

**Voluntary Organisations for Children,
Young People and Families**

STRATEGY

2014 - 2017

December 2014

Foreword

By **Len Simkins**

Independent Chair of VOCypf

I am very happy to introduce this first Strategy for VOCypf.

This document outlines VOCypf's overall strategy for the next three years and will help us develop specific action plans for each year.

VOCypf has provided a wide range of well received services for the children's sector since its launch last five years ago. However, many of these services have been demand or funding led. This is the first attempt by VOCypf to start planning our services in a more strategic way.

The voluntary children's sector plays an essential role in supporting the children's agenda. Voluntary sector organisations therefore need to have a voice when policy decisions, affecting children, young people and families, are being made by statutory bodies. VOCypf aims to continue to inform the voluntary sector about children's sector issues as well as helping to build the sector's capacity to have a stronger voice. This Strategy starts to plan how we are going to approach this work over the next few years. Action Plans will then be produced each year to provide more detail on VOCypf's annual plans.

As I have only been in post as independent chair since September 2013, the time since then has been a steep learning curve for me and I would therefore like to thank the VOCypf Officer, Linda Bulled, for all her enthusiasm and support, and also the new VOCypf Executive Group for their support and input in helping us move forward with developing this Strategy.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank Central Bedfordshire Council, Bedford Borough Council, and the Bedford Borough Safeguarding Children Board for their funding for VOCypf, and to thank the CVS for acting as our host agency.



VOCypf - History

Children's sector networks in Bedfordshire have been in existence for over 20 years.

The current network came together from two existing networks: **Family Network** and **Voluntary Organisations Consultative Group** and became the **Voluntary Organisations Consortium (VOC)**.

This network was re-named the **Voluntary Organisations for Children, Young People and Families**, VOCypf for short, in 2009.

This change to VOCypf took place at the same time as the two new unitary authorities of Bedford Borough and Central Bedfordshire were created. VOCypf works in both local authority areas and has had, and continues to have, a good working relationship with both unitary authorities - and both authorities help to fund VOCypf.

VOCypf - Rationale

VOCypf brings together organisations in the children's sector to promote greater involvement in, and understanding of, local and national agendas.

Both national and local voluntary sector/not for profit organisations advocate on behalf of children, young people and families who do not have a voice. They seek to ensure the best outcomes for their client group through lobbying, consultation, research, service mapping, needs analysis and service delivery.

Voluntary organisations are often experts in their field and able to provide valuable information to the government of the day for them to make informed decisions. Unfortunately at times this information is not acted on and the voluntary sector voice is ignored.

Having a network of organisations makes the sector stronger to impact on decision making both locally and nationally. Having a coordinated approach can also facilitate greater engagement with the voluntary sector and allow for capacity building.

The voluntary sector in the UK has a big impact and a very valuable role to play in the lives of children, young people and families. The sector, particularly the bigger national organisations, makes a large contribution to the services on offer in our society. The smaller organisations which are often hidden grassroots groups make a contribution to the fabric of local communities which can never be measured. VOCypf helps to promote this valuable work in Bedford Borough and Central Bedfordshire.

VOCypf – Key activities

Since 2009 VOCypf has played an important role in supporting voluntary sector organisation in working with children, young people and families.

Over the last five years VOCypf's services have developed considerably. Current activities include:

- Key partner in the local safeguarding agenda in Bedford Borough and Central Bedfordshire
- Attending, or directly engaging with, over 20 local strategic networks or working groups, to influence the statutory decision making processes in Bedford Borough and Central Bedfordshire
- Regular input into consultations in the children's sector in Bedford Borough and Central Bedfordshire
- Regularly distributing information on children's sector issues to over 200 organisations and contacts on the VOCypf database – including producing and distributing a regular online newsletter
- Promoting the voluntary sector in general through its links with the CVS and membership of Voluntaryworks

VOCypf – Current position

The structure of the VOCypf is as follows:

VOCypf Independent Chair - Len Simkins

VOCypf Executive Group - Amanda Cole – YMCA Bedfordshire
Wendie Lovatt - FACES
Kate Martinow - Goldington Family Centre (until Dec. 2014)
Mrunal Sisodia - Bedford Borough Parent Carer Forum
Dee Thomas - 4YPUK
Martin Trinder - CVS (Host agency for VOCypf)

VOCypf Officer – Linda Bulled

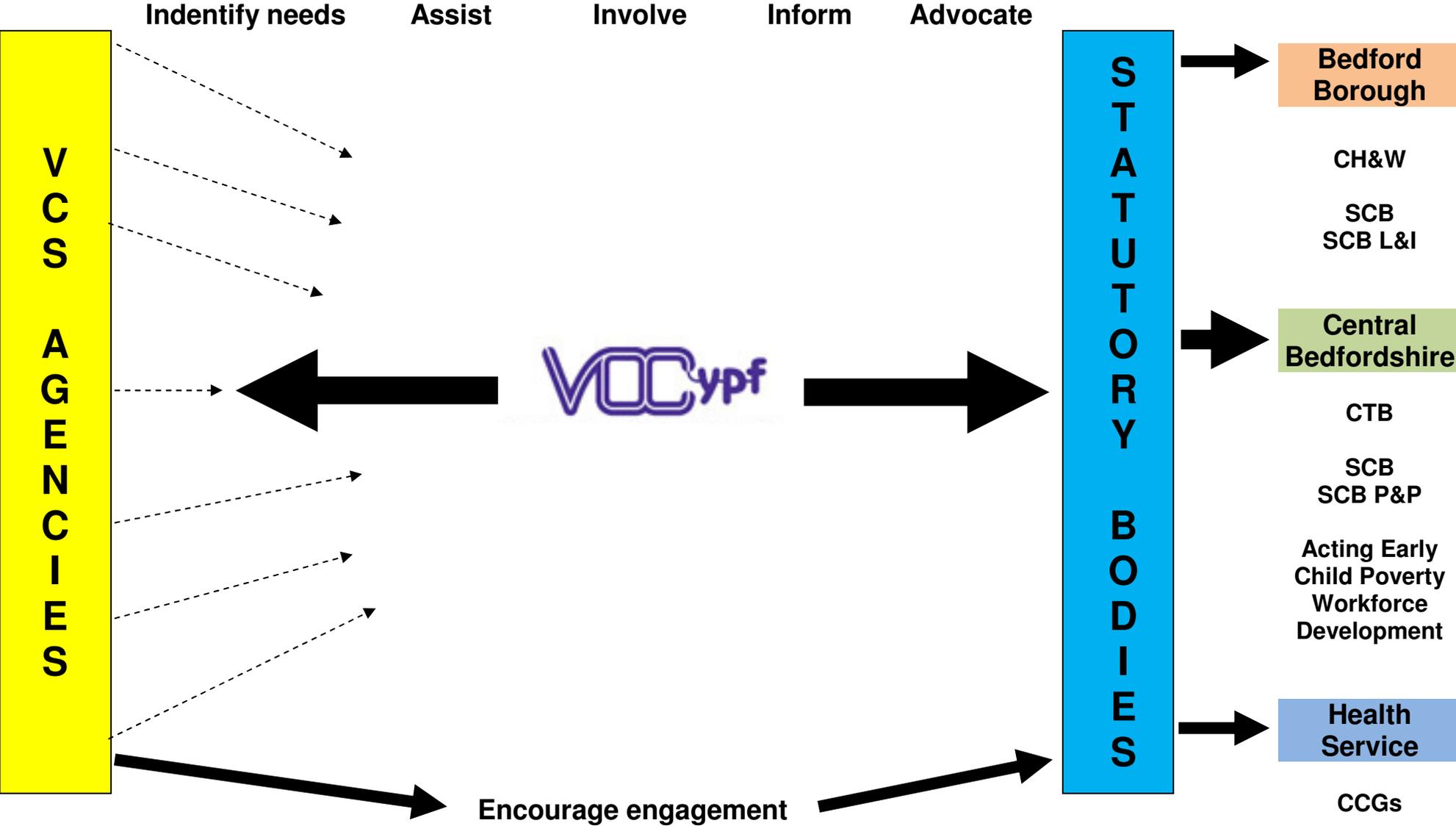
VOCypf Communications Officer – Emily Herman (until Dec. 2014)
- Helen Hall (from Dec. 2014)

NB The communications work originally undertaken for VOC has recently been transferred to a new permanent post. The new postholder will be employed by Bedford CVS, VOCypf's host agency, and will be responsible for communication duties for both the CVS and for VOCypf.

The Network's key priorities are set by the VOCypf Executive Group. Our work is influenced by the needs of the members of the VOCypf network and the needs of our main funders (Bedford Borough and Central Bedfordshire).

VOCypf's funds and finances are administered by Bedford CVS, which acts as our host agency. The VOCypf Officer has a desk at the CVS and most of VOCypf's meetings are held at the CVS.

VOCypf - Role



National agenda for children, young people and families

There are always changes taking place under this agenda and every new national government that comes into power will have key policies which will impact on outcomes for children, young people and their families.

VOCypf seeks to keep the sector up to date with these agendas by horizon scanning and publishing information which will keep the VOCypf up to date with changes. This enables organisations to be more proactive in long term business planning and to take advantage of the opportunities as they arise.

Children, young people and families are always a high priority for any national government and decisions made by governments can be political in nature but the voluntary sector has always been very adaptable and flexible in its response when it is well informed and engaged with as a respected partner.

The government is recognising the value of the family as the basis for a stable environment for the child; they are recognising that some families need additional support to ensure this is achievable. An enhanced universal service offer and additional early intervention services are critical to support families when they have short term problems from which they can recover if the right support is available at the appropriate time.

There have been a number of recent national Government initiatives around this agenda:

The Children and Families Act 2014 changes the law to give greater protection to vulnerable children, better support for children whose parents are separating, a new system to help children with special educational needs and disabilities, and help for parents to balance work and family life. It is far reaching and covers: Adoption; Family Justice; Child Welfare; the role of the Children's Commissioner for England; Children and young people with special educational needs (SEN) and disabilities; Childcare; and parents' rights.

Child Poverty Strategy 2014 restates the Government's commitment to tackle poverty at its source – be it family breakdown, educational failure, addiction, debt or worklessness. We are clear that this task starts from the earliest stages in a child's life. Through our investment in the early years and the Pupil Premium, we are determined that to give youngsters the best possible start, with schools seen by struggling families as the route to a better life for their children. By tackling the barriers faced by disadvantaged children, raising educational attainment, and leaving no child behind, we can break that destructive cycle of poverty.

The Working Together to Safeguard Children 2013 streamlines previous guidance documents to clarify the responsibilities of professionals towards safeguarding children and strengthen the focus away from processes and onto the needs of the child. It replaces:

- Working together to safeguard children (2010)
- Framework for the assessment of children in need and their families (2000), and
- Statutory guidance on making arrangements to safeguard and promote the welfare of children under section 11 of the Children Act 2004 (2007).

Troubled Families which supports local authorities with a highly intensive intervention for families where there are multiple needs and endeavors to get children back to school, reduce youth crime and anti-social behaviour put adults on the path back to work thereby reducing the high costs to the public sector.

The Raised Participation Age where the Government has changed the law so that from start of the 2013/14 academic year, all young people are required to continue in education or training:

- Until the end of the academic year in which they turn 17.
- From summer 2015 this will be until their 18th birthday.

Young people now have a choice about how they continue in education or training post-16, which could be through:

- Full-time study in a school, college or with a training provider.
- Full-time work or volunteering combined with part-time education or training.
- An Apprenticeship

The Special Educational Needs & Disability legislative changes came in on 1st September 2014. These are probably the most radical of all the changes to take place over the last few years. For children and young people identified as having special educational needs or disabilities (SEND) it can be difficult to get the support they need to do well. This is a really important change which covers the following:

- Improves the support system for children and young people with SEND and their families.
- Improves educational provision for pupils with SEND.
- Helps young people with SEND prepare for adulthood and life outside the education system.

Looking to the future, the trend is towards a seamless services delivery both up through the age ranges and between service providers. The SEND agenda in particular has encouraged Children's Services and Adult Services to work together to prevent the young people falling into the black hole of service loss at 18 years old. It has also facilitated joint commissioning between the Local Authorities and the Clinical Commissioning Groups bringing health, education and social care together to support the young person. Joined up early intervention is the golden thread across all the issues that affect young people whether it is domestic abuse, mental health issues, SEND, complex health issues, substance mis-use and many more.

Voluntary sector organisations are one of the mechanism by which this level of intervention is delivered and therefore play a huge role in the Early Help agenda.

Local picture for children, young people and families

In 2009 Bedfordshire County Council and the three district Councils of Bedford Borough, Mid Bedfordshire and South Bedfordshire ceased to exist. They were replaced by the two unitary authorities of Bedford Borough and Central Bedfordshire. This had major implications for Children's Services which had been countywide and now became split under the jurisdiction of Bedford Borough and Central Bedfordshire. These authorities being much smaller geographically and structurally meant that services were either shared which brings its own set of issues or were run by each unitary authority individually. This reduction in size often leads to difficulties with economies of scale and level of expertise available.

During the first few years it was a steep learning curve for both unitary authorities but over time many of the initial issues have been overcome and each authority has developed its own way of working. It is still recognised that many of the national initiatives and government agendas are similar for both authorities and where appropriate there are shared discussions. An example of this is around safeguarding where there has been some work approached on a pan-Bedfordshire model particularly around Child Sexual Exploitation and Domestic Abuse. Each of the unitary authorities has its own Safeguarding Children Board that is accountable to the Councils Chief Executive.

Bedford Borough and Central Bedfordshire are served by the NHS Bedfordshire Clinical Commissioning Group and the Bedfordshire Police Authority which also covers Luton Borough.

The two main hospitals which serve the unitary authorities are Bedford and the Luton & Dunstable which is situated on the Luton & Dunstable border.

Both Bedford Borough and Central Bedfordshire are actively engaged with the VOCypf network and each part fund the VOCypf Officer post and the VOCypf Communications post.

Local services are continually evolving and like local authorities throughout the country there is never enough money to fund all the services which the authorities would like to provide. As with the national picture the local voluntary agencies often provide enhances universal services, early intervention and prevention and in some cases services which support complex needs.

Services vary across the two authorities and are dependent on the priorities set by each individual Council. The members of the VOCypf network hold a number of local authority contracts and actively contribute to the identification of service gaps through performance and monitoring and open stakeholder events.

VOCypf is invited to be part of all the strategic and operational partner boards and groups. This may be through attendance of the VOCypf Officer or by individual representatives from VOCypf network organisations. Details of the meetings currently attended are given overleaf.

Partnership meetings attended by VOCypf

Bedford Borough

- Bedford Borough Safeguarding Children Board (BBSCB)
- BBSCB Learning & Improvement Group
- Child Health & Wellbeing Group
- SEND Reforms Steering Group
- JSNA Review Group
- CAMHS Strategy
- The Practitioners Network
- Partnership Community Forum
- The Children's Centre Network and Partnership
- 4 Locality Network Panels
- Community Network Steering Group

Central Bedfordshire

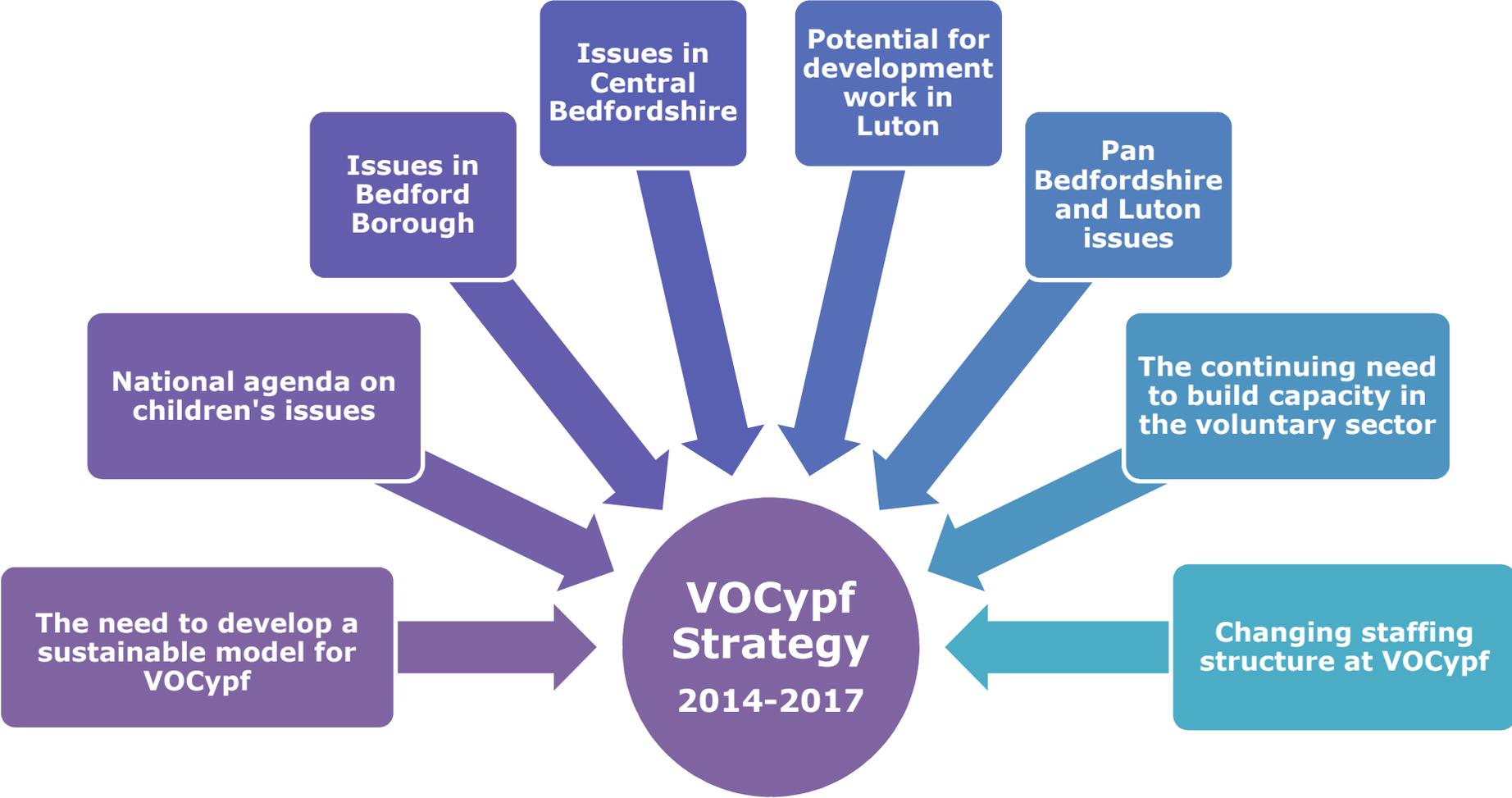
- Childrens Trust Board
- Child Poverty Group
- Acting Early Group
- Workforce Development Group
- Central Bedfordshire Safeguarding Children Board (CBSCB), CBSCB Practice & Performance Group, plus T&F groups as appropriate
- 14-19 Partnership, NEET & RPA
- SEND Support & Aspirations Board, Workstream 6 Joint Commissioning
- Head Teachers & Partners Group as appropriate.
- JSNA Review Group

NHS Bedfordshire Clinical Commissioning Group

- CYP & Maternity Stakeholders Group
- SEND Commissioning
- CAMHS Stakeholder

Drivers of change for VOCypf

There are a number of factors and changes which will have an impact on VOCypf over the next few years.



VOCypf Strategy

Mission

To champion the voluntary and community sector working with children, young people and families in Bedford Borough and Central Bedfordshire

Principles

VOCypf services should be planned in a coordinated manner to meet needs of the local voluntary and community sector,

- using collaboration and partnership working across the both the voluntary and statutory sectors
- promoting the safeguarding of children
- providing quality services that the voluntary and community sector will have confidence to use
- underpinned by a commitment to promoting equalities and diversity

Strategic Aims

1. To **identify the needs** of children, young people and families in the local community to underpin the aims and activities of VOCypf.
2. To **assist** local voluntary and community organisations working with children, young people and families to work effectively and deliver quality services
3. To **involve** voluntary and community organisations working with children, young people and families by facilitating effective communication, networking and collaboration in the sector and with other sectors
4. To **inform** voluntary and community organisations working with children, young people and families by disseminating information on sector needs, developments, opportunities and threats
5. To **advocate** on behalf of the sector and enhance its role as an integral part of local planning, policy making, commissioning and service delivery
6. To **encourage engagement** between local voluntary and community organisations and statutory partners working with children, young people and families, by working collaboratively and promoting effective working relationships to enable the diverse views of the sector to be represented

Action Plans

Once this Strategy is adopted, VOCypf's Executive Group will produce a more detailed **Action Plan** to outline its recommended action for 2014/15.

This recommended action will take into account the drivers of change for VOCypf (see page 11) and the resources available for 2014/15.

The 2014/15 action plan will then begin to help implement VOCypf's Strategy and will help to achieve VOCypf's strategic aims (see page 12).

The 2014/15 action plan will be reviewed in early 2015 and a subsequent action plan will then be developed for 2015/16. A similar process will then be used the following year to develop an action plan for 2016/17.

Review of the Strategy

The intention is to review the VOCypf Strategy in early 2017 so that a new Strategy can be developed for 2017 – 2020.

However, the current Strategy could be refreshed before 2017, if the need arises.