

**Nirvana for the sector? -  
Intentions into Actions, analysing  
DCSF's Third Sector Strategy  
and Action plan**



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## Clear Expectations – one year on

In late 2009 Children Matter East, via the VCS Engage programme, commissioned Family Matters Institute to help the sector establish what progress Children's Trusts around the region were making with their plans to develop Commissioning. The research also sought to explore the impact this was having on the sector.

The report found that there was some progress and that in general relationships between the sector and commissioners were viewed positively. From a Children Matter East perspective securing a meaningful future for the sector during the economic downturn is vitally important. A recent Guardian leader suggested the pressure will fall on medium size organizations that have neither the expertise nor capacity to maintain a toehold in the developing market. Children Matter East's belief is that a thriving third sector that works with children and young people needs organisations of all shapes and sizes including; large nationals, medium size regional providers and smaller local organizations, a reflection of a diverse sector.

All through the summer members have been reporting intelligence that suggests a deteriorating position, with; projects and organisations under threat or retracting, tenders offered where the costs bear no reflection of the ask and a struggle to play an equal role in integrated working, particularly alongside Schools. What's driving the deterioration? The recession and the inevitable squeeze on public spending... in other words heightened anxiety, and keeping hold of what you already have as a start point.

Department of Children Schools and Families view on this.... frustration as Trusts find ever more imaginative ways of reinterpreting guidance on investment into the sector. The roster currently includes; Family Intervention Projects, Aiming Higher for Disabled Children, Targeted Mental Health in Schools, amongst many. At the same time the sector is beginning to sense the first signs of cutbacks and cost pressures in its already limited infrastructure support, particularly in some unitary authorities.

The solutions, long term..... *Intentions into Actions* DCSF's new Third Sector Strategy and Action plan talks about emerging guidance, clarity and reinforcement of the sectors role in Children's Trust and guidance to the sector and its partners on commissioning. Which probably should mean a welcome revision of the 'Engaging with' and 'Working with'... the VCS" documents from 2004.

Children Matter East's response, to move forward its plans to develop a commissioning framework and this month (October) it will publish draft regional commissioning principles for consultation. Finally on very positive front, and despite some differing views from Children's Trust hats, off to CWDC for their commitment to continue with Workforce Development and Reform investment direct into the sector.

## ***Thinking small when thinking big: Research exploring positive practice for involving small organisations in local children's trust arrangements***

### **Recommendations**

The research set out to identify examples of positive practice for supporting smaller VCS organisations to thrive. From the examples studied, the report makes a number of recommendations:

#### **Develop specialist support**

VCS infrastructure with a distinctive but inclusive children, young people and families focus should be developed to support the sector to engage, and have a stronger collective voice in local Children's Trust arrangements.

#### **Nurture local leadership**

This infrastructure should be led by the local children, young people and families VCS, be appropriate to the local context and specifically cater for the needs of smaller VCS organisations who are vital to effective children's trust arrangements.

#### **Provide the necessary resources**

Resources should be made available to support the local children, young people and families' specific infrastructure in general, and small organisations' participation in particular. Resources could include, for example, dedicated posts, financial support, officer time and expertise, or guidance. To be effective, any officers involved must be trusted by the sector.

### **Adopt an outreach approach**

An appropriate model of infrastructure, VCS-led agenda, consideration of the needs and capacity for smaller organisations and the availability of resources to support participation are essential in supporting known, or already engaged smaller organisation to thrive.

However, an outreach approach should be adopted to identify those small organisations which exist 'under the radar' and to support and encourage their engagement.

Neither Children's Trusts, nor local infrastructure arrangements should rely on smaller organisations making the first approach.

### **Conclusion**

*Thinking Small When Thinking Big* explores three examples of VCS infrastructure arrangements which represent features of positive practice in terms of creating and sustaining an environment in which smaller voluntary and community sector organisations can thrive. The report concludes that it is essential for smaller organisations to be specifically catered for when considering the bigger picture of the Every Child Matters Agenda, children's Trust arrangements and local VCS infrastructure.

The full report of *Thinking Small When Thinking Big* can be downloaded from [www.childrenengland.org.uk](http://www.childrenengland.org.uk)

## **Clubs for Young People: The Blueprint Inquiry**

The Blueprint Inquiry team set out to identify the elements of a great youth club and what needs to be done to develop and sustain such clubs. Bringing together key information and evidence about youth clubs from a variety of sources the intention was to create a practical blueprint for youth clubs in the 21st century, offering the best to young people. The Inquiry heard evidence from over 400 youth leaders, workers and volunteers, from our club network and local authority staff, through the commissioned workforce survey, and through local consultation events. The views of over 100 young people were listened to through filming at local youth clubs, and MTV BOOM! project events, as well as through Clubs for Young People's survey of our Big Exchange group. **The recommendations that follow reflect this process.**

### **Conclusion and recommendations**

The network of youth clubs today reflects many aspects of life within communities, their values and aspirations, belief in their young people, the commitment of community leaders and the passion and energy of the staff and volunteers. Essential to the sustaining and development of these clubs, and the clubs of the future, is a well structured support network to develop the all round quality and breadth of provision in every club, whatever their size or focus. Without recognition of the importance of this support, the chances of developing a world class network of clubs will become increasingly difficult. The following recommendations, which are designed to support this process, are focused on delivering what the Inquiry team set out to do in offering practical solutions and the provision of a blueprint for 21st Century youth clubs.

#### **Recommendation 1**

Clubs for Young People recommends that national club-based stakeholders and supportive organisations come together to develop a nationally agreed definition of youth clubs and clear guidance around purpose. Clubs for Young People recommends that all youth clubs give details of address including postcode, opening times and categories of activities delivered to a national register based on the agreed definition and guidance for youth clubs, and that this register be linked to local authority data collection for positive activities, and be accessible to the public. Clubs for Young People will commit to a full audit of their youth club stock and make it available to the DCSF's Information and Signposting of Positive Activities project (Plings).

#### **Recommendation 2**

Clubs for Young People recommends the further development of a youth club infrastructure with corresponding network support, based on the successful principles of the School Sports Partnership model. This needs to be supported with appropriate funding for a national lead body and the full engagement of top tier local authorities and local voluntary sector partners. Ten pilot beacon club networks should be developed to create a pathfinder approach to their wider development.

#### **Recommendation 3**

Clubs for Young People recommends that the Government supports through the Department of Children Schools and Families (DCSF) a Youth Investment Forum set up by Clubs for Young People. This Forum will explore and champion how best to sustain investment in young people through the provision of more and better youth facilities and innovative approaches to financing these youth facilities.

#### **Recommendation 4**

Clubs for Young People recommends that future policy direction supports open access provision in socially deprived neighbourhoods rather than targeting individual young people referred by statutory agencies. This should be supported by a broad partnership approach to enable effective and appropriate 'signposting' both to and from youth club based activities.

#### **Recommendation 5**

Clubs for Young People recommends that the Government commits to a new national medium grants capital investment programme. Clubs for Young People would work with the Government to secure private sector match-funding for such a programme. This should be specifically for the improvement of the current stock of local youth clubs based on where this is needed most. We would recommend that this be on the basis of a minimum application of £250,000 up to a maximum of £1 million.

#### **Recommendation 6**

Clubs for Young People recommends that the DCSF commissions independent research into how local authorities have managed their Youth Service budgets over the past two years, the proportion allocated to voluntary sector providers and the commissioning models used to inform these decisions. This would be to test the statutory guidance from the amended 1996 Education and Inspection Act that local authorities "should use the service provider that offers the best possible combination of skills and experience to deliver services of the highest possible quality and for the most economical cost."

#### **Recommendation 7**

Clubs for Young People recommends that national club-based stakeholders and supportive organisations come together to develop a set of National Occupational Standards based on quality assured qualifications for club-based youth work. These National Occupational Standards for youth club workers should be available at levels 2, 3 and 4 and should take account of the impending changes to the generic youth work degree qualification curriculum.

#### **Recommendation 8**

Clubs for Young People recommends that a national quality standards framework for youth clubs is developed as part of the recommended youth club infrastructure, with appropriate investment and support to build third sector capacity in this area.

#### **Recommendation 9**

Clubs for Young People recommends that national club-based stakeholders and supportive organisations come together to develop an outcomes-monitoring framework which enables voluntary sector youth clubs to demonstrate the impact that they are having on young people's lives, particularly those being commissioned by statutory, charitable and private sector agencies.

#### **Recommendation 10**

Clubs for Young People recommends that a scheme is developed to support young people in work development experiences within a youth club setting. Funding from the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) Future Jobs Fund scheme could be ring-fenced to enable this to happen.

## Safe Network: The National Third sector safeguarding unit

Children Matter East partnership with Children England and NSPCC to deliver the regional element of this national programme continues to go from strength to strength. Over 150 delegates attended Safeguarding the Future at Duxford in June and further activity is planned throughout the autumn. In addition the region has taken the lead for the development of Safeguarding Standards for organisations that have a substantive contractual relationship with a Children Trust.

The standards work across eight key components including sections on training and recruitment as well as policies and procedures. The framework will be supported by a work book and web based resources that bring together the latest guidance and best practice recommendations in what is a very fast moving environment. The standards development has been supported by the regions Local Safeguarding Children Boards and Go East and will hopefully receive a national Safe Network / DCSF endorsement.

The standards which also include a tool to develop actions and monitor progress will be formally launched at Children Matter East's autumn forum in October. The standards are designed as a regional framework and can be adapted to local needs; most importantly they are compliant with section 11 of the Children Act 2004. All Children's Trust statutory partners have to comply with the requirements of the Act via an annual audit, and to achieve this successfully most are moving toward including the sector in their arrangements when they commission services. Given that Pre Schools and Nurseries many of whom have very limited resources can and do achieve these standards it does not seem an unreasonable expectation.

However the framework is still in its pilot phase, three of the regions Children's Trusts will be running trials, the key message here is that the tool is about improvement and support. Children's Trust should not attempt to implement the standards without first discussing plans with the sector locally and ensuring there is an agreed level of support in place.

### **What else is on its way from Children Matter East and its collaboration with Safe Network;**

- A sub regional Vetting and Barring Scheme Roadshow with partners including Thurrock CVS and ECVYS at **Orsett Hall, Essex on Monday 19<sup>th</sup> October.**  
<http://www.childrenmattereast.org.uk/cms/uploads/MEDIA/DOCUMENTS/Thurrock-event-19.10.09.doc>
- A specific Safeguarding & Safe Network section of Children Matter East Website
- E learning packages covering; **Child Protection Awareness, Keeping Children Safe, Preventing Bullying and Staying aware.**
- Regional and Sub Regional Safe Network seminars and outreach to support BME, faith and rural communities
- National capacity building 'familiarizing the trainer' scheme for local development workers.



## Intentions into Actions

In late July DCSF published their Third Sector Strategy and Action plan, optimistically called Intentions to Actions. What are its important announcements? CME asked its Regional Manager; Kevin Garrod to provide an analysis of its contents.

*Inevitably one can try and plough through a whole document seeking clues to the future, and whilst I am a great advocate of detail on this occasion moving straight to the **`Making it Happen`** section (section 5) provides the most illumination on DCSF thinking. As is often the way there is also a subsequent narrative, or rather in this case an important post script, recent changes at DCSF have produced a new grouping under Clare Barham (who until recently was interim Director for Children and Learners with Go East) which places responsibility for the sector alongside; The Commissioning Support Programme (CSP), The Centre for Excellence and Outcomes (C4EO) and the Prevention agenda- interesting times.*

*Back to the plan then, first it's ambitious, no issues there, but the journey of travel to get to what appears to be a promised land is in reality more complex than any strategy could reflect, Intentions to Actions signs up for;*

- Third sector involvement at all levels of commissioning, from strategic planning and putting forward users' perspective to service delivery and monitoring.
- Regulation to ensure the sector is consulted on the Children and Young Peoples Plan
- Commitment to a mixed model of commissioning that includes grant funding and commissioning from third sector partnerships and consortia.
- Encourage sub-contracting models that support the involvement of smaller organisations in the delivery of part of a bigger contract.

*It also promises that the recently endowed Commissioning Support Programme will work with the sector to provide two practical guides on; how to engage with the Third sector and for the sector on how it can play a full role in the commissioning process. With the first due before Christmas!!*

*One could be forgiven for suggesting that this is little more than regurgitating already know facts and that the two CSP led activities are overdue reiterations of 2004 guidance. However the really crucial move is the sectors alignment with CSP, C4EO and the Prevention agenda so loudly trumpeted at the Labour party conference*

**Next time round – The new Children's Trust guidance**



## Case Study: Hertfordshire

### Strengthening the children and young people voluntary and community sector voice in the Hertfordshire Children's Trust Partnership

It is widely acknowledged that the voluntary and community sector (VCS) has a vital role to play in improving outcomes for children, young people and their families. Historically, the Hertfordshire Children's Trust Partnership (HCTP) has had a positive relationship with the local VCS. However, there was recognition that it could be developed further. Reflecting this, HCTP and the Children and Young People's VCS in Hertfordshire agreed to pilot the VCS Engage programme to strengthen the involvement of the VCS at the strategic level in the planning, commissioning and delivery of services.

The programme began in early 2008 with evidence gathering to identify the extent to which the VCS were involved. Feedback suggested that key areas to take forward were communications and representation; involvement in safeguarding, the need to celebrate success; and building capacity to make this happen. A small working group consisting of both HCTP and VCS representatives was set up and an action plan produced, which was approved in February 2009.

The Hertfordshire VCS Engage Action Plan is a three-year plan structured around the four essential components of Children's Trust arrangements: inter-agency governance; integrated strategy; integrated processes; and integrated front-line services. Each section identifies why VCS involvement is important; assesses existing arrangements and sets out a range of actions. It is already beginning to have a positive impact. In particular:

- A VCS Strategy group has been set up, and has begun to consider a number of issues that affect the wider VCS such as workforce reform
- A successful VCS stakeholder event was held in November 2008 to facilitate input into the emerging CYPP. A further event is planned for October 2009
- The spring 2009 edition of Hertfordshire Children's Partnership News contained a supplement dedicated to the voluntary and community sector
- Five pilots are being run with Councils for Voluntary Service (CVS) to increase the involvement of the VCS in District Children's Trust Partnerships (DCTPs)
- Commissioning arrangements have been updated to ensure that voluntary and community organisations are able to compete on a level playing field
- Voluntary and community sector representation on the Hertfordshire Safeguarding Children Board and sub-groups has been achieved

Whilst good progress has been made, further work needs to be done by the VCS to develop more robust and transparent representation arrangements. The development of a county-wide VCS children and young people's forum – which Hertfordshire currently does not have – has been proposed to provide a cohesive and coordinated voice for the voluntary and community sector in Hertfordshire to the HCTP and to. From the forum, attendees to HCTP groups are identified and mandated to represent the VCS, with clear arrangements in place for communicating issues up to the HCTP and back to the wider sector. Initial soundings have been positive, and over the next few weeks the proposal will continue to be refined and endorsement from the sector secured.

Finally as part of the sector growing importance in Hertfordshire, HCTP have asked the sector to consider whether as part of the emergence of a countywide forum it could take on the leadership of the Making Positive Contribution Outcome at Board level. From a regional perspective Hertfordshire's proposals alongside those currently under consideration in Essex represent a new generation of inclusion that can set regional and national benchmarks of good practice.

## **Children Matter East**

### **East of England Children and Young Peoples VCS Forum**

#### **To watch out for**

1. Children's Trust guidance consultation shortly, before Xmas
2. Prevention Green paper
3. COVER annual conference and AGM 21st Oct , Homerton College, Cambridge
4. Working Together consultation from November
5. Changes to CME website
6. CME Research work
7. Frameworks; Safeguarding and Commissioning

#### **Dates (See Children Matter East website for details)**

1. Friday 23rd October YSDF/CSP Event at Newmarket
2. Thursday 26th Nov 'You're Welcome' seminar, COVER
3. Friday 4th Dec 'Baby P seminar' – Smartlife, Cambs
4. DOH 3rd Sector programme seminar with NCB = Spring
5. **March 9th – Children Matter East Spring Forum , venue TBA**
6. **15th June – Children Matter East's annual Conference, venue TBA**
7. **5th October – Children Matter East Autumn Forum, venue TBA**