

CIVIL SOCIETY STRATEGY ENGAGEMENT EXERCISE - DEPARTMENT OF DIGITAL, CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

May 2018

Extracts from the Community First Yorkshire response to the consultation

To prepare this feedback views have been taken from the VCS community and also includes feedback shared among colleagues within the Action with Communities in Rural England (ACRE) network. Community First Yorkshire is part of the national network of 38 ACRE members of Rural Community Councils.

CIVIL SOCIETY

For the purpose of the Strategy, civil society is inclusive of all those outside of the public sector, who share the mission of building a stronger society and improving lives, regardless of traditional sector boundaries such as charity or private, and for profit or not. This mission-based interpretation will encompass individuals, movements, groups, organisations and businesses.

Government help to increase the impact of civil society:

- Build trust
- Funding based on social impact not bland measures or economic criteria
- Targets and outputs currently mitigate against partnership working
- Create social investment frameworks for joined up investment, across government and also other funders of civil society such as BIG Lottery and BBC Children in Need
- Devolution of budgets shaped around a framework, cross department devolution and cross departmental planning

To build public trust in civil society:

- Build an understanding around concepts and words such as neighbourliness
- Need to have people who are valued and respected to champion 'civil' society mirroring the effect David Attenborough has had on the use of plastics
- Negative stories about issues at senior levels within VCS organisations have a huge impact on perceptions. Work is needed to enable more of the positive stories to be told, about good work done locally and nationally, how society is changing through people involved in community work and supporting one-another (not just at times of sudden catastrophe or harsh winters). Words like together, connections, common interests.

Advantages the wider definition of civil society

- It provides advantages so long as there are checks and balances in place to ensure 'mission-led' activity for the social good is central to the business vision and management
- Provides breadth but there are considerations which need full and thorough consideration such as how trust will be maintained, how and if a level playing field for competing for services is maintained, how and if employment practices will be routed in social justice where the employee/employer relationship is beneficial to all parties.

Disadvantages the wider definition of civil society

- Loss of trust and people becoming sceptical about the real motives of organisations in the civil society sector

- Loss of trust affecting VCS organisations reputations and ability to engage volunteers.

PEOPLE

The whole voluntary and community sector exemplifies the picture of enabling people to play an active role in society. Examples include high profile activities such as street parties, community fundraising to sustain local assets to low key shopping for neighbours, parish meetings and other clubs and societies. They work well because people can see the impact of their involvement.

Three important changes (from a list of six):

- Increasing awareness of the range of opportunities
- Empowering people or giving them permission to have a say and take action
- Developing a better understanding of how social action can build the networks and relationships among people as well as the confidence and skills of the disadvantaged and disengaged.

To implement the changes:

- Infrastructure support is needed to enable and where necessary lead change.
- Greater awareness of 'civic society' and enthusiasm for involvement across all ages.
- A framework of priorities which joins up public sector investment across: education, health, DCMS, Defra, DWP and local government.

Three important changes (from a list of nine) for growing involvement of young people

- Integrating young people into wider social action activities
- Offering more support to create sustained opportunities
- Supporting young people to develop the skills and confidence to lead action on issues that matter to them.

Three important changes (from a list of five) to enable young people to meaningfully engage in shaping national and local policy and services:

- Strengthening networks between policy makers and organisations who work with young people and have expertise on how to engage them
- Sharing and celebrating where young people have actively helped shape policy
- Establishing more youth advisory panels across government departments.

Local feedback has raised concern that the introduction of Social action in primary schools should not happen. The reason is that there are enough pressures on primary school children and teachers and they are already very active, without the need for a further 'quality mark'.

PARTNERSHIP

Three important changes (from a list of 11) to enable more impactful partnership working

- Better understanding of the benefits of partnerships
- Better knowledge of opportunities to work in partnership
- A common agenda / shared vision and strategy.

In addition to enable this stronger leadership around partnership working and leadership infrastructure support is needed.

An effective pool of funding and financing as well as income opportunities for the voluntary and community sector will have the following elements:

- Commissioning for longer term periods, five years plus
- Flexibility to accommodate variations led by changing needs and changing conditions.
- Infrastructure support funding
- Models of infrastructure support mirroring commissioning and public sector investment plans.

Three important changes (from a list of six) to the funding and financing environment to better support the work of the voluntary and community sector:

- Making it easier to bring together civil society with potential funders
- More skills training for civil society
- Stronger collaboration between funders.

In additional improvements to funding and financing environment should consider:

- Collaboration between planners and funders ideally through devolved budgets
- Opportunities for civil society organisations to come together to get to know one another and discuss opportunities for collaboration.

The greatest potential for the future development of investment models for civil society is at region and local levels.

PLACE

Breaking down barriers in communities and building a common sense of shared identity, belonging and purpose is supported and Community First Yorkshire has suggested further input into this area of thinking once more is known.

Devolution via regional structures has in the past provided an effective way to develop appropriate strands of investment reflecting regional and sub-regional (local authority areas) needs and where necessary went to more local levels. The co-terminous nature of organisations' boundaries helped this process.

Three important changes (from a list of 10) to be made to enable more people to work together locally to break down barriers and build a common sense of shared identity, belonging and purpose in general:

- Communities having more or better support on how to mobilise themselves and take action
- Institutions and organisations delivering public services involving communities in decision-making
- More opportunity for diverse groups of local people to meet to discuss local issues and what they think they could do to improve things.

Three important changes (from a list of five) to enable local public services to respond further to the needs of communities:

- Drawing on wider civil society networks to support services
- Changes to commissioning practices
- Greater understanding of how to demonstrate and measure social value.

