

Joint Forum

Between Government and the Voluntary and Community Sector

JF2/15

DATE: 15 May 2015 **TIME:** 10.00

VENUE: NICVA Headquarters, Duncairn Gardens Belfast

Chair - Michael Donnelly	(Joint Chair) Dept for Social Development/Voluntary and Community Unit (VCU)
Present - Public Sector Group (PSG)	
Jack O'Connor	Dept for Social Development/Voluntary and Community Unit (Joint Forum Secretariat) (VCU)
Susan Hunter	Dept for Social Development/Voluntary and Community Unit (Joint Forum Secretariat) (VCU)
Keith Gordon	Dept for Social Development/Voluntary and Community Unit (Joint Forum Secretariat) (VCU)
Harry Armstrong	Dept for Social Development/Voluntary and Community Unit (Secretariat - Public Sector Group) (PSG)
Chris Dorrian	Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMdfM)
Sharon Smyth	Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI)
Jeff Johnston	Department of the Environment (DoE)
Gabrielle Kerr	Department for Regional Development (DRD)
Kathryn Semple	Public Sector Reform Division/Department of Finance and Personnel (PSRD/DFP)
Damian Brady	Department of Culture Arts and Leisure (DCAL)
Angela Starkey	Department of the Environment (DoE)
Carolyn Barr	Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP)
Elaine Colgan	Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS)
Jackie Gregg	Department of Regional Development (DRD)
John Noble	Department of Employment and Learning (DEL)
Linda Wilson	Department of Education
Margaret Rose McNaughton	Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMdfM)
Martin Ireland	Department for Social Development: Voluntary and Community Unit (VCU)

Martina Hanna	Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMdfM)
Olive Matthews	Department for Employment and Learning (DEL)
Willie Gribben	Department of Justice (DoJ)
Clare Mullen	Belfast City Council Development Department and Community Services (SOLACE)
Present - Voluntary and Community Group (VCG)	
Anne O'Reilly	(Joint Chair)NI Rural Women's Network (NIRWN)
Seamus McAleavey	NI Council for Voluntary Action (NICVA)
Marie Cavanagh	Gingerbread (GNI)
Jonny Currie	East Belfast Community Development Association (EBCDA)
Kevin Doherty	Disability Action (DA)
Lisa McElherron	NI Council Voluntary Action (NICVA) (Head of Voluntary and Community Group VCG)
Eddie McDowell	Churches Community Work Alliance (CCWA)
Chris Quinn	NI Youth Forum (NIYF)
Anne McVicker	Women's Resource and Development Agency (WRDA)
Jenny McEneaney	NI Council for Voluntary Action (NICVA) (Secretariat)
Colin Devine	North West Community Network
Dermot McCluskey	Disability Action NI
Duane Farrell	Age NI
Kate Laverty	Victim Support Northern Ireland
Geoff Nuttall	World Wildlife Foundation (WWF)
Orlaith Minogue	Save the Children Northern Ireland
Apologies	
Tracey Meharg	Department for Social Development: Voluntary and Community Unit
Elaine Downey	Department for Social Development: Voluntary and Community Unit
Janet Johnston	Department of Justice
Niall Heaney	Department of Agriculture and Rural Development
Glenda Davies	Sandy Row Community Forum
Geraldine Hanna	Victim Support NI
Kevin Murphy	Voluntary Arts Ireland
WELCOME and INTRODUCTIONS	
1. Michael Donnelly welcomed senior departmental officials, Willie Gribben from the Department of Justice; John Noble , Department for Education	

and Learning; **Linda Wilson**, Department of Education; and **Margaret-Rose McNaughton**, Office of the First and deputy First Minister who attended this Joint Forum to hear and respond to the concerns of the Voluntary and Community Sector.

MINUTES / ACTION POINTS / MATTERS ARISING JF2/15

1. The Minutes were agreed as an accurate reflection of matters discussed and all Action Points were cleared.

MATTERS ARISING

1. Susan Hunter updated members on the position of the Concordat Annual Report and advised that the draft would be circulated to members for comment.

AGENDA ITEMS

Michael Donnelly thanked everyone for attending this Joint Forum which had set aside the normal agenda to discuss the impact of the implementation of the 2015/16 Budget. He asked everyone present to consider how we could work together and move forward. Michael then invited Seamus McAleavey to provide an overview of the situation from the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS).

Overview from the Voluntary and Community Sector

1. Seamus opened by putting into context, how the sector viewed the Budget decision-making process. He stated that due to VCS organisations being defined in Departmental budgets as 'discretionary spending' the sector was being disproportionately and unfairly treated as it was the quickest and easiest to cut. He expressed concerns at the lack of a strategic overview as many organisations were being cut by multiple departments, despite implementing Programme for Government priorities and achieving positive preventative outcomes. Seamus updated members on meetings that had been ongoing and being carried out by NICVA with the First Minister, deputy First Minister and other Ministers and advised that two OFMdFM Junior Ministers had been directed to consider the decision making processes in departments, map where cuts have been made, the

impact these cuts will have on organisations and services and to present findings to the First and deputy First Ministers.

2. Lisa McElherron (NICVA) delivered a presentation outlining the trends emerging from NICVA's 'CutsWatchNI' survey which was set up to track the effect funding decisions were having across the Sector. Lisa reported that early survey responses were highlighting job losses with children and young people's groups being most affected so far.

[Papers\Joint Forum PSG briefing paper.pdf](#)

Case Studies

3. To illustrate the range and degree of the impact of the cuts across the Sector five representatives from widely different organisations provided a synopsis of the effect of cuts on their staff.
4. Kate Clifford (RCN) opened with a view of how vulnerable rural communities were even to small reductions in funding. She highlighted the point that many rural communities had 'hidden' populations and that these small voluntary and community groups were often the only providers of vital services for children and elderly people. These groups often had no links to larger, well-known organisations and did not have the connections to elected representatives to have their voice heard. She stressed the vulnerability of the lack of 'visibility' with rural populations and the fact that the services provided were often the only services available.
5. Eddie McDowell (CCWA) outlined the effect of a short notice announcement of cuts from one Department which had resulted in two staff members being declared redundant with less than four weeks' notice. He added that funding decisions had been made without any consultation and that organisations had been doubly penalised as a result of diversifying their funding streams.
6. Anne McVicker (WRDA) told the Forum of the disproportionate impact of the cuts on women and the women's sector. Anne discussed the importance of core funding to organisations highlighting that even a small change in the award could affect a wide range of services provided by the organisation; citing an example of a recently awarded contract to an organisation which may not be deliverable because of the cuts to core funding. Anne stated that the sector was not naïve about the cuts but asked for a proportionate share of the burden and for a better picture of how cuts have or will affect women.

7. Geoff Nuttall (WWF) outlined the short-term view of cuts to the environment sector. He explained how these organisations had been working with government to maintain land protected under EU legislation and how failure to maintain this land will result in monetary fines. He went on to point out that organisations had been developing strategic partnerships with officials over a number of years but that these had been jeopardised by the approach taken with the budget. Geoff stated that the sector could not have anticipated the scale of the cuts and added that in uncertain times, the sector needed clarity with the funding arrangements under the new departmental restructuring proposals.
8. Jonny Currie (EBCDA) told the Forum that the information his organisation had collected in relation to the cuts showed that the impact had been devastating in East Belfast and that it was inevitable that organisations' capacity to deliver will reduce. Jonny discussed the role the sector had in implementing and supporting government projects which were now in jeopardy, adding that there had been a fundamental lack of respect in how the funding decisions had been made and communicated. He stated that organisations which had followed government good practice advice to collaborate and share resources were now being penalised for a second time through these funding decisions.
9. Anne O'Reilly expressed concerns of how funding decisions were impacting on organisations' governance arrangements. Boards were being asked to manage risk and performance which was increasingly difficult.
10. Kate Clifford pointed out the Sector's capacity for innovation and how, if given sufficient notice, it can access resources that are not available to Government. She added that organisations sought to reduce overhead costs rather than services in order to minimise the impact on the most vulnerable. Sector members agreed that the lack of notice many organisations had been given was impacting on their ability to innovate and, with year-on-year reductions, there was no longer any scope for further internal streamlining.

Moving forward

1. Margaret-Rose McNaughton stated that she would be relaying these discussions to the Junior Ministers who had been appointed to oversee

the implications of the 2015/16 Budget. She explained that her role was fact-finding and the challenge was to map the organisations and services affected and it was agreed that NICVA would provide information from the CutsWatchNI survey. She agreed that there was a need for early engagement between Departments and the Sector for the 2016/17 Budget and that discussion was timely for the issue to be reflected in the June Monitoring Round. Margaret-Rose said she was aware of a suggestion of a Transition Fund similar to that made available to voluntary and community groups in GB and that she was due to meet next week with DFP officials to discuss this. She cautioned however, of a fund being made available in NI.

Action point 1.

NICVA to provide information from the CutsWatchNI survey to OFMdfM

2. Jack O'Connor told the Forum that while the timing of the Budget was beyond anyone's control, DSD had developed a set of criteria to existing projects to prioritise the allocation of funding. This process measured projects against the criteria at a strategic and project level to ensure a consistent and transparent process.

Action point 2.

Circulate DSD selection criteria.

3. There was discussion on the need for a more collaborative and participatory approach to budgetary processes and it was agreed to include this as a standing item on the Joint Forum agenda. The Joint Forum also agreed to establish a sub-committee, to include senior staff from Departmental Finance Directors' Group, to keep abreast of developments and to inform Junior Ministers.

Action point 3.

Sub-committee members to be identified by Joint Forum Secretariats.

4. Discussion then centred on how Departments could identify organisations which had multiple funders to avoid cuts being imposed on the same sector and organisation twice. It was agreed that this would be covered as part of the pre in-year budget discussions through the sub-committee which would also ensure that funding impact data had a consistent interpretation. Michael and Margaret-Rose agreed to meet as early as possible to discuss matters further.

Action point 4.

Michael Donnelly and Margaret-Rose McNaughton to meet to discuss matters further.

5. Voluntary sector members discussed difficulties identifying the correct decision making official that is relevant to their organisation. Members agreed that the onus was on Public Sector Group to assist sector members to navigate the departments.

Any Other Business

1. There were no further items of business for discussion.

Date of Next Meeting

1. It was agreed that the next meeting would be scheduled in October in NICVA.

Action Points:

1. **NICVA to provide information from the CutsWatchNI survey to OFMdFM.**
2. **Circulate DSD selection criteria.**
3. **Sub-committee members to be identified by Joint Forum Secretariats.**
4. **Michael Donnelly and Margaret Rose McNaughton to meet to discuss matters further.**