**Joint Government/Community Sector Forum**

**Joint Secretariat**

**Joint Forum Meeting**

**4 February 2014**

1. The first Joint Forum meeting for 2014 was held in the Northern Ireland Council on Voluntary Action’s (NICVA) headquarters in Duncairn Gardens, Belfast and chaired by Michael Donnelly from the Department for Social Development’s (DSD) Voluntary and Community Unit (VCU). Anne O’Reilly, co-Chair also attended.

**KEY POINTS**

1. In addition to the standing items on the agenda updates and presentations were delivered on the Reform of Local Government (Department of the Environment), Addressing Bureaucracy Project (Department for Social Development), Financial Capability Strategy for NI (Department of Enterprise Trade and Investment) and Procurement (Department of Health Social Services and Public Safety).

**Update on the Reform of Local Government**

1. Progress is continuing with the implementation of the Reform of Local Government and Department of the Environment is working with Councils on community planning, statutory partnership working arrangements and current Council-related activities. A strategic planning conference has been arranged with Co-operation Ireland for 27th March in Dundalk.

**Addressing Bureaucracy Project**

1. A presentation was delivered on the background to, and progress made, by the Addressing Bureaucracy Project Team followed by a question and answer session. Recognition was given to the commitment given at the highest levels
by government officials to identify and address the key issues.

**Financial Capability Strategy**

1. A presentation on the Department for Enterprise Trade and Investment’s Financial Capability Strategy informed members of a key commitment by the NI Executive to address the challenges of disadvantage and inequality caused by economic disengagement. The aim of the Strategy is to have better-informed, more skilled and more confident consumers, better able to manage, plan and take responsibility for their financial affairs at various life stages and events; identifying vulnerable groups; and establishing priority areas for action.

**Procurement**

1. The issue of funding sector organisations to deliver services and why Departments may consider procurement as an alternative continues to be a subject of considerable debate. A cocktail of issues such as long-term, inflexible and unresponsive core funding; multiple contracts for the same services across numerous sites coupled with the drive for efficiencies are some of the drivers behind government seeking to consolidate the approach to service delivery.
2. The Sector has been quick to realise the impact of this not only in terms of the capacity of some organisations to compete for contracts but also the potential impact on the local economy.
3. This topic will remain as a main item on the agenda.

**COMMITMENT ACTION TEAMS – UPDATES**
4. A proposal to hold inter-Forum meetings between Commitment Action Team (CAT) managers and the Joint Chairs was agreed by Forum members. The aim of this arrangement is for detailed briefings on progress to be made to the Joint Chairs with a shorter update at the Joint Forum. This will allow more time for fuller discussion on specific items on the agenda.
5. The next CAT Managers’ update will be held in April.

**Addressing Bureaucracy Project**

1. See above.

The report on the Addressing Bureaucracy Project is available to download from the Department for Social Development’s website by following this link: [Addressing Bureaucracy: A report on tackling bureaucracy in government funding to the Voluntary and Community Sector - April 2013 (PDF 1MB)](http://www.dsdni.gov.uk/addressing-bureaucracy-report.pdf)

**Addressing Bureaucracy Project – Prompt Payment Pilot**

1. The Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action (NICVA) agreed to assist the Prompt Payment Pilot by seeking the views of voluntary and community organisations about setting targets for the payment of grants. NICVA will include questions in their Viewfinder survey which is due to be issued in two weeks time.
2. The Project Board overseeing this project meets quarterly with the last meeting held on 4 November 13. The Project Managers Team meets monthly with Pilot Group Managers to report on progress with pilots studies and review overall progress on recommendations from the Addressing Bureaucracy Report.

**Outcome-Focused Approach to Funding**

1. Community Evaluation Northern Ireland (CENI) has been appointed as Building Change Trust’s strategic partner to support the strategic development and delivery of the Inspiring Impact Programme in Northern Ireland.
2. The UK Inspiring Impact initiativeis a collaboration of eight partner organisations, from impact measurement experts to sector membership bodies. The UK Programme commenced in 2012 and the [Building Change Trust](http://ceni.us5.list-manage1.com/track/click?u=4d70395f360ec980ba98c4c2a&id=95ee7bc985&e=c131502c25), as the Northern Ireland partner on the UK board, is committed to supporting the delivery of a linked programme in NI.
3. The work of this team has been suspended pending the outcome of the work being taken forward by Building Change Trust. A representative from the team is working with Building Change Trust and updates on progress are maintained through this link.

**Influence and Examine Impact of Government Policy**

1. Following the launch of the Policy Champions’ Network guidelines on Effective Stakeholder Engagement, this team will be meeting to discuss how the process of engagement with government can be developed.
2. This team has met on three occasions over the past six months. A further meeting will be scheduled for later this month.

 **Concordat Compliance**

1. The new team piloting the Concordat Compliance Tool has trialled the Tool with two voluntary and community organisations to gauge their views on the review and subsequent development of a DSD policy. The team reports that no firm conclusions can be reached at this stage however similar issues are emerging.
2. The team has met on two occasions since November 13. The next meeting is scheduled for later this month.

**Communications Strategy**

1. This team is testing the feasibility of developing a ‘Joint Forum’ slot on the DSD/VCU website as a central source for government communications. With the further development of email contact details for Departments, Arms Length Bodies, Non-Departmental Public Bodies and local Councils, it is anticipated that this will create a streamlined approach to circulating information across the public sector.
2. The team has met on two occasions since November 12. Subgroups are working on separate elements of the project and a further meeting of the team is being arranged for later this month.

**Concordat Annual Report**

1. A timeline for completion will be drawn up and circulated to members. In line with previous years the report will be published for presentation to the NI Executive and Assembly members before recess at the end of June 2014.

**Date of Next meeting**

1. The next meeting will be held in May 14. The Secretariat will be in touch in due course to confirm the date and location.

**Further information**

Further information on the role of the Joint Forum and the topics under discussion can be obtained from susan.hunter@dsdni.gov.uk tel: 02890 829399 (direct dial 38399) or keith.gordon@dsdni.gov.uk tel: 02890 829409 (direct dial 38409)