

Do you know your LAAs from your elbow?

Stronger Communities - LAAs and the voluntary and community sector

An Introduction and feedback from the GOYH Support programme

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What are LAAs?

Local Area Agreements are three year agreements between local authorities (and agreed with the Local Strategic Partnership) and central government, to deliver stated priorities for the local area.

LAAs are intended to:

- simplify the use of funding streams;
- improve co-ordination and enhance joined up working between local partners;
- provide greater flexibility to meet local needs;
- enable local people to have an increased level of influence over decision making.

LAAs are outcomes focused, i.e. local partners should identify and agree on the changes they want to create in relation to four thematic 'blocks':

- Children and young people
- Safer and stronger communities
- Healthier communities and older people
- Economic development and enterprise

Partners can then identify how different funding streams can be used to achieve these changes. The LAA guidance includes an annex of funding streams, which you can select from, to negotiate into the LAA. This process is intended to shift the emphasis of service delivery away from organisational boundaries e.g. xxx department has responsibility for xxxx, to one which asks the question, how can xxx be best delivered and who needs to play a role in this?

LAAs will be reviewed each year to ensure that they continue to reflect local and national priorities.

Safer and Stronger Communities Fund and the Neighbourhood Element

The Safer and Stronger Communities Fund (SSCF) was introduced in all areas in 2005, irrespective of whether they have an LAA. In areas without an LAA, SSCF amounts to a 'mini-LAA'.

SSCF brings together Home Office and ODPM funding streams. In addition to tackling crime and community safety issues, it encompasses improved quality of life for people in disadvantaged neighbourhoods and community empowerment. It is therefore important that the VCS makes its mark here in the shaping and design of the outcomes and indicators. The VCS has a role in identifying the issues (based on evidence) and indicators, and illustrating its role in meeting relevant targets.

From April 2006, ODPM funding for community empowerment, neighbourhood management and neighbourhood wardens will be merged into a single funding stream and allocated to areas with the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods. This funding is called the '**Neighbourhood Element (NE)**' of SSCF. In areas with LAAs, activity in the selected neighbourhoods may well be able to support the outcomes in all four blocks.

But some areas are excluded - those that already have Neighbourhood Management Pathfinder or New Deal for Communities status, and those that are in Housing Market Renewal Pathfinder areas.

NE funding is significant for the VCS (and particularly for CENs) because it illustrates the value of community empowerment, capacity building and community influence in service delivery across all the LAA blocks.

The regional context

Area and LAA accountable body	LAA status	Neighbourhood Renewal Area	SSCF NE
South Yorkshire:			
Sheffield (SCC)	Pilot round - from April 2005	✓	1 eligible area
Barnsley (BMBC)	Pilot round - from April 2005	✓	1 eligible area
Rotherham (RMBC)	2 nd round - from April 2006	✓	
Doncaster (DMBC)	Pilot round - from April 2005	✓	1 eligible area
West Yorkshire:			
Leeds (LCC)	2 nd round - from April 2006	✓	3 eligible areas
Calderdale (CMBC)	3 rd round - from April 2007		1 eligible area
Bradford (BMDC)	Pilot round - from April 2005	✓	3 eligible area
Kirklees (KMC)	2 nd round - from April 2006	✓	
Wakefield (WMDC)	2 nd round - from April 2006	✓	1 eligible area
North Yorkshire:			
North Yorkshire County Council (NYCC) Includes districts of: Scarborough, Richmondshire, Ryedale, Harrogate, Craven, Hambleton, Selby	3 rd round - from April 2007		
York (YCC)	3 rd round - from April 2007		
Humber:			
East Riding (ERYC)	2 nd round - from April 2006		1 eligible area
Hull (KHCC)	3 rd round - from April 2007	✓	
NE Lincolnshire (NELC)	3 rd round - from April 2007		1 eligible area
North Lincolnshire (NLC)	3 rd round - from April 2007		1 eligible area

Voluntary and Community Sector Involvement

“Community engagement and delivery by the voluntary sector are very important elements in the development of LAAs. Successful LAAs will fully involve all relevant stakeholders including, in particular, the VCS and local people in helping to identify, shape and deliver local services. Areas should look to build the infrastructure or capacity building services being developed through Change Up where relevant, and the community capacity building framework provided through ‘Firm Foundations’, both of which can be aligned with the LAA. Rural areas should also consider how best to use the Rural and Social Community programme which is paid as part of the LAA.” (LAA Round 3 Guidance, ODPM)

So, central government is clear that the VCS should be involved in both the design and the delivery of the LAA i.e.

- help identify what the priorities are
- influence the design and delivery of services
- provide services
- be a key player in the facilitation of community involvement
- contribute to the evaluation of how local people have been able to get involved and influence the design and delivery of services.

Each LAA should include a ‘**statement of involvement**’ which sets out how the VCS is involved in the agreement and how the link is made with initiatives such as *ChangeUp* and *Firm Foundations*.

As the VCS is involved in all aspects of people’s quality of life, it has a role to play alongside other agencies in all four of the LAA blocks. There is currently one mandatory national outcome in the Safer and Stronger Communities block that is particularly relevant:

“Increased capacity of local communities so that people are empowered to participate in local decision-making and are able to influence service delivery”

This translates into a key goal for the VCS, and should underpin all four blocks:

“To empower local people to have a greater voice and influence over decision-making and delivery of services.”

From Round 3 (2007) this mandatory outcome has slightly shifted to:

“Empower local people to have a greater choice and influence over local decision making and a greater role in public service delivery”

Opportunities for the VCS

The crucial role of the VCS is set out in *Local Area Agreement Guidance*, which states that local authorities should ensure the involvement of the VCS to “identify, shape and deliver” the services included in the LAA. LAAs should promote improved understanding, better organisational coordination and the sharing of best practice between local practitioners and voluntary and community organisations. It follows therefore that the VCS should be able to:

- demonstrate its role within the national and local partnership agenda
- develop a more ‘equal’ relationship with partners
- influence service design and delivery for the benefit of local communities, particularly the most disadvantaged
- get VCS priorities on the local agenda
- access funding and support for community activities to improve quality of life
- enhance collaboration between VCS groups with common interests and objectives.

There isn’t any new money specifically attached to the LAA but if the VCS can demonstrate its value the LSP ought to make resources available for new and existing activities in order to meet agreed outcomes. In addition, the VCS is well placed to contribute to the evaluation of how local people are able to influence the design and delivery of services and how they access them e.g. through capacity building, VCS service delivery and providing a voice for local people and groups.

Challenges and issues for the VCS

- **Lack of a resourced infrastructure.** This is particularly an issue in the non Neighbourhood Renewal areas. The extent of VCS influence over LAAs rests on a respectful relationship with partners and a united and coherent VCS. For example, in the Derbyshire LAA there has been a lot more VCS involvement in the children’s and young people’s block because it had been working with partners around the development of Children’s Trusts long before LAAs came on the scene. It has developed a strong children’s and young people’s VCS infrastructure and has been resourced (albeit in a limited way) to support VCS involvement.
- **The complexity and short timeframe within which LAAs are developed.** This can effectively exclude wider VCS involvement, leaving individuals in an invidious position of either making decisions on behalf of the sector or the VCS losing out altogether. There is not enough time for the VCS to organize itself to create a shared ‘vision’ around outcomes, nor how they can best be delivered, so there is neither widespread VCS involvement in the design of the LAA nor are the outcomes ‘owned’ or bought into by the VCS.
- The above can place the **VCS in a weak position** – both internally and with partners.
- **The development of LAAs in two-tier areas** can be considerably more complex and require more investment of resources in building effective partnership approaches across the districts.

- **Promoting VCS involvement across all the LAA themes.** In some cases the VCS has found itself pushed into the Safer and Stronger Communities theme, with little recognition of its contribution to the other themes or that community participation should underpin it all.

Questions to address:

Capacity: How can the VCS build its collective capacity to be involved?

Resources are needed to support better engagement by individuals and the VCS in the design of the LAA, and subsequently in the delivery of the action plan and the wider community strategy. The Government's framework for community capacity building, *Firm Foundations*, identified four main outcomes of capacity building which are relevant across all LAA blocks: social capital and cohesion, community self-help, participatory governance and sustainable involvement.

ChangeUp as a funding stream should already be helping to achieve this (it will be managed by Capacity Builders from April 2006). There may be other resources available through the LAA or through other funding streams. For example, the Big Lottery has already funded an extension to the community planning process to districts, parishes and neighbourhoods in Dorset so that there is greater VCS capacity to engage with the LAA. From the end of March the Big lottery will launch its new infrastructure funding pot. In Derbyshire one CVS has had a half time post funded to help deliver the Children's Trusts agenda which has resulted in a network of VCS organisations working with children and young people.

Governance: how can the VCS ensure that community voices are heard in the new structures?

In NR areas there is a recent history of resourcing Community Empowerment Networks (CENs) and they now have a clear ongoing role with regard to governance issues (indicative core funding for CENs is identified in SSCF). It is important that VCS reps are supported with training and communication mechanisms to ensure they are up to speed with information and developments, and have an opportunity to be accountable back to the sector.

In Nottingham, an LAA project group was established comprising officers from the CVS, the CEN and the Black Partnership Network to ensure that different elements of the VCS were kept informed and could feed into the process.

In Bradford, the VCS chair of the Building Communities Partnership, and the Community Empowerment Network (CEN) were actively involved in the development of all three blocks and are leading the development of the SSC block. As a result, the VCS has been able to develop detailed milestones and targets around VCS involvement in decision-making and measuring the strength and contribution of the VCS. They ensured that the VCS:

- had representation on the district negotiating team and all key LAA partnership events and meetings.
- was commissioned to arrange workshops on each of the three themes, to consider ways of enhancing the role of the VCS in decision-making and service delivery.

Service Delivery: how can the VCS ensure that the commissioning process is fair to VCS groups (and not just the usual VCS groups)?

The VCS is already a deliverer of services and has the potential to deliver a lot more. A mapping of VCS delivery helps to state your case (see GOYH report "*Improving neighbourhoods and supporting active communities: the impact of the Single Community Programme*", downloadable from www.cogs.net.uk). Often the VCS has good links with specific interest groups who may be delivering a wide range of public services locally such as health and social care, education and learning, housing, employment and community support and safety.

The North East's Black and Ethnic Minority Community Organisations Network (BECON) is currently working with BME groups to disseminate information about LAAs and discussing with Government Office how BME groups can benefit and inform implementation of the next LAAs.

Independence: how can the VCS ensure that it retains its integrity and independence?

This is related to the point about governance but is also about the fact that the VCS is noted for its capacity to influence as well as to deliver services. In Bradford, the community empowerment network is exploring how it can provide resources for the VCS influence role under the LAA. There are many examples of how the VCS is promoting its distinctive role, e.g. supporting volunteers, building social capital, and drawing down funding from the SSCF block to resource this. The Compact should underpin the relationship between the VCS and statutory partners.

Outcomes: How can the VCS ensure that outcomes are genuinely shared with and supported by communities?

Stronger communities underpin all SSCF outcomes and it is essential that adequate time and resource is committed to support their development. The SSCF agreement should include a statement of the involvement of the VCS and local people in the design and delivery of the agreement. This should state how local people and the VCS have been informed, consulted and given the opportunity to participate in the process and the delivery of outcomes. Community Empowerment Networks in NRF areas have a particular role here.

March 2006 GOYH LAA support programme

Some 'pointers' shared through the workshop programme:

Sector Influence	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>"We have an open door, we need to run through it and design the new space"</i> • There is the potential for VCS influence. Use opportunities to shape and influence policy and strategy for local services • Importance of VCS involvement at earliest possible stage, make the most of existing opportunities / go with the moment, we need to influence change and put mechanisms in place to do so. • Need to be active and strategic participants - be pro-active, come up with some of the answers first – get ahead and ask questions. • Opportunity for 'active' delivery, being more proactive and thinking ahead. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use opportunities to shape and influence policy, strategy for local services, commissioning frameworks locally. • Need to agree statement of involvement at beginning of process as format for how the LAA is agreed. • Ensure VCS representation across 4 blocks. • Need full involvement now it has been agreed. • Need to know about strategy, for sustainability of our organisation. • Have a right to be at top table. • Have a clear idea of what VCS wants to achieve – vision.
Sector organisation	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We need to get organised - organisational challenge for the sector. • Work through local community networks. • Professionalism, do the research. • CENs experience of PMF – use what's been useful and get ahead of the game. • Use the issues faced by our client groups to re-shape services. • Make the shift, micro - macro perspective. • Relationship with ChangeUp – link infrastructure organisations to LAA, need to raise at ChangeUp consortium. • Plan carefully as to how we can get involved in the whole process. • Desirability of having a 'dedicated' LAA team within sector, quite often needs to be a small group to see all the work through (e.g. Bradford, Nottingham). • Think more laterally – consider issues from all 4 blocks (themes) in relation to service delivery issues, increase options. • Need to keep VCS motivated. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need to get the sector 'turned-on' to the importance of LAAs and make it attractive and easier to see its value. • Be part of task and finish and officer groups – infrastructure organisations should prioritise the time. • Build relationships and develop links with others – within and outside of the VCS Bring together organisations with similar interests – find / identify 'natural' partners that are willing to share experience and provide support. Engage with specialist infrastructure and engage thematically in consortia. • Work out how we fit as an individual organisation and how we develop partnerships with others. • Impact on the VCS over the next few years – what will the sector look like? How to establish relationships with providers and procurers that will benefit the sector. • Get engaged and make yourself known.
Communication	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make a nuisance of ourselves! • Knowledge = power. • Need to pitch idea so local organisations buy into idea and contribute. • Need to sell ourselves (VCS) and what we can deliver (e.g. translating & explaining strategy) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need to better articulate role/contribution of sector. • Communication and information – How do people find out about it? How do people feed into it? How do we influence decisions? Need to improve e.g. information on websites.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Selling the value of the VCS – need to get more practice at promoting the VCS contribution. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collect information – who should we be talking to about what?
Representation and Accountability	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Become familiar with the compact and how to use it. • Representatives feed back – how effective – how participative, impossible task > move to advocates. • Lack of representation by VCS of small groups and issues of accountability. • Be responsible for sharing information. • Difficult getting people to work together – possessive of their roles – will they lose staff as a result? Some community groups felt that the same people always took the lead. • Develop capacity of reps to operate effectively and credibly by developing a standard approach to gathering and demonstrating “hard evidence” of presenting a representative view. • VCS team to co-ordinate on LAA – this needs to be resourced and drawn from people across sector. • Suggest training for all VCS, important so they <u>all</u> understand the strategic process and can participate at equal level. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need integrity – deadlines push people into participating without having time to plan. • Representation process is unclear. • Continue to develop knowledge base about LAA we need to ensure the message gets back to the whole sector. • Ensure LSP reps fully informed and able to communicate in some level of detail as others, and that have enough knowledge on LAA to push involvement of sector. • Seek clarity on who our representatives are to ensure <u>feedback</u> is given. • More support networks for reps and represented. • Accountability arrangements for VCS. • Infrastructure organisations need to listen and take positive action. • Important to keep network members involved and informed - briefings, etc. • Network of organisations need a voice – not just one or two well established organisations.
Sector capacity and inclusion	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Long term gain but short term resources. • Enable resources to support full participation of VCS in LAAs and task groups. • Ensure process effectively resourced and possible drawing in other organisations to contribute. • Find ways of rising above the day-to-day work of running a busy charity. • Established networks are invaluable. • VCS team to co-ordinate on LAA – this needs to be resourced and drawn from people across sector. • Network of organisations need a voice – not just one or two well established organisations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How best to ensure diverse interests are reflected in LAA's. • Difficulty in rural areas. Government funding to assist engagement in certain areas? • Concern that small groups will miss out, become marginalised, the statutory and large organisations will benefit as they are organised. • Need to be inclusive. • The process hasn't been in place for the VCS to fully participate e.g. BME communities haven't been involved from the beginning. • Need to obtain and give out LAA information.
Outcomes and assessment	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Importance of outcomes focus – creating change. • Raise profile of what the sector does in terms of outcomes – use the PERFORM framework to plan. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need to measure outputs/outcomes in a way communicable to other bodies. • Use stretch targets and rewards but scrutinise existing targets before thinking about stretch.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication of outcomes and contributions can be a barrier, but have opportunity to break this down. • Develop methods and toolkits for evidence and outcomes that the VCS deliver. • Think through outcomes, indicators etc. • Don't lose sight of our purpose – to serve communities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need baselines about VCS involvement – partnership, responsibilities, investment. • Take back to CEN and devise ways to bring PMF to life within the Network. • Statutories don't have any better understanding of outcomes etc, than VCS. • Develop tendering 'kits' - / commissioning frameworks
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Further information requested during the support programme

- Would like to hear experience from a two tier authority and how they have sorted out LAA arrangements.
- Examples of other LAA's, outcomes and indicators, where to get information on mandatory indicators etc.
- A simple guide to what LAA are, benefits, weaknesses etc. easy to use!
- Examples of documents and good practice from other areas.
- Would have liked more discussion/guidance on outcomes/indicators/measures for development of social/human capital.
- E-mail work sheets and update of research that we may find useful.
- Actual examples of documents (LAA/SSCF) produced in region.
- Experiences of VCS heads in LAA process.
- Regular updates from other communities.
- Ideas about process/structure for accountability. Thoughts about where the real power lies.
- More information about what is happening in other areas of the country.
- Need for sessions around the role of the sector in newly structured strategic partnerships, the sector in terms of strategy and delivery and the links between LAA streams and funding, commissioning and procurement
- Anything and everything.

Sample of participants experience of the support programme:

- *Open and honest discussion about what is happening in different areas and what the real issues/problems are.*
- *Sharing information with other networks and seeing how other structures operate.*
- *Opportunity to reflect on current position and those of others.*
- *Opportunity to share information and ideas. Comparison of LAA activity. Different processes and styles of working.*
- *Everything! Being able to debate, discuss and share – this has enabled a great deal of learning, light switches going on and thoughts for future action. We are developing democracy!*

Frequently asked questions at the workshops

- **What's the place of the Compact?**

The compact should underpin your relationship with partners and enable your role in the process.

“Local compacts form the basis of the partnership with the voluntary and community sector, setting out the rules for engagement between local public sector bodies, including local authorities, and local voluntary and community sector organisations. Local Compacts are in place or under development in 98% of local authority areas, with LSPs increasingly taking a lead role. They can co-ordinate a strategic streamlined approach to voluntary and community sector engagement between the ranges of public sector bodies represented on the LSP;” (ODPM) Round 3 LAA Guidance.

- **How much scope is there for redesign and reshaping in the refresh/review?**

LAA performance reviews take place every 6 months to assess and report on progress against outcomes and targets. They also review the strength of partnership working and engagement of relevant partners including the VCS, and the extent to which they are involved in service delivery

The annual LAA refresh is an opportunity to reflect any key changes in LAA Guidance. The refresh should examine the outcomes, targets, funding streams and enabling measures to be included for the remaining years of the LAA. It is therefore another opportunity for the VCS to participate in shaping the future of the LAA.

- **How do existing LPSA stretch targets fit with LAAs**

Under the previous LPSA regime, areas were generally required to negotiate 12 stretched targets. Areas now have the freedom to choose the number of stretched targets they wish to negotiate for their LAA reward element. Clearly if you have already negotiated LPSA stretch targets these need to be seen through though the LAA provides for a much broader range and number. In a LAA Most areas are coming to the end of their LPSAs and moving into the ‘second generation’ LPSAs under the LAA.

- **What practical ways can VCS infrastructure organisations keep raising the profile of how the sector contributes to the LAA?**

See the information sheet on negotiating with power holders for pointers based on the experience of the VCS in some areas.

- **How do LAAs fit with Neighbourhood Management?**

There is a strong link between the two – particularly because both are around the principle of communities shaping improved services. In some NR areas, Neighbourhood Element funding is available and aligned in SSCF, and from Round 3 LAAs more NR funding is being put into the LAA pot. For more information, see the paper produced by the Local Agreements Network, *“Community Cohesion, Neighbourhood Management and LAAs”*, available from the IdeA website. It states

“Neighbourhood management can help to achieve many of the LAA outcomes in all 4 funding blocks and also can support LAA freedoms and flexibilities through activities such as reducing bureaucracy, pooling and aligning funding, promoting stronger partnerships and giving the Community and Voluntary Sector (CVS) a stronger voice in local affairs The Safer and Stronger Communities ‘block’ of LAAs perhaps demonstrates the most obvious interaction between LAAs and neighbourhood management, although neighbourhood management and community participation are key to all four LAA policy blocks.

The Neighbourhood Element of the SSCF was announced in July 2005 to support work in 100 disadvantaged neighbourhoods. Funding will run from April 2006 and March 2010, with £1.6 million provided for each neighbourhood over the four years. This timespan is intended to be long enough to test the success of the approach, which could then be sustained locally, if successful. In providing funding for the Neighbourhood Element (NE), the ODPM has recognised that no one size fits all in neighbourhood arrangements – the approach chosen by local partners can build on current local neighbourhood based arrangements or can follow a recommended model, based on experience and evidence of what works.

The recommended model involves local authorities and their partners identifying a neighbourhood with a population of around 10,000 and setting up a neighbourhood management scheme comprising a neighbourhood manager and support team, community outreach workers and neighbourhood wardens. A small amount of leverage funding would complement the neighbourhood management staff to attract the interest of service providers and give new ways of working a kick start. This model was likely to be particularly relevant for areas which had previously not received much central government renewal funding.”

Signposts:

- NACVS; Nov 2005 – Voluntary and community sector involvement in second phase local area agreements. www.nacvs.org.uk/resources/la/laaphase2.doc
- IDeA; 'Making it work' - guidance on VCS involvement in LAAs, including on the content of statements of community involvement. www.idea-knowledge.gov.uk/idk/aio/1359044
- Home Office/Office of Deputy Prime Minister – 'Indicators of Strong Communities' - indicators for the capacity building/community empowerment outcome in the SSC block and SSCF agreements. www.neighbourhood.gov.uk/publications.asp?did=1567
- ODPM Guidance on LAAs <http://www.odpm.gov.uk/index.asp?id=1161635>, including the LAA Toolkit
- IDeA knowledge base <http://www.idea-knowledge.gov.uk/idk/core/page.do?pagelid=1174195>
- VCS perspective from ACRE, Community Matters, Community Development Foundation, NACVS and Urban Forum <http://urbanforum.org.uk/new/index.html> (March 2005)
- The Safer and Stronger Communities Fund: The Neighbourhood Element – Implementation Guidance, NRU July 2005, www.neighbourhood.gov.uk
- Evaluation of Local Strategic Partnerships: governance - a briefing note for LSPs by LSPs www.renewal.net/Documents/RNET/Research/Evaluationlocalgovernance.pdf
- National evaluation of Local Strategic Partnerships: issues paper - voluntary and community sector engagement in Local Strategic Partnerships www.renewal.net/Documents/RNET/Research/Voluntarycommunitysector.pdf
- Local Area Agreements Guidance: Round Three and Refresh of Rounds One and Two LOCAL AREA AGREEMENTS GUIDANCE... <http://www.odpm.gov.uk/index.asp?id=1164930> - 11k - 03 April 2006

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