local authority were much more likely to report a positive relationship; however, it is clear that there are many other factors at play. Of those who received at least some funding, 88 per cent reported a 'positive' or 'very positive' relationship compared to 66 per cent of those who did not receive any funding. However, 21 percent of those who received no funding thought that their relationship was 'very positive', suggesting that Volunteer Centres see that there is more to the relationship than just funding. Interestingly, the telephone survey didn't show any correlation between the amount of funding that was received from the local authority relative to the Volunteer Centre's overall budget and the perceived strength of the relationship.

There was a correlation between those who had seen their funding increase and the perception of the relationship. Ninety-one per cent of those whose funding had increased over the previous two years saw their relationship as either 'positive' or 'very positive'.

## **5.5 Personalities**

Personalities were often cited as a critical factor in the relationship. This was regularly cited by all those we spoke to in the case studies and they undoubtedly play a role in all relationships. In analysing what lay at the root of these personalities, there appeared to be an important distinction between 'personal characteristics' and 'professional characteristics'. For example, a person's sense of humour, communication skills or general positivity can be seen as 'personal characteristics' whereas their professionalism, attitude towards collaboration or management style are better seen as 'professional characteristics'. The two can often be confused. For example, a person's attitude towards the professionalisation of the VCS can often manifest itself as a 'personal characteristic' but it is better understood as a 'professional characteristic' as it relates specifically to a person's professional behaviour.

The characteristics of 'personality' that were often cited from each sector were seen as both enabling factors and barriers to the relationship. From the Volunteer Centre, they often saw the individuals who they dealt with from the local authority as having a negative attitude towards the VCS, unapproachable and not good at open communication. 'Personal characteristics' will clearly play a role, however, they can also be understood as 'professional characteristics' shaped by the organisation in which the individuals are operating. So it could be that the local authority actor is seen as having an unfavourable attitude towards the VCS generally but it is actually because they do not have the time to deal with enquiries properly, or that the tone set by the local authority leadership means the individual will give statutory services primacy over the VCS.

Similarly, many from the local authority felt that some individuals working for Volunteer Centres were not proactive enough in capitalising upon opportunities and were not professionally focused upon targets. Yet these 'personal characteristics' may also be seen as 'professional characteristics' as the Volunteer Centre staff may simply not have the resources to capitalise upon opportunities. The Volunteer Centre may also have the professional attitude that if the VCS becomes too "professional" in the local authority sense (i.e. too target driven) they will diminish the very flexibility and person centred approach that makes the VCS unique and successful at engaging with the community.

## **Summary**

This chapter has explored a range of key factors which impact the relationships between local authorities and Volunteer Centres. The effect of Local Compacts was a focus of this research but it was seen that they have a relatively low impact upon the relationships. Although there were some examples of Local Compacts working, the research found that they generally had relatively low credibility, low levels of awareness, inadequate implementation mechanisms and low levels of accountability.

The research also explicitly explored the role of the National Indicators 6 and 7. It found that NI6 had some positive impact upon funding in the local authority area where it had been adopted and there was also an expectation that it would have a positive impact in the areas where it had not been adopted. The research found that the prioritisation of NI7 had little impact upon the relationship. It was also seen that a wide range of other factors impacted the relationship such as funding levels and local authority leadership. In many ways this myriad of other factors were seen to mitigate the impact of formalised agreements such as the Local Compact or National Indicators upon the relationship.

## **6. Summary and conclusions**

The report began by discussing the challenging context in which Volunteer Centres find themselves generally and the anticipated challenges for local authorities (chapter 2). In chapter 3, the report discussed the perceptions that Volunteer Centres and local authorities have of one another. It went on to examine in detail the different types of relationships that they have including funding, communication and strategic level relationships (chapter 4). Chapter 5 explored the factors that impact the relationship, with special focus on Local Compacts and the new performance framework. This chapter will draw out some of the key conclusions from the research regarding these relationships.

### **6.1 Unfavourable perceptions of one another**

In many of the case studies the Volunteer Centres and local authorities had unfavourable perceptions of each other. This had a material impact on the relationship as it made it more difficult for the two sectors to communicate effectively with each other and less likely to work together successfully.

### **6.2 The complexity of the relationship**

The relationships are extremely complex as they involve a whole range of actors within the Volunteer Centre and the local authority, they operate on an operational and a strategic level and are often impacted on by a range of related relationships such as the Council for Voluntary Services' relationship with the local authority, the networks of Volunteer Centres and CVSs and the two tiers of local authorities (the 'six degrees of separation' discussed in section 3.1.2). This complexity is compounded by the variety of relationships in different local authority areas due to differing structures in volunteering infrastructure, differing structures in the local authority, differing funding arrangements and differing historical contexts.

### **6.3 The asymmetry of the relationship**

One of the most powerful findings from the research was the degree of asymmetry in the relationship that existed between the Volunteer Centre and the local authority. The asymmetry in the relationship is underpinned by the different degree of importance which is placed on the relationship. Largely, local authorities felt that the relationship was of low significance. Volunteering is only one of a great number of priorities and policy objectives which the local authority pursues.

Even where the local authority engaged with volunteering, they often favoured engagement with other agencies – such as large volunteer involving organisations – to fulfil their policy objectives or by delivered volunteering infrastructure services within the local authority itself. This sidestepping of Volunteer Centres was based on a lack of trust that the Volunteer Centre could deliver around the local authority's objectives.

On the other hand, the Volunteer Centres spoken to in the case studies characterised the relationship as extremely important, critical or even essential to the success and sustainability of the Volunteer Centre and its effectiveness in delivering its six core functions.

This unidirectional dependence is compounded by the wider power asymmetries that exist between local authorities and Volunteer Centres. Local authorities have access to considerably greater resources than Volunteer Centres. Related to this is the asymmetry which arises from a funder-fundee relationship. The vast majority of Volunteer Centres are dependent upon funding from local authorities in order to function.

This asymmetry of relationship resulted in the local authority dictating the terms of the relationship with regard to the level of funding, the structure of the funding, the terms of the funding relationship, the method of communication, and the nature of strategic engagement by the Volunteer Centre.

## **6.4 The threat of more competitive funding arrangements**

The majority of Volunteer Centres in the case studies were reliant upon funding from the local authority to deliver their core functions. The threat of moving to a more competitive funding arrangement was a considerable concern for many, as they felt that it could be the final nail in the coffin for volunteering infrastructure in its present form. The research we carried out largely justified this fear as the low level of trust and value placed in Volunteer Centres by local authorities makes it more likely that they will open up funding to other organisations from the voluntary and community sector (VCS) and the private sector.

As Volunteer Centres' expertise relates to volunteering specifically, if they cannot win volunteering contracts they have nowhere else to go for funding. The uncertainty and insecurity of funding for Volunteer Centres also has the potential to increase as these structural threats coalesce with the cyclical impact of the recession and subsequent public spending cuts. However, not all were so fearful as some Volunteer Centres felt that they were in a strong position to win contracts around volunteering even in the face of outside competition.

## **6.5 The fragility of the relationship**

The fragility of the relationship between Volunteer Centres and local authorities came across very clearly from the case studies. In some cases, the relationships were characterised as a 'house of cards'. Indeed, it seemed that even when the relationship appeared relatively sound, a small experience could have a potentially dramatic impact upon the relationship. For example, where the Volunteer Centre had been unable to participate in a small project with the local authority or where a Volunteer Centre had seen their approach to a local councillor rebuffed.

## **6.6 Independence of Volunteer Centres**

In the research we saw a number of examples where the commitment to the independence of the Volunteer Centres had been understood and respected by local authorities. However, there were also numerous ways in which this independence was seen to be compromised. In funding there was a general anxiety that an increasing number of conditions and targets were being placed on Volunteer Centres and as such there was a danger that they had (or would) become a delivery arm for the local authority. In one extreme example the local authority had made the merging of Volunteer Centres with CVSs an explicit condition of funding. This is a clear violation of the Compact principle of independence outlined in chapter 2.

There were also examples of the independence of Volunteer Centres being compromised in their communication with local authorities. Firstly, it was often the case that the local authority dictated the terms of communication and demanded a clear, unified and singular voice from the VCS. Many Volunteer Centres also felt that they could not communicate openly and honestly with local authorities as it may jeopardise their access to funding; conversely, local authorities felt they welcomed open communication and respected the right of the VCS to do so without fear of consequences.

## **6.7 Mixed perception of the impact of Local Compacts**

In both the survey and the case study work there was a split between respondents who felt that the Local Compact had impacted positively upon the relationship and those who felt that it had little impact either positive or negative. Both viewpoints were represented among Volunteer Centres and local authorities; however, the former tended to feel the Local Compact had been less effective than the latter. Generally it was felt that the launch of the Local Compact was strong with relatively wide consultation and awareness; however, many felt that its use and relevance had diminished since its inception and it was not the living document it was hoped to be. Despite this, the vast majority of respondents were optimistic about the potential refresh of Local Compact agreements as long as lessons from the first Local Compact were taken on board.

## **6.8 Local Compacts face numerous challenges**

To a large extent the complexity of the relationship mitigated the impact of Local Compacts as there were a range of factors outside of the control of the Local Compact that could supersede its aims and principles. However, respondents also felt there were a number of direct challenges to the impact of Local Compacts upon the relationship. In particular it was felt that there was little follow up from the initial promotion of the Local Compact. Also inadequate implementation mechanisms meant that the document's principles were not explicitly enshrined in strategic relationships and agreements, such as those relating to funding. As such, the principles lacked the teeth to be enforced by either side of the Local Compact. This was felt especially keenly by Volunteer Centres.

## **6.9 The difficulty of engaging strategically with the local authority**

The Volunteer Centres in the case studies found it very difficult to engage strategically with the local authority. Generally they faced two types of barriers. In some cases the local authority had appeared to make a strategic decision to engage with the CVS rather than the Volunteer Centre directly. In other cases, where the local authority wants the Volunteer Centre to engage, they are finding it difficult to get their voices heard and are being drowned out by other VCS organisations which have been more successful at securing the engagement of the local authority.

## 7. Recommendations

The research team was invited by the Commission for the Compact, to make some suggestions for future action that might improve the relationships between Volunteer Centres and local authorities.

As has been outlined throughout this report, the relationships between local authorities and Volunteer Centres, like most relationships, are extremely complex. Each local authority area will face its own particular set of complexities and therefore it is impossible to make specific recommendations to either Volunteer Centres or local authorities.

That said, the research has delivered some interesting learning about the nature of the relationships and the factors which impact them. As such, it is possible to make some general recommendations with the hope of strengthening the relationships in the future and helping Volunteer Centres and local authorities work together to deliver 'more for less'. This is in the context of decreasing funding and increased demand for services which is expected from 2011.

Many of these recommendations will also apply to wider relationships especially between the local authority and the VCS more generally. These general recommendations can then be adapted and tailored to each particular situation by the practitioners and policy makers involved.

### 7.1 Local authorities

The research primarily explored the relationship between Volunteer Centres and their local authority, although in some areas the key aspects of this relationship took place through the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP); for example, the funding arrangement. As such, many of the recommendations below apply to the LSP as a whole – such as the PCT and local emergency services – and not just the local authority.

One of the challenges in making recommendations to the local authority about how the relationship with Volunteer Centres can be strengthened is that the research has shown that they do not always value Volunteer Centres and their relationship with them. Therefore, in order for local authorities to give the Volunteer Centres higher priority they must first be convinced of their importance and worth in helping to support and develop within volunteering within the local authority area. Recommendations around this are included overleaf.



### **7.1.1 Increase awareness and understanding of the role of Volunteer Centres**

There is a role for the local authority in increasing their understanding of the work of Volunteer Centres. We would also urge local authorities to be mindful of some considerations around volunteering infrastructure:

- Do not assume that volunteering is a force of nature that ‘will carry on regardless’ without appropriate resourcing and engagement. Volunteer Centres disproportionately engage with those who are less likely to volunteer and often have additional support requirements, such as unemployed volunteers, disabled volunteers and BME groups (Hill, 2010). They also work to actively improve practice in volunteer management in volunteer involving organisations through training and other types of support. This increases the quality of experience of volunteers, can improve retention and can also make the involvement of volunteers richer and more meaningful for the volunteer themselves, as well as increasing the impact upon the local community.
- It is also important to recognise that, although Volunteer Centres can certainly help meet local authority targets, especially around the new performance framework, their contribution to the local community is much broader.

### **7.1.2 Invest staff time and resources in the relationship**

In many of the case studies there was some appetite among local authority staff for engaging more actively in the relationship with Volunteer Centres; however, they perceived that this relationship was less of a priority than some of their other work and they simply did not have the time and resources to engage fully in the relationship with Volunteer Centres. All relationships require some investment of time and in this case it could lead to greater understanding and better communication, and improve the ability of the Volunteer Centre to deliver around the objectives of the local authority.

### **7.1.3 Recognise the independence of Volunteer Centres**

A key recommendation is around the freedom of Volunteer Centres. Volunteer Centres have the potential to be more flexible, responsive and closer to the communities that they serve than local authorities in certain situations. This can only hold if they are free to act independently and, at times, adjacently to the local authority.

Recognising the freedom of Volunteer Centres as an asset rather than a frustration will allow them to have the greatest impact upon the local authority area. This principle was often understood and respected by local authorities yet there were troubling exceptions. Where it was understood and respected there were generally stronger relationships with Volunteer Centres. In the refreshed National Compact, government undertakes to “avoid compromising or undermining the independence of third sector organisations (whatever financial or other relationship may exist between them).” (The Compact, 2009, p8)

#### **7.1.4 Develop clear but flexible funding arrangements**

The freedom of Volunteer Centres is felt especially keenly around funding as these are often the most binding agreements between local authorities and Volunteer Centres. It was felt that a clear agreement with a number of targets directly related to the core functions of Volunteer Centres was useful but any conditions which compromise the core mission of the Volunteer Centre or relate to organisational structure were thought to be too burdensome.

#### **7.1.5 Offer non-cash support**

The report has acknowledged that local authorities may face considerably tighter budgets after the next government spending review comes into effect in 2011. However, there are a range of non-cash types of support that they can offer Volunteer Centres. In particular Volunteer Centres mentioned the desire for access to local authority properties, links to the Volunteer Centre on the local authority website, joint events around volunteering or articles in the residents' magazine.

## **7.2 Volunteer Centres**

### **7.2.1 Getting the local authority to value the Volunteer Centre**

Due to the huge pressures upon the time and resources of local authorities, particularly over the next spending round, it is more important than ever that Volunteer Centres be proactive about demonstrating and marketing their importance and impact.

This research suggests that local authorities want to see this engagement from voluntary and community sector (VCS) organisations. They recognised their own limitations in time and resources and conceded that in many cases it is 'he who shouts loudest' who will gain attention and therefore engagement from the local authorities.

Volunteer Centres benefit from being proactive and 'bringing ideas to the table'. Crucially, it was felt that other VCS organisations were doing this more effectively than Volunteer Centres in the areas we explored. Whilst acknowledging the resource constraints of many Volunteer Centres to engage in this work there are a number of steps that could be taken in order to achieve this. Volunteer Centres can:

- Develop a clearer and more rigorous evidence base for their activities and the impact it has on their local area. The Institute for Volunteering Research (IVR) has developed the 'Check it Out' toolkit to assess the impact of Volunteer Development Agencies (IVR, 2007).
- Run small discrete projects with the local authority. For example, sitting on the steering group for the local authority's employer supported volunteering scheme or running a joint campaign with the local authority, such as placing a clock in the main local authority building which counts the number of hours given to volunteering in that local authority area over the year. All stakeholders felt it was an effective 'gimmick' for raising the profile of volunteering and the Volunteer Centre.

- Market activities more effectively through local press, events and campaigns.
- Engage strategically with the local authority around volunteering to represent their interests and also to demonstrate their expertise and 'added value'. Whilst being perhaps the most important recommendation for the Volunteer Centres this is also potentially the most difficult to enact. We have discussed previously that Volunteer Centres appear to have become increasingly marginalised by local authorities in some areas and that whether integrated or independent, they can find it difficult to get their voice heard at the highest level within the local authority.
- To strengthen their voice Volunteer Centres should work in networks with other Volunteer Centres, CVSs and VCS organisations.

### **7.2.2 Windows of opportunity**

As well as being proactive it was thought that Volunteer Centres could benefit from being more opportunistic in their dealings with the local authority. In particular, participants from both sectors referred to the concept of a 'window of opportunity' where Volunteer Centres have to seize on particular opportunities with the local authority.

These windows of opportunity often close and so the need for quick responses and proactive suggestions within these windows is vitally important. The cited examples of these 'windows' included when the local authority has changed leadership, when the local authority undergoes third sector reviews or when the Local Strategic Partnership is deciding which National Indicators to prioritise.

### **7.2.3 Engage directly with the local authority**

One 'easy win' for Volunteer Centres is to consider whether it is appropriate to invite a councillor to sit on its board of trustees. This research suggests that where this happens the Volunteer Centre can have a greater understanding of the political situation within the local authority, an early warning system for potential threats and opportunities within the council and a direct individual relationship with the local authority, which provides a channel for increased awareness in the local authority. However, this will of course depend upon the level of engagement from the individual councillor.

Other ways of directly engaging with Councillors could be to invite them to attend meetings or act as a patron of the Volunteer Centre.

### **7.2.4 Deliver small projects with the local authority**

The delivery of small projects with the local authority can be extremely beneficial for the Volunteer Centre. However, some caution should be shown when instigating these projects. Volunteer Centres should consider whether to directly deliver projects that do not relate to their core functions as it may lead to mission drift.

For example, transport schemes where the Volunteer Centre administers the volunteers for the local authority's transport needs can provide some much needed resources for the Volunteer Centre but it is not part of the Volunteer Centre's core functions to do this. If anything, this type of project may contribute to even greater misunderstanding about the role of Volunteer Centres by the local authority.

### **7.2.5 Resistance or acquiescence**

A difficult issue for Volunteer Centres is how to respond when things go wrong with the local authority; for example, their freedom and independence has been compromised). Should they 'resist' through campaigning and therefore risk being further marginalised or do they 'acquiesce' in order to 'live to fight another day'? Different actors in the case studies had different ideas on where the correct balance between 'resistance' and 'acquiescence' lies. What seems crucial, however, is to address this issue strategically and make it an important consideration when engaging with local authorities. Volunteer Centres should ensure that their strategic response is planned with other organisations where possible.

### **7.2.6 Danger of 'mission drift'**

Local authorities are clearly a key strategic partner for Volunteer Centres and an extremely important funder. At times, though, the closeness and importance of this relationship led to 'mission drift' for the Volunteer Centres, who feared they had become – or were in danger of becoming – a delivery arm for the local authority at the expense of their wider charitable aims. Sometimes securing funding from the local authority is a matter of survival for the Volunteer Centres, which means they have little power to negotiate funding targets. As with point 7.2.5 the key to avoiding this seemed to be a more strategic engagement with the local authority, which was driven by the charitable aims of the Volunteer Centre whilst at the same time demonstrating the ability to support the local authority in achieving their aims.

### **7.2.7 Meet the responsibilities outlined in the Compact**

Many Volunteer Centres already meet their responsibilities as outlined in their Local Compact. Where this is happening it is seen to strengthen the credibility of the Local Compact and add authority to Volunteer Centres when they attempt to draw attention to Local Compact violations by the public sector. The specific responsibilities will differ between different Local Compacts but many will include good governance, risk planning and consultation with service users on representation and campaigning.

### **7.2.8 Get tender ready**

The spectre of tender was seen to be of great concern to many Volunteer Centres in the case studies and it seemed that this concern is largely well founded. Therefore there is a strong motivation for Volunteer Centres to become 'tender-ready' as the move towards increased tendering seems likely across England.

Becoming more tender-ready can be a difficult process, but most advice suggests it contains three key elements – increasing the understanding of the funder and their needs (in particular the criteria against which they will judge applications), building stronger relationships with the funder, and evidencing and marketing activities more successfully.

### 7.3 Recommendations for other bodies

- There is a role for Volunteering England as the national infrastructure body for volunteering. Some Volunteer Centres in the case studies felt that the case for a sustainable local volunteering infrastructure had not been won at a national level. In particular they saw a role for Volunteering England in campaigning and lobbying on their behalf to national government, national infrastructure organisations and to national networks of local authorities, and empowering the local volunteering infrastructure to campaign on their own behalf. There was also a role identified for IVR and other voluntary sector researchers as the need for clearer and more robust evidence on the activities and impact of Volunteer Centres was felt keenly.
- Integrated CVSs also have a role as they largely take on the strategic function of the Volunteer Centre. Their role includes working as closely as possible with the Volunteer Centre part of their operation. Although in many ways there is great overlap between the interests of the CVS and the Volunteer Centre there may also be some conflict between these interests at certain times. As such it is vitally important for the relationship between the Volunteer Centre and the local authority that the CVS recognise the Volunteer Centre as a distinct part of the voluntary sector infrastructure, which will at times have interests that do not exactly match the interests of the CVS as a whole.

### 7.4 Recommendations for Local Compacts

Partners in each local area co-design their own Local Compact to suit their circumstances using the National Compact as a guide. When discussing Local Compacts throughout the research there were a number of recommendations made by participants as to how Local Compacts could be strengthened in the future.

Many of the recommendations suggested by participants chimed with the recommendations outlined in the 2008 report “*What makes a successful Local Compact*” produced by The Institute for Voluntary Action Research (IVAR) for the Commission for the Compact. The research suggests that there is potential for Local Compacts to play a positive role in the relationship if recommendations are taken forward.

- There was thought to be a need for a clear implementation plan for the principles and activities outlined in the Local Compact. It was felt that without this plan the document would not be fully brought to life in the local area.

- One way to do this would be to embed the Local Compact (or at least its principles) in contracts and funding agreements between the local authority and the Volunteer Centre. This is already done in some local authority areas. It has the potential to turn an admirable and aspirational document (as many felt the existing Local Compact was) into a set of binding commitments between the two sectors thereby strengthening the chances of the principles being put into practice. In particular it would give the Local Compact the 'teeth' that so many felt it lacked.
- Another way to increase the accountability of Local Compacts would be to develop the means of recourse when partners in the Local Compact feel that the principles have been breached. Many Local Compacts outline local dispute resolution procedures but many in the case studies felt that these were not always functioning properly.
- The low awareness of the Local Compact among key stakeholders was also seen as a considerable challenge. It was felt that if there were more high profile Local Compact champions this would improve the awareness of it and its principles. Some others also suggested including the Local Compact in staff inductions (in both the Volunteer Centre and the local authority) so that staff are immediately aware of it and it is given the formal status it requires to flourish.
- There was some concern expressed that the National Compact refresh concentrates too much on funding relationships and therefore does not offer the necessary support to organisations that do not receive funding or only receive small amounts of funding. In particular, it was thought that there needed to be more attention paid to the campaigning and alternative role of the VCS.

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# Appendix

## Methodology

This section provides more details of the methods used in the research. A mixed methods approach was applied to the research including a literature review, a telephone survey, some secondary analysis of statistical information and in-depth case studies of four local authority areas.

### Literature review

The existing literature on Volunteer Centres, the relationship between Volunteer Centres and the relationship between local authorities and the voluntary and community sector more widely was reviewed. This review discovered little hard research (although a relatively large amount of anecdotal evidence) relating to the relationships between Volunteer Centres and local authorities.

The findings from this literature review can be found in the background and context section of this report although some of the wider themes from the existing research are also referenced throughout the report.

### Telephone survey

A structured telephone survey of Volunteer Centres in England was designed by the Institute for Volunteering Research. The survey was then delivered by BMG Research (Bostock Marketing Group Ltd). The short survey asked questions around a number of areas including:

- The positivity of the relationship
- Funding (level, changes and perceived security)
- Other types of relationship
- Factors which impact the relationship (including the Local Compact and National Indicators)
- The challenges faced by Volunteer Centres in the relationship.

The survey spoke to Volunteer Centre managers. It was beyond the scope of this research to consult the perceptions of local authorities around these issues. This was due to limited resources for the project and the difficulties of consulting staff in similar roles in each local authority, which would have increased the resource burden. The telephone survey received responses from 220 out of 310 Volunteer Centres in England. This represents a response rate of 71 per cent. Questions relating to the Local Compact were added to a subsequent survey of Volunteer Centres, which had a response rate of 49 per cent (152 out of 310 Volunteer Centres).

The dataset was analysed by BMG Research but they also provided IVR with the full dataset. Subsequent analysis on the data was then carried out including combining it with data from Volunteering England's Annual Membership Return of Volunteer Centres. The results of this analysis can be found throughout this report.

### **In-depth case studies**

The quantitative data was supplemented by in-depth case studies of four local authority areas. These case studies were designed to explore:

- The history of the relationship between Volunteer Centres and local authorities
- The relevance, use and impact of Local Compacts and Compact principles on relationships and ways of working
- The nature and strength of the relationship between Volunteer Centres and local authorities, including funding
- The impact of the relationship on the work of the Volunteer Centre's impact and effectiveness
- The role of the local government performance framework including local area agreements and National Indicators 6 and 7 'participation in regular volunteering' and 'an environment for a thriving third sector'
- Issues and challenges for relationships in the future
- Aspirations for the future of relationships.

We systematically selected the case studies based on a range of factors that we thought would provide a rich variety of experiences across the Volunteer Centre and local authority network. It was not the intention of the research to develop a representative sample of local authority areas. However, the case studies were selected based on a range of criteria including:

- Two unitary authorities and two two-tier authorities
- A mix between independent and integrated Volunteer Centres
- A mix between Volunteer Centres receiving different levels of funding
- A geographical mix including some rural and some urban Volunteer Centres
- A focus on areas where the Volunteer Centres characterised their relationship with the local authority as positive (to provide the richest good practice recommendations) although included some Volunteer Centres who perceived their relationship as negative
- Local authorities with a different number of Volunteer Centres
- All areas had a Local Compact
- Include at least one area where the local authority had adopted NI6 and NI7.

Each case study involved semi-structured interviews with a range of stakeholders involved in the relationship including:

- Interviews with Compact Officers (or equivalent, such as Third Sector Officer, Funding Manager or Third Sector Officer)
- Interviews with Local Compact steering groups
- Interviews with local councillor
- Interviews with Volunteer Centre managers
- Interviews with Volunteer Centre trustees or, where applicable, CEO of the accountable host body (such as the Council for Voluntary Service)
- Interviews with other key stakeholders including representatives from the Local Strategic Partnership and regional government agencies.

The majority of interviews were carried out face-to-face but for practical reasons some were carried out over the telephone. The majority of interviews lasted between one and one-and-a-half hours. An initial consent form was signed by all face to face interviewees. Where the interviews were carried out over the phone, verbal (recorded) consent was given. The findings from each interview were then summarised and returned to the participant for their agreement. The majority of interviewees explicitly gave their agreement to the summary of the findings; however, it was not possible to discuss the summaries with all participants. In these cases the interviewee was contacted via email to explain that we were assuming agreement if we did not hear from them by a given date.

The content of the interviews was confidential and therefore no experiences, attitudes or quotes have been attributed to any individual or organisation in this report. Where necessary to explain a point some general details have been given regarding a particular case study area.

### **Steering group**

In order to guide the methodology and findings from the research, a project steering group was set up. This group consisted of experts from across the voluntary and community sector and local government sector. The function and aims of the steering group were:

1. To guide the development of the research project.
2. To offer expert advice on key elements of the project including the policy context, selection of case study organisations, topic guide design and data analysis.
3. To offer guidance on the draft report and research bulletin.
4. To give advice on dissemination strategies for the research results.

### *Structure of the steering group*

The steering group included nominees from volunteering infrastructure organisations, voluntary sector researchers and persons involved in policy/funding development for the sector.

### *Meetings*

The steering group met twice during the course of the project between July 2009 and January 2010. These meetings were arranged to correspond with key milestones in the project including the design of the fieldwork and the completion of data collection.

### *Members of the steering group*

Nick Ockenden, Institute for Volunteering Research

Matthew Hill, Institute for Volunteering Research

Sally Cooke, Local Government Association

Jess Crocker, Compact Voice

Peter Horner, NAVCA

Rob Jackson, Volunteering England

Rob MacMillan, Third Sector Research Centre

Lynne Regan, Volunteer Centre Bexley

Siân Sankey, Commission for the Compact

# The Institute for Volunteering Research

The Institute for Volunteering Research (IVR) is a specialist research and consultancy agency focusing on volunteering. It was set up in 1997 in response to the increased demand for research on volunteering. Since then IVR has carried out a wide variety of research, consultancy and evaluation projects on many different aspects of volunteering, including four national surveys of volunteering.

IVR aims to:

- Carry out and commission research on different aspects of volunteering at a variety of levels
- Disseminate findings so as to maximise the policy and practice impact
- Act as a focal point for research on volunteering
- Develop links with bodies involved in volunteering research in England, the UK and other countries, with a view to sharing knowledge and exchanging ideas
- Stimulate and contribute to education and training on volunteering.

For more information, visit: **[www.ivr.org.uk](http://www.ivr.org.uk)**

*IVR is an initiative of Volunteering England in research partnership with Birkbeck, University of London.*



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