**Joint Government/Voluntary and Community Sector Forum**

**Minutes of meeting on 19 May 2014**

**Present:**

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| Anne O'Reilly | Northern Ireland Rural Women’s Network Joint Chair |
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| Anne McVicker | Women’s Resource & Development Agency |
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| Carolyn Barr | Department of Finance and Personnel: |
| Chris Dorrian | Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister |
| Chris Quinn | NI Youth Forum |
| Clare Mullen | NILGA |
| Colin Devine | North West Community Network |
| Damien Brady | Department of Culture Arts and Leisure: |
| David Savage | Department of Education: |
| Duane Farrell | Age NI |
| Eddie McDowell | Churches Community Work Alliance |
| Elaine Downey | Department for Social Development: Voluntary and Community Unit |
| Fergus Cooper | Save The Children Northern Ireland |
| Gabrielle Kerr | Department for Regional Development |
| Geraldine Hanna | Victim Support Northern Ireland |
| Glenda Davies | Sandy Row Community Forum |
| Harry Armstrong | Department for Social Development: Voluntary and Community Unit |
| Helen Ferguson | Carers Northern Ireland |
| Jack O'Connor | Department for Social Development: Voluntary and Community Unit |
| Jackie Murray | Department of Justice |
| Jeff Johnston | Department of Environment: Equality Unit |
| John McManus | NICVA |
| Jonny Currie | East Belfast Partnership |
| Karen Smyth | NI Local Government Association |
| Kevin Doherty | Disability Action NI |
| Kevin Murphy | Voluntary Arts Ireland |
| Lisa McElherron | NICVA |
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| Marie Cavanagh | Gingerbread NI |
| Maureen Waddell | Department for Social Development: Voluntary and Community Unit |
| Michael Donnelly | Department for Social Development: Voluntary and Community Unit Joint Chair |
| Nichola Creagh | Department of the Environment: |
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| Seamus McAleavey | NICVA |
| Sharon Smyth | Department of Enterprise Trade and Investment: |
| Susan Hunter | Department for Social Development: Voluntary and Community Unit |

**Apologies:**

Keith Gordon Department for Social Development VCU

Olive Matthews Department for Employment and Learning

Niall Heaney Department of Agriculture and Rural Development

Speakers/Observers

Alison McMillan DSD Communications Team

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| Louise McLaughlin | Department of Finance and Personnel |
| Philip Rodgers | Department of Enterprise Trade and Investment: |

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| **Agenda Item** | **Purpose of discussion** | **Key points of discussion** | **Conclusion** | **Action** |
| 1. **Welcome and Introductions** |  | Anne O’Reilly and Michael Donnelly welcomed all to the meeting. |  |  |
| 1. **Minutes of last meeting JF02/14 and action points** |  | The minutes of the last meeting were agreed as an accurate and true record.  **Action points from last meeting;**  All action points were cleared from the last meeting. |  |  |
| 1. **Procurement** |  | Members were referred to the NICVA scoping paper on the different mechanisms for funding and Seamus McAleavey provided an overview of when these options could be used.  He highlighted the disadvantages of procurement and the potential for low bids resulting in poor quality services. He also pointed out that the procurement approach to securing services would drive out innovation as service providers would be focused on costs rather than trying to find new ways of delivery. Seamus stressed that commissioners would need to be clear in what was needed.  Seamus pointed out that the ongoing situation with budgetary constraints created a need for innovative ways of delivering services and highlighted the work undertaken by NICVA to try new ideas and test new approaches. He highlighted his concern that procurement could result in organisations closing, particularly those led by people directly affected by ill health/disability etc. In closing, he suggested that more discussion was needed on funding, particularly in times when resources were scarce.  Anne agreed that more reflection was necessary and opened the discussion to members.  Michael Donnelly responded by highlighting the difficulty for service commissioners to determine whether funding should be grant or procurement and stated that the challenge for government was to consider whether funding should be by grant or procurement: if procurement, to consider whether social clauses would be appropriate and also to involve the Sector in the design process. He added that in order to be able to compete in a procurement situation the Sector would need to ensure that they were in a position to do so.  Glenda Davies highlighted the detriment of procurement on community development and the risk of mission drift for organisations adapting to the needs laid down by procuring services. She added that she would like to be involved in co-design and services of commissioning.  Anne pointed out that involvement in the design and commissioning of services was a policy engagement role and should be considered at the policy development stage to ensure that services matched need.  A number of additional points were raised by members:  Colin Devine - procurement favouring exclusive approaches, which had a greater impact on services in less urbanised areas;  Glenda Davies – larger/regional organisations coming into local areas and the less profitable services not being delivered;  Clare Mullen NILGA in response to Glenda’s concerns about large/regional organisations monopolising contract awards advised that Councils were considering this in relation to local businesses and would be happy to include the VCS;  Seamus McAleavey suggested arranging a conference with council CEOs to look at options;  Lisa McElherron – in relation to social clauses, advised members of research available on this topic and that this would be taken forward by the relevant CAT.  Anne O’Reilly noted the points raised for inclusion as agenda items. |  | Include points for discussion by Joint Chairs |
| 1. **Innovation in Supporting Service Delivery: presentation by Louise McLaughlin, Public Sector Reform Unit , DFP** |  | Louise McLaughlin from DFP’s Public Sector Reform Unit delivered a presentation on improving public services by developing new models for service delivery. New models of delivery included Payment by Results, Social Impact Bonds and Mutuals/Cooperatives.  The presentation generated considerable discussion on each of the models highlighted and on their implementation in NI.  **Social Impact Bonds (SIBs)**  Some issues raised included:   * the lack of philanthropic sources in NI; * alignment of structures with no investor; * no relationship with funding body when managed through an IB; * contractual issues with secondary providers; * clarity in the use of terminology; * feasibility of securing philanthropic investors if government objectives were at odds with their mission aims; * additional layers of bureaucracy with SIBs.   Seamus McALeavey commented that while the theory was good, there were questions in relation to the availability of capital in NI and the increased cost to organisations taking loans to finance these initiatives.  Lisa McElherron advised members that these initiatives had been in place in GB for about 3 years and that the National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) was assessing the impact on the Sector. She highlighted an example in Peterborough where a national policy change implemented by Government adversely impacted on a programme set up to address re-offending rates by short-term prisoners which was financed through a SIB. This example highlighted the potential risk to investors.  Louise addressed the issues explaining that this concept was new to NI and that pilot exercises would be conducted before implementation. She also indicated the possibility of an innovation fund to kick-start the process.  Michael Donnelly acknowledged the need to have this matter brought to the Joint Forum at the early stages of implementation in NI and stated that the f Forum is keen to remain involved in the process.  Anne also was keen for the forum to keep a close eye on new service delivery models and its effects on the voluntary and community sector. |  | all papers issued with Joint Communique  Consideration to be given to inviting speakers from other regions  Joint Forum to keep a watching brief on developments |
| 1. **Key policy developments** |  | Michael Donnelly stated that he was keen for important policies to be brought to the attention of the Forum at an early stage and suggested the Forum should be used as a filter to discuss what is happening across government.  He added that PSG would consider policies under development and bring policies and key initiatives to the Joint Forum. Anne noted that Lisa McElherron would act as policy filter for the VCS. |  |  |
| 1. **Enabling Success: A new Strategic Framework to Tackle Economic Inactivity in NI. Presentation by Phil Rodgers, DETI** |  | Phil Rodgers from DETI’s Economic Policy Unit outlined the background to the recent consultation on tackling the high level of economic inactivity in NI.  The Joint Forum was asked to consider two issues – how the Strategy could be implemented and piloting new approaches.  He advised that strategic management and co-ordination would be delivered through a Task Force consisting of representatives from government, business organisations and the VCS but stressed that the group needed to be clear in its remit, how it fits with existing groups and the number of members.  Phil suggested that the process should be designed by key stakeholders who would remain involved when services were commissioned. The overall aim was innovation in social policy to design a process to deliver new ways of meeting needs.  Anne welcomed the fact that while the consultation period was over, government was still considering input to the development of the framework and suggested that the Joint Forum could work with the Task Force.  Members raised a number of points:   * the number of existing strategies addressing the same issues, i.e.NEETs; * the need for stakeholders to involved in the design process; * opportunities arising with the Reform of Local Government and Councils assuming responsibility for community planning; * consideration to be given to geographical and thematic pilots; * consideration to the difficulties in keeping people in work and assisting others to return to work and the need for flexibility with employers/benefits system and health and social care services.   Phil acknowledged the points raised and re-stated that they would be covering difficult issues and that pilots for testing would be sought.  Phil noted the key role of the forum in developing strategic coordination through playing a role in the task force as alluded to in the consultation document.  Phil stated that the economic taskforce would be made of people in the voluntary and community sector, private sector and the public sector.  Phil was keen to note that the joint forum may be too large to facilitate in terms of the economic task force. However, the forum could be used as a mechanism to develop a process to help meet principles and co-design.  Phil was also keen to draw people’s attention to the SBRI initiative which tends to focus on effectiveness, efficiency and scale.  Phil drew upon examples of other working groups and was keen to stress that the economic task force shouldn’t duplicate current groups like NEETS forum.  Phil raised the point that in the wake of changes in local government reform, namely community planning, joined up government is important in delivering development.  Lisa McElherron was keen to stress that the forum must be cautious not to duplicate or step into realm of policy development as this is not the role of the forum, however, it is important to facilitate talk around policy development. Lisa also stressed that we should be careful not to add another layer of bureaucracy to the forum but that we should work to develop meaningful partnerships.  Elaine Downey noted there were key issues within the strategy; these included business, community planning, linking with public sector reform and a policy filter between sectors. |  | all papers issued with Joint Communique |
| 1. **Public Sector Group** |  | Elaine Downey briefed members on the ongoing review of the Public Sector Group. Issues under review included membership, the role of representatives, communicating across Departments and presenting items for the agenda.  She explained the Group’s remit to act as filter for policies under development, the practicalities of selecting policies and how they are presented to the Joint Forum. Other issues under consideration are the role of PSG with community planning and the role of the Public Sector Reform Group and how their work links with PSG and the Joint Forum.  Members were updated on the results of the NICVA survey on prompt payments which had reported about half of respondents experiencing delays with payment from government funders. Elaine gave an undertaking to share the findings with other Departmental representatives.  Following on from this matter, Alasdair McInnes provided an update on recent delays with payments to organisations being funded by DHSSPS. Difficulties were being experienced following the implementation of a new shared services system in the Health sector. Alasdair assured member that his Department was aware of the problems and that action was ongoing to rectify the matter. |  | NICVA survey findings to be circulated to PSG. |
| 1. **Reform of Local Government  Nicola McCreagh** |  | Nicola referred to her paper on local government reform and provided an update on progress to date and current work issues.  In response, the SOLACE representative (DN: need name) highlighted the need to manage expectations. She stated that Councils needed time to establish their new identities and that plans may not be ready by 2015. She went on to explain that each Council would be working in different ways but that they are keen to work with the VCS.  Anne was keen for the Joint Forum to engage with councils as the planning proposals are be implemented.  Clare Cullen, the NI Local Government Association (NILGA) representative, alerted members to an open call for applications for Belfast City Council’s Community Development Programme. This Programme has £2.6m funding for revenue, capital build and general advice projects. |  | all papers issued with Joint Communique |
| 1. **Commitment Action Team (CAT) updates** |  | **Addressing Bureaucracy**  Members were advised that the pilot studies had been completed and that reports from these exercises would be fed into the Code of Practice which was at the final draft stage. She anticipated that the Code of Practice would be signed off be signed of and shared with Departments in early June. The Project Board would then be asked to give approval to consult with stakeholders on its implementation.  **Outcome focused approach to funding.**  Marie Cavanagh advised that the NI Inspiring impact Programme had been launched in March this year and that a series of information and awareness seminars on impact practice and outcomes-focused funding was underway with public sector bodies.  **Compliance Tool.**  Glenda Davies advised members that consideration was being given to testing the amended Compliance Tool on a more complex policy or programme. Glenda reported that while feedback on the toolkit was positive there was a perception that ‘compliance’ had negative connotations and asked members to consider how the process could be portrayed in a more positive light.  **Communications Team.**  David Savage provided members with screen prints of the proposed look for the Joint Forum portal which has been created on the DSD Voluntary and Community website and the development of ‘Mail Chimp’ for email communications across Departments.  He put forward a recommendation for a low-key launch of the website in the autumn when the site would be operational and all available information uploaded.  A further recommendation was made regarding a re-launch of the Concordat agreement. He explained that in the 3 years since its publication, there had been a significant turnover of the people involved in its development and given the progress made towards the Concordat commitments, it would be opportune to remind government and the sector of the agreement. |  |  |
| 1. **Concordat Annual Report** |  | Susan Hunter advised members that the Concordat was in the final draft stage but that agreement was needed on the VCG and PSG input.  Lisa McElherron proposed a joint government/sector commentary. Following discussion it was agreed that a combined statement would be drafted.  It was agreed that VCU Secretariat would confirm whether the Concordat would be presented to the Assembly via a written or an oral statement. |  |  |
| 1. **Any Other Business** |  | Jonny Currie from EBCDA raised a query regarding OFMDFM’s Social Investment Fund which had been launched 2 years ago and, given the cross-cutting nature of the programme, asked if an update could be provided.  Elaine agreed to take forward through PSG. |  | Elaine to arrange update from OFMDFM’s SIF Team |
| 1. **Date of Next Meeting** |  | Date and location of next meeting to be agreed between Secretariats. |  | Members to be advised of dates/time/location of meetings |

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