William Shawcross, 30 January 2013

Speakers:

- William Shawcross, Chair of the Charity Commission

William Shawcross, The Charity Commission

- William has been Chair of the Charity Commission since the beginning of October 2012. The Commission is an important institution that goes back many years and they have a vital role in regulating the sector.

- The Commission underwent a tough strategic review before William joined. The Commission’s funding was cut by a third over four years in real terms during the 2010 spending review. In 2014/15 the budget for the Commission will be £22 million, this is down from £30m two years ago. The Commission has 320 staff, this will go down to under 300 from next year. The Commission will be operating with reduced resources.

- The Commission exists to serve the public and not charities: it is a policeman not a friend, but aim to act as a ‘friendly policeman’. It is not for the Commission to run charities but for trustees. The priority for the Commission is the sector’s compliance with charity law.

- It is amazing how strong the charitable sector is. There are 5 – 6,000 new charities a year. The Commission have received 5,000 inquiries so far this financial year.

- With strained resources the Commission is encouraging self-reliance among trustees; as part of this, it is encouraging charities to join umbrella organisations.

- It is also improving its online services and web-based guidance.

- In order to allocate resources to areas of highest priority, the Commission has also worked with partners to assess levels of risk facing charities. For example, Institute of Chartered Accountants in England on Wales (ICAEW) led pilot review project which saw accountants anonymously reviewing the financial governance of group of charities. ICAEW itself published analysis of the reviews and found that while financial governance was good over all, charities demonstrated clear weaknesses in terms of fraud awareness and fraud prevention.

- The Charity Commission recently published guidance for charities and individuals delivering humanitarian aid in Syria. Guidance reminds people raising charitable funds other than for existing registered charities that, in so doing, that they take on responsibility of charity trustees and should therefore be mindful of charity law. The Commission recently held a seminar with charities on that particular issue.

- The Commission currently has 35 on-going statutory inquiries; it has opened 13 so far this financial year. Inquiries are the regulator’s most serious type of investigation into charities. In addition, the Commission at any one time is working on 100s of lower risk cases, which may also involve serious concerns about governance or trustee management.

- The Commission’s engagement with Preston Down Trust has had a high profile over the last few months. The organisation applied to register as a charity, the Commission turned down the application as they couldn’t determine that it was an organisation advancing religion for public benefit. The Commission did not revoke charity status as the organisation involved did not have charitable status to start with. The case will be looked at independently by the tribunal and they will decide whether it is a charity advancing religion for public benefit. The Charity Commission has been accused of a plan to secularise Britain but this is absolutely not the case. There are 100’s of Christian charities registering each year, they make up 1/5th of all religious charities in England and Wales.

- The Commission has to make difficult decisions on sensitive issues but their role is to implement the law and not make judgements.

- It is heartening that parliamentarians take such an interest in the Commission.
About the APPG on Civil Society

The All Party Parliamentary Group on Civil Society and Volunteering exists to provide a forum for discussing issues affecting the voluntary and community sector with Parliamentarians from across the political spectrum.

How to get involved?

- **Come to a meeting** (details below)
- **Join the group** - APPG members get advance notice of all of our sessions as well as an invitation to our Christmas Parliamentary Reception. E mail for details
- **Give us a call, visit our website or follow us on twitter**

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Future Meetings

- **19th March 2013** – Leadership.

Please RSVP to Alison Evans on [civilsocietyappg@ncvo-vol.org.uk](mailto:civilsocietyappg@ncvo-vol.org.uk) or telephone 020 7520 2473.