

Strengthening the strategic voice of the VCS in Nottingham

Report to One Nottingham Board, 11th March 2016

1. Proposal

A number of Nottingham-based voluntary and community sector (VCS) organisations are considering how the sector could have a stronger voice and play a more strategic role in the city.

One Nottingham (ON) Board are asked to consider how this might happen. Specifically, they are asked to:

- encourage and support the creation of a voluntary sector strategic group, comprising organisations with capacity to horizon scan, drive strategy and lever funding
- invite a representative of the group to become a member of ON Board and the Chief Officers Group.

This paper presents the opportunities and challenges faced by the VCS, a view of the roles and responsibilities different organisations within the sector play and early thinking on how to better harness these. The proposal of a new group is in addition to the current and future role of NCVS – it is not intended to replace it.

2. Context

The recent ON partnership review found broad consensus that the VCS has a critical role to play supporting citizens. Partners strongly supported the view that wider engagement delivered better results, but recognised there was less capacity and resource to sustain this. ON have voluntary sector representatives, but comprehensively representing large and small organisations is challenging.

Some valued VCS organisations are also under considerable pressure. They are struggling to make the shift from grants to other forms of funding, cover overheads and remain financially viable.

The sector has a more important strategic role to play in the city:

- An expectation that the sector plays a role in public service transformation or system change (e.g. from BLF and Cabinet Office)
- A trend for transformation funds and large grants to go to large VCS organisations or VCS-led consortia (e.g. from the Big Lottery Fund, Europe and Government-backed social impact bonds)

- A role building community capacity as statutory services look to individuals and neighbourhoods to do more for themselves

It must fulfil this strategic role during a period of change and challenge:

- A shifting policy landscape including devolution, the promotion of social investment and greater regulation of charities and housing associations
- Beneficiaries with more challenging and complex needs (as statutory payment by results services ‘pick off’ those with lower level needs)
- Changing or uncertain infrastructure (e.g. new area based infrastructure grants, NCVS’s current review of its role, the recent closure of One East Midlands).

With this in mind a number of VCS organisations met recently to discuss how they could collectively give a stronger and more strategic voice to the sector, better identify opportunities and collectively harness these.

3. The sector

As with businesses, ‘the sector’ varies greatly in terms of mission, capacity, skills and experience. And like businesses, there are organisations that lead their field for a particular geography or sector, or that are highly specialist. One way of viewing the sector in Nottingham is as follows.



4. Possible role and responsibilities

All have a role to play in supporting citizens, advocating for them and sustaining and growing a skilled, sustainable sector. This could be better achieved by recognising and harnessing their different characteristics, as follows.

4.1 Strategic

- Citywide view, that can shape local decision making
- Capacity to horizon scan policy opportunities and threats
- Strategic voice, often networked to national campaigning and influencing on thematic issues (e.g. housing, gender equality)
- Capacity, as delivery organisations, to source grants and contracts and develop ‘supply chains’
- ‘On the job’ capacity building for consortium partners, and ability to highlight capacity gaps of those that don’t pass due diligence to infrastructure organisations
- Role in system change as large grant holders and service providers
- Responsibility to co-ordinate delivery activity at a citywide level (e.g. with health and back to work services)
- Note national charities with a strong local presence may fall under this category

4.2 Area Leads

- Ability to give a place-based view to decision-makers
- Strong advocates for their areas, with a rich understand of community needs and assets
- Early insight – a knowledge of what is happening ‘on the ground’ that can shape delivery of local services
- Local capacity building and grant giving role
- Ability to co-ordinate delivery in neighbourhoods (e.g. with other VCS partners and also schools, places of worship, food banks etc)

4.3 Niche

- Micro, possibly volunteer-led, so delivering a high level of value added
- Critical to achieving social inclusion and cohesion, because of their niche work and ‘gap filling’
- Enable consortia to provide inclusive, highly personalised services
- Understanding of the challenges for and strengths of smaller groups and communities
- Role developing understanding of larger VCS and statutory organisations, to address stigma and improve accessibility

Maintaining a vibrant, sustainable sector will not be possible without a strong Nottingham CVS. They have a critical role representing *Niche* organisations, researching wider pressures on and opportunities for the sector and delivering training and support to better enable them to contribute to and represent their beneficiaries within grant or service consortia. Larger organisations need a place to go to ensure opportunities are widely promoted to a

well-supported network. Other bodies, such as the Nottinghamshire Community Development Foundation, will continue to have important roles developing and working with trusts and foundations and making available community grants.

5. Implementation

One option would be to create a strategic VCS group in a similar way to the highly regarded Inter Faith Leaders group. It would, in effect, fulfil a theme partnership role, providing a place for One Nottingham and individual partners to take issues and seek views, whilst remaining free to conduct its own business as it sees fit. It could comprise *Strategic VCS* organisations with capacity to horizon scan, drive strategy and lever funding and one or more *Area Leads*.

Responsibilities of the group would include:

- Supporting ON VCS representatives to fulfil their Board responsibilities
- Advising the ON Board on delivery of the ‘Fair’ and ‘Aspiring’ aims of the Nottingham Plan
- Recommending priorities to the ON Board, and facilitating and commissioning activity in support of ON objectives
- Horizon scanning for sector opportunities and threats, and formulating strategic responses
- Developing a strategic approach to sector capacity building that reflects the above (this will need to reflect and complement the future role of NCVS)
- In doing so, ensure a local delivery offer than can compete with national and ‘prime’ providers, when desirable
- Promote joint working within the VCS, and with statutory and business partners to achieve better outcomes for citizens through system change
- Share learning and best practice
- Act as a place to go for partners to access learning from or seek the support of the VCS
- A connection to and voice for local communities
- Recognise and celebrate the contribution of volunteers
- Act as an escalation route, for new and emerging issues on the ground.

6. Report sponsors:

One Nottingham sponsor:

Andrew Redfern

One Nottingham Board Member (VCS) and Chief Executive, Framework Housing Association

Supported by:

Dave Brennan, Castle Cavendish

Jo Bradley-Fortune, Groundwork Greater Nottingham

Cherry Underwood, The Renewal Trust