All Party Parliamentary Group on Civil Society and Volunteering

Supporting Small Charities – 8 November 2013

Speakers:
- Richard Caulfield – Chief Executive, Voluntary Sector North West
- Alex Swallow – Chief Executive, Small Charities Coalition
- Pauline Broomhead – CEO, The Foundation for Social Improvement

Richard Caulfield, Voluntary Sector North West

- There are 14,592 social enterprises, charities etc. in Manchester, 82% have an income under £10,000. The small sector is key and absolutely part of the conversation. Government policy is often more focussed on the larger charities.
- There are some excellent new local initiatives tackling the issues facing small charities, for example the Knowsley Foundation which brings together private, public and voluntary sector partners.
- It is often said that small charities should merge, this is wrong and it is often the larger charities that should merge. We need to look at support and not just push towards merger.
- Many organisations in Manchester are not involved in public service delivery – they don’t have that money and so it is not relevant.
- Social finance is not an opportunity, it is a niche market and not mainstream. We need to develop policies that focus on smaller and local organisations.
- The National Citizen Service has not delivered for smaller organisations, it has only delivered for organisations like Serco etc.
- The Big Lottery Fund (BIG) is increasingly linked to government policy and its programmes are delivered in a way which is not overly useful to the small charity sector.
- BIG should be made totally independent from government, like the Bank of England and the Care Quality Commission. If it was totally independent it would stop the government raiding it.

Alex Swallow, Small Charities Coalition

- The Small Charities Coalition is a support organisation for small charities.
- Good governance is extremely important for small charities.
- Small charities are incredibly diverse, some have no staff, others are run by volunteers etc.
- There is currently a perfect storm of cuts, economic difficulties and no reserves but there is also a rising demand for services due to the cuts.
- We need to speak loudly about the sector and we need to be less London-centric. This includes funders, big charities and politicians. Local conditions are so important, every area is different.
- We need to work together to highlight collective issues and help each other. We all have issues on finance, funding, communications, IT etc. We should share best practice as we are all experts on something.
- We need to remind government and the media how big we are. 97% of registered charities have an income under £1million. A lot of the debate is about the big charities, the 3%.
- A lot of smaller charities are going to survive through collaboration.

Pauline Broomhead, The Foundation for Social Improvement

- Small charities spend 99% of their time delivering services rather than looking at broader issues affecting the sector. They focus on what they are set up to do it’s why they do a great job but it’s also why their voices are often absent from wider debates.
- When the Charity Commission closed the consultation on changes to the Annual Returns - of the 160,000 charities in the sector only 249 charities responded.
The results of the FSI’s Small Charity Index, showed that 74% of charities were ‘more or less satisfied’ with the support that they receive from the Charity Commission. However more or less satisfied is far cry from saying that charities are completely confident and able to have their say in how the regulator represents their views.

There are dramatic changes happening across the voluntary sector: from funding streams shifting from grants to contracts to the role of civil society in delivering public services, and the way that charities campaign and relate to Government.

The Small Charity Index found that in June – August 2013, small charities saw a 64% increase in demand for their services against a 20% drop in voluntary income (donations). This was also alongside 28% of small charities dipping into their reserves each month in order to deliver their services. Small charities are ‘running on empty’.

In June the FSI published the Gridlock report which found that only one in three charities were satisfied with the experience of bidding for contracts and only one in four were satisfied with the relationship their charity has with local commissioners. Only a third of small charities were happy with the experiences they had when competing for a contract.

Small charities must be part of the delivery of local services, councils and Government need to give local charities a fighting chance so that they can give the people they support a fighting chance.

It is essential that we increase the voice of the 97% to make sure that they are in the conversation, and not simply subject to the outcomes.

The FSI delivers over 2 million free services each year to small charities, this includes over 2,500 free delegate places at one day training events and conferences (65% of services are delivered outside of London). http://www.thefsi.org/

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

- 3rd December 2013 – Christmas Reception

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