



CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Launch of DEFRA Third Sector Strategy

Transcript of a speech by Kevin Brennan MP, Minister for the Third Sector at the launch of the DEFRA Third Sector Strategy at Nobel House, 3rd November 2008

I am very pleased to be here at the launch of Defra's third sector strategy.

Although much of the recent focus has rightly been on the financial system and the implications for our economy, we continue to face the long term challenge of living sustainably. That challenge requires action by all of us, from individuals to government.

It is also a challenge for the third sector, both in the way that they operate and also in their role to encourage and enable changes in our communities.

Before I talk about that, and as this is the start of Compact Week, I would also like to say a bit about the Compact between Government and the sector.

This week we are celebrating ten years since Government and the voluntary and community sector came together to sign up to a set of undertakings to improve how they work together.

I believe that over those ten years the Compact has resulted in real

positive change – the launch of Defra’s strategy is one example of that.

The Compact’s key messages

I also believe that the core messages of the Compact are still relevant:

- that we respect the independence of third sector organisations and value their independent voice;
- that government proactively engages third sector organisations in the development of new policy, and in reviewing existing policies;
- that we need fair funding and intelligent commissioning so that we can together maximise the outcomes for the communities we serve;
- that the whole breadth of the third sector is able to contribute to achieving positive outcomes, including smaller community organisations or organisations representing diverse communities;
- and that we recognise the specific contribution of volunteers.

Looking forward – Compact debate

With the tenth anniversary of the Compact Week, now is also a good time to be looking forward.

That’s why we have asked the Commission for the Compact to lead a debate on how the Compact can be changed to ensure it remains relevant so it can continue to help both government and the third sector face the challenges of the coming years.

The Compact cannot stand still as the world changes but must instead reflect the changing landscape in which we all work.

Looking forward – Defra strategy

And, as I said in my introduction, one of the most significant changes in that landscape has been the recognition that urgent action is needed to meet the challenge of climate change and to reduce our impact on the planet.

With that in mind, I'm particularly pleased that the Office of the Third Sector will be working with Defra on a diverse programme to embed sustainability throughout the third sector. We'll jointly be developing a reporting package on environmental measures that is both transparent and proportionate.

And on Thursday Jonathan Porritt, Chair of the Sustainable Development Commission, will launch a workshop for staff in the Office of the Third Sector to examine opportunities to 'green-proof' programmes. Our delivery partners, Capacitybuilders and Futurebuilders, will also attend. All of us need to consider our impact on the planet, and we want to ensure that our programmes really do embed sustainable development principles.

Many of our Strategic Partners have already embraced the issue of sustainability and BASSAC will be leading them on a journey to further develop their programmes, with the support of OTS.

And Huw, Joan and I will be chairing a task-group of key stakeholders to examine how existing national activities can help

the sector lead by example in embedding sustainable development, the environment and climate change within organisations and activities.

Conclusion

Living within our environmental means is a challenge for all sectors, and I believe we can best meet that challenge by working together.

I also believe that the third sector is ideally suited to bring about the changes that are needed for our society to develop in a truly sustainable way.

Alongside national and international action by Government, and alongside changes in the way that private companies operate, all of us as individuals need to consider our own choices and behaviour.

Third sector organisations, which work within and are part of communities across the country, are well placed to help individuals consider how their choices impact on the planet. They already have a vital role to encourage and enable us all to change our behaviour, and that role must surely grow still further in the future.

I'm therefore looking forward greatly to working with you all to enable the third sector to contribute to meeting that challenge.

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