

Shadow Voluntary Sector Partnership Council: Note of a meeting between the National Assembly and representatives of the Voluntary Sector held on Thursday 14 October at the National Assembly Building, Cardiff Bay

Present:

Assembly Members

Rt Hon Alun Michael MP AM
Jane Hutt AM
Ann Jones AM
Lynne Neagle AM
Mick Bates AM

David Melding AM
Helen Mary Jones AM
Pauline Jarman AM
Edwina Hart AM- (Item 4)

Voluntary Sector representatives

Anne Morgan	<i>Advice</i>
Roger Fox	<i>Arts & Culture</i>
Catriona Williams	<i>Children</i>
Steve Cranston	<i>Community</i>
Graham Price	<i>Education & Training</i>
Katie-Jo Luxton	<i>Environment</i>
Patsy Rawle	<i>Black & Ethnic Minorities</i>
Mair Stephens	<i>Gender</i>
Margaret Knight	<i>Health & Care</i>
John Puzey	<i>Housing</i>
Dave Maggs	<i>Intermediaries</i>
Aled Edwards	<i>Religious Organisations</i>
Wendy Williams	<i>Sport & Recreation</i>
Dominic Rudd	<i>Animal Welfare</i>
Helen Payne	<i>Youth</i>
Marjorie Dykins	<i>WCVA</i>
Graham Benfield	<i>WCVA</i>

Officials

National Assembly

Helen Thomas	<i>Director of Social Services & Communities Group</i>
Mike Shanahan	<i>Head of Social Care Policy Division</i>
Peter Fullerton (Item 2)	<i>Head of Urban & Rural Development Division</i>
David Pritchard (Item 4)	<i>Head of Corporate Planning Unit</i>
Alyn Williams	<i>Voluntary Sector Branch</i>
Jill Clements	<i>Voluntary Sector Branch</i>

WCVA

Cath Lindley	<i>WCVA</i>
Sue Pickavance	<i>WCVA</i>

Apologies

Gareth Jones AM, David Davies AM, John Griffiths AM, Mark Rowley (*Volunteers*), Keith Roberts (*International Aid*), Simon Jones (*Employment*)
Keith Towler (*Criminal Justice*)

Item 1: Welcome and introductions

1.1 The First Secretary welcomed everyone to the meeting. He acknowledged the difficulties in establishing partnership council which was representative of the voluntary sector without becoming too unwieldy. It was important to establish a partnership agreement which suits the nature of the sector.

1.2 The composition of this meeting had been decided to reflect, as far as possible, political party balance among the eleven Assembly Members; representation of each of the voluntary sector categories as identified by Wales Council for Voluntary Action (WCVA) and WCVA representation in its own right. Officials of the National Assembly and WCVA were also present.

1.3 The First Secretary said that the effectiveness of this and any subsequent group would depend upon it being used in an overarching way and upon being supplemented by a good relationship between the sector and the Assembly between meetings. The relationship must be based on mutual confidence in patterns of working.

1.4 The First Secretary referred to the efforts already made to develop Assembly structures to support its relationship with the voluntary sector. He said that the Assembly sees its relationship with the voluntary sector as cross-cutting. He would maintain overall responsibility for the development of the Schemes including the Voluntary Sector Scheme and Jane Hutt, with day to day responsibility for the sector as a whole, would champion the voluntary sector within the Cabinet. All Assembly Secretaries have responsibility for ensuring effective working with the voluntary sector in their own subject areas.

1.5 Marjorie Dykins thanked the First Secretary for his remarks and all the Assembly Members for their presence.

Item 2: Report on Progress of the Compact

2.1 The First Secretary introduced the paper, which set out the progress made since the launch of the Compact between the Government and the Voluntary Sector in Wales in November 1998. He said that he was particularly keen to see the principles of compact translated into local compacts and that it may be appropriate in the near future to have a further

meeting with the WLGA and WCVA to assess and ensure progress **[action: Voluntary Sector Branch /WCVA]**

2.2 Marjorie Dykins asked for a report on the progress on local compacts to be available at the next meeting of the group **[action: Voluntary Sector Branch / WCVA]**

2.3 Margaret Knight and Anne Morgan asked for more information about the Voluntary Sector Liaison Officers for sight of the procedural guidance.

2.4 Jane Hutt AM agreed that the list of voluntary sector liaison officers should be shared with the voluntary sector representatives of the group immediately and that the procedural guidance issued to Assembly official should be made public via the internet. At the same time, the First Secretary cautioned that it is important to allow the Voluntary Sector Liaison Officers time to familiarise themselves with their new roles. Their appointment is a first step in raising consciousness amongst all Assembly staff and care should be taken not to overload these people and distract them from this initial important task. He stressed that the Voluntary Sector Liaison Officers are a new and additional resource and should not be seen as a replacement where existing contacts exist. He also advised that the procedural guidance is part of wide ranging internal Assembly guidance for civil servants covering issues much wider than the relationship with the voluntary sector **[action: Voluntary Sector Branch]**

2.5 Margaret Knight said that the voluntary sector would be happy to contribute to training for Voluntary Sector Liaison Officers.

2.6 Catriona Williams questioned how well the Compact - in particular the consultation procedures - is being integrated into Assembly working practices. Many consultation exercises had not been operated according to the minimum 8 week rule.

2.7 The First Secretary reassured the group that the principles and commitments within the Compact are being taken seriously. However, he asked the group to consider the volume of work and change which the Assembly and its staff had faced over the past months.

2.8 There had been a phenomenal amount of consultation in the early days of the Assembly. However, he reminded the group that as things settled down, the subject committees' published forward programmes of work will help to clarify the committees' priorities for the year ahead and enable the voluntary sector and others to feed in at an early stage of the discussion.

2.9 Jane Hutt AM said that there should be a restated commitment that following the meeting the Assembly will adhere to the preferred 12 week / minimum 8 week consultation period wherever possible and that where this is

impossible, reasons should be given **[action: Voluntary Sector Branch / National Assembly Group Directors]**

2.10 Graham Benfield said that it is important to understand that the perception in the voluntary sector is that the Compact had been launched a year ago; it has been endorsed by the Assembly and therefore the procedures should already be in place and the commitments being implemented.

2.11 Helen Mary Jones AM said that although the table at annex A said that the compact is being integrated into the working practices of the Assembly, she had not seen much evidence of this in the Committees in which she is involved. She said that it is incumbent upon all Assembly Members as well as staff to ensure that the voluntary sector interests and impact are integral to their discussions in all cases.

2.12 The First Secretary said that the table was not intended to claim that the implementation of the policy was complete. It was work in hand. He agreed that it is the responsibility of all Assembly Members as well as officials to create an environment where the voluntary sector is integral to the Assembly's decisions and activities.

2.13 At Marjorie Dykins' request, the discussion about timetable was expanded to take in the timetable set out (paper 3, Annex A) for the Voluntary Sector Scheme.

2.14 Dominic Rudd expressed concern that, assuming that the Assembly adopts the Scheme in March 2000, there was an implication that written strategies would not be in place until December 2000 / January 2001

2.15 Jane Hutt AM assured the group that there is no suggestion of putting it off or waiting for 12 months. Much was already underway and it will continue to be driven forward. However, it is important to recognise that the starting point for different parts of the Assembly varies and some will take longer to get there than others. The proposals are about mainstreaming the voluntary sector. The targets are end dates for the process - they did not preclude faster progress where that is possible. The group itself will have an important role in advising on the development of strategies and where they perceive there to be gaps.

2.16 Mike Shanahan advised the group on two important considerations which informed the timetable attached to the Scheme - the need to consult according to the integral consultation procedures; and the fact that it will be a document with legal force - unlike the Compact.

2.17 Marjorie Dykins remained concerned that, while she accepted that some of the practices which would eventually be enshrined in the written strategies are already in place, an unpublished strategy has the potential to

be inequitable, eg neglecting the needs of the smaller and grass roots organisations.

2.18 The First Secretary agreed that it is important to ensure that the strategies address the needs of smaller and grass roots organisations and suggested that getting it right in respect of these is what might take time.

2.19 Helen Thomas assured the group that she would take away from the meeting the importance of progressing the Compact commitments and would discuss with her fellow Group Directors the need monitor progress and to keep this group informed. **[action: Helen Thomas / National Assembly Group Directors]**

2.20 The First Secretary suggested that the issue of targets/deadlines could be the subject of further fruitful discussions between officials of the Assembly and WCVA with him or Jane Hutt as appropriate **[action: Voluntary Sector Branch / WCVA]**

2.21 Lynne Neagle AM sought more information about the voluntary sector's consultation about its relationship with regional committees.

2.22 Cath Lindley provided some background on the consultation and brief outcomes. She advised that the results had been sent to each Regional Committee Chair offering them a further briefing/meeting.

2.23 The First Secretary said that it is important to recognise that regional committees were not there to duplicate the role of the subject committees and that to do their job effectively, they should not be stifled by a standardisation of approach.

2.24 Helen Mary Jones AM suggested that the Assembly Members present should take it upon themselves to raise with their regional committee chairs the consultation results and an appropriate response to the voluntary sector **[action: Assembly Members]**

Item 3: National Assembly Voluntary Sector Scheme

3.1 This First Secretary introduced this item explaining that there were two papers for consideration. The first paper was on Community Development which, subject to the views of this group, would be circulated for wider consultation before being (i) published in its own right as a National Assembly/voluntary sector reciprocal document and (ii) reflected in the National Assembly's Voluntary Sector Scheme.

3.2 Peter Fullerton said that due to its complexity, it had been expected from the outset that the Community Development document, produced in support of the Compact, would take longer than the other supporting

documents to produce. The completed document on a subject which goes beyond the voluntary sector per se has the support of the practitioners from the community sector as well as the group's Assembly officials and policy makers.

3.3 Helen Mary Jones AM said that it was an excellent and important document. Her one concern was that it appeared to treat the community as a single entity and not to reflect the imbalance between the strengths of players within the community. She suggested that this was not a matter which needs to be addressed before wider consultation but rather to be taken into consideration when the document is being finalised after consultation.

3.4 Mick Bates AM suggested that there is a need for more training in the area of community development.

3.5 Graham Benfield said that it was a good paper but was missing an action plan, without which nothing would happen.

3.6 The First Secretary requested officials to undertake consultation on the draft in a way which reflects the comments made in discussion and draws out the points to be included in an action plan **[action: Peter Fullerton/WCVA]**

3.7 Pauline Jarman AM said that for the compact and the Scheme to be successful in terms of community development, the Assembly would need to consider issues about how the sector is resourced.

3.8 The First Secretary said that a start had already been made in moving towards common application systems so that small community groups resources were not wasted in chasing funds. It is however a very complex issue which involves local government as well as other UK Government Departments.

3.9 The First Secretary then introduced the paper on the draft Voluntary Sector Scheme which he said had been drafted building upon the strong content of the previously agreed Compact and is required under the Government of Wales Act. He advised that subject to the views of the group, the next steps were for the Assembly's lawyers to consider the draft; consultation on the draft and an Assembly debate in Plenary.

3.10 Marjorie Dykins said that the voluntary sector representatives were very satisfied with the content of the scheme and recognised it as being in the forefront of UK development. She referred to the earlier discussion about the timetable (paras 20-28 above) and reinforced the voluntary sector's wish for this to be changed. She asked that when the Scheme is circulated for consultation it, or the covering letter, contains an explanation of the timetable and the commitment to ongoing implementation **[action: Voluntary Sector Branch]**

3.11 Graham Benfield said that Annex B on the proposed contents of the annual report needs more work to include qualitative indicators, reflecting progress as well as activity. This was agreed. **[action: Voluntary Sector Branch / G Benfield]**

3.12 Marjorie Dykins asked for integration between the Voluntary Sector Scheme and the Local Government Scheme.

3.13 The First Secretary confirmed that it is the Assembly's intention to achieve a degree of synergy between all its schemes. He assured the group that at the meeting of the Local Government Partnership Council on 11 October there had been frequent reference to the voluntary sector.

3.14 Mike Shanahan explained for the sake of clarity that, whereas the Compact had been a reciprocal document, the Scheme would be written to reflect the Assembly's legal obligations only. It would be for the voluntary sector to consider how to respond in order to maintain the reciprocal arrangement built up through the Compact.

3.15 Graham Benfield and others confirmed that this is understood and the partnership which the voluntary sought with the Voluntary Sector depended upon the commitment of both.

3.16 It was agreed that officials would (i) ask the Office of the Counsel General to proof the draft Scheme against the Assembly's legal responsibilities and obligations (ii) amend annex B in consultation with WCVA and (iii) submit a final draft of the Scheme and proposals for consultation to the First Secretary with a view to consultation taking place as soon as possible **[action: Voluntary Sector Branch]**

3.17 It was also agreed that pending the adoption of the Voluntary Sector Scheme, this group should be known as the Shadow Voluntary Sector Partnership Council.

Item 4: Spending Plans and Priorities

4.1 The First Secretary introduced the item, inviting Graham Benfield to present a paper - *National Assembly Expenditure and the Third Sector* - on behalf of the voluntary sector representatives, and welcoming the Finance Secretary, Edwina Hart AM to the meeting to respond and present her own paper - *A Better Wales - Responses to Consultation and Next Steps*.

4.2 Graham Benfield explained that the voluntary sector's perception, at all levels and in all parts of Wales, is that there is no explicit direction in funding the voluntary sector. Rather that once the budget for everything else is decided, what is left goes to the voluntary sector.

4.3 The voluntary sector believes that while people are beginning to realise that it is not possible to activate the policy outcome without the voluntary sector, and are therefore involving them in partnerships, if the sector is dependent upon the other partners for resources then it is not a true partnership. The sector welcomes partnership but their involvement puts an enormous pressure on organisations - attending meetings can be very resource intensive.

4.4 Public agencies are saying that they do not know how to deliver social inclusion, but they still take the money to do so. Although they then go to voluntary organisations to help deliver but there is often not enough money left to do the job properly

4.5 The voluntary sector wants to see:

- resources related to policies rather than the traditional spend;
- mechanisms to discuss spending priorities and how it affects the sector - like the Assembly's discussions with local government.
- recognition of the need for dual track funding - (i) robust local partnerships and (ii) National strategies and funding routes.

4.6 The First Secretary said that the Assembly is pursuing, for the first time, an approach which starts to 'unpick' spending. He said that in the case of the voluntary sector there are three aspects of funding to be considered - funding the sector itself - organisations such as WCVA which help the sector to exist and develop; funding activity - such as volunteers and training; and funding services - which varies considerably throughout the sector according to organisations' involvement in delivering services.

4.7 Edwina Hart AM said that she welcomed this opportunity to talk to the group, particularly following a similar meeting with the Local Government Partnership earlier in the week. She said that she had been very pleased with the number of responses to the Consultation Paper A Better Wales - particularly from the voluntary sector. She appreciated the initial concerns that the way in which the original paper was written may have seemed more appropriate to the business sector than to the voluntary sector but stressed that it is an ongoing process. She would make her first speech to the Assembly on the outcome of the consultation on Wednesday, 20 October - but this would not be the end of the process. She wishes to take a fundamental look at the systems to ensure that the Assembly's decisions on the allocation of resources are properly relevant to outcomes.

4.8 Jane Hutt AM emphasised that the Assembly's starting point is the needs of people. She also reminded the group that the voluntary sector is an issue for all the Assembly's committees.

4.9 Graham Benfield said that to ensure that the needs of people are properly addressed the resources need to be allocated on the basis of who

does what. While substantial amounts of money are funnelled through local authorities, it will always work to the detriment of the voluntary sector.

4.10 Catriona Williams said that the capacity of local authorities to get hold of money, without bidding, to deliver programmes - even when they were not necessarily best placed to do so - disadvantaged voluntary sector organisations which have to bid for everything.

4.11 Marjorie Dykins cautioned that programmes such as Surestart, while well developed with the involvement of the voluntary sector, would suffer if the foundation bodies were weakened because their resources were diverted elsewhere.

4.12 Helen Mary Jones AM said that there were many issues which needed to be worked through; the Assembly's expenditure system should not be one which sets local government and the voluntary sector in competition; Assembly Members do ask more of the voluntary sector than they can be expected to deliver. She suggested that a sub group be convened to work through some of the issues in time for next year's spending round.

4.13 The First Secretary and Edwina Hart agreed that it would be useful to look at the issue for next year, recognising that it was too late to make major changes this year. The group should look at strategic issues and systems which would provide a more level playing field for the voluntary sector; it should consider financing at a local level and a national level. The First Secretary suggested that in the first place officials from the Assembly's Finance Group and Voluntary Sector Branch and from Wales Council for Voluntary Action should start the process by setting out the terms for such a group. Further membership could be considered once the terms were established **[action: Voluntary Sector Branch to arrange meeting with colleagues from Finance and WCVA]**

4.14 It was agreed that this work should begin as soon as possible, to take account of the long lead in time to expenditure decisions and to demonstrate progress to the wider voluntary sector.

4.15 It was agreed that the objective of the group is not to release larger sums of money but to consider improvements to the systems in order to make better use of the resources available.

Item 5: The Active Community

5.1 The First Secretary had advised the group at the outset of the meeting that this item would be postponed until a later meeting **[action: secretariat]**.

Item 6: Public appointments

6.1 The First Secretary introduced the paper which sought suggestions for attracting a wider range of quality candidates for public appointments. He said that although the number of quangos was reducing there would continue to be a number of public appointments - such as to some Assembly Sponsored Bodies and NHS Trusts. In view of the smaller numbers of public appointments it is all the more important that these should be filled by people who are both of good quality and representative of Welsh life.

6.2 Roger Fox welcomed the paper and noted with pleasure that a number of comments made by the voluntary sector in previous forums had been taken on board within the paper. He suggested that the language used in advertising should be carefully scrutinised to ensure that it is clear and open - citing the example of 'adequate training and induction', he suggested that this might act as an unwarranted deterrent to some people.

6.3 Mair Stevens cautioned that care should be taken in publishing pictures of current appointments to avoid perpetuating existing stereotypes. She also said that job descriptions should be written in a way which makes clear that it is open to everyone to apply.

6.4 Jane Hutt recognised that the subject had been discussed in previous forums and said that this is a more root and branch approach to reforming the appointment system - an open discussion about the systems which invites practical ways and suggestions for improvement.

6.5 Wendy Williams urged people to look at volunteers in their organisations as well as staff when considering who to nominate for public appointments - and to provide the support and encouragement which will enable individuals to put themselves forward.

6.6 The First Secretary advised the group of the change in the appointment system which means that appointments previously made by Ministers now involve committees.

6.7 He said that alongside the open invitation to suggest ways in which the system could be improved, there is a degree of urgency because of the number of appointments coming up over the next few months. This is because appointments had been extended during the time leading up to the Assembly so as to allow the Assembly the opportunity to consider new appointments itself. It was agreed that a list of appointments coming up over the next few months, together with any supporting information, would be circulated to the voluntary sector representatives on the group **[action: Secretariat]**.

6.8 It was agreed that public appointments should be placed on the agenda of the next meeting but that members should not wait until the next meeting to make their suggestions [**action: secretariat / all**]

Next meeting

7. It was agreed that a further meeting should be arranged for January, subject to the timing of key factors, such as the consultation on the Voluntary Sector Scheme [**action: secretariat / all to note**]