

# Bridging the Digital Divide in Derbyshire

## An ICT Strategic Framework for the Voluntary and Community Sector

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# Bridging the Digital Divide in Derbyshire

An ICT Strategic Framework for the Voluntary and Community Sector

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### Strategic Context

The Derbyshire ICT Group for the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) has produced a strategic framework to help coordinate thinking, plans and activities with regard to the development of Information and Communications Technology (ICT). In consequence, the primary goals are to:

- Raise the profile of ICT within the VCS throughout Derbyshire.
- Provide a framework for a joined-up approach to ICT development.
- Align ICT development with other local, regional and national strategies.

This strategic framework is less about solutions and more about identifying the issues, gaps and trends that need to be addressed over the coming years. The framework is for the Voluntary and Community Sector as a whole, where individual organisations and community groups will be encouraged to use it as reference for their own strategies and plans.

The report starts with an exploration of the *Digital Divide*, followed by a background to the use of ICT in the Voluntary and Community Sector and an insight into the current activities occurring locally. After this setting of the scene, the report considers the needs of particular communities of interest, as well as exploring some key general issues and needs, including investment, support, planning and resistance to using ICT.

### The Strategic Framework

**PURPOSE:** The overarching purpose of the strategic framework is to improve ICT capability within VCS infrastructure and front line organisations, as well as disadvantaged communities, community groups and households.

**VISION:** The vision adopted for the strategic framework is that by 2014:

- There will be affordable, reliable and tailored ICT support and learning opportunities available for all those who need it, as well as relevant, trusted and clear advice available.
- VCS Infrastructure organisations, frontline service providers and funders will share a common awareness of the total costs and benefits of ICT, enabling them to make informed decisions about its use.
- Community leaders, activists and representatives will know how to make the best use of ICT within their communities.

**GOAL:** The overarching goal of the strategic framework is to raise and transform the profile of ICT within the Voluntary and Community Sector, which translates into seven strategic aims. These aims are shown on the next page, along with some potential activity areas.

<b>AIMS and POTENTIAL ACTIVITY AREAS</b>	
<b>FOR COMMUNITIES</b>	<b>FOR VCS ORGANISATIONS</b>
<b>1. Reduce fear and develop trust in using ICT</b>	
Produce and/or signpost to skillsheets and factsheets that address common ICT questions.	
Encourage the loan and trial of ICT resources, possibly through mobile services.	Raise awareness of the benefits of ICT with senior staff, trustees and managers.
Facilitate the development of local self help groups.	Present case studies of how ICT has been used beneficially.
<b>2. Minimise the risks associated with the use of ICT</b>	
Encourage the provision and use of ICT health checks.	
Promote the practice of backing up systems, using an appropriate technology.	
Provide impartial advice when purchasing ICT, so that it matches with community needs.	Promote the use of shared servers, where all computers use the same operating system.
Target particular communities of interest and offer free, regular computer health checks.	Help senior staff and trustees to create good ICT strategies.
<b>3. Reduce the costs of purchasing ICT resources and ongoing maintenance.</b>	
Encourage inclusive maintenance and support packages with ICT purchases.	
Explore the potential benefits of centralised purchasing and/or buying groups.	
Encourage the recycling of ICT resources used by organisations to be used by communities.	
Train people to maintain their own computers and associated technologies	Influence policy makers and funders to recognise the total cost of ICT ownership.
Train local people to provide basic set-up and maintenance support on a voluntary basis.	Ensure ICT management & budgeting is part of a general improvement in management.
<b>4. Develop affordable, tailored and high quality ICT advice &amp; support services.</b>	
Enable impartial and affordable VCS-approved provision of ICT advice/support.	
Develop a network of local ICT champions.	
Promote provision of highly customised support for the most disadvantaged communities.	Encourage development of sector-specific ICT standards, awards and charters.
Develop a network of local ICT volunteers.	Develop a network of local ICT mentors.
<b>5. Improve ICT skills and knowledge.</b>	
Show people how to pass on their learning to others.	
Encourage development of highly customised and accessible training.	
Encourage people to learn about ICT together.	Regularly review ICT learning/training needs of the sector.
Engage learning providers, such as universities & adult education centres to provide relevant local courses.	Develop capacity of sector managers to create ICT strategic plans for organisations.
<b>6. Explore and demonstrate how ICT can improve everyday life and work.</b>	
Encourage best practices with regard to improving ICT accessibility.	
Develop a bank of evolving ideas of how ICT could be used in new ways.	
Raise awareness of how ICT can be used at home and in community groups.	Encourage online collaboration and remote working within the sector.
Promote events where people see and learn how ICT does and can impact on their lives.	Monitor emerging services and technologies to explore how the VCS could use them.
<b>7. Assist in the use of ICT as a facilitator of beneficial changes in society.</b>	
Engage with online groups to improve social inclusion in Derbyshire and beyond.	
Encourage the development of local online networks that facilitate local activities.	Encourage the use of ICT as a part of the move towards better VCS organisations.
Encourage the use ICT that enables collaboration within and across communities.	Represent the ICT needs of the sector in wider policy and strategic frameworks.

## Guiding Principles

A good strategy depends upon the way it is implemented, as well as the results. In consequence, the following guiding principles will also underpin the strategic framework:

- ICT as an integral part of a broader vision for change in the VCS.
- Demand responsive interventions.
- Joined-up approach.
- ICT as a tool for social inclusion.
- Cascade learning.
- Focus some resources on trusted intermediaries and community champions.

## Current Trends and Future Issues

A good strategic framework would be impotent without some consideration of the future, so the report also starts to highlight some trends and issues that are likely to be important in the future:

- Increased Access to Free and/or Low-priced Technologies.
- Increased Access to Free Software.
- Increased Access to Free Online Services.
- Switchover to Digital Television.
- Transformed Communications
- More Mobile Technologies.
- More Remote Working.
- Technology Becomes Invisible.
- ICT and Accessibility.
- ICT and Democracy.
- ICT literacy.

## The Derbyshire ICT Group for the Voluntary and Community Sector

In line with this strategic framework, the ICT Group recommends that existing ICT support projects in Derbyshire continue and are strengthened. In addition, the ICT Group will take the lead with regard to the following:

- Providing a strategic voice for ICT issues with the VCS in Derbyshire.
- Encouraging networking between those responsible for and/or interested in ICT.
- Raising awareness of local, regional and national ICT services and service providers.
- Helping to build the capacity for ICT volunteering and mentoring.
- Supporting the development of awards that recognise ICT excellence and innovation.
- Production of targeted events dedicated to the above activities.

# STRATEGIC CONTEXT

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The Derbyshire ICT Group for the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) has produced this strategic framework to help coordinate thinking, plans and activities with regard to the development of Information and Communications Technology (ICT). In consequence, the primary goals of this document are to:

- Raise the profile of ICT within the VCS throughout Derbyshire.
- Provide a framework for a joined-up approach to ICT development.
- Align ICT development with other local, regional and national strategies.

This strategic framework is less about solutions and more about identifying the issues, gaps and trends that need to be addressed over the coming years. The framework is for the Voluntary and Community Sector as a whole, where individual organisations and community groups will be encouraged to use it as a reference for their own strategies and plans. The intention will be to enable a stepwise change in the approach to ICT within the Voluntary and Community Sector, which – in turn – will contribute to improving efficiency, effectiveness and experience of all aspects of working in the sector.

## 2. THE DIGITAL DIVIDE

The digital divide is the gap between those with regular, effective access to digital technologies, (e.g. computers, mobile phones, digital television) and those without. This concept relates to social inclusion and equality of opportunity, and has become increasingly relevant as society has become more dependent on such technologies in its democratic, economic and social processes. The digital divide often results from the socio-economic differences between communities that in turn affects their access to information mainly but not exclusively through the Internet.

The digital divide is not a clear single gap that divides a society into two groups. Disadvantages can take such forms as low performing computers, low quality or high-priced Internet connections, difficulty in obtaining technical assistance and less access to subscription-based content. The abilities to read, write and work with numbers enable a person to engage fully in life; similarly, the ability to use computers and associated technologies is becoming an essential skill in today's world. In fact, many people now see ICT capability as the third basic life skill after literacy and numeracy.

There are a variety of arguments about why closing the digital divide is important, such as enabling social mobility, providing equal opportunities and promoting democracy. Information technology is playing an increasingly important role in continued learning and career advancement; however, the effects of the gap between households with and without Internet access are already evident.

Some see access to the Internet becoming a basic component of civil life, just like telephone services. Much vital information for education, work, leisure, safety, etc. is increasingly provided via the Internet, so good access provides equal opportunities for everyone. In a broader sense this has implications for democracy — from the simple abilities to access government information to more ambitious visions of increased public participation in elections and decision-making processes.

The Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) is really good at engaging with disadvantaged and disengaged communities, so they have a clear role to play in narrowing this digital divide. However, a digital divide also exists between the level of engagement and usage of ICT between the voluntary sector and other sectors.

## 3. THE VOLUNTARY AND COMMUNITY SECTOR AND ICT

The ChangeUp Programme is about strengthening the support and assistance available to voluntary and community organisations (VCOs). Developed in partnership with the sector, the ChangeUp framework focuses on improving capacity building and infrastructure within the VCS by aiming to improve quality, efficiency, coherence, sustainability and strategic development.

Through the ChangeUp programme six national 'hubs' have been created, each linked to particular infrastructure issues. One Hub focuses upon ICT. This ICT Hub ([www.ictHub.org.uk](http://www.ictHub.org.uk)) is a

group of voluntary sector organisations who have come together to plan and deliver a co-ordinated framework of ICT guidance, good practice, advice and support for VCOs accessible at a local level.

The ChangeUp Programme and the development of the ICT Hub has provided new impetus towards increasing investment in ICT, to raise the awareness of the full potential of ICT and to make better decisions about the use of ICT.

From the start, regional programmes have implemented ChangeUp investment, managed through the nine Government Offices in England, and developed through sub-regional consortia of VCS organisations. Like other consortia, the Derbyshire VCS Consortium has produced an investment plan for projects that address gaps in infrastructure provision. The Derbyshire VCS Consortium has identified ICT as a crucial area for intervention and strategy development.

## 4. ICT IN DERBYSHIRE'S VOLUNTARY AND COMMUNITY SECTOR

One of the earliest pieces of work supported by the Derbyshire VCS Consortium was a project researching into the ICT and information system needs of VCS organisations. The result was the influential report "Is Derbyshire Doing IT?"<sup>1</sup>, which presented the results of a survey, showed some examples of good practice and recommended some possible ways forward.

There are now a range of projects operating in the county, either countywide or more locally, offering support to the voluntary and community sector. The following list is not designed to be exhaustive, but to illustrate the increase in activity .....

### 4.1. Derbyshire CircuitRiders

One of the recommendations in the "Is Derbyshire Doing IT?" report was to adopt a CircuitRiders approach. A Circuit Rider is a mobile ICT development worker who:

- Is mobile – Circuit Riders travel from one organisation to another, sometimes carrying with them the hardware and software they need for their work.
- Has a caseload – Circuit Riders have an ongoing involvement with organisations: they don't just visit an organisation when there's a problem.
- Works with small organisations – Circuit Riders generally work with small organisations, which can't always afford to employ an IT specialist or to pay for professional technical support.
- Works collaboratively: Circuit Riders support each other and share information as part of the Circuit Rider movement.

The Circuit Riders model has gained an increasingly high profile in the past few years, because it tends to be more affordable, flexible and understanding of the sector's needs.

While most Circuit Riders' would share the above approach and description, Circuit Riding is more of an ethos than a job description: different Riders work in different ways, depending on factors like their own skills and the needs of the organisations they work with. Circuit Riding doesn't seek to be the only solution to voluntary organisation's ICT needs; rather, it's a new way of describing one area of work, which seems to make it easier for funders and policy makers to understand organisations' needs.

In Derbyshire, the CircuitRiders initiative has resourced:

- The Development of a countywide directory of ICT service providers who can serve the VCS.
- A countywide VCS ICT working group.
- An ICT Champion for the VCS in Derbyshire, who provides free, impartial consultancy and advice, helping to demystify what computers can do and how to make best use of them.
- A pilot technical support project, operated by the social enterprise Purplezebra (<http://www.purplezebra.org.uk>), who fixes and upgrades computer equipment for VCS organisations across the High Peak and Derbyshire Dales area.

The original research also set the scene for P-MITT, which provides mobile ICT training. The tutor visits organisations every couple of weeks, working with staff and volunteers on their own computers in a way tailored to individual needs.

The three Circuit Riders – ICT Champion, ICT tutor and IT technician have become a virtual team, each with different specialism and each offering different services to the VCS.

#### 4.1.1. Awareness Raising Events

Derbyshire Circuit Riders have been actively involved in raising the profile of ICT in the sector through a range of events, organised by partner organisations and co-ordinated through the ICT working group. These include:

- Database conference
- Wise Up Roadshow
- Seminar — Using ICT Volunteers

A regional ICT conference will also be held in Chesterfield in October 2006.

## **4.2. Net:Gain**

IT29 won the contract for the first stage of Net:Gain in Derbyshire. IT29 is a social enterprise that balances a strong belief in social values and corporate responsibility with a firm commitment to a high quality customer service with reliable solutions at cost effective rates.

Net:Gain is an innovative programme, designed to bring about a step-change in the ICT capability of the Voluntary and Community sector. It aims to help VCOs to take a practical, appropriate and informed approach to ICT planning and support. Net:Gain is not designed for 'techies', but is for anyone who guides the strategic direction of their organisation, such as chief executives, trustees and senior managers.

Net:Gain will:

- Ensure those who lead VCOs both understand and can harness the potential of ICT.
- Identify areas where ICT could improve business processes and service delivery.
- Help VCOs develop an action plan for ICT development and training.
- Help to get the most out of ICT investment.
- Provide a better basis for leveraging that investment, and managing it well.
- Provide ongoing support, signposting, and opportunities for further training.

The mix of services will depend on local market need and on maximizing local opportunities and partnerships. This will help develop support programmes which offer what local VCOs want, and give each Net:Gain provider the chance to develop a sustainable, income-generating service for the future, as the VCO market for ICT services matures.

## **4.3. Digital Inclusion Project**

Groundwork Erewash Valley are developing a digital inclusion initiative, designed to widen access to ICT-based learning throughout the community, with a particular emphasis on tailored one-to-one training and basic skills provision. This project is a potential model for a countywide approach.

## **4.4. Accessibility Champion**

AbilityNet are the primary service provider in the UK who are working to improve the accessibility of the ICT infrastructure for the VCS. AbilityNet is a national centre of excellence in computing and disability and is the only charity providing national pan-disability services in this area.

AbilityNet helps disabled adults and children use computers and the internet by adapting and adjusting their ICT equipment. Whatever the disability or problem, everyone can stay in touch and enjoy life more with ICT. AbilityNet also has significant experience in providing web audits, and is in an excellent position to provide training and resources to the VCS to develop more accessible websites, as required by law.

AbilityNet's services include:

- Advice and information.
- Producing and distributing resources on web accessibility and IT accessibility.
- Delivering training and support.
- Improving accessibility support to the sector through Regional Accessibility Champions.

There is now an ICT Accessibility Champion for the East Midlands, based at Voluntary Action Leicester. The role of a Regional Accessibility Champion includes:

- The services of an individual who will help to deliver the training and development opportunities offered by AbilityNet.
- Promoting and distributing accessibility resources to organisations in their region.
- Offering support services and conducting awareness raising events.
- Providing Accessible ICT Kits on loan and/or for purchase.

## 4.5. ICT Volunteering

Through a number of local seminars, the national ICT Hub is promoting the idea of ICT volunteering. ICT volunteers are not necessarily experts in their field, but are people with an interest in ICT, who have reached a certain level of competence in the subject and who wish to share their advice, knowledge, skills and experiences with their peers.

ICT volunteers can be recruited from a number of sources. They may be:

- Retired or unemployed with time on their hands.
- People seeking a change in career.
- Volunteers from local community groups.
- People already working for or recommended by volunteer bureaux.
- Learners looking for practical experience.

By the very nature of the work, an ICT volunteer can take on a number of different roles, such as coach, facilitator, critical friend and so on. And they could work at many different levels, from an older person who has just bought a computer to a chief officer of a VCS organisation who is learning how to create an ICT strategy.

A primary leader in the field and a partner of the national ICT Hub is iT4Communities who encourage companies and individuals with professional ICT skills to volunteer these skills for the benefit of the community. By supporting both the charity and the volunteer through the volunteering process, iT4Communities aims to bridge the gap between ICT professionals and charities needing ICT help.

Locally, the ChangeUp supported projects have succeeded in many ways; however, there is more work to do with regard to ICT volunteering. It will take time to build the support and capacity for such ventures.

## 5. ISSUES AND NEEDS

### 5.1. ICT Investment

In the "Is Derbyshire Doing IT?" report<sup>1</sup>, only a quarter of organisations said they had enough funding to address their ICT requirements. Money for new ICT equipment is generally written into new or one-off projects, which corresponds with the finding in the report "Leading the Way to ICT Success<sup>2</sup>." This approach is not good practice or sustainable!

In addition, there has been a low level of investment in ICT skills throughout the VCS over the years for a variety of reasons, including the lack of clear ICT strategies for organisations and the prioritisation of other activities. This has contributed to widening the digital divide between the VCS and other sectors. Now, there is a growing assumption that ICT is a useful tool for increasing efficiency and effectiveness of VCS organisations in managing projects, in delivering services, in communicating and in campaigning.

### 5.2. ICT Support

In the past, there has been a lack of cohesive or comprehensive support on ICT issues to the Voluntary and Community sector. Now, the case for investment in such support seems to be well proven. For example, the Cross-cutting Review of Voluntary Sector Service Provision in 2002 identified a need to provide additional ICT support across the sector, to help organisations to use ICT to maximum effect. Since then, there has been much research into the specific ICT support needs of the sector, particularly by the ICT Hub and other stakeholders in ChangeUp.

In addition a consultation run by the Active Community Unit in 2003 concluded that:

- There is very little ICT specialist provision available to VCOs [therefore] most organisations consequently fail to take full advantage of the benefits offered by ICT.
- There are 'few sources of advice which are knowledgeable about both ICT and the specific demands of the VCS.
- There should be investment in specialist VCS infrastructure which would ensure the availability of face-to-face advice, guidance, technical support and some limited training.

In 2004, Net:Gain has also shown that there is a tendency in the sector to prefer trusted intermediaries, such as local, informal, peer support, face-to-face help; as well as the need for a flexible service that can fill gaps, signpost and adapt to different needs.

### 5.3. ICT Strategic Planning

The Active Communities Unit has also discovered that there is a lack of strategic understanding of ICT at senior management and trustee level of VCS organisations. In fact, many organisations do not have an ICT strategy or an ICT budget, compounded by a poor awareness of the options for covering ICT costs (Net:Gain 2004). Also, Net:Gain's research showed that there was a general unwillingness – regardless of size – to engage in strategic planning for ICT. In consequence, any strategic level services must offer high added-value to ensure that there is a willingness among VCOs to dedicate time and money to the process.

In the Is Derbyshire Doing IT? report<sup>1</sup>, over two-thirds of Derbyshire-based VCS organisation said that their ICT strategy was reactive and focused on short-term needs. As part of a general approach to developing longer-term strategies, the report highlighted the need for someone with ICT knowledge to be in the management committees of infrastructure organisations.

### 5.4. Efficiency Improvement

There is a strong case to show that ICT can help to improve efficiencies within organisations and communities; however, the delivery and management of ICT services could also be more efficient. Economies of scale may need to be considered, possibly with some infrastructure services best provided across more than one district or local authority area.

Again, the Derbyshire Doing IT? report<sup>1</sup> had produced some evidence for this need. For example, the report indicated that operating systems and software applications were only updated when new computers were purchased. Often this resulted in incompatibility problems between computers and overall reduction in effectiveness.

## **5.5. Accessibility**

The majority of VCS organisations in Derbyshire have not carried out an audit of the accessibility of the hardware or software (Source: Is Derbyshire Doing IT? report<sup>1</sup>); however, there does appear to be a willingness to make changes when necessary, but such decisions tend to be taken reactively when a particular problem was highlighted.

Ideally, VCS organisations would become great exemplars of best practices, because this approach aligns with the general values of the sector. Currently, this is not possible, because many organisations do not know what modifications could be made, or how. There is a need for better advice and information – AbilityNet (See Signposting) is working hard to change this situation.

## **5.6. Resistance to Using ICT?**

There appears to be a resistance to using ICT, probably because there is a perception that the use of ICT reduces the emphasis upon people and direct working relationships. The challenge will be to reduce this resistance by developing approaches that are in line with the values and culture of the VCS, whilst showing how ICT can help VCS services to be coordinated, accessible and effective.

Lack of knowledge also seems to contribute to such resistance. For example, the majority of people interviewed for the Is Derbyshire Doing IT? Study had not tried remote meeting software or services, even though there was frustration expressed over the traveling time associated with face-to-face meetings, particularly on a regional basis. When awareness was raised of the potential approaches that could be used, there was an indication that people would use the services, if available and relatively easy to use.

## 6. COMMUNITIES OF INTEREST

As long as ICT is managed well and sensitively, it can be very beneficial generally to communities and organisations; however, particular *communities of interest* will have particular issues, needs and desires that may require targeted activities. In this light, we have started to list some of the communities of interest and to highlight some key factors relevant to each group.

The VCS plays a key role in helping and supporting disadvantaged communities, so the strategic framework needs to ensure that resources are not just directed towards improving organisational use of ICT, but also contribute to the improving how communities access and use ICT. This will require service providers to look at discrete and diverse needs, so we have started to identify how particular people require particular kinds of support.

N.B. A large proportion of the information for this section came from the Digital Equality report produced by Citizens Online.<sup>3</sup>

### 6.1. Disadvantaged Communities

The Government's National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal sets out one of its major principles as "Reviving local economies", and a key associated objective is "Improving ICT in deprived neighbourhoods". In this context, community development can be powerful when combined with ICT. Whilst community development aims to give people in disadvantaged communities more control over their lives, ICT can assist in this process.

The report, "Using ICT to Help Achieve Regeneration Objectives<sup>4</sup>", has highlighted a number of benefits, including the following:

- Making information and communication more accessible.
- Building confidence.
- Developing new skills or updating existing ones.
- Improving the image of an area.
- Helping groups suffering particular disadvantage, such as the disabled.
- Improving the delivery of goods and services.
- Creating new businesses and boosting business activity.
- Overcoming social and/or geographical isolation.
- Strengthening networking within local communities.

In addition, Wired Up Communities (for the DfES) ran seven pilot projects to encourage the use of ICT, which highlighted a number of issues and benefits. Issues included the amount of time it took to get people beyond the very basic level, expectations were too high and the resistance to Government-led schemes in disadvantaged communities. That said, the projects did show that ICT could make a significant difference to communities, resulting in greater community cohesion and demonstrating the value of community champions. The challenge is to encourage continued use after a period of subsidised access.

### 6.2. Older People

Over the next fifty years the age pyramid of the population will be turned upside down. People aged sixty and over already outnumber children under sixteen. In this context, it is important to note that older people tend to have a greater need for public services (health, social care etc) than younger people. The risk is that as services continue to develop around technologies, older people will be excluded further in society.

Older people face particular barriers to going online, including insufficient income and difficulties with vision/dexterity; however ICT can also help older people to be more socially involved as well. ICT can be of particular use to those with limited mobility or poor transport links by providing easier access to information and facilitating communication with others.

A recent survey from Ofcom that looked at the online access of marginalised groups has shown that older people were the least engaged. Just 28% of people over the age of 65 have home

internet access, compared to a UK average of 57% of households. As a result, pensioners cannot access government services as well as the most competitive deals on commercial goods.

### **6.3. Younger People**

The majority of ICT in schools and e-learning programmes affecting schoolchildren focus almost exclusively on the classroom. Yet we know through the Impact Research published by BECTA<sup>5</sup> that access to ICT at home has a bigger impact on educational outcomes than access at school.

Government figures estimate that over 80% of UK households with children at school have computers, due to a very steep growth rate in recent years. This still leaves up to 20% of young people (3M in UK) without access to computers at home. These children are likely to be from the most deprived families, so such digital exclusion is likely to compound general social inclusion issues.

The e-Learning Foundation has also found that a computer at home does not necessarily mean that it is accessible! For example, the computer may be for a parent to use for work and children may be discouraged or barred from using it. In addition, there may be competition for use from other siblings.

### **6.4. Disabled People**

According to AbilityNet, nationally about five million people could be considered ICT disabled, with problems associated with upper limb mobility, sensory impairment and learning disabilities; however whilst some disabled people need particular adaptive technologies, the majority do not. There is a general lack of awareness that disability does not necessarily prevent ICT use; compounded by a lack of general knowledge as to how ICT can increase independence.

### **6.5. Black and Minority Ethnic Communities**

BME populations tend to show higher uptake of the Internet compared to the expected rate based upon wealth. This is thought to be due to the desire to communicate with relatives overseas.

Language may be an issue for some people, so access to software in minority languages could become an issue; however, ICT could also be an enabler for those who need to learn English as a second language.

There are also cultural issues, such as the need for women-only training sessions for some groups.

### **6.6. Women**

There are several initiatives dedicated to supporting women in developing ICT awareness, such as Women Connect (<http://www.womenconnect.org.uk>) who support women's organisations in England with online resources, organisational development and some equipment. In this way the capacity of women's groups is strengthened to form new partnerships and influence policy and decision-making on issues concerning gender equality and ICT.

### **6.7. Travellers**

The mobility of some groups of Traveller children, such as those from the Fairground and Circus communities, and many Gypsy families, precludes their effective access to normal schooling provision during their main working season. This is a fundamental concern to the communities and to teachers who try to support them. Traveller Education Support Service (TESS) teachers have for some years been supporting schools in their efforts to provide traditional, pack-based, forms of distance learning to bridge this gap. The use of ICT was seen as offering the potential to bring a new perspective to this challenge.

The original E-Learning and Mobility Project (E-LAMP) started in 2003, which was dedicated to exploring the use of ICT to enhance learning for mobile Traveller children. A key objective was to develop an argued and costed case for using a range of ICT-based approaches to reinforce supported distance learning for Traveller children. One outcome of the project was a full report published in 2004.<sup>6</sup> This has led to several spin-off projects.

### **6.8. Refugees and Asylum Seekers**

There are a range of initiatives around the country dedicated to providing ICT training particularly for refugees and asylum seekers, which includes improving access to ICT in libraries, training in different languages and the loan of laptops.

Recently, the ICT Hub has supported a project dedicated to raising awareness of ICT as strategic tool for Refugee Community Organisations (RCOs), after earlier research had shown that RCOs were under using their software and were receiving inadequate ICT support.

## **6.9. Prisoners**

It has been national policy that there is no Internet access within prisons, due to security issues. This can impact upon the potential quality of ICT training within prison communities; however, the Government have increased ICT provision within prisons considerably in recent years. Projects such as Prisoners' ICT Academy has resulted in new or upgraded computer workshops and involvement of Learndirect, which aims to provide up to around 7,000 offenders with secure web-based access to Learndirect courses by December 2006.

In addition, the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) are currently in the process of developing an Offender ICT strategy. As part of this, a pilot at Her Majesty's Prison Leyhill is evaluating a commercial design for a secure 'Internet Kiosk', and the practical benefit that offenders can gain from e-learning within the security constraints required by the prison environment.

# THE STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

## 7. PURPOSE

The overarching purpose of the strategic framework is to improve ICT capability within VCS infrastructure and front line organisations, as well as disadvantaged communities, community groups and households.

## 8. VISION

By 2014:

- There will be affordable, reliable and tailored ICT support and learning opportunities available for all those who need it, as well as relevant, trusted and clear advice available.
- VCS Infrastructure organisations, frontline service providers and funders will share a common awareness of the total costs and benefits of ICT, enabling them to make informed decisions about its use.
- Community leaders, activists and representatives will know how to make the best use of ICT within their communities.

## 9. OPERATING ASSUMPTIONS

The operating assumptions that underpin the strategic purpose and vision are:

- ICT literacy is becoming the third most important life skill after reading and numeracy.
- A key role of the VCS is to focus upon those who are disadvantaged.
- There is a need to help those providing services as well as those being served.
- The digital divide is a real source of social and economic exclusion.
- Technologies and ICT skills will **not** be developed in isolation from other activities.
- The strengths **and** weaknesses of using ICT are recognised.
- ICT will help the sector to provide new and better services in a better way.

## 10. OVERARCHING GOAL

**The overarching goal of the strategic framework is to raise and transform the profile of ICT within the Voluntary and Community Sector.**

To achieve this aim, there will need to be a concerted effort to improving the general perception and understanding of ICT, so that it is viewed as an important enabler of other activities, rather than an end in itself.

Success will mean that ICT is viewed as an invaluable **tool for VCS organisations** when it is seen to:

- Increase capacity and contributes to sustaining the Voluntary and Community Sector.
- Improve the delivery, management and monitoring of services and projects.
- Contribute to better management of information and an improvement of communications.
- Be a key and important **part** of strategic planning and plans. (Rather than an add-on)

In addition, success will mean that ICT is viewed as an invaluable **tool for communities** when it is seen to:

- Satisfy the needs of particular communities of interest, such as older or younger people.
- Be accessible by everyone within the community.
- Enhance current and new community activities.
- Help improve relationships with other communities.

## 11. STRATEGIC AIMS

To enable the focusing of resources and attention, we have distilled this overarching goal into seven general strategic aims, each with their own more specific objectives. Due to their universal nature, these aims are appropriate for organisations and communities; however, the objectives are tailored accordingly.

The strategic aims are to:

- (1) Reduce fear and develop trust in using ICT.
- (2) Minimise the risks associated with the use of ICT.
- (3) Reduce the costs of purchasing ICT resources and ongoing maintenance.
- (4) Develop affordable, tailored and high quality ICT advice and support services.
- (5) Improve ICT skills and knowledge.
- (6) Explore and demonstrate how ICT can improve everyday life and work.
- (7) Assist in the use of ICT as a facilitator of beneficial changes in society.

The associated objectives in the next section may adapt and change over the coming years; however, these aims are likely to remain constant.

## 12. STRATEGIC ACTIVITY AREAS

The primary aims have been translated into example objectives suitable for communities and VCS organisations.

12.1. Reduce fear and develop trust in using ICT	
COMMUNITIES	VCS ORGANISATIONS
Produce and/or signpost to skillsheets and factsheets that address common ICT questions.	
Encourage the loan and trial of ICT resources, possibly through mobile services.	Raise awareness of the benefits of ICT with senior staff, trustees and managers <sup>1</sup> .
Facilitate the development of local self help groups.	Present case studies of how ICT has been used beneficially.

12.2. Minimise the risks associated with the use of ICT	
COMMUNITIES	VCS ORGANISATIONS
Encourage the provision and use of ICT health checks.	
Promote the practice of backing up systems, using an appropriate technology.	
Provide impartial advice when purchasing ICT, so that it matches with community needs.	Promote the use of shared servers, where all computers use the same operating system.
Target particular communities of interest and offer regular free computer health checks <sup>2</sup> .	Help senior staff and trustees to create good ICT strategies.

<sup>1</sup> Net:Gain already starting to address this activity area.

<sup>2</sup> In particular, ensure that those who go online are safe and secure.

<b>12.3. Reduce the costs of purchasing ICT resources and ongoing maintenance.</b>	
<b>COMMUNITIES</b>	<b>VCS ORGANISATIONS</b>
Encourage inclusive maintenance and support packages with ICT purchases.	
Explore the potential benefits of centralised purchasing <sup>3</sup> and/or buying groups.	
Encourage the recycling of ICT resources used by organisations to be used by communities.	
Train people to maintain their own computers and associated technologies.	Influence policy makers and funders to recognise the total cost of ICT ownership.
Train local people to provide basic set-up and maintenance support on a voluntary basis.	Ensure ICT management & budgeting is part of a general improvement in management.

<b>12.4. Develop affordable, tailored and high quality ICT advice &amp; support services.</b>	
<b>COMMUNITIES</b>	<b>VCS ORGANISATIONS</b>
Enable impartial and affordable VCS-approved provision of ICT advice/support.	
Develop a network of local ICT champions.	
Promote provision of highly customised support for the most disadvantaged communities.	Encourage development of sector-specific ICT standards, awards and charters.
Develop a network of local ICT volunteers.	Develop a network of local ICT mentors.

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<sup>3</sup> The ICT Hub is already looking at the possibility of passing on the savings of buying centrally; however, there needs to be a real push to reducing the ongoing costs, not just the initial capital purchases.

<b>12.5. Improve ICT skills and knowledge.</b>	
<b>COMMUNITIES</b>	<b>VCS ORGANISATIONS</b>
Show people how to pass on their learning to others.	
Encourage development of highly customised and accessible training.	
Encourage people to learn about ICT together.	Regularly review ICT learning/training needs of the sector.
Engage learning providers, such as universities and adult education centres to provide relevant courses locally.	Develop capacity of sector managers to create ICT strategic plans for organisations.

<b>12.6. Explore and demonstrate how ICT can improve everyday life and work.</b>	
<b>COMMUNITIES</b>	<b>VCS ORGANISATIONS</b>
Encourage best practices with regard to improving ICT accessibility.	
Develop a bank of evolving ideas of how ICT could be used in new ways.	
Raise awareness of how ICT can be used at home and in community groups.	Encourage online collaboration and remote working within the sector.
Promote events where people see and learn how ICT does and can impact on their lives.	Monitor emerging services and technologies to explore how the VCS could use them.

<b>12.7. Assist in the use of ICT as a facilitator of beneficial changes in society.</b>	
<b>COMMUNITIES</b>	<b>VCS ORGANISATIONS</b>
Engage with online groups to improve social inclusion in Derbyshire and beyond.	
Encourage the development of local online networks that facilitate local activities.	Encourage the use of ICT as a part of the move towards better VCS organisations.
Encourage the use ICT that enables collaboration within and across communities.	Represent the ICT needs of the sector in wider policy and strategic frameworks.

## 13. GUIDING PRINCIPLES

A good strategy depends upon the way it is implemented, as well as the results. In consequence, the following guiding principles will also underpin the strategic framework.

### 13.1. ICT as an integral part of a broader vision for change in the VCS

ICT improvement cannot happen in isolation – it needs to be an integral part of the programme to improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the VCS. Only when an organisation knows where it is going and what it wants to do will it be able to search effectively for the ICT solutions that will meet its needs. ICT should always be seen as a tool, a facilitator, or an intrinsic part of an initiative or service, but never as the solution. ICT is a means to an end. Using ICT can help to produce directly or indirectly a range of benefits for both individuals and communities.

### 13.2. Demand responsive interventions

Much of the work so far to reduce the digital divide has focused upon access to technology and training. Now, it is important to target interventions and campaigns for those who do not use computers or the Internet. Demonstrations of benefit need to focus upon the interests of potential new users. For example, access to government services may not be perceived as sexy, but there may be enthusiasm for services that provided added value to the experience of sport or leisure.

We would like to set the challenge for all strategic ICT interventions to allow for local and personal adaptations, so that they have meaning and long-term value for individuals and communities. If ICT is introduced to a community from the perspective of addressing community need it is much more likely to inspire individual interest and to reach sustainability. Initiatives that attempt to provide ICT for its own sake are less likely to succeed.

In consequence, many social and economic programmes dedicated to reaching excluded communities need to consider the appropriate use of ICT within those interventions. In a broad sense, this may be called *ICT proofing*; however, it needs to be much more than a box ticking exercise. The creative use of ICT could result in outcomes that are beyond expectations.

### 13.3. Joined-up approach

A joined-up approach will help to prevent duplication and reinvention, whilst enabling resources to be used more efficiently.

### 13.4. ICT as a tool for social inclusion

ICT can be used to promote social inclusion and provide added value to community development projects. For example, projects that focus upon helping single parents may address the need for computer access at home for their children's school homework, as well as non-school learning.

### 13.5. Cascade learning

*"The best way to learn is to teach", Anonymous.*

Whenever possible, the intention will be to encourage those who learn about ICT to pass on their learning in a customised and creative way. As well as being cost effective, this approach will foster good working relationships in communities and organisations. In its most formal form such cascading of knowledge would be done by ICT Volunteers, but the intention here is to value and facilitate the everyday passing on of knowledge and skills as well.

### 13.6. Focus some resources on trusted intermediaries and community champions

There are key individuals and key groups in every community who operate or could operate as important gateways to information, as well as providing the local knowledge that is important for the building of trust. ICT can support these intermediaries in a number of ways including:

- Enabling more regular contact.
- Coordinating interventions for those with a diverse array of needs and service providers.
- Development of very local community portals developed by the community themselves.

In addition, successful projects often arise from a local champion with the vision, belief and ability to inspire others. Such champions could promote ICT use and/or use ICT to achieve their aims.

## 14. CURRENT TRENDS AND FUTURE ISSUES

A good strategic framework would be impotent without some consideration of the future. In this light, we have started to identify and reflect upon the significant trends that are emerging today and the likely issues that will need to be addressed in the future. This list is not comprehensive or complete, but designed to give some seeds for thought and exploration.

### 14.1. Increased Access to Free and/or Low-priced Technologies

There is a concerted effort from a range of organisations to provide a free use of computers and associated technologies, or access to very low priced deals. Availability of such services is likely to grow as the VCS — through the ICT Hub— makes it happen.

There are different approaches to ensuring that people have access to computers at home. Some of these approaches are described below. At present, the major driving force is educational, to ensure that all students can have the benefits of ICT at home, as well as school or college.

#### 14.1.1. Computer Loans

ICT loans and subsidy schemes are intended to make computers and associated technologies available on a short-term basis to disadvantaged students and other members of the community; especially those who unable to afford home computers. For students, this can have great benefits for improving home-school links and raising the quality of homework.

For example, Lead Scotland (Linking Education and Disability), is a voluntary organisation set up to support disabled young people and adults and carers to access post-school education. They lend computers and printers to people for up to six months through their free computer loan scheme (<http://www.lead.org.uk>).

#### 14.1.2. Discounted Deals

There are a number of organisations that provide discounted deals for the voluntary and community sector. You can save from anything up to 80% on software and hardware. The ICT Hub has a list of suppliers at: [http://www.ictHub.org.uk/cms/openCMS/ictHub/discounted\\_deals/](http://www.ictHub.org.uk/cms/openCMS/ictHub/discounted_deals/).

#### 14.1.3. ICT Recycling

Donated and refurbished computers can be a boon to low-income communities or households, as well as cash-strapped VCS organisations. Pentium-level computers are now over five years old, and millions of them are being disposed. Even so, it is wise to be cautious and to ensure that the technology will meet your needs. Incompatible software and upgrade costs may turn a free offering into something more expensive than expected.

Old computers work better with old software and this may be fine for many small organisations and low-income households, as long as it provides good access to the Internet, decent word processing and cost effective printing.

The IT Resource Guide for UK Charities and Non-Profit Organisations provides lists of suppliers, including those who specialise in recycling PCs at <http://www.itforcharities.co.uk/pcs.htm>.

### 14.2. Increased Access to Free Software

#### 14.2.1. Freeware

The Free Software Movement believes in the ethical development of software resources, with many free software projects aimed specifically at community organisations. Freeware is software which runs on Windows as well as other platforms but which has no licence fee (or no license fee for non-profit organisations), or which has "lite" versions which are free.

This is a real option for some community groups, as long as great care is taken when downloading freeware from the Internet, because some files can be infected with viruses. There is a need to use reliable sites and to know how to check such files with security software.

#### 14.2.2. Open Source

Open Source software is also free of charge, but is much more than that. With such software you have the rights to use, modify, and redistribute the code that structures the way it is used. The software may be free, however, providers can charge you for servicing and support or for adding

bits to it. Good examples of this kind of software are Firefox, which is a fast, flexible and secure internet browser, and Thunderbird, which is software for emails. Another software that is growing in stature is Open Office, which offers a word processor and spreadsheet facilities similar to that offered by Microsoft.

The two primary reasons that VCS organisations may use open source software is the lower cost and the philosophical foundations of such an approach i.e. non-hierarchical, voluntary collaboration.

The National Computing Centre (NCC) is one of the delivery partners of the ICT Hub and they have lead responsibility for Open Source. In addition to seminars at the national and regional conferences, they have a detailed programme of work and support around developing resources and providing help and advice. The ICT Hub knowledgebase provides an emerging collection of information and advice around open source.

The Cambridge Independent Advice Centre (CIAC) is leading a free and open source software (FOSS) project in the East of England. Funded by ChangeUp, it aims to test the usefulness of free and open source software (FOSS) for the UK voluntary and community sector. For more information go to <http://foss.ciac.org.uk/>.

### 14.3. Increased Access to Free Online Services

There are a large range of services emerging through the Internet, many of which are in their early stages of development. For example, there are a number of services that are encouraging sharing and collaboration, such as Flickr (<http://www.flickr.com/>), which encourages the sharing of photographs. Also, there are a number of services that could be very useful to organisations, such as Survey Monkey (<http://www.surveymonkey.com/home.asp>) that enables you to conduct online surveys for free.

Several factors are driving the production of these services, including:

- Ability to interact and communicate with a diverse range of people.
- Able to access and integrate a wide range of information and information sources.
- Increased opportunities to design and customise the services to match with your needs.

Some services are provided as a public service, whilst others develop because they align with their beliefs and aspirations for a better world. There is a real opportunity for the VCS to use these emerging services, to adapt such services for the sector and/or to develop totally new services.

A strong and widespread service model is the idea of a basic free service, or very low paid service (sometimes called 'lite'), plus payment for additional features, support, add-ons etc. This approach could align well with the values of the VCS, whilst responding to the need to be more self-supporting and to develop new income streams.

### 14.4. Switchover to Digital Television

Originally, all televisions were going to be digital by 2006; this target has shifted. Starting in 2008 and ending in 2012, TV services in the UK will go completely digital, TV region by TV region. This process is called digital switchover. The UK's old television broadcast signal (known as "analogue") is being switched off and replaced with a "digital" signal. Any TV set or video recorder that's not converted to digital when the switchover takes place will no longer receive TV programmes.

For the VCS, this could be a real opportunity to help to identify those in most need. We can assume that a large majority of those who not have digital television in 2008 are likely to be also homes with low access to computers and the Internet. If this assumption is correct, the VCS could assist households with the switchover to digital TV **and** link it to possible improvements in ICT. This could mean helping households and communities to use their televisions as gateways to the Internet (so reducing the need for a computer), or linking other schemes — such as computer loans — with this major change.

## 14.5. Transformed Communications

Over recent years, there has been a major increase in the ways we can communicate and collaborate with each other. New media and new formats are emerging all the time. This is likely to be of particular importance when deciding how and what information to deliver to younger people, who are growing up in a culture with more communication channels and more options available. A quote from the Innovating Information in Derbyshire report <sup>7</sup> is appropriate here: *"The challenge will be to monitor such developments and to experiment with how the VCS could use emerging technologies like podcasts, blogs, interactive TV and mobile videos. We may not have all the answers now, but we need to ensure that this does not become a sector blind spot."*

## 14.6. More Mobile Technologies

There is a firm trend towards an increased opportunity for people to do things whilst travelling and whilst away from their work or homebase. The question here is whether this opportunity will be open to everyone – the expectation is that it will not be open to everyone, so will be a primary future factor in contributing to the digital divide.

## 14.7. More Remote Working

The ability to interact, work together and socialise without being in the same place has been around for a long time; however, this is becoming easier, cheaper and more effective.

ICT volunteers tend to be concentrated in particular geographical areas. Charities not based near these clusters often have a great deal of difficulty in accessing high-quality ICT skills.

IT4Communities have tried to do something about this. They have created a Virtual Volunteering "location" category so that volunteers can easily list projects, which could be done working remotely when searching for opportunities. Remote volunteering can pose new challenges but can also be every bit as rewarding and successful as local volunteering.

## 14.8. Technology Becomes Invisible

In his The Future of Technology article <sup>8</sup>, Dr Simon Davey talks about how ICT 'naturalises' as people and organisations see applications not the grey boxes, because technology stops being clever and starts being smart. For example, the ability to easily write, edit and print an article is the key, not how to use a word processor on a computer! This shift in perception is subtle, yet profound, as the technology starts to become invisible.

That said, this trend will work alongside the contrasting trend, where the technology and gadgetry continue to be symbols of status, such as plasma televisions and designer mobile phones.

## 14.9. ICT and Accessibility

In recent years, there has been a major push to improve access to services by the Government and other bodies. In parallel, there has been a major strategic shift towards providing public services through the Internet, including online tax returns, car tax and so on. These two activities have helped to drive improvements in web accessibility, which means that those with hearing, sight and other problems can engage in public life through ICT.

## 14.10. ICT and Democracy

ICT is already having an impact upon decisions made at senior, national and international levels, and this influence is likely to grow. For example, weblogs (known as "blogs") are online diaries that have become very popular and for some people a valuable alternative source of information and different viewpoints, as well as a possible conduit for consultations. Online petitions and lobbying are also gaining in influence. For example, Jamie Oliver's campaign to improve the quality of school dinners was heavily supported by an online petition that resulted in politicians receiving a wave of correspondence and ultimately leading to a major change in policy.

In the long-term, ICT may also play a more direct role through online voting and referenda, if the security issues can be dealt with effectively.

### **14.11. Emphasis Moving From Access to ICT Literacy**

Several years ago, the availability of Internet access at an affordable cost was the key issue. However, this has become less important with the increased social penetration of the Internet and other technological advances, but this still remains an issue. Many people can get low cost access in libraries and internet cafes, but the evidence still suggests that people are much more likely to make regular use of an Internet connection at home rather than anywhere else.

Today, the discussion is moving from the technologies themselves to skills and literacy. Training people in computer skills is like teaching them to read and write for the first time, which needs to be followed by learning how to search and use information effectively. Even though access will be not as emphasised access to regular practice will still be a limiting factor.

## 15. CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, the Voluntary and Community Sector can play four key roles in digital inclusion:

- As champions, actively promoting digital inclusion through projects.
- As mediators, acting as conduits between disadvantaged groups and ICT.
- As supporters, introducing disadvantaged groups to ICT.
- As role models, demonstrating how ICT can be used sensitively and effectively.

In line with this strategic framework, the ICT Group also recommends that existing ICT support projects in Derbyshire continue and are strengthened. In addition, the ICT Group will take the lead with regard to the following:

- Providing a strategic voice for ICT issues with the VCS in Derbyshire.
- Encouraging networking between those responsible for and/or interested in ICT.
- Raising awareness of local, regional and national ICT services and service providers.
- Helping to build the capacity for ICT volunteering and mentoring.
- Supporting the development of awards that recognise ICT excellence and innovation.
- Production of targeted events dedicated to the above activities.

Clearly, for VCS organisations and their ICT systems to be sustainable, the sector needs to address a number of fundamental issues that are the result of low and incoherent investment in the past. Sustainable ICT development requires the needs of the sector to be addressed for the medium to longer term, not just for short-term projects. As well as the raising of the ICT profile within the VCS, this reorientation will require a parallel change in the way policy makers and funders help to increase capacity and seed long-term improvements.

Finally, the key sign of success will be when ICT is referred to in the majority of VCS strategies and plans, not just those dedicated to improving the use of technologies and communications. This will indicate that ICT has been truly absorbed into the VCS culture and community as a valuable and essential enabler of all activities.

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# APPENDIX

## A1. SIGNPOSTING

<b>AbilityNet</b>	<a href="http://www.abilitynet.org.uk">http://www.abilitynet.org.uk</a>
<p>AbilityNet is a national charity with nine regional offices, which are the UK's largest provider of independent advice and information on all aspects making ICT accessible for people with a disability or limiting condition.</p> <p>For example, AbilityNet offers a 'one-stop-shop' for all your assistive technology needs, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Assistive hardware &amp; software.</li><li>• Fully configured computer systems.</li><li>• Lifetime technical support.</li><li>• Home installation and training.</li></ul>	
<b>ICT Foresight</b>	<a href="http://www.ncvo-networks.org.uk/blogs/ictforesight/">http://www.ncvo-networks.org.uk/blogs/ictforesight/</a>
<p>From September 2005 until March 2007, the National Council for Voluntary Organisations are looking at the impact of ICT on the VCS. This means not only looking at how VCOs use or could use ICT to further their missions, but also at how ICT is driving change in society, and what implications this has for VCOs and the complex relationships they have with their many stakeholders (funders, beneficiaries, users, volunteers, donors, staff, regulators, competitors, partners, etc.)</p> <p>ICT Foresight aim to publish a series of reports aimed at voluntary and community organisations, from small community groups to big name charities. The aim is to stimulate thinking about the changing operating environment, future direction and strategic decisions.</p>	
<b>ICT Hub</b>	<a href="http://www.ictHub.org.uk/">http://www.ictHub.org.uk/</a>
<p>The ICT Hub is a partnership of national voluntary and community organisations. This partnership provides a range of services to help voluntary and community sector organisations benefit from ICT.</p>	
<b>ICT Hub Knowledgebase</b>	<a href="http://www.ictHubknowledgebase.org.uk/">http://www.ictHubknowledgebase.org.uk/</a>
<p>The ICT Hub Knowledgebase is designed to help community and voluntary sector organisations access the benefits of information technology. The knowledgebase is a comprehensive source of independent ICT information and advice. This service is delivered by LASA.</p>	
<b>I-See-T</b>	<a href="http://www.i-see-t.org.uk/">http://www.i-see-t.org.uk/</a>
<p>I-See-T is a project exploring Information &amp; Communications Technology (ICT) for collaboration in the voluntary and community sector (VCS). I-See-T is run by ruralnet uk but is open to rural and non-rural organisations. This year-long project aims to share the experience, tools, advantages and pitfalls of using ICT for collaboration with organisations in the VCS that could benefit most.</p>	
<b>The IT Resource Guide</b>	<a href="http://www.itforcharities.co.uk/">http://www.itforcharities.co.uk/</a>
<p>The IT Resource Guide for UK Charities and Non-Profit Organisations provides long lists of those who provide ICT-related services, particularly for the third sector.</p>	

<b>iT4Communities</b>	<a href="http://www.it4communities.org.uk">http://www.it4communities.org.uk</a>
<p>iT4Communities is an initiative to encourage companies and individuals with professional IT skills to volunteer these skills for the benefit of the community. By supporting both charity and volunteer all the way all the way through the volunteering process, iT4Communities aims to bridge the gap between IT professionals and charities needing IT help.</p>	
<b>LASA</b>	<a href="http://www.lasa.org.uk">http://www.lasa.org.uk</a>
<p>London Advice Services Alliance has been involved in the provision of expert advice and information to the voluntary advice and legal sector since 1984. It has developed and implemented a number of innovative ICT systems to assist with the raising of standards. These include Knowledgebase, a database of ICT information and advice, the development and support of circuit riders to meet the needs of the voluntary and community sector and consultancy and project management services.</p>	
<b>RuralNet UK</b>	<a href="http://www.ruralnet.co.uk/">http://www.ruralnet.co.uk/</a>
<p><b>Ruralnet   uk</b> is a rural regeneration charity with specialist skills in Information, Communications and Collaboration Technologies (ICCTs) and wide experience covering their potential and their appropriate use for rural areas. It uses ICCTs to make connections between people, to ensure that information reaches those that need it, that networks are developed and supported, and that project partnerships achieve their full potential. Ruralnet   uk works at local, sub-regional, regional, national and European levels.</p>	