



performance hub

Third Sector Peer Review

Report of a Pilot Project

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A Performance Hub Report
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The Performance Hub works to help third sector organisations (TSOs)* achieve more.

(*charities, voluntary organisations, community groups and social enterprises)

Our vision is of high performing TSOs having a positive impact upon the lives of millions.

Our overall aim is for improved third sector performance, and performance to be an integral part of the third sector's agenda.

Four specific aims contribute to this overall aim:

- To increase TSOs' awareness of the benefits of focusing on performance and improve their ability to use performance tools and approaches.
- To increase and improve the performance support offered to frontline organisations by local, sub-regional, regional and national infrastructure of all types
- To develop a more relevant, more effective and more accessible knowledge base about third sector performance.
- To strengthen the two way relationship between funders and TSOs on performance issues.

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1.0 Executive summary

In 2006, the Performance Hub commissioned a study to explore the feasibility of peer review as a way to help third sector organisations improve their performance and the way they work. Our aim was to produce practical guidance to help support peer review, and ensure that it was piloted and written with an awareness of existing schemes available in the third and public sectors. This research report outlines the process, the findings, and some recommendations. If you are interested in trying out peer review for yourself, you may wish to read our practical guide 'Peer Review in the Third Sector: A guide to improving your services'.

1.1 Process

This is a report about a participatory research project to test the applicability of peer review as a way of improving third sector. The research was commissioned by the Performance Hub, and was devised and run in partnership by Leeds Metropolitan University's Policy Research Institute and Yorkshire and the Humber Regional Forum. Nine senior employees from third sector organisations from across Yorkshire and the Humber took part in the research, with a view to generating a model, materials and recommendations that might be used to take the concept forward if it was found to be beneficial.

There is very little published work giving evidence of the level of use or benefit of peer review to third sector organisations. Nonetheless, a few good examples of peer review models being applied in the third sector were located and studied, as were a number being promoted in the statutory sector, particularly in local government. Discussions were held with individuals involved in developing, promoting and supporting these peer review models, and their views and access to their materials helped guide initial work in developing materials for testing during the pilot.

Participants in the project were recruited through the Regional Forum's membership network, and it became evident very quickly that there was significant interest in and demand for the peer review approach. Although the intention was to conduct one pilot exercise, due to the number and enthusiasm of participants it was possible to run three, thereby enabling the testing of the model and materials in a range of contexts.

A set of training materials was developed and delivered at a one day training event to ensure that all participants approached their pilots with a similar level of understanding about the process. This session was used to highlight and develop the skills required of Peer Reviewers (the individuals commenting on an organisation), and to emphasise the importance of comprehensive preparation on the part of Hosts (the organisation using the peer review process to improve an aspect of their performance).

Each of the three pilots was facilitated by a member of the research team, all of whom worked with Hosts to ensure adequate preparation for their peer review visits, and to attempt to keep proceedings on track and focussed on the issues under consideration. Research team members also assumed responsibility for writing and ensuring the Peer Reviewers' views were incorporated into the reports.

An evaluation event was held, allowing all participants to contribute their views on the process, and to make suggestions about whether and how to take forward the peer review model in light of their experience. This work was complemented by a formal written evaluation, with all participants being encouraged to complete evaluation forms.

1.2 Findings

The project adopted the following broad definition of peer review:

peer review involves one or more elements of an organisation being evaluated by someone of equivalent status from outside the organisation who understands its operational environment, challenges and opportunities.

The approach emphasises that any Host can make use of the skills and expertise of people working in a similar environment, to identify better ways of doing things.

The key recommendation to emerge from the project is that peer review should be made available to third sector organisations as one of a range of options to help them improve. Participation in the project was beneficial to all participants: Hosts benefited from the input of their peers, and Peer Reviewers enjoyed personal development and identified potential benefits for their own organisations in the future. Additionally, participation in the project served to generate energy and enthusiasm, both for the process itself, and for performance improvement areas identified by the Hosts.

The project tested both materials, and ethical and practical issues involved in peer review, and came up with a number of conclusions about it can be successfully implemented in the third sector:

- Given the diversity in types of organisation and service within the third sector, it would be inappropriate to attempt to use the peer review process tested in this project to impose a standard set of performance criteria, or a model of the effectively performing third sector organisation. Instead, the process works best if guided by the key principle that **'the Host decides'**. This principle should apply to almost every factor relating to the peer review, but specifically should allow the Host to determine the criteria against which they feel their performance should be assessed.
- Peer reviews conducted by groups of **three Peer Reviewers** worked well, and visits of **one day's duration** (either one full day or two half days) provided sufficient time to address the issues examined in each pilot.
- **Matching of Peer Reviewers** to the Host was found to be a crucial part of the peer review process. Further testing is needed about how familiar the Peer Reviewers should be with the Host or locality.
- Each peer review makes different demands on the Peer Reviewers, and the matching process should take account of the Host's perceived requirements. The project used a set of **Peer Reviewer competencies** as a means of ensuring quality in the delivery of peer reviews.
- For successful peer review, it is helpful for one individual to lead or facilitate the process. This **Lead Peer Reviewer or Facilitator can** support the Host in preparing for the visit and ensure that the visit itself

covers the right ground, and that the report is well written and delivered on time.

- While there was some concern about the time commitment required of Peer Reviewers, the **voluntary nature** of the model should be preserved, and participants contributing to the development of other organisations should be entitled to benefit from a review of an element of their own organisation or service at a later date.
- **Training** contributed significantly to the successful outcome of peer reviews in each of the pilots, and should comprise a central element of any future development of the model.

1.3 Recommendations

The report incorporates a number of recommendations, most notably that further work is done to **promote the model** as an option for third sector organisations seeking to improve their performance.

If the third sector is to derive maximum benefit from the peer review model, then a central agency will need to secure resources and manage the process.

The **peer review materials** used during the pilot have been revised in light of experience, and are recommended as the basis for future implementation of peer review in the third sector.

There are four key learning points in relation to implementation:

- adopt '**the Host decides**' as the key guiding principle;
- provide support to the **facilitation role**;
- promote the use of a '**voluntary agreement**' to retain the third sector's characteristics and ensure benefits accrue to all involved in the process; and
- ensure the **flexibility of approach** is retained.

2.0 Introduction

This report describes the learning from a pilot project, commissioned by the Performance Hub, to:

- explore the feasibility of peer review as a way to help third sector organisations (TSOs) improve their performance;
- produce practical guidance to help support peer review;
- ensure that this guidance was written and piloted with an awareness of existing schemes available in the third and public sectors.

The research used to inform this report was undertaken between December 2006 and January 2007 by staff from the Policy Research Institute and Yorkshire & the Humber Regional Forum¹.

The report:

- summarises key literature on the topic of peer review
- introduces some peer review schemes from other sectors that may be of interest to the third sector
- explains the pilot peer review project and key learning points;
- makes recommendations.

The resulting guidelines are presented separately to this report in 'Peer Review in the Third Sector: A guide to improving your services'.

¹ Details about the PRI and Regional Forum are presented at Annex 5.

3.0 Summary of the literature

A detailed review of available literature on peer review was undertaken as an integral part of the study. The following summary² highlights the issues that were identified as critical in designing the peer review project materials.

3.1 Introduction

Peer reviews have been identified as a potential model for developing the effectiveness of the third sector (NCVO 2003); and as a means specifically of enhancing the performance of charities (Charity Commission 2005). The Charity Commission report encourages the third sector to 'design its own solutions' but recommends that peer reviews would 'comprise trained and experienced senior practitioners from the sector'. They would be requested by the receiving organisation or be recommended as a pathway to improvement by the Commission. Third sector organisations were therefore seen as 'best placed to understand the pressures they face' and that this could make peer review work for them, as part of an 'accredited scheme issued by the Commission'.

There is a growing body of literature related to peer review, much of it of a practical nature, principally aimed at the statutory sector. There is little academic literature that evaluates or analyses the peer review process in the third sector.

3.2 Concepts and Related Methods

Peer reviews have been variously recommended as a management tool for target and objective setting, a self-evaluation tool for individuals and groups, a form of governance scrutiny, or as a mechanism for capacity building.

Evaluation and research

Wren defines Peer Review as 'a form of evaluation, a form of organisational, social, and sustainability action research' (Wren 2004). Other authors emphasise the role of participatory research, which is often used in a community development context as a means of empowering local people and developing their skills and confidence (Weiss 1972 and Stringer 1996), and empowerment evaluation, which supports the strengths of communities based on sharing experiences and involving practitioners in the evaluation and review process (Hopkins 1989, Posavac & Carey, 1997, Fetterman 1997 and 2000, and Everhart and Wandersman 2000). Most peer reviews adopt qualitative research methods (Scriven 1972, Patton 1987, and Guba & Lincoln 1981).

Self assessments

Peer reviews are related to and often incorporate self assessments (Bolton 2004). A notable model of self assessment is PQASSO (Practical Quality Assurance System for Small Organisations) which was designed by Charities Evaluation Services (CES) as a self-assessment tool for voluntary sector organisations. CES is working to adapt PQASSO to a peer review approach.

Effective management

Peer reviews can be seen as a form of effective management of service quality. Methods include Group Mentoring (Kram & Isabella 1985, Holbeche 1996, Genoni and Ritchie 1996, and Ritchie and Genoni 2000) and inspection, or performance

² Details of references cited in this summary are provided in Annex 2.

appraisal. Sholtes, however, argues that performance appraisal and peer review are undertaken to control behaviour rather than to improve processes and services (Sholtes 1993). Blackmore showed that in higher education, the term 'performance appraisal' has been changed to make it sound less threatening being variously described as 'peer review', 'peer evaluation', and 'peer support review' (Blackmore 2005). She argues that the ethos of peer review needs to disassociate itself completely from appraisal systems.

Change

Pagani argues that peer review, in a global context, is utilised as a tool for change (Pagani 2002). He describes peer review as 'the systematic examination and assessment of the performance of a State by other States, with the ultimate goal of helping the reviewed State improve its policy making, adopt best practices, and comply with established standards and principles'. He identifies peer pressure as a related concept to peer reviews: the effectiveness of peer review relies on the influence and persuasion exercised by the peers during the process (Pagani 2002).

Capacity building

The role of peer reviews in helping to develop capacity building has also been explored (Connelly and York 2003 and Osburne and Purkey 1995).

3.3 Peer Reviews in the Third Sector

In recent years, third sector organisations have been applying peer review processes to secure external verification of their progress with performance improvement.

The **ACRE Network Performance Improvement Programme** (Action with Communities in Rural England) which began in February 2004, aimed at generating performance improvement within its member organisations, the Rural Community Councils (RCCs) across England, and to demonstrate the improvements resulting from a robust system of Peer Review (ACRE 2005). RCCs appear to have embraced the programme, seeing it as a means to demonstrate they are 'fit for purpose'. The system of Peer Review was developed by ACRE, the outcomes of which include benefits in sharing best practice amongst the wider network, identifying and overcoming areas of weakness in individual RCCs and personal development for the fully trained Peer Reviewers. The ACRE scheme was the first formal Peer Review accreditation system for third sector infrastructure organisations. More information can be found on the ACRE website at www.acre.org.uk/zPROJECT_PIP_PEERREVIEW.htm.

NAVCA runs **Action Learning Matters** (ALM), a project using the knowledge and skills of a small group of people combined with skilled questioning to work on real problems and implement solutions. It is a national resource on Action Learning for the third sector funded by the Workforce Hub, which began in January 2006 and will conclude in March 2008. ALM provides information on what action learning is, where it is happening, how to get involved, advice on setting up an action learning programme, and signposts to other types of learning activities. It offers phone guidance, advice networks, mentoring, consultancy and products such as the Action Learning Matters resource pack. ALM provides a dynamic web resource www.alm-vol.org.uk and will be running pilot action learning sets on a regional basis.

PACE (Practical Award in Community Excellence) is an organisation committed to helping organisations develop quality standards. As well as assisting community groups working towards PQASSO or Quality Mark, PACE has developed its own model of quality assurance specifically geared towards the needs of community organisations. PACE standards are simpler than some quality systems, with the emphasis on support and peer-assessment rather than self-assessment. It is designed to be used flexibly by community groups, enabling them to progress at an appropriate pace and in a way that reflects their size and culture. PACE has organised its own peer assessment panel with people who have direct experience of working with and in community organisations. PACE developed training for assessors through an Open College Network course called 'Assessing Organisations' for training assessors.

The **PQASSO Quality Mark** (launched 2007) is an externally assessed 'kite mark' to show an organisation has met the PQASSO standards. PQASSO, the Practical Quality Assurance System for Small Organisations, is the most widely used quality assurance system within the third sector, adopted by thousands of organisations wishing to become more efficient and effective. Each level offers guidance on what is required to run a healthy, efficient and effective organisation. Further information can be found at www.pqassoqualitymark.org.uk.

Relate, a UK network of 80+ relationship counselling organisations, have been using the PQASSO quality assurance system across the whole federation since the early 2000s and, following the pilot of a number of different review and assessment models, they introduced a peer review system in 2003. As Relate did not want to develop their own quality system, but wanted one with external credibility, they helped pilot the PQASSO peer review system. CES, the developers of PQASSO, trained 13 peer reviewers to carry out reviews of six voluntary and community organisations. Working in teams of two, the reviewers identified whether the organisation met the requirements of a particular level of PQASSO (CES 2005).

The **Service Audit Partnership** (SAP) project, which ran from November 1999 to October 2001 and involved five major London homelessness agencies, used a system of peer audits to improve the quality and safety of supported housing projects and sharing best practice to the wider sector (Lyon 2001). Although all the members agreed that SAP had been an effective tool in improving the quality and safety of their services to clients, there was not a consensus as to its future direction for funding to continue. The SAP website (www.serviceaudit.org) gives a range of useful material.

3.4 Peer Reviews in the Statutory Sector

The Improvement & Development Agency for Local Government (IDeA) has helped promote peer reviews within local government, often with other organisations (IDeA 2007). The following are key examples of such initiatives:

The **Local Government Improvement Programme** is a performance improvement approach based on peer assessment and review against the benchmark of an 'ideal' authority. It is targeted at local authorities only. The benchmark (IDeA 2005) is intended to be aspirational and as such has all the desirable attributes of a modern and effective council.

The **People Management Peer Review** is designed to develop the skills of managers in councils and enable councils to make sense of the people issues

around comprehensive performance assessment. It also seeks to address the five key themes identified by the Department for Communities and Local Government (formerly the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister) and Employers Organisation Pay and Workforce Strategy for Local Government.

A **Peer Clearing House** for local government was established by the IDeA in 2003 to recruit, accredit and place peer reviewers. It facilitates the brokerage of peers for both the IDeA and non-IDEA improvement projects in the local government sector. Accredited peers are serving local government members and officers who have shown they have relevant competencies. Peers work on a range of projects, helping to build capacity, confidence and sustainability in local government by sharing knowledge and experience. They champion change by recognising and celebrating excellence in others.

The **Gateway Review** process is a peer evaluation of major projects at key points of the project lifecycle. Reviews are carried out by an external team of professionals who can offer an independent judgement on the success of the project and any support or other needs that the project might need to address prior to moving to the next stage. Officers look at processes in other authorities and enable good practice to be shared. Their use has been extended to the Ministry of Defence and the NHS. The Byatt review (DTLR, 2001) of local government procurement recommended that the local government sector should adopt the Gateway model. The Department for Children, Schools and Families (formerly DfES) has made Gateway Reviews compulsory for all Building Schools for the Future programme of schools rebuilding. Members of the review team are drawn from a pool of trained and accredited reviewers maintained by the Public Private Partnerships Programme.

IDeA, SOLACE Enterprises and Warwick University Business School (WBS) Local Government Centre have developed a **Local Strategic Partnership Peer Challenge Tool** (SOLACE Enterprises not dated). This model was designed to be applicable to partnerships, particularly Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) and their involvement with Local Area Agreements (LAAs). It is based on a mutually supportive process that looks at how LSPs are performing, at their strengths and areas for improvement.

Although statutory peer reviews have largely been conducted within the IDeA framework, some authorities have collectively formed their own **independent peer group** consortiums. A programme of reviews was conducted by a partnership of four authorities in Hampshire and West Sussex in 2002 (Chambers 2002).

Excellence in Business offered the following key reasons for the statutory sector to undertake peer reviews (Excellence in Business not dated 2):

- Offer an objective and fresh perspective from a 'critical friend'
- Encourage Councils to think about their strengths and areas for improvement as well as the opportunities and barriers to making progress
- Help prepare a Council for future performance assessments
- Contribute to the Council's overall capacity to improve
- Identify and prioritise key improvement themes
- Raise levels of self-awareness and enable benchmarking
- Support Best Value Review activity

3.5 The elements of peer review

Authors including Connelly and York (2003) have recognised the following elements of effective peer review:

Clear goals, objectives and ground-rules

Most peer reviews (see references to the examples in 3.3 above) use an agreed set of principles, standards and criteria against which performance is to be reviewed.

Experienced stakeholders

Stakeholders can include local and national government, professional bodies, employers, local residents, service recipients or clients, paid and voluntary staff, and auditors. Each may have their own view of what constitutes good quality, and may therefore have a different assumption of the basic principles against which a peer review should be carried out. As identified in the literature it is important to be clear about who will participate in any peer review (e.g. DAC/UNEG 2006). Wren identified a key assumption that peers are (a) similar enough in understanding, experience, and context, that they can understand one another; yet (b) dissimilar enough so that their experiences, contexts, and creative ideas allow novel exchange (Wren 2004). It is seen as important to provide training for both reviewers and hosts before they participate (Bingham and Ottewill, 2001); to pair less experienced peer reviewers with more experienced partners (Landy and Farr 1983); and to form review teams that combine a variety of subject specialists (Bingham and Ottewill 2001).

Time and resources

Realistic consideration of time and resources are necessary for an effective peer review. Existing literature indicates that generally there will be too many variables to allow a firm estimate, however, most peer review systems acknowledge that 'it may be helpful - on the basis of experience to date ... to provide at least a general sense of the minimum time and resources likely to be needed to carry out a peer review' (DAC/UNGS 2006 p16). While most of the literature recognises the potentially burdensome nature of the process, most feel this is a necessary price to pay to ensure a high level of capacity and skill.

Credibility

Issues of credibility are identified as among the main structural concerns in utilising peer reviews (Scriven 1997 and Blackmore 2005). A peer review may be too cursory or superficial a treatment, or have insufficient engagement of the panel members to warrant the claim of a properly informed peer assessment (DAC/UNEG 2006). Harvey argues that peer review teams are not always particularly critical, and make judgements based on what they are told, spending most of their time in a limited number of locations with selected discussants (Harvey 2002). Other studies suggest that Peer Reviewers have a fear of being too critical (Silva, Reich & Gallegos 1997, Cole 2003, DAC/UNEG 2006, and Smith et al 2002).

3.6 Peer Review Procedure

Although the literature review did not focus primarily on the practicalities of undertaking peer reviews, we have briefly outlined some key elements. Based on similar processes, such as action research (Stringer 1996) and empowerment evaluation (Fetterman 2002), a number of phases can be identified:

- The **preparatory phase**: consisting of background analysis and of some form of self-evaluation.

- **Collecting and analysing the data:** when a range of data is collected and analysed and the findings are shaped against the normative framework used. Wren notes that qualitative data may be generated from two sources: interviews and workshops, and implicit reflections of the interviewers based upon their observations and experiences (Wren 2004 and see also Schon 1983). Data-gathering and analysis work is often although not always carried out by the peer review team (OECD peer reviews are normally delegated to carefully selected consultants DAC/UNEG 2006).
- **Presentation and dissemination of the review report:** 'The final report and particularly its recommendations form an important basis for follow-up monitoring of the performance of the organization and, ultimately, for a subsequent peer review' (Pagani 2002). The peer reviewers are normally instrumental in validating the evidence, bringing together the judgements, conclusions and recommendations of the review. The Australian Scholarship in Teaching Project (2007) gives a range of useful advice on their website relating to this stage for giving and receiving helpful feedback: www.clt.uts.edu.au/Scholarship/Protocol.for.Feedback.htm.

3.7 Factors for Effectiveness

Finally, the literature indicates that the effectiveness of the peer review process is dependent on the combination of a range of factors, which may be summarised as follows:

- **Value sharing:** collective aims of effective peer review need to be clearly demarcated and agreed (DAC/UNEG 2006 and Pagani 2002).
- **Pursuit of truth and honesty:** This is perceived as 'a sincere intent to understand an event in context and from multiple worldviews' (Fetterman 2001). Others also feel that it is essential to base peer reviews on an open, trusting relationship and within a culture of criticism (Bingham and Ottewill 2001, Cole 2003).
- **Adequate level of commitment:** Peer reviews can function properly only if there is an adequate level of commitment by those participating in terms of both human and financial resources as well as in goodwill. Thus, the participating organisations must not only place adequate financial means at the disposal of the process; they must also be fully engaged at different times as examiners, and subjects of the review.
- **Mutual trust:** This is a vital factor in the success of peer reviews as by their nature they are a co-operative, non-adversarial process (Pagani 2002 and Piggot-Irvine 2003). The right training is seen as assisting this process.
- **Mutual learning:** As a form of mutual learning, the peer review approach is supported by a body of literature that explores social and organisational learning developed through social interactions, recognition of tacit knowledge, embodied forms of learning, learning from each other, experience, emulation, and in situated practice (Easterby-Smith et al 1999, Dixon 1994, and Murphy and Cleveland 1995).
- **Credibility:** Pagani (2002) and DAC/UNEG (2006) have noted a strong linkage between the credibility of the process and its capacity of influence.
- **Culture of Criticism:** In the context of higher education, both Cole (2003) and Bingham and Ottewill (2001) acknowledge peer review as improving the quality of the service through reviewing ideas and catching mistakes as well as developing a quality improvement culture.

4.0 Third Sector Peer Review Project

This section outlines the project, including the opportunities and challenges we encountered, and illustrates how these might be addressed in any future development work. The overall aim of the project was to establish whether or not the peer review model could be applied by TSOs to help them improve their performance, and to test the applicability and effectiveness of the materials developed.

4.1 Development of pilot peer review materials

Significant background research was undertaken, during which it was established that successful peer review models running in other sectors incorporate standardised materials. It was felt that a set of materials should be developed for the purposes of the project to assist participants in working their way through the process and to ensure the quality of their effort. Telephone interviews were conducted with representatives of a range of organisations that support peer review (see Annex 4), to identify with them any pitfalls that should be avoided or aspects to emphasise in producing peer review materials. The interviews enabled the research team to focus these materials on the aspects of the process felt to be most important in implementing effective peer reviews, and the pilots were used to test the applicability and effectiveness of these materials, revising them as the project progressed. The following sections summarise the key aspects of the materials, the final version of which – revised as a result of work on the project – are presented in a separate report: ‘Peer review in the Third Sector: A guide to improving your services’.

Defining peer review

A straightforward definition was devised, drawing from the range of literature, to make the process as accessible and applicable as possible to the full range of TSOs deemed likely to make use of the materials. Thus, peer review is defined in its simplest terms as a review by others of equivalent status or standing, involving one or more elements of an organisation being evaluated by someone from outside the organisation who understands its operational environment, challenges and opportunities. Peer review is promoted in the guide as having the potential to benefit any third sector organisation, focussing on improving any aspect of their activities.

Stages of peer review

From an examination of a range of existing models, and bearing in mind critiques of peer review, we identified three key stages. Details of the work required to implement each stage are included in the guide:

- Planning the peer review
- Conducting the peer review
- Results of the peer review process

Peer review principles

The fundamental guiding principle behind the approach to peer review as promoted in the Guide is that the Host decides, setting the context within which the review is to be undertaken. The Host is responsible for determining all aspects of the process, including which issue requires attention; the criteria against which performance is to be measured; how to involve their peers in the review; which recommendations from the final report they implement; and

whether they make any third party aware that their service has been reviewed, or share the findings emerging from the peer review report. These are the key principles outlined in the guide:

- **The Host decides** the focus of the peer review
- Hosts enter into the process **voluntarily**
- It is conducted in a **transparent and supportive** manner
- Clear, agreed and **achievable outcomes** are identified at the outset
- The **criteria** against which performance is to be measured are determined by the Host, and are **not linked to funding or inspection regimes**, unless the Host wants them to be
- Reviewers conduct themselves in a **constructive** and **independent** manner throughout the process and provide Hosts with **fair, expert, and timely** advice
- **Confidentiality** between Host and Reviewers is maintained at all times, and identities of contributors are to be protected in any reports
- The host organisation retains **ownership** of the findings of the review, and manages the implementation of any suggested changes

Peer Reviewers

In this pilot, Peer Reviewers were defined as the people who are best placed to comment on the host organisation's performance, and as being likely to:

- Hold or have held a managerial position in the third sector
- Have been trained in how to carry out a peer review
- Have direct experience in the identified area of service delivery
- Work or have worked for a similar-sized third sector organisation
- Be unknown to the Host

The first three suggested criteria are recommended in the guide, but following the pilot, it was thought that a Reviewer from a different sized organisation could also offer interesting ideas, and someone who knows the organisation could have greater insight.

The guide also details a number of competencies which Peer Reviewers are expected to exhibit:

- Analysing information
- Constructive criticism
- Collaborative working
- Effective communication
- Developing people
- Organisational sensitivity
- Promoting diversity

4.2 Recruitment of Hosts and Peer Reviewers

On the basis of the initial review of literature, it was decided that peer review would be of most benefit to organisations with two or more staff, as it was acknowledged that there was likely to be a significant time commitment to participating in the process. Consequently, an e-mail was circulated to all Regional Forum member organisations in mid December 2006, inviting chief or senior officers of organisations with two or more staff to participate. The initial response to this recruitment drive was encouraging, with 23 individuals expressing interest.

Further information was sent to these potential participants early in 2007, identifying in more detail the demands likely to be made on their time, and advertising the dates for training and evaluation sessions. A number of these potential participants were unavailable for the scheduled dates, and the group reduced to a more manageable size of nine participants. Details of the participating organisations are included in Annex 4.

4.3 Peer review training

Adequate training for participants was recommended in various publications to ensure a high quality and mutually beneficial exercise. As each of the models considered in the literature review had their own approaches to training (with only PACE accredited), it was decided to prepare bespoke training materials, emphasising issues identified in the preparatory stage.

A day-long training event was delivered in Leeds, drawing on the combined experience of the research team and using materials from a range of relevant sources, including those generated specifically for the pilot. As well as exploring with participants some general themes such as peer review in other contexts, performance and quality; the training focussed on the following key themes:

Assessment frameworks: Introducing models to stimulate analytical thinking, including PEST and SWOT.

Case studies: Selected to highlight the complexities of the peer review approach, real-life examples were presented to participants to test their analytical skills in a hypothetical context. The four case studies used (SensAbility, Cardigan Centre, Faith Regen UK & East London Mosque and Take a Break & North Warwickshire User Involvement Project) were selected to reflect the diversity of the sector, and to reflect some of the characteristics likely to be evident in the pilot Host organisations. These were used as the basis of role-play exercises, designed to familiarise participants with a range of likely scenarios, and to enable them to demonstrate their skills in all aspects of the Peer Review process: analysing data, challenging practice, collaborative working, effective communication, developing people and organisational sensitivity. Participants were encouraged to work in small groups to consider the following questions:

- What criteria might be used to assess the organisation?
- What evidence might be needed to facilitate a review?
- Who might Peer Reviewers want to meet during a review?
- What challenges might be foreseen in undertaking a review?

Presentation and feedback skills: Participants were encouraged to share experience and test out ways to present feedback, which could potentially include negative criticism, using the same hypothetical scenarios.

Introduction to peer review model and materials: This involved talking through the proposed approach, including a thorough discussion of the different materials, and highlighting the difference in roles for Hosts and Peer Reviewers. In particular, it explored the practicalities around the proposed guiding principles.

Identifying assessment criteria: The review of literature identified different approaches to the setting of assessment criteria within which peer review might be conducted. This section of the training allowed for a discussion on how best to define criteria in different contexts and explored the potential challenges to following 'the Host decides' approach in deciding the criteria.

Practical and ethical issues: Key issues likely to present participants with practical and ethical challenges were identified, and ways in which they could anticipate, prepare for and respond to these were discussed.

Ethical Issues	Practical Issues
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confidentiality • Data use and storage • Respect for participants • Equality • Legal compliance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Likely time commitment • Paying Peer Reviewers' expenses • Matching Peer Reviewers to Hosts • Facilitating peer review visits • Professional indemnity insurance

4.4 Facilitation of reviews

Identification of Hosts

All participants were given the opportunity, half-way through the training event, to put themselves forward for consideration as potential Host organisations. Although originally contracted to undertake only one peer review, it was agreed (after discussion with participants) that it would be useful to carry out more than one, both to generate more, information-rich findings for the research and to provide more opportunities for the participants to derive benefit from the exercise. Ultimately, three Host organisations were identified, each identifying one specific issue on which they wanted a peer review to focus.

The following pen-portraits provide an overview of the Host organisations, and summarise the issues on which they wished the peer review to focus:

Action for Black Community Development (ABCD), Bradford

ABCD is an infrastructure support organisation for voluntary, private and faith groups from the African and African Caribbean communities in the Bradford district. The organisation aims to develop a comprehensive regeneration programme for these communities, influence mainstream provision and develop bespoke programmes for groups.

ABCD has established thematic forums between African and African Caribbean voluntary and community organisations and public sector institutions, enabling advocacy and representation on issues such as health, housing and education. It has secured a seat on Bradford Vision, the local strategic partnership, and has previously run successful EU-funded advice and support services promoting employment opportunities to African and African Caribbean residents.

The organisation is managed by a Board of ten Trustees, has a pool of three volunteers, and employs three full time staff. Its annual budget is approximately £135,000.

ABCD wanted to host a peer review to gain insights into approaches for fresh marketing, and greater confidence to pursue a marketing campaign.

Barnsley Arena

Barnsley Arena was established to help service users and carers have a say about the services that are available to them. As well as making information more readily available to their members, the organisation provides free training, information and support to help individuals participate in local decision-making processes.

The organisation is managed by a Board of 18 Trustees, has 1,300 members (of which 30-40 are 'active') and employs nine full time staff. The annual budget is approximately £250,000.

Barnsley Arena wanted to host a peer review to assess how well the organisation involves services users and carers in its work.

St. Luke's Cares, Leeds

St Luke's Cares is a well-established organisation in South Leeds that provides a range of services for the surrounding communities of inner and outer South Leeds. It aims to respond to the needs of the local community by raising self esteem and developing the capacity and skills of individuals; by education and awareness raising activities in the community; to work for the regeneration of the area, particularly in terms of increasing employment and training possibilities; and to help local community and voluntary groups to develop and contribute to the well-being of residents in the area by providing support, facilities and premises from which to operate. St. Luke's Cares provides a number of services, including:

- Targeted youth work, with over 4,000 young people currently on their database, including holiday programmes, youth forum, drop-in service and group support
- Connexions access points and advisors
- Drop-In Project, covering information, advice and guidance on health, sexual health, careers, housing and benefits
- Physical activities programme
- Community café and bar

The organisation is managed by a Board of 11 trustees, and has a workforce comprising six full time, seven part or half-time and eight sessional staff. The annual budget is approximately £210,000.

St. Luke's Cares wanted to host a peer review to help them review the current staffing structure of the organisation; and to assist them in establishing full cost recovery through the use of internal information.

www.stlukesholbeck.org.uk

Allocation of Peer Reviewers

The proposed approach of allocating Peer Reviewers to Hosts was initially informed by the findings from the literature review, particularly in relation to the experience of stakeholders (section 3.5). After discussions with participants it was modified and Peer Reviewers were allocated to the three pilots on the basis, principally, of their skills, experience and interest. The following factors were also identified for consideration when matching Peer Reviewers and Hosts:

Geography

There was considerable debate about whether Peer Reviewers should come 'cold' to the Host, unfamiliar with and therefore less likely to have existing views on local context and politics; or for them to have an understanding of the local context, so that they could get straight to the core of the host organisation's business without also needing to learn about their broader environment.

Nature of business

It was felt that there was merit in using Peer Reviewers with direct experience of the services being delivered by the Host. However, it was acknowledged that it was more important for the Peer Reviewers to have prior experience of the issue identified for review, than experience of the type of service.

Size of organisation

Wherever possible, participants felt that it would be helpful for Peer Reviewers to have had experience of working in an organisation of similar in size to the Host. As above, however, it was acknowledged that their experience of the issues identified by the Host was likely to be more important.

An attempt was made to test different approaches, with one Host being allocated two Peer Reviewers from similar organisations, and two pilots with less closely matched organisations. It was deemed more important to emphasise the key skills that Peer Reviewers should bring to the process (see Section 4.1, Peer Reviewers).

Host preparation

Given that it was felt inappropriate to attempt to impose on the third sector a single definition of an effective or high performing organisation, the pilot project adopted as a fundamental guiding principle the notion that 'the Host decides'. This gives a significant degree of responsibility and empowerment to potential hosts, and requires a not insubstantial amount of preparation.

A set of guidance notes (incorporated in 'Peer Review in the Third Sector: A guide to improving your services') was produced to help Hosts work through the preparatory phase. Firstly, Hosts were advised to identify what they wanted the Peer Reviewers specifically to look at, and to break this down into discrete elements. For each of these elements, Hosts were encouraged to quantify the key features, and sources of evidence, that could be used to assess this element. Hosts were helped to produce and complete a self assessment template using the criteria they had identified, descriptions of progress against these, and details of

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evidence used to reach their assessment. They shared these with their Peer Reviewers in advance of the review.

Hosts were also encouraged to plan the itinerary for the peer review visit, and to approach any funders, partners, trustees, staff, volunteers and users who they wanted their Peer Reviewers to meet. Materials were produced for Hosts to distribute to participants to explain the aims of the exercise, and they were encouraged to schedule interviews with key individuals who could help the Peer Reviewers establish a better understanding of the situation.

Peer review visits

Each peer review visit was conducted over one day. The arrangements for each visit varied, reflecting their different focus and the corresponding information required. The two Peer Reviewers were accompanied by a member of the research team who acted as note taker and facilitator, ensuring that the discussions remained focussed on the agreed subject matter and on schedule.

Each of the three visits started with a wide-ranging discussion between the Host's Chief Officer (all of whom had taken part in the peer review training) and the Peer Reviewers, allowing for the visitors to develop a clearer understanding of the issues under consideration, as well as developing an impression of the circumstances under which the organisations operate. Interviews were also scheduled with a number of different people including partners, funders, service users and staff at each of the projects, allowing pertinent issues to be explored in detail.

Visits concluded in a de-briefing session with Peer Reviewers presenting the Chief Officer with initial feedback. Different approaches were taken in each setting, reflecting the nature of the issue under consideration and the feedback to be given. In one case, the Peer Reviewers left the facilitator to present the Host with three key findings from their discussions; in another, the Host presented back a draft staffing structure, which they had revised to take on board comments made in their earlier discussion with the Peer Reviewers; and in the third case, Peer Reviewers presented the Host with a critique of the issues, and entered into a detailed discussion about the shortcomings they perceived.

Feedback and reports

A template was created for the written reports, and to help assess whether a standard approach to reporting was helpful or not. It proved difficult for reports to be drawn up in the same format, essentially because of the difference in focus of each of the peer reviews. The full reports are attached as Annex 2, but the following summary is presented to illustrate similarities and differences between the three reports, and to highlight aspects that were found to be particularly useful to the Hosts.

	ABCD	Arena	St. Luke's Cares
Purpose of Visit	All three reports presented a succinct summary of the purpose of the visit, providing the reports with a clear context		
List of Materials	Each report included details of the materials circulated to the Peer Reviewers in advance of their visit		
Issues Addressed During Visit	Business planning, funding, publicity, perception, profile	Mission statement, communication, involving service users and carers, partnerships,	Organisational culture, volunteers, development plan, staffing structure, role of Group

	ABCD	Arena	St. Luke's Cares
		structure, expectations, culture, service delivery	Manager, review of financial information
Interviewees	Chief Executive, staff, service users, partner agency representative	Chief Executive, staff, commissioners, carers, trustees, service users	Group Manager, staff
Recommendations	Affirmed ABCD's role, work needed on core objectives, need to involve target client group in operations, adopt systematic approach to publicity & communications (suggestions made)	Add focus and strategic direction, build up evidence base, support staff, review user publicity, build on user involvement, review organisational and staff structures, clarify user expectations	Specific changes to organisational and staff structure, raise awareness of funding issues, suggestions made about how to set up 'real cost' charging system

All three Hosts agreed that the reports were useful, and had helped them reflect on aspects of their organisations in need of attention. As mentioned above, one Host took immediate action, making changes to the organisation's proposed staffing structure while the Peer Reviewers were still visiting. Another Host admitted that the report went further than they had anticipated, covering a range of issues far wider than the intended focus of the visit, the recommendations of which they plan to use to develop their work in a number of areas. The third Host was satisfied that the report addressed all the issues of concern to them, but felt their Peer Reviewers could have been more strident in their written commentary, to reflect the more critical, and more useful, verbal feedback. Some changes were made to the report, but the Peer Reviewers were ultimately reluctant to commit to paper comments that might have unforeseen repercussions if the report found its way into the 'wrong hands'.

4.5 Evaluation

An evaluation was undertaken as a central part of the project, with all participants encouraged to maintain a record of any thoughts about the process from the start of their involvement until the formal evaluation event at the end of the pilot. Evaluation forms were circulated to participants prior to the formal event, allowing participants to (i) share their thoughts about the effectiveness of the Peer Review model and materials piloted during the project, and (ii) comment on the way in which the project was conducted, providing feedback to facilitators on their role and information on likely future support needs.

Peer review model

The process has generated energy and enthusiasm among all participants. One Host in particular valued the way in which this translated into input from their Peer Reviewers, saying 'I really appreciated their enthusiasm and their willingness to give up their time'. Other stakeholders agreed, with some reporting that they

enjoyed participating and were asked really good questions – it felt like the reviewers had really got to the bottom of the organisation.

The piloted approach was perceived by participants as being helpful, structured and well delivered. It helped participants to make the most of their time away from routine management or service delivery, focusing instead on these developmental issues:

this system ensures that time is taken to look closely at individual sections of the organisation and work, time which is often not available to the third sector due to demands on delivery and targets.

The application of the model, particularly its principles and values, was also found to be helpful, with one participant observing:

it is non-judgemental and also helps to affirm where practice, direction, etcetera is sound.

Peer Reviewers commented on the effectiveness of the process, too, and were particularly impressed by the way in which stakeholders responded to their lines of enquiry. For example, one Peer Reviewer was impressed by 'people responding honestly to questions, rather than trying to sell or promote a particular point of view', which helped them concentrate on 'brief, solution focused approaches'.

Project management

Overall, feedback on the management of the pilot project was positive, with participants identifying the training, materials and support provided by the research team as particularly useful. When asked to identify the most helpful aspects of the support provided, respondents typically commented on good facilitation and support, specifically with help in recruiting peer reviewers, training participants, and the planning and administration of events.

There were areas where participants felt the project could have been delivered better, including communication about the likely time commitment of participation. For example, one respondent said:

I was confused about the levels of senior staff, and I think I might not have got involved had I realised there was less in it for me (though I did benefit).

Timescales

The tight timescale to deliver the pilot required specific dates and short deadlines from the outset, which excluded over half of the original volunteers from participating due to prior engagements. By the end of the pilot, half of the volunteers had dropped out, with only four participants attending the final evaluation event, due to the pressure to complete work for their employers. More flexibility in the way the project was delivered, particularly in relation to date-setting, might have helped more organisations and volunteers to engage. This might also have reduced the time commitment required of each participant, and helped maintain higher levels of input throughout the lifetime of the project.

The tight timescales also affected the timing of the review visits, which, particularly in the more complex cases, hindered Hosts' preparation, and made it difficult to (i) engage their Peer Reviewers in discussions about the setting of assessment criteria; and (ii) collate and circulate all the necessary materials in advance of the visits. Although a challenge to this pilot, such constraints might not be as problematic if the model was run again with more flexible timing. If

recruitment, training and the peer reviews themselves are undertaken on a rolling programme, people could sign up to the process as and when they were available, participating in activities at a pace suited to their own capabilities and the needs of the organisations under review.

The potential to fully evaluate the impact of the process on the work practices of Host organisations was also reduced due to tight timescales. Ideally, time would have been allowed for return visits to explore how they were using the peer review reports. Similarly, it would have been more equitable had it been possible to accommodate a peer review visit to all participating organisations, thereby spreading the benefits among participants.

Focus

One particularly noteworthy issue emerging from the evaluation is that participants perceived the focus of the peer review visits to be problem solving on specific issues rather than organisational or service review. In one case, the Host's initial focus was on a very specific aspect of their organisation's promotion and publicity work, and their Peer Reviewers needed to negotiate a broadening of the goals to consider wider policy and strategy areas where they felt their skills and experience could be used to best effect. In the other cases, where Hosts used the peer review process to address broader organisational issues such as staffing or finances, they remained focussed on the problematic aspects in the management of the organisation or service. While this does not detract from the perceived benefits to both Hosts and Peer Reviewers, it does imply that conceptual or practical issues somehow skewed the focus of the process away from the wider goals.

There was a deliberate attempt to test the applicability of the model in both strategic and service delivery contexts, and the latter may have come across more strongly, influencing the identification of issues. In another two cases, the participant was a recently appointed manager who used the process to help address key issues identified in their initial organisational assessment, which again implied that the timing of the pilot had an effect on the selection of issues. Whatever the reason for 'problems' dominating the pilot peer reviews, it might be considered a valuable learning point for future development of the model, allowing for an equally flexible approach to the focus and application of peer reviews, particularly as no overarching view of an 'effectively performing third sector organisation' is to be applied (unlike the IDeA model).

The following brief outline of one of the pilots is included to provide a more in-depth picture of the way in which the process generated both practical solutions to performance related issues and findings for the peer review research.

Case study: St Luke's Cares

St. Luke's Cares is a well-established organisation in South Leeds that provides a range of services, including youth work, information, advice and guidance for the surrounding communities of inner and outer South Leeds. The majority of the employees first came into contact with St. Luke's Cares through the work of its projects and then through volunteering.

Having been recently appointed as the new Group Manager, the Host was keen to use the peer review process to:

- review the current staffing structure of the organisation and assess a range of options to improve it

- identify options to assist the organisation in establishing full cost recovery in relation to the commissioning of their services

Prior to the visit, the Host circulated a range of materials to the Peer Reviewers, and collated more materials for them to consider during their visit. A number of interviews were arranged, allowing the Peer Reviewers to meet with service users, volunteers, staff, trustees and commissioners as well as the Group Manager, thereby gaining a broad on the organisation and its performance.

During the visit, the Host and Peer Reviewers explored a transactional analysis model (taken from counselling of parent/child relationships) to assess the relationships within the organisation's staffing structure. This helped identify a range of suggestions, which could help overcome problems encountered by volunteers making the transition to paid employment and streamline the organisation's staff management. A number of recommendations addressing the following aspects were made and incorporated in the subsequent report (see Annex 2).

- Merging service and staffing functions in certain identified areas
- Separating identified management and service delivery responsibilities
- Further developing volunteering policies
- Establishing real costs
- Raising awareness of funding issues with staff, service users and commissioners

Before the Peer Reviewers had left the premises, the General Manager had devised a new staffing structure, and had sought their views on its applicability. Subsequent work has been carried out to implement some of these changes, and to further revise the structures to help make the organisation more effective. The Host has identified significant tangible benefits to St Luke's Cares from participating in the peer review process:

'Immediately following the peer review I met with the Chair to discuss the report and the findings. We immediately adopted some of the recommendations in particular:

- *an organisational restructure involving the sub projects becoming self-managing clusters*
- *a redesign of the Management and Administration Team*
- *a proposal to the Board for expenditure from the free reserves to implement some of the above'*

4.6 Findings and Conclusions

Headline findings

The main findings of the project are very positive, with 'I found it a really positive experience' a typical response. The process was described by one Host as 'a tool which made me stop and think about practice and current working procedures'. Acknowledging that this was something that she had needed to address for 'quite some time, but seemed unable to find the time to give it [her] full concentration' the same respondent indicated that 'it was an excellent and fortuitous experience'.

These comments suggest that there is potential to use Peer Review as a means of improving organisations across the third sector.

Indeed, the model has been found to be robust, and was identified by several participants as something

that could be introduced as part of a self-regulating, quality assessment and problem solving approach, for example within a consortium (or at least operated by an independent, informed source).

This suggests that the benefits of the model reflect the empowerment evaluation approach described in section 3.2, and shows that peer review supports TSOs in the evaluation and review process.

What was felt to be 'exciting' about peer review was that it is a 'step on' from action learning as it involves direct engagement with organisations and their stakeholders; and it is independent, distinguishing it from line management and other internal management approaches. The separation from externally-set criteria and performance appraisal (required by some funders) was particularly valued by participants. It is important to note that these views are on an approach which was not linked in any way to performance appraisal, and that participants (in line with the caution noted in the bibliography, section 3.2) saw this detachment from appraisal as a great advantage. Participants perceived peer review as a viable improvement tool for senior managers in TSOs which could be used alongside or in place of existing models. It is seen as having 'real value' as an approach able to sit alongside others (e.g. qualitative research, self-assessment, action learning, empowerment evaluation, group mentoring and paid-for consultancy, etc.).

Needs and Benefits

The immediate positive response to the initial enquiry from Regional Forum members gave a clear indication that the proposed pilot was addressing an unmet need. It became evident through ongoing discussions that senior officers in many TSOs are keen to identify and make use of new support mechanisms such as peer review. Although there is only a limited amount of literature about the impact of peer review in the third sector, the existence of a few bespoke peer review models with which participants were familiar (such as the ACRE and NAVCA approaches) indicates that the approach is gaining credibility within the sector. Several participants identified a current lack of tailored support from infrastructure, and one suggested peer review as 'an excellent way of getting peer support and objective analysis on issues where you might be stuck'.

The benefits of participating in the peer review process, as Host and Peer Reviewer, were very much in line with those identified in the literature (section 3.5), and were felt by participants to be wide ranging and significant. One participant observed that the experience of 'stopping dead' was 'very powerful and intense'.

Receiving critical feedback from peers rather than paid professionals was valued highly by Hosts, who recognised that the approach of their peers was less detached and more mindful of the circumstances they operate in than might be expected from a paid consultant. Hosts also felt that what came back to them in the reports was 'more considered than had been expected'. The outcome of the process also appeared to exceed Hosts' initial expectations, with one commenting:

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on the whole this was a positive experience, which has benefited my organisation... you would expect to pay vast amounts of money for this kind of consultation.

The process of preparing materials for the peer review helped one Host to 'highlight what was available and what was missing', and to 'step back and look more objectively'. This reinforces the findings from the literature (section 3.7), which indicate that there are significant benefits to be gained from engaging fully with the preparatory phase. Similarly, thinking about who the Peer Reviewers might need to speak to helped to 'think about our stakeholders, and who influences us, and who is influenced by us'.

One Host emphasised the positive response to the process from their Trustees, stating that they 'have been very pleased to have an outside view to help us'; while others confirmed that the process bolstered their Board members, trustees and management committee members. These comments are consistent with the 'key reasons' put forward in previous research for statutory sector organisations to undertake peer reviews (as summarised in section 3.4). The process of securing their Trustees' agreement to participate was also identified as 'a positive process' which resulted in

considering where we are in the organisation and whether we were ready to listen to some constructive criticism.

This contributed to the setting of clear goals and ground-rules, an element described as a necessary part of the process in the literature (section 3.6).

Peer Reviewers found it useful to 'step out of their own environment', and to reflect on their own professional and personal development. As well as seeing how their strengths complemented those of their Hosts, Peer Reviewers took away key learning, realising how valuable it would be for them to undertake a similar exercise in their own organisations. One claimed to be already 'reviewing how my organisation engages service users and carers'. This aspect of the process reflects the notion of 'mutual learning', identified as an important component of peer review in current literature (section 3.8). One Peer Reviewer concluded

not only does the Host benefit but the Reviewers also get to look at similar organisations and are able to take away examples of alternative practice, which could be implemented in their own work;

and another suggested that

reviewing led me to recognise my own skills that I usually don't think about and also helped me to reflect on my own practice in a critical way.

All participants felt it had helped develop skills such as:

- Problem solving
- Analysis and critique of internal and broader policy and practice issues
- Policy development and management
- Reflection on individual performance

Although not suggested explicitly by existing literature, it might have been expected that the more complex the range of issues under consideration, the more challenging the process for the Peer Reviewers, and consequently the less successful the outcome for the Host. However, during this pilot, Peer Reviewers were able to engage with the full range of issues with which they were presented on each of the three visits, and all three Hosts were able to identify direct benefits from their participation in the process. Indeed, analysis of the evaluation suggests that the more complex of the three pilots fully engaged the Peer Reviewers, providing them with an adequate challenge wholly justifying their attendance; while the pilot with the narrower issue did not make sufficient demands of the reviewers.

Future development

The pilot allowed the research team and the participants to identify a number of issues requiring particular attention and/or further exploration if the model is developed or used elsewhere in the third sector. Many of these are consistent with issues identified in the literature review, and add to the understanding of how peer review as an approach can be applied to the third sector.

It was agreed that the principle of '**the Host decides**' was absolutely the right way to proceed, and that this should include the full range of issues described in the materials. The Host should also have the right to decide to stop the review if they feel it is proceeding in a way which fails to meet their expectations. It was noted that there is merit in the Host involving their peers in discussions about the assessment criteria in advance of the visit, allowing for their experience and expertise to inform the shape of the process as well as its implementation. Several issues emerged during the pilot in relation to the Host's preparation, including the need for them to:

- Provide clarity about what they realistically hope to achieve from the peer review
- Collate and circulate all relevant materials, including details of the assessment criteria and/or completed self-assessment forms, well in advance of the visit
- Engage stakeholders relevant to the subject matter being reviewed in the visit (trustees or board / management committee members, service users, funders / commissioners and staff), and prepare a structured itinerary to ensure they all have an appropriate level of input to the process
- Provide their Peer Reviewers with guidance about the kind of information they require in the final report, and the extent to which they should feel able to express their opinions in their report

The process of **matching Reviewers to Hosts** was felt to be critical to the success of any peer review, and it was felt that particular attention should be paid to facilitating this process. One participant commented

I think closer scrutiny should be implemented when matching Reviewers and Hosts – as each individual Reviewer has different skills.

Ultimately, it was agreed that Hosts need to be clear about the nature and level of **skills, experience, topic knowledge, degree of responsibility** and **local knowledge** they require from potential Peer Reviewers, as some of these characteristics would assume more significance than others in a given situation. For example, a Host might be more concerned that their Peer Reviewers have

certain skills than current responsibility for managing a similar service; and there might be occasions when it would be more beneficial for Peer Reviewers to have less local knowledge and more experience of a certain topic. Accommodating the complexity of these variables in the development of a third sector peer review model is likely to prove challenging, but it was felt that careful consideration of these characteristics needs to be given on a case-by-case basis, and that the Host should be supported in making a selection that best meets their requirements. The consensus was that any given team should ideally contain Peer Reviewers with contrasting and complementary characteristics.

On the basis of their experience in this pilot, participants felt that there would be merit in having **up to three Peer Reviewers**. Unlike the IDeA model, which was considered in discussion with the participants, it was felt that a large group of peers might prove difficult to accommodate, especially in smaller TSOs, and that three members should be able to work with the full range of stakeholders and the Host's chief officer or trustees. The ideal team would comprise three peers, either with one assuming 'lead' responsibility, liaising with the Host and writing the report; or with two peers and a facilitator.

There was a difference of view about how long the peer review visit should last. As with the literature we reviewed (section 3.6), the importance of allowing adequate time for planning and undertaking peer reviews was emphasised, while at the same time the difficulty in estimating the likely level of commitment in advance was acknowledged. Ultimately, it was felt that the purpose of the visit and the composition of the team would determine the **duration of the visit**. For example, a tightly focussed review using Peer Reviewers from across a wide geographic area might need to be completed in less than a day, partly as the issues are limited and partly to limit the time commitment of Peer Reviewers. Conversely, it might be possible to conduct a more complex review, or a review using a locally based team, lasting more than a day, or a series of half days.

All participants found the **peer review materials** used in the pilot useful, although some issues were felt to require further attention. None of the Hosts used the template for the self assessment for example, which raises questions about its applicability. Some participants felt that it would have been useful for all visits to follow a similar schedule, and for the materials to have a template for planning visits; however, most participants felt that visits should vary according to the issues under consideration. There was a request from one participant for a template to be produced, too, for the final report. Although one was devised, it was found to be too prescriptive, and each facilitator framed their report in such a way as to reflect the visit and the needs of the Hosts. In conclusion, it was agreed that it might be helpful to incorporate in the materials a range of templates to assist those participants who require them in preparing for and implementing a peer review. Additionally, it was felt that the materials should incorporate a greater **awareness of diversity issues**.

While it was acknowledged that their presence at each of the pilot visits had been helpful, there was some divergence in opinions as to the **facilitator's role**. If the model is taken forward using a facilitator, then care must be taken in identifying and agreeing their role in advance of each visit. Participants felt it was likely that some Hosts would be more receptive than others to the input of a facilitator in chairing sessions, contributing their views alongside those of the Peer Reviewers, and writing the report; while others (and potentially some Peer Reviewers) might prefer them to fulfil a purely functional, administrative role. Some participants appreciated the impartiality of the facilitator's role, while others preferred the idea

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of a **Lead Peer Reviewer** fulfilling the role, although it was acknowledged that similar issues such as securing clarity about their role would need to be addressed, as well as the need to consider remuneration for their additional input to the process.

The pilot unearthed the potential for sensitivities about the **content of the final report** to limit the overall success of the peer review process. The literature reviewed suggested that although the process can be seen to some extent as an end in itself, the final report is an essential element of the peer review model (section 3.6). Two of the Hosts were 'nicely surprised' by their final report, finding them thorough, fair and containing helpful recommendations. The third Host felt that their report could have been far more critical, saying that:

both I and the Trustees felt the final report was not strong enough. Some of the verbal feedback was not reflected and I felt that this was because the reviewers were too concerned with not offending anyone. For it to be really useful we needed firm opinions and it felt like the final report was too polite and not blunt enough. We would have welcomed more detailed criticism and, the trustees needed to hear that from someone other than me. That was one of our reasons for participating – to get an honest view from someone without a vested interest.

Some Peer Reviewers were indeed concerned that their report should not be too critical, as the content could only be based upon on an 'impression' of the issue, gained over an incredibly short timescale. There was also recognition that the report could potentially be used against the Host organisation if a third party gained access to it and found serious criticisms of their policy or practice. These tensions reflected those identified in the literature (section 3.7), emphasising the need for a 'culture of criticism', while acknowledging that Peer Reviewers can sometimes feel unable to commit to criticism on the grounds of their limited knowledge of the Host's situation.

There was considerable discussion during the pilot about the **financial implications** arising from participating in the peer review process, particularly for Peer Reviewers. The data presented in the following table provides an illustration of the real time commitment (in days spent) made by those who participated in the pilot:

	Host	Peer Reviewer
Training day	1	1
Preparing for visit	1	0.5
Peer review visit	0.5	1
Producing report	0	0.5
Evaluation	1	1
Total days	3.5	4
Plus the cost of travel to and from events (although participants were offered reimbursements against out-of-pocket expenses).		

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Some participants, particularly Peer Reviewers, were concerned about the negative effects on the delivery of their own services due to time spent reviewing, particularly where they were employed by smaller organisations. Although it was acknowledged that there had been personal and organisational benefits arising from their participation, it was felt that the lack of provision of any financial 'payback' was unhelpful. These views reflected those found in peer review literature, which emphasises that to be successful, it requires significant commitment from all involved. It was agreed that, should the peer review model be further developed or implemented elsewhere in the sector, attention should be given to either: (i) securing resources to pay Peer Reviewers; or (ii) ensuring that any Host organisation benefiting from a peer review be required to commit staff time to undertaking one for another TSO, thereby ensuring costs and benefits are shared and spread through the sector. Whichever resourcing model is adopted, it was agreed that efforts should be made to pay Facilitators or Lead Reviewers for the extra work they carry out (especially the time taken to write reports).

Participants agreed categorically that no individual should be able to participate in a peer review unless they had undertaken **training**, both in the use of the materials and in the principles that should apply; a sentiment echoed in section 3.5 of the literature review. While this issue was felt to be critical for Peer Reviewers, it was also felt that Hosts required training and support in order to ensure they prepared adequately and therefore got maximum benefit from the process. There were no conclusions reached about whether training should be accredited in some way (as in the case of the PACE project, section 3.3), although it was acknowledged that accreditation could serve to standardise the approach taken, potentially providing some quality assurance.

There was some debate about whether there should be some form of **selection** or **approval system** for peer reviewers, as the model applied in the pilot did not necessarily allow for quality control of the individual participants. However, as participants are required to be chief or senior officers of TSOs, it was acknowledged that quality assurance was partly built in to the selection process.

5.0 Recommendations

Based on the project findings, the following recommendations have been drawn up as a means of further developing the Third Sector Peer Review model, and to ensure that the implementation of any future scheme addresses the identified needs and issues exposed by the project.

5.1 Provide more opportunities for third sector peer review

The main recommendation is that there is further work done to roll out the benefits of peer review to the third sector, as identified in the course of the project, by seeking to establish a national Third Sector Peer Review Scheme. In line with the assessment of the peer review models being rolled out in other sectors (particularly the IDeA models), it is recommended that the third sector model should be promoted nationally, with support for delivery provided regionally by regional level bodies.

A national co-ordinating role would allow for consistency of approach across the sector (albeit qualified by the need to adopt flexibility in implementation) in resourcing third sector peer review and for lessons to be co-ordinated and represented as part of ongoing national negotiations around performance improvement in the third sector. It is felt that the regions are likely to be best suited to the co-ordination of delivery of third sector peer review, for a number of reasons: each region has a wide enough variety of TSOs from which to draw members for a Peer Reviewer pool (without being so large it becomes unwieldy, as might be the case with a national pool); there are parallel developments at regional level (including changes in the delivery of government funding and governance) which suggest a natural tie-in with other improvement and policy agendas would be possible; and third sector networks already exist.

The responsibilities of the different organisations involved in the initiative's delivery might incorporate the following elements:

National role – coordination and quality control

- Further testing and developing the model and associated materials, ideally incorporating a longitudinal evaluation exploring the impact of the model in different settings within the third sector
- Promoting peer review as a viable method of improving performance across the third sector, and specifically promoting the Third Sector Peer Review initiative (to include hosting information on a dedicated website)
- Publishing and disseminating Third Sector Peer Review materials (including those from other peer review models, to avoid 're-inventing the wheel', and allowing TSOs to select the model best suited to their circumstances)
- Designing training materials
- Delivering training for the trainers, who will be engaged in training potential Peer Reviewers
- Developing and promoting quality control systems that ensure consistency of approach across the country
- Securing and administering funding to ensure effective delivery of the initiative

Regional role – delivery

- Promoting the scheme to third sector organisations in each region, both to members and non-members of their networks
- Recruiting and training of potential Peer Reviewers and Hosts
- Maintaining a database of trained Peer Reviewers
- Responding to requests from potential Hosts, matching Peer Reviewers to meet their needs, and facilitating initial dialogue between them
- Overseeing evaluation of scheme's delivery at regional level (including checking that reports have been sent, conducting three-month follow-ups with Hosts and the application of emerging quality control systems)

5.2 Incorporate key elements in a Third Sector Peer Review Scheme

If further work is to go ahead, there are a number of elements which should be incorporated into the model. These include the following:

The Host decides

The scheme should be based on the values described in the materials presented in section 4.1 of this report, and 'the host decides' should be the scheme's key guiding principle, particularly in relation to the following:

- The focus of the review
- The criteria against which organisations or elements of organisations are to be assessed³
- The characteristics of the peers they would like to conduct the review
- The nature of the evidence they provide to their peers, and the identity of the stakeholders who participate in the review
- Whether and to what extent they accept or act upon the recommendations of the review
- Whether and/or when to withdraw from the peer review process

The pilot has indicated, but not conclusively demonstrated, that peer review can be applied in almost any context within the third sector, and it is recommended that further development of the model should retain the commitment to making its implementation and associated benefits as widespread as possible. However, the size of participating organisations should remain a constraint: it is recommended that TSOs wishing to participate in a peer review should employ two or more members of staff.

Support the facilitation role

This report presents two potential options to facilitate the peer review process: through the employment of an external, neutral facilitator; or by ascribing specific additional responsibilities to one of the Peer Reviewers. Process skills such as helping the Host to prepare for the visit, keeping participants focused and on schedule, summarising emerging findings and taking the lead in writing the report

³ It is recommended that Hosts be encouraged to seek the views of their likely Peer Reviewers and / or facilitator in setting the performance criteria, to ensure that they make the most of their expertise.

have been identified as crucial to the likely success of the model. Whether promoting the peer review model through the use of a Facilitator or Lead Reviewer, it is recommended that whoever runs such a service gives due attention to this role, and ensures that whatever delivery mechanism is put in place incorporates adequate provision for the training and support of these individuals.

Promote the use of a voluntary agreement

During the evaluation it emerged that some participants had volunteered to participate in the pilot under two potentially detrimental misapprehensions. The first was that the time commitment would be smaller. The second was that employers would be reimbursed for time of hosts and reviewers. There was some discussion about whether participants in future third sector peer reviews should be reimbursed for their time, but it was concluded that the voluntary element (incorporating 'payback' to Peer Reviewers' employers by their being able to commission a free peer review at a future date) had more merit, and was more likely to be supported. It is therefore recommended that the model be promoted as a mutual support initiative for the third sector, along similar lines to the Gateway Review and Peer Clearing House models currently being promoted in the local government sector. Ordinarily, there should be no financial exchange between Host organisations and Peer Reviewers, and any external funding secured should be used only to provide for the administrative and facilitation roles.

Promotional materials should clarify the likely time commitments, including training and evaluation as well as participating in peer review activity. Additionally, it is recommended that some form of voluntary contract or agreement be devised, outlining from the outset what participants can expect from each other and the likely time commitments they will be required to make during the implementation of the review. The scheme implementers should work to ensure that senior officers of organisations benefiting from a peer review act as Peer Reviewers to another third sector organisation within a pre-determined timescale (e.g. twelve months).

Annex 1: Acknowledgements

This has been a challenging but nevertheless highly enjoyable piece of work for all those involved. It appears to have been particularly successful, both in terms of stimulating immediate improvements in performance at the Hosts, and generating findings that can be extrapolated and applied across the third sector as a whole.

The success of the project has relied entirely on the commitment and enthusiasm of the participants who volunteered to take part, and particularly those individuals who agreed to have their practice put under the spotlight. I have been inspired by the enthusiasm and application of all those who took part in our project, and I would like to thank each and every one of you for making this such an enjoyable and worthwhile venture. Various quotes have been drawn from our conversations with the participants; I hope I have not misconstrued any of these, or used them out of context.

Other people have also made invaluable contributions, including people who allowed us to review their peer review materials so that we could – in producing our own – avoid re-inventing the wheel. I hope we have not failed to give credit where it is due; thank you. We also spoke to people engaged in piloting peer review models in other contexts within the third sector, and I would like to thank you all for your openness and willingness to share information about your experience, which helped us avoid certain hidden pitfalls.

Our relationship with the Performance Hub has been exceptionally constructive, with regular meetings and scheduled telephone calls allowing for ideas to be knocked around and the relevance of emerging findings to be tested. This level of communication has helped keep the research focussed, and provided reassurance that we have had the client's support in all our endeavours, for which I am also grateful.

Finally, thanks are due to my colleagues on the research team, who have worked tremendously hard to ensure that all the materials we have produced and that the support we have given to participants has been of a high standard. I have been impressed by their commitment to and enthusiasm for the project, which have inevitably helped to ensure the relevance of the emerging findings.

Martin Purcell
Project Manager
27th April 2007

Annex 2: Peer review reports

Visit Report

Action for Black Community Development (ABCD)

Friday 2nd March 2007

Host: David Odunukwe (ABCD)

Peer Reviewers: Catherine Barnard (Arch Mediation Service, Harrogate); Paul Robinson (Rotherham Children and Young People's Voluntary Sector Consortium)

Facilitator: Martin Purcell (Policy Research Institute)

Purpose: to gain insights into approaches for fresh marketing

Outcome: greater confidence to pursue marketing campaign

Materials circulated in advance of visit:

- Mission, Vision, Strategies & Programmes document
 - Review of Business Plan
 - Memorandum & Articles of Association
 - ACCEPT (discontinued employment service) leaflet and poster
-

Introduction

The peer review had been organised to assist ABCD in reviewing their arrangements for marketing the organisation, to raise their profile and remind members of their target population of what they do, what they have achieved and to professionalise their image. As part of their introduction to ABCD, Peer Reviewers entered into discussion with David Odunukwe (DO), who stressed the following:

- The key thesis of the business plan review is that the organisation is funding chasing rather than business plan led, and DO acknowledges that the vision, mission and business plan need refreshing.
- Funding of core activities (i.e. providing infrastructure support to African and African Caribbean third sector organisations) comes from ERDF and LAA budgets. Other funding is secured by 'mopping up' bits of funding for small contracts (e.g. research projects, information databases, workshops, website design). **N.B. DO noted that funding for next year is still not secured, emphasising the need for better business planning, a funding strategy and marketing materials.**
- There are 'operational contradictions' between ABCD's core objectives and the delivery of disparate services, not least of which is the question of the appropriate level of engagement with the African and African Caribbean (A&AC) community and the associated tension between providing services to groups (core business) or individuals (additional contracted services).

Initial Response

The feedback from peer reviewers at this point was to suggest that there was some potential to distinguish between different elements of ABCD's marketing work, effectively 'advertising' their work and successes to the community; and 'marketing' their successes to potential funders. In particular, the need to respond to the changed funding environment (in which TSOs respond to

commissioning by statutory sector agencies) was emphasised, and it was suggested that marketing needs to be highly sophisticated (i.e. focussed and targeted), to include lobbying via ABCD's high-level networks to ensure their partners commission work from them.

In order to inform any marketing work, it was felt that greater clarity about ABCD's direction of travel is needed, and it was suggested that work on the mission, vision and business plan would need to be undertaken before, and to inform, any new marketing initiative.

At this point, DO was given the opportunity to revise his preferred outcomes, and he requested that the Peer Reviewers provide a couple of recommendations about how ABCD might gain more focus on their mission and aims, and how these could be translated into their marketing work; not what to do, necessarily, but what to consider.

Perception / Profile of ABCD

The peer reviewers held discussions with a number of people (including ABCD staff and service users, and partner organisations) to explore with them how the organisation is perceived and positioned within the A&AC community and local decision making processes in Bradford. A number of themes emerged during these discussions, including the following:

- It is acknowledged that the organisation has some challenges in relation to how it is perceived by the community, based partly on historical failings on their part to meet the A&AC community's expectations, and partly on the changes in their services necessitated by changes in funding. However, there is a sense that the organisation has made some progress in this regard, and that the A&AC has an increasing feeling of 'ownership' of ABCD.
- It was also recognised that there are continuing tensions within the A&AC community, and that ABCD needs to ensure that people from all backgrounds within the African and African Caribbean communities feel the organisation is representing their interests and meeting their needs. Related to this is the issue that people from the A&AC community sometimes appear to expect more of ABCD than they can give, due to resource constraints which are not always appreciated by their customers.
- The key roles identified by all respondents were around community development, empowerment and representation, ensuring that the A&AC community has a voice in local decision making, and developing their skills to bring influence to bear.
- Members of the community continue to approach ABCD for services previously provided by them but for which they no are longer funded (e.g. employment advice). N.B. no individuals seeking such support are turned away; rather, they are given some support by ABCD staff or / and signposted on to other providers.
- ABCD is acknowledged (by both high-level strategic bodies and practitioners) as a representative voice for the African and African Caribbean community in Bradford, both for input to strategic planning and for support in gaining access to this community to deliver services.
- The provision of information to the A&AC community was identified as a key element of ABCD's work, with the focus being on providing information on a wide range of issues / services tailored to meet the needs of the

A&AC community (with less emphasis on providing information on A&AC issues to partners).

- A strength that ABCD could exploit more is their effectiveness in accessing 'hard-to-reach' groups within the community, although it was acknowledged that they could extend their reach further into the community.
- The reputation which ABCD appears to have gained within the community can be characterised as having secured the trust and confidence of those who have used their services (e.g. people come to ABCD to secure employment advice in preference to Job Centre Plus).

Recommendations

The peer reviewers reached the end of the visit with the common view that ABCD has a definite role to play in relation to its core objectives, and in providing a valuable service to the A&AC community in Bradford. Specifically, it was felt that ABCD is in a strong position to provide a voice for the A&AC community, ensuring they are represented at all levels of local decision-making and providing bridges between and within the community, and to planning structures and service providers in Bradford.

It was agreed that work on promoting and publicising the organisation's achievements is needed, but that this should follow an initial exercise which could give greater clarity / focus to their core objectives. It was felt that this should not be too onerous, as there is clear support for ABCD's core work, and that as – strategic and operational responsibilities appear to have been delegated by the Board to staff – this could be undertaken by them (e.g. by organising some kind of brain-storming session, to include appropriate 'critical friend' stakeholders) with a view to making suggestions to the Board about mission / vision / business plan. This work could help clarify whether the organisation focuses purely on infrastructure support or includes individually-tailored service delivery (bearing in mind that these need not be mutually exclusive, and that intelligence about the community which could be useful in the infrastructure work could be gained from service delivery).

It was also felt that there was scope to explore how ABCD might involve the different elements of the A&AC community more centrally in its work, sharing responsibility for different elements (for example) of the representative work, thereby empowering the community rather than assuming full responsibility for representing them. Thus, ABCD could retain its role as the 'strong voice of the black community' (i.e. the more they engage with the A&AC community the better they can represent their interests at a strategic level), while at the same time strengthening its own structures and embedding its message deeper into that community.

It was felt that ABCD could adopt a more systematic approach to publicity and communications, and that its publicity and marketing work could be used to:

- emphasise why ABCD is / should be providing a given service (e.g. to meet a proven need; because they are better placed to provide it than others)
- highlight examples of ABCD's achievements (the peer reviewers felt they had discovered 'lots of little gems', and that ABCD could collect a portfolio of more of these, releasing them into the public domain 'a little and often'):

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- make best use of a variety of media, including existing approaches (such as e-mail networks, e-mail bulletin, inserts in CVS bulletins), planned work (website, leaflets and local radio), and systematic use of the local printed media (e.g. T&A).

In considering these, it was felt that ABCD should:

- Think about multi-lingual issues;
- Nurture media outlets about forthcoming events and current issues (firstly to ensure they always come to ABCD for commentary, and also so ABCD doesn't need to wait to be asked for its views)
- As well as informing the A&AC community about what ABCD is doing, emphasise how individuals and groups can become involved in ABCD's work.

Visit Report

Barnsley Arena

Tuesday 6th March 2007

Peer Reviewers: Alison Lowe (Chief Executive of Touchstone), Helen Dawes Senior Co-ordinator at Home Start Leeds.

Facilitator: John Harris (Development Manager Workforce and Skills at the Regional Forum).

Purpose of the visit: to assess how well Barnsley arena involves services users and carers in the work of the organisation.

The Peer Reviewers and facilitator visited Barnsley Arena with the brief from the Chief Executive to focus on *the inclusion of service users and carers in the work of the organisation*. Having said this, issues discussed on the day ranged over all of the organisation's work and the ways in which it delivers this work. Having met with members of the staff team, commissioners, trustees, service users and carers we would like to thank them for their time and commitment to this process.

List of materials considered prior to visit:

- Memorandum and articles of association
 - Report and financial statements 2006
 - Letters to members of Barnsley arena database
 - Briefing paper for Chief Executive recruitment procedure
 - Examples of newsletters
 - Consultation paper to members
 - Service specification for Participation process 2004
 - FAQ for Barnsley arena
 - Letter about involvement sent to 200 members of database – with responses
-

Organisational Mission

Barnsley Arena has no mission statement, aims or objectives.

- In order to give focus and strategic direction, the panel recommends that Barnsley Arena addresses this deficit as part of the planned review and restructure of the organisation

In relation to the evidence base of Barnsley arena and the impact of its work it was noted as a matter of concern that this appeared to be weak. At a time when funders are and should be moving to longer term funding cycles ('three plus one') this is not yet the case for Barnsley Arena.

- An evidence base of Barnsley Arena's impact needs to be built up

Communication

The panel felt that internal communication was a big issue for Barnsley Arena. The Commissioners have begun a series of structural changes to the decision making frameworks with Barnsley and the panel did not feel that this had been

effectively understood by staff. The view of the commissioners was that the system had become 'stale' and could be made more informal and interactive.

- The staff team needs to be supported through internal review and team building time in order to engage more assertively with the new structures

We were pleased to hear that the PCT had been invited in to undertake a training exercise with staff on some of these issues however we felt that much more "buy in" was needed from staff and this could be addressed at the visioning session to discuss mission etc.

There appeared to be good communication between the Chief Executive and Commissioners but the panel was aware that there was still some work to be done with external partners to overcome the historical differences which had built up.

Involving service users and carers

In relation to service users and carers, the panel felt that the information given to them could be more creative and did not appear to meet the needs of a wider range of diverse communities which are growing in number in Barnsley. Feedback on this issue was mixed: one message was that there were a large number of formal papers full of jargon sent out by the Council – another that Barnsley Arena communication had improved enormously and that the newsletter was excellent.

- The panel recommends that there be a review of the amount and nature of papers sent out to service users and carers

This review needs to include all communications including information about Barnsley Arena, how to join as well as the papers which are required to be consulted upon by commissioners. There might be a need to discuss with commissioners how papers can be simplified, perhaps with a short précis and recommendations sheet at the front. Service users and carers should be included in this review.

There were barriers to involvement identified (by trustees and service users and carers) which need to be addressed: meetings being held at inconvenient times for people in work or for carers, the facilities for the Older People's board meetings being inappropriate, the 'formalised architecture' of board meetings etc.

- Barnsley arena should explore more informal ways of involving service users / carers and identify ways that other barriers to involvement can be removed

The issue of payment for participation was raised by one of the service user/carer group as was the idea to hold an 'Open Day' for all organisations and sub groups involved in Barnsley Arena, offering appropriate training and the need for active outreach work. The subject of food was raised and how important it can be in bringing people together.

- The issue of service users and carers being acknowledged for their participation was raised and how important this is

Partnerships/structure

- Barnsley Arena needs to review its structure as a matter of urgency.

As part of the Organisational review of mission etc, trustees need to consider how the needs of the Arena can best be met via partnerships with similar and complementary organisations. In order to secure its financial future, Trustees should undertake a review of the organisation's constitution and consider expanding the areas worked with beyond Barnsley Borough Council's borders.

- The structure and roles of the staff team would benefit from being reviewed

At a time when participation structures are being changed this presents an opportunity to see if all staff roles will fit with new ways of working.

Expectations/Culture

In relation to the role of the Chief Executive it was clearly signalled by trustees, service users/carers and commissioners that she has a very positive attitude and is making the right changes to the organisation and its working practices.

The panel felt that there were some cultural shifts which needed to take place if Barnsley Arena was to continue into the longer term. It is commonly understood that experiencing significant change creates uncertainty and stress. The panel felt that staff were uncertain about change and were in need of support and development in terms of working in new ways e.g. new forms of partnership with commissioners and in exploring what worked and what did not.

Expectations of different sub groups within an organisation and its system may differ or clash.

- The panel therefore recommends that the question of changing expectations be addressed as part of the mission/visioning exercise with trustees and staff and that this is properly communicated to service users and carers.
- We also recommend that commissioners are open and honest about which decisions service users can make and when they are only being consulted about detail or other matters which may not change as a result of the involvement.

Service Delivery

We have mentioned some of the ways in which service delivery might be changed. Communication tools need to be reviewed and the way in which service users and carers are engaged needs to be more creative and tailored to the needs of targeted groups. For instance, BME communities and younger people seem to be excluded under the current arrangements.

Ideas for working in different ways must include service users and carers but Arena should also seek the views of potential service users and carers too to ascertain what the barriers to their involvement are and what needs to change to address these. There are also other service user type organisations across the region such as the Leeds Involvement Project and perhaps links might be made with these organisations to share good practice, develop possible mentoring and partnership opportunities and also to benchmark quality and performance.

Visit Report

St Luke's Cares

Thursday 28th February 2007

Peer Reviewers: Ann Pemberton and Mike Beckett

Facilitator: Sarah Kelsey

Purpose: To review the current staffing structure of the organisation; and to assist St Luke's in establishing full cost recovery through the use of Internal Information.

List of materials read by Peer Reviewers in advance of visit:

- Current development plan
- Current Staff and Management Structures

List of materials looked at by Peer Reviewers during the visit:

- Financial information
 - Volunteer application pack
 - Email to all staff notifying about the peer review visit and alerting staff to the possibility of them being asked to speak with the peer reviewers as part of the process
-

Background

Organisational Culture

The discussions between the peer reviewers and the organisation began with some useful information about the organisational culture of organisation. It was explained that the majority of the employees within the organisation first came into contact with St Luke's Cares through the work of its projects and then through volunteering. This is very positive and reflects well on the organisation and its standing within the local community. However, it was noted that recruiting volunteers as staff can sometimes create a 'dependency culture' - where the employee looks to the organisation (and particularly the Group Manager) to help support and nurture their development and the sustainability of their employment. The transactional analysis model from counselling of parent/child relationships was explored, including the importance of communication to empower individuals to become adults through adult communication and through taking on responsibility. It was noted that in the precarious world of the community and voluntary sector where limited life funding is often the only source of funding employees that have begun life within the organisation as a volunteer may encounter some problems when making the transition to paid employment. It was agreed that the employer-employee relationship and the employer-volunteer relationship are very different. It was also noted that staff already working or volunteering within the organisation may view paid workers and volunteers in different ways so if a volunteer makes the transition to paid staff, management needs to be mindful of this.

Volunteers

Following on from the discussion of the culture of the organisation the peer reviewers took some time to share examples of good practice when recruiting and signing up volunteers. Ideas included:

- Sending those responsible for volunteer recruitment on specialised training courses specifically designed for the community and voluntary sector;
- Taking time in the initial meeting with a volunteer to explore what they want to get out of the volunteering experience, to ensure that they are steered towards the right role, within the right area of the organisation;
- The use of tick boxes in the application process to formalise and record the interests of the volunteer so they can indicate where they think their strengths and contribution might best be utilised;
- Build the capacity of volunteers so that they might be able to contribute in areas where they are not currently doing so, such as administration, finance and fundraising
- Look into revitalising relationships with Jobcentre Plus to bring volunteers into the organisation through their welfare to work programme;
- To consider expanding the use of placements from those already utilised to include other educational establishments or courses.

Comments on the development plan

The development plan was sent to the reviewers in advance of their visit to the organisation. There were several comments and suggestions made with regards to this document:

- The document clearly states the aims and objectives of the organisation but might also benefit from a 'snappy' vision statement;
- The 'Foundations and Vision' section might be better headed as 'History'.
- The 'Collaborating Organisations' section could be described as 'Partnerships' or 'Partner Organisations' and the existence of these relationships could be better exploited to benefit the organisation, especially with regards to joint funding bids;
- The financial information and strategy regarding the Church could be omitted;
- Financial information pertaining to current projects and the funding strategy for their continuation and expansion could be included;
- The Tiger 11 information, if included, could be cloaked more in terms of a partnership arrangement rather than a project.

Current staffing structure

The structure of the organisation

The present structure of the organisation was looked at in detail. Close analysis revealed that one of the divisions (Buildings and Community) could actually be subsumed into the other two (Youth and Adult), resulting in a more streamlined structure. As a result of the discussions the Group Manager has already looked to amending the structure of the organisation.

Discussions also took place around the possibility of grouping the various different youth projects into 'clusters', although there were no firm outcomes from this.

The role of the Group Manager

In looking at the existing structure of the organisation the peer reviewers were interested to find out whether there were any duties or responsibilities of the Group Manager that could be delegated to other staff to relieve some of the burden on post holder.

It was clear from discussions that the Group Manager has a great deal of passion for the fundraising aspect of the job. However, completing applications is very time intensive. A couple of suggestions were put forward by the peer reviewers which could assist the Group Manager when submitting funding applications:

- Empowering project managers to contribute to funding applications and bids for funding;
- Exploring the potential of the Board of Trustees to assist with the completion of funding applications and proposals.

However, it was also noted that because of the Group Manager's enthusiasm for completing funding applications, the Group manager could also explore the possibility of delegating some of the other tasks they currently undertake to make more of their time available for fundraising activities.

Staffing

The organisation is currently implementing systems to improve and monitor quality and performance. Through the course of discussions with the peer reviewers it was suggested that a new position could be created within the organisation to oversee such activities and also to take on associated administrative tasks. Funding for this post could be found in the 'surplus' of the organisation, which is currently carried over from year to year. It was felt that now would be a good time for such an investment in the 'core' of the organisation. Also discussed was the expansion of the role of a member of staff returning from long term sick leave, to include assisting with the collation of internal financial information to ascertain the true cost of project delivery.

It was also suggested that if staff were to be moved within the organisation to take on a different role – physically moving them within building and having a 'leaving do' for their previous role could help both the post-holder and the rest of the staff adjust to their new role within the organisation.

Review of financial information

Establishing real costs

The organisation was keen to establish the 'real' cost of running its core function and to work out a system for calculating full cost recovery when bidding for new project funding. To explore this, the peer reviewers looked over the relevant financial information.

Several suggestions were made:

- At the start of the new financial year begin to allocate spend according to each project. This will begin to build up a true picture of the costs associated with project delivery, which can then be used to inform future funding applications.
- Routinely integrate management, administration and overhead costs into the budget of each project.
- In the interim period between now and the new financial year try and ascertain the management, administration and overhead costs of each project.
- Break down individual staffing costs.
- Rename administration costs as 'stationery' to more accurately reflect what they represent.
- Break down IT expenses to distinguish between core costs and project costs.

Raising awareness of funding issues

The financial viability of several individual projects was discussed and suggestions were made with regards to improving awareness of funding issues amongst project staff, service users, providers/funding bodies and the local community:

- Set up a Money Saving Working Group where all staff can attend a regular meeting. (To be held regularly at first and then, when an internal review and activities have been completed, it could be held on an annual or bi-annual basis). The purpose of the meeting is to discuss ways in which the organisation might save money or reduce expenditure;
- Write to funding bodies to notify them that without secure funding projects such as the Holiday Programmes will not take place;
- Notify the parents of children who use such services that the service may not take place if funding cannot be secured so that they can write to pressure the relevant funding body, this may include a pro forma petition/letter template to ask for them to show support for the organisations bids (This may also help to publicise the organisation and promote increased community loyalty);
- Make staff more aware of how much projects actually cost and any shortfall, if projects are currently running at a loss make sure that staff know that the project is currently being subsidised;
- The organisation does appear to be providing a much needed service and ought to be remunerated more for its activities by funding bodies to reflect the costs of the projects delivered.

Discussions with staff

The peer reviewers took the opportunity to speak with staff from the organisation at different levels. There were several observations from these brief discussions:

- The real cost of projects was unlikely to be known by most staff;
- There were several tasks, currently being carried out by the project manager, such as planning staff rotas and filling in monitoring forms, which could perhaps be delegated to the proposed monitoring and performance officer post;
- That those on the ground floor had passion for their jobs and could easily contribute to first drafts of funding bids, making use of their expertise;
- Concern was expressed about the role of the project manager, who in addition to a project manager role is also currently undertaking a full connexions caseload. The peer reviewers discussed the possible delegation of some activities to project team meetings, project staff and team leaders, with monitoring rather than management being the main requirement.

Annex 3: References

The following references are cited in the summary of the annotated bibliography, detailed in Section 3:

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Annex 4: Personnel

The research team comprised members of staff from both the Policy Research Institute and the Regional Forum, all of whom were involved in designing, delivering and facilitating the involvement of third sector partners in the project. The key project personnel, and their roles, are summarised as follows:

- Martin Purcell: Policy Research Institute (Project Manager)
- John Harris: Regional Forum
- Sarah Kelsey: Policy Research Institute
- Murray Hawtin: Policy Research Institute

Work on the implementation of the pilot project would not have been possible without the input of senior staff from a number of third sector organisations from across the Yorkshire & the Humber region. Their involvement allowed for the testing of the model and proposed materials in a variety of 'live' situations, with individuals fulfilling the requirements of the different roles identified as being necessary in the preparatory phase of the research; and assisting in the evaluation of the pilot, and making recommendations about how the model could be developed for future use. The participants in the pilot were as follows:

- Catherine Barnard: Arch Mediation Service, Harrogate
- Mike Beckett: Citizens Advice Bureau, York
- Helen Dawes: Home-Start, Leeds
- Lynne Elliot: Barnsley Arena
- Alison Lowe: Touchstone, Leeds
- Ann Pemberton: Home-Start, Leeds
- Louise: St. Luke's Cares, Leeds
- David Odununkwe: Action for Black Community Development, Bradford
- Paul Robinson: Voluntary Sector Children & Young People Consortium, Rotherham

The following organisational summaries provide an illustration of the range of organisations represented by these participants, and indicate the variety of contexts within which it is likely that a Third Sector Peer Review model could work:

Action for Black Community Development (ABCD), Bradford

ABCD is an intermediary infrastructure support organisation for voluntary, private and faith groups from the African and African Caribbean communities in the Bradford district. The organisation aims to develop a comprehensive regeneration programme for African and African Caribbean community, and to influence mainstream provision and develop bespoke programmes for groups from their target community.

As well as having established thematic forums between African and African Caribbean voluntary and community organisations and public sector institutions (e.g. health, education, police, housing regeneration), enabling advocacy and representation on issues such as health, housing and education, ABCD has secured a seat on Bradford Vision (the local strategic partnership), and has

previously run successful EU-funded advice and support services, promoting employment opportunities to African and African Caribbean residents.

Arch Mediation Service, Harrogate

Arch Mediation recognises that disputes between neighbours can sometimes get out of hand, and offers a mediation service as a way of sorting out differences without involving council officials, the police, solicitors or the court. Their service uses specially trained, independent, non-legal volunteers who listen to both sides of the dispute and help people involved to reach agreements between themselves.

Typical issues which the service addresses include:

- Noise nuisance of every kind
- Anti-social behaviour
- Children's and teenagers behaviour
- Verbal abuse, intimidation and harassment
- Nuisance caused by pets
- Parking and car repairs
- Boundary disputes

www.harrogate.gov.uk/immediacy-2138&theme=_normal

Barnsley ARENA

Barnsley Arena was established to help Service Users and Carers have a say about the services that are available to them. As well as making information more readily available to their members, the organisation provides free training and support to help individuals participate in local decision-making processes. If you feel you haven't got time, then you are very welcome to join our organisation and simply receive information.

Home Start, Leeds

We are part of a national and international charity that offers a unique service that helps families who are experiencing difficulties while bringing up young children.

The safety and well being of children is at the heart of everything we do. We recognise that often the best way to help children is to support their parents, helping them give their children the best possible start in life. Volunteers develop warm and supportive relationships with families and offer the kind of support that is best suited for each family. Home-Start volunteers offer one on one home visiting support, usually on a weekly basis, although these arrangements are flexible to your needs.

Our volunteers offer emotional support and friendship and will provide you with the support you feel you need. This may be a good listening ear, encouragement,

some practical help or simply someone to share an adult conversation with occasionally!

www.home-startleeds.co.uk/index.php

Rotherham Voluntary Sector Children & Young People Consortium

The Rotherham Voluntary Sector Children and Young People's Consortium is a group of voluntary sector organisations who provide services for children, young people and families in Rotherham.

The Consortium's mission is to improve outcomes for children, young people and families in Rotherham by supporting its members to be full and effective partners in the development and delivery of local services.

Over 13,500 children and young people across Rotherham were supported by these organisations in 2005. They employ over 300 staff with an equal numbers of volunteers. They are diverse in size, focus and service user groups.

Membership of the Consortium is open to any voluntary sector organisation that is, or may be, contracted to provide services to children, young people and their families in Rotherham.

www.varotherham.org.uk/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=32&Itemid=76

St Luke's Cares

St Luke's CARES is a well-established organisation in South Leeds that provides a range of services for the surrounding communities of inner and outer South Leeds. It aims to respond to the needs of the local community by raising self esteem and developing the capacity and skills of individuals; by education and awareness raising activities in the community; to work for the regeneration of the area, particularly in terms of increasing employment and training possibilities; and to help local community and voluntary groups to develop and contribute to the well-being of residents in the area by providing support, facilities and premises from which to operate.

www.stlukesholbeck.org.uk/index.php?menuorder=29

Touchstone, Leeds

Touchstone is a registered charity with a vision to deliver outstanding services that transform the lives of people experiencing mental health difficulties. Touchstone exists to help people facing difficulties related to their mental health to live in the community with dignity and independence, and through its work aims to enhance people's mental well being. It is strongly committed to equality, independence, choice and the right of everyone to receive the services they need.

Touchstone provides a range of flexible, innovative services that enable people to experience an improved quality of life. It ensures that services are accessible and shaped by the needs of existing and potential service users. Every individual

is entitled to be treated with respect to express their choice and preference in the matters and decisions that affect their daily lives.

www.touchstone-leeds.co.uk

York Citizens Advice Bureau

York CAB offers a comprehensive advice and representation service, addressing any question raised by clients about their situation or concerns. As well as providing a general advice service (provided by a team of professionally trained volunteer advisers), the Bureau employs a range of specialists who are professionals in particular areas of welfare law.

The range of services offered by the Bureau include:

- Open door sessions access to advice - especially for urgent cases.
- Appointments.
- Sessions offered at different places around the city.
- Telephone advice sessions.
- Home visits for those people who cannot get out and about.
- Letter and fax enquiry service.

www.yorkcab.org.uk

Initial telephone interviews were held with a number of individuals from national organisations with an involvement in existing Peer Review schemes. The input of these respondents was helpful in that these interviews helped the research team to refine their understanding of the concept, and to shape the pilot project.

Participants in these interviews included:

Nigel Bacon: Chief Officer, Warrington CVS

Debbie Dalby: Chief Officer, Halton Voluntary Action

Mirella Grillo: Charities Evaluation Service (PQASSO Peer Review pilot project)

Fiona Martin: NAVCA (Performance Hub)

Pamela Park: Deputy Chief Executive, Westminster Voluntary Action

Morag Plank: Deputy Director, Merton Voluntary Sector Council

Action with Communities in Rural England

Annex 5: About the Partners

Performance Hub

The Performance Hub works to help third sector organisations (charities, voluntary organisations, community groups and social enterprises) to achieve more. It is one of six national hubs of expertise devoted to helping the third sector. The other hubs specialise in:

- finance
- governance
- information, communications and technology (ICT)
- volunteering
- workforce development

The Performance Hub is a partnership. Charities Evaluation Services (CES) is the accountable body. CES and the National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) are the lead partners. Hub staff are based at CES, NCVO and the National Association for Voluntary and Community Action (NAVCA). The Hub is funded by Capacitybuilders through the *ChangeUp* programme.

Regional Forum

The Regional Forum for Voluntary and Community Organisations is a registered charity set up in 1997 to develop a coherent and organised voice for the voluntary sector in the region. It is a membership organisation with 200 members, which themselves represent over 20,000 organisations.

The Forum believes that by placing the voluntary and community sector (VCS) at the heart of Yorkshire and the Humber we can create an inclusive and vibrant region with a high quality of life for all. The Regional Forum supports, develops and advocates for a VCS that is increasingly...effective, influential, healthy and connected.

The work of the Regional Forum covers a range of policy areas:

- BME Information Service
- Engagement & Regeneration
- European Funding Service
- Infrastructure Development
- Voluntary & Community Sector Representation
- Social Economy Development
- Workforce Development and Skills

Policy Research Institute

The Policy Research Institute is one of the UK's leading university-based centres for applied economic and social research. Founded in 1987, they have established a track-record of high quality research, evaluation and consultancy for a wide range of clients including:

- central government departments

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- regional and local development agencies
- local authorities
- regeneration partnerships
- European Commission

Providing a multi-disciplinary environment for research and evaluation, the Policy Research Institute works to improve policy and practice across a range of fields including:

- labour markets and skills
- economic development and urban regeneration
- enterprise and SMEs
- local and regional governance
- social inclusion and the third sector