

# **The future of 3<sup>rd</sup> Sector engagement and the LSP**

**A report and recommendations from the 3<sup>rd</sup> sector event  
held on 14<sup>th</sup> August 2008**

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**REDCAR**  
**& CLEVELAND**  
**PARTNERSHIP**

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## **1.0 Background**

As the Governments recently published document '*Principles of representation: A framework for effective third sector participation in Local Strategic Partnerships*' states, the voluntary and community sector is key to delivering ambitions to strengthen the involvement of the community in shaping better places. It has an essential role in decision-making and in delivering services which meet the needs and aspirations of those who use them. The Government wants the best local partnership working with the voluntary and community sector to be the rule not the exception, particularly through Local Strategic Partnerships.

In some areas the voluntary and community sector's engagement with partners is already strong, particularly where the sector has well-developed infrastructure and networks that offer a two-way flow of information between the LSP and the local voluntary and community sector. If they are working well, such arrangements will result in a fully informed local voluntary and community sector that is connected with communities and is an integral part of local decision making.

It is the desire of the Redcar and Cleveland Partnership that those well-developed arrangements exist here. The voluntary and community sector is recognised as being of significant importance in this borough and the sector's independence is a major strength that is of particular value to the LSP.

In the past 2 years, there have been significant responsibilities placed on LSP's, Local Authorities and the sector themselves to ensure active involvement of voluntary and community sector bodies in decisions making and delivery. In '*Strong and Prosperous Communities*', the Local Government White Paper, the Government set out a "*clear expectation that the local third sector will be actively involved with all LSP's in helping to shape the local area*"

### **1.1 Engagement in Redcar and Cleveland**

Significant strides have been made in the last few years to strengthen engagement in Redcar and Cleveland. The Council has made improvements to the way in which it consults and involves local people, introducing Area Committees, the Viewfinder Citizens

Panel, and working with the Redcar and Cleveland Partnership to produce a research and consultation toolkit and undertake the first major Quality of Life survey.

In autumn 2005, extensive work was carried out with the voluntary and community sector to develop the Local Area Agreement statement of voluntary and community sector involvement. This important piece of work highlighted the following areas of work to effectively engage further with local people:

- the need to build capacity in the voluntary and community sectors, thereby increasing confidence and the ability to influence local decision-making.
- the need to strengthen the organisation of geographic and thematic communities in order to improve their engagement with public services providers.
- the need for public service providers to share best practice, join resources and work together to coordinate their engagement with local communities.

The Council therefore worked with voluntary and community sector and the Partnership in 2007 to develop a Community Engagement Capacity Building Plan that will build on the existing high quality engagement activities and the positive relations that already exist between service providers and the communities they serve.

In July 2007, a review of the arrangements for the stronger communities' element of the Safer and Stronger Communities Partnership was carried out. As a result in November 2007 the Partnership Board agreed to the development of a Stronger Communities Partnership to enable the partnership to embed the stronger communities' agenda across the LSP, and secure an overview and scrutiny function/critical friend role within the Partnership.

## **1.2 The Community Empowerment Network (CEN)**

In 2002, with funding from the Government's Community Empowerment Fund, the CEN was established to create a vehicle for people from the community and voluntary sector to be involved in the decision-making processes of the Redcar & Cleveland Partnership. The Primary Objectives of the CEN included creating opportunities for people to get their voices heard by decision-makers, provide training and development opportunities for residents and other voluntary groups, producing relevant briefings and resource materials

for local groups and establishing an active network in the borough that links voluntary and community groups together to create a voice across the sector.

The Government policy context against which the work of the Community Network is evolving has been described in other documents including the Community Engagement Capacity Building Plan approved by the Partnership Board in May 2007.

With regard to the development of Community Empowerment Networks, since 2001, £43 million a year has been invested in them nationally, through the Single Community Programme and now through a range of external funding streams. Many CENs however cease to operate, others have been incorporated into other organisations and those that remain face funding cuts. The governments Neighbourhood Renewal Unit ceased funding CENs in 2005 with the final award of finance transferred to Networks through LSP's in 2006/07 when all central government dedicated financial support came to an end.

At the same time the Governments policy of increasing the engagement of local communities in the work of Local Strategic Partnerships and in Local Area Agreements remains in place and the Public Sector Agreement 21 requires the building of more cohesive, empowered and active communities.

In Redcar and Cleveland, the Community Network continued to be supported between 2002 and 2007 by the Redcar and Cleveland Partnership and government funding through GONE, and in that period almost £2million was invested in the CEN via £378k per annum.

### **1.3 Impact of CEN's**

Nationally, evaluations of the work of CENs have painted a mixed picture of their impact. While they have contributed to the increased involvement of the VCS in the structures of LSPs and LAAs, and have contributed to communicating with and the involvement of communities in the decisions that effect their services, they have confronted a number of challenges including:

- Their ability to successfully select and support VCS representatives on the various strategic and thematic bodies;
- Confusion as to the role of a CEN in relation to other infrastructure bodies (for example local Voluntary Development Agencies)

- Their value for money.
- The mixed reaction of some statutory sector bodies when faced with increased community representation.

#### **1.4 Review of the Community Network**

Against this background, the Community Network Steering Group considered the future of community engagement in Redcar and Cleveland and agreed that a review of the work and impact of the work should take place. In December 2007, the CEN appointed Martin Honeywell, an independent Neighbourhood Renewal Advisor, who published his report highlighting that the CEN had achieved a great deal in its five years of work but there were areas of significant improvement required, and seven key recommendations were made.

1. That the Network should prioritise a series of core activities
2. Establish an efficient and effective governance and management system
3. Clarify relationships with other VCS infrastructure bodies and with statutory providers of related services
4. Clarify Network membership relationships with local community organisations and thematic voluntary sector organisations
5. Develop innovative and imaginative approaches to consultation, communications and facilitated consensus building
6. Adopts a programme of capacity building in communications, consultation and facilitated consensus building
7. A target to measure progress in enhancing its profile throughout the Borough. Every VCS organisation in the Borough should know of the Network, know what it does, know how to make contact and judge its work positively

Following the review, it was imperative that the voluntary and community sector had an opportunity to discuss and make representations on how future engagement should be taken forward in Redcar and Cleveland.

Thus in August 2008, an event was held to bring voluntary and community sector representatives together with LSP members to map out future engagement structures.

## **2.0 3<sup>rd</sup> sector engagement and the LSP event**

During June and July 2008 a steering group consisting of Linda Bell (Chair of the CEN), Mal Fitzgerald (CEO of RCVDA), Paul Taylor (Acting Partnership Manager) and Tracy Calvert from the LSP Support Team developed a programme to seek the views of the voluntary and community sector on future engagement. A programme was developed and a wide range of stakeholders were invited to attend the event being held on 14<sup>th</sup> August 2008. The programme that was delivered is attached as **appendix 1**.

Presentations were provided on the governments drivers, the review of the CEN, the Community Engagement and Capacity Building Plan before participants were given the opportunity to examine alternative models used in other Local Strategic Partnerships.

Following the presentations, two workshops were provided. The first provided an opportunity for stakeholders to feedback on what the key elements of engagement between the LSP and the voluntary and community sector should be and how they wished to see the LSP communicate with their organisation.

The second workshop, allowed stakeholders to discuss i) the potential for area partnerships, ii) how they could relate to the Councils Area Committees and vice versa and iii) on what geographical basis they could be created and potential stakeholders

### **2.1 Participation**

The event was attended by 52 stakeholders, 39 from voluntary and community sector bodies and 13 individuals represented public sector organisations, as shown in figure 1 below.

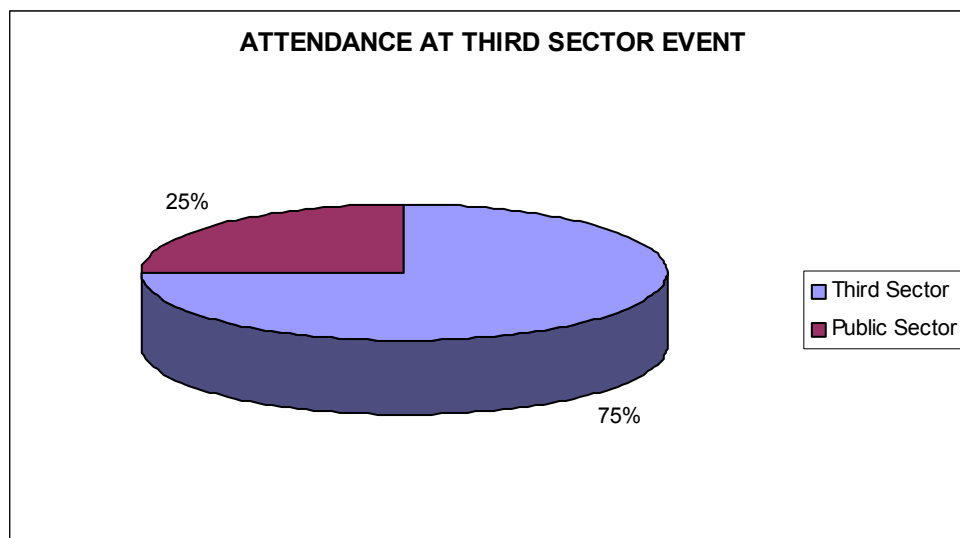


Figure 1.

## 2.2 Workshop outcomes

### 2.2.1 Workshop 1 - elements of engagement between the LSP and the voluntary and community sector

Stakeholders identified important elements that must be embedded in the relationship between the voluntary and community sector and the wider LSP. Adequate representation, transparent and accountable lines of communication, robust consultation and the creation of easier channels to enable all to be heard were seen as key elements that must be adopted in the future.

At the present time, stakeholders felt that there was a lack of communication with the sector, a lack of transparency in representations, a lack of understanding of who was represented on the LSP and a lack of clarity of the sectors role.

**Critically stakeholders felt that voluntary and community sector membership on the LSP was not representative of the sector as a whole and that it should recognise geographical areas in Borough.** There need to be clearer lines of communication and consultation with groups representing better defined geographical areas.

### 2.2.2 Workshop 1 – future ways for the LSP to communicate with organisations

Stakeholders ultimately wish to see more community representation on the LSP with grass roots individuals including representation from smaller community groups. It was felt that communities of interest are not adequately represented currently.

Stakeholders highlighted the need for clear structures for providing information, and also for the sector to feed information/issues back to the LSP. Reciprocal information sharing is key for the sector and the LSP.

There was a clear desire to see the LSP use plain English and reduce the 'jargon' used when communicating. Interestingly it was felt that the LSP should utilise the skills of all LSP members and forum members – not the same people all the time. More regular information is required to keep the sector informed via newsletters and not only email. The issue was raised around the importance of providing details in relation to who is on thematic groups which would improve clarity and understanding.

**Stakeholders were also supportive of the creation of local forums to meet needs of the variety of communities that exist in localities, and to use community messages through Councillors, community leaders and front-line workers.**

### 2.2.3 Workshop 2 - How could area partnerships relate to the Councils Area Committees and vice versa

**There was clear support for any area partnerships to have identical boundaries with the 5 Area Committee areas, which would have separate independent structures from Area Committees.** Stakeholders would want the partnerships to be accountable to the LSP, focus on community interest themes, be able to empower local representatives to be part of financial decision-making in localities and not be exclusive of neighbourhood arrangements.

**Critically, stakeholders felt that these community area partnerships should then have adequate representation directly on all thematic blocks of the LSP, with transparency in organisational structures and relationships.** These community area partnerships would then feed into Area Committees and vice versa – with direct reporting into the Stronger Communities Partnership.

Stakeholders also suggested an independent body to manage that relationship/engagement with training for all sectors to promote better understanding of the relationships.

#### 2.2.4 Workshop 2 – On what geographical basis could the area partnerships operate

**The model employed by the Area Committees was the one most favoured by stakeholders, with the 5 geographical partnerships having representation on the thematic partnerships to influence strategy and feed back to their own locality partnerships.**

Community anchor organisations were highlighted significantly as the vehicle to co-ordinate and support the locality partnerships, and the need to resource them, potentially through Area Based Grant.

There was a view that these partnerships should meet in the evenings to improve attendance, that all stakeholders have the opportunity for training and that they should not exclude officers from the local authority or wider LSP members from having input. It is clear that everyone should have the opportunity to participate including all local community/VCS groups. The partnerships need leadership an overall point of contact / facilitator with the suggestion of a voluntary and community sector forum to co-ordinate the views of the geographical partnerships.

#### 2.2.5 Relationship between Area Committees and new community partnerships

Consideration needs to be given to how the Area Committees relate to any new potential new Community Area Partnerships. There must be clearly defined terms of reference for the new partnerships, clearly defined roles, responsibilities and membership structures, with open lines of communication and formal lines of reporting between the two structures.

#### 2.2.6 Financial support for new engagement structures

In August 2008, almost £250,000 of Community Engagement and Capacity Building money was granted to a number of voluntary and community sector organisations for infrastructure work. Within this distribution, a grant was awarded to RCVDA, until March 2009, which included financial assistance towards setting up a voluntary sector forum, bringing together the communities of interest groups.

### **3.0 Proposals for new engagement structures**

The workshops provided a wealth of information on which to determine a way forward for improving the engagement of the voluntary and community sector on the Redcar and Cleveland Partnership and to provide the sector with the information and support they require to become an integral part of local decision making.

As such the following proposals are made:

#### **1. *Establish 5 Community Area Partnerships, co-terminus with the Area Committee Boundaries***

The Partnerships will be open to all voluntary and community sector organisations within the localities to attend. Each partnership will elect a Chair and Vice Chair, and be based around an anchor organisation in their locality. The organisation will need to be resourced to be able to provide a support function to the area partnership. Each partnership will also include the Chair of the Area Committee in that locality.

#### **2. *Establish a new 'LSP Community Sector Forum' to co-ordinate the area partnerships***

A co-ordinating Community Sector Forum of 25 members will be formed from 5 members from each Area Partnership and will elect a Chair and Vice Chair. This body will co-ordinate and support the work of the area partnerships, with clear lines of reporting and accountability.

#### **3. *Establish Community Sector Forum representatives on thematic partnerships and the LSP Board***

The Community Sector Forum will nominate a maximum of 2 representatives to sit on each of the Thematic Partnerships. It will also nominate 2 representatives to sit on the LSP Board in addition to the Chair and Vice Chair of the Forum. Community Sector representatives will continue to support theme groups within each block as currently exists.

#### **4. *LSPs Community Infrastructure Support Group to oversee transition***

The Community Infrastructure Support Group within the Stronger Communities Block will oversee the development of the new structures, the membership of each group and the

reporting arrangements into the LSP. They will develop an implementation plan to be agreed with the Stronger Communities Thematic Partnership.

### **5. Proposed timetable for implementation**

The following draft timetable is proposed:

Stage	Date
Report to voluntary and community sector stakeholders for comment	8 <sup>th</sup> – 26 <sup>th</sup> September 2008
Report to Stronger Communities Partnership	15 <sup>th</sup> October 2008
Report to LSP Board	31 <sup>st</sup> October 2008
Report to Councils Executive Management Team	November 2008
Development of implementation plan at Community Infrastructure Support Group	25 <sup>th</sup> November – 19 <sup>th</sup> December 2008
Report to Council's Cabinet	December 2009
Report on membership and management of new arrangements to Community Infrastructure Support Group	January 2009
Report to LSP Board and agree new structures	13th February 2009
New structures operational from	1 <sup>st</sup> April 2009

### **4.0 Conclusion**

The future success of the LSP and the voluntary and community sector is dependent upon robust, open and transparent lines of communications, and a structure that enables proper representation by voluntary and community sector on all groups across the LSP. The structure that is proposed from the recommendations in section 3.0 is shown in figure 2.

The voluntary and community sector provided invaluable input at the event and has demonstrated its commitment to improving people's quality of life in Redcar and Cleveland. This report aims to be an accurate reflection of the sector's views on the relationship between community groups, localities and the LSP.



The future of 3<sup>rd</sup> Sector engagement and the LSP

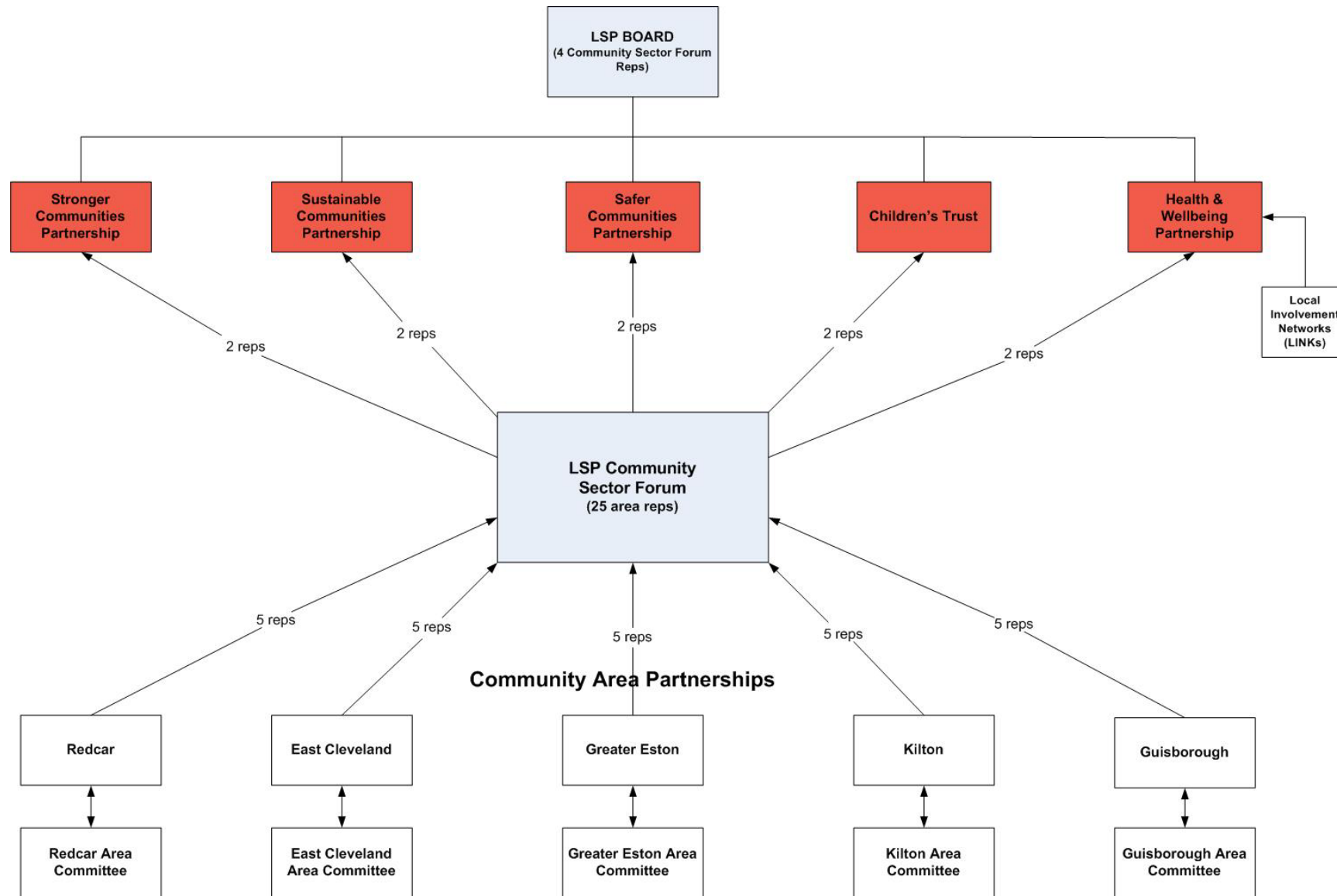


Figure 2.

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