

Really Useful Stuff

WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP



SOUTH HOLLAND

Really Useful Working in Partnership Stuff

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Words included in the Jargon buster section are highlighted in yellow through the text.



Links to other parts of the handbook are marked by flags.

Introduction

Why do we need this chapter?



Artwork: Stockxpert.com

This chapter looks at how we work with others to deliver common goals, for mutual benefit. This work can be within the voluntary sector, or with the statutory or private sector. In recent years partnership working has really come to the fore, with many funders, government departments and other agencies looking to see if people are working together.

Whilst partnership working brings many benefits, working with others can have its problems.

In this chapter we aim to provide clear examples of how we can work more effectively with others.

Why do we need to **work in partnership?**



Ownership	Take responsibility for, care for; sense of a project belonging to the community. In this context it doesn't refer to possessions that can be given away or sold
Partnership	A group of people or organisations that can work together to reach a goal, using the skills and advantages of each. The partnerships can be very formal, very informal, or somewhere in between
Resources	These can include equipment, premises, money, staff and volunteers' time, knowledge, skills and expertise

Why do we need to work in partnership?

There can be several good reasons for choosing to work in **partnership**.

For the partner organisations:

- To help meet the group's aims
- Clearer understanding of each other's roles
- Ensure organisations aren't duplicating activities unnecessarily
- To share **resources** with others
- To help secure funding, maybe from a greater range than is possible as one organisation
- So as not to re-invent the wheel.

For the community:

- To meet different aspects of a person's need, without having to expand the service you offer
- Local '**ownership**' of the project
- Project is likely to be more inclusive
- Potential longer-term benefits than a time-limited project will allow.

It is worth remembering that it is the people within the organisations that work in partnership, not the organisations themselves! Without the investment of people's time, partnerships will not work.

Potential problems with working in partnership

- Fear that larger organisations, especially statutory, may take over the project, and that the voluntary and community sector has no real power or influence
- Organisations will have different levels of experience, knowledge or expertise to work in partnership
- Smaller organisations may feel they have gained little whereas the larger organisations may appear to have gained more.



It is important to establish a shared understanding at the outset of what the partnership is trying to achieve, how it can achieve that, and what is outside of its remit. Organisations are then clear how the work of each partner links to their own, how they can contribute, and what they can gain.

Partnerships have been likened to baking a cake. They are about contributing to the ingredients and not just taking a slice of the finished cake.

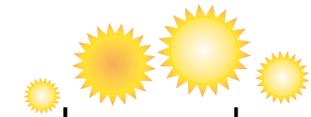
However, the question, 'What's in it for me?' remains valid. If the partnership is going to make little or no impact on your organisation's work, is it the right partnership for you to be involved in?



Good communication is vital in developing the relationships we call partnerships.

Different partnerships

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Jargon buster

Lead agency	In a partnership, the partner that takes the lead role
Procurement	More than simply going shopping. A process of acquiring goods or services especially by obtaining quotes or tendering
Protocols	Rules relating to official occasions

Different partnerships

Partnerships or networking?

Organisations can work together, share ideas and meet regularly as alliances, networks or project teams. These would be examples of less formal partnerships, with no contractual agreement in place. Some would not call this a partnership, but more akin to networking.

See Section 3.



For many, a partnership suggests a more formal, contractual arrangement where roles and responsibilities are agreed to meet identified tasks. The contract will be written, agreed and signed. It might be a formal legal document. There will be agreed ways of working — also known as protocols or terms of reference, for example, on procurement and confidentiality. Targets will be agreed, as well as how progress towards these targets is measured.

The length of time the partnership exists can be short-term or several years.



Photo: Lincolnshire County Council

In a partnership, one of the partners can take responsibility for co-ordinating the partnership, holding the budget and employing staff. They are often referred to as the **lead agency** or 'accountable body'.

Example of a partnership

A Local Strategic Partnership (LSP), typically has the local council as the lead organisation. LSPs may also involve representatives from health, police and social services, the job centre, local association of local councils, Citizens Advice Bureau, housing associations, Environment Agency, local infrastructure organisation / council for voluntary service and local employers.

What does a partnership look like?



Photo: Stockxpert.com / Karen Struthers

Groups can have a number of different partners, either to deliver one specific project, or across the range of services it provides. Some partners may be key partners, others less so. Some partnerships will take up more time than others. Some are ongoing, some for a set period of time needed to deliver a particular project. A partnership that involves service users may come up with different issues to one that involves directors and chief executive officers. A mix of the two could give a balance. As has been said previously, some partnerships are formal, some less so.

For instance a pre-school will work in partnership:

- With the families of the children in its care. This is ongoing, and an integral part of their service. Contracts are signed when a child first starts, and agreements made on each side. There are just two partners in this instance.

It may also work:

- With the local children's centre. This is the more formal partnership, possibly with the local authority as lead agency / organisation, with the pre-school as one of the partners. Meetings are minuted, targets set and monitored, budgets approved and so on.

Partnerships you may have heard of

- With an employer, to provide childcare for its employees, eg a hospital, factory or college. This might be a simple case of the pre-school hiring rooms or it might be that the employer has tendered for a person or company to run its provision on site. In either case this is not a 'partnership', but a straightforward business arrangement.
 - With the local childminding group, to provide a continuous childcare service from early morning into the evening, with childminders dropping children off and / or picking children up. This would be of the more informal kind of arrangement.
 - To deliver activities in school holidays when they would normally be closed. This could be in partnership with artists, musicians, dancers, a local heritage group, a local kick-boxing group, parish council and so on. It would be a partnership formed for a specific project — the holiday activity club — and a specific time — the school holidays. This partnership could be an informal alliance or a more structured partnership with set terms on both sides.
- Community Safety Partnership
 - Lincolnshire Road Safety Partnership
 - Lincolnshire Sports Partnership
 - Local Strategic Partnership
 - RACoL — (Regeneration Across Communities of Lincolnshire)

Activity

Does your group work in partnership with anyone? Is this an ongoing partnership, or for a specific period?

Are there other people or organisations you could work in partnership with?

Networking

— more than just a ‘jolly’



Jargon buster

Capacity building	Helping people develop confidence, knowledge and skills to become active in their community
Clique	Group of individuals that can often exclude others. It can end up being an exclusive or select group of individuals
Fragmentation	Where individuals, groups or families within a community have little or no connection with each other. Eg people living on the same street but unaware who their neighbours are
Marginalized	Where individuals or groups feel they are excluded from voicing their opinions because of various reasons such as age, race, disability, gender or sexual orientation. They feel they are on the margins of society
Network	Direct and indirect connections made between people and organisations
Networking	A process through which relationships and contacts between people and organisations are formed, developed and sustained for mutual benefit
Resources	These can include equipment, premises, money, staff and volunteers’ time, knowledge, skills and expertise
Service Level Agreement (SLA)	A contract that exists between two parties. For example, a local authority will detail the service it needs and the level and quality to be provided. A voluntary organisation will agree to provide the service

See Equality and Diversity Chapter } **Page 20**

Networking – more than just a ‘jolly’

What is networking?

Networking is about forming, developing, and sustaining relationships between people. This could be for the benefit of the individual or the organisation they represent.

A **network** can come about by chance, where a few people who know each other anyway decide to make their relationship a little less haphazard.

It can be formed for a particular purpose, for instance on a housing estate to bring residents and agencies together to identify needs and solutions to problems.

Benefits of networking include:

- The development of strong alliances around particular issues, whilst allowing individual organisations to maintain their own identity, allegiances and interests
- The development of relationships with a wider range of organisations than might have been possible without the network
- The creation of a means of sharing information and success, expertise and influence across organisational, community and cultural boundaries. Helps people feel less **marginalized**, and communities less **fragmented**
- The development of a sense of common purpose
- The provision of a forum to debate and discuss
- The facilitation of joint projects and events
- Ensuring a group is better placed within the network to take advantage of opportunities that present themselves.

All the above help to build the capacity of communities (**capacity building**) to achieve their goals.

Activity

How has networking helped you and your organisation?

Barriers to networking include:

- Undervaluing networking, leading to reluctance to allow others to participate
- Little structure or accountability — although some might see that as a plus
- Maintenance of the network can end up falling on a small group of people
- **Cliques** can emerge and networks can become exclusive clubs*
- Some people do nothing more than sit and listen, whilst others can dominate, sometimes without realising
- People might not feel they have the time and energy to help maintain a network on top of their 'day job', or for another meeting
- Uneven **resources** amongst the network. Some will not have the budget to cover expenses of going to a network meeting, or putting a newsletter together, or to cover for someone attending a meeting
- Lack of trust between groups / organisations
- Difficulty in arranging mutually convenient venues / times.

***To a degree a network will be exclusive:** A childcare network will be exclusive to childcare providers, families, health visitors and so on, and people with an interest in the subject.



Photo: Stockxpert.com

A disability network will be exclusively for people with disabilities, their carers and support agencies, and people who are interested in the subject.

What is important is not to discriminate against a person or organisation which does fit the criteria for the network, either by not 'letting them in' or by treating them less favourably when they are in.

Activity

What resources could your organisation offer to help networking?

Think of the possible barriers to networking for your group and how you might overcome them.

Developing and sustaining networks

Networking can be developed and sustained in a number of ways. We may not see some of these ways as 'networking', or think them very noteworthy. Some ways may not seem very purposeful in themselves, but do keep the contact going:

Staying in touch over a period

- Stopping to chat and catch up after various meetings
- Bumping into someone by chance, and having a quick catch up
- Meeting up for a coffee every few weeks
- Sending a Christmas card.

By email

- Forwarding on snippets of information that may be useful to others
- Sending reports of events
- Asking others in the network for information or support for a particular issue.

In person

- Forwarding information that could be useful to others in the network
- Offer to facilitate a network meeting.

As an organisation

- Build in cost of attending (and hosting?) meetings — specific networks or otherwise — into a funding bid or **Service Level Agreement (SLA)** where possible
- Encourage collective discussion amongst the network, and a review of where the network is
- Encourage sending out information that could be of use to others in the network
- Ask people what they thought of an event — evaluation.

Activity

Think of the different ways — formal and more informal — that you keep in touch with other people and organisations.

Lincolnshire Compact

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Jargon buster

Accountable	Being required or expected to justify actions or decisions; responsible
Compact	A partnership framework to promote positive working relationships between voluntary, community and statutory sector
Equality	Being equal in value. Equality therefore is about making sure that people are equally valued. They are not necessarily treated the same but given equal opportunity to reach their potential. (See text and activity on page 4 of Equality and Diversity Chapter)
Framework	Parts joined together to produce a structure
Policy	A policy is a deliberate plan of action to guide decisions and achieve rational outcomes
Procurement	More than simply going shopping. A process of acquiring goods or services especially by obtaining quotes or tendering

Lincolnshire Compact. What is it?



The **Compact** is a statement of partnership between voluntary, community and statutory sector organisations. By signing up to the Compact, organisations commit to working together more closely, recognising each other's rights, responsibilities, differences and duties.

It does this through national codes of practice that cover:

- Volunteering
- Community groups
- Consultation
- Black and Minority Ethnic
- Funding and **procurement**.

In Lincolnshire these have been interpreted into locally relevant clear codes of practice.

The following is taken from the Lincolnshire Compact website www.compactlincs.co.uk

The aim of the Compact is to:

- Promote good working relationships between voluntary, community and local statutory organisations.

The outcomes of this aim will be:

- Better co-ordinated services
- Improved quality of life for the people of Lincolnshire

- Improved understanding between sectors of each other's values and ways of working.

The objectives of the Compact are:

- To develop a **framework** that promotes voluntary and community group engagement in influencing and decision-making that affect the community
- To work towards greater **equality**, recognition and respect between the sectors when working in partnership
- To improve communication and information flow between statutory, voluntary and community sectors.

The shared principles and values of the Compact are:

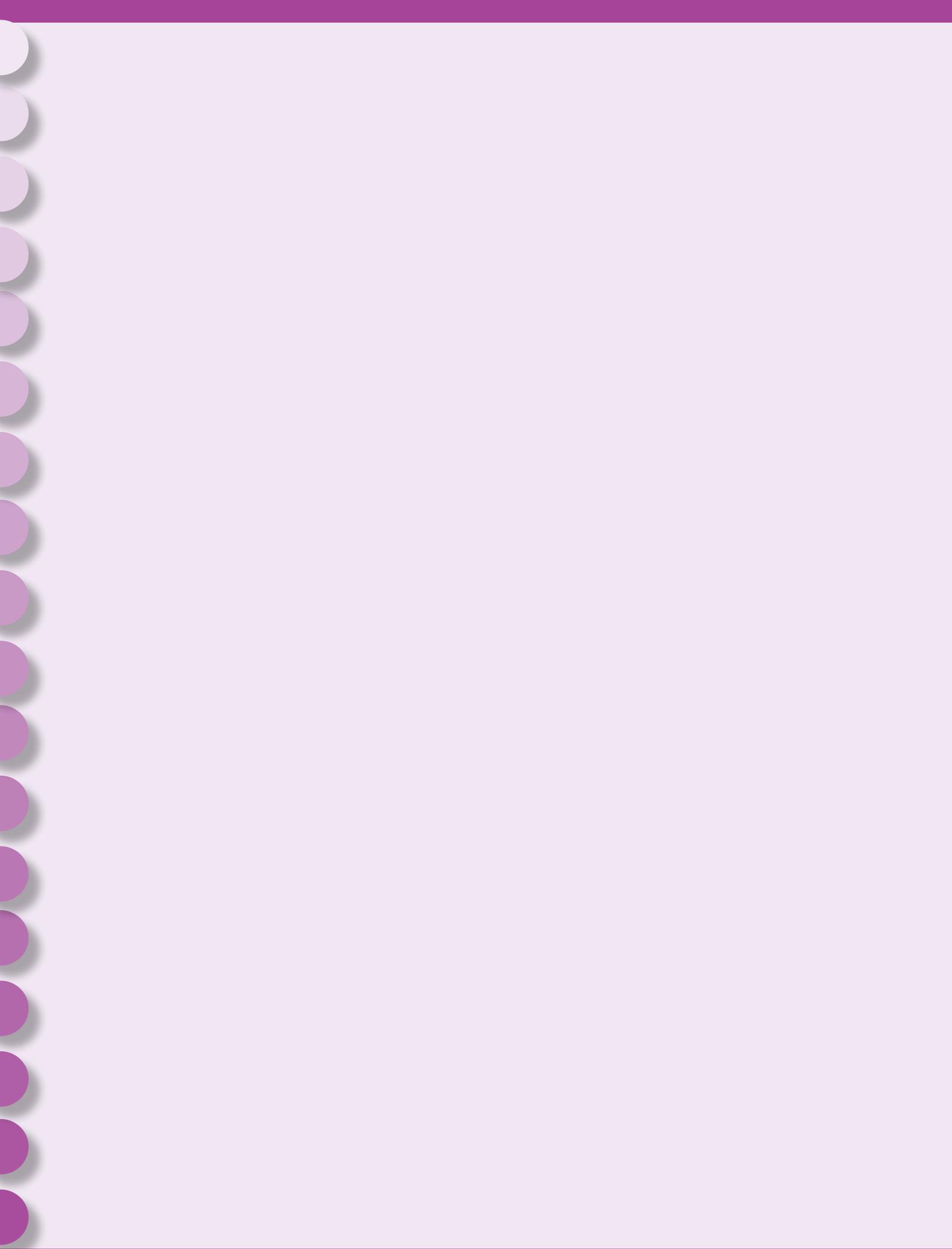
- All partners recognise that they each have distinct but complementary roles in the development and delivery of public **policy** and local services
- The partners also acknowledge the importance of being **accountable**
- Partnership-working adds value and helps to create shared aims and objectives.

The Compact document itself will not change anything. To make the Compact work, organisations should:

- Sign up to the Compact
- Adopt the Compact's codes of practice
- Work in the spirit of the Compact
- Support the Lincolnshire Compact Working Group
- Embed the principles and values of the Compact within their own organisation
- Promote the adoption of the Compact to other organisations.

For a full list of partners in Lincolnshire who have signed up to the Lincolnshire Compact see **www.compactlincs.com**

Has your organisation signed up yet? More details on the website.



Working in partnership with the **statutory sector**



Local Area Agreement (LAA)	A three-year agreement between a local area and central government based on local priorities as identified in the Sustainable Community Strategy
Local Strategic Partnership (LSP)	A non-statutory body that brings together, at a local level, agencies from the public, private, voluntary and community sectors. The lead player is often the local authority and partners include the police and health authority
National Indicator (NI) Set	A performance management framework for local government which central government uses to monitor the performance of local government and its LSP partners
Statutory / public sector	This sector includes councils, police and the NHS
Sustainable Community Strategy (SCS)	The Local Strategic Partnership creates a long-term vision for the area to tackle local needs. This vision is set out in the Sustainable Community Strategy (SCS)

Working in partnership with the statutory sector

In this chapter we look at just two ways of working in partnership with the statutory sector:

- Local Strategic Partnerships and
- Local Area Agreements.

What is a Local Strategic Partnership?

A **Local Strategic Partnership (LSP)** is a multi-agency, umbrella partnership that brings together local councils and key partner agencies including:

- Voluntary and community organisations
- The police
- Local health services
- Local businesses.

One of the main purposes of an LSP is to develop a shared, long-term vision for the locality to improve the quality of life for local residents. This vision is set out in an overarching strategy — the **Sustainable Community Strategy**. It should set out how services can be improved and delivered in ways that will improve the social, economic and environmental wellbeing of the area it covers.



Photo: Lincolnshire County Council

The benefits of this way of working include:

- Improved planning and delivery between different partners and across sectors. Joined-up working
- Improved local quality of life
- Involving local people in decision-making to shape the community they want to see in the future
- The drawing up of an action plan explaining who will be responsible for what, and when
- A process by which progress can be monitored and reviewed
- Helping to ensure organisations aren't duplicating activities unnecessarily.

Sustainable Community Strategy

Most LSPs are structured as follows:

Executive: made up of representatives from the key delivery agencies. This is the primary decision-making body of the LSP and is responsible for overseeing the delivery of the Sustainable Community Strategy (SCS).

Assembly: wider representation from across all sectors. The Assembly provides a wider consultative forum as well as reviewing the actions of the Executive.

Sub-Groups / Theme Groups: these are set up by the Executive to develop and implement delivery plans for each of the LSP's priorities.

Not all partners will be involved in all areas of work. Some may only work in one area – eg children's services, and no others. Some, such as councils, will be involved in delivering services in all these areas.

In two-tier areas, such as in Lincolnshire, LSPs exist at both county and district level. The Lincolnshire Assembly is the overarching county LSP. Each of the seven districts have an LSP covering the district area.

Information relating to the Lincolnshire Assembly can be found at www.lincolnshireassembly.com

A Sustainable Community Strategy (SCS) is the master plan for the area covered by the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP). It draws on and influences the work of all key partners of the LSP. It should also draw on data about the area, identify what work is already being carried out, co-ordinate better services and develop a future plan for the area. All of this needs to take account of what local people say they need.

By law, all local authorities have to have a Sustainable Community Strategy to improve the social, economic and environmental wellbeing of the area.

Currently in Lincolnshire, each district LSP produces a Sustainable Community Strategy which feeds into an overarching countywide SCS for Lincolnshire.

For more information, take a look at the publication 'How Your Council Works'.

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Local Area Agreements

Local Area Agreements (LAAs) are three-year agreements between central government, the local authority and its partners.

The LAA gives local authorities and their partners the flexibility to find local solutions to local problems. They can prioritise spending to achieve solutions. In two-tier authority areas – like Lincolnshire – the County Council (the upper tier) is responsible for developing the LAA, along with district councils, key public sector partners and partners from the voluntary and community sector and business sector. Representatives from these sectors form the Lincolnshire Assembly.

From 2008 each LAA will contain:

- 17 **statutory** education and early years targets
- Up to 35 targets chosen from a list – the **National Indicator Set (NI Set)**, negotiated with the regional government office. (For Lincolnshire, Government Office for the East Midlands or GOEM)
- Additional targets which can be added from the NI Set or developed locally.

Funding from central government will help to work towards achieving these agreed targets. In future a Comprehensive Area Assessment will look at how well the whole area –

in our case Lincolnshire – is doing to meet these agreed targets. By selecting targets, LSPs can choose ones they consider will benefit their residents the most.

Not all work needs to be done through the LAA. Some projects may take longer than three years to complete. Some may not need to have a partnership approach.

LAAs should result in improved efficiency through joined-up working, strengthened partnership working and an enhanced community leadership role for local authorities.

Each year the LAA will be reviewed to ensure it is still relevant. Each review will also extend the LAA for another year so it always remains a three-year plan.

The voluntary and community sector has representatives on the Lincolnshire Assembly.

For more information ask your local CVS, or log on to www.lincolnshireassembly.com

Working in partnership within the voluntary sector



Consortium	A partnership, in this case, of key voluntary and community organisations
Infrastructure	'The physical facilities, structures, systems, relationships, people, knowledge and skills that exist to support, develop, co-ordinate, represent and promote frontline organisations.' www.eastmidlandsinfrastructure.org.uk
Local Infrastructure Organisations (LIOs) – general or generic	Organisations that deliver the above through a range of services available to all. These include Councils for Voluntary Service (CVS) and Voluntary Action Centres. Also known as second-tier organisations
Local Infrastructure Organisations (LIOs) – specialist	Organisations that deliver the above through a range of services available to specific groups or specific types of advice. These include Race Equality Councils, Disability and Youth services. Also known as second-tier organisations
First-tier organisations	Voluntary and community groups 'on the ground' which provide a direct service to their beneficiaries
Frontline groups and organisations	As first-tier organisations

Working in partnership within the voluntary sector



The voluntary sector is a diverse sector with a wide range of groups that carry out very different roles. Some are small, local groups; others are larger organisations covering larger areas – a town, district, county or wider. Some groups will work with people with specific needs, whilst others have a broader remit. As such, being part of the same sector does not necessarily mean we all talk the same language.

The voluntary sector has a culture of innovation, responsiveness and flexibility and the ability to work closely with service users. It increasingly recognises the

advantages of working with the statutory sector. However, there are also opportunities to work more closely within the voluntary and community sector.

When could we work in partnership within the voluntary sector?

An obvious example of this is when an organisation identifies a need amongst its clients. It could try to meet the need itself by expanding and developing. It could also look at what is already being provided locally by other voluntary organisations and how their organisations could work together.

Increasingly organisations are coming together to help secure funding for a common project. A funder will not want to see three very similar projects within the same locality. They are going to want to know why you can't work together.

Organisations may come together for a particular event, such as a festival, carnival or anniversary.

Local forums and networks

Many **Local Infrastructure Organisations (LIOs)** host a forum and events for a range of Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) organisations to attend in order to network, gather information, meet new people and compare notes.

Other networks and forums have specific topics such as Disability Networks and Older People's Forum. Details can be found from LIOs.

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Village Hall Clusters

Community Lincs manages a network of village halls in Lincolnshire, through meetings, email and training events.

See Resources Chapter

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The Multi Use Centre Network

The Lincolnshire Multi Use Centre Network comprises representatives from the community and voluntary sector who are involved in the operational and strategic running of the 18 Multi Use Centres located across Lincolnshire. The aim of the network is to share good practice, ideas and support.

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Lincolnshire Voluntary Sector Consortium

In 2003, the Government launched the Capacity Building Infrastructure Support programme (CBIS).

The name of the programme then evolved into ChangeUp and subsequently Capacity Builders. The aim remained constant – to support the rationalisation of community / voluntary sector **infrastructure** support services to maximise efficiency, effectiveness and reach. The Lincolnshire Voluntary Sector Consortium is the mechanism we have in the county by which these objectives are being implemented.

The **Consortium** consists of specialist and generalist Local Infrastructure Organisations (LIO) for the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS). The Consortium is working to a Capacity Builders' strategy and business plan to support the co-ordination and development of support services to Lincolnshire's **frontline groups** and organisations. The types of services being aligned to Consortium plans include: training; funding advice; small groups' development; networks; ICT development and increasing the number of volunteers and volunteering opportunities.

It looks to raise the profile of VCS in Lincolnshire at local, regional and national levels through contributions to consultations and policy development. The Consortium is also

looking to develop links with the public and private sector.

At time of writing, the Consortium is in the process of developing a website. Minutes of Consortium meetings, the business plan and information on any related project work will be kept on it. This will link to the Compact website.

Updates on the Consortium activity will be sent out via LIO networks and newsletters. The Consortium will organise events for the voluntary and community sector on a regular basis, to share best practice.

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Chapter**

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Mediation and advocacy

7



Jargon buster

Advocacy	Support given to help people get their views heard, and their choices respected. It does not have to involve conflict
Mediation	Independent support from third party to help people resolve disputes and disagreements

Mediation and advocacy

MEDIATION

Mediation * is a way of helping people resolve disputes and disagreements through face-to-face meetings with an independent third party who will not take sides and is experienced in helping people resolve problems.

Mediation should take place in a neutral venue to enable people to discuss important issues in a safe environment. Each person involved is given an equal opportunity to express their concerns without feeling forced or pressured into taking actions, which they do not want to become engaged in.

Encouraging openness allows each person to discuss the problems that are most worrying to them.

This should help people find a compromise.

Sometimes situations can break down

further, drawing in other people, solicitors and even the police.

Increasingly nowadays focus is on good-quality outcomes which stop short of prosecution or litigation. Professional mediating bodies such as Lincolnshire Mediation offer a service that is neutral and fair to all parties.

When might mediation be used?

You might use mediation if there is a grievance or dispute between your staff or volunteers or between your group and another group.

The Lincolnshire Compact (the agreement between voluntary and statutory organisations in Lincolnshire) says that mediation will be used if there is a disagreement between organisations such as voluntary groups and statutory ones.



Photo: Stockxpert.com

***Information taken from the Lincolnshire Mediation website www.lfms.org.uk**

ADVOCACY

Advocacy * means helping people speak up if they are unable, unsure or afraid to do so themselves. It helps to get their views heard, have their choices respected, and to better represent themselves. Mediation tries to resolve issues with both parties. Advocacy works solely with one party.

All sorts of people may need advocacy support at some time in their life. Groups of people who may need support are:

- People with a learning disability
- People with physical disabilities
- Older people
- Young adults in transition
- Migrant workers
- Older people with mental ill health
- People with dual diagnosis and / or other forms of disadvantage.

Issues may be around:

- Housing
- Benefits
- Debt
- Court appearances
- Tribunals and appeals, and so on.

*Information taken from the
CALL Advocacy website
www.calladvocacy.org.uk

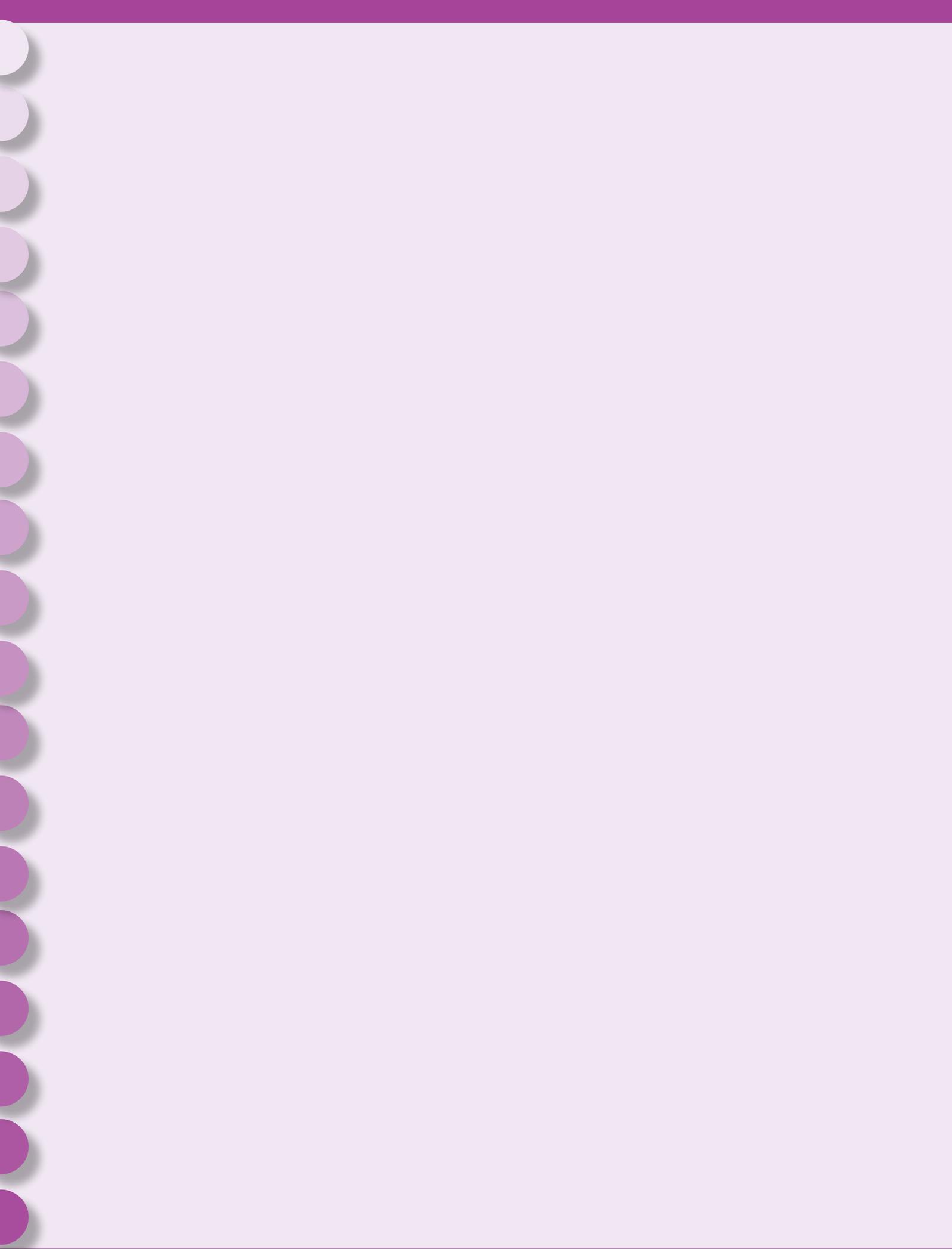


Photo: Stockxpert.com Radul

Advocacy support can be provided in a range of settings:

- In your own home
- In day care centres
- In group homes
- In residential homes
- Hospitals
- Wherever there is found to be a need.

An advocate may be paid or a volunteer. They will listen to you to find out what the issue is and will tell you how they think they can help. Information given is confidential.



Sustainable Communities Act 2007

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Local Government Association (LGA)	National voice for local government sector
Selector	Appointed to draw up shortlist of proposals put to local authorities under the Sustainable Communities Act
Sustainability	Solutions that will last in the long term, not quick fixes
Sustainable Communities Act 2007	This Act establishes a co-operative method of decision making at a local level. It is built on the premise that local people and local councils are the experts on their own problems and have the solutions to them



The Sustainable Communities Act 2007

The Sustainable Communities Act received Royal Assent in October 2007. As such it was still very new when *The Really Useful Stuff Handbook* went to print (Autumn 2008) and so the following can only be a summary of what is known to date. More information can be found on www.unlockdemocracy.org.uk and www.communities.gov.uk

The **Sustainable Communities Act 2007** aims to promote the **sustainability** of local communities. Sustainable communities are those that are sustainable socially, economically and environmentally. The principle of the Act is that local

people know best what needs to be done to help the sustainability of their communities. With some issues, local people can do for themselves, supporting each other as individuals, neighbours, and family members or through voluntary and community groups. Sometimes what needs doing goes far beyond what communities can do for themselves. The Act provides a means for local people and local authorities to ask central government to take action to improve the economic, social or environmental wellbeing of their area.

Ideas generated by local communities are fed through their local authority and a body known as the '**selector**' (it is envisaged this will be the **Local Government Association**) to central government. There are no set

Photo: Healthy Communities LCC



Village shop, partly run by volunteers

criteria to say what issues can or cannot be addressed under the Act. However, it will not be possible for all suggestions to be put direct to central government, so local authorities and the selector will have a 'short-listing' role.

Local councils now have a legal duty to set up citizens panels, drawn from all sections of the community. They will try to reach agreement with those panels on suggestions made, before submitting them to the Government. This is more than simply a consultation exercise.

The Government now has a legal duty to co-operate with local authorities and try to reach agreement on what action it will take on the suggestions. The Act does not specify how or who local authorities should consult. However,

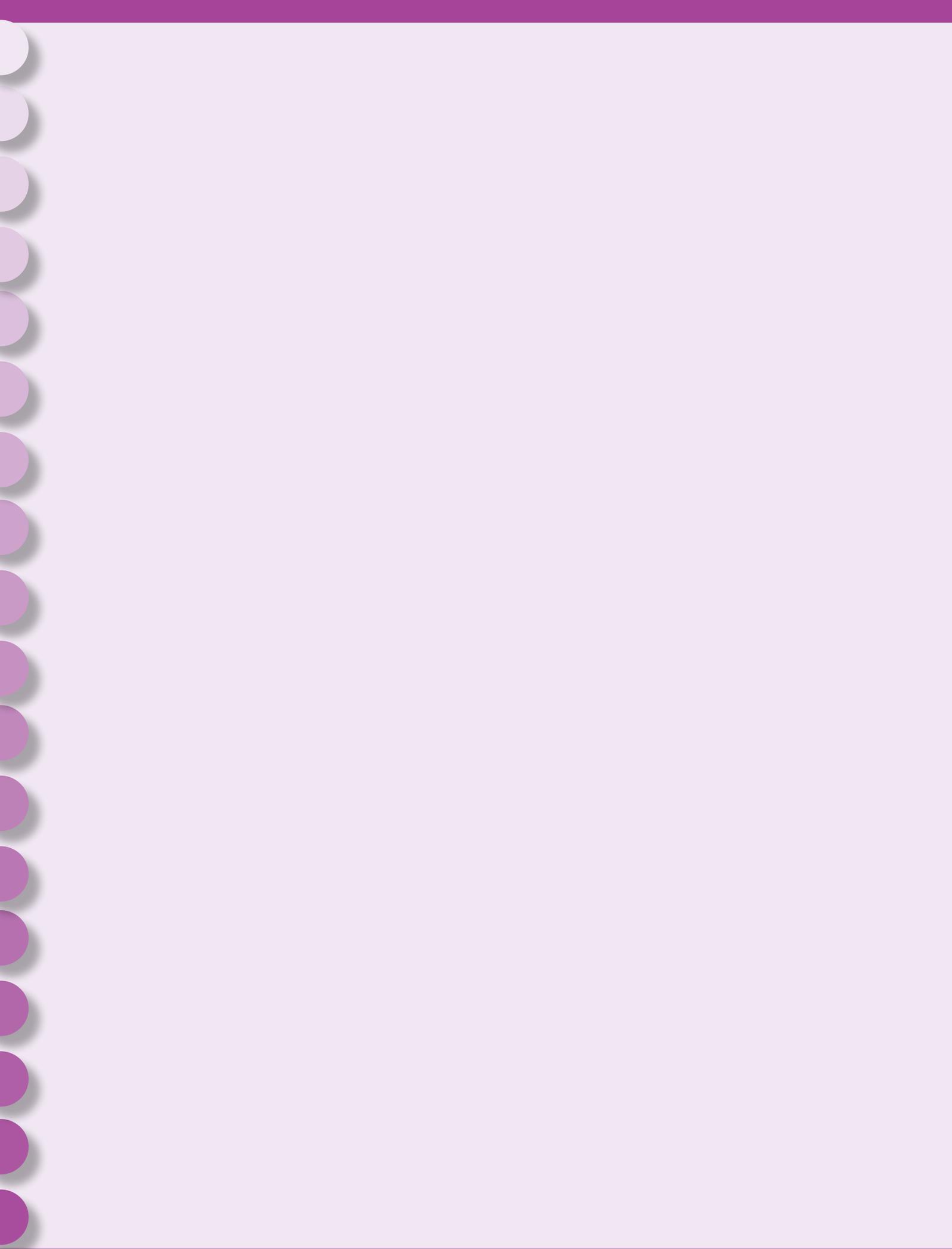
they will receive guidance from the Secretary of State on including people from under-represented groups, and about establishing and consulting panels of local residents.

The Government will consult the selector and reach agreement on which of the proposals on the short-list should be implemented. The Government will respond to all of the suggestions that are short-listed by the selector and will publish an action plan setting out how it will take forward the suggestions that it adopts.

By October 2008 the Government must ask every council to submit suggestions of ways that it can help local people and local councils make communities more sustainable. Any suggestions not taken up by local councils or Government will need an accompanying explanation as to why.

The Sustainable Communities Act also ensures that communities are better informed about the public funding that is spent in their area via 'Local Spending Reports.' These will provide quick and easy access to information about where public money is spent.

Councils have the power to opt into the processes of the Act, they are not required to do so. However, if they choose not to opt in, they may well be challenged by their electorate!



Useful **contacts**

Further reading

The Well-Connected Community: A Networking Approach to Community Development

Alison Gilchrist

Policy Press

ISBN 13: 978 1861345271

How Your Council Works

This guide is published jointly by NAVCA, IDeA and Urban Forum to provide information to help people understand what their council does and help community groups have a greater say in local decision-making. It provides essential information to help citizens and groups make the most of opportunities to influence decision-making and hold their council to account.

Website: www.navca.org.uk

You might like to add other publications in the space below:

Useful organisations

Department for Communities and Local Government

Website: www.communities.gov.uk

Unlock Democracy

Website:

www.unlockdemocracy.org.uk

Useful websites

Lincolnshire Compact

Website: www.compactlincs.co.uk

