



CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Better together: improving consultation with the third sector

A speech by Kevin Brennan MP, Minister for the Third Sector at the launch of the report and handbook 'Better together: improving consultation with the third sector', 27th November 2008

I am delighted to be here this morning, to celebrate another goal achieved from the Third Sector Review, and I'd like to extend my personal thanks to Richard [Wilson, Director, Involve] and his team at Involve, and to everyone whose contribution, big or small, made today possible.

Voice a vital role played by the third sector

In uncertain times, I think it's important to recognise how important the third sector is – the role it plays in society, and the support it gives government. The people in this room make a difference not only to the individual lives you touch, but to helping perpetuate a culture of giving and support that benefits us all, whether we use those services directly or not. As a member of the community, as a father, I find it an invaluable contribution that you help to make the country I live in, and that my children grow up in, a better place.

One of the most vital roles the third sector plays is really that of a bullhorn, or microphone – letting the voices individuals, groups and communities across the country be heard. It's a fairly loud world out there, and it's easy to get lost in the noise.

This is important for two reasons.

First, it does the obvious democratic service of letting everyone be heard. And second, it helps problems get solved. The simple fact is: the people who know the sector best are best suited to help us find solutions.

Which, of course, brings us to why we're here today.

Consultation is a central way for TSOs to have voice

As we know, this report and handbook is focussed on consultation. For those of you who are public servants, consultation will be a familiar process but it must be more than that.

At its best, consultation is a powerful tool for the views of society as a whole, to be heard, and to have an impact on shaping the policies that affect us all, and creating better outcomes.

Consultations mean formal and systematic recognition, and an opportunity to influence policy-makers, informing and, yes, *challenging* the status quo. When Galbraith coined the term 'conventional wisdom', he wasn't being complimentary. We find solutions to problems by taking an innovative view, by looking at issues from different angles, and working collaboratively helps us do that.

And consultation is a valuable tool for the policy-maker; the insight it provides can spare many a wrong turn – and yes occasionally we do get it wrong – usually through not consulting properly.

So this really is a celebration of how we all work together to find better, more effective solutions.

Partnership working within the project itself

This report not only advocates a positive and active engagement between the third sector and government – it is itself a product of it. I am grateful for the assistance of everyone who shared their experiences and reflections, and I'd like to extend my thanks.

In particular I would like to acknowledge the great contribution and influence of Children England - formerly NCVCCO. Children England not only co-funded this research with us, but worked along side us in commissioning and overseeing the research, and ensuring the third sector was at the heart of the work – I know that having them on board was a major factor in the project's success.

Encouragement to use handbook

I'd like to finish by saying that both the report and the handbook are really a job well done – important reading for all of us here, and extremely valuable to anyone thinking about conducting a consultation with the third sector.

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