

Mapping the Journey: Exploring the Voluntary Sector's Relationship with Community Planning in North Lanarkshire

A Timeline Overview for Voluntary Sector and Community Planning Partners

Report from Voluntary Action North Lanarkshire August 2014



A Product of the Third Sector Community Planning Improvement Programme in North Lanarkshire

1.0 Voluntary Sector and Community Planning in North Lanarkshire: The Early Days (2003-06)

The Local Government in Scotland Act (2003) was a trigger for the voluntary sector's participation within Community Planning in North Lanarkshire. The Act stipulated that local authorities initiated, facilitated and maintained Community Planning Partnerships across Scotland. Although North Lanarkshire Partnership was established as North Lanarkshire's Community Planning Partnership some six years before the Act was introduced, the new legislation provided a very specific direction for Community Planning, underlining its importance and the essence of involving a range of Community Planning Partners.

In 2003, voluntary sector support structures in North Lanarkshire were shaped by the two key national networks of the CVS Network (Council for Voluntary Services) and the Volunteer Centre Network. At that time, three CVS organisations existed to provide a host of support services to voluntary sector organisations in North Lanarkshire (CAVOC, MAVS and North Lanarkshire North CVS), whilst Volunteer Centre North Lanarkshire offered specific support and services for volunteers and volunteer-involving organisations.

As a response to the increased focus on Community Planning and to provide a vision for the wider voluntary sector in North Lanarkshire, the three CVS organisations and Volunteer Centre North Lanarkshire worked with North Lanarkshire Council and other Community Planning Partners in 2004 to develop a first North Lanarkshire Voluntary Sector Strategy. In order to develop the Strategy, a Voluntary Sector Strategy Development Group was formed which incorporated the three CVS organisations, Volunteer Centre North Lanarkshire, a variety of cross-representative voluntary sector organisations, North Lanarkshire Council and NHS Lanarkshire. Essentially, this was the local voluntary sector's first real concerted co-produced activity to identify itself within the Community Planning sphere.

In 2006, CVS North Lanarkshire was established as a single entity to deliver central support services to voluntary sector organisations in North Lanarkshire, thus amalgamating and replacing the three smaller CVS organisations in North Lanarkshire. The emergence of CVS North Lanarkshire was to be the central driver in advancing the voluntary sector's relationship with Community Planning.

2.0 Breakthrough and Sector Participation within North Lanarkshire Partnership (2003-08)

In 2003, a significant stride forward in ensuring the voluntary sector was well represented within Community Planning was taken as agreement was reached for two voluntary sector representatives to join the North Lanarkshire Partnership Board. Prior to 2003, there had been ad-hoc voluntary sector representation from the local CVS's at North Lanarkshire Partnership Board, but refreshed and formalised terms were agreed following the North Lanarkshire Voluntary Sector Conference of 2003. The agreed terms were that one representative would be allocated as agreed by the Voluntary Sector Strategy >>

Development Group (later to be CVS North Lanarkshire and then Voluntary Action North Lanarkshire), and the other representative would be appointed by election on a two-year cycle. This was a major breakthrough for the local voluntary sector, as it was not only one of the first appointments of voluntary sector representation to a Community Planning Partnership Board in Scotland, but demonstrated a recognition from North Lanarkshire Partnership that the voluntary sector was considered a valued partner.

In 2006, following the success of the first North Lanarkshire Voluntary Sector Strategy and the introduction of CVS North Lanarkshire, the terms of reference of the Voluntary Sector Strategy Development Group were reviewed and the group became North Lanarkshire Voluntary Sector Partnership Group. North Lanarkshire Partnership Board endorsed the newly formed Voluntary Sector Partnership Group as a designated formal sub-group of the Community Planning Partnership. The two voluntary sector representatives to North Lanarkshire Partnership Board (June Vallance and Francis Fallan) became the Chair and Vice-Chair of the new Voluntary Sector Partnership Group, and other agencies and partnerships represented initially included CVS North Lanarkshire, Volunteer Centre North Lanarkshire, North Lanarkshire Information and Advice Forum, and North Lanarkshire Council. Its recognition by North Lanarkshire Partnership quickly established the Voluntary Sector Partnership Group as the key strategic table for connecting the local voluntary sector to Community Planning activity.

Around the time of the establishment of the Voluntary Sector Partnership Group, it was becoming increasingly apparent that the voluntary sector required to communicate and advocate with one voice within the Community Planning agenda. To assist this process, CVS North Lanarkshire and Volunteer Centre North Lanarkshire formalised their partnership arrangement by establishing a Voluntary Sector Infrastructure Liaison Forum, at which consensus for a singular sectoral approach could be established.

3.0 SVA Pathfinder Programme and Strengthening of Structures (2008-10)

By 2008, the wheels had been fully set in motion for the voluntary sector's full participation within North Lanarkshire Partnership. Many negative stereotypes of what the voluntary sector is and how it operates had been banished by this stage as the two voluntary sector representatives assisted the process of increasing the knowledge of Community Planning Partners, and the Voluntary Sector Partnership Group made a successful contribution to the 2008-2012 North Lanarkshire Community Plan.

On behalf of the Voluntary Sector Partnership Group, CVS North Lanarkshire and Volunteer Centre North Lanarkshire obtained funding through the Supporting Voluntary Action (SVA) Programme in Scotland to deliver a two-year SVA Pathfinder Programme in North Lanarkshire. This Programme enabled a full strengthening of the Voluntary Sector Partnership Group to make it fully representative of a range of thematic areas of the voluntary sector, and saw the introduction of six Voluntary Sector Locality Networks and eight Voluntary Sector Thematic Networks as sub-sets of the Voluntary Sector Partnership Group.

In many ways, the Voluntary Sector Locality and Thematic Networks provided the final piece of the jigsaw in establishing a clear two-way accountability line between grassroots voluntary sector organisations and volunteers and the key decision-makers of North Lanarkshire Partnership. The Voluntary Sector Locality Networks proved an instant success, with voluntary sector organisations, volunteers and other community partners coming together in the six localities of North Lanarkshire to discuss and share information >>

about local voluntary sector activity. Voluntary Sector Thematic Networks were also successful, although it was discovered that Thematic Networks became relevant (or less-relevant) according to the current social, economical and cultural environment (for example, the Employability Network has remained hugely successful since 2008 as employability has remained a relevant topic throughout the last six years).

4.0 Localism and Establishment of Third Sector Interface (2008-10)

Following the 2007 Scottish Parliament elections, the newly installed Scottish Government outlined its vision for 'localism' and placing an emphasis on streamlining services to fit local priorities rather than simply developing national frameworks or networks to replicate in local areas.

Part of this process involved reviewing the existing CVS and Volunteer Centre Networks in Scotland. The Scottish Government expressed a desire to replace these Networks with a single 'Third Sector Interface' in each local authority area in Scotland, which would act as a leading umbrella body for supporting volunteering development, capacity building for voluntary sector organisations, social enterprise development, and voluntary sector connectivity to Community Planning Partnerships. Each local authority area was to a certain extent given free reign as to how it would structure its Third Sector Interface from existing organisations and services operating.

In 2008, the four key partners of CVS North Lanarkshire, Volunteer Centre North Lanarkshire, North Lanarkshire Council, and Lanarkshire Social Economy Partnership established a working group with the intention of developing a framework for North Lanarkshire's Third Sector Interface. During 2008-09, a detailed review of existing structures and consultation process was undertaken, resulting in a partnership decision in October 2009 to work towards establishing a new organisation entitled Voluntary Action North Lanarkshire to act as the single Third Sector Interface for the local area. Voluntary Action North Lanarkshire was to amalgamate and incorporate services previously delivered by CVS North Lanarkshire and Volunteer Centre North Lanarkshire, including the newer element of social enterprise development.

A further working group was installed to take forward initial Board appointment and operational planning for Voluntary Action North Lanarkshire. On 31 March 2010, CVS North Lanarkshire and Volunteer Centre North Lanarkshire were closed as organisations and Voluntary Action North Lanarkshire became operational on 1 April 2010.

5.0 Voluntary Action North Lanarkshire and Changing Culture with CPP Engagement (2010-12)

With (by enlarge) a continuity of staffing and service delivery carried forward from predecessor organisations into Voluntary Action North Lanarkshire, the transition of operational services for the voluntary sector proved to be generally a smooth process with minimal disruption for service users. Throughout its first year of operational, the brand of Voluntary Action North Lanarkshire became increasingly recognisable, and by the end of its second year of operation, Voluntary Action North Lanarkshire was well recognised locally as the organisation which delivered services previously rolled-out by CVS North Lanarkshire and Voluntary Action North Lanarkshire.

It became apparent fairly early into the life cycle of Voluntary Action North Lanarkshire that the >>

establishment of a single lead organisation for the voluntary sector would result in significant gains in relationships between Community Planning Partners and the voluntary sector. Community Planning Partners, particularly North Lanarkshire Council and NHS Lanarkshire, benefited from having single door access to the voluntary sector in North Lanarkshire through the Third Sector Interface. In this respect, a fundamental role of Voluntary Action North Lanarkshire became brokerage between Community Planning Partners and the wider voluntary sector. This area of work represented the fourth and final strand of the Scottish Government's directive to Third Sector Interfaces in Scotland, which was developing the voluntary sector's role and involvement within Community Planning.

It was noticeable that the credibility and value of the voluntary sector within North Lanarkshire Partnership became greater and better recognised during the period 2010-2012, with Voluntary Action North Lanarkshire becoming a main player at several strategic groups and partnerships, not least of all within the Reshaping Care for Older People Change Plan agenda. North Lanarkshire Voluntary Sector Partnership Group also became slicker in its operation with Voluntary Action North Lanarkshire driving its agenda, and this was clearly recognised at North Lanarkshire Partnership Board level.

This major step forward in relationships with and recognition by Community Planning Partners provided a great source of assurance for the wider voluntary sector, with the justification for developing a single Third Sector Interface widely recognised by all sectors by 2012.

6.0 Third Sector Representatives on Local Area Partnerships (2012-14)

By late 2012, with voluntary sector representation at North Lanarkshire Partnership Board already well established, focus began to turn to voluntary sector representation with local area Community Planning structures. Although Community Forums as local voluntary sector organisations were representative of communities on six Local Area Partnerships operational within the North Lanarkshire Partnership structure, a concern of the Voluntary Sector Partnership Group was that there was no formal or agreed representation of specifically the wider voluntary sector within these Local Area Partnerships.

Discussions between Voluntary Action North Lanarkshire and North Lanarkshire Council took place to address these concerns, and it was agreed that six new voluntary sector representative roles would be installed to attend and represent the sector at six Local Area Partnerships. Similar to the elected voluntary sector representative on North Lanarkshire Partnership Board role, the six voluntary sector representatives on Local Area Partnerships would be appointed on a two-year cyclical basis through a nomination and ballot process. A transparent process to appoint inaugural representatives took place from January-March 2013, and six voluntary sector representatives were appointed to Local Area Partnerships on 1 April 2013.

The first year of voluntary sector representation on Local Area Partnerships involved new relationships being formed between voluntary sector representatives and local Community Planning Partners and Community Forums, as well as a network of voluntary sector Local Area Partnership representatives being established. During 2013-14, voluntary sector representatives submitted quarterly reports to Local Area Partnerships, updating Community Planning Partners on sectoral activity in local areas.

Although still in its relative infancy, and with some learning to be taken from the first cyclical period, >>

voluntary sector representation on Local Area Partnerships has overall been a successful step forward for the voluntary sector in further enhancing and strengthening its connectivity with Community Planning. The nomination process for the second cycle of elected voluntary sector representatives will commence in January 2015, with a newly appointed set of representatives scheduled to be in place by 1 April 2015.

7.0 North Lanarkshire Voluntary Sector Strategy 2013-18 (2012-14)

In 2012, the Voluntary Sector Partnership Group identified a need for a new North Lanarkshire Voluntary Sector Strategy to be developed to refresh the collective vision and objectives of the local voluntary sector, particular in light of the strides forward taken in relation to sectoral connectivity to the Community Planning.

A fully inclusive consultation period followed, where voluntary sector and statutory partners were engaged with to help visualise a successful five-year path for the voluntary sector in North Lanarkshire to strive towards from 2013-18. The result was the creation of North Lanarkshire Voluntary Sector Strategy 2013-18, which highlighted the four key areas of focus for the voluntary sector of effective representation, communication and engagement, capacity building and collaborative working, and making an impact.

Strategy Progress and Outcomes 2013-14 ↻

One year on from its official launch at North Lanarkshire Voluntary Sector Conference 2013, North Lanarkshire Voluntary Sector Partnership Group reviewed Strategy advancement to date, with the following progress recognised under each of the four areas:

Effective Representation *(ensuring that the community and voluntary sector and its representatives are enabled to access all levels of the Community Plan and participate fully in its processes and structures):*

- The introduction of a Third Sector Representation Matrix has been an extremely valuable development, enabling recognised monitoring and recording of mandated voluntary sector representation at various strategic partnerships and groups
- Positive voluntary sector participation and representation at Local Area Partnerships has broadened the local voluntary sector's knowledge of and engagement in local Community Planning activities
- Community Planning Partners have acknowledged increased awareness and understanding of the local voluntary sector and its value as a result of bolstered and purposeful voluntary sector representation at strategic partnership level.

Communication and Engagement *(ensuring that the community and voluntary sector are informed and consulted about Community Planning initiatives and priorities):*

- Voluntary Sector Locality Network events now include information sessions from Third Sector Local Area Partnership Representatives and North Lanarkshire Council Regeneration Services Managers
- *Involve*, the quarterly newsletter of Voluntary Action North Lanarkshire which is widely circulated to the local voluntary sector, has been redesigned to include focussed sections on locality and thematic Community Planning activities
- Grassroots voluntary sector organisations and volunteers are actively invited to engage with Third Sector Local Area Partnership Representatives and provided with regular e-bulletins. >>

Capacity Building and Collaborative Working *(building the capacity of the community and voluntary sector to develop and deliver services through collaborative working, service level agreements and contractual arrangements across the range of the Community Planning Thematic Priorities):*

- The local voluntary sector's collaborative delivery of the Community Capacity Building and Carer Support element of the Reshaping Care for Older People Change Plan has been widely acknowledged as a national model of good practice
- Capacity building of voluntary sector organisations has been significantly enhanced through increased promotion and facilitation of quality standards such as Volunteer Friendly and PQASSO
- The portfolio of organisational development training available for voluntary sector organisations has been diversified, with several new and relevant programmes rolled out for the first time by Voluntary Action North Lanarkshire during 2013-14.

Making an Impact *(Ensuring that the voluntary and community sector has in place effective monitoring and evaluation arrangements that can be used to gather information and demonstrate the contribution and impact of the sector to the work of the Community Planning Partnership):*

- Voluntary Action North Lanarkshire has been mandated to report on wider local voluntary sector activity and objectives within North Lanarkshire Partnership's Single Outcome Agreement and Community Plan for 2013-18
- The Scottish Government's National Community Planning Sub-Group has invited Voluntary Action North Lanarkshire to participate in 'Deep Dive' research into the voluntary sector's connectivity to the Community Planning and Community Engagement agenda
- During 2014-15, a new Third Sector National Community Planning Programme has been introduced to research and develop detailed strategies for improving the voluntary sector's participation in Community Planning Partnerships across Scotland.

North Lanarkshire Voluntary Sector Partnership Group maintains a reporting template to monitor progress against each of the Strategy's objectives and sub-objectives. The introduction of the Strategy has successfully enabled the voluntary sector to work collaboratively at a higher and more effective level with Community Planning Partners.

8.0 Current Structures and Connectivity: Reaping the Rewards (2014)

The eleven year journey mapped in sections 1.0 to 7.0 has resulted in a healthy and strong level of voluntary sector participation being achieved in today's Community Planning environment in North Lanarkshire. Voluntary Action North Lanarkshire intelligence suggests greater local partnership working than ever before between the voluntary sector, statutory partners and independent partners, and a notable increase in co-production in North Lanarkshire.

Whilst efficiency savings in the public and voluntary sector since 2008 has clearly contributed to a greater need for collaboration, the effect that the implemented structures highlighted throughout this report have resulted in should not be underestimated. Community Planning Partners now have a better understanding of ethos, the value, and the contribution of the voluntary sector as a result of the mapped journey. >>

Diagram 8.1: Current Connectivity Structures ↻

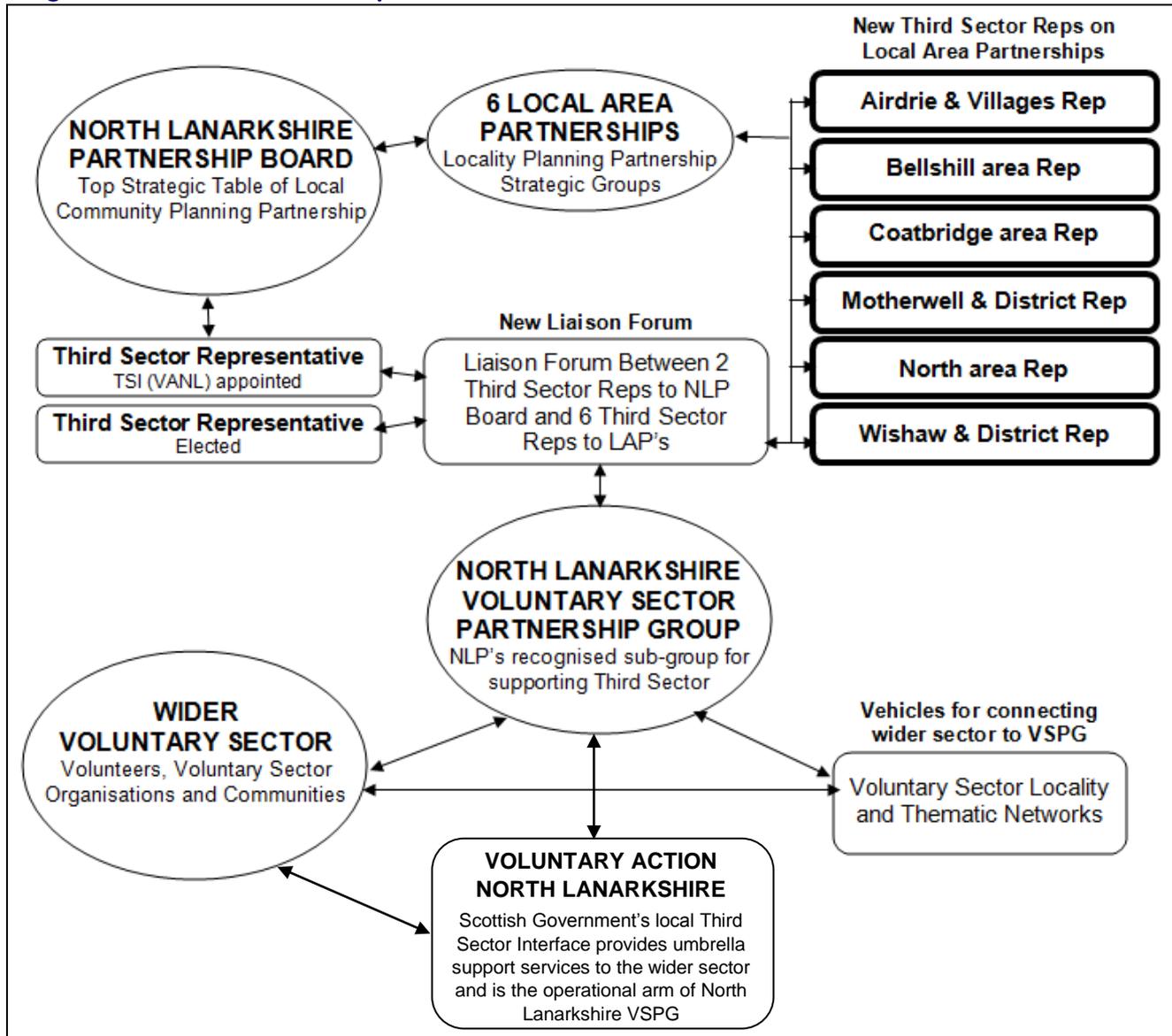


Diagram 8.1 (above) illustrates a generic overview of how structures now in place enable the voluntary sector to have linkage to the Community Planning Partnership, and vice versa. Clear lines exist for accountability, reporting and feedback of voluntary sector participation to both the wider voluntary sector and Community Planning Partners. The conduit to these structures is essentially the Voluntary Sector Partnership Group and the Third Sector Interface (Voluntary Action North Lanarkshire), whom without connectivity would essentially become broken and disconnected.

9.0 Third Sector Community Planning Improvement Programme and the Future (2014-16)

Whilst it is recognised that significant progress has been made in implementing robust and functional structures for actively involving the voluntary sector in Community Planning, it is also acknowledged that improvements can continually be introduced and the landscape within the voluntary sector and Community Planning sphere is ever changing. Hence, the voluntary sector requires to adapt to a fast-moving environment for Community Planning linkage to remain current, relevant and effective.

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Nationally, a Third Sector Community Planning Improvement Programme was launched in 2014 to help improve voluntary sector connectivity to Community Planning across the country. This is a resourced programme of The Scottish Government Third Sector Unit, Voluntary Action Scotland, and the Improvement Service which has the objective of focussing on improving the impact of Third Sector Interfaces on Community Planning and achieving better outcomes and connectivity for the voluntary sector and Community Planning Partners alike. An investment of £320,000 is supporting the Programme nationally during 2014-15, with five local Third Sector Interface partners receiving £40,000 to develop a robust self-assessment and improvement planning programme of activity.

Voluntary Action North Lanarkshire was selected as one of the five Third Sector Interface partners to participate in Year 1 of the Programme (2014-15). Year 1 of the Programme, which concludes on 31 March 2015, will be followed by a second year of activity which will involve the full network of 32 Third Sector Interfaces in Scotland. Voluntary Action North Lanarkshire strives to be in a position by this stage to share key learning with other local authority areas in Scotland and to continue to develop local structures and connectivity.

As key brokers between the wider voluntary sector and North Lanarkshire Partnership, the two voluntary sector North Lanarkshire Partnership Board representatives, the Voluntary Sector Partnership Group, and Voluntary Action North Lanarkshire believe that the Programme provides a unique platform for development. The Programme provides an opportunity for voluntary sector organisations, volunteers, and wider communities to participate and contribute more effectively to the Community Planning agenda in North Lanarkshire. It is anticipated that Community Planning Partners will benefit from having greater knowledge, relationships and collaboration of and with voluntary sector partners, and ultimately the Programme intends to achieve a slicker voluntary sector contribution to the North Lanarkshire Single Outcome Agreement.

The vision for the Third Sector Community Planning Improvement Programme in North Lanarkshire is of a 'thriving and inclusive local voluntary sector that actively participates in, contributes to, and benefits from Community Planning activity, with the ethos, value, and impact of the sector widely understood and acknowledged by all Community Planning Partners'. This mimics the wider long-term vision which the Voluntary Sector Partnership Group has for local voluntary sector involvement in Community Planning.

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