

Single Children and Young People's Plan

A response from the voluntary and community sector

Contents

1. About this response
2. General comments
3. Section 1: Vision for the City's Children's Services
4. Section 2: Needs Analysis and Shared Methods
5. Section 3: Be Healthy
6. Section 4: Stay Safe
7. Section 5: Enjoy and Achieve
8. Section 6: Making a Positive Contribution
9. Section 7: Achieve Economic Wellbeing
10. Section 8: How We Use Our Budget and Resources
11. Section 9: Performance Management and Service Management
12. Section 10: Working With Partners, Children and Young People
13. Working the Voluntary and Community Sector

About this response

This paper is a summary of comments made at two conferences held in autumn 2005 which were attended by the following voluntary and community sector groups:

17th October 2005

42nd Street
Anson Cabin Project
Apostles and St Cuthberts Churches
Benchill Community Centre
BESS Counselling
Black Health Agency
CARISMA
Catholic Children's Rescue Society
Barnardos
Childline
Chrysalis Manchester
City Centre Project
CN4M
Contact a Family
Depaul Trust
Eclipse
Family Action Benchill
Fairbridge
FSU
Gaddum Centre
Hanifah Small School
Hideaway
Longsight Transitions Project
Manchester Alliance for Community Care
Manchester Care and Repair Ltd
Manchester Carers Forum
Manchester Young Lives
Mary Seacole Trust
Manchester Disabled People's Action Group
Mossside & Hulme Rollersport Club
Peer Support Project
Reach Out
Salvation Army
Slade Lane Neighbourhood Centre
Sowing Seeds
Springboard for Children
Starting Out
Tree of Life Centre
Trinity House Community Resource Centre
Victim Support & Witness Service
Voluntary Youth Manchester
Wai Yin Chinese Womens Organisation
Water Adventure Centre
Woodhouse Park Family Centre
YASP

29th November 2005

42nd Street
After Adoption
CARISMA
Challenge Team UK
Cheetham Hill Community Association
Chinese Health Information Centre
Chrysalis Manchester
City Centre Project
Community Network for Manchester
Depaul Trust
Discus Family Support Team
Eclipse
Fairbridge
Gaddum Centre
Homestart
Manchester Alliance for Community Care
Manchester Care & Repair
Manchester Young Carers Forum
Manchester Deaf Centre
Manchester Young Lives
Mothers Against Violence
Parrswood Tenants Association
Safe in the City
Slade Lane Neighbourhood Centre
Southern Voices
Sowing Seeds
St. George's YCC
Timothy Trust UK
Victim Support & Witness Service
Voluntary Youth Manchester
Wai Yin Chinese Women's Society
Water Adventure Centre
Woodhouse Park Family Centre

General comments

- There are several references to “the voluntary sector” – it would be acceptable to use this as a catch-all term if there was a definition of what it includes. It covers a massive range of organisations from small community groups to national charities (we know that in Manchester there are literally **hundreds** of non-statutory organisations working to support children, young people and families) and in order to educate partners about the current contribution and future potential of the sector, there needs to be some substantial explanation of this term. The term “voluntary community and faith sectors” is more accurate but still doesn’t necessarily convey the sense of scale and breadth. The faith sector, for example, still needs to be recognised in it’s own right for its particular area of expertise as well as part of the sector as a whole.
- If the intention is to produce a number of more detailed action plans on particular aspects of the broad plan, it would be useful to list these – this way the Plan would act as an index for those wishing to find out about specific themes in more detail and about how they are going to be coordinated and achieved.
- In each of the outcome sections, there is little obvious relationship between the “key facts” and the “key actions”. If each of the key facts is a need, then it would follow that each should be addressed by a key action (or a number of actions). Where examples are specified, they should be presented in terms of the communities they are aimed at: these may be area-based (helping bring a district focus) or communities of interest (which could be presented under the headings used in the Needs Analysis – e.g. ethnicity, disability, poverty, etc.).
- Consistency throughout the Plan needs to be improved in terms of the communities of interest which are cited as examples – currently the reasons why some specific groups are included, when others are missed out is not clear.
- It is important that what comes under ‘what children and young people say is important’ in the Plan is included as part of the key actions.
- The language used needs to be realistic – consulting ‘fully’ with children and young people is not going to be a reality. Where possible acronyms should not be used.
- It would help to draw attention to the actions which are about prevention as distinct from those which are about supporting people with developed and identified needs.
- As noted below, many of the services detailed in the plan are aimed at individuals – a running theme of the Plan should be to show how services interlink to provide a cohesive model of support for families of all kinds and the community as a whole.
- For a document which is about children and young people, there is little focus on the stages of development which they are going through in growing up and how services support them – nowhere, for example, is there any mention of young people discovering their sexual or religious identity yet these are key factors in the building of self-esteem and achieving personal fulfilment in adulthood. There needs to be clearer links made to the Youth Matters paper.
- It is still unclear how the non-statutory partners fit into the Childrens Trust “arrangements” and Multi Agency Teams. There needs to be some indication of how this will be developed.

Section 1: Vision for the City's Children's Services

- **Neighbourhoods of choice:** Explain what is meant by this, e.g. a place where people will choose to live because it is somewhere they will thrive.
- **Self-esteem:** Needs to be more explanation of what the importance of is and why it has been identified as a priority. It's not referred to anywhere else in the Plan.
- **Service integration:** behind this is a principle that the boundaries between who provides particular aspects of support should be the concern of the professionals and not the people using the service. The concept of "a service" needs to be redefined as "what the person receives" from a range of organisations not "what we deliver". For the last few years we've been talking about promoting "person-centred" approaches and the way they react to an individual. But this is potentially limiting because most people live in a family or community – so should it now be seen as "family centred"? This is about recognising the reality of "interdependence" – so it's not just about linking bits of services together around a common single "client" or "customer" but looking at the whole landscape of factors and bringing a range of individual services together to address them.
- **Shared Responsibility:** although it does not have a statutory duty in the same sense as the City Council or other agencies, the voluntary sector *does* have a responsibility – they are, by nature, value-based organisations and so assume a responsibility. This is enshrined in the governance structures of organisations (which are determined by charity law) which establish an accountability to the community. There is also accountability to agencies which fund the work. Additionally, the Government is increasingly promoting the role of voluntary organisations as providers of "mainstream" services – the responsibility placed on organisations to take responsibility for meeting the needs of the community is set to grow further over the coming years.
- **Governance:** explicit links should be made between the new Governance arrangements and the Manchester Community Engagement Strategy. This strategy has been agreed by both the LSP Board and the City Council Executive and defines the elements of Community Engagement as:
 - Informing
 - Researching
 - Involving
 - Consulting
 - Devolving Decisions
 - Supporting Community Action

So, for example, it would be worth addressing the question of how the local community will be able to contribute to the views of the District Children's Board? Or, at least, acknowledging that there is a commitment to build a process by which this can happen.

- **Listening:** early in 2005, the Children and Young People's Partnership agreed a strategy for Community Engagement which, very broadly, broke down as follows:

- Views of children and young people (lead: Manchester Children's Fund)
- Views of voluntary and community organisations working with children and young people (lead: Child & Family Support Forum & Voluntary Youth Manchester, working jointly as part of the Community Network for Manchester)
- Views of other partner agencies (lead: Education Department)

The three conferences held between October 2005 and February 2006 as well as the longer term work of the Child & Family Support Forum & Voluntary Youth Manchester are the means by which the voice of the voluntary sector is being expressed. It's important to recognise that the sector has not one but **two** roles: one as a voice for the community and the other as a provider of services. In terms of listening to local needs, the voluntary sector can help articulate the views of the children, young people and families with whom they work – indeed it is a characteristic of the sector that they have historically been better than statutory agencies at involving their service users in shaping and managing their work.

- **Top 20 measures:** we recognise that this is a means of relating the Public Service Agreement targets to the five Every Child Matters outcomes. However, all of these targets are driven by the delivery of services – it could be seen that they say more about the success or failure of services than they do about the achievements of children and young people themselves.

It sends out an unfortunate signal if “Making a positive contribution” is primarily to be measured by reducing youth nuisance and re-offending. As outputs (being the intermediate stage between activities and outcomes) they provide an indicator of progress – but, on principle, there should be some kind of qualitative and positive target about whether children, young people and families themselves feel that the quality of their life is improving as a result of the plan. We recognise that this is difficult to measure but the LSP Quality of Life Survey and the work under the Community Engagement Strategy may provide a basis for this – target 18 for example could include the numbers of young people engaged in volunteering activities (this would require a definition of what constitutes “volunteering”).

Section 2: Needs Analysis and Shared Methods

The headings in this could usefully be reproduced elsewhere in the report as cross-cutting themes in the “where we need to do better” sections – making an explicit link to identified needs and key actions.

There also needs to be some demonstrated understanding of the fact that these issues are never isolated from one another – for example the multiple discrimination experienced by disabled children from ethnic minorities or the barriers faced by families of children with both physical and mental health needs.

- **Ethnicity:** links with Agenda 2010 need to be made here.
- **Disability:** The section on disability in particular is inadequate – though it does acknowledge this (but then does nothing about it). It would be useful to give some indication of how many disabled children there are estimated to be, beyond the 2,800 stated. It should also be recognised that the term “disabled” covers vastly differing physical and mental health needs which require equally diverse types of support. In particular it is astonishing that there is no reference to learning disability in this section.
- **Family Structure:** again, this is inadequate and gives the impression that it is based on the blanket assumption that a single parent family is always a bad family. It does not, for example, take into account the resilience or stability of the family environment – for example how many children in Manchester have lived through the breakdown of their parents’ relationship or lived through the death of a parent? Again, this is an opportunity to set out a new vision of how need is perceived and therefore a new approach to meeting the need.

Section 3: Be Healthy

This section only considers two approaches:

- providing support to those in greatest (or perhaps most obvious) need
- prevention through education

In terms of prevention, while education is important, this is ultimately ineffective if it is solely delivered through schools – it only targets the individual child and does not consider the conflicting messages the child may get in the family home. There needs to be better support for parents (of all ages) in embedding health messages. The Plan needs to show clear links between activities in schools and with community based programmes which work with families. The example of promoting breast-feeding is a good one – there is a voluntary sector project working in Wythenshawe which organises groups of mothers together to provide education and peer support around breast feeding – but it also has social and other spin-offs which are, for those involved, exactly what makes the scheme so appealing and so worthwhile.

The Plan misses the middle raft of preventative services which are about support before things reach crisis level or a “need” is even acknowledged (i.e. it’s not just about “early intervention”). The emphasis on mental health services which “require the intervention of a practitioner” is about meeting the needs of children and young people who have a mental health need which has already manifested itself – it does nothing for those young people who are coping now but who, without support will probably develop mental health needs in years to come – this is about prevention not by education but by active support in building resilience and self-esteem.

There needs to be stronger links made between health outcomes and social inequalities. It is difficult to separate health from the social context in which the child or young person is situated and clear links need to be made to other parts of the Plan in relation to this i.e. stay safe and economic well-being.

The Plan as a whole is weak on issues around families affected by disability – it provides a chance to redevelop the vision for this group within the community (which goes far beyond the 2,800 mentioned in the needs analysis). This section contains no reference to children with learning difficulties or the role of services in supporting their inclusion in the mainstream. In fact the section as a whole is weak on supporting the needs of children and young people with long term health needs – there is nothing, for example, on how the transition between children and adults services can be made as smooth as possible and the role of carers. There is also no reference to other significant groups who have specific health needs including those suffering from domestic violence, homeless children and young people, and different black and minority ethnic groups.

By and large, after the main interventions with very young children, most young people have little contact with health services – particularly with GPs - which often means that mainstream health services are poor at understanding young people, particularly where there are complex family issues. This will become increasingly significant in the move to practice-based commissioning as there is a risk that services to this group will not be given the focus they deserve – the Plan is an opportunity to commit to an approach which will ensure this does not happen.

There is also no mention of sport and physical activities in this section, which is key to achieving this outcome. There needs to be a clear commitment in the Plan to providing accessible physical and leisure activities to contribute to improving physical and mental health.

On page 19, please explain what is meant by “screening for substance misuse” – how formal is the screening programme intended to be?

The role of the Voluntary and Community Sector

One thing which many voluntary sector groups working in this field do is provide informal support services in a non-stigmatising environment where young people who are coping with difficulties can get support in a way which looks at their mental, physical and emotional well being in a non-intrusive way. This is a typical example of where the voluntary sector has a huge advantage in terms of engaging people who are wary of approaching a formal service for fear of it being an admission of failure in some way. The Plan needs to capitalise on this by building up a range of community based services which promote coping skills, resilience and recovery but which are not labelled as “mental health” and therefore not just non-stigmatising but also not constrained in terms of the kinds of support they can provide – ranging from advice to practical support.

The voluntary sector is also well placed to offer alternative models of service delivery around physical and mental health problems for key groups of people who may be marginalised by mainstream services. The sector is in a good position to fill the gaps in therapeutic interventions and counselling for children and young people and provide an advocacy role and critical voice due to its independence.

Section 4: Stay Safe

There is no reference to the fact that understanding why some children and young people choose to disengage from mainstream education (and other services) is key to creating an inclusive society in which they choose to participate (links to the “neighbourhoods of choice” agenda). The concept of developing children and young people’s self identity and ‘resilience factors’ is very important. There is a huge agenda around improving young people’s aspirations and the quality of their decision making to reduce their risk taking behaviour e.g. around choices to smoke, use substances, engage in other physical risk behaviours like self-harming, over eating or poor diet, engage in criminal activities as a means of income or bravado (concepts of masculinity) and disengage from school or the home too early or in inappropriate ways.

There needs to be a clearer link with the drugs, alcohol and domestic violence agendas where acquired patterns of behaviour are transmitted from one generation to the next: the work around “Hidden Harm” is an attempt to address this issue, but the approach has a wider application which could be established here. The fact that these links are not obvious is due to the way in which services are planned and managed around individual issues rather than acknowledging that you cannot separate the child or young person from the social context in which they live.

The agendas around the crime and the fear of crime (including domestic violence and bullying) can also be addressed by neighbourhood based work and particularly intergenerational work. For example, the City Council’s Valuing Older People strategy identified that older people have the highest fear of crime while acknowledging that young men are statistically the highest victims of crime. As part of the citizenship and respect agendas, bringing these issues together may provide some new ways of considering these issues from a community driven perspective – helping build a consensus around social responsibility and thereby creating a greater sense of community cohesion. Some community groups are already doing this on a neighbourhood level (faith based groups in particular have a strong track record in this area) and the Plan may be a good opportunity to raise the profile of such activities.

The tone of this section focuses on very formal interventions with people who are already known to mainstream services. We do not know (because there is no research available) how many people in Manchester are engaged with voluntary sector groups but not with statutory services – or how many are engaged with both but where the different approaches bring different results. There needs to be a greater commitment around enabling children and young people to feel able to contact and communicate with services – support needs to be in appropriate culture, style, language and formats.

The example of vetting procedures in relation to volunteers and community based activities is one where the lack of a principle of full cost recovery for voluntary agencies is having an impact. In many cases groups are expected to absorb the increased bureaucracy of performance management without any additional resources which means they are spending precious time and skills on keeping up with administrative procedures. While this may be less of a problem for larger organisations, it has driven many smaller groups (usually those started within the local community) to meet the basic criteria rather than building capacity and good practice within their organisations. Again, it comes down to investment in nurturing the voluntary sector as a market. The fact that a city like Manchester hasn’t been able to establish a properly co-ordinated volunteer bureau which can support with CRB checks and vetting procedures is testament to this, despite the obvious need.

There is little recognition of diversity within the Plan, with some major assumptions about families. Groups of people who have little mention but have specific needs in order to be able to stay safe include refugees and asylum seekers, children and young people who are homeless and those with physical and learning disabilities (amongst others).

The role of the Voluntary and Community Sector

Again, this is an area where the voluntary sector is ideally placed to provide low-level and preventative services. People tend to trust the sector because it has a close relationship with the community and it is truly empowering (although local authority services may employ an empowering style, its relationship with the user will always be governed by its statutory responsibility). Indeed there are many voluntary and community groups who are already making a contribution and are preventing self-destructive behaviours develop which destroy emotional and mental well-being as well as physical well-being.

Information sharing around the new Children and Young People's Teams is an issue which is still unresolved when it comes to the voluntary sector. There needs to be a proper debate about how far the sector (and its service users) wants and needs to go with this – and what the expectations of statutory partners are. This could be flagged up as a key action for the future.

A voluntary sector link to the Area Child Protection Committee and the future Local Safeguarding Children Board is currently being developed.

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Section 5: Enjoy and Achieve

The concept of achievement as described in this section is solely around educational attainment. Even within this, there is scant attention to alternative education provision and the inclusion of children and young people with special educational needs.

In this section there is a significant gap: there is very little about “enjoying”. An obvious element which has been omitted here is play. This is absolutely crucial to a child or young person’s development and a key preventative strategy for the city. There needs to be a greater commitment to the provision of outdoor play space and an acknowledgement that current provision may not be safe or secure. The role of leisure activities is missed here.

If we are to build neighbourhoods of choice, then the sense of cultural identity and personal fulfilment cannot be solely limited to education (especially education which is focused on employment). For one thing, this creates a potentially short term result – Manchester would become a society which identifies employment and economic achievement as the only marks of success...so when today’s younger generation retires or wishes to get a change of pace, they may have a developed perception of Manchester as a place to work but not to live – and choose to move out of the area, taking all the skills and income they have developed with them. This is an exaggerated scenario, but it shows how the message which is sent out about the value of cultural and social development could ultimately have a longer term economic impact.

There is a chance to build a view of education (in its broadest sense) as an ongoing process which is a constant part of family life and the beginning of personal fulfilment, rather than just being about creating the employees of the future (important though that undoubtedly is). Home life is not mentioned, however, it is only if you are able to be happy at home, that you are likely to achieve elsewhere. In a similar vein there is no recognition of the link with the importance of faith sector organisations and having a moral dimension to enable children and young people to enjoy and achieve.

The Role of the Voluntary and Community Sector

Voluntary sector organisations often deliver informal social and cultural education – particularly those which are based around cultural and creative activities. These are hugely significant parts of personal development as well as being activities which can bring families together and divert children and young people into positive behaviours.

The development of extended schools and a wider range of out of school activities is another case in which the voluntary sector is well placed to continue to develop a broad range of activities which are shaped and delivered by the community and accessible to the whole family. There are already activities stretching from after school sports clubs and play schemes to social and cultural activities which run throughout the year as well as during the summer holidays for the whole family.

The voluntary and community sector has a strong relationship with the community they work in and are often better placed because of their value-based systems of working, flexibility and informality to work with young people not in employment, education or training. They are also in a strong position to support children and young people to have a voice in how they would like services to be provided.

Section 6: Making a Positive Contribution

The fundamental problem with this section is that key facts and targets focus on negative activity despite it being about making a *positive* contribution. ASBO's and dispersal orders criminalise young people and are deemed by many to fail to address the real underlying problems in a community.

In the "need to do better" section much of the work around involvement fits within the Manchester Community Engagement Strategy (MCES) – it would be good to make some obvious links to this and develop a strand of the strategy which brings all the work around children and young people together into a cohesive programme under the MCES banner as this is signed up to by both the LSP Board and the City Council Executive.

Support for parents and families is crucial. The key actions could include not just parents of teenagers but also teenage parents themselves. Some research has just been produced (in a collaboration between a voluntary sector group and Manchester University) which shows that while it is often still stigmatised, some teenagers who become parents take the opportunity to turn their lives around as a result of becoming responsible for bringing up a child. Given the high levels of teenage pregnancy in Manchester, there is further work to be done to ensure that where this does happen, it does not mean that the young woman's opportunities to achieve under the five outcomes are closed off – again, this is about sending messages to future generations.

The idea of a central recording system for volunteering opportunities is certainly welcome: as noted above, the lack of a volunteer bureau in Manchester is a major gap in infrastructure which needs addressing across the whole range of voluntary sector activity. For young people to develop confidence and positive aspirations there need to be alternative routes to mainstream education where they feel they can succeed e.g. youth achievement awards, volunteering opportunities. Mentoring schemes for older young people equip them with skills to carry them forward in life and provide younger children with positive role models. This is not just about children and young people becoming involved in volunteering but also about adults who may wish to get involved in working with children and young people in a voluntary capacity. It is part of the development of the workforce as much as it is of developing services and personal opportunities. The relative failure of Manchester to capitalise on the massive volunteer input to the Commonwealth Games must partly be down to the fact that there is no single visible agency leading on this work, though there are some individual initiatives within the voluntary and statutory sectors which have been successful.

The Role of the Voluntary and Community Sector

The voluntary and community sector provides a significant proportion of the volunteering opportunities within the city. They also run a significant number of youth forums outside the Young People's Council. The voluntary and community sector has close links with communities whose contributions are more invisible or groups who are particularly marginalized and are able to work with these groups in a sustained way over a long period of time to enable them to achieve their aspirations. There is a key role of faith organisations (and other voluntary sector organisations) to introduce different value systems and moral ethics which help children and young people develop a positive identities. In addition to this they provide family support groups which give people the opportunity to share positive experiences and achievements.

The section on page 31 about helping children and young people make their voices heard and the role of the Children's Rights Service is significant for the voluntary sector because one of the services the sector is providing more and more of is advocacy. Nationally and locally advocacy services for children and young people are underdeveloped (especially compared to, say, mental health or even older people's advocacy services) but Manchester's voluntary sector has been involved in developing good practice in these kinds of services for some years. This could be taken further if there is support for the idea at a strategic level.

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Section 7: Achieve Economic Wellbeing

In order to achieve economic well-being children and young people need to have access to a range of options and opportunities. This part of the Plan, however, focuses only on mainstream education and employment as the formula to achieve economic well-being. Through this approach there is a danger of trying to fit all children and young people into a particular structure which, in many cases, is not geared up to meet their needs. There must be a greater focus on alternative opportunities including alternative educational provision and social enterprises (of which there are numerous good examples in the city). These offer a more appropriate route to achieving economic well-being for many, and are especially important for more vulnerable children and young people.

This section, once again, focuses entirely on interventions aimed at the individual child or young person and ignores their context and economic environment in which they are living. What about the low income households in which many are growing up? Lack of low cost housing in the city is a key issue in terms of being able to achieve economic well-being, and needs to be addressed in the Plan.

Like other cities such as Liverpool, Manchester now has second generation unemployment and it is being recognised that this is because there is a failure to pass on aspirations from one generation to the next. The role of parents is absolutely critical to achieving positive outcomes for children and young people and there is a real need to have a greater focus on parents and their relationship with their children. There is a need to address parent's experience of education and employment. If parents do not have enough self-esteem and confidence to gain further education and employment it is likely that this will be passed onto their children. The Plan fails to reflect the importance of linking services to the whole family and the good work that is already being carried out to improve this.

There is little mention of work experience or volunteering which is key. The example of Connexions getting 13 young people into voluntary activity as a pathway to paid employment is interesting - there is currently no collected data on how much of this is going on across the voluntary sector as a whole. This could be an additional function of a volunteer bureau. The local authority also needs to take a lead on providing work placement opportunities and show a real commitment to ensuring jobs go to local people. There needs to be stronger relationships between schools and communities and better links need to be developed between universities in Manchester and under-achieving schools.

There is a huge gap in advice and information services for young people. They need to know how to find out about different opportunities and how they can access them. There needs to be more opportunities for young people to find out about job opportunities within the non-statutory/non-private sector voluntary sector through work placements and job fairs. Many voluntary sector groups are already effectively social enterprises in all but name and more could be done to develop this. These are often value-based organisations which can create employment opportunities where the private sector is largely failing to do so. The section on young people with disabilities speaks of them only in terms of accessing services, but they also want to maximise their independence and get jobs - one means of doing this is by developing social enterprise which can offer positive role models.

As in other sections of the Plan, there is inconsistency in which disadvantaged groups are mentioned and not mentioned. Looked after children are mentioned, however there is also no mention of young people who are engaged in informal employment, and who may be

discouraged to enter into further education because of the income they are bringing into the home. It is also light on the needs of groups of young people we know are not in education, employment or training (NEET). There needs to be consistency in the approach.

The Role of the Voluntary and Community Sector

Although we do not know how much money the voluntary and community sector brings into the city, we know that it is making a real contribution to economic well-being within the city and this needs to be acknowledged. The sector has scope for offering alternative job opportunities for those which mainstream training routes may be not be appropriate - most out of school play schemes, for example, are run by the voluntary and community organisations which equates to a huge number of work placement opportunities. The local focus of organisations means they are successful in achieving creative participation of children and young people which leads to culture change. The voluntary sector also acts as a key point of access to Connexions.

People need to believe in themselves before there can be change and the voluntary sector play a key role in building skills, confidence and self esteem to enable people to engage in education and employment. The way services are family-centred also means they play a key role in breaking the intergenerational cycle discussed above.

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Section 8: How We Use Our Budget and Resources

This section talks about the Council's priorities, service strategies, etc. While the Council is taking the lead on the Children's Trust arrangements, other partners need to state their case in this section if the document is to be "owned" collectively.

Service & Budget strategy needs to be transparent. It was noted that if this were currently the case we would now be talking about 2007/8 funding. This is essential if want to plan strategically and in partnership.

The commitment to community involvement in identifying how budgets can be best used to meet needs is a very welcome start – but at the moment it must remain a question about how genuine that involvement will be. It will be a huge challenge for the Children's Board to devolve powers of decision making and performance management down to this level, particularly given that it will be the Board who will retain accountability to local and central Government.

There is recognition in the Plan that investment in new technology is part of service development – this is a good example of where the sector struggles to develop. Despite the accepted benefits of new technology, there is no strategic planning nor investment in this across the statutory and non-statutory partners. Because of the lack of development time available, there are also few opportunities for to build partnerships within the voluntary and community sector to address this.

In terms of the voluntary and community sector, the discussions of the 29th November generated some questions which may form the basis of an action plan. More detail on some of these issues is also included in the final section of this document – the Voluntary Sector Statement.

What is "the sector"? Can we get some kind of definition?

It's important to remember that the voluntary sector is not an agency – it is a diverse *sector*. (It's also arguable that the statutory "agencies" are not nearly as cohesive as the term would suggest). The diversity of being a sector is a strength and groups expressed concern that the sector should not become nor be treated as an agency. There is however, recognition that cohesion and collaboration is important and the role of infrastructure organisations in supporting this is seen as essential. These help support with information, advice, campaigns and development: though it still remains the case the capacity of organisations to participate is limited – few have the time or money to engage in strategic work: these are mostly larger organisations and the valuable grassroots perspective of the small community organisations is under-represented.

The problem of "defining" the sector is well illustrated when considering budget issues. There is no mechanism for discovering what the voluntary sector's "budget" is. What can be said is that the voluntary sector has a strong track record in bringing in additional resources into the local economy. Some basic local research conducted around mental health suggests that the voluntary sector, overall, tends to bring in at least as much again from external sources as it receives from local statutory agencies – meaning an investment in the voluntary sector is effectively doubled. The sector also releases resources from within the local community – in purely economic terms, the value of volunteer time is unknown but must be considerable. Paradoxically, restrictions on what funding can be spent on still leaves organisations often struggling to meet management and development costs. More co-ordination at the budget

planning level between voluntary sector agencies and between the sector and other partners could find ways to rationalise this and release capacity from within the sector – but this can only be done if there is at least some level of stability in the funding environment.

How can we get away from always talking about funding?

The voluntary sector is often accused of being obsessed with funding. This is a fair criticism and is something people in the sector are very conscious of. But it is hardly surprising...if you don't know where your next meal is coming from it's not unreasonable that you will talk about food at every opportunity!

Groups identified three things which will need to be developed to change the thinking from being so driven by funding concerns. Much of it is already set out in the Compact but little progress has been made so it was felt it should be re-stated:

- ***Establish a minimum funding period***
Organisations have proposed funding contracts should be for **a minimum of 3 years**. For new projects this should include a 1 year development / lead-in period. (For further detail, see the Voluntary Sector Statement below)
- ***Implement Full cost recovery***
(For further detail, see the sections on Performance Management and the Voluntary Sector Statement below)
- ***Improve information sharing:***
With the coming of commissioning and the eventual pooling of budgets, groups feel there is an opportunity to change the way information about funding is shared. This is about fair access to funding and maintaining the diversity of the sector: groups were concerned that smaller organisations should not be “squeezed out”. It was proposed to develop a communication hub – a central place from which information about available funding, planning and strategy are available.
 - Advise on processes: e.g. contracts, competitive tender, grants, commissioning
 - Gather information on technical issues such as TUPE considerations
 - Advise on the impact of pooled budgets:
 - which budgets are included (e.g. Connexions / Youth Service?)
 - when they will be included
 - What monies are available to the voluntary sector
 - what can be funded by them
 - a fast-track warning system
 - Support in putting ideas forward to be commissioned
 - Support in writing funding bids (which is a skill)
 - Build realistic and common monitoring and evaluation processes to enable the impact of groups to be shown in proportion to their size as an organisation and over a realistic ***timescale***.
 - Develop solutions to competition issues
 - Support a mechanism for voluntary and community sector involvement in budget scrutiny – to monitor the way in which funds are managed
 - Promote commissioning mechanisms which nurture and enable a diverse sector ranging from community groups through to large national organisations.

It was agreed that this is best done through voluntary & community sector infrastructure support and that some of this is already in place but needs further development.

Section 9: Performance Management and Service Management

For the voluntary sector, performance management is a capacity issue:

- the capacity to be performance managed by funders
- the capacity to collect information about needs, quality, etc and feed it into both performance management and strategic planning structures
- the capacity to project manage itself
- the capacity to build consensus and partnerships within the sector and with the statutory agencies

This creates a huge extra pressure on groups: collecting data takes valuable time and requires skills which organisations don't always have the resources to develop. Building an understanding of an outcomes focus is a challenge for any organisation, but even more so for those smaller groups who have limited infrastructure. At present, building capacity to do this is never included in the funding for organisations – this is an example of what is usually called “full cost recovery”.

This is where the lack of proportionality in performance management distorts the picture: the results tell more about the management capacity of the organisation than the quality of the service it delivers. There is rarely any relation between the size of the task and the size of the organisation (or the funding resource). Given that full cost recovery is not in place as a standard, it's also important that groups be measured in terms of “distance travelled” towards an outcome.

There are some practical recommendations:

- introduce a system of proportionality based on the **size of organisation**, the **amount of funding** and the **timescale of the project** (results can't always be measured quickly – especially towards the end of a project when staff may well be moving to new jobs).
- create more **transparency** so that groups can consider to what data they can reasonably collect and compare it to what they are being expected to collect.
- clarity on **why** the information is required and what it will be used for. E.g. it *should* feed into meaningful needs analysis – district commissioning and needs analysis should feed into and out of a performance management framework

The section on workforce development does not recognise the voluntary sector workforce (paid as staff or unpaid as volunteers) despite its ever-growing size. The sector needs to be included in the multi-agency analysis of the children's workforce.

There are no infrastructure organisations in Manchester able to have any real impact on workforce development – except in providing some training. A solution to this would be to build more opportunities for multi-agency workforce development. This would enable agencies in the statutory and non-statutory sectors to share training and workforce development, which would have several benefits:

- reducing duplication
- creating consistency across the sectors
- building relationships and building respect for the different (but not invalid) perspectives between practitioners in the statutory and voluntary sectors

The Plan is unclear on where the voice of children and young people fits into performance management. Again, linking it to the Community Engagement Strategy and showing clearly how the Children's Board will be informed by the views of children and young people would help demonstrate the relevance of the Plan. This is not to suggest that children and young people simply need a direct representative around the table – it's about ensuring that there is a clear mechanism which shows where their views are fed into the system and how this in turn drives development. The voluntary sector can have key role in accessing children and young people's views to provide evidence of the impact of services (including very young children and parents).

In the section on Service Management, it is interesting to see that some of the roles listed are no longer being solely provided by the statutory agencies – some residential workers are based in voluntary sector organisations for example. Other roles, such as advice workers, are not included in this a list at all – yet their contribution is essential. Again, there is no mechanism to gather data on these issues across the voluntary sector and consider their impact.

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Section 10: Working With Partners, Children and Young People

There are still issues to be considered in developing “joined up working at a community level” – this is all being done on a neighbourhood/ward/district basis and as yet there are no criteria for determining what circumstances would be better served by a citywide approach – for example communities of interest, e.g. people who have more in common with others with similar needs rather than those who live nearby. This is most likely to apply to minority groups such as ethnic communities, people with disabilities, or people facing homelessness.

Extended schools provide a good opportunity for partnership working between schools and local voluntary groups.

Sure Start is a good example of where collaboration across the sectors is embedded in the process from the start. In some parts of the city the voluntary sector is providing a lead – further work could be done to evaluate the added value this has brought.

It is not yet clear how the voluntary sector will be engaged in the redesign of Healthcare or in the implementation of the National Service Framework for Children, Family and Maternity Services.

Parenting is another example of a case in which, despite being a major provider of parenting resources and being the only sector able to access the Government’s Parenting Fund (which is being granted massive extra allocations in 2006), the voluntary sector is not engaged at the top strategic level: the Parenting Board does not include any representation of the sector.

The section on listening to children and young people needs to be expanded to make specific links to the Manchester Community Engagement Strategy as already noted. The group discussions at the meeting on 29th November agreed some key principles around engaging young people:

Overall strategy

- Be aware of our assumptions & question ourselves: *why* are we trying to engage young people?
- Build up a range of ways to engage:
 - Small groups
 - Use more creative mechanisms such as competitions. (These also create added incentives for engagement.)
 - Get out onto the streets – don’t expect young people to come to you. Create some “word of mouth”, get out there.
 - Talking (and listening) informally to young people as opportunities arise – not always making a distinction between “Engagement” and other activities. This could be a standard attached to job descriptions
- Build a principle of exchanges - programmes which encourage young people to try different things. Also, seeing young people in similar circumstances can be very powerful. This can apply to groups or individuals.
- The principle of communication needs to be built in much more clearly – sharing information but at a very informal level. There need to be feedback mechanisms but which are about follow up: this is an on-going process, much more than the customary view of “feedback”.

- Monitor which groups are engaged and how often: it's important not to keep making too many requests to same group – otherwise they'll develop consultation fatigue and become less effective.
- Monitor the range of children and young people who are involved: ages, backgrounds, etc.

Good practice at meetings:

- Always have activity to break the ice
- Hold meetings somewhere with decent facilities.
- Have the group supported by a champion: someone who has a rapport with young people – in schools it's often automatically the headteacher (or another teacher) which is usually inappropriate. It shouldn't be people in grey suits (figuratively or literally).
- Be informal, not agenda-driven. That's not to say there should be no agreement about content but it's possible to have a group make decisions about their activities and discussions rather than setting an agenda in advance.
- Encourage people to speak from their own experience: focus on yourself \ your issues *are* young people's issues. Young people telling us what they are doing and what they aspire to. Examples of what you have done where you are from.
- Ensure there is real partnership working – that it's involvement and not mere consultation:
 - Don't patronise - young people know when they are being used to tick boxes
 - Sort why & what first - what is meaningful & relevant to the young persons life?
 - Be clear: what kind of thing is you're discussing – e.g. a policy, a service or a structure?
 - Keep it interesting and realistic: What can you can actually change? Is what we are doing making a difference? Be clear about what *can't* be done.
 - Agree boundaries with the group about wasting time – this is important or people will simply disengage.
- Explore the concept of role models. For young people with different abilities it can have a huge impact if there is an adult role model.
- Be clear what's different about each discussion – don't keep going over the same ground.
- Don't create short term expectations: encourage the group to consider how long it should take for things to change.
- Above all be positive: don't make discussions about “stop this” or “you must do that” – emphasise well being and hopes for the future.

Working with the Voluntary and Community Sector

We feel there should also be a section specifically around the relationship with the voluntary and community sector in this part of the Plan. The workgroup discussions at the conference held on 29th November 2005 built up the following:

The voluntary and community sector in Manchester is already playing a significant role in improving the quality of life of children and young people in Manchester. There is a consensus among the many diverse groups which make up the sector that strengthening the relationship between the sector and statutory agencies will enable us to do even better. The question therefore is to define how best that relationship can work.

It is our intention to develop a detailed action plan around the partnership between the voluntary and statutory sectors for addressing these issues. This will not be just actions for the voluntary and community sector – it will require the commitment of **all** partners. Below are the broad principles which groups felt should shape the plan:

Working together

- **Being equal partners in the thinking:** there needs to be an approach of developing plans *together*. For example, the writing of the Single Plan itself is a case in point: rather than being written jointly, it was written in isolation and then sent out for consultation. This way of working creates a reaction for or against ideas: if we are to do things differently and better, we need more opportunities to shape each other's thinking and *then* write the plans.

For this to work there needs to be commitment to the engagement of the voluntary sector at the strategic planning level. For this to work requires a change for all of us: the sector is developing mechanisms which support accountability. An intention to develop a detailed action plan around the partnership between the voluntary and statutory sectors for addressing these issues

- **Being listened to:** Often the insight and skills of the sector are dismissed because they are perceived as “anecdotal” or “informal”. True, the voluntary and community sector does not have the capacity to build a formal evidence base – but the sector cannot develop a research function while groups struggle simply to survive. Yet to dismiss such evidence as the sector does produce (in whatever form) wastes a unique perspective and the stimulus of fresh thinking.

This is also about providing a challenge (which is not simply being critical) and feeding in a different approach and helping change the thinking and culture of service delivery and planning. This is not to assume that the statutory sector is always wrong and the voluntary sector is always right, but it is part of the sector's value that it can develop and communicate a fresh, independent perspective.

Acknowledging and valuing the sector's impact

- **Unique services:** Recognition of the contribution of the sector to service delivery – particularly around prevention. Many voluntary sector organisations are in this area of work, providing flexible, “low level” (a term which is often misleading because it is applied to some quite complex interventions) and preventative services. Beyond this,

many organisations are involved in providing ongoing support both during and after a crisis: often statutory workers will put service users in contact with a local voluntary organisation to provide a support structure once close contact with the mainstream service ends.

- **Value based organisations:** being value-based changes the nature of the organisation. At the Management Committee level, the thing which most keeps Trustees (who are after all volunteers) engaged is the fact that they are giving their time to organisations working to a certain set of aims & objectives. For some these will be very specific and the organisation may not, for example, wish to expand. In the commercial world this would be a mark of failure – but to value-driven organisations, their success is marked by the contribution they make to the community – this is difficult to quantify but work has been done within the sector to encourage groups to find ways to measure their impact. It also links back to the principle that voluntary sector organisations make their mark by challenging statutory agencies at both the individual (i.e. service user) and strategic levels.

While some relationships at the strategic level are slowly improving, there are still concerns that inspectors and funders do not really understand the sector's culture.

- **Innovation:** the sector is known for being skilled at creating new kinds of services. Sometimes this is because of a constant necessity to reinvent ourselves in order to secure “new” funding. Yet it is also the case that organisations are sufficiently flexible to be able to redefine and adapt their services quickly in response to needs. On an individual level, this is often the case – voluntary sector workers (paid and unpaid) have a long tradition of working with the person rather than being over-constrained by the perceived limits of their role. It is suggested this *may* be because unlike the large statutory authorities, such groups do not have a department structure which can create a culture of “thinking in boxes”. Whatever the reason, there is a clear need to nurture the sector's ability to innovate as this is what helps transform services – and in a commissioning environment, a healthy range of different ways of meeting needs is essential.

Nurturing the sector

The vulnerability of the sector is its lack of capacity to sustain and develop itself in the long term - and it is the smaller groups who are the most vulnerable, irrespective of the quality of their output. Much of this can be done by implementing and building on the principles established in the Compact.

- **Stability:** Organisations of all sizes must be able to develop. To do this they need to be given sufficient resources - the principle of full cost recovery is well known but rarely practised. Individual organisations need to be able to build up an infrastructure if they are to survive and develop. The sector can look at ways to share resources and release capacity, but even this takes time and skills to do. It is not necessarily a question of *more* money – a *stable* funding environment would enable groups to take a longer view.

The Council's three year budget cycle rarely translates into sustained three year contracts for voluntary sector activities. It is well known that this destabilises the sector and wastes valuable time and energy every year in trying to secure continued funding – and replacing workers who have moved onto other roles due to not having a confirmed contract. Organisations have proposed **funding contracts should be for a minimum of 3 years**. For new projects this should include a 1 year development / lead-in period.

It is recognised that this is a challenge, but a solution needs to be found: groups cannot be sustained (let alone developed) by constantly fighting for survival.

This would create some stability and enable groups to focus on development rather than survival. It would also have other spin-offs: e.g. voluntary sector organisations would be able to take advantage of Government initiatives such as Futurebuilders which provide capacity building money. However this is only a loan and guidance states that it is partly secured against the signing of a future contract for service provision which will enable the loan to be repaid.

At the conference on 29th November 2005, **all** of the 30+ groups present confirmed that they were awaiting news of funding for 2006/7 (i.e. 16 weeks hence). The sector is resilient - groups will find ways to survive by tracking down funding, but this is just survival – what they lose in the meantime is valuable staff, time which could be spent on delivering and developing services. This is not sustainable in the long term and it constrains any attempts to improve the quality of capacity of the sector. And perhaps most of all, the small groups (often those working at a local level with the most marginalised communities) are those who are most vulnerable.

This is also about moving on from “project culture”. Funding systems are currently structured around setting up new, discrete initiatives which effectively stand alone within organisations – and probably stop the minute the funding stream ends (or if they don't close, they have to be rebadged and redesigned to match the criteria for the next funder). This has created a situation of a constant flux, driven by the instinctive urge to for services to survive rather than a more considered approach measured against current need. There is recognition within the sector that often services are set up and expect to be permanent – but not yet an understanding of how a project (or an organisation) decides when its work is? This could be addressed by moving to a system of *programme* funding in which less restricted resources are allocated to organisations to enhance their impact on meeting particular needs in ways which build on the expertise they already have. This is much the same principle which central government is trying to create with local government in developing Local Area Agreements.

- **Proportionality:** while nobody in the sector disagrees with the principles of performance management mechanisms, there is concern that the ever-growing monitoring workload further impacts on time which should be spent on delivery and development. Most performance management systems are imposed by funders – and yet it is only by having a diversity of funders that organisations manage to survive: with the result that they have to fill several different monitoring returns, beyond all proportion to the amount of funding they receive – without being able to draw down additional resources to support this. Suggested criteria for proportionality are:
 - the size of the organisation
 - the amount of funding
 - the duration of the funding (which may be different from the time needed to measure the true impact of the work)

- **Full cost recovery:** Funding (particularly from the City Council) rarely allows for the whole cost of project such as management and back office functions - in particular the requirements of performance management and increasing monitoring and evaluation work. **Funding should not be issued unless it is fully costed** – this again creates stability within the sector but more importantly, it makes the funding allocation process focus on the added value a provider will bring.

This is an issue faced by voluntary sector agencies across the country is that when costing services, statutory agencies often seem cheaper because their massive departmental structure is rarely reflected in full in the costings – for example, the contribution of HR and Legal departments rarely figures in these costs...yet external agencies (voluntary and private) need to budget for them in order to remain viable as organisations.

- **Research:** It was suggested that more be research could be done on identifying how much the sector is worth in budgetary terms. This would also help address another long-standing issue in the sector's relationship to the City Council: the Council only consults and engages with organisations which it already funds. Infrastructure groups have been able to provide some counterbalance to this but there needs to be much greater recognition of the breadth of the sector and a planned approach to engaging with a much more diverse range of groups.
- **Capacity release:** there is a need for capacity building within voluntary sector organisations – and any funding should take this into account. However, there is also much which could be done to release the existing capacity in some organisations for the benefit of the wider sector; there is potential for some partnership working between groups to develop shared support service functions. Groups suggested the following examples:
 - Employment practice – particularly in relation to staff retention
 - Workforce development
 - Service user involvement
 - Monitoring and evaluation – developing shared systems which link all our requirements together, from the Every Child Matters outcomes through to SORP reporting