Looking to the Future – 25 March 2014

Speakers:

- Simon Gillespie – Chief Executive, British Heart Foundation
- Judy Robinson – Chief Executive, Involve Yorkshire & Humber
- Andrew Harrop – General Secretary, Fabian Society
- Lisa Nandy MP – Shadow Minister for Civil Society

Simon Gillespie, British Heart Foundation

- The future for the sector has undoubtedly changed and we are facing challenges. Public trust remains.
- The regulation of individual organisations is not the way high though and we would like to see it remain high.
- Moving forward we must learn from the challenges and mistakes of the past. There are big problems that require big solutions, transparency and accountability are key.
- The sector can be poor at building alliances but changes are driving us towards collaboration and mergers. We can make more of a difference working together.
- In the future people will express their altruism in different ways, people will increasingly want simple ways to do things. The days of the giant cheque are over.
- There are some structural issues that need to be resolved and simplified for example pay roll.
- We need to demonstrate how we make a difference and what our impact is, charities don’t have a ‘right’ to exist.
- We need to connect meaningfully and relevantly with beneficiaries. It is important that organisations adapt and respond more quickly to beneficiaries needs.
- We need to think big whatever level we are at.

Judy Robinson, Involve Yorkshire & Humber

- There are three key points: prevention, place and prospects.
- It is critical to the future that we promote prevention. It is good for people, good for organisations and it saves money.
- Many areas are already severely deprived and so the role of the local authority is changing. Grants are vital, contracts are rarer. Irrespective of politics some areas are innovating.
- With regards to prospects it is not a wholly gloomy picture but some small organisations are very vulnerable. Lots of organisations have little or no reserves.
- We need to:
  - Do more about prevention
  - Rethink the relationship with local authorities and local government
  - Look at why the vast majority of the sector suffers from a lack of attention
  - Keep in mind that local knowledge and local information are so important. If we lose the organisations we also lose that.

Andrew Harrop, Fabian Society

- A critical factor in the relationship between the sector and government is money and that won't change whoever wins the next election.
- There are pressures on individual givers and philanthropy, donations are not necessarily down but there are now different ways of giving.
All Party Parliamentary Group on Civil Society and Volunteering

- Voluntary organisations need to think more than ever about their direction – who are they accountable to? Leadership, accountability and trust are key concepts. Organisations need to show what they are delivering.
- Organisations need to be clearer about who is doing what and why. There is always a hierarchy in larger organisations – paid staff, volunteers, service users. We need to invert that and blur the boundaries.
- Relationship with government is an important factor, under Labour the sector was seen as an agent/tool of the state. Under the current government the Big Society has provided a more hands off approach. How do we move beyond either of these to reach a more collaborative approach?
- Does government want to go down the bigger and bigger procurement route with more risk? Non-profits in that area will look different to the corporate partners. The heart of the voluntary sector is not able to flourish in that environment.
- It needs to happen at a much more local level. We need to help shape answers and not just deliver what commissioners want. We need to have an honest and equal relationship.
- What is different about voluntary organisations?
  - Increasingly voluntary organisations will be hybrid and they have the potential to mix sources of funds that others cannot.
  - There is potential for the sector to be true champions of service users. It is important to prove user focus.
  - Sense of community and place is embedded and small local solutions are providing answers.

Lisa Nandy MP, Shadow Minister for Civil Society

- Charities have a unique role in society, they are often working with people who lack a voice in society. They have a huge responsibility to provide a voice.
- The sector is sometimes treated as a political football which isn’t right.
- The sector needs to speak up for itself and diversity is one of its greatest strengths.
- The sector’s moral compass is what people outside the sector value.
- There has been a cumulative impact of spending cuts – there is a role for government in how it supports smaller organisations.
- Procurement needs to be closer to people – local or sub-local. Infrastructure has been scaled back or no longer exists.
- It has been survival of the fittest and those that have adapted aren’t necessarily the ones that are needed.
- There is a responsibility on charities to embody the values that the sector is known for. On the whole the sector treats people well but there are problems. There is an issue with charities taking on unpaid interns or staff not being paid or treated well. Pay ratios matter.

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
Future meetings

- Tuesday 13 May, 4.00 – 5.30pm
- Tuesday 8 July, 4.00 – 5.30pm

Please RSVP to Alison Evans on civilsocietyappg@ncvo.org.uk or telephone 020 7520 2473.