

Quality in Infrastructure Support Services (QuISS) (2009-13)

Evaluation Summary (July 2013)

Quality in Infrastructure Support Services (QuISS) has provided outstanding support to Voluntary and Community Organisations (VCOs) in Middlesbrough, Stockton-on-Tees and Redcar & Cleveland.

July 2009 to June 2013

An evaluation of the 4-year project was undertaken to review the outcomes, successes, challenges and any areas for improvement. Headline outcomes are:

2844

• Instances of specialist support to VCOs

771

• Individual VCOs supported by QuISS

1394

• People attended events and training

98%

• Said that the support was 'good' or 'excellent'

Meeting need in Tees Valley

Tees Valley is characterised by high levels of multiple deprivation in urban centres and rural pockets and concentrations of people with complex needs, as well as rural communities spread across a large area with little access to services. Voluntary and Community Organisations are an important source of support, development and advocacy for a diverse range of communities and interests in the area.

Expectations from Government and the public sector are that VCOs can and should drive the self-help culture. However, increasing levels of need in communities coupled with decreasing levels of resources available to tackle problems, means additional capacity building support is required for these VCOs.

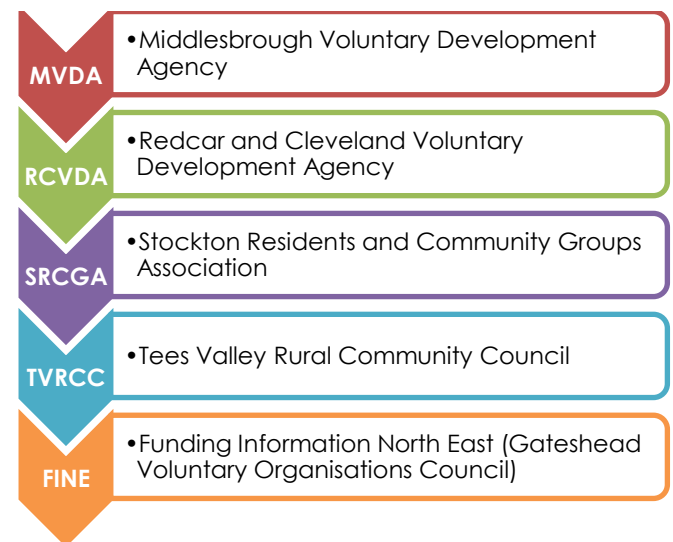


Delivering quality...
achieving impact
in the Tees Valley

Boosting infrastructure support

Local Support and Development Organisations (LSDOs) have worked for years in the different local authority areas and rural areas in Tees Valley to provide advice and support to VCOs. Four LSDOs and a specialist funding advice project recognised increasing demand from communities and VCO needs for a lot more technical support around funding, sustainability, governance and other issues. They secured resources from Big Lottery Fund and began the 3-year QuISS project in July 2009. It was so successful, that additional funding was awarded for a further year.

Partners

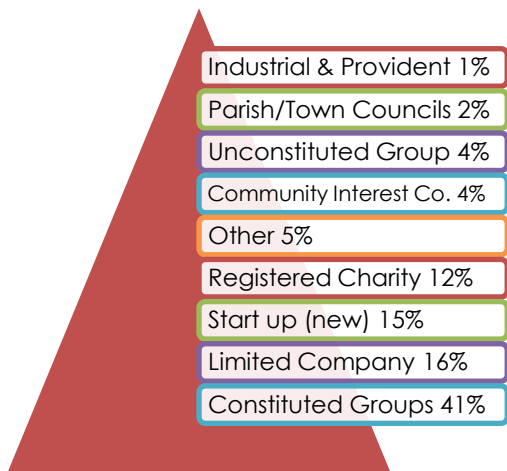


Providing specialist development support and advice, MVDA, SRCGA and RCVDA work with VCOs within their respective local authority areas and TVRCC with VCOs in rural areas. FINE provides general, as well as Tees Valley specific, funding information and support.



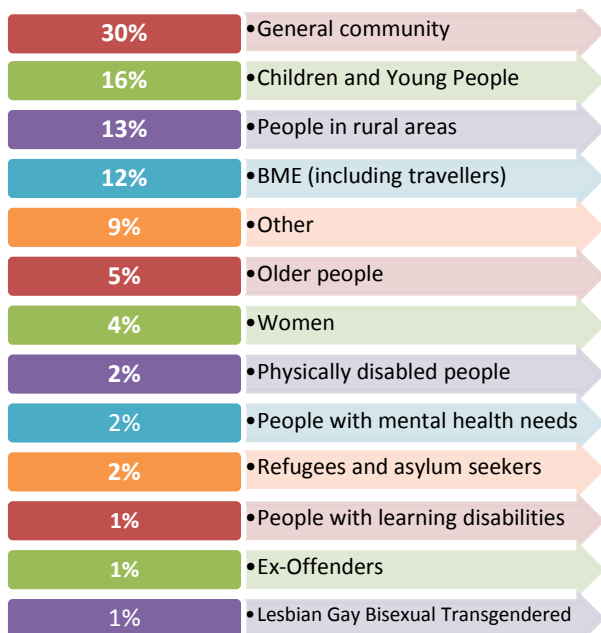
Types of VCOs supported

771 different VCOs were supported by QuISS over 4 years. Understanding their legal structure and governance has been important. The right type of advice can help them become more sustainable, develop and grow in future. The vast majority were constituted groups, with start ups, charities and limited companies making up the bulk of the rest of support.



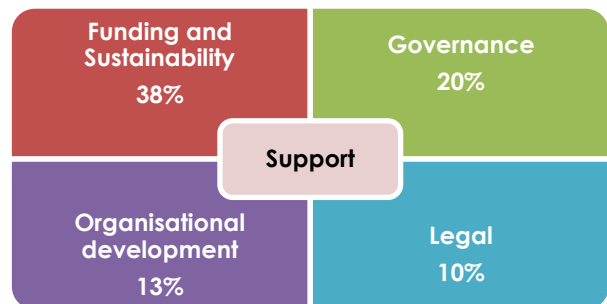
Target beneficiaries

The VCOs supported by QuISS, have a wide range of target beneficiaries, with many concerned with local community activities or children and young people, urban concentrations of BME organisations and a range of rural and specialist VCOs:



Types of support provided

The prime focus of the project is to help VCOs to build capacity and become more effective and sustainable organisations. LSDO support enables them to develop and grow and provide the best quality services for their target beneficiaries. The types of support provided reflect this requirement.



Between 1% and 3% of support was given on: financial management, quality standards/assurance or business planning.

How support is provided

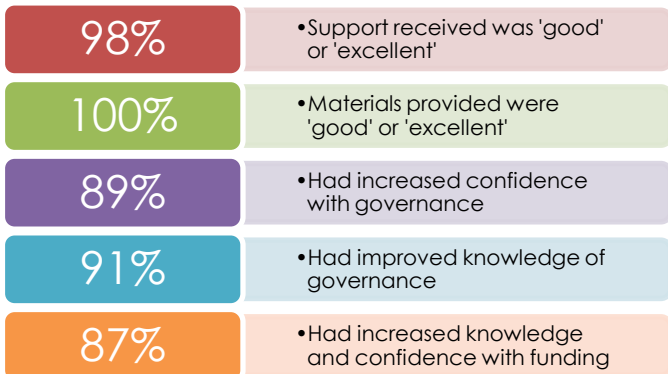


Each of the delivery partners' staff provides development support to VCOs on a one-to-one basis. This constitutes the majority of support provided and there were 2844 instances during the four-year project. This has been supplemented and supported by a programme of events and training for VCOs, jointly planned and delivered across one or more areas by different partners.

In addition, very high quality and standardised information and guidance sheets have been produced and shared across all partners and VCOs.

Impact of support provided

In Years 3 and 4 of the project, feedback was gathered from those receiving support from QuISS, with impressive results:



Benefits to VCOs

There have been a wide range of benefits to the VCOs which have received support. These demonstrate that the objectives of the project to build a more effective voluntary and community sector have been achieved through the efforts of the partnership.

Expert support on the issues that matter
Locally accessible events, training, support
Clear routes and signposting
Ongoing support for improvement
Training to build capacity and knowledge
High quality information materials
Opportunities to meet other VCOs
Raising awareness of issues affecting them
Highlighting needs of the people they help
Building their own capacity and skills
Increasing knowledge and confidence
Providing better support to beneficiaries
Identifying new opportunities

These VCOs still face major challenges however, due to the external environment, including the economic downturn and its ongoing impacts. In addition the changes in public policy and the reductions in resources available to public services, as well as a dramatic shift in funding approaches and availability for the voluntary and community sector are all ongoing challenges.

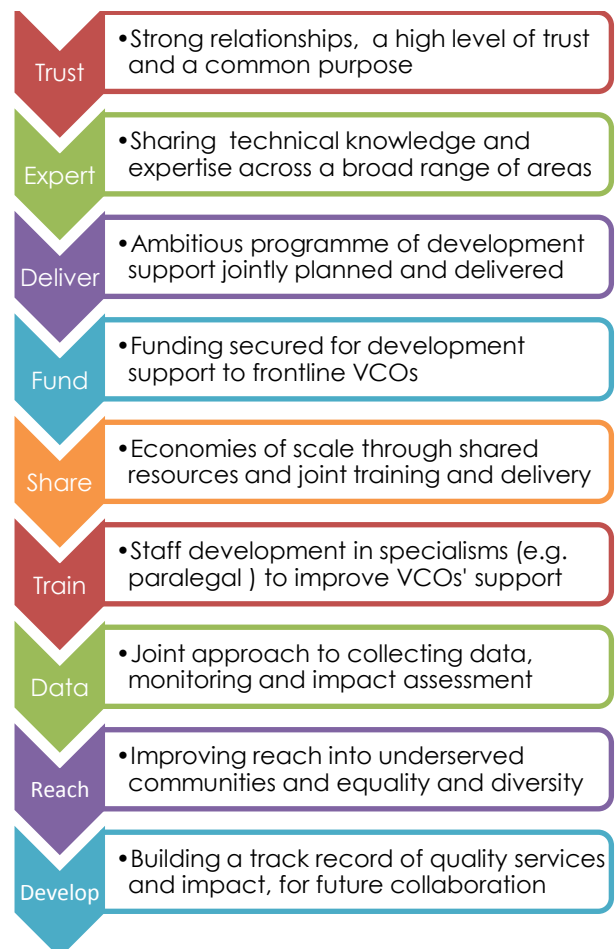
"They are always there for us, whenever we need help.

They are fantastic and are working for the whole community, not just for us. Everyone gets the same level of service."

Mamadou Balde, Chair, (Tees Valley) Mano River Union

Benefits of a partnership approach

The QuISS partnership approach has brought significant advantages for their individual organisations, the partnership, VCOs supported and, in turn, their beneficiaries. QuISS had added value to Tees Valley as a whole, by strengthening the voluntary and community sector and its capacity to support people and places.

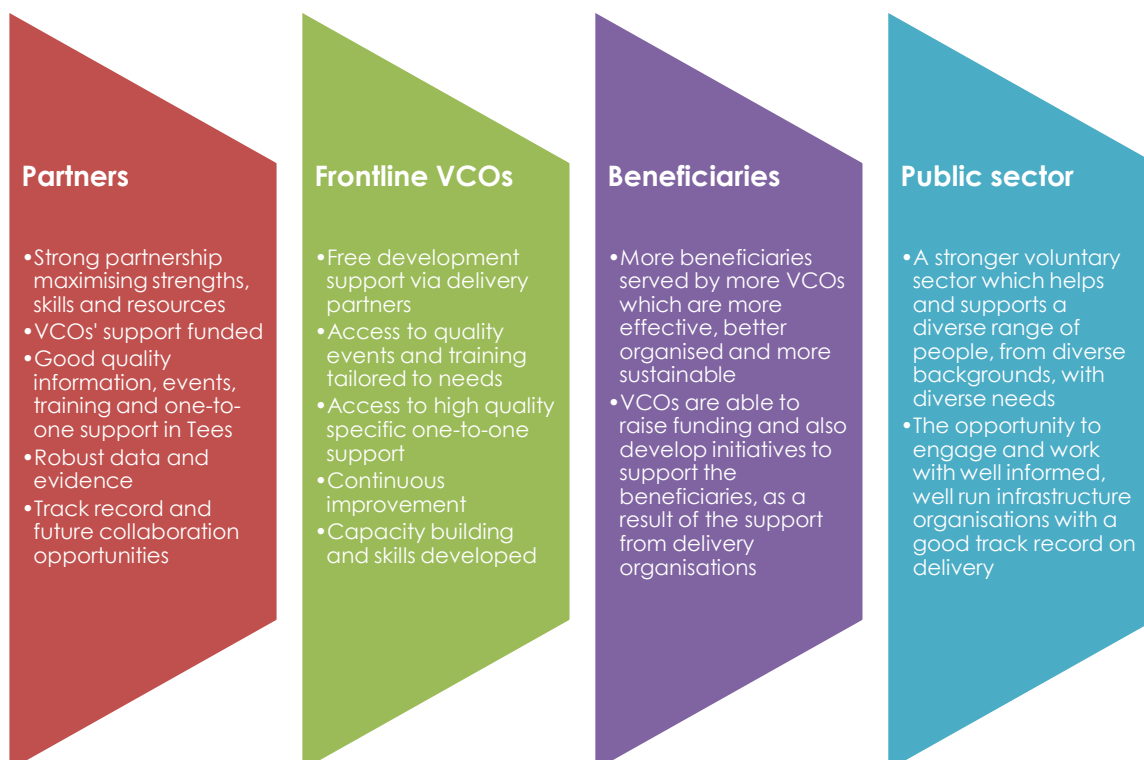


Conclusions

QuISS was the first time that the partner organisations had worked together in this way and for FINE, the first time they had worked with these partners. It has proved to be a very successful project, has delivered all of the outcomes agreed with Big Lottery Fund, worked with twice the number of VCOs originally envisaged and has delivered a very high quality set of services across Tees Valley in the target areas.

Throughout the life of the project and continuing are major external challenges, including the economic downturn, changes in public policy, large reductions in public funding and funding available to support the voluntary and community sector, as well as restructuring in local authorities and other services. This has threatened the survival of both infrastructure organisations and VCOs, but they have managed to continue and have provided a level of excellence of service and support that is genuinely remarkable in the circumstances.

What QuISS did for...



Future priorities

Create platforms for ongoing dialogue with public sector partners and commissioners and explore ways to support this activity in a more sustainable and strategic way

Publicise and profile more broadly the outcomes and impact of the support provided, including continuing to use in-depth case studies to illustrate issues and impact on VCOs and beneficiaries

Identify champions in the voluntary, public and private sectors who can raise the profile and lobby on behalf of the partnerships, VCOs and sector in order to attract resources and support

Using the expertise of partners and networks to provide specialised briefings and services on development support for voluntary and community sector organisations

Consider future collaborative working opportunities with current and other partners as a means of resourcing organisations and the development support they provide

Continue to improve data collection, monitoring and analysis and build on impact assessment methodologies to provide intelligence on trends and support needs to inform planning and influence policy and decision makers