

Third Sector Strategy

**One Year On
- a progress report**

November 2009



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<http://www.defra.gov.uk/corporate/about/how/third-sector/index.htm>

For more information on what Defra is doing in relation to the Third Sector please see our blog: <http://blogs.defra.gov.uk/3rd-sector/>

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Huw Irranca-Davies MP



Defra's third sector strategy was launched on 3 November 2008. The publication of the strategy was the culmination of more than a year's work with the third sector and across various teams within Defra. The third sector makes a vital contribution to Defra's strategic objectives, and strong partnerships with the sector are important to the way we develop and deliver our policies. This has been a busy year for Defra, with the publication of the latest climate projections, UKCP09, the passage of the Marine Bill through Parliament, and the development of new policies on food security. In all of these, third sector organisations have played a leading part, providing expert advice and challenge and support in equal measure. Increasingly, we have also come to realise the important contribution the sector makes in helping turn our policies into reality, helping communities and individuals understand and respond to environmental challenges and supporting services in our rural communities.

The strategy set out a five year vision detailing some of the key opportunities for Defra to work in partnership with the sector to achieve shared outcomes, and where Defra will improve the way it works so that our engagement with the sector is more effective. This report is the first statement on the department's progress and implementation of the strategy commitments and aims to highlight areas where we consider we are moving in the right direction and acknowledge where we need to do more work.

The report shows that we have made some good progress in reinforcing and developing our relationship with the third sector, increasing our understanding of its rich diversity. In many other cases we have set in train projects and done the groundwork that will bring further big improvements in the future.

I have taken a close interest in the strategy and the work of Defra's Third Sector Advisory Board and look forward to hearing their views in response to this report.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Huw". The signature is written in a cursive style and is underlined with a thick black horizontal line.

Huw Irranca-Davies MP
Defra's Third Sector Minister

Roger Clarke, Chair of Defra's Third Sector Advisory Board



The publication of Defra's third sector strategy followed an extensive 12-month consultation period. It built on the work of Defra's Compact Group. However, the strategy is much broader than the Compact and covers all aspects of Defra's relationships with the third sector.

Charities, not-for-profit organisations and social enterprises have a vital role in securing better outcomes for the environment, rural areas and sustainable development, working in partnership with Defra. A diverse array of third sector stakeholders work for Defra. These range from small, volunteer-led rural community groups through to international environmental Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and waste and recycling social enterprises. The voluntary sector plays a vital role in building a lively and well informed civil society. Voluntary organisations deliver services, provide public information, champion causes, and influence public policy. They are a vital part of our democracy. They engage the active participation of millions of people.

Defra's third sector strategy set out an ambitious set of commitments and was an important statement of intent. The focus is now on delivery. The Third Sector Advisory Board plays a key role in overseeing the implementation of the strategy, working with Defra.

This One Year On report provides opportunity to reflect on, and refresh the strategy. The Advisory Board provides Defra with strategic advice on direction from their third sector perspective. The board will review the value and feasibility of certain commitments where no progress has been made.

The Advisory Board is grateful to Defra Ministers and civil servants, and to Defra agencies, for their enthusiasm and commitment to working with voluntary organisations to make England a better place.

There are more than 100 commitments listed in the strategy and progress on individual action points which can be found in the detailed document that accompanies this report.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Roger Clarke". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Roger Clarke

Chair of Defra's Third Sector Advisory Board

Introduction from the Defra third sector team

Defra's Third Sector Strategy identified number of high level themes for our work with the sector, aimed at developing our understanding of and relationships with the sector, and working collaboratively to deliver shared outcomes. Those themes were:

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1. Advocacy, voice, campaigning and informing policy development
2. Sustainable living, communities and places
3. Public services
4. Encouraging social enterprise and environmental entrepreneurship
5. Creating a framework for greater environmental leadership within the sector

Renewing the way we work with the sector

6. Improving our listening to, and communications with, the third sector
7. Understanding the sector better
8. Joining up what we do
9. Better partnerships
10. Enabling delivery bodies
11. Better commission practices and procedures.

This report sets out progress against each of those themes, identifying for each theme how far we have progressed and where further work is required. It also highlights some of the major achievements under each theme to give a sense of the diversity of the activity we have been engaged in with our third sector partners. Within each theme set of specific commitments were made. The detail of our progress against each commitment is contained in the Annex to this report.

1 Advocacy, voice, campaigning & informing policy development

Objectives

- To develop a more consistent approach across policy areas in Defra, when involving third sector organisations in advocacy and policy development, learning from activities where it works best.
- To develop a better understanding in Defra, about the policy areas where co-design and early proactive engagement with the sector should be the norm, and those policy areas where informing and consulting third sector organisations are more appropriate.
- To deepen and diversify our engagement where there are currently gaps, and to work better through intermediaries to engage smaller or harder to reach voices.
- To build on existing collaboration, by sharing insights and evidence more and to work together to influence others and bring about the changes needed to live within our environmental means, whilst maintaining and respecting the independence of the sector.

Out of the 35 total commitments on this issue in the strategy 4 actions have been completed. 1 has been revised and 29 are ongoing. No progress has yet been reported on 1 action.

Analysis

This section documents the wide range of work that has and is being carried out by policy teams across Defra's remit to develop and deliver policy in partnership with the third sector, in areas such as climate change, environmental behaviours, rural communities, food, ecosystems, flooding, water, waste, packaging and biodiversity. Policy makers have worked collaboratively with third sector organisations, drawing on their knowledge and expertise. This has been a particularly strong area in terms of early delivery of the Strategy's commitments, with a broad selection of third sector stakeholders (including smaller organisations) getting involved in consultation and policy development at an early stage, in a way that better suits them. Many of these actions maintain strong commitments for continued collaboration.

Highlights

- We are engaging with the industry led Climate Change Task Force through the Rural Climate Change Forum as it looks to develop a Voluntary Action Plan for the sector to deliver the Government's aim to reduce yearly emissions from

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English farming significantly in the period 2018-2022, as set out in the UK Low-Carbon Transition Plan.

- Third sector organisations have been closely involved in Defra’s Food Security consultation process. A workshop was held in September 2009 involving third sector organisations, NGOs, OGD’s and retailers to consult them on Food Poverty and Social Exclusion
- Third sector organisations have been involved in developing a Vision for a Sustainable Food System as part of Defra’s Food Chain Programme.
- Several third sector stakeholders are partners to the new Campaign for the Farmed Environment.
- Key third sector animal welfare organisations such as World Horse Welfare, Compassion in World Farming and the RSPCA have been engaged in the review of the Welfare in Transport Regulations.
- The RSPB have been closely involved in the core Steering group of the UK Climate Change Risk Assessment, contributing to a scoping study published in Spring 2009.
- Third sector organisations were asked for their views on the scope of the National Ecosystem Assessment before it was finalised and are represented amongst the authorship of the first report as well as on the User Group of the Assessment, where they will be able to steer the outputs of the Assessment to ensure it is relevant to a broad spectrum of stakeholders.
- Third sector stakeholders have been closely engaged with the development of the Marine and Coastal Access Bill and this has continued during its legislative progress through Parliament.
- Defra has entered into a contract with the National Flood Forum in order to help us make better use of their knowledge and experience in our policy making. We have worked closely with the NFF in developing the draft Flood and Water Management Bill. Waterwise, RSPB, church groups, Scouts and other community groups have been involved in our work on the Government’s Future Water Strategy.
- Third sector organisations continue to play an important role within the Waste Stakeholder Group to advise Government on the delivery of the Waste Strategy for England and developing future policy.
- Wildlife Link and members of the **UK Biodiversity Action Plan** Standing Committee have been involved in contributing thoughts towards the developing UK Government position on the successor to the Convention on Biological Diversity target to significantly reduce the rate of biodiversity loss by 2010.

2 Sustainable living, communities and places

Objectives

- To provide a clear, evidence-based framework for third sector organisations, to innovate and scale-up actions which help individuals, as active citizens and consumers, choose greener behaviours which reduce their carbon emissions and protect the natural environment.
- To promote environmental volunteering and recognise the role of unpaid volunteers in Defra affairs.
- To help facilitate collective action, community empowerment, informal learning and community solutions which protect the natural environment, and create sustainable and resilient communities – in urban and rural areas.
- To facilitate strong placed-based partnerships between third sector organisations and statutory organisations, which work together to improve environmental outcomes, strengthen rural communities and make the best use of regional and local plans for doing so.

Out of the 26 total commitments on this issue in the strategy 3 actions have been completed. 1 has been revised and 18 are ongoing. No progress has yet been reported on 4 actions.

Analysis

Defra has for some time recognised the power of the sector to mobilise individuals and communities to action, its ability to reach groups and individuals that Government sometimes struggles to connect with. This year, we marked the end of Every Action Counts, a programme led by the voluntary and community sector with support from Defra, to encourage and support communities to take action to protect the environment. But the experience of that programme will live on in a number of new initiatives launched in the past year. These range from activities to increase environmental volunteering, to fund programmes to promote environmentally-positive behaviours, and to supporting community empowerment in rural areas.

This is an evolving area, and we and our partners in the sector will continue to work together to develop and deepen our understanding of what works best in persuading and empowering people and communities to make greener choices. A key element of these activities will be evaluating their impacts, sharing that learning and looking at ways to scale up the impact.

Highlights

- Defra funded the Reynolds Cheshire Initiative, 'We Will If You Will', to develop and implement a food campaign focusing on changing behaviour around the areas of growing your own and eating seasonal food. We are currently evaluating this programme of work.
- The Greener Living Fund has made £6million available to develop and support projects run by third sector delivery partners to influence the environmental behaviour of national audiences whose motivations they understand. The fund aims to help individuals and communities in England to live more sustainably, reducing their carbon footprint and reducing pressure on natural resources. The delivery partners are: Climate Outreach Information Network (COIN); Co-operatives UK; Global Action Plan; Marine Stewardship Council; National Trust; National Union of Students; Sustrans and Waterwise.
- As part of the Influencing Consumer Food Behaviour work the Food Policy Unit has presented information and advice to NGOs and third sector organisations at Defra's Consumer Representatives meetings throughout the year. These discussions have helped us develop and shape the evidence based consumer friendly advice we make available through communication channels such as DirectGov.
- As part of Adapting to Climate Change programme ACRE was commissioned to produce the sector specific content for the adaptation guide for local and community councils.
- Gordon Brown and cabinet colleagues, Ed Miliband and Hilary Benn, hosted a celebration of environmental volunteering at Number 10 Downing Street. More than 150 volunteers from across the UK attended.
- A 'Projections in Practice' event was held for the third and community sector in July 2009 to raise awareness of UKCIP climate impact scenarios. As a follow-on the third sector team have been promoting the free Regional Climate Projections training opportunities through their blog and contacts.
- Defra has agreed and approved a funding package with NALC and ACRE of £100,000 per annum for the 3 years to 2010/11, aimed at supporting the Government's agenda for community empowerment.
- The original zero waste projects were successful and all have continued in some form after the funding had ended. We have now announced another 6 places, which will receive Towards Zero Waste Funding. Once again these places will act as pathfinders for sustainable waste management. Places which are seen to demonstrate a significant attack on waste, including going beyond targets placed in the Waste Strategy 2007 will be accredited as "zero waste places".

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- The Muck In4Life campaign was launched in May 2009 by Defra’s Third Sector Minister, Huw Irranca-Davies. The campaign aims to increase the number of people involved in conservation volunteering. We now have nearly 30 partners, including BTCV, RSPB, Marine Conservation Society, the Wildlife Trusts and the National Trust.
- Each of the Regional Climate Change Partnerships has been allocated £45,000 of funding from Defra for the 2009-2010 financial year.
- An internal volunteering fair is held annually in November to attract interest and stimulate involvement in volunteering by Defra staff. We have promoted a BTCV Trustee opportunity on the Third Sector Blog and in an internal Office Notice.
- Defra continues to provide funding to Rural Communities Action Network (also known as the ACRE network) to develop the network’s strategic influencing.
- A final tranche of funding of £40k was provided to Farming and Countryside Education towards the end of last year (2008-2009) to help support the legacy of the “Year of Food and Farming” initiative “Think Food and Farming”.

3 Public Services

Objectives

Work with Defra’s delivery bodies and the third sector to:

- Increase opportunities for third sector organisations in delivering public services which help individuals, communities and public sector organisations to manage and use natural resources more efficiently, defend the public from environmental risks and protect the natural environment.
- Recognise and support the role of third sector organisations who provide services to the public to promote the welfare of animals and the wellbeing of the public in planning and recovering from the impacts of flooding, animal disease and rural stress.
- Continue to support advocates who highlight public service issues in rural areas, so that mainstream service providers address these needs more effectively.

Out of the 7 total commitments on this issue in the strategy 6 of the actions are ongoing and no progress has been reported on 1 action.

Analysis

The third sector already plays a key role in delivering public services. Of particular relevance to Defra are activities in the fields of waste and resource efficiency, food and farming, and the natural environment.

We continue to support WRAP and the REalliance CIC which is focussing on improving the capacity of the sector to operate effectively within the waste services sector. Another thread of activity has been our support to the work of the OTS in measuring the social and environmental benefits of engaging third sector organisations in service delivery. We contribute to the OTS Advisory Board for the Social Return on Investment (SROI) programme and have promoted the outputs of the programme through our blog and internally with colleagues in the Sustainable Behaviours Unit. We have also supported WRAP in the development of a balanced score card approach for the monitoring of the range of outputs produced by third sector organisations involved in the provision of waste services.

We have also committed to the secondment of a member of staff to OTS's Contracting Unit for one day a week, and will explore the possibility of a Defra Minister sitting on the MISC 37 Cabinet Sub-Committee. The Contracting Unit supports MISC 37, which is focussing on reducing barriers to the commissioning of services from the third sector. Our contribution will focus on how we can properly measure and value the wider benefits obtained when working with the third sector, with a view to applying this across Government to ensure that contracts take into account the wider social and environmental benefits from working with the sector.

Finally, we have started a dialogue with Futurebuilders, which gives loans to third sector organisations involved in public service delivery, with the aim of incorporating sustainability criteria into their loan agreements.

Highlights

- Defra's Third sector team has established an ongoing dialogue with Futurebuilders, an organisation that provides loans and investments to third sector organisations to help them deliver public services.
- We have used the third sector blog to promote Office of the Third Sector (OTS) guidance on delivering public services through partnerships and consortia and other relevant issues (e.g. the work on Social Return on Investment) coming out of OTS.
- Defra continues to support the work of WRAP and REalliance CIC on waste minimisation – in particular, looking into market and network development.
- We have committed to support OTS's Contracting Unit with a secondee for one day a week.

4 Encouraging social enterprise & environmental entrepreneurship

Objectives

- Work with the sector to improve understanding and the evidence base about the environmental contribution which can be made by social enterprises with primarily social or economic objectives.
- Explore the potential for the expansion of social enterprises in new environmental markets related to homes, SMEs and other potential customers.

Out of the 7 total commitments on this issue in the strategy 2 actions have been completed and 5 are ongoing.

Analysis

Social enterprises are a firm fixture on the Defra delivery landscape, particularly in the fields of waste and resource efficiency, but the potential of the social enterprise sector to contribute to outcomes for the environment and for rural communities go much wider than that. Since the strategy was published, our Social Enterprise Strategic Partnership (SESP) has undertaken a number of activities to raise awareness of the opportunities for social enterprise to contribute to outcomes for Defra. In particular, the SESP has engaged intensively with the food policy team to scope out research to explore the potential contribution of social enterprises to food policy. They also provided a first-hand insight into the benefits by arranging a successful field trip to see social enterprises in action.

But this is just a start and there is potential for similar work to take place involving other policy areas. The SESP will be looking at these opportunities as part of its work programme in the year ahead.

Highlights

- Defra's Social Enterprise Strategic Partnership (SESP) established in December 2008.
- Peter Couchman, CEO of the Plunkett Foundation, was appointed to Defra's Third Sector Advisory Board to represent the interests of social enterprise. He also acts as the link between the Advisory Board and our Social Enterprise Strategic Partnership.
- Members of the Social Enterprise Strategic Partnership worked with the food policy team and Defra's social scientists to develop a bid to OTS's 'Social Enterprise Action Research' programme. This was a competitive process and secured £60k of funding to implement the project which will look at the role of

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social enterprises in all aspects of the food sector in the South West region. This project will be implemented over the next 18 months.

- During the year social enterprise has been promoted through an event (Social Enterprise and the Environment); a field trip (to food based social enterprises) and features on the Defra third sector blog which include guest posts from our strategic partners.

5 Creating a framework for greater environmental leadership in the third sector

Objectives

- To act as a catalyst to help bring together existing activities, tools and good practice on embedding sustainable development within the organisation, including improving environmental performance, and to mainstream these within existing sector support programmes.

Out of the 7 total commitments on this issue in the strategy 1 action has been completed. 2 are ongoing. There has been no progress on 4 commitments.

Analysis

Many of the strategy commitments under this theme are being taken forward under the aegis of the Ministerial Task Force on Climate Change, the Environment and Sustainable Development set up in May 2009. The task force was set up to consider the role of the sector in moving society to a more sustainable way of living. It is designed to be action-oriented, and to focus on what needs to be done by the sector, by government, and in partnership. Ministers from four departments, Defra, DECC, CLG and OTS, are leading the Government's involvement. The task force has brought together representatives from a diverse range of organisations, not just those with an environmental mission, to highlight the leadership role the sector can and should play in response to the challenges of climate change, sustainable development and the environment. Secretariat support has been provided by the Green Alliance and NCVO.

The task force's report will be published early in 2010 and will form the basis for ongoing work between government and the sector.

Highlights

- The Ministerial Taskforce was strengthened considerably by CLG joining the original departmental partners.

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- The Ministerial Task Force met for the first time on 15 June 2009 and the third sector partners have met throughout the summer to work on the commitments the intention is to publish early in 2010.
- Defra and DECC Ministers, Huw Irranca-Davies and Joan Ruddock re-affirmed their commitment to the Third Sector Declaration on Climate Change and a number of third sector organisations signed it for the first time.

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6 Improving our listening to, and communications with, the third sector

Objectives

- Increase opportunities for more effective two-way dialogue and co-design in policy development and implementation.
- Enhance the quality and culture of partnership working across the Department, between Defra and third sector stakeholders, building relationships and mutual trust.
- Improve our third sector stakeholder engagement to become more strategic and consistent.
- Ensure that smaller, BME and hard to reach third sector groups have a voice in policy development and implementation, making best use of using existing mechanisms where possible.

Out of the 8 total commitments on this issue in the strategy 4 actions are ongoing. No progress has yet been reported on 4 actions.

Analysis

A number of the commitments under this action have been discharged through the innovative application of Web 2.0 technology. The Defra third sector blog was launched as a pilot in April 2009. This is linked with images and video material stored on Flickr and YouTube respectively. The blog provides a comprehensive dialogue on the activities of Defra that relate to the third sector team and highlights the activities of key stakeholders. It also provides a channel for comments and feedback from readers. Visitors are able to subscribe to the blog and receive alerts when new material is posted. Around a quarter of subscribers to the blog are within the 'Defra family' and so the blog performs an important function of raising awareness of our activities both internally and externally. In the coming year we will work to promote the blog more proactively to the third sector.

We also recognise that more work is required to broaden the range of communications channels we make use of and to this end we have established a Diversity sub-group of the third sector Advisory Board to recommend on how we can reach 'hard to reach' groups. We have also supported the publication of the Every Action Counts Diversity report and the 'The Environment Sector and Race' event.

Progress report – Renewing the way we work with the sector

Highlights

- Defra Third Sector blog launched in April 2009 and covers many of the commitments in this section.
- A dedicated group of the Defra third sector Advisory Group has been set up to consider diversity.
- The third sector team were nominated and reached the finals of the National Compact Awards for ‘Excellence at a National Level’.

7 Understanding the sector better

Objectives

- Improve understanding in Defra about the distinctive characteristics and diverse nature of the third sector and the different approaches which can be used to engage.
- Improve understanding about the independence of third sector organisations and the practical application of this to our third sector relationships.
- Improve clarity within Defra about the distinction between the strategic and delivery roles of third sector organisations.

Out of the 12 total commitments on this issue in the strategy 1 action has been completed. 8 are ongoing. No progress has yet been reported on 3 actions.

Analysis

We have done a lot over the last year to set in progress work that will greatly improve understanding of the third sector in Defra. We have set in train work to develop our systems to better understand the relationship between Defra and the Sector as consultees, and initial work has taken place to map the experience of third sector organisations when working with Defra, to improve how Defra does business with the sector as we move forward. To help improve understanding of the sector within Defra we have seconded in a respected member of the sector to work with Defra policy areas, helping them understand issues such as the sector’s fiercely guarded independence. As this activity continues over the next year, it should help Defra better understand the diversity of the third sector, its contribution to the outcomes we share, and what we in Government can do to support them.

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Highlights

- The Head of Defra's third sector team was seconded from ruralnet|uk and is proactively working across Defra to improve understanding of the third sector across the organisation.
- Defra's third sector Advisory Board will be taking forward a mapping exercise to better understand Defra's third sector stakeholders.
- Our Social Enterprise Strategic Partnership in association with the Economic and Social Research Council delivered an event open to all Defra staff to give them a better understanding of the role of social enterprises.
- British Waterways staff and their management board attended Defra's 2008 Volunteering Fair and took part in a Tow Path Tidy Up Project.
- The Social Enterprise Strategic Partnership has organised a visit to two social enterprises for Defra staff, with the core theme of 'food'.
- 'Customer Journey Mapping' work has been set in train to look at the experiences of third sector organisations when they engage with Defra in policy development and applying for grants and it is hoped that this will be very useful in helping Defra better tailor its interaction with the third sector on these two key areas.

8 Joining up what we do

Objectives

- Work with third sector partners to help understand and facilitate links between Defra policy priorities and those owned by other Government Departments.
- Join up communications across Defra's different third sector stakeholder groups, that each relate to different Defra policy areas, in order to add value to the delivery of Defra's top priorities.

Out of the 3 total commitments on this issue in the strategy 3 are ongoing.

Analysis

Given the breadth of expertise, and the range of interests, of Defra's third sector stakeholders, joining up what we do is vitally important. Effective communication has been the key to progressing this objective. Since the publication of the strategy, we have used the Defra third sector blog as a means of disseminating information about Defra initiatives and priorities to all our main third sector networks. This has helped

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us to highlight key opportunities and synergies. We support the Defra third sector Advisory Board in this regard, ensuring that they have access to the right information across Government to be able to develop a targeted work programme. We have built on our already good relationship with the Office of the Third Sector by taking time to consider emerging, strategic issues – which has been particularly helpful in helping prioritise our work. These individual strands have led to an environment in which our work with the sector, and with colleagues across government, is more transparent and more collaborative. A good example of this is the Joint Ministerial Task Force on Climate Change, the Environment and Sustainable Development – envisioned in the Strategy to involve Ministers from Defra, DECC, and OTS, it soon expanded to involve CLG as well, and we are involving officials from other departments in discussions of its emerging work. While there is still work to be done – joining up what we do is an ongoing task – we have made significant inroads by being open, honest and inclusive.

Highlights

- REalliance and the Waste and Resources Action Programme (WRAP) are developing a balance scorecard that values environmental, economic and social outcomes.
- The Defra third sector blog is being used as a resource containing information and links relating to Defra's policy initiatives.
- The third sector Advisory Board's developing work programme reflects the importance of joining-up agendas with other Government Departments – a strong link has already been made to the work of the Joint Ministerial Task Force on Climate Change, the Environment and Sustainable Development.

9 Better partnerships, building on existing mechanisms

Objectives

- Build on the Defra Compact Group and Defra Social Enterprise Forum, to establish more strategic partnerships with senior Defra representation
- Improve the consistency and effectiveness of third sector stakeholder engagement procedures across the Department and make the most of existing ongoing relationships with key third sector stakeholders
- Adopt a clearer distinction between strategic relationships and delivery relationships

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Out of the 8 total commitments on this issue in the strategy 1 action has been completed. 5 are ongoing. No progress has yet been reported on 2 actions.

Analysis

This section concerns cross cutting actions we have been putting in place to ensure better working with the sector: Many of these are already bearing fruit while others have set in place effective partnerships for future working. A third sector Advisory Board has been created, as has a Social Enterprise Strategic Partnership. These groups have in place forward work programmes that will enable them to operate at a strategic level and further strengthen the relationship between Defra, its delivery bodies and the third sector. Defra's third sector team and also the third sector blog have been playing a role to ensure that Defra staff are more aware of potential third sector partners and the best ways to engage them. Looking forward, Defra's third sector Advisory Board and third sector team will continue to promote OTS initiatives within Defra.

Highlights

- The Defra third sector Advisory Board was established in March 2009 to succeed Defra's Compact Group, and is made up of a high calibre membership. The board met formally for the first time May 2009, with Huw Irranca-Davies attending this first meeting.
- Defra's Social Enterprise Strategic Partnership (SESP) established in December 2008, is made up of representatives from: The Plunkett Foundation; Social Enterprise Coalition; RISE; DTA and Co-operatives UK. The role of the partnership is to raise awareness within Defra to the role social enterprises play in the delivery of Defra's policy objectives.

10 Enabling our delivery bodies

Objectives

- To work with our relevant executive agencies, NDPBs and delivery partners to together improve our collective understanding and awareness about how to improve engagement of third sector organisations – for example as our delivery partners, service providers, suppliers, expert advisers, advocates and independent intermediaries.
- To develop a more consistent approach across the Defra Network in the way organisations engage third sector organisations.

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- To better understand Defra delivery body relationships with particular third sector organisations and identify opportunities for more collaborative working across the Defra Network with these organisations to promote increased efficiency and effectiveness.

Out of the 9 total commitments on this issue in the strategy 1 action has been completed and 7 are ongoing. No progress has yet been reported on 1 action.

Analysis

As Defra itself is not a delivery organisation, it relies heavily on its agencies to deliver its policy outcomes. Therefore the relationships between the agencies and their third sector organisations are critical for Defra delivery. Defra agencies generally have very good relationships with the third sector and we have been encouraging them to formalise these arrangements into third sector Policy Statements. We have invited our agencies to present to our Advisory Board, and Natural England recently shared views on how better to involve the sector as they move forwards.

Highlights

- We have supported Natural England, the Forestry Commission and the Environment Agency in the development and publication of third sector policy statements.
- Natural England met the third sector Advisory Board to discuss consultation, forward work and its work involving the third sector.
- Defra agencies attended a Defra workshop on working with social enterprises.
- Defra third sector team has been encouraging agency sponsor teams to make the organisations aware of the commitments in the third sector strategy.
- 65 Local Action Groups (LAGs) have been formed to implement the Leader approach (Axis 4) of the Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE). The Leader approach is a 'bottom-up' community-led delivery approach in geographically defined rural areas. LAGs are groups of volunteers from the private, public and not-for-profit sectors, who identify local priority needs and then select projects to be supported through RDPE to address them.

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11 Better commissioning practices and procedures

Objectives

- Improve our understanding of the goods and services that third sector organisations currently supply to Defra, and the future potential for a third sector supplier base.
- Improve the consistent application of the Government’s eight principles of good commissioning and Compact principles in Defra’s grant funding and procurement processes.
- Explore new ways of ensuring third sector organisations are able to fully respond to procurement opportunities and standard procurement procedures.
- Explore ways of taking into account the value of third sector providers in the procurement process.
- Encourage and enable commissioners at national, regional or local level who help deliver Defra policy priorities, including Defra’s biggest suppliers, to include third sector organisations in their own procurement processes and supply chains.
- Where possible, support capacity building or market development initiatives with potential third sector providers/suppliers related to Defra policies.

Out of the 10 total commitments on this issue in the strategy 2 are ongoing. No progress has yet been reported on 8 actions.

Analysis

Defra recognises the value of sustainable procurement, and is particularly interested where procurement can be made in a way that is not only value for money but which has social and environmental benefits as well, the sorts of benefits that are inherent in third sector organisations. We have been doing internal work to optimise our financial systems so we can better baseline our procurement activities that currently involve the third sector. Looking forward, as this work is verified, we will be able to explore how we can potentially enable the third sector to capitalise on Defra’s procurement opportunities.

We used a two-stage application process for the Greener Living Fund to reduce the burden on the sector. 112 ‘concept papers’ were received in the first round and then 17 organisations were provided with financial and technical assistance to work up and submit their final proposal. 8 organisations were successful in attracting funding for their projects.

Progress report – Renewing the way we work with the sector

Highlights

- Working closely with an OTS consultant, Defra's third sector team have been gathering information on the funding that Defra's delivery bodies have provided to the third sector and funded Defra's procurement division to carry out a similar exercise within core Defra. Defra's financial system has been updated to better differentiate the various types of third sector organisations.
- We have used the third sector blog to promote OTS guidance on delivering public services through partnerships and consortia to Defra staff.

