

The Way Forward – Valuing the Voluntary Sector

Voluntary and Community Sector Conference

17th March 2007



Section 1: Introduction

The Way Forward – Valuing the Voluntary Sector, the Voluntary and Community Sector Conference was held on 17th March 2007. The Conference aimed to present the Third Sector Review from differing points of view, and then to give delegates an opportunity to ask questions of the speakers in the Question Time slot.

A video address from Ed Miliband MP, Minister for the Third Sector was played first.

Keynote speakers from Government Office East of England (GO East), the Directory of Social Change and the National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) each gave their opinions on the Third Sector Review.

This was followed by a lively Question Time where delegates put questions to the keynote speakers about the Review.

After lunch Celia Clark presented the research Valuing the Voluntary Sector in Basildon District, this research aimed to bring up to date information on the voluntary and community sector in Basildon District carried out in 2002.

The afternoon continued with workshops on:

- Full Cost Recovery
- Top Ten Fundraising Tips
- Networking and Forums
- Governance and Management

These workshops aimed to build the capacity of the voluntary and community sector in Basildon District and to prepare for the implications of the Third Sector Review.

This was the third Voluntary and Community Sector Conference and follows on from the “Fit for the Future” and “Working and Talking Together” conferences.

Section 2: Keynote speakers

A video address from **Ed Miliband MP, Minister for the Third Sector** opened this section. He made four main points, (1) the voluntary and community sector (VCS) need stable funding moving to three year grants; (2) organisations can get involved in public service delivery but Local Authority grants are to be available if they do not want to; (3) community assets to be fully utilised for the benefit of the community; (4) the Government will consult with and listen to the voice of the VCS. Transcription in Appendix 1.

The first speaker was **Sue Lowe one of the Team Leaders in the Communities, Neighbourhoods and Culture Team at Government Office East of England (GO-East) in Cambridge**. Copy of presentation in Appendix 2.

Sue's presentation was on the Local Government White Paper and the Third Sector Review. She started by reminding delegates that she had spoken at the "Fit for the Future" Conference in September 2005 and then gave an update on progress in the last 18 months:

- Local Area Agreements (LAA) have been rolled out nationally
- The Essex agreement was signed in April 2006
- May 2006 saw the creation of the new Cabinet Office, the Office of the Third Sector
- The consultation on the future role of the third sector in social and economic regeneration was launched
- The interim report was released in December 2006
- This will feed into the comprehensive spending review this summer.

She then went on to speak about Strong and Prosperous Communities the Local Government White Paper. It says they 'want the best local partnership working between local authorities and the third sector to be the rule and not the exception...' It recognises the Third Sector role in shaping and designing effective services, representation and advocacy and lobbying and influencing policy.

Sue said that Sustainable Community Strategies provide the framework for a strong and healthy local voluntary and community sector which makes it easier for local groups to take on ownership and management of local assets. There is a £30 million national fund for this.

This was followed by **Helen Rice, the Director of Learning and Development at the Directory of Social Change (DSC)**. Copy of presentation Appendix 3.

Helen began by reminding the conference there is no single unified third sector, the roots of the sector lie in the individual giving time and freely associating in pursuit of a common goal or to address a need. It is not the government's role to determine the future role of the third sector in social and economic regeneration. The sector needs to be trusted to do its work and involvement from the state should enable this. If it wasn't for funding most VCS organisations would not enter into any involvement with statutory authorities, more unrestricted funding needs to be made available. In order to enable voluntary sector activity the government should maintain and expand its local grants ensuring local needs are met with initiative, energy and skills.

The third speaker was **Mubeen Bhutta, Policy Officer from National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO)**. Copy of presentation Appendix 4.

Mubeen started with a background to the review and then looked at NCVO's key message. The recommendations are that all the roles of the sector are supported, that Compact is implemented, public services are transformed, a sustainable funding mix is provided and the 2002 cross-cutting review is implemented. The innovation of the third sector must be supported, the skills of the third sector workforce and employers should be built, there should be investment in VCS infrastructure and duties on local government.

The Government's interim report in December 2006 recognises the voice and advocacy roles of the VCS, calls for transformation of public services and commits to finding a sustainable environment for the VCS. NCVO responded asking for a deeper understanding of the VCS voice and campaigning role, a third sector skills council and a dedicated select committee.

The full report is expected in Spring/Summer 2007 and the Comprehensive spending review in Summer 2007.

Section 3: Question Time

(Sue Lowe – SL, Helen Rice – HR, Mubeen Bhutta MB)

Q. What sanctions are included in the white paper for those Councils who do not carry out the duty to work with local voluntary organisations with the experience of ineffective Local Strategic Partnerships and the lip service paid to COMPACT's.

A. SL - April 2008 will see the comprehensive area assessment, there will be sanctions if they do not uphold benchmarks, the LAA has a challenge function. Essex County Council are looking at a county wide COMPACT.

MB – problems with assessment are being addressed.

Q. Sharon Tillbrook, BBWCVS. Have the Government thought about how to consult with the local level of the sector. It appears to me that how they are currently consulting is not reaching the local level and in fact they seem to be directing the sector towards sub regional, regional and national level. This cannot reflect local needs and therefore will not be included in the development of policy.

A. HR agreed with Sharon.

SL – consultation events have been held including major regional events. Go East encourage sector to hold local events. Please feedback to Go East with all reviews and from stakeholder events.

Q. Brother Sarwar, Basildon Islamic Centre. Why is nothing said about Black and Minority Groups? How are you working about cultures? There are not many links with our groups.

A. SL – Do challenge and ask questions (the challenge function).

Government work with community cohesion groups and racial equality groups and funding has been made available through Capacity Builders.

SL – Recognised the need to improve representation.

HR – 22 groups nationally funded by the government, no BME, Disability, and Equality groups. After lobbying for the women's group that she works with they have secured funding, but the funding was then reduced from 5yrs to 3yrs.

MB - it is an increasing challenge for government to recognise these groups.

Q. Jim Smith, BDVC. How long before you need to be 'professionally qualified' to become a trustee in the voluntary sector? This will deter people who 'just want to volunteer'.

A. HR – opposed to standards for trustees it is inappropriate for small groups.

MB – there are problems with retaining skilled and qualified staff. There need to be an increased awareness of trustee liability and strategic development not necessarily their professionalism.

Q. Sharon Tillbrook, BBWCVS. The Government Cross Cutting Review in 2002 talked about Full Cost Recovery (FCR) being implemented by April 2006 across government and third sector contracts. However, this is not happening, the latest Charity Commission report 'Stand and Deliver' states only 12% of contracts are on a Full Cost Recovery (FCR) basis. How will the Government address this, as Ed Miliband talked about funding as one of the key issues for the sector, three year funding not at FCR is not sustainable for the organisation or the services delivered.

A. SL – cross cutting review aspirations were not met. Funders and bidders both need to understand and plan for sustainability and what is needed. Sector needs to develop its expertise. Work needed around procurement and contracts.

MB – the government need to consider the short term investment for long term gain.

Q. If the Government is getting evermore involved in voluntary groups does that mean there will be even more red tape and paperwork. This is putting people off helping out.

A. HR – Yes, if constrained by government funding.

SL – needs to be proportionate to the level of funding.

MB – NCVO are aware of this their 2005 report recommended a cut in red tape; no response has been given yet.

Q. Vince Lewington, Kings Way. How will funding be structured? Will contracts require voluntary organisations to pay out money first and thus limiting access to organisations to those that can afford to do this?

A. SL – there is a need for set up costs, not just equal payments. There needs to be a better commissioning and procurement of services.

HR – voluntary sector contracts are not equal to private sector in delivery of contracts. It needs to be a fair deal, fair contract and fair terms.

SL – the aspiration of the white paper is to work on equal terms.

MB – Treasury has revised it's guidance to funders.

Q. Peter Kendal, WHCM. Helen Rice touched on how the VCS is most effective when trusted and innovative when a light touch is applied. Can central and local government etc. allow this to happen and maintain its commitment to funding?

A. MB – funders need to measure outcomes and not just follow the money.

SL – Yes they can and progress is being made towards this. Outcomes need to be looked at and not just the process. She is optimistic that this will happen.

HR – A grant gives freedom to respond to need in the best way. A Contract, to deliver what the state should have delivered in the first place, does not allow this.

Q. Stephen Foggo, Billericay Neighbourhood Watch. Are there any ways the government is looking at the private sector to put money into the voluntary sector.

A. MB – yes the Treasury is looking at business in the community.

SL – Community Foundations work with the public and voluntary sector.

HR – It is hard to gain information from companies, they need incentives from the government for companies to give to voluntary sector.

Section 4: Valuing the Voluntary Sector in Basildon District

Celia Clark, Partnership and Participation Officer at BBWCVS gave a presentation on the research Valuing the Voluntary Sector in Basildon District. The research shows that over 49,000 people have benefited from the services of voluntary sector organisations. 505,000 hours are given a year by volunteers to these organisations. This gives a value of £4,740,000 to volunteering in the District. The sector also generated over £7 million in funding. To see a full copy of the report contact BBWCVS or visit www.bbwcvs.org.uk/documents.htm

Section 5: Workshops

Full Cost Recovery

What do you need in order to achieve full cost recovery?

- Partnership working
- Assertiveness/negotiation skills

How can BBWCVS help to meet your needs?

- Facilitation by BBWCVS
- Get funders around the table.
- Accountability of funders.
- Getting the message out – what is meant by non-profit.
- Training on budget planning.

Copy of presentation Appendix 5.

Top Ten Fundraising Tips

Copy of presentation Appendix 6.

Networking and Forums

How do we know what we don't know? How can organisations gain knowledge and who are the stakeholders. Discussion took place about the voluntary sector forum in Basildon and included its links to the Local Strategic Partnership. Questions raised were - how to influence local strategic bodies and how to influence funders to widen their criteria.

Copy of presentation Appendix 7.

Governance and Management facilitated by Pam McCarthy, BBWCVS with Faye Kadesh BBWCVS.

Governance is setting the policy – Management is executing the policy decision.

Section 6: Evaluation Report

Returned forms: 30

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
The conference objectives were clear	12	18			
The conference objectives were well met	11	16	2		
The conference met my own expectations	12	13	3		
The presentations were clear and easy to understand	13	13	1	3	
The workshops were useful	12	15			
The materials provided were useful	13	16			
The trainers/speakers responded well to questions	13	14	2		
The conference has helped me further develop my knowledge and/or understanding	11	18			
This conference has helped me to further improve my skills	8	17	3		
The food served was appropriate to my dietary needs	15	12		1	2
The venue was appropriate to my physical needs	15	13	2		

Comments:

- Lack of lift from underground car park was a problem as a blue badge holder. Well organised, friendly and a chance to exchange views and information.
- To me the conference items and opportunities to network particularly useful at the time of getting a new project off the ground.
- A superb event – it is always interesting and enjoyable. That so many participants are prepared to sacrifice their weekend is proof positive that it is an important conference.
- I had a very enjoyable day and learnt a lot. It was a very helpful conference.
- An enjoyable day – thank you.
- This was a very useful, quality conference.
- Very good conference – best I've been to for years – full but not overstuffed. Initial session – PowerPoint presentations - need to read all the words for benefit of sight impaired delegates. Q & A session – please announce your name prior to answering for benefit of sight impaired delegates. EDA? ERA? Did everyone know who they are? Networking workshop – PowerPoint presentation – print on screen – too much, too small. 10 Top Tips – excellent slides & delivery, useful and encouraging. Lunch – too much choice – main courses, lovely cakes, good coffee.
- DSC speaker was excellent.
- Speakers needed mikes.
- Enjoyable morning, would have liked workshop in morning.
- The conference was useful and interesting it will be useful to my organisation as will the workshops.
- Wonderful networking opportunities.
- I thought there would or should have been a focus on volunteering as it was a conference Valuing the Voluntary Sector. Speaker from DSC was excellent.
- Good Value.
- Thoroughly enjoyed conference. But access was denied from lower car park.
- More support material. Transcriptions of speakers please.
- I didn't even know what 'Third Sector' was so I have learnt something today! A lot of the speakers talked about things I had no previous knowledge of. It was a big learning curve and I really enjoyed the day. The food was excellent.

Further training opportunities and events suggested:

- Important updates.
- Anything relevant organised by BBWCVS because they are V Good organisers.
- More conferences of this nature – not every 18 months.
- I would be interested in attending any event that could be useful to me or my organisation.
- Other events on issues facing the VCS – to raise awareness and inform.
- Would like to see workshops on monitoring and evaluating projects.

Section 7: Speakers, Facilitators and Delegates

Speakers

Sue Lowe	Government Office East of England
Helen Rice	Directory of Social Change
Mubeen Bhutta	National Council for Voluntary Organisations

Facilitators

Sharon Tillbrook	Basildon Billericay & Wickford CVS
Carole Houghton	Basildon and Thurrock Independent Advocacy Service
Peter Kendal	WHCM Counselling and Support
Pam McCarthy	Basildon Billericay & Wickford CVS
Jane Lutton	PAVIS
Angie Cahill	Basildon and Thurrock Independent Advocacy Service
Celia Clark	Basildon Billericay & Wickford CVS
Faye Kadesh	Basildon Billericay & Wickford CVS

Delegates

Alan Varnes	Benfleet Methodist Church
Andy Lewington	Kingsway
Anne Bouvier	WHCM
Artak Poghosyan	BBWCVS
Becky Walsh	BBWCVS
Bonnie Ames	Bards in Black
Brother Sarwar	Basildon Islamic Centre
Catherine Sackey	Thames Gateway Investing in Communities
Catherine Jameson	Essex Southend & Thurrock Connexions Ltd
Celia Suppiah	Thurrock Community Mothers & Breast Feeding
Deborah Cooke	Shape Shifters
Dennis Warren	BBWCVS
Eileen Knott	Castle Point and District Stroke Club
Elaine Hitchcock	Friends of Craylands
Eugene Jeter	Technology 4 Kids
Ev Cole	DIAL Basildon & South Essex
Geoff Kay	BBWCVS
Geoffrey Sharp	Castle Point and District Stroke Club

Gordon Henshall	Essex Scouts
Ian Dawson	Bards In Black
Jan Stevens	DIAL Basildon & South Essex
Jenny Dowsett	Hamelin Trust
Jill Thornton	Directory of Social Change
Jim Smith	BDVC
John Robb	BDVC
Joyce Sweeney	Essex County Council
Julie Hammerton	BBWCAS
Kabba Alpha	Essex County Council
Laura Cronshaw	St Albans CVS
Lesley Greenaway	Wickford Scout Group
Marlene Moura	PPI Forum for Basildon and Thurrock Hospitals
Mike Peart	Shape Shifters
Mr M. Hassan	Sudan Organisation for Development
Mrs Barbara Armitage	SAVS
Nick Salmon	BBWCVS
Norman Redican	BDC
Paul Nagle	Basildon District Arts Association
Peter Patterson	BAT (Basildon Arts Trust)
Ray Munro-Crump	Groundworks Southeast
Revd Steve Williams	Thames Gateway Investing in Communities
Revd Esther McCafferty	Churches Together in Basildon
Richard Boyd	Disability Essex (EDPA)
Rosemary Ajwana	Trust
Sally Bridger	BBWCVS
Sally Webb	Wickford & District Talking Newspaper
Sangita Mittra	Essex Racial Equality Council
Sharon Chan	BBWCVS
Sherie Griffiths	Small World
Shriya Rewjapaksa	TRUST
Stephen Foggo	Billericay Neighbourhood Watch
Teresa Clark	Parentline Plus
Tony Guyon	Interlock
Vince Lewington	Kingsway
Vivien Dewey	South Anglia Housing
Z Malik	Sudan Organisation for Development
Lisa Starcs	Tendering CVS
Julia Murphy	Women 4 Women
Terri Sargent	Basildon District Council

Section 8: Sponsors

Thank you to everyone that supported the conference and to the sponsors listed below:

Thames Gateway South Essex, Investing in Communities

Basildon District Council

Tesco (£10 Community Voucher)

Without this support The Way Forward - Valuing the Voluntary Sector Conference would not have taken place.

