

**Department of Communities and Local Government
Third Sector Strategy
Response to the Discussion Paper**

By the Yorkshire and Humber Regional Forum¹

Overview

- We welcome the fact that the Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG) has developed a strategy for effective and on-going engagement with the sector
- We welcome the recognition of the vital role of the voluntary and community sector in the cohesive communities agenda by CLG
- We welcome the recognition that the sector's unique role is founded in its independence, and its multiple and varied roles across all levels of communities and structures.

Q1. Effective implementation of Compact principles

- We welcome the proposals by CLG to strengthen the implementation of Compact and Compact principles.

Q2. Effectiveness of engagement with the third sector

i) At regional and sub-regional levels

- We would reiterate that effective engagement with the sector at regional level needs to be developed and supported:
 - o Regional level is the key stage where the vcs can engage with the public sector and government. It is the essential building block between aggregating local experience and implementing national policy.
 - o It is also the level where “honest brokerage” can be achieved. In that it is close enough to local level experience in the sector, but far enough away to not present rivalry, or to become embroiled in local level disputes or politics.

¹ The Yorkshire and Humber Regional Forum is one of the nine regional voluntary and community sector networks in all the English regions. It was set up in 1997 to act as a strategic voice for voluntary and community networks in the region and it has a very powerful partnership role with its members and with key regional agencies. It is a member-led network of networks with over 165 member organisations. The Forum brings together voluntary and community sector organisations to ensure that the sector has the right support and structures to contribute to regional activity. The Forum believes that by placing the voluntary and community sector at the heart of the region, we can create an inclusive and vibrant region – with a high quality of life for all.

- There is a need for this to be coupled with more coherent support of the regional networks across the 9 regions, in order to provide a more consistent capacity across the regions.

ii) At local level

- We recognise the value of work placements between third sector and the public sector, and would encourage this to be developed at local level wherever possible, where local civil servants spend time understanding the sector from experience within it, and vice-versa.

Q3. Strategic Partners

- We welcome the introduction of the 'strategic partners' system at the CLG and have applied to be part of the scheme as part of the VCS regional networks' network.
- We believe the combination of national coverage, but with solid, identifiable links in each region is an excellent way forward and will complement and enhance the work of the CLG.

Q4. Community Anchors

- We welcome many of the initiatives to promote community anchor organisations, and the strategic use of asset transfer to promote sustainability in communities
- We would advocate that this should not be restricted to just community anchors, bound by geographical location, but also:
 - Anchors for communities of interest
 - Sector anchors – organisations with a stable and sustainable profile that can stimulate and support other newer or smaller organisations
- We believe that the best way to nurture communities and promote engagement is through strengthening the existing infrastructure support available to community groups and organisations. We would like to see increased support for organisations, often at district level, but currently fulfilling something of the "anchor" role to enable them to reach further, and support more of the community level activities and initiatives.
- We believe that by investing in current infrastructure provision, we can maximise on relations already established, and have the best chance of sustaining a presence over the range of functions needed to support communities and organisations.

Q5. Good models

- As a regional forum, we are frequently made aware of examples of support and partnership working from member organisations from across the region.

- We would stress the importance of this function to enable organisations share best practice, provide peer support and to develop innovative practice.
- However, our ability to support real best practice sharing forums and to collate and aggregate experience is limited.
- We would welcome discussions with CLG, and the Office of the Third Sector to develop our role in this area.

Q6. Major Gaps

- We, as strategic bodies, need to work more in conjunction with each other in order to act more swiftly in identifying gaps in provision and support to communities. We would welcome a dialogue with the sector on how we can develop more responsive structures to meet previously unidentified need.
- We would identify CLG as a core ally in Government to advocate on behalf of the sector's role and potential in the work of other government departments.
- We would reiterate the importance of the Regional VCS Networks as strong sources of intelligence, with enough contact to local presence but also a strategic overview of both regional and national trends.

20th September 2007