

# A Strategic Review

of Voluntary, Community & Faith  
Sector Representation 2008





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# A Review of Strategic Representation 2008

## Introduction

This report sets out the findings of the 2007 – 2008 voluntary, community and faith sector strategic representation review undertaken by Leeds Voice.

Last years review of voluntary, community and faith sector strategic representation set a baseline for the former local area agreement targets:

### **LAA - VCF2:**

Evidence of the strategic voluntary, community and faith sector representation on all Leeds Initiative and Local Area Agreement groups and partnerships, and community representation at neighbourhood level at all District Partnership groups and forums.

An increased number of voluntary, community and faith sector representatives feel that their contribution is valued and 'making a difference'. All representatives are linked to formal structures and networks and partners seek representatives via those structures.

### **LAA – VCF3**

Evidence of statutory sectors' acknowledgement and use of formal structures for seeking representation.

This review shows progress made towards the targets set in the former Local Area Agreement and the implementation of the 2007 review recommendations. Both reviews have used the Compact Equal Partnerships Code of Practice as a tool for measuring perception and performance of our partnerships.

The review findings show that there has been a general increase in the amount of representatives who perceive themselves as an equal, active partner that makes a difference. This information is a useful gauge in starting to measure the new Leeds Strategic Plan local indicator 'an environment for a thriving third sector' and the starting point for discussion on the new Empowerment White Paper; 'Communities in Control'.

## Background Information

Following on from the Strategic Representatives Review Completed in April last year a review was completed in April 2008 to identify if things had changed and how Leeds Voice are addressing the outcomes from the 2007 review.

## Methodology

To ensure that the same information was collated and to mark against last years review the same format of view process was taken with representatives completing questionnaires and having a representative's focus group. Also, as before, the review was discussed in the Children and Young People's Forum as an item on the agenda in the April meeting

24 completed forms were returned, 1 focus group was held and one forum fed into the discussion.

## Review Findings

### ***Do you think the voluntary, community and faith sector is a fully recognised partner?***

50% of the representatives surveyed felt that "at times" the voluntary community and faith sector were a fully recognised partner of the Leeds Initiative, or local area partnership group they belong to. 42% felt that they "were a fully recognised partner" and only 8% felt that they were not.

In comparison to last year the review showed 32% feeling that they were fully recognised against an increased 42% in this year's review which is an increase of 10%.

50% of those surveyed felt that at times they were fully recognised this has risen by 1% compared to last years 49%

There has been a notifiable change of those who felt that they were not a recognised partner, this has decreased from 19% last year to 8% this year.

When rating their perceptions the representatives also gave examples and case studies to support their views.

In particular it was clear to see that those who scored lower than the others were new to representation, had only attended one or two partnerships or groups, and were still new to the process and the partnership itself. This was noted in comments about the partnership being "top heavy" and hence not yet being able to set the agenda.

Of the examples submitted it has been recognised that with "change", and ever changing / developing partnership structures, representatives feel that there is more potential to be able to keep up with the changes within local structures. It is apparent that most representatives have commented on how their partnership is going through, and the pace of change. In some instances it has been identified that the voluntary, community and faith sector is not consulted enough throughout these processes. There was also a recognition that some policy decisions are/were made at a higher level that representatives cannot reach and that representatives should challenge their lack of inclusiveness at every opportunity.

It was generally felt that there was equal representation in current partnerships of both statutory and voluntary representation with some having alternating Chair and Vice Chair (if the Chair is Statutory then the Vice Chair is voluntary). It was also felt that the new locality enablers in the Children Wedge based partnerships were supporting and being proactive with the sector and their involvement.

It is also apparent that the sector can contribute and add value to strategies and documents that emerge out of statutory agencies. However, it was felt that the capacity to have all the knowledge and understanding of what is emerging is an issue, and that not all of the representatives (and their organisations) have the resources or infrastructure support to know all partnership issues as “it is not their full time job”.

In relation to ‘ensuring the partnership reflects the community it serves’ it is clear that there is a gap in this area and more could be done to engage the local community partnerships. In particular, representation from BME (Black & Minority Ethnic) communities was highlighted as there being little or no links with some partnerships and the BME Network / Strategy Group.

The Children and Young People’s Forum discussed in depth how, as time has progressed, they cannot fully represent the Faith Sector. Within the city of Leeds there are so many differing cultures and faiths that it is impossible to fully represent the views of such a diverse faith sector. The group felt that there should be an open discussion within the Leeds Voice Management Committee about a change from the voluntary, community and faith sector to the 3rd Sector and then representatives would feel better about representing the Faith sector

One view (Children Leeds Wedge based Partnership) felt that policies and decisions within partnerships does not acknowledge the local communities and their needs at present. But, with the proposed changes within the wedge based partnerships and the development of the Extended Services agenda this is going some way to rectify this and in the future the partnership might score higher when the representative is asked again.

In one District Partnership, representatives commented that voluntary, community and faith sector members are not given the opportunity to put items on the agenda and the partnership spends too much time on delivering presentations. Whilst these presentations are both interesting and informal, it does not allow adequate time for voluntary, community and faith sector updates and involvement. One representative in the West Partnership states that more often the presentations over run limiting the already short time that has been allocated to the voluntary, community and faith sector for updates.

The communications between the partnerships still needs developing as in some instances only emails are used and the language is difficult and needs to be more simplified to understand.

### ***Is the Sector making an active contribution to the partnership?***

When asked if representatives felt the sector was making “an active contribution” to the partnerships they were linked to 60% felt that they were and 40% felt they were at times. No-one surveyed felt that they were not.

This is an improvement on last year with an increase of 11% feeling that they were now making an active contribution.

Examples which demonstrate this include the development of group / table work which involves all partners in the discussions, equal representation at partnerships and that the representative

themselves have commented that they do contribute and take part in the discussions during their meetings.

It was felt that, although the willingness is there, sometimes the capacity and time element of being a representative hinders the role. When there is a representative in the partnership there are good routes of communication and it allows for the asking of questions to clarify issues and in the development of strategies. The voluntary, community and faith sector have good communication networks to ensure views are obtained and relayed to ensure contribution to strategy development.

It was felt that the representative's bursary scheme helps towards ensuring the voluntary, community and faith sector are making an active contribution to the partnership.

### ***Does the partnership use Leeds Voice structures to seek involvement from the voluntary, community and faith sector?***

92% of the representatives felt that the Leeds Voice structures were being used to seek involvement from the sector.

Of those 92%, some did feel that their partnership had to be reminded of this and sometimes needed to be pushed in the right direction to seek involvement.

Of the 2% who did not know, it was felt that the partnership would prefer to choose their own representative and then this would depend on what relationship they have with that particular organisation. They felt that the Leeds Voice structures were used more for an information gathering / feedback exercise than a route to obtain representation.

### ***Are representatives contributions being valued and making a difference?***

76% of representatives felt that their contribution was valued and making a difference. 16% of representatives felt that their contributions were not valued or making a difference and 8% decided not to answer the question.

This is where we have been marked lower than in the review completed last year, with a drop of 15% now deciding that their views were not as valued as this time last year.

To evidence this difference there are three new representatives, two of which have not commented as they are still new to the partnership, this equates to 12% of the replies. When evidencing the comments the following views were collated:

- Fears about voluntary representatives putting themselves at risk by putting their heads above the parapet and there is a view that we are only representing ourselves and not the whole sector
- Valued – yes in the rhetoric. Representative not sure if all individual members of the partnership believe it though as there are still comments along the line of do you get paid, aren't you a volunteer etc.
- In District Partnerships there have only been a few occasions where there has been the opportunity to give an update on local voluntary, community and faith sector activities and involvement.
- A historical difference to gain access to other forums is affecting representation – tensions

made between groups and partnerships over a period of time that are difficult to undo.

Evidence to support how representatives do feel that their contributions are being valued and making a difference:

- Round table discussions help to influence direction and views are then incorporated into policy and change
- Since attending the partnership the statutory sector has an increased awareness of the voluntary sector and the contribution it makes to the current agenda, for example; the involvement of the sector in the development of the Family Support and Parenting Strategy.
- Recognition that there is a valued view and making a difference that the Chair, or the Vice Chair of the partnership is from the voluntary, community and faith sector.
- Representatives are now being sought to attend Strategic Commissioning Boards and places are being allocated on these Boards for the voluntary, community and faith sector.
- Views expressed in consultations or planning processes are being included. Changes to Strategies are being made once views have been made: e.g. the change in the time-tabling of the review of the Children and Young Peoples Plan.
- The Safeguarding Board want to ensure that Safeguarding becomes everyone's business and without the involvement of 3rd Sector organisations this would not be possible. This has recently been borne out by the Board agreeing to increase its contribution to the Safeguarding agenda by funding a Development Worker post which will work primarily with 3rd sector organisations.
- The National Teenage Pregnancy Unit came to Leeds to do an audit and to look at areas for improvement and areas where they could help. The Representative made the point that the voluntary, community and faith sector in Leeds is well placed and has good contacts with Children and Young People. There was recognition that the statutory sector relies on the voluntary, community and faith sector and this has been taken on board and presented in the Teenage Pregnancy Unit overall report.
- The representative has been involved in discussions around the Implementation of ContactPoint and there is more partnership work in progress to ensure full voluntary, community and faith sector representation in these discussions in the future.
- Children and Young Peoples Cluster debate and letter to Rosemary Archer outlining concerns over the Cluster development project. As a result a meeting was called and the representatives were asked their views and how to progress in the future. The voluntary, community and faith sector were then able to set their own agenda.
- All the Children Leeds Wedge based partnership local plans and the development of them have had involvement from locally based voluntary, community and faith sector organisations.

## Focus group discussion notes

The structure of the Representatives discussion/ focus group followed quite an informal line with a series of questions being asked to the reps to promote discussion. The questions are listed as follows:

1. What active contributions do you feel the voluntary, community and faith sector has made to the partnership over the last year?
2. Have there been barriers to active contribution from the voluntary, community and faith sector? If so what? How can they be removed?
3. Do you feel that the partners have a clear understanding of your representative role? Can you evidence that?
4. There have been a lot of changes to the partnership structure in Leeds e.g. District Partnerships changing, 5 wedges to 3, thematic partnerships restructuring. Do you think that this has had an impact on the voluntary, community and faith sector being an equal partner?
5. Do you feel that the partners are creating an environment for 'thriving third sector'?
6. What do you see as an environment for a 'thriving third sector'?
7. What can Leeds Voice do to support the creation of this environment?
8. Lastly have you felt the impact of the recommendations of the last reps review?

### Interest and discussion points:

Questions were raised about the language of the reps review document and that since last year the language in some cases has changed and could be written in another way. There was also discussion questioning what, and who, were the Partnerships, as there was a range of different levels at which you participate in a partnership, and does it mean:

Partners – with a big “P” meaning statutory groups and Partners with a little “p” meaning voluntary, community and faith sector groups?

The word partnership also was addressed in terms of Scrutiny Boards, as reps are not equals, don't have voting rights and are only there as an advisory role to support the Councillors during scrutiny.

The group also felt that in question 1 it should read Leeds Initiative instead of Partnership, owing to the fact that all partnerships are trying to change/influence/advise the Leeds Initiative as the big picture.

It was discussed that some partnerships operate differently to others with some being used just to share information (District Partnerships - D.P.) about strategic decisions that have already been made. Also when in receipt of the presentations representatives are not given the opportunity to feedback on what they had seen. (DP). It was felt that there is better opportunity to contribute on a higher level Children Leeds.

It was felt that there is more contribution occurring with a more open discussion at a local level on thematic based partnerships and the voluntary, community and faith sector are encouraged to attend sub groups, task orientated, or specific topic groups. This is more apparent with the development of the Children Leeds Partnership and its wedge-based partnerships but it does also depend on the confidence of the representative and in some cases the angle in which they are coming from.

This then prompted the discussion about “Professional Reps” and “Community focused” reps. The group felt that in general professional reps were from larger organisations and were in paid employment where as “Community focused” reps generally were from voluntary organisations who did not receive payment from their organisation and further more were actual volunteers.

This lead to a discussion about what the different focuses a professional and community rep would have and how they would probably look at the same agenda with different views given their backgrounds.

When addressing barriers it was felt that the above did contribute to being a barrier but again language in general was also a barrier for understanding what things actually meant.

Another barrier that needs to be addressed is being asked to represent the “Faith Sector”. The group felt that they could not represent specific faith groups, as the knowledge that this entails is comprehensive. The group felt that they had specific knowledge of their own faith but not of all the others. When looking at how diverse Leeds is and how many faiths there are in the city, faith representation needs to be addressed in more detail.

It was felt that not only do partners need to be aware of the role of a Leeds Voice representative but other voluntary, community and faith sector organisations in general. It was felt that in general partners did know about their role but in changing times, and as new partnerships are being developed, more emphasis was needed about the role of the rep and what their roles and responsibilities were. There are some partnerships that still needed reminding and work still needs to be done to address this. (eg Education Leeds).

“Official” Leeds Voice representatives were discussed and how other general voluntary, community and faith sector staff in meetings are advising partners that they are from the sector so they can represent the sector but they don’t actually fulfil the Representation function properly i.e. not feeding back and don’t complete the feedback part that they should if they were an official representative.

When asked about the current changes and how this has had an impact on the voluntary, community and faith sector and representation the group felt that this was different depending on which partnership you actually attended. One representative on one partnership (DP) felt that due to limited communication about the changes people were guessing at what the new structure would be. If they were to follow suit then the rep could be representing a large amount of the city (one third) and if they happen to be a community representative (see earlier discussion) they would not be able to complete their role effectively as they would not know about issues in the outer wedge as well as those issues in the inner wedge. (eg asking to represent a view from Otley when you are from Armley).

There has been varying amounts of progress on this depending on the partnership and some reps felt that they were fully involved and kept up to date with the changes. However some felt that they were in a state of limbo without not knowing or being involved in the discussions.

The group felt that the partners were creating an environment for ‘thriving third sector’ but external influences were making it difficult for the partners to proceed, the main example being the Government pulling the funding from the partners (NRF funding). It was agreed within the group that there was an open willingness from all partners to creating an environment for ‘thriving third sector’

The discussion moved on to representation and how Leeds Voice could support this environment. The group discussed whether we needed seats on the District Partnerships given the involvement of the voluntary, community and faith sector in other strategic locality based partnerships (CL having smaller sub groups and task oriented groups that have open invitation to all voluntary, community and faith sector providers to attend and be involved in the planning of services. This is for Children’s Services and not replicated through other partnerships.)

The level of representation on the Area Committees (AC) was discussed with there being different approaches taken by the different AC. Some allow a more open discussion where as others only allow minimal time to discuss and once the time has run out you have to leave. This does not appear to be fair representation across the wedges at AC level.

It was discussed that Leeds Voice should demonstrate a strong lead to support the representatives on the Leeds Initiative Board and provide strong leadership to the representatives. It was felt that the confusion (mentioned earlier) about representation should be addressed at this level sending the message down to the other partnerships and that there should be more clarity about “reps” and official reps”. There was also a discussion around the clarity of roles, who all the reps are and at what level they are representing at. With consistent changes the reps themselves are sometimes unclear about who is doing what and at what level. This discussion included: ‘Should the Forum Co-ordinators take on more of a reps role in the more strategic partnerships, as they will have the knowledge and understanding of the sector to represent the sector at a higher strategic level?’

Overall, there is much recognition that the representatives do actually feel valued within their partnership.

## Reviewing the Recommendations from the 2007 Representatives Review

The recommendations from the Strategic Representation Review (April 07) were looked at in detail and the action, change or implementation that had occurred since was advised. Comments are listed in point order according to the recommendation number:

Recommendation	Action	Comments
1. Time is an important factor in achieving effective voluntary, community and faith representation. It is important that representatives and Leeds Voice forum coordinators receive papers in time to consult with their members. It is recommended that at least one-week notice be given. Where this is absolutely impossible relationships will be built between Leeds Voice coordinator, representative and relevant partners in order for as much preparation be undertaken as possible.	No Change. More development required.	It was felt that things are still the same generally and it was felt that the sector needs to be more proactive to get items on the agenda or to set the agenda. The Reps felt that they were consulted with about things on the agenda and generally felt that there was time between meetings but more is still needed

<p>2. Time should also be given to seek representatives, where this is impossible Leeds Voice and the membership will be able to swiftly provide interim representatives who have the knowledge and skills to input.</p>	<p>No Change. More development required.</p>	<p>Discussed having interim representatives and need to address the possibility of having a deputy representative if unable to make the partnership meeting. Substitute representatives?</p>
<p>3. Where appropriate, understanding should be given to representatives that need time to consult with their members after a meeting before a voluntary, community and faith decision or input can be taken. Where this is not possible representatives will be made confident of the general views of their forum to speak on their behalf.</p>	<p>Improvements made.</p>	<p>Progress is being made but in some partnerships it is slower than others. Looked at inactive and active representatives. Compared to this time last year progress is being made but slowly.</p>
<p>4. Representatives will be able to draw upon their forum and other networks to input into debate at partnership meetings. This may mean that it is agreed that they invite a forum member with specialist knowledge to a meeting.</p>	<p>To develop more.</p>	<p>Some formal routes have been taken but not much progress has been made.</p>
<p>5. Leeds Voice will provide ongoing information about voluntary, community and faith composition, impact and delivery to representatives and partners to strengthen the position of the sector.</p>	<p>To develop more</p>	<p>Again some limited progress has been made – still need to work towards achieving.</p>
<p>6. Leeds Voice will seek places for representatives nominated or elected as appropriate by the related forum on action focused sub-groups on order to allow the voluntary, community and faith sector to be more involved in partnership delivery and consultation.</p>	<p>Has been achieved but reps still need to be aware and reminded regularly.</p>	<p>Reps feel that they can draw upon their forum and networks, they mainly do this through the forum coordinator who will be able to support them and quite often give them the additional knowledge they seek. Reps have been known to make a few calls to sound things out prior to a meeting. What about a core team of reps?</p>
<p>7. Partners should be able to distinguish between community representatives, voluntary representatives and faith representatives and Leeds Voice will endeavour to represent and draw upon the skills of each of these groups.</p>	<p>Partners need reminding of processes.</p>	<p>This now happens but must question; Are the reps in it for themselves or for the voluntary, community and faith sector (mentioned earlier in discussion about official Leeds Voice reps)? There needs to be more definition about a representative and a Leeds Voice representative and also how they introduce themselves in their particular partnership.</p>

<p>8. To ensure that representatives are clear on their role, the systems and the amount of commitment needed. Leeds Voice will plan to consolidate a universal induction for all representatives with specific elements for each partnership group. This induction will also be acknowledged and contributed to by the partnership.</p>	<p>Continue to implement in forums. Achieved.</p>	<p>Induction package done. Needs to be updated and implemented throughout the Leeds Voice representative system.</p>
<p>9. Feasibility will be assessed for a 'buddy' system within partnerships themselves where a partner will support the representative whilst the induction is taking place.</p>	<p>Development required.</p>	<p>Work still needs to be done. One possibility is different levels of pREPeration training to suit the level of partnership a rep is involved in. Existing Reps should have refresher training, which is written in to the induction as something they need to do.</p>
<p>10. Forums, partners and partnerships need to recognise the different levels of contribution and involvement that representatives bring. It should be acknowledged that strength lies in the voluntary, community and faith sector ability to reach local communities and bring this voice to the decision making table. It should no longer be acceptable to label a representative not 'professional enough' for a partnership as they become inclusive and accessible.</p>	<p>Ongoing.</p>	<p>The group felt that they could not answer this and felt that there should be more clarity about what it means.</p>
<p>11. Partnerships should assess themselves against the Compact Code of Practice for Equal Partnerships to ensure that they have a baseline to improve on. This should include an audit of what partners bring to the partnership.</p>	<p>See Leeds Voice actions.</p>	<p>See earlier notes ref Community and Professional Reps.</p>
<p>12. The feasibility for day secondments or shadowing between voluntary, community and faith and statutory partners will be assessed as a practical way of understanding 'time zones' and cultures.</p>	<p>Achieved.</p>	<p>The group felt that progress has been made to distinguish that reps are no longer professional enough.</p>
<p>13. pREPeration training will be expanded and linked to existing networks to further nurture and build capacity in potential representatives from under-represented community and faith groups.</p>	<p>Needs Development</p>	<p>No work done to press this needs addressing.</p>
<p>14. Further development of Leeds Voice representation systems will be in line with the national work carried out by NAVCA to introduce a standard for representation.</p>	<p>Achieved.</p>	<p>The group felt that this was being achieved.</p>

## **Conclusion**

In general there has been a positive improvement in how partners see the Voluntary, Community and Faith Sector Representatives. In comparison to the 2007 review in all but one area there has been a positive recognition around the representative theme and the roles and responsibilities of a representative.

Over time the representative system has started to embed itself into the partnerships across the city and it is embedded in how most partnerships work and the way they link with the voluntary, community and faith sectors. This is a much improved and positive way of working compared to the findings of the review in 2007.

There is a general recognition that partners no longer see representatives as unprofessional and in only a couple of cases are there still questions around being unpaid or volunteers which again last year had raised concerns by representatives. Work needs to be done to develop the understanding in the partnerships around of the role and responsibilities of the representative, the representative election process and the agreed feedback mechanisms to ensure full voluntary, community and faith sector involvement.

## **Recommendations May 2008**

These recommendations will form the Leeds Voice development plan for its representational system and it was felt that work should continue to build, develop and be aware of the recommendations made in the 2007 review that were not fully achieved and in particular to focus on those not yet met:

1. Time is an important factor in achieving effective voluntary, community and faith representation. It is important that representatives and Leeds Voice forum coordinators receive papers in time to consult with their members. It is recommended that at least one-week notice be given. Where this is absolutely impossible relationships will be built between Leeds Voice coordinator, representative and relevant partners in order for as much preparation be undertaken as possible.
2. Time should also be given to seek representatives, where this is impossible Leeds Voice and the membership will be able to swiftly provide interim representatives who have the knowledge and skills to input.
3. Where appropriate understanding should be given to representatives that need time to consult with their members after a meeting before a voluntary, community and faith decision or input can be taken. Where this is not possible representatives will be made confident of the general views of their forum to speak on their behalf.
4. Leeds Voice will provide ongoing information about voluntary, community and faith composition, impact and delivery to representatives and partners to strengthen the position of the sector.
5. Partners should be able to distinguish between community representatives, voluntary representatives and faith representatives and Leeds Voice will endeavour to represent and draw upon the skills of each of these groups.
6. Feasibility will be assessed for a 'buddy' system within partnerships themselves where a partner will support the representative whilst the induction is taking place.

7. Partnerships should assess themselves against the Compact Code of Practice for Equal Partnerships to ensure that they have a baseline to improve on. This should include an audit of what partners bring to the partnership.
8. The feasibility for day secondments or shadowing between voluntary, community and faith and statutory partners will be assessed as a practical way of understanding 'time zones' and cultures.
9. pREParation will be expanded and linked to existing networks to further nurture and build capacity in potential representatives from under-represented community and faith groups.
10. Further development of Leeds Voice representation systems will be in line with the national work carried out by NAVCA to introduce a standard for representation.

### **Possible Actions For Leeds Voice:**

1. To follow up faith representation and to develop links in to the City-wide Faith forum for representation and to link into community leaders meetings to address faith representation.
2. To try to define voluntary, community and faith organisations.
3. Define "Official" representative and voluntary, community and faith representative.
4. To consider the views to move towards being 3rd Sector representatives in line with National Strategies and representation.
5. To suggest the encouragement of the partners of the Area Committees to be more community aware.
6. There should be more links between the thematic and local forums now that there are more cross cutting themes that affect more people.
7. To have an annual representative get together to share experiences which is enforced as being part of the role of being a rep and that you must attend.
8. To create a strap line for official Leeds Voice reps and introductions that reps must use.
9. Investigate the feasibility of a Leeds Voice Reps badge – this would help give clarity to both the representative and the partnership.



Leeds Voice would like to thank all of their representatives who took part in this review

