



# **Exploring the advocacy role of community anchor organisations:**

Final report – February 2008

## **Authorship and Acknowledgments**

This report has been written by (in alphabetical order) Dr Mike Aiken, Ben Cairns and Romaine Hutchison. It is based on an action research study carried out by Dr Mike Aiken, Alison Ewart, Romaine Hutchison and Patricia Young, with support from Professor Margaret Harris.

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## Executive Summary

### Introduction

This is an Executive Summary of the Final Report of a Study carried out as a partnership between the Institute for Voluntary Action Research (IVAR) and bassac, in association with the Improvement and Development Agency (I&DeA). The Study had one principal aim:

*'To describe, develop and implement models for community anchors to exercise and facilitate advocacy with and on behalf of other community organisations and the wider community'.*

We note the policy interest in advocacy and in community anchor organisations, and the fact that, in government policy documents, the 'advocacy' function of organisations is usually described as 'voice' and tends to be seen in terms of speaking on behalf of individuals and communities and attempting to exert influence on their behalf. We highlight the fact that despite this substantial government interest in the advocacy role of voluntary and community organisations (VCOs) in general, and community anchor organisations in particular, there are many conceptual and practical difficulties around the implementation of the 'advocacy' role. There is also some confusion over the myriad of different terms used to describe the role, amongst academics, practitioners and policy makers.

### Part One: Our Approach to the Study

In Part One we describe our approach to the Study. It included 37 semi-structured interviews with staff and trustees from 19 community anchor organisations, predominantly bassac members, but including a small number of members of the Development Trusts Association and Community Matters. They were based in a range of different, but mainly urban, locations in England. We asked interviewees about:

- Their understanding of the term 'advocacy' in the context of their organisation's work
- The priority attached to it
- Issues and themes with which they were engaged
- The resources used to undertake the work
- The barriers to its performance
- The future of their organisation's advocacy work
- How their advocacy work might best be supported in the future.

We also interviewed twelve local authority staff with responsibility for working with VCOs in the localities of the organisations studied, to gain their perspectives on the advocacy role of VCOs and in particular of community anchor organisations.

The Study was a qualitative one, designed to elicit opinions and perspectives on matters related to community anchors' advocacy role. Study participants' views are presented anonymously, in relation to key emerging themes.

## **Part Two: Study findings**

In Part Two we describe the Study findings, under four main headings:

- Description and focus of the advocacy role of community anchor organisations
- The practice of advocacy in community anchors
- Local authority perspectives
- Taking advocacy forward.

### **Section One: Description and Focus of the Advocacy Role of Community Anchor Organisations**

#### **Terms used to describe the 'advocacy' role of community anchors (section 10)**

We describe the wide variety of terms used by Study participants to refer to their 'advocacy' role. We note that the terminology used was not consistent and that Study participants variously accepted, doubted, rejected or modified the term 'advocacy' as applied to their activities; a number of other terms were used, including 'voice', 'empowerment' and 'helping people'.

#### **The focus of community anchors' advocacy work (section 11)**

Study participants tended to refer to their advocacy activities in terms of either the individual or collective focus for the work. At other times they referred to the purpose of their organisation's intervention, usually described as aiming to bring about changes in other agencies' service provision or policies.

In those community anchors with a focus on individual advocacy, the work generally involved representing people or assisting them to represent themselves, usually in relation to statutory agencies. Where advocacy was understood as having a collective aspect, this might entail, for example, supporting people in particular neighbourhoods on issues of importance to them, bringing them together and enabling them to have a voice. Community anchors were also often involved in providing support to smaller VCOs in their area and representing their needs to the local authority and other statutory bodies.

#### **How explicit is advocacy as a role for community anchors? (section 12)**

Some Study participants referred to advocacy as being an explicit organisational role, for example stated as a priority in strategic plans or staff job descriptions, while for most others it was more implicit, a key part of the organisation's way of operating, but not necessarily spelt out as such.

### **Section Two: The Practice of Advocacy in Community Anchors**

#### **Methods of undertaking advocacy (section 14)**

Community anchors carried out their advocacy roles through a wide variety of methods, including intervening with statutory bodies in relation to individuals; working through forums and networks to bring issues to the attention of statutory agencies; bringing groups together; capacity building or providing services for smaller organisations and individuals.

### **Who is responsible for performance of the advocacy work? (section 16)**

The locus of responsibility for the performance of the advocacy role appeared to vary according to the dynamics and type of work undertaken by particular organisations. Advocacy with an individual focus was generally carried out by staff with a specialist function, for example advice workers. In organisations that were heavily involved in working through partnerships, advocating on behalf of community needs, the needs of smaller organisations or service delivery issues, the work tended to be 'senior staff led', with Chief Executives playing a major role. In some, particularly smaller organisations, there were examples of board members participating. Elsewhere a 'shared ethos' approach was emphasised, with staff, volunteers and trustees all playing their part. In some instances, particularly organisations working with young people, a 'user engaged' approach, where project participants or clients were highly involved in the advocacy work, featured strongly.

### **Challenges to the performance of an advocacy role (section 18)**

Study participants identified some common barriers or restrictions in relation to their performance of an advocacy role. These related to funding, relationships with the local authority and their own organisational capacity. They noted how the advocacy role was not recognised in existing funding mechanisms; that, combined with the target-driven culture of some funding streams, and the general lack of secure funding, posed difficulties with supporting the work, which was often subsumed within Chief Executives' or project workers' time alongside other activities. The lack of funding for outreach work exacerbated the difficulties of trying to advocate on behalf of individuals with complex and resource-intensive problems.

Study participants also described challenges in relation to local authorities' views of their role; some did not understand community anchors' work. In some localities relationships between local authorities and VCOs were characterised by conflict; the skills of local authority staff to engage with community anchors were also sometimes seen as weak.

Community anchors were also held back by their own organisational capacity, for example by a lack of skills or research capacity, weaknesses in governance, the absence of a strategic role for advocacy or preoccupation with organisational survival.

### **Factors conducive to the performance of an advocacy role (section 20)**

Study participants identified a number of factors that enabled them to undertake an advocacy role. They described the skills needed to advocate on behalf of individuals and, where advocacy had more of a collective focus, they stressed the importance of building and maintaining relationships with key groups and individuals. The need to develop alliances, local knowledge and policy awareness was seen as crucial in this respect. Some were able to draw on the expertise of networks operating in specialist areas such as debt relief, domestic violence or counselling. The networking opportunities provided by their respective national organisations: bassac, Community Matters and DTA, were seen as useful.

## **Section Three: Local Authority Perspectives**

In Section Three we turn to the perspectives of local authority interviewees on community anchors' advocacy role.

### **Local authority understandings of community anchors' advocacy role** (section 22)

Local authority interviewees had a broadly similar understanding to community anchors of the advocacy role. They focused on the importance of extending participation in the democratic process and providing routes for individuals and communities to influence local authority policies and service provision.

### **Routes and forums for community anchors' advocacy work** (section 24)

Local authority interviewees appreciated the unique advocacy role of community anchors as multi-purpose organisations and the breadth of their reach to, and knowledge of, local communities. They described the different routes for community anchors' advocacy work – through forums, networks and partnerships but also through formal and informal contacts with local authority staff.

### **The impact of advocacy** (section 26)

Local authority interviewees considered that community anchors play a very important advocacy role. They described how anchor organisations can help bridge gaps between local authorities, communities and smaller organisations, and can play an important scrutiny role in relation to service provision and policy. They sometimes felt that their impact could be discerned in strategic ways more than in relation to changes to specific services. Some queried the effectiveness of various forums and networks.

### **The challenges of advocacy** (section 28)

The challenges for local authorities in responding to advocacy activities were said to include structural differences between the voluntary and community sector and local authorities, lack of designated officers, staff skills and unclear policies on engagement with VCOs. Further challenges were posed by the lack of well-defined routes for advocacy, which tended to be scattered across various forums, commissioning processes, service delivery discussions and funding. In some authorities officers queried the legitimacy of VCOs in general to perform an advocacy role.

Local authority interviewees identified challenges for community anchor organisations; these focused on funding difficulties and the funding relationship with local authorities, although lack of organisational capacity or skills were also felt to play a part.

A number of factors conducive to a productive advocacy relationship were described, including the establishment of appropriate structures for cross-sectoral dialogue and an understanding of the implications of policy changes. Some interviewees identified the need for skills development and awareness-building strategies to help the sectors understand each other better.

## **Section Four: Taking Advocacy Forward**

In Section Four we return to the views expressed by community anchor Study participants, focusing on the ways in which they wished to proceed with their advocacy work.



### **The future: what role would community anchors like to play around advocacy?** (section 30)

Developing the advocacy function was seen to be an important goal by most community anchors; some expressed a preference for extending their work to focus on additional client groups, while others wanted to broaden and deepen existing activities. The need to build firmer foundations with local communities was seen as crucial in some areas.

Some Study organisations referred to the need to develop their own skills in this area of work, and to extend their organisational understanding of their advocacy role. At the same time national work to promote this aspect of community anchors' work and to stress the need for more secure funding was seen to be necessary.

## **Part Three: Analysis and Discussion**

In Part Three we reflect on the Study findings and offer some practical suggestions for responding to the issues and concerns raised by Study participants.

### **Terminology**

We return first to the issue of terminology; we refer to the variety and, at times, inconsistency, of terms used to describe the advocacy function. We note that, while such variance might be problematic for those trying to measure advocacy across community anchors, it made little difference to practitioners. We suggest that any attempts to agree an absolute definition of 'advocacy' should be resisted.

We note that, while the variety of terminology did not appear problematic to Study participants, some did, however, struggle with conceptualising the function; they also experienced a number of challenges to its performance, posed by the funding environment, the increasing complexity of the issues they needed to address, and their relationships with local authorities. In some organisations staff had explicit responsibilities for advocacy, but more often the function was implicit in organisational missions, activities and job roles, embedded in organisational culture, and generally without dedicated funding, job roles or outcomes attached to it. The breadth of organisations' coverage – of individuals, neighbourhoods, organisations and issues – confirms that community anchors are engaged in a practice of advocacy consistent with their function as multi-purpose organisations.

### **Advocacy function – dispersed or embedded**

We suggest that there are two distinct arrangements for the location of the advocacy function within community anchors – '**Dispersed Advocacy**' and '**Embedded Advocacy**'. In the '**Dispersed Advocacy**' arrangement the function is located within discrete parts of different roles which may not be closely linked, while in the '**Embedded Advocacy**' arrangement, the advocacy function can be seen as overlapping, with similar issues being addressed at different times, or in different ways, by a range of staff, volunteers and board members.

### **Methods and skills**

We go on to suggest that, while community anchors employ a range of advocacy methods, they are often inter-linked, with advocacy on behalf of individual service users, for example, leading on to other work in partnerships or other forums on behalf of neighbourhoods or communities of interest. The same skills might be used across several different forms of advocacy.

### **Advocacy and the multi-purpose model**

We highlight the multi-dimensional nature of the practice of advocacy in community anchor organisations, which we suggest is in keeping with their multi-purpose nature, allowing them to make the kind of linkages that enable them to advocate for individuals *and* communities and for the particular policies and services needed by those groups.

We note the importance of coordinating the advocacy function across different job roles and different types of advocacy, which we suggest applies to both Dispersed and Embedded forms of advocacy. In both forms too, the Chief Executive's role in acting as advocate and in coordinating the work of others is crucial, but often not formally acknowledged.

The Study findings indicated that funding is rarely available specifically to support advocacy work; while we do not argue for funding for specific and dedicated advocacy posts, we do suggest that funding is needed for the coordination and delivery of the advocacy function embedded within a multi-purpose core.

### **Relationships between community anchors and local authorities**

The Study confirms that the primary audience for much of community anchors' advocacy work is the local authority; we suggest that this may include: contesting individual decisions; challenging the allocation of services; suggesting improvements to the delivery of services; questioning the way policy has been operationalised; drawing attention to unmet needs or playing a role in the development of local policy. We note that some local authorities have serious concerns about both the legitimacy and efficiency of community anchors. We discuss the challenges to the development of a constructive advocacy relationship and suggest that there may be a need to develop new methods of representation rather than relying on existing formal structures for engagement such as the Local Strategic Partnership.

### **Community anchors as advocates - the way forward**

We conclude our discussion by highlighting some ways forward to develop and implement the advocacy function in community anchors. In addition to practical suggestions aimed at community anchors (section 46), local authorities (section 48) and central government (section 49) for improving the understanding, profile and resourcing of advocacy, we identify (section 47) a number of practical measures for bassac, the commissioner of this Study. These focus on:

- Building and promoting awareness of the distinctive nature of the advocacy function of community anchors with governmental agencies, VCOs and other stakeholders
- Developing a knowledge and evidence base around the issues on which community anchors undertake advocacy work
- Coordinating the skills development of community anchor staff engaged in advocacy, for example in relation to: external relations (communication, negotiation and lobbying); community links and consultation; impact assessment
- Coordinating the development of the 'policy awareness' of community anchor staff engaged in advocacy
- Acknowledging the critical role of the Chief Executive (or equivalent) and providing appropriate support on leadership and management, possibly through innovative arrangements, such as mentoring and peer support.

## Introduction to the Final Report

This is the Final Report of an Action Research Study carried out as a partnership between the Institute for Voluntary Action Research (IVAR) and bassac, in association with the Improvement and Development Agency (I&DeA). The Study had one principal aim:

*'To describe, develop and implement models for community anchors to exercise and facilitate advocacy with and on behalf of other community organisations and the wider community'.*

The starting point for the Study was a desire to investigate the nature of 'advocacy' in community anchor organisations in the light of, on the one hand, heightened policy interest in this area and, on the other hand, conceptual and practical issues raised by earlier research.

We should note at the outset that we do not intend to propose or employ an absolute definition of 'advocacy', nor do we seek to suggest alternative language to describe the broad landscape of activities which can be grouped under the heading of 'advocacy'; these include: 'advice', 'lobbying', 'campaigning', 'voice', 'engagement' and 'representation'. For the purposes of this Study and this Report, therefore, we are interested in the broad concept of 'advocacy', which we understand as a generic term to cover a range of activities to enhance conditions for individuals or collectivities or to influence policies and services. Study participants' own understandings of the term will be described in Part 2 of this Report, while in Part 3 we explore some of the issues associated with the terminology and its interpretation in practice.

We use the term 'community anchor organisations' to describe organisations which are part of the broad voluntary and community sector (VCS) and have been described (Thake, 2006) as having four distinguishing characteristics: that of being local; being small in comparison to larger regional and national charities; being a focus for activity that has often grown out of a tradition of self-help and improvement; and having a competitive advantage over most external agencies because of their local presence and ability to respond to specific needs and situations. All of the organisations that took part in the Study can be considered as fitting this description, although they would not necessarily always refer to themselves as 'community anchor organisations'.

### **1. Policy interest in advocacy and community anchor organisations**

The potential role of the VCS and of individual voluntary and community organisations (VCOs), in particular 'community anchor organisations' (Home Office, 2004a), in providing 'advocacy' on behalf of local communities has assumed increased prominence in recent years.

Since the late 1980s central government has been keen to see VCOs take a greater role in the provision of public services; this theme has been stressed in numerous publications and policy documents (e.g. HM Treasury, 2002;

2003; National Audit Office, 2005). Promotion of the sector's role as an agent of civil renewal and facilitator of community engagement has been a more recent development (Home Office, 2003), reflecting governmental concerns about reduced amounts of civic engagement, as exemplified by low levels of participation in political processes, anti-social behaviour and a lack of 'community cohesion' (Community Cohesion Unit, 2002).

Community anchor organisations are seen as one means for implementing this agenda. The Home Office document *Firm Foundations* lists as one of the government's priority areas for action '*The development and support of community anchor organisations as key agents to promote and support local community development and neighbourhood engagement*' (Home Office, 2004a: 15). The Local Government White Paper, *Strong and prosperous communities*, states a commitment to '*promote a strong and healthy local voluntary and community sector which is an essential component of empowering local people, particularly those who are traditionally hard to reach*' (DCLG, 2006: 57).

The 'representative' and 'facilitative' function of VCOs has also been highlighted. For example, the Cross Cutting Review referred to infrastructure bodies providing '*a voice for VCOs and access to representation and policy making*' (HM Treasury, 2002: 20), while the ChangeUp report talked about infrastructure '*providing a representative and accountable voice for frontline organisations to policy makers, service planners and funders*' (Home Office, 2004b: 22). More recently, The Local Government White Paper refers to the diverse nature of the VCS and its varied roles, which are described as including '*shaping and designing effective services, representation and advocacy, lobbying and influencing policy*' (DCLG, 2006: 56). This theme is picked up in the *Third Sector Strategy for Communities and Local Government* discussion paper, with references to the third sector providing '*voice and representation for citizens and communities*' (DCLG, 2007: 11), as well as in the Third Sector Strategy which argues that a key priority for community anchor organisations is '*to provide advocacy and voice for the community and to stimulate community involvement and activity*' (HM Treasury, 2007: 41).

Government policy documents have tended to see 'advocacy' in terms of speaking on behalf of individuals and communities and attempting to exert influence on their behalf. The *Compact on Relations between Government and the Voluntary and Community Sector in England*, (Home Office, 1998, section 6) for example, noted that VCOs '*act as pathfinders for the involvement of users in the design and delivery of services and often act as advocates for those who otherwise have no voice*'. In *The Role of the Voluntary and Community Sector in Service Delivery A Cross Cutting Review* (HM Treasury, 2002) reference is made to advocacy as one of the distinctive features of the VCS. The theme recurs in a more recent Treasury report, *Exploring the Role of the Third Sector in Public Service Delivery and Reform: A Discussion Document*, which refers to the sector playing a key role in '*advocacy on behalf of communities and the individuals they serve and represent, for example through campaigning and lobbying activities or formal representation in decision-making fora*' (2005: 7). David Miliband, when still a minister in the DCLG, gave a speech which described the VCS thus: '*in its role providing advocacy for communities, it provides a voice for citizens,*

*campaigning against injustice, tackling vested interests, and challenging the balance of power within society* (Speech to NCVO annual conference, 2006).

However, despite this increased policy interest, the practical experience of I&DeA regional associates and members of bassac and partner organisations in the Community Alliance<sup>1</sup> and other recent research with community anchor organisations (IVAR, 2006) suggests that there are a myriad of conceptual and practical difficulties around the implementation of the 'advocacy' role.

## 2. Earlier research

The term 'advocacy' has been, and still often is, used in the VCS in relation to actions taken by VCOs on behalf of individuals, for example people with learning disabilities or mental health problems, who may have difficulty doing things such as securing services from statutory bodies or generally making their voices heard (e.g. Action for Advocacy, 2006). While the term continues to be used in this very specific sense, its use has been expanded to cover other aspects of VCS work besides those relating to the support and promotion of the rights of individuals and facilitating their access to services.

Most documents emanating from VCS infrastructure bodies appear to regard the terms 'advocacy', 'voice' and 'lobbying' as broadly equivalent. NCVO's response to the Third Sector Review (2006: 1), for example, states that '*Government must support all the roles of the third sector, particularly funding for voice, campaigning and advocacy work which is critical for VCOs to play either a representative role or to support individuals to advocate on their own behalf. Government should introduce a small grants programme to support the voice and advocacy work of local VCOs*'. The numerous ways in which VCOs can contribute to the democratic process are also highlighted by academic commentators; for example, three main means of involvement have been suggested: by bringing issues to public attention and informing the policy process; by ensuring that, in a pluralist democracy, a diversity of voices is heard; and by directly engaging citizens in public life (Taylor and Warburton, 2003).

In both US and UK academic literature, the word 'advocacy' is often used to describe activities undertaken by VCOs in the areas of lobbying, campaigning and attempts to influence public policy. Jenkins (1987: 297) highlights the distinction between advocacy and service delivery: '*Advocacy focuses on changing policies and securing collective goods, whereas service delivery creates divisible or individual benefits and may be provided without actual changes in policies*'. He goes on to note that '*.... Advocacy does not necessarily result in actual influence. Policy advocacy is a question of articulating positions or sets of demands, not necessarily securing them*' (1987: 297). Saidel and Refki (2007) usefully distinguish 'advocacy as representation' and 'advocacy as participation'.

The theme of policy influence is elaborated upon by Boris and Mosher-Williams (1998: 488), who comment that '*Advocacy is the term generally used to describe efforts to influence public policy. In classifications of nonprofit*

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<sup>1</sup> bassac, Community Matters, DTA

*organizations, advocacy is narrowly defined as the protection of rights and promotion of political interests. We argue that an expanded conception of advocacy that encompasses civic involvement is necessary to study the role played by nonprofits in facilitating the public voice that sustains a democratic civil society’.*

Schmid and Bar, whose research was conducted in Israel, but who also reviewed literature from the US and UK, noted a lack of consensus in relation to the terms ‘advocacy’ and ‘political activity’. They adopted a definition of advocacy which also focused on the theme of civic engagement, describing it as ‘*efforts to change policies or influence the decisions of government and state institutions in order to promote a collective goal or interest through enhancement of civic participation*’ (2006: 2). Schmid and Bar go on to describe advocacy as encompassing activities aimed at influencing the social and civic agenda, gaining access to decision-making arenas and mobilising support from policy-makers in order to achieve favourable processes. Both they and Boris and Mosher-Williams (1998) note that such activities are usually seen as secondary to VCOs’ main activity, i.e. the provision of services. Elsewhere, Walden (2006: 718) describes some of the components of advocacy as ‘*data collection and analysis, issue formation, coalition-building, and organizing constituencies*’, which she considers to be ‘*speculative and proactive. It is especially hard to measure and assess*’.

UK literature appears to follow a similar path to the authors referred to above in understanding the term ‘advocacy’ to include lobbying and campaigning activities that attempt to influence public policy. Taylor and Warburton (2003: 327) for example, refer to the ‘*advocacy and watchdog*’ roles of VCOs; Taylor et al (2002: 2) to ‘*advocacy and lobbying*’, both in ways which imply attempts to influence public policy.

Turning to the practical challenges associated with ‘advocacy’ work, barriers can be seen to include the time taken up by involvement in partnership working and the fact that VCOs often consider that power still lies very much in the hands of statutory bodies, leading some to choose to remain outside the policy process (Taylor, Craig and Wilkinson, 2002). The difficulties for VCOs of taking an equal part in decision-making processes have been noted (Elstob, 2006); attention has also been drawn to the tendency for policy development to be highly centralised, reducing opportunities for VCOs to influence outcomes at the local level (Taylor and Warburton, 2003). Finally, it has been argued that doubts about the representativeness of some infrastructure organisations can result in some local authorities questioning their legitimacy (Harker and Burkeman, 2007; Taylor and Warburton, 2003). These issues are discussed extensively in the literature devoted to VCS and statutory sector partnerships (e.g. Taylor, 2001).

### **3. Summary of the starting point for the Study**

It is clear then that, while there appears to be substantial government interest in the advocacy role performed by VCOs in general, and by community anchor organisations in particular, there is nevertheless confusion over the various terms used to describe aspects of this role, as well as concern about its operation in practice.

In developing a conceptualisation of advocacy (in a broad sense), our interest in this Study was to tease out the key variables which come together to make up the advocacy 'phenomenon', including:

- The purpose of advocacy activity
- The activities (and methods) involved
- The 'object' (or audience) of the advocacy activities
- Groups or individuals on whose behalf the advocacy activities are carried out
- The practicalities (including challenges and conditions) of carrying out the advocacy activities.

#### **4. The Structure of this Final Report**

In Part One we describe our approach to the Study.

In Part Two we focus on the Study findings in four sections. Section One outlines the terms used by Study participants to refer to their advocacy function and describes the focus for their various advocacy activities. In Section Two we consider in more detail the practice of advocacy, including the methods used, the locus of responsibility for the work and the challenges involved. In Section Three we describe the perspectives of local authority interviewees on the advocacy role of community anchor organisations. In Section Four we discuss Study participants' views of the way forward for community anchors' performance of an advocacy role.

Finally, in Part Three, we analyse and discuss the issues emerging from the Study findings and their implications for both policy and practice.

## PART ONE: OUR APPROACH TO THE STUDY

### 5. Aim of the Study

This Action Research Study was conducted by the Institute for Voluntary Action Research (IVAR). The Study had one principal aim:

*'To describe, develop and implement models for community anchors to exercise and facilitate advocacy with and on behalf of other community organisations and the wider community'.*

### 6. Methodology

Between July and October 2007 we carried out semi-structured interviews with senior staff and trustees from 19 community anchor organisations: 15 bassac member organisations, one Community Matters member and three members of the Development Trusts Association (DTA).

Across the 19 organisations we completed a total of 37 interviews, with 30 senior staff (two interviews involved two staff members) and nine trustees (usually the Chair or another experienced trustee). Thirty-two interviews were carried out face to face and five by telephone. We also interviewed one staff member from a local infrastructure body closely connected with one of the interview organisations. Interviews lasted between one and three hours.

We interviewed twelve local authority staff with responsibility for working with the voluntary and community sector (VCS), in the localities of the organisations studied, to gain their perspectives on the advocacy role of voluntary and community organisations (VCOs), and in particular of community anchor organisations. All of these interviews were carried out by telephone and lasted about an hour.

### 7. Organisational details

The 19 Study organisations worked in a range of different, but mainly urban, locations in England. All except one (which concentrated on work with one particular user group) can be considered as multi-purpose community anchor organisations, providing services and activities for a very broad range of local people, for example advice and legal services, activities for children and young people, lunch clubs, childcare, educational classes and training and so on.

It should be noted that this Study has been unusual for the large number of organisations (ten in total) invited to participate in the research which declined to be involved, either because they considered they did not perform a significant advocacy role or because they felt unable to commit the time to be interviewed. While substitutes were found to take their place, this extended the research process beyond the originally agreed timescale. In several instances we also experienced considerable delays in making interview arrangements, and / or it proved impossible to secure the participation of trustees or local authority interviewees. These difficulties had some impact on



the range of organisations that took part in the Study, and in particular on their geographical diversity, in that several organisations originally selected from regions other than London decided not to participate.

In Appendix One we provide some brief descriptions of the Study organisations in anonymous form.

Seven of the twelve local authority interviewees were employed by London boroughs. The other five worked for district or county councils in other regions: two in the West Midlands, two in the south-west and one in the Yorkshire / Humber region.

## **8. Interview questions**

We asked senior staff and trustees from the 19 Study organisations about:

- Their understanding of the term 'advocacy' in the context of their organisation's work
- The priority attached to advocacy within the organisation's strategic plans and job descriptions
- The issues and themes with which they were engaged
- The allocation of responsibilities within the organisation for performance of the advocacy role
- The resources used to undertake these roles
- The barriers to performance of advocacy activities
- The future of the organisation's advocacy work
- Their ideas about how bassac might provide support for the work.

The interviews with local authority staff sought to elicit their views about the performance of an advocacy role by VCOs, and in particular by community anchor organisations. In pursuit of this aim, we asked them about:

- Their understanding of the term 'advocacy' in relation to VCOs' relationship with the local authority
- The range of ways in which the advocacy role is performed
- Issues that arise for the local authority in response
- Specific issues relating to community anchors' performance of an advocacy role
- The resources allocated to working with VCOs
- The future of the local authority's engagement with VCOs around their advocacy work
- Their ideas about ways in which the Improvement and Development Agency might support local authorities' work with VCOs around advocacy.

## **9. Presentation of data**

The data from the interviews have been organised thematically, resulting in the emerging findings presented in Part Two of this Final Report.

Given that this is a qualitative and not a quantitative Study, we do not attribute numbers to those holding any particular point of view, although we do highlight points made by several interviewees. We are presenting the findings anonymously; we refer to ideas as being put forward either by 'Study participants' (when referring to the views of paid staff and trustees from the organisations that took part in the Study) or 'local authority interviewees'. Unattributed quotations are presented in italics. We generally refer to community anchor organisations as 'community anchors'.

## PART TWO: STUDY FINDINGS

### Section One: Description and focus of the advocacy role of community anchor organisations

In Section One we outline the different ways in which Study organisations referred to their advocacy role, before moving on to describe the various ways in which they carry out this work. We then discuss the extent to which advocacy is considered and described as an explicit organisational role.

#### 10. Terms used to describe the ‘advocacy’ role of community anchors

##### 10.1 Variety of terms used

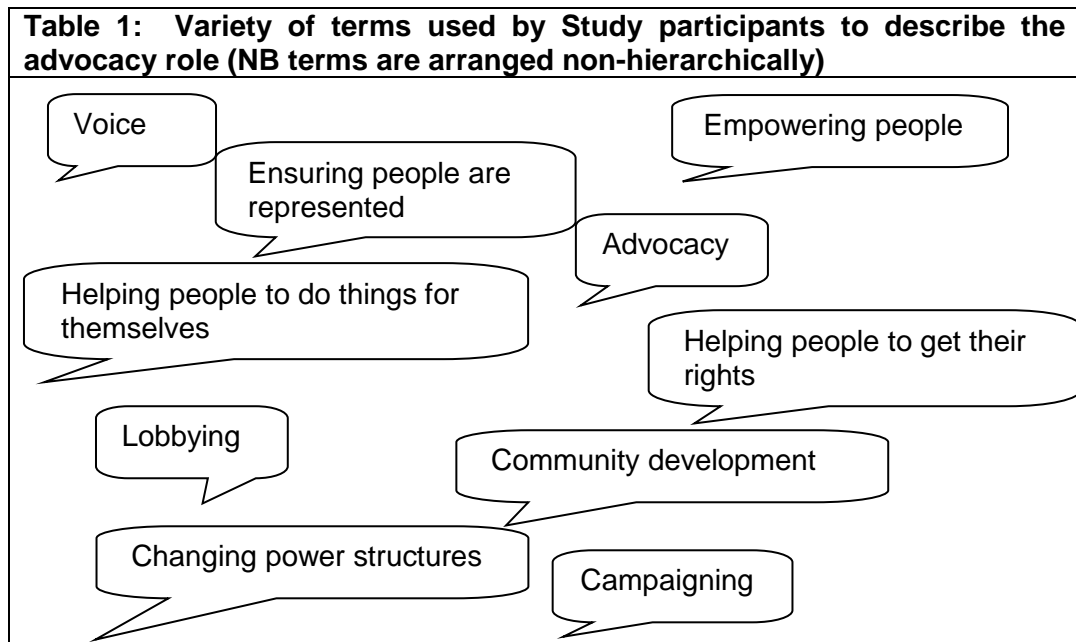
The words used to describe their advocacy activities were extremely important for some Study participants; they did not, however, necessarily use the word ‘advocacy’, nor was its use consistent across, or even within, the Study organisations. One Study participant, for example, argued: *‘We are not advocacy focused, we don’t do very much advocacy work’*, yet when discussing their service delivery role stated that: *‘we see ourselves as advocates of young people, on their behalf, on their rights to play...that’s our role as service providers and advocates of young people.’* An organisation which was deeply engaged in advice work for individuals and the local community pointed out that the word ‘advocacy’ would never be used, rather: *‘we talk about making sure the community is represented, empowering people, helping people to do things for themselves.’* In other organisations the term was thought to be ‘disenfranchising’: *‘we want to empower people: “advocacy” sounds patronising.’*

Distinctions were sometimes made between terms such as ‘advocacy’, ‘campaigning’ or ‘voice’. Some organisations had established a professional advocacy service for users of public services and used the word ‘advocacy’ only in that quite specific sense; they often used other terms such as ‘voice’ to distinguish their other work with individuals or groups. Community development was seen by one organisation as a crucial process for changing power structures that prevented people participating in decisions that affected their lives; advocacy was considered as central to that happening. One Study participant whose organisation focused on advocating for individuals said that they did not consider that they advocated on behalf of the neighbourhood and would not use terminology like ‘campaigning’: *‘we don’t really talk about lobbying or campaigning – I don’t think we’ve ever used those terms.’*

In summary, terminology is not consistent and organisations variously accept, doubt, reject or modify the term ‘advocacy’ as applied to their activities; a wide variety of other terms is used, including ‘voice’, ‘empowerment’ and ‘helping people.’

In the subsequent parts of this Final Report the term ‘advocacy’ is used as a generic term to encompass the whole range of terms used by Study participants themselves to describe what we consider as broadly comprising

the concept of advocacy (see Introduction to this Final Report). Table 1 sets out the variety of terms and phrases (including advocacy itself) used by Study participants.



## 11. The focus of community anchors' advocacy work

Study participants tended to refer to their advocacy activities in terms of either the individual or collective focus for the work or the purpose of their organisation's intervention, usually described as aiming to bring about changes in other agencies' service provision or policies. Some also made reference to lobbying or campaigning on behalf of their own organisation, in particular their need for additional resources. We concentrate here, however, on describing in turn the Study findings in relation to advocacy work with individuals; with neighbourhoods; with smaller organisations and work with a focus on changes to policy or service delivery.

### 11.1 Advocacy work with individuals

For some community anchors the main focus of their advocacy work was on individuals, for example: *'accessing services for people that may have difficulties (physical or mental), seeking options and helping people make a decision on the basis of the information.'* This approach was especially prevalent in organisations that undertook work with individual clients, for example advice work with people experiencing problems with welfare benefits or debt, or programmes assisting parents in relation to their children's special educational needs. These all entailed representing the individual or assisting them to represent themselves, usually in relation to statutory agencies.

In other instances organisations might assist individuals encountered through the course of activities taking place in a community building. This might be *'somebody coming to the front of the community centre trying to find out*

*about local services. Advocacy would then be a matter of giving someone the relevant information and enabling or supporting them through the process.* At times Study participants saw advocacy for individuals as about *'participation'*, which involved *'building up service users' skills to self-advocate.'*

The link was also made to social inclusion strategies which sought to draw individuals from disadvantaged groups out of the shadows, by suggesting positive proposals for change to policy makers whilst taking care not to talk on behalf of those people: *'giving a voice and sometimes articulating that voice on behalf of those in the community who might not be able to do so themselves. It involves positive suggestions about how to improve. It falls short of actually speaking on behalf of people, but is instead facilitating their voice being heard'*. At this point advocacy work with individuals begins to blend into more collective approaches. One example given arose from advice work with individuals receiving welfare benefits: involvement in a Financial Inclusion Steering Group provided the organisation with the opportunity to raise wider issues: *'we can say X is a real problem, e.g. possession orders, and flag up key issues and remedies. It's very important to do that.'*

## 11.2 Advocacy with a collective focus: neighbourhoods

Advocacy was also understood as having a collective aspect, and in this form might involve supporting neighbourhoods on issues of importance to them, for example, *'...working with a community or people who want to do something on behalf of a community.'* It was discussed using a variety of terms: *'we might talk about making sure the community is represented, empowering people, helping people to do things themselves'*, or quite simply: *'we're advocates for the benefit of the community in this town.'* It was sometimes described in terms of facilitation: *'we have the ability to often facilitate community members coming together over a particular issue and then assisting them to make their views known to the statutory authority.'* Advocacy also took the form, according to some Study participants, of *'brokerage'* between communities or individuals and a statutory agency – a role which could *'enable'* people to put their views forward.

The advocacy role, in the collective sense, was also understood as engaging with specific constituencies, bringing particular groups of people together and enabling them to have a voice. For example, children were the focus for one community anchor which set up groups to find out, and then tackle, their specific concerns in conjunction with the local authority: *'Children found the traffic frightening...Giving children a voice is an important part of what we do.'* Community anchors appear to have developed strengths in advocating for particular disadvantaged groups - strengths which have grown from the particular features of their localities and histories. Study participants were, for example, often active in children's services or were involved with young people, parents and carers. Work with Black and Minority Ethnic communities, refugees and with women, particularly facing domestic violence, were also prominent foci. It was also becoming more common to engage with people with learning disabilities and older people. Advocacy might take the form of engagement in forums and partnerships around issues such as childcare, parenting, youth, crime, environment, disadvantage faced by BME communities, older people, health, refugees, transport, employment, disability and neighbourhood development. As one Study participant argued: *'the*

*centre is prepared to be involved in everything where [the town] needs a voice and if they don't have a route in we do it.'*

### 11.3 Advocacy with a collective focus: with smaller organisations

Many Study participants described their organisations as providing support to smaller voluntary and community organisations in the neighbourhood, representing their needs to the local authority and other statutory bodies: *'doing the job of representing smaller community groups that may not have a formal structure and which we are working with.'* This might involve assisting groups in funding bids or working with the local authority to ensure, for example, that commissioning processes were fair and accessible. It also included highlighting to council officers the needs these groups had uncovered about particular constituencies. For example, one Study participant in a small town where there was perceived to be a *'withdrawal of services'* by both the state and private sector saw their organisation as a *'catalyst in the community'*; this led them to: *'support social enterprises where an important business might not be viable.'*

### 11.4 Advocacy for changes in service delivery or policy changes

Community anchors sometimes have significant Service Level Agreements with local authorities. Study participants suggested that this can put them in a position of being able to improve the service delivered to make it more appropriate: *'to advocate on an individual's behalf about services, helping local authority officers understand individual perspectives'; 'I want to be able to provide a range of services that are funded and meet the needs of the local community. I think part of it is being able to affect local policy and funding'.*

Work aimed at improving educational support for Black and Minority Ethnic children, facilitating community integration, crime prevention and mediation can all be seen as examples of influencing wider services.

<b>Table 2: The focus of community anchors' advocacy work</b>
<b>Advocacy focused on:</b>
<b>(a) Individuals</b>
Individual disadvantaged clients
<b>(b) Collectivities</b>
Neighbourhood or community of interest
Smaller community organisations
The community anchor organisation
<b>(c) Services or local policy</b>
A service or intervention
Policy (local level)

## 12. How explicit is advocacy as a role for community anchors?

Some Study participants referred to advocacy as being an explicit organisational role, for example stated as a priority in strategic plans or staff job descriptions, while for others it was more implicit, a key part of the organisation's way of operating, but not necessarily spelt out as such.

### 12.1 Location of 'advocacy' in strategic aims and job descriptions

One senior staff member was confident in seeing advocacy as explicit across the organisation, stating that: *'advocacy roles are very much in the business plan...giving people a voice, listening to the views of the community...'* In other organisations the role was explicit in the Chief Executive's job description: *'leading in partnerships, drawing groups together...also in securing a longer lease...I would say that they are community advocacy roles.'* Elsewhere advocacy and voice, along with community development, were seen as: *'a very high priority...community development...it spreads across all our work including staff meetings – it's essential – the advocacy is essential.'* Other organisations could point to the term 'voice' being located in their strategic aims, for example engagement in one re-development area had entailed a high level of local involvement as the organisation and local people were looking at a 10 – 25 year town vision. Here advocacy was an integral aspect of their long-term vision while, at neighbourhood level, it was also informing week by week progress on very immediate issues such as litter and rural bus services.

### 12.2 Advocacy as implicit rather than explicit

Study participants who considered that advocacy was implicit rather than explicit argued that: *'we wouldn't say we do advocacy, we do community development...'*, but community development which *'includes an advocacy role...is in job descriptions and strategic plans.'* In addition such an organisation usually set out campaigning roles in its strategic plan. One Study participant argued that: *'I would have to say priorities are implicit...it's inherent in that what we do is about improving...the status of excluded groups. It wouldn't be explicit in the job description.'* In other places advocacy would be seen as fundamental, but the term 'advocacy' would not be used: *'it goes along with trying to change the balance of power, so it's a major element but not necessarily described as advocacy.'* One organisation succinctly pointed out the embedded sense of advocacy in that, although it was not explicit, it would be detectable if that aspect of their work was removed: *'although we don't state that we do it – if we didn't do it, it would be noticed'.*

## 13. Summary

The terms used to describe the advocacy function were not consistent, but the actual roles performed by community anchors, despite some differences in emphasis, were broadly similar. Study participants described and differentiated individual and collective forms of advocacy. Advocacy aiming at improving service delivery, and sometimes policy, was also discussed. As multi-purpose organisations, community anchors would typically engage in a wide range of issues encompassing, for example, the needs of women facing

domestic violence, assisting people with drugs or debt problems; the educational needs of Black and Minority Ethnic groups and neighbourhood concerns. The priority given to advocacy work was in some instances made explicit in strategic plans and job descriptions and in other situations implicit and embedded in overall missions and ways of working.

## Section Two: The Practice of Advocacy in Community Anchors

In Section Two we look in more detail at community anchors' practice of advocacy. Firstly, the methods used by community anchors to undertake advocacy are considered. Secondly, we examine who is responsible for the performance of advocacy within community anchors. Thirdly, Study participants' views about the challenges to undertaking this role are described. Finally, the factors deemed to be conducive to the performance of an advocacy role are discussed.

### 14. Methods of undertaking advocacy

We describe below the range of methods adopted in performance of an advocacy role in relation to the different types of advocacy described in sub-sections 11.1 – 11.4 above.

#### 14.1 Individualised advocacy

Advocacy in relation to individual clients or other members of the community could include both direct work with individual service users, for example intervening with statutory bodies to ensure access to appropriate services or resources for individuals or families, and also indirect work in relation to service users' needs. One Study participant, for example, saw users' active involvement as integral to their method of working with a particular disadvantaged group: '*we take users with us to relevant forums*'; they also ran a development group within the community anchor which examined issues such as: '*our influence and whether service users are involved*.'

One Study participant engaged with advice work stressed that: '*every single person we see has different needs and capabilities. It's very important to develop trust so you understand what their needs are...what does this person actually want to do?*' This might involve reassuring people that they have the skills to deal with an issue themselves; alternatively it might mean staff taking a higher profile role and reporting back regularly.

#### 14.2 Advocacy through forums and networks

Advocacy was described by some Study participants as taking place through forums, networks, committee work and one-to-one conversations with local authority officers. In this form community anchors might gather together their collective experience and intelligence from their engagement with individuals and neighbourhoods and feed this through to statutory organisations. This was seen as complementing individual advocacy work – it was described as an important '*duality*' by one Study participant – which could enable community anchors to play a 'strategic' role with statutory organisations. Another Study participant pointed out: '*we are represented on a really wide*



*range of forums, most of which connect to the strategic partnership – we send reps to various forums...they advocate more generally than on service user needs.'*

Developing consortia of other groups has been another typical method; one anchor, for example, had formed: *'a group of other VCS youth organisations who agitate for the needs of young people ...it's a kind of pressure group.'*

#### 14.3 **Advocacy by bringing groups together**

Community anchors have sometimes taken a direct lead by setting up and training community facilitators from very localised groups to work on issues as they arise around crime or community unrest. In one example, a youth group was attacked and the anchor rapidly brought together the young people, people from the various communities involved, and the police: *'to best meet people's needs...to condense a set of views...to ensure our objective was met which was never to have something like that happen again and to ensure the police dealt with the issue in a more sensitive and pro-active way.'* Thus the anchor worked alongside all the protagonists in that particular situation.

Anchor organisations have sought to involve local people in dealing with issues affecting them by a variety of means; one, for example, actively used drama techniques and fun days to develop community engagement. Another took residents from one borough to professionals planning a large-scale development in a neighbouring area and presented research: *'it was about gathering community needs, we trained the researchers, that's about advocacy.'* Residents also undertook interviews, facilitated focus groups *'and facilitated meetings with 55 local organisations.'* Another had set up a series of forums in different villages and invited the statutory organisations to participate regularly; here the anchor had helped establish a collective mechanism where people could advocate for themselves, or be signposted to other sources of support.

#### 14.4 **Providing services and capacity building**

It was suggested that collective approaches to advocacy might also involve providing services or undertaking capacity building for other organisations: examples included running training sessions for newly established voluntary groups, helping with legal status and constitutions, assisting with newsletters, offering a library of resources or providing a payroll service, computer and web-hosting facilities. This could, it was suggested, be seen as a form of advocacy for small organisations in that it would help them begin to develop their own voices.

Providing a centre was itself seen as a method for engagement, and was considered by some anchors as a foundation for advocacy work: *'a salt and pepper approach'; 'we need to have our fingers in many pies – to do enough in each to take part.'*

The provision of services for individuals – for example a needle exchange with a 'no questions asked' approach - provided *'soft ways'* into engagement for young people: *'it is like a spider's web! There are many ways in – but you can't easily fall through.'*

## 15. Summary

Community anchors' advocacy roles can be seen variously as acting on behalf of individuals, communities (including neighbourhoods, communities of interest and small voluntary organisations), or in relation to particular services or policies. A wide variety of methods are used across these three categories, including individualised advocacy; work through forums and networks; bringing groups together and providing services and capacity building.

## 16. Who is responsible for performance of the advocacy work?

Responsibility for performance of the advocacy work seemed to arise from the dynamics and kind of work undertaken by particular organisations. The one distinctive exception seemed to be in organisations with a strong emphasis on advocacy on behalf of individuals, where the work could be described as being led by staff in a 'specialist advocacy function.' In organisations where advocacy tended to have more of a collective focus the role was usually described as being led by the Chief Executive or other senior staff, or by senior staff in conjunction with the board. Two further patterns, often overlapping with one or more of the other styles, could be discerned; these could be described as 'shared ethos' cases where the role was widely distributed across the organisation, or 'user engaged' where users were highly involved. These five types are discussed below and illustrated in Table 3.

### 16.1 Specialist workers

In some situations advocacy was a specialised activity undertaken by staff skilled in a given area, for example disability, parenting, domestic violence or work with a particular user group such as young people, or generic advice workers. This type of work is most evident in community anchors where there are specialist workers based in different project teams: *'in terms of individual advocacy, it's nearly all done by the family support team because that is their area of work.'*

### 16.2 Advocacy led by senior staff

In organisations that were heavily involved in advocacy work through partnerships, advocating on behalf of community needs, the needs of smaller VCOs or around service delivery issues, the advocacy function could be seen as being 'senior staff led'. One Chief Executive pointed out that: *'with a very small staff team much of the work goes through me.'* In a much larger organisation with high engagement in partnerships and local forums the Chief Executive stated that while all staff played some role in advocacy work, in reality: *'it is virtually all done by the CEO.'* In another large community anchor with a management team: *'the greatest focus will be amongst the most experienced staff and it is most likely to be focused at the development manager level.'*

### 16.3 **Advocacy shared between board and senior staff**

Some organisations admitted that their boards were *'remote'* and did not contain local people, while in others the board's main role was to focus on strategic and governance issues. Nevertheless there were examples of board members being active on forums and partnership groups. In smaller organisations in particular, board members were more likely to participate and a *'shared board and senior staff'* style can be discerned. In one anchor, for example: *'one leads on housing, another board member leads on transport, different board members are involved in other areas...'*, all of which entailed participation in external forums, while the Chief Executive sat on another coordinating group. Board members were thus at times seen as undertaking an important advocacy role, and doing so on a voluntary basis.

### 16.4 **Advocacy undertaken by many as part of a shared ethos**

In some community anchors a *'shared ethos'* approach was emphasised, with advocacy, voice and engagement functions part of a way of working shared by all staff and volunteers and in some instances board members. This approach was exemplified by comments such as: *'because of the nature of the organisation, virtually every staff member...has unofficially taken up that role'*; and *'volunteers and board also do advocacy, you can't easily separate the work'*. Elsewhere: *'There isn't a single post for an advocacy worker, it is so embedded in the work we do particularly for the CEO and project workers, it's part of our role'*.

### 16.5 **Advocacy undertaken with a high degree of user engagement**

In some instances, particularly in relation to youth work, there was an emphasis on empowering the user as an essential part of any individual or collective work. This *'user-engaged'* approach is exemplified by an organisation engaged with Black older community members; staff took a volunteer who was also a service user to a conference: *'to raise concerns from a user's perspective and an older person's perspective. She also learned from going to that conference what is achievable.'* In one town the advocacy function was played by a radio station run by a community anchor; it helped facilitate a sense of community, and also acted as a focus for community development and advocacy work. For example, when a group of housing association residents was in dispute with the housing association, the station manager arranged for them to put their views. Afterwards the group wrote to thank the station: *'now the association are listening'*, whereas before the radio broadcast *'the group had said "we don't have a voice".'*

<b>Table 3: Who performs the advocacy role in community anchors?</b>	
<b>Who performs the advocacy role?</b>	<b>Predominant advocacy focus</b>
<b>(i) Specialist advocacy function</b> Specialist workers in advice or counselling roles or with a subject specialism (e.g. youth work, children and parents' work, race work)	(a) Individualist/ Representative Advocacy
<b>(ii) Senior staff led</b> Chief Executive Officer or equivalent	(b) Community Advocacy focus (c) Service delivery or policy style focus
<b>(iii) Shared board and senior staff led</b> Chief Executive and one or more board members	(b) Community Advocacy focus (c) Service delivery or policy style focus
<b>(iv) Shared ethos</b> All staff seen to play a high role in advocacy	(b) Community Advocacy focus (c) Service delivery or policy style focus
<b>(v) User engaged</b> Users closely engaged alongside staff or volunteers	(a) Individualist/ Representative Advocacy (b) Community Advocacy focus, (c) Service delivery or policy style focus

## 17. Summary

The locus of responsibility for the advocacy role in a community anchor varies to some extent according to the model adopted. Advocacy with an individual focus is generally carried out by staff with a specialist function, for example by advice workers. In other models, particularly involving much partnership and forum work, the Chief Executive tends to play a major role, sometimes in conjunction with board members. Cutting across these distinctions there are locations where a 'shared ethos' role operates, with many staff and volunteers playing an important part, and others where a 'user engaged' model features strongly.

## 18. Challenges to the performance of an advocacy role

Study participants described some common barriers or restrictions in relation to their performance of an advocacy role. These centred on challenges around funding and the nature of advocacy; the relationship with the local authority and their own organisational capacity.

### 18.1 Funding challenges

#### 18.1.1 Lack of funding for advocacy work

A major challenge concerned the existing and emerging funding mechanisms which did not recognise the advocacy role. Along with a general problem of '*lack of stable funding*' there was an overwhelming concern that funding was

not available explicitly for advocacy work. Although advocacy was an integral part of many organisations' work, it was invisible to funders, and even at times to the anchor itself, as illustrated by the Study participant who described advocacy as: *'bundled up in everything else that happens with community development and community economic development...it is often a missing set of skills so they often evolve along the way because it is not a defined activity area... but it is the lifeblood of what we are doing. It's very intangible so it's underneath the surface.'*

Advocacy work was usually subsumed within the Chief Executive's time, or in particular project workers' roles alongside other activities, or dispersed across many staff members' and volunteers' roles. This posed a particular challenge for the CEO: *'We don't get any funding...it's seen as part and parcel of [the CEO] job to make sure it happens.'* It was frequently pointed out that: *'a large amount of the CEO's work is spent on this advocacy work'*. Others described how the funding was squeezed from other resources: *'It's more a case of being funded to do something else but the commitment of staff is to look wider than the issues you are dealing with, so you do it.'* The work was usually an 'add-on' to other work that did receive funding or *'funded from underspend on other budgets.'* One Study participant commented that: *'we are doing work that incorporates a strong element of advocacy because that's how we've chosen to do it but there is no specific funding to do advocacy.'*

The advocacy work, if funded at all, appeared to be supported more often by Trust income or by the Big Lottery Fund. In a few cases community anchors had endowments, or some self-sufficient income from their building rentals or a spin-off activity, which they used to subsidise their core costs (such as a Chief Executive's salary) and this, either directly or indirectly, supported advocacy work. In only one case, in the context of a long-standing contract for work with parents, was it felt that advocacy work was specifically and explicitly funded, while: *'more generic family support work is Trust funded.'*

### 18.1.2 The nature of funding streams

The nature of some funding streams also posed difficulties: *'the target driven culture of funding streams'* was seen to be a major problem in relation to organisations' ability to perform an advocacy role which might, under less rigid funding regimes, be funded either within project costs or as part of more generic community development work. There was also a lack of recognition of advocacy work in any outcomes or measurement processes. One Study participant whose organisation had some independent income found that it could not fund its community development work and, seeing it as a core and most important function of the organisation, brought it within core costs and subsidised it: *'it's very hard to get funding for community development – it's the core of our work and drives the advocacy work – so we brought it into the core costs.'*

### 18.1.3 Increasing complexity and intensity of advocacy

Advocacy was described as an increasingly resource-intensive and complex activity, both for those organisations that advocate on behalf of individuals and those that work more with groups and networks. For example, cuts in Job Centre staff have meant that staff in advice roles in some anchor

organisations have had to spend much more time than previously trying to advocate on behalf of individual advice service clients.

The lack of funding available for outreach work often compounded these problems. A client might have multiple problems with, for example, eviction, debt and an abusive partner, which required intensive support, but: *'we can't go...with clients for example to the housing office, to sort a claim, but instead have to write a letter... if you went with them you could see if they are just filing the letter or writing the correct information down.'*

It was also suggested that it can be hard to motivate or build the confidence of people who have experienced social exclusion – in which case an anchor may face particular problems in an advocacy role that may appear to statutory sector staff to lack legitimacy. The retort could come: *'if the parents don't mind, what's the problem?'*

## 18.2 Challenges concerning relationships with the local authority

Uncertainties on the part of local authorities and other funders over the various roles of community anchors and statutory organisations created barriers in some localities. *'Politics and bottle'* was how one Study participant summed up the barriers, by which was meant the need to have the confidence to advocate while at the same time applying for commissioned work to carry out necessary services. Despite being highly critical of the commissioning process itself, they felt: *'can we shout too loud about it?' or 'we would be nervous of advocating against funders'.*

Study participants expressed a range of different views about relationships with local authority staff. In some locations it was felt that: *'the local authority does not want to hear local people...we don't have a good relationship with officers'* or *'voluntary organisations think the local authorities don't understand what they are doing'* and therefore *'there need to be bridges built.'*

In a few cases, community anchors did not appear to have a strategic connection with their local authority. Sometimes this was because they were unable to make coherent links, or they did not wish to engage. One organisation had lost funding and was run by volunteers; they preferred to emphasise: *'working in unity with local people.'* Others appeared to have conflictual relationships with their large urban local authorities, although they maintained funding roles on functional terms with commissioners. Here there was considerable emphasis on becoming *'self-sustaining and independent'* – developing a particular form to meet a given function.

A lack of staff skills in statutory bodies was also cited as a problem, with a *'huge deficit in the participation work'* found in some statutory organisations; hence community anchors were often in the position of teaching other organisations some of these skills: *'When we sit on forums, when we go to meetings...people are amazed about what...we have done...to involve service users.'*

### 18.3 Issues of organisational capacity in community anchor organisations

As well as the funding difficulties cited above, Study participants described a number of issues relating to organisational capacity which limit their performance of an advocacy role. These related in particular to governance; the lack of a strategic advocacy role; lack of appropriate skills; preoccupation with organisational survival and lack of research capacity.

#### 18.3.1 Governance

Finding trustees with the right skills remained an ongoing problem for some anchor organisations; there was also the question of ensuring local representation and building the capacities of trustees to provide appropriate governance. Some long-established organisations considered that their governance structure was: *'well meant, but misplaced...times have moved on...the trustees sometimes lack the vision to make that giant leap'* or that *'the sector doesn't have the entrepreneurial skills and vision necessary to identify business opportunities.'* Developing the understanding and skills in this area at board level was felt to be important but it was recognised that: *'the challenge is to get enough trustees...'* In a few organisations there was a lack of agreement between trustees and senior staff as to what extent advocacy was an explicit priority.

#### 18.3.2 Strategic role for advocacy

Some Study participants considered that their organisations could do more advocacy work if the role was formalised more strategically in the organisation: *'it's done because we do it, or rather we've decided to do it'*, but this was not always a clear and explicit strategic direction. One Study participant reflected on the difference between their individual and collective advocacy activities in that: *'overall we are successful in helping individuals improve their lives, but in relation to making changes for the vast majority of the community it's very difficult.'*

#### 18.3.3 Skills deficit

Lack of appropriate staff skills in some instances restricted organisations' ability to undertake an advocacy role. Retaining skilled staff who could undertake quality work was considered to be difficult when funding was insecure; this in turn threatened both service delivery and advocacy. One Chief Executive stated that: *'Working in the sector is not secure, so when you get people who are really sharp they tend to get drawn out of the sector.'*

#### 18.3.4 Preoccupation with organisational survival

In some organisations staff and trustees were preoccupied with organisational survival, and felt that they needed to concentrate some of their resources on advocating for their own organisational existence. The buildings or infrastructure of some community anchors were seen to be quite literally crumbling. Preoccupation with the fragile state of their buildings, combined with lack of core funding, diverted even senior staff from advocacy work. One Chief Executive, for example, pointed out that: *'one minute I am doing the*

*cash flow and the next I am unblocking the toilet...there's only so much one person can do.'*

### 18.3.5 Research capacity

Study participants also felt that they needed time and resources to do research to support their organisations' advocacy work, for example doing more work with local residents to find out what they considered to be the main social issues affecting them, or developing: '*a stronger way of collecting evidence*'. The limited opportunities to collect a clear evidence base were felt to constitute a barrier - '*I think that's what's lacking*' - with staff not always having the time or skills to gather such data. One Study participant commented that although they gained rich insights from people's cases, there was little chance to weave these together and aim for broader policy changes; they were: '*very focused on delivery and had few resources to put these stories together.*'

## 19. Summary

Challenges to undertaking advocacy were identified in three main areas: around funding and the nature of advocacy; the relationship with local authorities; and in connection with aspects of community anchors' own capacities. Community anchors' own organisational fragility was sometimes seen as restricting their advocacy role.

## 20. Factors conducive to the performance of an advocacy role

### 20.1 What enables Community Anchors to undertake advocacy?

Study participants identified a range of factors that enabled them to undertake an advocacy role. These related primarily to: the skills and attributes of those undertaking the work; the existence of alliances, local knowledge and policy awareness; and the ability to draw on external sources of information, support and advice.

#### 20.1.1 Skills and attributes needed

Study participants sometimes found it hard to separate out skills needed to perform an advocacy role from generic community development and organisational skills. This was the case especially in relation to work that did not focus on engagement with individual clients, which was seen to require: '*listening to people and not being impulsive; being willing to accept that what you think is right, which may not be accepted by the person themselves.*' It was suggested that other necessary skills for individual advocacy included listening skills, attendance at meetings with clients, the ability to write letters and attend case hearings, and to signpost people or introduce them to other related services.

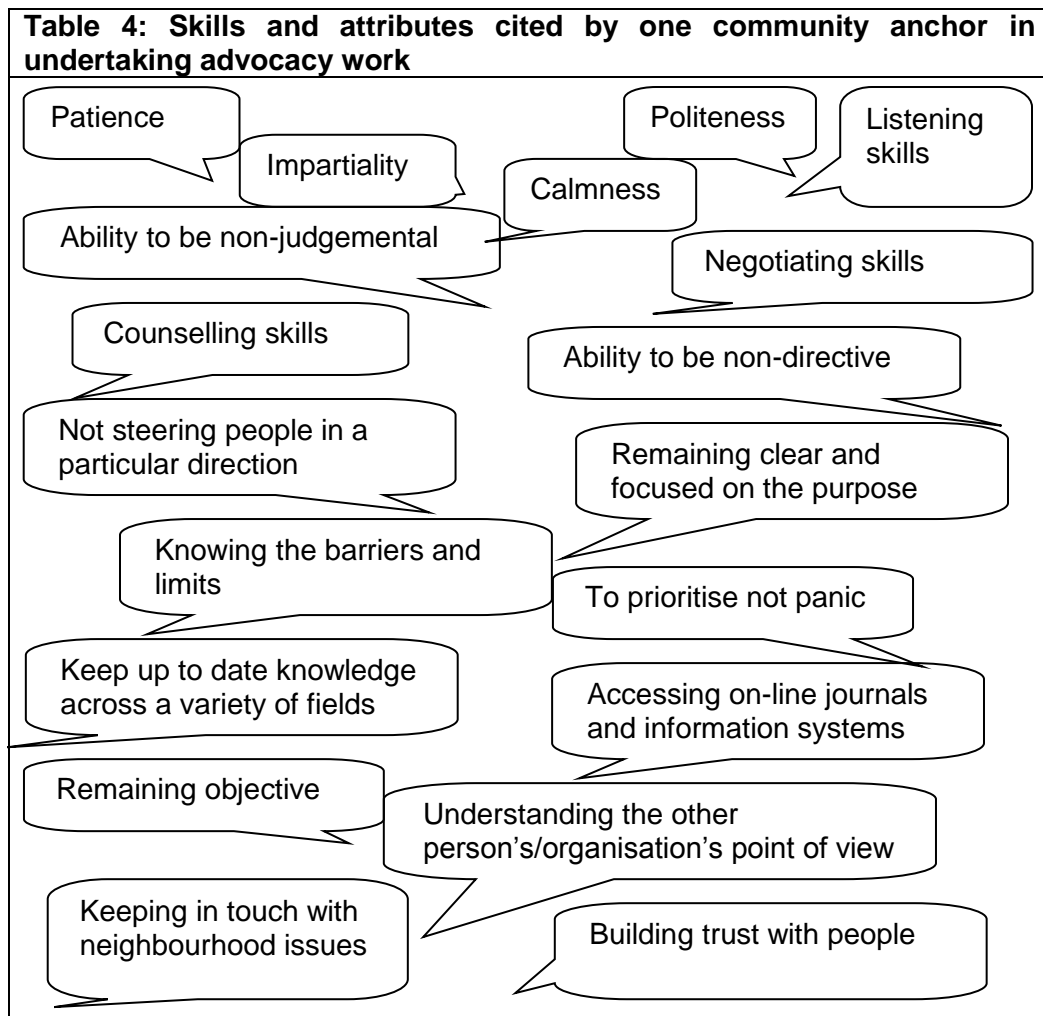
Where advocacy had a more collective focus, Study participants stressed the importance of the ability to build and maintain relationships with key groups and people: '*being able to make connections and not seeing an issue as just relating to one individual*', and '*being in the right groups around town, having*



*connections, keeping doing events so you have a profile...relationships and who you get on with are important.* Others identified that, where work with groups, networks and forums is involved, it is important to: *'seek effective understandings of positions amongst different groups coming from different positions.'*

It was suggested that longer-term and more general needs may be addressed by considering and arguing about the appropriate level of resources, services or process of service delivery required. Here the ability to make the case for a clear, well resourced role for the VCS in commissioning processes or in representative roles with other statutory agencies was seen as important.

Table 4 gives an example of the skills and attributes one community anchor cited as being important in its advocacy work.



### 20.1.2 Alliances, local knowledge and policy awareness

Other Study participants stressed the importance of alliances with strategic people and organisations, local knowledge and the ability to *'identify and lever in allies, community opinion formers...navigation skills around the town, knowing who to speak to.'* Maintaining close contact with the communities

being served was felt to be crucial. One Study participant summed this up as: *'keeping your ear to the ground, keeping in touch with neighbourhood issues gathered through talking to people...the biggest skill is about building trust with people on an individual level and listening.'*

For some Study participants a large part of their advocacy work was undertaken through forums and partnerships. In this context the ability to put individual stories together in a collective way so as to make an impact was seen as important: *'coming from a multi-purpose agency your work covers maybe 10 –12 specialist areas.'* An ability to keep up to date on policy and legal changes was seen by many Study participants as vital because: *'part of our skill is to keep updated on any legal changes.'* Knowledge was an important resource: *'if people ask "what do you know?" we can say we are involved in consortiums and partnerships across a wide range of these issues.'*

Some Study participants described evidence of changing relationships with local authorities: *'Progressively it's felt that officers we had clashes with previously are suddenly seeing our side of the issue...there is this sense of the earth seriously shaking...it's a very different arena than it was two years ago.'*

### 20.1.3 External sources of information, support and advice

In some localities, Study participants were able to draw on the expertise of specific networks in specialist areas such as debt relief, domestic violence or counselling. Others used a wide range of sources of information, advice and networking from across the VCS. The training provided by many organisations was, however, frequently seen as too generalist to meet their needs.

DTA, Community Matters and bassac were used for information, advice and networking opportunities by members. For example, *'bassac...provide an opportunity for people to come together and meet...although it is not something they have a high profile on'*; another organisation felt *'bassac is brilliant'* at picking up and supporting key issues of concern: *'...two are DTA and bassac because if I have got any questions I can give them a call...if I am right to interpret things in a particular way.'*

### 20.1.4 Combination of factors: skills and attributes identified with success

Study participants were able to identify some factors which, in combination, contributed to the successful performance of an advocacy role. These were described as:

- Highly skilled and committed staff (particularly at senior level) in a community anchor; strategically minded and engaged board members;
- An anchor with some measure of financial independence; good connections and relationships between community organisations, anchor and local authority;

- Trust built between neighbourhoods and the organisations based on regular communication, intervention and results.

One Study participant argued: '*why are we successful? We have a dynamic CEO, the organisation has a vision, it is dynamic, there is partnership support for community needs...it is an independent organisation*'. Proper funding to support workers on strategic committees was also felt to be important: '*you can't rely on volunteers to do all that work*', along with recognition of contextual factors, such as in a new town: '*there are no listed buildings so change is quite possible*'.

## 21. Summary

Study participants identified a range of skills and attributes and resources which could be drawn on to facilitate their advocacy function. These included:

### **The appropriate 'people' skills to:**

- Facilitate and listen to communities and individuals
- Develop informal professional relationships
- Maintain contact with key individuals
- Retain the trust of communities
- Build alliances.

### **The capacity to:**

- Possess local knowledge
- Understand the national policy context
- Use external support and training.

### **The skills and capacity in combination to:**

- Use skilled and committed staff with the trust of the community and enough local connections to gain results.

## Section Three: Local Authority Perspectives

In Section Three we focus on the local authority interviewees' perspectives on community anchors' advocacy work. We discuss in turn their understandings of what the role involves; the different routes and forums used for advocacy on behalf of individuals, communities and local groups; the impact of advocacy, and their views of the challenges posed by this work for local authorities and for community anchors. We conclude Section Three by highlighting some factors considered by local authority interviewees as conducive to a productive relationship between their authorities and community anchors.

## 22. Local authority understandings of community anchors' advocacy role

Local authority interviewees described a range of aspects of community anchors' advocacy roles, including bringing forward individual and collective

concerns; helping to improve services and influence policy and extending citizens' opportunities to participate in the democratic process.

### 22.1 **Extending participation in the democratic process**

Some local authority interviewees considered that community anchors widened the opportunities for individuals and communities to make their views heard and to participate in the democratic process. Advocacy might thus involve community anchors playing a role in *'representing the feelings of the community'*.

There was considerable agreement between the local authority interviewees and those in the community anchor organisations on the scope of advocacy. One local authority interviewee, for example, saw the role as providing *'a voice for a group of people who may not be in some of the right levels in the democratic process...taking people's opinions and thoughts and placing them at all levels within the hierarchy'*, while another suggested that the community anchor's role was to make statutory systems accessible: *'advocacy is recognising that some people may need help in accessing the system and supporting and championing them in this.'*

### 22.2 **Role with individuals, communities and organisations**

One local authority interviewee linked the individual and collective aspects of advocacy, seeing the role as covering a broad range of activities: *'advocacy on behalf of the voluntary sector and the local communities and local people as individuals who don't have a route through to us in the local authority.'* It was seen as important to understand that advocacy could mean keeping a community facility, like a community anchor, open so as to provide a base for smaller groups, and: *'acting on behalf of...other voluntary sector organisations.'*

### 22.3 **Role in improving services**

Some local authority interviewees considered that advocacy was more concerned with improving services or providing routes into the local authority for service users' views: *'empowering young people or parents to say what they would like as a service from us'; 'it's about influencing decision making, influencing services and making services more appropriate to the people they serve'*.

### 22.4 **Passing on information and influencing policy**

Advocacy was also held by some local authority interviewees to mean passing on information, aiming to affect policy or acting as *'a critical friend.'* One local authority interviewee considered that the difference between *'advocacy and interpreting'* was not well understood by colleagues, and that an important strand of advocacy meant: *'not just about informing people about information, it's how that information is passed over and how it's interpreted.'* For some officers the role entailed influencing the council's policy; a commissioner of services, for example, found the community anchor's roles in a local forum to be an extremely important *'space for the sector to talk to me as the key local authority strategic lead.'* Another officer

felt they should: *'have a role in saying what the local community want so as to influence policy...advocating for their communities.'*

## **23. Summary**

Local authority interviewees had a broadly similar understanding to community anchors of the advocacy role. This focused on the importance of extending participation in the democratic process and providing routes for individuals and communities to influence local authority policies and service provision.

## **24. Routes and forums for community anchors' advocacy work**

### **24.1 The reach of a community anchor**

Local authority interviewees showed some appreciation of the unique role of community anchors as multi-purpose organisations: *'Single issue community organisations are by their nature a single service so they focus on that issue. Community anchors recognise that there are different areas so they approach problems slightly differently.'* The multiple routes into services offered by their distinctive knowledge and expertise were also valued: *'The good thing about [the community anchor] is that people can go in and get information about where to go...it offers a central area and they will know how to access other services.'* It was recognised that they were: *'good at linking with other VCOs so if I needed to know about...domestic violence they would help me access services...'*

Interviewees noted that some community anchors combined the notions of being local and community based with operating across a town or borough. The overview across a town was seen as valuable because they: *'have a more panoramic view of issues affecting the voluntary sector...a more strategic view of how things operate and need to operate.'* In contrast VCOs such as Councils for Voluntary Service were seen to be less focused on local community groups: *'There is a difference, they [anchors] are more localised in their sector...CVSs are more responsive to the voluntary sector...some CVSs were saying they were community anchors but they can't be – they are far too large and not localised'; 'anchors would be locally based.'*

Anchors were also felt to be important for the simplicity of relationships with the local authority which they might provide: *'it's easier for the council to talk to them because they have a range of service areas...you can talk to them on a more general level. They offer efficiencies, more joined up services – it also reduces the number of communication transactions...talking to one person dealing with eight service areas rather than eight different organisations.'* Their ability to link smaller groups was also recognised: *'the more community-based groups which are more grass roots – they link to the local authority much more via [the anchor] organisation.'*

### **24.2 Contacts with local authority staff**

When considering advocacy on behalf of organisations, as opposed to individuals or communities, local authority interviewees most often referred to the Compact, where this was in active use, since this frequently involved an

organisational responsibility located in a given officer or department. Sometimes a voluntary sector unit would be identified as holding this brief – although such units were often more concerned with general capacity building or community development support and small grants. Alternatively a funding, or partnership, or town forum officer, located typically in a regeneration unit and funded by special programme funding, played a more generalist role. Such staff seemed to act as portals into the local authority, and were often natural allies and points of contact for community anchors who could play the counterpart role of an access route into the community. One local authority interviewee pointed to: *'officer support for neighbourhood partnerships in each area'* through which they would have contact with community anchors.

Advocacy in relation to community needs had a clearer route into local authorities, either through directorates, forums or Local Strategic Partnerships, but could be limited to very specific service delivery issues. It was apparent in many of the situations discussed that much depended on relationships between individual officers and community anchor or VCS staff who stretched their role to include advocacy. One local authority interviewee commented that: *'My role is about money and how it is used and routed properly to the voluntary sector – as an offshoot of that role I am involved in wider work...if I just did what the money was funding I wouldn't do all this [supporting small voluntary organisations]. Even when organisations' contracts have finished I am still a resource...it is a relation and it works both ways...it is an on-going and informal relation.'* Elsewhere it was pointed out that: *'we do work well with [the anchor]. We have good personal contacts...because we have a funding relation.'*

### 24.3 Advocacy through forums and partnerships

Forums and partnerships were identified by local authority interviewees as central means through which community anchors could undertake advocacy. In one case the community anchor was pro-active in organising residents' forums and brought all the relevant tiers of local government together, along with other statutory bodies such as the fire service or police.

Local authority interviewees referred to the existence of various strategic forums concerning, for example, services for children and families, adults with learning disabilities, transition to adulthood, as well as various neighbourhood forums and umbrella forums for voluntary organisations. In one town there was a range of strategic groups for commissioning alongside area-based groups to draw in local issues. Other local authorities further cited Race Equality partnerships, Youth Sector Groups, Learning Partnerships, Transport Forums, a Community Empowerment Network and a Community Centres Network. Where there was regeneration funding, towns also had a series of groups feeding into an overview group coordinating a town development plan; there might also be residents' forums in each area.

In one locality the community anchor had brought different groupings together via a town forum to bring about long-term changes to an area that was previously strongly divided: *'originally there was no community, there were no facilities, and it was a very divided place'*; now: *'all partners are involved and play a role.'* This *'provided a model'* and was seen as distinct from the

approaches in more established towns where organisations were working very separately.

In some areas such partnerships had developed a cohesiveness around their issues and had become advocacy groups in their own right – seeking resources or different styles of provision when there had been cutbacks, for example around skills and training.

#### 24.4 **Advocacy through informal channels**

In addition to partnership working more informal channels for advocacy were described. One local authority interviewee acknowledged that advocacy activities could be very individualised in their nature, often undertaken by one key senior worker at a community anchor who might be at full stretch as a result of other organisational demands, meaning that the intensity of advocacy work could change according to that person's capacity. It was suggested also that the informal nature of such relationships meant that it was not always clear if a person was advocating on behalf of their own organisation or the wider VCS and, if the latter, '*do people know you are advocating for them or what you are advocating about?*' Contacts between individual professionals and community groups were important too, so: '*there are lots of smaller voluntary groups that individual social workers might be involved in.*' There might be: '*working together in meetings and representing one-to-one views of parents and carers, that's been quite strong.*' Advocacy might also involve one local authority worker discreetly passing on requests to colleagues in other departments in the absence of any more formal channels. This could, however, cause internal friction and was thought to need handling with care.

### 25. **Summary**

Local authority interviewees appreciated the unique advocacy role of community anchors as multi-purpose organisations and the breadth of their reach to, and knowledge of, local communities. They described the different routes for community anchors' advocacy work – through forums, networks and partnerships but also through formal and informal contacts with local authority staff.

### 26. **The impact of advocacy**

Nearly all the local authority interviewees considered the role of community anchors and the VCS generally to be: '*very important.*' The reasons given focused on the way in which the role helped the local authority in getting closer to the community and small local organisations, or keeping the council under scrutiny to ensure that its services remained relevant. They also, however, questioned the extent of the impact on policy and practice and the effectiveness of some forums.

#### 26.1 **Getting local**

Community anchors' advocacy role was particularly valued by one large local authority because it was important '*to get local...it is important that those*

*anchors hold that dialogue on behalf of their communities.'* Other local authority interviewees emphasised the role anchor organisations could play to: *'advocate on behalf of smaller organisations we can't easily reach.'* With individuals, anchors were seen to be able to *'bridge the gap between the voluntary and statutory sector...it has a huge level of trust from its users.'* Anchors were variously seen as able to *'lend credibility'* and play *'a scrutiny role.'* Most importantly, they needed to take note of people: *'who have no vested interest but advocate on behalf of the needs of the community at large.'*

## 26.2 Changes to policy or practice as a result of advocacy activities

The views of local authority interviewees can be divided into two distinct but uneven groups in relation to their perceptions of changes to services that had occurred as a result of advocacy activities. One group considered the role extremely important, but when pressed found it hard to pinpoint any specific changes. Typical expressions were: *'difficult'* to identify; or *'No, but I am sure there must be'*, or *'Yes, there are to some extent...I can't think of anything at this moment...if I am about to do something I contact the community anchor and get any comments.'*

The second grouping expressed positive opinions, but rarely pointed to any specific changes, although one local authority interviewee spoke of the way young people engaged with a community anchor had: *'helped to increase the services available for young people in the community by building a really good adventure playground.'* The dominant view can be summarised as being that the influence had been large, subtle and to some extent invisible because the effect had been to change overall strategy or management style. The interviewee quoted above, for example, also commented that: *'we are looking at integrating our services for disabled and able bodied young people'*. They had met representatives from the community anchor who had: *'pushed for us to strengthen at a strategic level how we plan our services, pushing us to improve our strategic plan for integration of children and young people with disabilities.'* The local authority was now: *'pulling all heads of services round the table to plan for integration...it is assisting us in driving forward that agenda.'*

One local authority interviewee pointed to the *'massive drive'* the local community anchor was having in contacting BME and mixed heritage parents so that the local authority could hear their views about what services were needed. Elsewhere the community anchor was credited as having: *'influenced the political agenda'* on the approach to the management of community facilities and had *'influenced the strategic partnership to play more of a role.'*

## 26.3 Effectiveness of forums

Despite the number of groups and forums, one local authority interviewee suggested: *'I have no idea how effective they are'*; and in another town a local authority interviewee felt that advocacy was not a major role of any of these groups. In some instances the involvement of community anchors, and VCOs in general, in such forums could present dilemmas: one interviewee, for example, commented that: *'from my point of view, it's been difficult for people to ask questions, they feel if they make themselves unpopular it might affect*



*their funding.* Forums appeared sometimes to have their own life cycle which at one point might be largely policy making and at other times, tackling service delivery: *'in the last two years, there were a lot of organisations advocating for specific areas of need...formulating policies and how children's services would be arranged...some of these have been finished and shifted to...rolling out services.'*

It was suggested by one interviewee that rationalising the number of such forums could be useful: *'there are too many organisations doing this work, recognising one organisation as the advocacy organisation could be important.'*

## **27. Summary**

Local authority interviewees found it difficult to assess the impact of advocacy activities. They generally valued the role played by community anchors in helping to present the views of local communities, but often felt that their impact could be discerned in strategic ways more than in relation to specific services. Some queried the effectiveness of various forums and networks.

## **28. The challenges of advocacy**

Local authority interviewees described various challenges in responding to the advocacy activities of community anchor organisations; they also noted a number of difficulties for anchor organisations themselves in performing this role. They identified various factors conducive to a productive relationship.

### **28.1 Challenges for local authorities**

The challenges for local authorities centred on:

- Lack of designated officers
- Structural differences between statutory and voluntary sectors
- Issues of legitimacy
- Local authority policies on engagement
- Skills and awareness of local authority staff.

#### **28.1.1 Lack of designated officers**

Local authority interviewees suggested that many authorities lack a designated officer charged with responding to the advocacy activities of community anchor organisations. And as we noted earlier, there are often numerous formal and informal routes into local authority decision-making processes. The statement that *'there are various departments who work with them on different issues and projects'* seemed to reflect a common pattern. Where there were designated officers these would be: *'different job titles in different locations'* and *'there are sometimes single service forums...commissioning forums where they bring in third sector providers. There is no effective forum as a whole.'* Local Strategic Partnerships, and the associated area boards with VCS representation, meant: *'the sector is having a voice'*. Nevertheless it was felt that: *'my view as an officer is that the voice*

*gets marginalised in those structures.* Sometimes Local Area Agreements had funds to: *'coordinate the sector's input'*, but the role would often be held by individual designated people in different departments.

### 28.1.2 Structural differences between the sectors

A key structural difficulty described by local authority interviewees centred on the challenge of what could be understood as the 'one voice' argument: the difficulty of dealing with a large number of different voices from the VCS. As one local authority interviewee pointed out: *'I don't think the issue of VCOs not being unified is going to go away.'* In one local authority there were well over one hundred youth groups performing a delivery role, and: *'for the local authority we want a clear method to discuss with the voluntary sector.'*

These structural differences posed challenges in terms of timescales for engagement between the two sectors. *'Matching and meshing timescales'* could hamper adequate consultation because *'government agendas don't match ours or the community's'*.

Some local authority interviewees felt that community anchors did not understand the limitations to the council's role, for example: *'with elderly people the local authority hasn't necessarily been resourced to provide for those needs'*. One local authority interviewee also suggested that advocacy in relation to improving service delivery could be better undertaken if VCOs understood more about service delivery options: *'if these advocates in the voluntary sector are not aware of the kinds of services they could be putting in bids for in the commissioning cycle they are not advocating – they are not playing the kind of role they could be playing.'*

### 28.1.3 Issues of legitimacy

Some local authority interviewees expressed concerns about the legitimacy of some organisations, political agendas or 'council bashing', and local authorities being able to comprehend the notion of receiving criticism from an organisation which they might simultaneously be funding.

Local authority interviewees were concerned about legitimacy issues in a number of areas: *'it is a challenge to know if we are hearing the view of the people or just the view of a few trustees who represent middle England'*; *'we always have to think about who the organisation is, who is part of it? Who are the management committee and the users?'* In some areas legitimacy was played down if *engagement* could be emphasised: *'in terms of delivering what people want you might be able to engage it all. Engaging is simply about listening a lot of the time. No issues of legitimacy from my point of view.'*

It was felt that there needed to be a growth in trust between sectors. Sometimes where local authority staff, as part of their role, had spoken with one group of VCOs, the next organisation they met accused them of talking to other organisations: *'not representative of the third sector.'* Suspicion and objections from some parts of the VCS could make the job of relatively junior local authority staff with continuing relationships with the sector extremely difficult and lead to them becoming highly cautious: *'An advocacy*

*organisation is not necessarily representative of the third sector but they have a role to play.'*

In some authorities the relationship between the sectors was perceived as conflictual: *'it's them against us'*, and characterised by a lack of trust: *'People can have quite a go sometimes'*, either against individual officers or councillors. In this situation one local authority interviewee felt that *'advocacy was done in a political way rather than a service way...that has an impact on officers and elected members.'* Information might then be fed back at meetings in *'a negative and aggressive manner'*, and in a way that was felt to be *'council bashing.'* This could, it was suggested, lead to a devaluing of community anchors' role as *'critical friend'*: *'every time we want to work with them it becomes a conflict because the officers don't understand the role of an advocate organisation. We've got a downward cycle at the moment.'*

#### **28.1.4 Local authority policies on engagement**

Local authority interviewees were often unclear about the existence of specific policies which codified a relationship with voluntary organisations – on advocacy or other issues – although the Compact was cited as an overarching document. One local authority interviewee was unsure: *'we might have such policies'*, while another felt that: *'I would say no, the Compact is the one document that outlines the principles and what we need to do.'* Compact implementation groups were not, however, seen as forums where advocacy in relation to service provision would take place.

#### **28.1.5 Skills and awareness of local authority staff**

Many local authority interviewees raised the issues of the skills and awareness of their own staff as central challenges: *'I think the main issues would be the skills of different council officers, their awareness of which voluntary organisations exist and the role they play...'* Some officers were said to be: *'hostile to the voluntary sector...'*, although it was felt that this situation was changing as a result of their commissioning roles. Sometimes interviewees felt that where there were careful negotiating or partnership skills amongst officers these were not institutionally recognised: *'partnership working is wanted but a profile of my job wouldn't recognise the skills I have in that area – it's all about budgeting and supervising.'*

### **28.2 Challenges for community anchor organisations**

Local authority interviewees also described challenges for community anchors in their performance of an advocacy role; in particular they referred to difficulties resulting from their funding relationship with local authorities and the constraints posed by lack of adequate funding for advocacy work. They also described difficulties in relation to organisational capacity and staff skills.

#### **28.2.1 The funding relationship**

The issue of the relationship between funding and advocacy was identified by several local authority interviewees as a challenge for community anchors. It was said to be: *'a tricky situation where somebody funds you...if you don't have an agreement that you can advocate on somebody else's behalf.'*

Despite the Compact this was seen to be a problem: *'I have been at local authority meetings where officers say "we pay them, they'll do what we like". It's shocking sometimes.'*

### 28.2.2 Funding difficulties

There was also some recognition on the part of local authority interviewees of the funding difficulties experienced by community anchors. Although they were considered to be doing valuable work across the cracks between specialist services, they sometimes fell between those same cracks when it came to commissioning processes: *'It might be harder for them to get funding because of the funding streams they use...because of the way we are configured...if you were a single focus organisation you would be more clear about your funding streams.'* There were also related concerns about the possibility of their multi-purpose nature implying lack of specialist quality: *'...one of the problems as a commissioner is...about the delivery of that particular service...if being multi-purpose means delivering lots of things not very well that doesn't fall into a commissioning model which is about delivering excellence. So sometimes being multi-purpose might fall against these organisations.'*

The need to address issues of resourcing was raised if the advocacy role amongst VCOs in general was to be developed: *'There is a huge contribution being given by the voluntary sector...which is not properly rewarded or acknowledged...the local authority should be doing much more...and help the community to develop their own bank of expertise and skills.'* In another area a local authority interviewee felt that one anchor organisation undertook a huge amount of advocacy from the crèche and nursery work because it was a multi-purpose organisation: *'it works with the whole community, not just...children's centres. By not specialising, people can go and have a nice meal and meet other people who are vulnerable...we can't replicate that...it's unique...when we thought we might lose it we realised how important it was.'* Nevertheless funding for that aspect of the work was difficult to secure – funding tended to be targeted, in this case, to the work of the children's centre only.

### 28.2.3 Community anchor skills and capacities

Some local authority interviewees felt that staff of community anchors were already highly skilled and active in their localities: *'they are quite effective'; 'they are very pro-active, a great networker and get a foot in every door.'* Nevertheless elsewhere local authority interviewees thought that community anchors needed to become more aware of the rapidly changing local authority structures and: *'prepare for the performance management agenda'* in order to avoid restricting themselves. Capacity issues remained important inhibitors of potential. At the extreme the view was expressed that some centres were adopting a very narrow interpretation of their role (for example undertaking simple room hire), with governance the restricting factor in some instances: *'the skills of the trustees are limited – many don't understand what they are trustees of...managers are appointed but used as caretakers.'*

In several places it was felt that the local authority should help the VCS to develop by making local authority training accessible, or through organising

shared events: *'I think the council should be pro-actively working with the sector on developing and actively helping them to develop their advocacy role...open up the workforce training that they are developing for the council officers...annual conferences on the role of the third sector jointly organised.'*

Several local authority interviewees thought that community anchors and other VCO members of partnership boards needed to take a sector-wide view and: *'become better coordinated'*, rather than advocating for their own localised constituency. It was suggested that community anchors and other organisations sometimes need to engage better and in a fairer way towards peer organisations: *'there needs to be honesty and transparency...certain organisations...get into discussions around possibilities and don't share that...It doesn't help for a united front.'*

### 28.3 Factors conducive to a productive relationship

Local authority interviewees stressed a number of factors conducive to a positive relationship between themselves and community anchor organisations. They also identified needs for learning and awareness raising that they considered would help them develop the relationship.

#### 28.3.1 The need to understand the implications of policy changes

Local authority interviewees were very much aware of the structural changes affecting local authorities and of the need to understand how policy changes affect each other's ways of working. One local authority interviewee, for example, noted how the role of local authorities has changed to one of enabler, with decreasing service delivery, while in the VCS: *'these organisations are looking at survival'*, with partnerships of crucial importance in maintaining their funding. The need to build cross-sectoral relationships was seen as increasingly important in this context.

Where there had been good relationships there were worries that changes of council status, for example to unitary status, might endanger such relations. There was an expectation of *'more partnership working'* and that strategic partnerships would be the route to manage funds for three year periods, by means of Local Area Agreements.

#### 28.3.2 Structures to facilitate dialogue

Local authority interviewees referred to the importance of structures that facilitate cross-sectoral dialogue: *'there is a need for a robust structure and facility that enables that communication to go on'*, and which do not exclude people from participating: *'the [VCS] reps don't engage...because of the terminology, the way that is structured.'*

Some local authority interviewees suggested that advocacy on behalf of the VCS should be included in Service Level Agreements. Elsewhere there was a call for a more equal role for the VCS on the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP): *'I'd like to see them having an equal say on the LSP. Being seen as a partner that is valued and trusted and that will allow the council to move out of delivery into this more strategic enabling role.'* Some felt that there was a need for: *'very localised forums - not about what goes on at the top - it's*

*about creating the space and the time so there can be real dialogue at the grassroots on health, social services, education, which is very effective.'*

### 28.3.3 Personal relationships

Others preferred to highlight the importance of good personal relationships: *'personal relationships – the better they are the more effective the working...policies don't mean much'*.

### 28.3.4 Skills development and awareness raising

A few local authority interviewees considered that staff skills and awareness needed to be addressed: *'skills development and more importantly raising awareness in the council about the role of the voluntary sector.'* One local authority interviewee stressed the importance of developing planning processes to incorporate advocacy; hence *'looking at how you ensure that the views are brought back into the planning and delivery of services and that it is always kept up and maintained...we think we do that but are we being as successful as we should?'*

Another perspective emphasised building awareness amongst local authority staff and between them and the VCS. Facilitation, training, visiting examples of good practice and 'translation' mechanisms to help the sectors understand each other were all suggested: *'the I&DeA does produce strong documentation which promotes the value of the third sector. We need to have some examples of effective working, facilitating some good joined up partnerships...taking some local authorities to see how things might be done, training...Chief Executives and members...promotion of good practice...the training of both sectors....'*

## 29. Summary

The challenges to responding to advocacy activities focused on the different structures operating in the VCS and in local authorities. Further challenges were posed by the lack of designated routes for advocacy, which tended to be scattered across various forums, commissioning processes, service delivery discussions and funding. Lack of clarity over local authority policies exacerbated this situation, while in some instances local authority staff were seen to lack the necessary skills. In some authorities officers also queried the legitimacy of VCOs in general to perform an advocacy role.

Local authority interviewees also identified challenges for community anchor organisations; these focused on funding difficulties and the funding relationship with local authorities, although lack of organisational capacity or skills also played a part.

Finally a number of factors conducive to a productive advocacy relationship were described, including the establishment of appropriate structures for cross-sectoral dialogue and the need to understand the implications of policy changes. Some interviewees identified needs for skills development and awareness raising.

## Section Four: Taking Advocacy Forward

In Section Four we describe the ways in which Study organisations wished to proceed with their advocacy work, and the issues they felt needed to be addressed in order for them to do this.

### **30. The future: what role would community anchors like to play around advocacy?**

#### **30.1 A variety of perspectives**

Some Study organisations wanted to do more than at present, either to *deepen* their work with existing groups or to *broaden* their activities to include people or issues whose needs they felt were not addressed. A second grouping of anchors, similar in size, was concerned with legitimacy issues and saw the need to connect more closely – or remain connected - to the communities in which they were based so as to provide a richer source for their advocacy activities to public bodies. A very small number of Study participants did not wish to develop the role further: *'to not go down that road.'* This was also expressed as *'advocacy has about the right prominence in the organisation'*, or *'I don't see it as a priority in the next two or three years.'*

A few Study participants from larger organisations felt that it was difficult to make definitive plans, since communities, and therefore needs, are constantly changing, necessitating a readiness to address new and emergent issues. Advocacy development was seen as: *'emergent...needs change and we need to be adaptable and we need to be flexible.'* Elsewhere it was described in the following way: *'organisations like us are complex and multifarious. It is not always possible to have an organisational position on something. If we have a strong view on something we will deal with it on a programme by programme basis...not leading a big campaign.'*

There was also a desire for innovation and trying out new ideas in a less rigid funding environment. Several Study participants suggested pilot schemes around innovation: *'enough money to experiment with. Give us room to move. Let's see what we can do'* was one suggestion. Another idea put forward was for a 'Community Leadership' pilot of around £150,000 divided amongst a dozen UK towns. Community champion organisations could be identified to act as sounding boards – focus group style – to feed back to the Office of the Third Sector who, it was suggested, *'had no knowledge of what was happening on the ground.'*

#### **30.2 Deepening and broadening the issues addressed**

Study participants highlighted a range of issues into which they felt they needed to extend their work or where they wished to deepen existing activities. One Study participant, for example, spoke of: *'specific areas around disability rights...there are always bits we can't do. We prioritise the most horrendous things.'* Others wanted to better support service users so they would be able to advocate for themselves. Other examples included building on pilot work around benefits advice: *'ensuring that those who are having financial problems are getting all the relevant benefits'* or moving into training

for employment: *'a big issue here is intergenerational unemployment.'* *'Growing diversity'* in areas not traditional destinations for Black and Minority Ethnic people challenged the services in some locations. Developing work around *'the needs of refugees and asylum seekers'* was cited, as was care of older people and *'accessible and affordable quality childcare because there is very little around.'* Others considered that *'working with families with drug and alcohol use to offer support'* was an emerging need.

For some community anchors it was not so much particular issues but rather work with small community groups that needed to be tackled so that they might engage better.

### 30.3 **Building a firmer foundation from which to advocate**

Building closer links with their communities was seen as key by some community anchors. Advocacy was described by one Study participant as: *'a very big and integral part of our work'* and consulting with the community was *'a pivotal role, to enable people to air concerns, to put recommendations forward'*. An anchor that had undertaken outreach ITC work with Asian groups had had to cut back as a result of funding reductions: *'we have had to withdraw from doing certain services and the outreach work has had to be cut back.'* The knock-on effect had been a dent in the trust and connection established with this group. In a rural area it was felt that: *'the single most important issue in the locality is the lack of a voice...to re-establish the town as a community...and to get better communication with the community.'* In a very different setting there was felt to be *'virtually no engagement'* between several local community centres and a multi-cultural centre; the community anchor wanted to break down these barriers.

### 30.4 **Awareness raising within community anchors in relation to their advocacy role**

Internal capacity building within community anchors to raise awareness about their advocacy role was considered an important need by some Study participants. It was felt that community anchors did not themselves always fully understand their own advocacy role, which they could not necessarily articulate clearly to themselves or others: *'it is about being able to capture and articulate the work that we do.'* Hence, finding out what other community anchors are doing and *'understanding the benefits of a voice function...[and]...thinking about how you can use what you hear'* was thought to be important. Furthermore it was felt that community anchors were *'not good at...singing our own praises...writing reports, developing case studies to demonstrate the quality of what we do.'*

### 30.5 **Capacity building and learning**

Study participants expressed a variety of different views in relation to capacity building, with the opinion strongly expressed by a few senior staff that training on its own was not the need: *'The last thing I would like to see is a training course put on because something needs to come out of this research! For people doing what we are doing I could identify their continual professional development...I feel I have the necessary skills...I need to keep up to date with policy.'* Training courses – even within the sector - were seen as



expensive and costly in terms of time: *'why can't they be delivered on site to the organisation?'*

Some support was, nevertheless, expressed for action learning sets around advocacy themes. There appeared to be an appetite for member-to-member exchanges and developing an understanding of advocacy activities that had worked well with other anchor organisations. Some Study participants considered that *'some skills training would probably be useful'*. A few specific 'skills gaps' were identified (although not consistently), for example, public speaking skills, developing strategy around advocacy, and understanding how central government structures worked. In addition, developing their own organisational capabilities and capacity – in terms of funding and moving to sustainability (*'generating your own income'* to enhance independence); adequate numbers of skilled staff; governance (not being *'bedevilled by detail'*) and strategic planning (beyond *'a lot of concentration on the building'*) - were, in different combinations, cited as important.

### 30.6 Promotional and lobbying work with government

Increased capacity was seen as crucial in organisations that seemed to be operating at full stretch, with Chief Executives often driven to tackling basic tasks in their building rather than the strategic or advocacy tasks they felt were their primary role. Many Study participants felt that more needed to be done to increase awareness at government level about the work and advocacy role of community anchors: *'we need to be taken legitimately and professionally for the work we do – by government and local authorities.'* It was seen as important to show that the VCS was *'effective at advocacy...and it is something the private sector never does...[and therefore] lobby for resources so that we are in a stronger position to advocate.'* Community anchors wanted there to be: *'policy lobbying reflecting the problems members are facing, especially through tendering and procurement.'* A common theme, summed up by one Study participant, was that: *'too much of our funding is insecure, and every three months we have to show evidence of the work we've been doing'*. This was thought to mitigate against the consistent ability to play an advocacy role. At a local level *'educating local councillors'* in relation to anchors' advocacy work was seen as important.

Many Study participants considered that their national infrastructure body (mostly bassac, but for a few organisations it was DTA or Community Matters) was already doing a good job and needed to do: *'more of what it is doing already'*, including *'providing a culture that understands [the community anchor's]...work.'* The ongoing need for a strong central voice that would argue for the advocacy role of community anchors was stressed by several Study participants. It was suggested that work needed to be done at central, and at times, local government level, to make the case for community anchors' advocacy work, and for the availability of funding to support it.

## 31. Summary

Developing the advocacy function was seen to be an important goal by most community anchors; some expressed a preference for extending their work to focus on additional client groups, while others wanted to broaden and deepen

existing activities. The need to build firmer foundations with local communities was seen as crucial in some areas.

Some Study organisations expressed a need to develop their own skills in this area of work, and to extend their own organisational understanding of their advocacy role. At the same time national work was seen to be necessary to promote this aspect of community anchors' work and to stress the need for more secure funding.

## PART THREE: ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

### 32. Overview

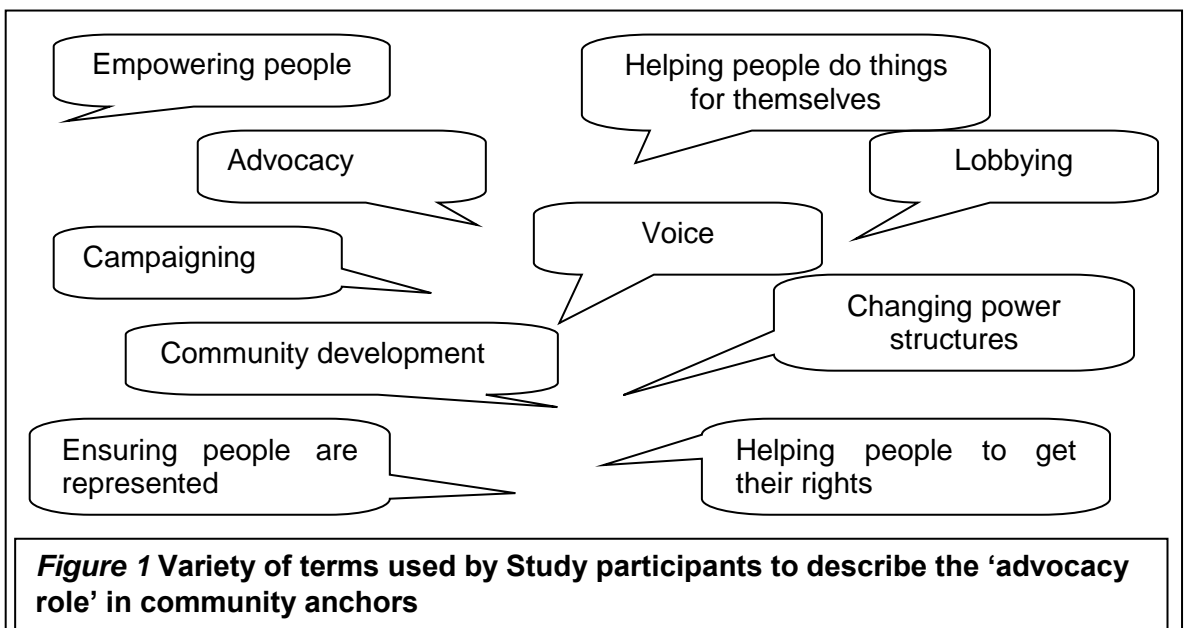
In Part Two we outlined the findings from our interviews with Study participants from community anchor organisations and local authorities. We described Study participants' experiences and thoughts about different aspects and dimensions of advocacy in community anchors. In this Part Three of the Final Report, we briefly discuss the issue of terminology before addressing the two principal themes of the Study:

- The practice of advocacy in community anchor organisations
- The relationship between local authorities and advocacy in community anchor organisations.

We conclude with some practical suggestions for responding to the issues and concerns raised by our Study participants.

### 33. Terminology

33.1 As we discussed in our Introduction, there is no clear agreement in the policy and academic literature on the use of the term 'advocacy' in relation to the work of community anchor organisations in the UK. Rather, a range of interchangeable and overlapping expressions are used for what we have termed 'the advocacy function'. This was confirmed by our Study, where we found a group of different terms and phrases (summarised in figure 1) being used to cover a wide range of 'advocacy' roles. These were not consistent, although the actual roles performed by community anchors, despite some differences in emphasis, were broadly similar. Study participants described and differentiated individual and collective forms of advocacy. Advocacy aimed at improving service delivery, and sometimes policy, was also discussed.



- 33.2 Whilst this variety and inconsistency in labels may be problematic for those trying to measure advocacy activity across community anchors in the UK, on the ground it made little difference to practitioners: they knew what activities they were doing. This suggests that any attempts (within government or the wider VCS) to agree an absolute definition of 'advocacy' should be resisted: where there are difficulties for community anchors or local authorities in relation to the practice of advocacy, these do not appear connected to terminology.

## **34. The practice of advocacy in community anchor organisations**

Whilst the variety of terminology used did not appear problematic, we did, however, find examples of Study participants struggling with conceptualising the advocacy function within community anchors. And as we noted in section 18, they often experienced challenges to the performance of an advocacy role - in relation to the lack of funding for the work, the increasing complexity of the issues they need to address, and their relationships with local authorities and other statutory bodies. At the same time some were battling with issues of organisational survival, or at least with limited capacity. Advocacy, then, is often taking place in difficult organisational circumstances, despite the prominence given to 'voice' by the current Government.

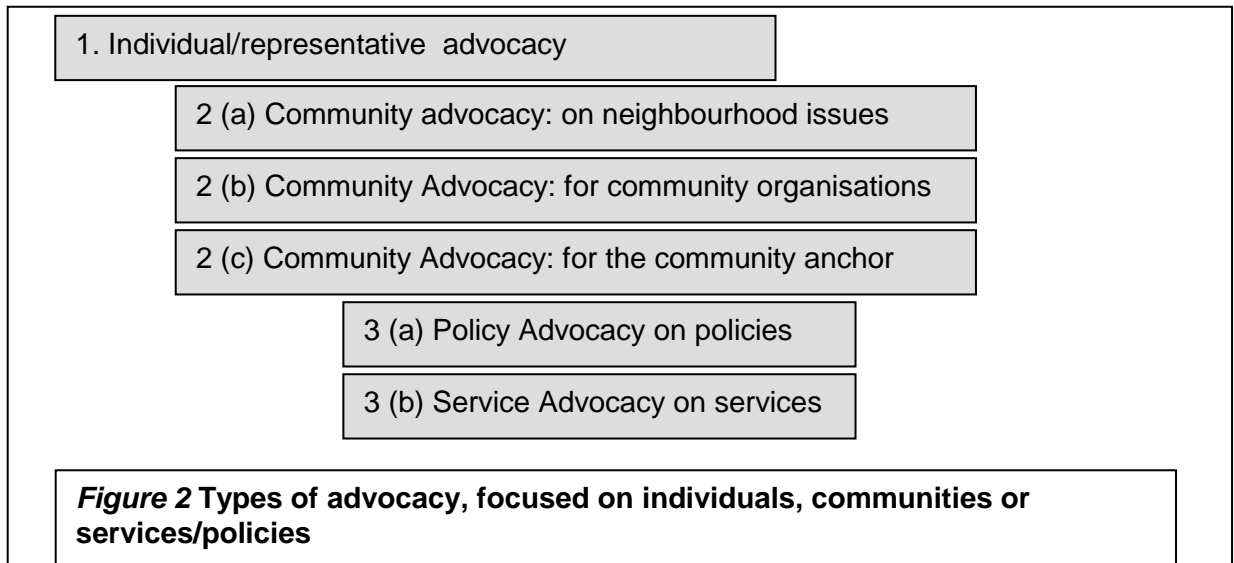
We found that while some community anchors had staff with explicit responsibilities for advocacy, more often the advocacy function was implicit, in organisational missions, activities and job roles. We found no evidence of a formalised 'advocacy profession' with significant funding streams attached to designated posts in the way that there may be in the arenas of 'quality', 'evaluation', 'training' or 'outreach'. Advocacy was, in contrast, often embedded in organisational culture, generally without dedicated funding, job roles or outcomes attached to it. This made it hard for many organisations to disentangle the role from the totality of the work they were doing.

- 34.1 Despite this, the Study findings allow us to address the key aim of this research by describing the core elements of advocacy in community organisations. We consider in turn:

- Types of advocacy in community anchors
- Location of the advocacy function in community anchors
- Methods of advocacy in community anchors
- Skills and resources required to carry out advocacy in community anchors
- A summary model of advocacy in community anchors
- The coordination of advocacy in community anchors
- The funding of advocacy in community anchors.

## **35. Types of advocacy in community anchor organisations**

Drawing on earlier research, as well as our own Study findings, several types of advocacy can be identified within community anchors, differentiated according to their subject or purpose (figure 2).

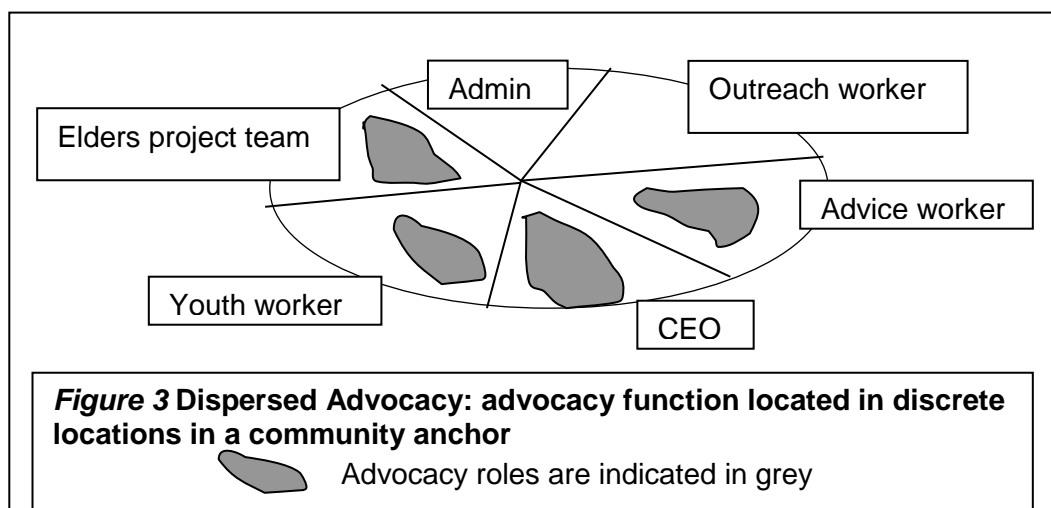


35.2 This breadth of coverage confirms that community anchors are engaged in a practice of advocacy which is consistent with their overall function as multi-purpose organisations.

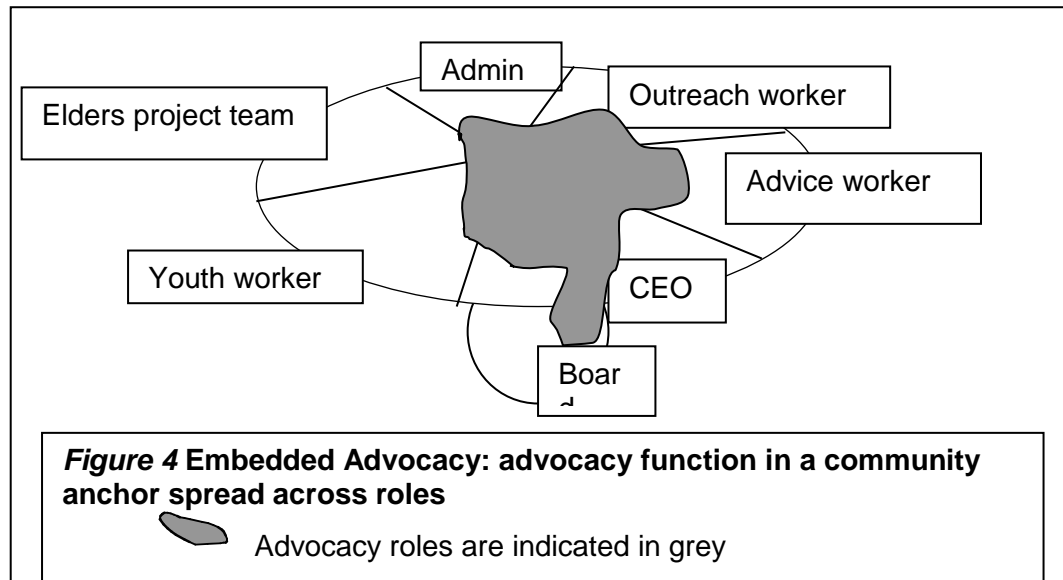
### 36. Location of the advocacy function in community anchor organisations

Our Study findings suggest that there are two distinct arrangements - 'Dispersed Advocacy' and 'Embedded Advocacy' - for the *location* of the advocacy function within community anchors.

36.1 In the '**Dispersed Advocacy**' arrangement (figure 3), the advocacy function is located within discrete parts of different roles which may not be closely linked. For example the Chief Executive may be engaged in partnerships to put forward views on how new commissioning processes may disadvantage small community groups; an advice worker may work with individual users on welfare benefits or debt issues; a youth worker or elders team may interact with the local council on issues relating to their particular group of users. Such an arrangement may be more prevalent in larger community anchors.



- 36.2 In the **Embedded Advocacy** arrangement (figure 4), the advocacy function can be seen as overlapping: similar issues (for example neighbourhood regeneration) may be addressed, at different times, or in different ways, by a range of staff, volunteers and board members.



- 36.3 In neither of these arrangements is it presumed that advocacy is one dedicated job role, but rather a *function* that is located across the community anchor.

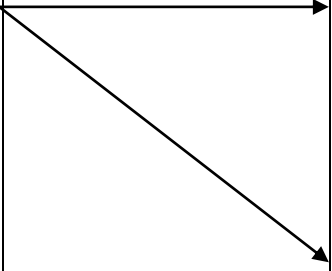

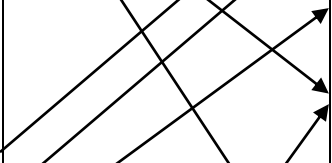
### 37. Methods of advocacy in community anchor organisations

We can also identify a range of methods employed to carry out advocacy in community anchors as well as the various benefits which the work is intended to achieve. Whilst these advocacy methods are broadly similar across the different advocacy types, we can highlight some distinctions in emphasis between individual and community advocacy.

- 37.1 First, the individual/representative type of advocacy is unusual in being one of the few instances in which we found either specialist advocacy posts or - for example in relation to work with young people, children or families - specific funding. The methods here inevitably included considerable emphasis on one to one work with individual clients and representation with, or for, them.
- 37.2 Second, community advocacy requires a greater emphasis on group skills, liaison between community organisations and negotiation with diverse stakeholders. Our findings indicate that this, in particular, is sophisticated and complicated work, requiring particular skills and a significant investment of time.
- 37.3 Third, policy and service advocacy might often emerge out of either of the first two types and is likely to require some investment of research and evaluation.
- 37.4 Despite these nuanced differences, our Study reveals that methods of advocacy in community anchors do not appear to be distinctively and

uniquely linked to any particular type of advocacy. Depending on the specific purpose of advocacy, a menu of methods might be used; thus, gaining rights for individuals in their benefits claim; seeking to improve a neighbourhood; or modifying a procurement policy might each entail a different mix of approaches. Figure 5 below offers an illustration of this.

**Figure 5: Focus, types, purpose and methods of advocacy in a community anchor organisation**

Advocacy focused on:		Types, purpose and methods of advocacy
<b>(a) Individuals</b>		<b>(i) Individualised advocacy:</b> <i>Purpose: to improve conditions for individuals</i>
Individual disadvantaged clients		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Individual representation</li> <li>• Consultations and research</li> </ul>
<b>(b) Collectivities</b>		<b>(ii) Community Advocacy:</b> <i>Purpose: to improve conditions for communities or organisations</i>
Neighbourhood or community of interest		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use of network of groups of peer organisations</li> <li>• Meeting with local communities of interest</li> <li>• Working in partnership groups/fora</li> <li>• Running media and communication strategies</li> <li>• Consulting and researching</li> <li>• Lobbying individual officials or elected members</li> <li>• Working in Local Area Agreements/Strategic Partnerships</li> <li>• Affecting commissioning/procurement processes</li> </ul>
Smaller community organisations		<b>(iii) Policy and Service Advocacy:</b> <i>Purpose: to change or influence a service or policy</i>
The Community anchor		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Delivering services</li> <li>• Meeting with users</li> </ul>
<b>(c) Services or local policy</b>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Working with commissioning officers in design and implementation of services</li> </ul>
A service or intervention		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Working in partnership groups/fora</li> </ul>
Policy (local level)		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consulting and researching</li> <li>• Lobbying individual officials or elected members</li> <li>• Working in Local Area Agreements/Strategic Partnerships</li> <li>• Affecting commissioning/procurement processes</li> </ul>

### 38. Skills and resources required to carry out advocacy in community anchor organisations

We found that the skills used in the practice of advocacy are likely to vary according to the methods being used. The same skill might be employed across all of the three broad types of advocacy.

38.1 A sample menu of skills and attributes would include:

<b>Figure 6: skills and attributes required to carry out advocacy in community anchor organisations</b>
<b>Interpersonal skills and attitudes, including:</b>
Patience Politeness Calmness Ability to be non-judgemental Ability to be non-directive Building trust with people Knowing the barriers and limits Understanding the other person's/organisation's point of view
<b>Knowledge and awareness, including:</b>
Keeping in touch with neighbourhood issues Specialist knowledge of a field Keeping up to date knowledge across a variety of fields Accessing on-line journals and information systems
<b>Technical skills and approach, including:</b>
Negotiating skills Listening and counselling skills Remaining clear and focused on the purpose Ability to prioritise and not to panic

38.2 This illustrative list confirms the breadth and complexity of advocacy in community anchors. This is highly skilled and sophisticated work; it cannot be easily reduced to an over-simplified list of competencies.

Our findings also highlight a distinction in advocacy practice that *can* be made between individual and community types:

- Advocacy on behalf of an individual, for example in order to gain a particular welfare benefit, may require listening to their circumstances, comparing their details with the appropriate rules and regulations and assisting them to voice their needs.
- Advocacy on behalf of local residents, for example in order to secure a new bus stop at a given location in a neighbourhood, is likely to require a different burden of evidence and process of engagement. This kind of community advocacy may thus entail: consulting with local people and other interest groups, collecting and aggregating views, debating and weighing the level of needs, and building coalitions to negotiate for a particular change.



Whilst *individual advocacy* may be undertaken by organisations that are not necessarily multi-purpose in nature, our Study suggests that *community advocacy* is a particular specialism of community anchors. The skills required for individual advocacy may need to be *deeper*, say in specialist knowledge; those employed in community advocacy can be seen as *broader*, with practitioners having to draw on a wide range of the skills outlined in Figure 6. In particular, our Study highlights the importance of building a knowledge and evidence base to ensure both *credibility* (for the substance of the community advocacy activity) and *legitimacy* (in the eyes of external audiences and stakeholders).

### 39. A summary model of advocacy in community anchor organisations

39.1 Taken together, the analysis set out above of the practice of advocacy in community anchors reveals a model which might be described as ‘multi-dimensional’, in keeping with the multi-purpose nature of these organisations. Aims, activities, methods, audiences, skills – all of these dimensions of advocacy often overlap to produce a multi-dimensional model of advocacy which is dynamic and peculiar to community anchors.

39.2 The ‘multi-dimensional’ model of advocacy in community anchors is illustrated in Figure 7 below which depicts a possible ‘hopscotch’ pathway, beginning with the presentation of an *individual* problem and broadening out to become a *community* issue.

**Figure 7: The multi-dimensional model of advocacy in community anchor organisations: a hopscotch approach**

(1) Advocacy focused on...	(2) The issues being advocated for (eg)	(3) The purpose/objective of advocacy (eg)	(4) The methods: advocacy activities (eg)	(5) The object/audience for the advocacy (eg)
<b>(a) Individuals</b>	Welfare benefit take-up	Gain rights or service for individuals	Individual representation	Local Authority
Individual disadvantaged clients	Individual service complaints	Improve neighbourhood environment	Consultations and research	Other statutory bodies (health, fire, police, Job Centre)
<b>(b) Collectivities</b>	Lack of services for elderly/youth	Address the needs of a community of interest or group	Meetings with local communities of interest	Local partnerships/town fora
Neighbourhood or community of interest	Dilapidated park/leisure facilities	Give a voice to excluded groups	Use of network of groups of peer organisations	Central government
Smaller community organisations	Poor transport	Draw attention to unmet need	Media and communication strategies	Local community/neighbours
The Community Anchor Organisation	BME parents neglected in professional services	Improve service provision or allocation	Partnership groups/fora	Other local voluntary and community organisations
<b>(c) Services or local policy</b>	Policy gap on children's needs	Modify procurement policy	Lobbying individual officials or elected members	National umbrella voluntary organisation
A service or intervention	Commissioning process insensitive to small groups	Change national policy	Local Area Agreements/Strategic Partnerships	
Policy (local or national level)	National policy not addressing young people		Commissioning/procurement processes	

## 40. The coordination of advocacy in community anchor organisations

- 40.1 Our Study has revealed the range and depth of advocacy of various types undertaken by community anchors. In community anchors where there is no dedicated 'advocacy' worker, we have argued that the function can be seen as integral to a way of working, operating across job and service boundaries. In such cases, however, there may be a risk of the work not having sufficient status or visibility. Consequently, the coordination of the advocacy function across different job roles and across different types of advocacy becomes highly important: for internal accountability and strategic discussions; for funding purposes; for training and recruitment purposes; to avoid the dangers of fragmentation of the role; and to increase the knowledge management and evidence gathering capacity of community anchors. Most importantly, it may offer community anchors an enhanced ability to make the kind of linkages which enable it to advocate for individuals *and* communities and for the particular policies and services needed by those groups.
- 40.2 The importance of coordination and strategy applies to both Dispersed Advocacy and Embedded Advocacy (see sections 36.1 and 36.2 above). Our Study suggests that, although both of these approaches have the potential to succeed, they do require internal coordination of the different facets of advocacy. It should also be noted that, in both arrangements, we found that a significant amount of the advocacy function resides within the Chief Executive's role. Their broad perspectives, combined with access to sound relationships with relevant partnerships, fora and external agencies, may be necessary factors in enabling community advocacy to function well. The extent to which this is formally acknowledged, either internally by the community anchor, or externally by statutory bodies, appears limited. Consideration may need to be given, therefore, to greater articulation and promotion of this aspect of the Chief Executive's role within community anchors.

## 41. The funding of advocacy in community anchor organisations

- 41.1 Although this Study has revealed that *community advocacy* is a particular feature of the work of community anchors, we found that funding is rarely available directly for this work. It seems possible that community anchors have 'accidentally' discovered and refined through practice a particular way of carrying out community advocacy. Over time, this approach - which has close links to community development approaches - has become embedded within their work. As such, it may be that it is less obviously visible to outsiders and less readily packaged for the purposes of funders. However, if community advocacy is, in effect, part of the *core* business of a community anchor, there may now be a need to consider the case for 'multi-purpose funding' in order to secure, within that package, the community advocacy function. This is not to argue necessarily for funding for specific, dedicated advocacy posts - the function may need to be *necessarily* spread across roles. It is, however, to argue for funding for the coordination and delivery of the advocacy function embedded within a multi-purpose core.

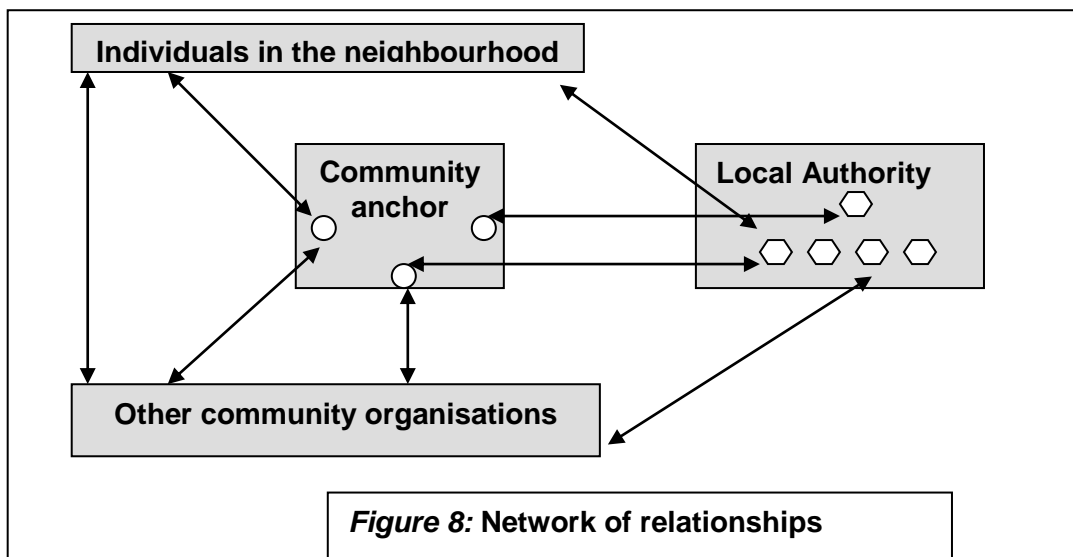
## 42. The relationship between local authorities and advocacy in community anchor organisations

42.1 Our Study confirms that the primary audience for much advocacy work by community anchors is the local authority; this may include:

- Contesting individual decisions
- Challenging the allocation of services
- Suggesting improvements to the delivery of services
- Questioning the way policy has been operationalised
- Drawing attention to unmet needs
- Playing a role in the development of local policy.

42.2 The advocacy role of community anchors is generally seen within local authorities as revolving around the importance of extending participation in the democratic process and providing routes for individuals and communities to influence local authority policies and service provision. There was widespread appreciation of the distinctive contribution of community anchors, for example the breadth of their reach to, and knowledge of, local communities. However, our Study does suggest that the depth of awareness and understanding within local authorities may depend on the quality of the relationship and the degree of trust between a given local authority officer and a Chief Executive of a community anchor.

Local authorities' level of awareness and understanding of community anchors' advocacy role may also be affected by a genuine complexity in relationships between community anchors and local authorities (illustrated in figure 8).



For local authorities there are serious concerns about both the legitimacy and efficiency of community anchors. Advocacy may be directed at a variety of locations and levels in a local authority from different parts of the same community anchor. How, then, should the local authority deal, structurally,

with these multiple voices from the community anchor, as well as from other community organisations *and* individuals? Below, we address:

- Individual relationships and the strategic configuration of advocacy in the local authority
- Responding to the challenge of representation.

### **43. Individual relationships and the strategic configuration of advocacy in the local authority**

43.1 The individual relationship between key individuals within a local authority and their counterpart(s) in community anchors emerges as critical. It provides a conduit for the implementation of different types of advocacy (see section 35 above), in particular community advocacy and policy/service advocacy. However, whilst such sound and trusting working relationships may be a necessary prerequisite to enable a good 'fit' for the advocacy work between the two parties, they may not always be sufficient.

43.2 First, there are rarely specific funding or procurement streams around advocacy activities; thus there tends to be no specific management of this work as a function within local authorities and hence rarely a single identifiable person – even as a first signposting officer. Depending on an officer's location and level in the local authority, advocacy may be discerned as taking place in commissioning or monitoring processes, within partnerships around specific issues, in fora about the organisational role of the sector or in individual meetings between officers and specific groups. Thus, relationships may be formed in a somewhat haphazard fashion; difficulties may arise if relationships are not forged at an appropriate level or in the most relevant location. Second, it is unlikely that one initial point of contact in any local authority could be identified for sole 'receipt' of advocacy activities from community anchors. Community anchors, by the nature of their work, will need to relate to a variety of departments. Local authorities in different places will be operating in different contexts, with different priorities and strategies. Third, an over-reliance on individual relationships might also make advocacy work highly vulnerable to changes in personnel.

43.3 In some localities in this Study there was evidence of a *disengaged* relationship between local authorities and community anchors. Histories of antagonism, lack of professional relationships, ineffective fora, political disagreements and issues of structures, scale and size may account for some of these ruptures. It is unlikely that local authorities and community anchors – which have distinctive and different roles – can always be in total harmony. Nevertheless where there is no kind of relationship, both parties may need help to consider where there could be areas of constructive engagement and what the stepping stones might be towards this. Joint training, awareness and capacity building work on roles and skills, and engagement of national umbrella bodies from both sectors, may assist in building or rebuilding these links.

43.4 In order to meet the new policy imperatives around their enabling role (DCLG, 2007), local authorities will increasingly need to be structured in ways that facilitate meaningful receipt, understanding and prioritisation of advocacy

approaches from community anchors. Our Study suggests, therefore, that further consideration may need to be given within local authorities to the development of appropriate, *corporate* structures that can ensure the maintenance of effective and efficient channels for advocacy. This may require the development of local, tailor-made configurations. Such a process might benefit from the kind of 'partnership improvement' process developed by the I&DeA and IVAR (Cairns et al, 2006): a joint exploration of expectations, relationships, roles, practices and structures between a local authority and a community anchor in order to form a new, strategic *modus operandi* around advocacy.

- 43.5 Within this, attention will need to be paid to the issue of impact. Local authority interviewees found it difficult to assess the impact of advocacy activities. Whilst they generally valued the role played by community anchors in helping to present the views of local communities, there was a widespread feeling that their impact could be discerned in strategic ways more than in relation to specific services. We have already discussed the need for community anchors to build an evidence base around their advocacy work (see section 18.3.5 above). They may also require support to develop a particular approach to assessing impact, for example one that does not necessarily require evidence of changing a particular policy but rather being able to ensure that a point of view has been cogently presented and argued at the appropriate level (Jenkins, 1987).

#### **44. Responding to the challenge of representation**

- 44.1 Our Study has confirmed that a key role for community anchors is to encourage and enable the voices of marginalised groups to be heard. Community anchors are often based in a particularly strong location - amidst a nexus of relations with statutory and community organisations – and able to assist and facilitate local authorities' work in connecting with local people. From the local authority perspective, however, we found that the clamour of different, and at times competing, voices often presents profound challenges, relating to the ways in which:

- The formal structures of local authorities can be receptive in dealing with multiple voices crossing several authority boundaries
- The legitimacy, strength and validity of different claims on resources can be considered and weighed
- These tensions can be managed.

- 44.2 We found widespread interest within local authorities for the VCS in general to 'speak with one voice'. However, in highlighting the distinctive features of advocacy in community anchor organisations our Study has confirmed the internally heterogeneous nature of the VCS. Thus, if local authorities are committed to a meaningful engagement with local communities and neighbourhoods, and if community anchors are accepted as appropriate conduits for that process, it may be necessary to approach the issue of representation in a different way. First, local authorities might consider developing approaches to management and liaison which are flexible enough to accommodate the diverse nature of the voluntary and community sector. Second, more attention might be paid to the need for new models of

representation that, as well as being grounded in local contexts, are also able to reconcile a local authority's desire for efficiency with the wider VCS's commitment to diversity and difference. In the case of community anchors and their community advocacy function, it may not be sufficient or appropriate to rely on existing formal structures for engagement (eg. the LSP). New, bespoke arrangements may be required.

## **45. Community anchors as advocates – the way forward**

45.1 One of the starting points for this Study was a desire on the part of both bassac and the I&DeA to consider how best to respond to the policy pressure to promote and encourage the 'voice' of the VCS, and to improve the interaction between local organisations and local authorities (DCLG, 2006, 2007; HM Treasury 2007). Alongside this, bassac was also concerned to address the findings of the 2006 study on the role of community-based organisations and their contribution to public services delivery and civil renewal (IVAR, 2006), in particular widespread evidence of community anchors being pulled away from community development practices (including advocacy) into service delivery.

45.2 Having described the practice of advocacy in community anchors, and noted the challenges facing them in the performance of this role, we conclude this Part Three of the Final Report with a brief consideration of some practical measures which might be taken to meet the challenges posed by the public policy agenda and highlighted in this Study and in our own earlier research. Building on our synthesis and analysis of the Study findings, we suggest some ways forward to develop and implement the advocacy function in community anchors. We address in turn:

- Action within community anchors
- Action within bassac
- Action within local authorities
- Action with central government.

## **46. Action within community anchors**

46.1 Within community anchors, our Study findings suggest a need to think more strategically about the advocacy function. In particular, it would seem that organisations might benefit from addressing the following:

- Improving awareness internally of the multi-faceted nature of advocacy; in part this might be achieved by building the advocacy function into reporting mechanisms to staff, volunteers, board and other stakeholders.
- Including advocacy as an explicit function within strategic plans; this might mean the extension of existing work to focus on additional client groups, or broadening and deepening existing activities. In either case, the need to build firmer foundations with local communities is likely to be crucial, in order to ensure that multiple stakeholders have access to the advocacy function

- Exploring the possible advantages of viewing the advocacy function as a programme area (to which many people in different roles may be contributing)
- Acknowledging advocacy as a core function in relevant job descriptions
- Developing systems for assessing the effectiveness of advocacy activities and outcomes
- Addressing the need for coordination of the advocacy function (possibly through funding for a role that is necessarily entangled within other activities; or through the establishment of a cross-cutting coordination team)
- Developing systems to facilitate a stronger evidence base for advocacy work.

## **47. Action within bassac**

47.1 We argued in our earlier work with community anchors that the role of bassac as a membership organisation was becoming '*ever more important as the pressures on its members increase, and as they grapple with the tension between their traditional role as servants of the community and their role as agents of government*' (IVAR, 2006: 50). This current Study confirms the importance of the contribution which bassac can make; this might include:

- Building and promoting awareness of the distinctive nature of the advocacy function of community anchors with governmental agencies, VCOs and other stakeholders
- Developing a knowledge and evidence base around the issues on which community anchors undertake advocacy work
- Coordinating the skills development of community anchor staff engaged in advocacy, for example in relation to: external relations (communication, negotiation and lobbying); community links and consultation; impact assessment
- Coordinating the development of the 'policy awareness' of community anchor staff engaged in advocacy
- Acknowledging the critical role of the Chief Executive (or equivalent) and providing appropriate support on leadership and management, possibly through innovative arrangements, such as mentoring and peer support.

## **48. Action within local authorities**

48.1 For local authorities the advocacy function in community anchors can present funding and operational problems. At a commissioning level the drive for quality services may disadvantage organisations which are non-specialists. The mix of funding services and receiving advocacy from the same organisation may create tensions for the local authority. In addition there may be multiple sites within the local authority for advocacy relationships from a community anchor (for example children's services, substance misuse, planning, and neighbourhood fora) which means the community anchor does not fit neatly into any one single box.

48.2 In sections 42 and 43 above, we suggested a number of practical measures (both for local authorities themselves and for the I&DeA in its support capacity) which have the potential to benefit the relationship between local authorities and advocacy in community anchors, including:

- Raising awareness of the multi-dimensional nature of advocacy in community anchors (and its significance to current public policy) across the whole authority
- Developing new structures to accommodate and interact with the multi-dimensional nature of advocacy in community anchors, as well as considering how best to ensure that existing structures adequately reflect the advocacy contribution of community anchors
- Laying the foundations for these structures through a shared process of 'partnership improvement'
- Supporting a transition within community anchors to evidence-gathering and impact assessment for their advocacy work
- Working with community anchors (and other VCS bodies) to develop more effective arrangements for 'representation'
- Exploring different funding options for the advocacy function in community anchors.

## **49. Action within central government**

49.1 Finally, our Study findings have some implications for the Government. In the light of the current heightened public policy interest in both 'voice' and community anchors, particular attention might be paid to:

- Understanding and acknowledging the complex nature of advocacy in community anchors, and its critical contribution to shaping key areas of public policy (eg. core themes of the Local Government White Paper)
- Recognising the different levels of investment likely to be required for community anchors to carry out an advocacy function
- Supporting the need for further research and skills development, for example in the areas of: representation; impact assessment; partnership working; community involvement and consultation.



## Appendix One: Case study organisations

In summary, the organisations that participated in the Study can be described as follows:

Organisation	Location / region	Member of
Organisation 1	London	bassac
Organisation 2	London	bassac
Organisation 3	West Midlands	bassac
Organisation 4	North-west	bassac
Organisation 5	Yorkshire and Humber	bassac
Organisation 6	Yorkshire and Humber	bassac
Organisation 7	South-west	DTA
Organisation 8	London	DTA
Organisation 9	London	DTA
Organisation 10	South-west	Community Matters
Organisation 11	London	bassac
Organisation 12	London	bassac
Organisation 13	London	bassac
Organisation 14	London	bassac
Organisation 15	London	bassac
Organisation 16	North-east	bassac
Organisation 17	West Midlands	bassac
Organisation 18	London	bassac
Organisation 19	West Midlands	bassac

The following vignettes illustrate the kind of multi-purpose organisations which took part in the Study (the names have been changed to preserve their anonymity).

### Huntsford Advice and Action Centre

*'Helping people do things for themselves'*

This multi-purpose community centre, located in a disadvantaged area of a northern city, was established 25 years ago. The make-up of the area is changing as more students move in; long-standing residents experience high levels of unemployment, sometimes over several generations of one family.

The Centre provides an extensive advice service around issues such as housing, benefits and debt. It also offers services for children and young people, both group activities and individual support.

Advocacy is an integral part of the Centre's work; staff advocate on behalf of individual users of the advice service and for children and families. This work includes liaising with statutory bodies, for example accompanying families to school meetings or case conferences, or trying to ensure that people get access to state benefits or housing, or helping them deal with financial institutions. Staff and trustees would not, however, generally use the work 'advocacy'; *'we might talk about making*

*sure the community is represented, empowering people, helping people do things for themselves’.*

This work is carried out mainly by paid staff in line with their areas of responsibility, for example advice, or children’s and youth work. The Chief Executive and Deputy are involved in a wide range of local and city-wide forums; this provides an opportunity to advocate on behalf of the needs of the neighbourhood. Two of the Centre’s trustees are local councillors; the close relationship with them and the area’s Member of Parliament provides a further means of putting forward ideas about local needs.

Advocacy work is not specifically funded; while seen as essential it is carried out as a by-product of other areas of work funded from different local and national sources. Staff would like to develop the advocacy work further, for example by working more with groups of residents to influence change in the area, but funding conditions act as a major constraint. In particular the fact that funders tend to focus on targets and quantitative measures of assessment limits the possibility of staff acting in more of a community development role.

### **Uptown Nexus**

*‘We can provide a whole raft of services and support as a multi-purpose organisation’*

Uptown Nexus was founded towards the end of the nineteenth century in one of the major cities in England. There is a large minority ethnic population and high poverty indicators in the inner-city areas. Racial tensions over the last few years have attracted national attention.

Uptown Nexus undertakes a wide range of activities; some are very localised while others are city-wide. These include debt and financial advice, after-school clubs and youth work (particularly focusing on gun crime). It is also setting up an innovative centre for older people and is active on childcare and with training and employment issues. Forums, neighbourhood facilitation and training events have been established to enable minority ethnic communities to express their views to each other and professionals. It runs a support service for street workers and prostitutes. Staff also support smaller community organisations to establish themselves.

A central goal is to provide services *and* to advocate for the needs of individuals and local communities. To this end the organisation is involved in a raft of partnerships, for example on social cohesion, financial inclusion, ageing, homelessness, and childcare. The multi-purpose function of Uptown Nexus is important because staff are able to advocate across the departmental boundaries of statutory organisations: *‘We can provide a whole raft of services and support as a multi-purpose organisation’*. They can point out links between, say health, housing and childcare, and articulate the accumulated stories of people in need direct to policy makers.

Words used to describe the organisation’s advocacy work for individuals and communities include *‘helping people’* and *‘giving advice’* as well as *‘advocacy.’* The strategic objectives specifically refer to lobbying and influencing local, regional and national policy. All staff play a role in undertaking this work, but the senior staff and in particular the Chief Executive play the central part in the forums.

The annual income is around £1m, but the advocacy work, which occupies at least 10% of the Chief Executive's time, is rarely funded. Most income is tightly targeted to direct service delivery through contracts plus some trust income. The local authority, while involving the organisation readily in specific and unpaid partnership work where it needs its expertise, is felt overall to have a disinterested and formal attitude at a strategic level and to be focused on precise outputs and outcomes.

### **Speak Up Centre**

#### *'It's multi-layered'*

This multi-purpose community centre, located in an inner city area, was established by local residents twenty years ago in order to respond to their educational, recreational and social needs. It incorporates an adventure playground and provides a range of youth and family oriented services as well various inter-generational projects.

The Centre's advocacy activities are '*multi-layered*', and include strategic level advocacy which involves participating in various local, sub-regional and regional strategic partnerships engaging with a broad range of issues. In addition, individual level advocacy is carried out on behalf of service users by, for example, attending case conferences. Speak Up Centre also researches and gathers information on behalf of the community and feeds this knowledge into appropriate structures.

Speak Up Centre is very much rooted within the community and sees itself as a voice for local people, working on their behalf to ensure that the views of community members are heard at the most appropriate level, their needs and concerns are recognised and addressed and services really do meet local needs.

The number of staff members involved in the Centre's advocacy work is increasing; their area of focus largely depends on their area of expertise. Board members – typically local residents – and volunteers also play an important role either because of their expertise as service users or because of their extensive local knowledge.

The work is funded from the core costs of the organisation and is seen to be an essential and integral function; there is no funding specifically allotted to 'advocacy'.

A recent restructuring of the local authority has created greater 'space' for advocacy and has increased the number of opportunities for the Centre to engage with the local authority.

Involvement in relevant networks (whether local, regional or national) provides a range of critical resources for Speak Up Centre's advocacy work. It does, however, face constraints in the shape of lack of organisational capacity, time and energy.

## Centre 4 Urban Young People

*'We see ourselves as advocates of young people'*

The Centre 4 Urban Young People was established in the 1980s as an inner city oasis to provide opportunities for children and young people, through play, leisure and a wide range of recreational activities.

Advocacy work is generally undertaken in collaboration with the local Children's and Young People's Voluntary Sector Forum, which provides opportunities to influence local authority decision-making and service provision.

Advocacy is an integral part of the Centre's ethos which is about representing children's and young people's views and providing services to them: *'we see ourselves as advocates of young people, on their behalf, on their rights to play, or to have somewhere to go'*. Advocacy tends to be reactive, in response to changes in the environment, rather than proactive as a way of influencing or creating change. For instance, in recent years a major – and successful - campaign was mounted to oppose threatened cuts to grants from a major funder.

Both the senior managers and the board get involved with advocacy, although the senior staff are *'at the coal face, dealing with the nitty-gritty'*. When appropriate service users are invited to participate.

The local authority has established a range of structures to work with the VCS and facilitate its advocacy role. It provides resources to develop the sector's broader structural and strategic capacities. It gives the local CVS funding to host thematic voluntary sector forums, including the Children and Young People's Forum. This funding supports a dedicated worker, who has automatic representation at various strategic forums.

There is no specific funding available for advocacy; the costs of such activities are taken from project funding. The Centre is *'in a constant battle to get enough money to operate. Any money raised goes towards service provision'*. Their advocacy activities are further undermined by the general apathy and lack of support from the community in which the Centre is situated.

## Dynamo Village Centre

*'Listening to the views of the community and feeding these through to other bodies'*

The Dynamo Village Centre was formed just over 50 years ago in a small town with a population of under 20,000, located in a rural area. It is based in a building which is several hundred years old and in need of some repair. It operates as a walk-in facility to enable contact between people: there is a café, notice boards, training and function rooms, but much work takes place outside the building and in neighbouring villages. The Centre is, for example, actively engaged in town planning, including the regeneration of an old industrial site. In addition they are giving children a voice in local authority plans and seeking to create safe spaces for young people to meet. There is work to address the needs of the 55+ age group as well as considering health issues, crime reduction, and supporting the business planning of other smaller groups and businesses.

The Centre uses a variety of means such as focus groups, drama techniques, residents' forums, newsletters, listening to individuals, festivals, to gather intelligence on the needs of local people and channel these into more formal partnership working with statutory organisations. There is also representative work on the needs of the voluntary sector in relation to the local authority. As an organisation they tend to sum up their advocacy activities in terms of '*giving a voice*', '*listening to the views of the community and feeding these through to other bodies*.'

The bulk of the advocacy work is undertaken by the Chief Executive, with two board members involved in some committee work and forums. There is little direct funding for this work. The Centre's total income is just over £160,000 per annum. Funding comes mainly from the local authority for projects which meet current policy priorities, plus some other contract income. There is a close relationship with the local authority, with regular telephone contact. The local authority views advocacy as a central part of the organisation's work.

### **Ask Right Here Centre**

*'It's about empowerment'*

The Ask Right Here Centre, established about 25 years ago, is located in a very disadvantaged, busy and congested corner of a large city. A New Deal for Communities programme currently operates in the immediate locality.

The Centre's work focuses on individual residents; staff provide an extensive advice service which aims to help people deal with problems relating to housing, benefits, employment, debt and access to statutory services. The Centre incorporates a project geared to assisting women who have experienced domestic violence, and work with refugees and asylum seekers.

Staff spend a lot of time working with people to assist them with identifying solutions to problems and making choices about their situations. They also help people negotiate relationships with statutory services, for example by writing letters on their behalf, liaising by telephone with public bodies or accompanying people to meetings.

Advocacy is considered a fundamental part of the Centre's work; staff see it as being about empowering people: '*it goes along with trying to change the balance of power, so it's a major element, but not necessarily described as advocacy*'; '*it's about empowerment, a way of working with people that will ensure they are provided with the knowledge to make decisions*'.

Advocacy work is carried out with individuals by paid staff according to their particular work areas; a community development worker does some work with local groups and networks.

The work with women who have experienced domestic violence is specifically funded by a charitable foundation; the advice work is funded by the local authority, and '*we're doing it in a way that incorporates a strong element of advocacy, but there is no specific funding for advocacy*'.

Staff would like to extend their advocacy role, for example by drawing on the experience of client groups and using it as evidence to statutory bodies. They are, however, severely restricted in their ability to perform such a role because of lack of staff, the constraints of short-term project funding and the demands of service provision.

### **Red Brick Centre**

*'Recognising that some people may need help in accessing the system and championing them in this'*

The Red Brick Centre was founded eighty years ago in an area with high levels of deprivation, *'to provide opportunities for local people to develop themselves and their communities'*. It is a multi-cultural inner city area housing a considerable number of refugees and asylum seekers.

Its advocacy function works in four ways:

- dealing with practical issues facing service users, representing them, and offering signposting. This is done partly via community workers' generic work and also through work with groups of clients
- lobbying to ensure that the needs of these groups are met by government initiatives
- providing a 'community voice' through general interaction with the community
- advocating, in a limited way, on behalf of the local voluntary sector.

Advocacy is described as being about *'recognising that some people may need help in accessing the system and championing them in this'*. A major aspect of the Centre's work involves representing and promoting the needs of victims of domestic violence, refugees, young people and people with learning disabilities to other agencies. Some of this is done in conjunction with other VCOs.

The individual advocacy work is undertaken by support managers and community workers. The Director pursues an advocacy role on behalf of the organisation together with policy issues affecting particular client groups and the community as a whole.

The majority of the Centre's funding comes from local authority contracts. There is no funding specifically earmarked for 'advocacy', despite it being integral to their work. Neighbourhood Renewal funding is due to end; there is anxiety about what will replace it. The main factor restricting the performance of advocacy work is instability of funding and lack of funding for core costs. The Director feels that a lot of energy is taken up with just trying to survive.

Relationships with the local authority and with other VCOs are good, and there is close contact with other community anchor organisations.

## **BME Voice Centre**

### *'A scrutiny and policy development role'*

This small Black and Minority Ethnic led multi-purpose community centre was established to lobby for the provision of culturally appropriate services for the BME population of a market town.

Much of the Centre's advocacy work is undertaken at a senior strategic level with key public agencies such as the local authority and the Primary Care Trust. It includes attending a range of forum and partnership meetings and service development meetings and providing '*a scrutiny and policy development role*'. Individual level advocacy is also undertaken with members of the community, including, for example, advocating on behalf of young people experiencing problems at school. Community consultation is also a key element of the Centre's work.

The advocacy work is intended to influence the way in which services are designed, developed and delivered, to ensure that they are appropriate to the needs of the local BME population. It is also intended to stimulate the communities on whose behalf it works to be proactive and engage more with issues affecting them.

The Centre is very small and so paid staff, board members, volunteers and service users are all involved in advocacy activities.

Whilst local public agencies depend to a great extent on the work carried out by the Centre, since it enables them to fulfil their duty to provide services relevant to all sections of the community, this dependence is not reflected in their level of financial support. The Centre does not receive any local money for its advocacy work, which is severely constrained by lack of human and financial resources.

The main resource that the Centre can fall back on is its dedication to ensuring that local BME communities receive the best possible public services.

## **City Resource Base**

### *'Trying to find practical ways forward'*

The City Resource Base is an extensive community-based regeneration project, established in the early 1970s to develop an area of land in a large city for community use. The area is extremely diverse, for example in the racial make-up of its residents and in the levels of wealth and poverty experienced.

The organisation's primary focus is on developing services and programmes for community benefit. It incorporates a range of leisure and business units, and includes sports and educational facilities. Staff support a number of small community organisations, including offering start-up office space.

Staff and trustees do not see advocacy, either on behalf of individuals or community groups, as the primary thrust of their work: '*the organisation does not have a pre-defined role in relation to advocacy*'. The performance of an advocacy role is very much an addition to the provision of services; there are no dedicated funds to support it. Staff do, however, act in this capacity in the sense of talking to local authority

representatives about local needs or gaps in services. One staff member in particular has a brief for community development, and works extensively to support local community groups, help develop a service or secure funding.

Staff and trustees would not generally use the word 'advocacy' to describe their role, preferring to talk more, for example, about '*trying to find practical ways forward and find resources to enable people to develop the services they want to have*'. This is usually done in conjunction with community groups.

The board includes some local councillors; this is seen as a positive link. The small size of the borough, combined with its political stability, enables VCOs, council officials and elected members to get to know each other.

City Resource Base's ability to perform a more extensive community development role is limited by its focus on service provision, the fact that funding for such work is limited, and hence the availability of staff time is restricted. The need to fit in with government strategies on work in communities is also felt to constrain organisational freedom.

### **Borough Action Base**

*'Representing the views of individuals or communities to large statutory authorities who otherwise might not listen to those groups'*

The Borough Action Base, established in the late nineteenth century, is located in a deprived inner city area. It manages two large community centres from which a range of community activities take place, structured around three themes: Community Development, Lifelong Learning and Healthy Living.

The Action Base offers a variety of advocacy services to individuals and organisations, including welfare rights advice and guidance. It also provides a focal point to bring together members of the local community to address key issues. The Action Base offers support to - and houses - numerous smaller community groups. On a broader level, it is involved in a sub-regional campaigning coalition and more local networks and consortia.

Advocacy is about '*clearly representing the views of individuals or communities to large statutory authorities who otherwise might not listen to those groups*'. The work is not generally recognised purely as 'advocacy': '*it's a means to an end. It's not what we do, it's how we do it*'. It is viewed as integral to the Action Base's ethos of social inclusion.

Advocacy is undertaken by the most experienced staff who tend to focus on their area of expertise. General advice and signposting is provided by frontline staff. There is an expectation that all staff / volunteers will advocate on behalf of the Action Base's client groups.

The Borough Action Base has substantial unrestricted funding which funds its community advocacy function. It also receives funding to provide capacity building support to community based organisations, which enables it to support them to advocate more effectively on behalf of their communities.



The extensive community development skills of staff, including their shrewd understanding of local systems and power structures, facilitate effective advocacy work. However, despite their access to unrestricted funding, insufficient funding is still a barrier. Other obstacles include the local political landscape and the lack of understanding of local politicians who '*in practice, don't like the community advocacy role*'. Allied to this was a fear of '*biting the hand that feeds you*'.

### **North Town Settlement**

*'Acting on behalf of residents and young people and other voluntary sector organisations'*

The North Town Settlement, which is located on the edge of a northern city (a New Deal for Communities area), was founded in the late nineteenth century to address the impact of poverty and deprivation on the community. It overcame a recent crisis which threatened its survival.

Its 'voice and engagement' activities include representing individuals (mainly children and young people) to schools / education authorities, employment services, police, youth offending teams / probation service, at court etc and lobbying for resources and services to meet the needs of this group. They also try to make a case for the need for a well-represented and well-resourced role for the local voluntary sector, particularly in relation to the commissioning process.

The Director describes their 'advocacy' role as '*Acting on behalf of residents and young people and other voluntary sector organisations*'.

The advocacy function is undertaken by paid workers and volunteers, who provide large-scale practical support. The function of addressing wider policy issues is undertaken by paid staff, especially the Director. Board members play a key role in supporting the staff and sometimes in lobbying local councillors.

Although the Director views advocacy as fundamental to the Settlement's work, it is not specifically funded –'*it's expected, on top of everything*'. In practice it is financed through the funding available for other services and activities.

Relations with the local authority are tense, particularly in connection with the status of the local commissioning process.

Barriers to the performance of advocacy work include:

- instability of funding and pressure to concentrate on 'funding-led' services
- tension and confusion with the local authority on commissioning; likewise with the NDC
- a weak local voluntary sector in terms of lobbying
- lack of co-operation from the education authorities and schools.

## **Bridgetown Action Centre**

*'We're advocates for the benefit of the community in this town'*

The Bridgetown Action Centre grew from a young people's outreach project started by a church group; it is now located in a converted public house in a town with a population of under 20,000 people. Public services, for example a tertiary college, and major businesses are retreating from the town to larger locations.

The Centre acts as an increasingly important hub for local activities. These include: a drop-in café, debt counselling, needle exchange, substance misuse work, informal youth activities, sexual health advice, IT and training facilities, employment and basic skills training, language and computer skills for Asian people, support for children in transition to senior school. The Centre acts as a shelter for newer community groups, and has tried to retain or stimulate local small businesses and public services of benefit to the community.

Advocacy is understood as supporting individuals as well as community advocacy: *'we're advocates for the benefit of the community in this town'*. The latter role makes use of the knowledge and community links gained from the Centre's multi-purpose role to affect changes in services and provision. The principle is to be involved in everything where the town needs a strong voice. They are thus centrally involved in a clutch of partnership bodies and forums including: a town-wide regeneration programme, Local Strategic Partnership, Connexions, police and youth offending forums, training and learner provider forum, neighbourhood learning group, youth umbrella group, BME group and voluntary sector forums.

The Centre employs a full-time Chief Executive plus various part-time or sessional staff and volunteers. Short-term project income and (increasingly) contracts from the statutory sector comprise the bulk of the annual income of around £250,000. Advocacy plays some part in the roles of all those engaged in the Centre, from volunteers in the café through to administrative staff, but the Chief Executive plays a crucial role. There has been good contact with the local authority, although this has often been with officers on special programme funding which is coming to an end.

The main barrier to developing the advocacy work has been lack of resources; in effect the advocacy work is not funded and money to support it has to be squeezed out of highly targeted and short-term programme funds aimed at service delivery. Volunteers continue to play an active role in the Centre, but it has been hard to recruit willing and skilled people to membership of the Centre's board.

## **All Village Voice Agency**

*'Voice of the community'*

The All Village Voice Agency, now around 10 years old, is based in a small town in a rural cluster with eight other villages housing a total population of 16,000 people. It developed from Single Regeneration Budget funding for community development work in the area. Social cohesion was an important driver in a community seen as divided because of the presence of one dominant employer. As an independent multi-purpose agency the Centre is able to link issues together without being seen as pressing for the interests of either the local authority or the dominant employer.

The terms used to describe their advocacy role include '*voice of the community*' - comprising lobbying, campaigning and facilitating new or improved services. The All Village Voice Agency finds it hard to disentangle advocacy from service delivery work and engagement in partnerships across a spectrum of initiatives – some highly local and some strategic. Staff and board members are seen as involved in advocacy at whatever level they are working. A community radio project is engaged in training young people and giving residents a voice on local issues. An initiative to create workspace units led to county council involvement and the creation of local employment opportunities. The setting up of quarterly village forums attended by 40 – 50 residents has brought together key statutory players and led to changes in service provision. The development of a 10 – 25 year community plan, an initiative led by the All Village Voice Agency, now involves local authority, key employers and community groups. Themed sub-groups focus on issues from transport to housing and employment. In the long term the work will revitalise the villages' housing, shopping, transport and employment capacity.

The All Village Voice Agency employs fewer than 20 staff within a budget of around £350,000. Although the advocacy function is seen as a central part of the organisation's work, it receives little support from statutory agencies. The lack of available funding has been tackled in the short-term by bringing the community development roles into the core funding component of the organisation, which includes the Chief Executive's post. This core is funded by the income generated from the employment agency established by the Agency.

Some local authority officers have been very supportive and are centrally involved in the community planning, whilst others have not understood the role. Local government reorganisation may affect some of the good relationships that have been built up. The village forums were initially felt to be a threat by local councillors, but are now seen as informing and complementing their role.

### **North Bank Community Hub**

*'It's the communities' community centre'*

The North Bank Community Hub, established twenty years ago, is a thriving multi-purpose community hub at the heart of much social, economic and cultural regeneration in an extremely impoverished inner city area characterised by high ethnic and cultural diversity and large numbers of refugees and asylum seekers. '*It's the communities' community centre. It houses many community groups and refugee community organisations.*'

The Hub undertakes a range of advocacy activities, including strategic level advocacy, for example participation in local, sub-regional and regional partnerships and forums in order to shape the policy and funding environment to make it more receptive to service users. There is also ongoing liaison with community organisations and businesses located in the Hub to determine emerging issues and, where necessary, play a brokerage role with key agencies to identify appropriate responses. Related to this is the ongoing work of community capacity building to equip local communities with the skills to advocate more effectively for themselves.

As well as advocating directly on behalf of disadvantaged Black and Minority Ethnic communities and the community organisations based in its premises, the Hub

identifies, through community intelligence, emerging trends and advocates at a strategic level for appropriate responses.

All members of the Hub – staff, board members, volunteers and service users - are involved in advocacy, which is viewed as a crucial and integral element of every role: *'We're all advocates. It works right through the organisation'*. People will tend to advocate based on their area of skill or expertise.

Although the Hub has received funding to provide capacity building (which can be considered as including advocacy and improving the quality of advocacy work) it generally has to use funding allocated for other programme areas to subsidise its advocacy work.

The local authority supports the advocacy work through its recognition of the expertise the Hub brings to key local issues. The depth of local knowledge, experience and expertise are major strengths. Inadequate resources, however, mean that it cannot operate on a *'level playing field'* with the public agencies with which it works.

### **Parent Action Place**

*'Supporting parents and carers to get the right services at the right time'*

This specialist community centre provides services offering disabled people and their families access to everyday and fulfilling life experiences. Although located in a deprived urban environment, they occupy a considerable amount of land, including a specially commissioned adventure playground.

Parent Action Place offers a range of advocacy activities including individual advocacy on behalf of children and families, for example attending educational reviews. At a strategic level, Parent Action Place is represented on forums connected to the Local Strategic Partnership. In recognition of their expertise around inclusive play, they have been commissioned to conduct borough wide research into accessible provision. Meaningful participation and user engagement are core elements of their activities.

Advocacy is integral to the organisation's ethos, in that it was established to provide adults and children, marginalised through disability, with a voice to demand the development of appropriate services.

All staff are expected to advocate; it is a condition of service that each staff member attends a local forum. Staff teams tend to advocate about their area of expertise. Volunteers and service users are also very involved. Young learning disabled service users have their own forum, used to advocate for improved provision.

The local authority provides some dedicated core funding for the Chief Executive's salary. They also commission Parent Action Place to deliver an advocacy service which it is legally required to offer. More generic family support work is Trust funded.

The local authority recognises the critical role played by Parent Action Place in *'actually supporting parents and carers to get the right services at the right time for them and the children / young people'*.

Despite the availability of adequate funding, and its acknowledged expertise in facilitating the participation of individuals with a range of disabilities, Parent Action Place faces two major constraints to its advocacy work in the shape of public attitudes to disability rights and the limited number of individuals with the skills to facilitate meaningful user participation.

### **Eastside Voice Centre**

*'A voice for users and the local community'*

This very long-established community anchor organisation provides an extensive range of services to the area's residents. These include a professional advocacy service for individuals and groups; the Centre also has a 'community voice' role which is concerned with capturing the concerns of both individual service users and the wider local community and trying to address them, for example by raising issues with policy makers. *'It is one of our strategic aims to be a voice for users and the local community'*. A lot of this 'voice' work involves making connections between different areas of need, or between different organisations and structures: *'trying to make connections, for example between the local authority or the PCT and smaller organisations'*. Staff feel that being a multi-purpose organisation facilitates their ability to make these links.

As well as raising concerns with policy makers, staff also try to encourage local people to make their own voices heard. In one part of the borough, for example, staff involvement facilitated the development of a community forum. Staff have done some work with statutory services to try to make them more accessible. They also work with smaller community groups, including helping them access funding, information and partnerships.

Apart from some time-limited Neighbourhood Renewal Fund money, Eastside Voice Centre's 'voice' work has no dedicated funding. Funding (from a wide variety of sources) is very much tied to service outputs: *'we're not resourced to do community voice or user voice'*.

Eastside Voice Centre would like to develop its voice function further, within a more formal structure. This might include the development of a stronger evidence base for the needs and concerns of local people, and a clearer route for conveying that evidence to policy makers.

### **The People's Place**

*'We want to empower people; 'advocacy' sounds patronising'*

This advice centre, which has an extremely strong sense of local identity, is based in a small former mining town. It was set up around twenty years ago by local people to provide benefits advice and other financial support such as a credit union to community members, in the face of major upheaval in the local economy. The People's Place was initially funded through Trusts; after ten years the local authority took over the staff and services. The People's Place subsequently acquired what it described as *'independence'* through European funding, which enabled them to fund

their running costs and purchase a community building. Recently all the funding sources expired and the People's Place is now staffed solely by volunteers, most of whom are also board members. Some new sources of funding have now been secured which will enable the trustees to build up the organisation again.

The organisation's 'voice and engagement' activities include representing individuals at DSS tribunals; with creditors; with employment services; police, social services etc. It provides comprehensive information on welfare benefits and a range of facilities to local groups. It also offers a base for several other client-based projects.

The People's Place does not describe its work as 'advocacy' but 'empowerment' - *'We want to empower people; 'advocacy' sounds patronising'*. Its aim is to clarify the rights of individuals and groups and strengthen their access to services. This function has been undertaken by paid staff who have been 'advisers' (when the organisation had paid staff) and more recently primarily by volunteers / board members.

The main barriers to the People's Place's advocacy work are considered to be the absence of stable funding to enable them to plan strategically (and develop board composition and skills) and lack of a coherent and strong local voluntary sector with which to lobby.

The organisation's relationship with the local authority has always been very tense and perceived as a threat to the community's independence. The People's Place strongly supports bassac, but otherwise views the national voluntary sector infrastructure as irrelevant to its needs.

### **Towers Resident Action Centre**

*'It's not doing 'to' our service users but 'with''*

This multi-purpose community centre is located in a market town which has pockets of poverty and social exclusion that the Centre aims to address. It offers a range of services including affordable childcare and healthy living projects. It is exploring the potential for supporting smaller community organisations.

Until recently, much of the Centre's advocacy work was focused on fundraising for the Centre itself; since funding has been secured, work has been undertaken to develop a consortium of local agencies to take a broader view of clients' needs and ways of meeting them.

Advocacy is understood as a means of enabling and empowering marginalised communities to advocate for their own needs: *'We are becoming a resident focused and led organisation. At the end of the day it's not doing 'to' our service users but 'with'.'*

Formal advocacy is typically undertaken by senior-level staff specialising in particular areas, but advocacy *'is an ethos throughout the whole organisation and all staff have a responsibility.'* Advocacy is also undertaken by service users who offer each other peer support.

Towers Resident Action Centre's advocacy work does not have discrete funding, although its service level agreement includes provision of support services for the

community. Lack of resources, both financial and physical, restricts the advocacy work.

The extensive local knowledge and experience of the staff team are seen as major assets. The Centre also has the support of an effective local CVS and a wider consortium of local agencies. The consortium is seeking funding for a development worker with a specific remit for advocacy.

The local authority is perceived as very supportive: *'the way we work together with social services is very reassuring. They are quite positive really'*.

The strong relationship between local agencies, the CVS and the local authority has led to a deeper understanding and appreciation of the advocacy role played by this Centre, enabling all parties to recognise that through cooperation and engagement, each of their strategic priorities can be met and the community well served.

### **Cityside Action**

#### *'Giving a voice to the needs of the whole community'*

This long-established organisation, based in a large city, is renowned for helping to pioneer unemployment insurance, nursery schools, meals on wheels and Timebanking. The building houses services for many groups, including a nursery; Travellers' support service; a Timebank to match the skills of people with disabilities or mental health issues to volunteering opportunities, and an Asylum Seekers Project. Other activities include a Pensioner's lunch club, music school, police consultative group, ESOL group, Sure Start play groups, Church group, Connexions / youth development, group for children with disabilities and a keep fit class.

Cityside Action's advocacy work focuses on representing individuals to statutory and local services, especially in relation to benefit claims, access to services, education, housing and immigration issues. Users include members of particular groups for whom services are provided, including Travellers; people with a history of mental health or disability issues; refugees; but also other local people.

Advocacy is understood as *'that which involves representing clients individually with agencies'*, but also *'giving a voice to the needs of the whole community'*. Cityside Action's role in advocating for the needs of specific client groups in policy work, for the organisation itself or for the local voluntary sector has been limited because of lack of resources.

Advocacy work is undertaken by project workers, supported by volunteers. The Director and some trustees advocate on essential issues for the organisation itself, for example in relation to premises or funding.

The organisation's work is funded mainly by the local authority, Sure Start and Neighbourhood Renewal plus a small annual grant from one particular Trust and sporadic pots of money from other Trusts and the Big Lottery.

The main barrier to the performance of advocacy work is considered to be lack of core funding and continuity of funding. Relationships with the local authority are

good, and also with local voluntary organisations – although there is little time to attend meetings.



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