



## **Notes from the CCEN seminar: Camden's voluntary and community sector review (held on 11<sup>th</sup> October 2010)**

### **Points made during the voluntary and community sector (VCS) discussion**

#### **Relationship**

- Lack of coherence across different parts of the local authority. In a general context there is positive representation but individual directorates have different attitudes towards the sector.
- The VCS need to work with council officers to develop coherent approaches to outcomes – less people working in the public sector after cuts are made could be problematic if those staff are lost.
- Can you have a pure procurement route and true partnership – there is a tension between partnership and the route of funding.
- Small groups are excluded by economies of scale. Different agendas of officers are a challenge – the challenge for the VCS is to raise the issues.
- The old Voluntary Sector Unit played a linking role – should revisit past approaches. There is a need for brokerage and overview.
- What are the council's priorities for the VCS?

#### **Funding**

- Council don't take account of leverage into the borough – need to stress what the VCS bring in. Uniformity in monitoring across council would help.
- Cheaper rent could enable more effective bids to other funders.
- Small grants could enable small groups (like tenants groups) to hold fundraising events and then cover their overheads.
- Full cost recovery should include rent and maintenance.
- Currently funding is going down whilst rents rise.
- Asset transfer – what does 'transfer' mean? Will the VCS be taking on problems? What state would buildings be in?
- A mixed economy of funding to match size of organisation – common sense that organisations that don't have staff capacity shouldn't be forced into commissioning process.

- `Camden's 'light touch' monitoring needs standardising and operating proportionally to size of organisation.
- Small groups – concerns that they won't have a chance – procurement needs to have a built in safety mechanism.
- VCS can suffer from inappropriate monitoring and threat of claw-back that other contractors don't experience.
- SMEs usually know their local communities but these are the organisations are being attacked.
- Organisations working with dispersed communities are also significant e.g. the disabled, but are also anxious about huge contracts.
- Competitors are also emerging from large 'local' players through expansion of services e.g. Mental Health Foundation Trust .

### **Strength and sustainability**

- Mergers are being encouraged e.g. police borough commanders, council chief executives.
- All power lies with big players e.g. partnership is often a main contractor and 'subbies' situation.
- Good partnership needs to be framed in commissioning intentions – to include small groups equally and fairly.
- Lottery is asking for bids with 'VCS leaders' – represents a shift in emphasis?
- Developing links with the private sector (corporate responsibility) takes a lot of time and commitment. Can be extremely beneficial but only if you have the capacity to do it well and sustain relationship.
- Pressure on resources often stops VCS going down corporate route.
- VCS can help to make best use of public money but needs resources and support to do this.
- There is sometimes useful 'in kind' support from the private sector – volunteers, mentors etc. but not so much the big funding needed to cover services and premises.
- Social Enterprise currently popular idea but charging for services is not appropriate to many VCOs – and charging also comes with admin costs.

### **Framework**

- VCS build relationships then funding stops – multitude of losses through 1yr grants – needs to be looked at by all funders.
- Convergence between what different funders and council want but don't talk to each other. Council funding affects fundraising. Could also streamline monitoring with others. Need to listen to what VCS is saying about relationships with other funders.
- Council *can* be flexible – examples of 'match' given to aid leverage from other funders.
- Working relationship needs to be simplified.
- Recognise role of sector as link to communities etc – other value – the review is a public sector perspective.
- Need short document to show all sides of the sector.
- Explore relationships between different VCS organisations.

## **Discussion with Nick Webb, Head of Communities and Third Sector and Alex Kenmure, Impact and Evaluation Officer**

**VCS:** The report doesn't address the council's relationship with the sector as a whole – it focuses on funded groups and public service delivery missing the unfunded and 'social glue' work. If the whole picture isn't understood then the relationship and support will be skewed.

**LBC:** We are challenging the view of the VCS as just an extension of council services – that should have come across in the review document. There may be voices in Camden that see the focus of scant resources on 'hard-nosed' services, for example mental health, drugs. We need to get better at teasing out more of the additional stuff. The council does have a commissioning and delivery responsibility and so officers often think in these terms.

We can look further at the networks and relationships that exist. Visiting organisations is a good idea – officers tend to be professionalised in individual fields and focus on meeting public targets through the best use of public money. Also prevention related work could be better promoted to chief officers.

**VCS:** There needs to be a mixed economy of funding – especially for small and medium sized organisations (SMEs). Also a corporate approach to monitoring – proportionality.

**LBC:** Guidance is needed on a mixed economy of funding, for example how much for grants or contracts etc – proportionally, and in terms of impact of the type of funding. We can work with the sector to establish where outcomes and impacts will be. The council recognises that there are disproportionate demands through monitoring, and wants to be less paternalistic – if we can see value we would opt for grants.

**VCS:** Partnerships will be more important – we need people in the council to work with us on this. For example, there is a tension between procurement and partnership working. Commissioning intentions should be written to support good partnership working and the involvement of local organisations in delivery.

**LBC:** Partnership can be included in specifications. For example sharing resources, local partnerships to support local organisations. Feedback on this would be useful. Current arrangements are being looked at in terms of appropriateness

**VCS:** A percentage of contracts could go to local organisations or partnerships with local organisations. Also if payment by results becomes

unavoidable in some services could larger providers help to underpin local organisations.

**LBC:** Partnership arrangements would need to be agreed in relation to impact.

**VCS:** Council staff are not fully aware of the role of the sector. This needs to be built into inductions – possibly with visits and secondments.

**LBC:** The review document is addressing this. The review is about looking at cross-cutting issues in commissioning etc and managing connections across a huge number of employees. Starting in areas like the senior commissioners group, the action plan etc. There should be a new procurement model from January, but there is currently no corporate or commissioning champion for the VCS.

**VCS:** Partnerships need council officers to work with, for example on outcomes based commissioning. This needs a champion – there is a risk of losing key staff and focussing on cost rather than full value.

**LBC:** There is a lot of chief officer commitment to outcomes based commissioning. Procurement officers can be risk averse when working with new types of provider – we are working with them to be more confident, and propose an innovation fund as an option. Partnerships are increasingly important and don't always have to be funding relationships. Which relationships or approaches maximise the impact of scarce resources. We want to take the emphasis off 'gift' relationship and have more equal collaborative relationships.

**VCS:** Organisations can find it time consuming and costly to tap into 'corporate social responsibility'. In kind support from the private sector is more common. Also the council doesn't recognise the amount of money the sector levers into the borough. They could be more pro-active with other funders – use of resources, monitoring etc.

**LBC:** Corporate social responsibility mentioned in the review is more about the council maximising its resources and looking at the bigger picture, for example what stops money flowing across sectors. The council need to walk the walk too if the comprehensive spending review is to be taken seriously.

**VCS:** There are a number of issues related to community buildings – like organisations not being legally allowed to sub let and maximise use and value of buildings, repairs, diminishing funding and rising rents (rent grants can be an effective way to support the sector). The asset transfer section of the review is also very vague.

**LBC:** The council want to be more transparent about how community buildings and tenants are supported and create a level playing field. The immediate situation is murky and needs creative input for a uniform and long term solution

