

**Third Sector Meeting with the Minister for Rural Affairs, Elin Jones AM  
12 December 2007  
11AM-Midday  
Conference Room 21  
Crickhowell House**

Attending:

Third Sector Representatives

Graham Benfield- Wales Council for Voluntary Action (WCVA)  
Claire Lawson – RSPCA  
Linda Pepper-Wales Association of County Voluntary Councils (WACVC)  
Constance Adams – (WCVA)

Welsh Assembly Government Officials

Peter Owen – Voluntary Sector Unit  
Huw Davies – Rural Affairs Business Unit  
Alun Streeter- OCVO  
Patrick Isaac – Rural Affairs Business Unit

**Introduction**

The Minister welcomed the group to her first meeting with the third sector. As this was the first meeting for the Minister with the third sector, the representatives explained briefly about the context of the National Assembly Voluntary Sector Scheme.

**1. Report on Third Sector Strategic Action Plan and how the Rural Affairs Department will take forward a departmental action plan**

The Minister introduced Peter Owen of the Voluntary Sector Unit who presented 'The Third Dimension', the Assembly Government's new Strategic Action Plan for the Third Sector to the group. The action plan had been launched at the WCVA conference in November, so the third sector representatives were familiar with the plan.

Specifically for the rural agenda, attention was drawn to recommendation 7d of the strategy:

*Ensure that the distinctive needs of the third sector in rural areas are appropriately recognised in guidance and in public sector activities.*

and 6a:

*Each WAG Department to work with the third sector to clarify the actions it will take in response to the Strategic Action Plan to further its remit, also challenge local authorities, AGSBs and other public agencies to take similar action to enhance this aspect of the third sector's role. Specifically, identify Departmental actions that will:*

- *enhance the contribution of volunteers*
- *strengthen the contribution made through community development approaches*
- *give a stronger voice to citizens' interests and concerns*
- *promote social enterprise approaches*
- *promote and support greater third sector involvement in design, commissioning, delivery and evaluation of quality public services*

It was noted that the Welsh Assembly Government was looking to the third sector to help it to deliver the 45 actions, and also to play an active role in public service design and delivery.

Peter Owen suggested that, as a first step, workshops could be arranged to a) 'map' the existing work being done within the portfolio to support and develop the third sector, and b) to identify potential new actions that could be taken to support the sector, so as to address recommendations 6a and 7d of the strategy.

**Action Point:** Workshop between third sector and Rural Affairs Heads of Divisions to be organised (**Lead: Peter Owen**)

The Minister brought the attention of the group to the One Wales commitment, to encourage work with the relevant local authorities to identify and address the particular needs of deep rural areas.

The Minister stated that she would be commissioning preparatory work on the issue in the new year, and will be looking to involve the third sector in the early stages for input as their experience in these areas will be crucial.

## **2. Presentation of the Carnegie Commission for Rural Community Development's Charter for Rural Communities.**

Graham Benfield, as a member of the Carnegie Commission for Rural Community Development, presented the Commission's final report, the Charter for Rural Communities..

The Commission undertook research and visits, as well as community meetings and focus groups, which led to a distilled analysis of what is common to successful thriving rural communities. Broadly, the findings were:

- Community ownership of Assets
- Strong local governance
- Strong social networks

With the enabling factors of:

- Growing capacity
- Enhancing community assets (Building capital)
- Increasing the scope of the community in the planning process (Realising participative community planning).

Graham Benfield went on to explain that the Charter's 41 recommendations or actions are for government (the different relevant Assembly Government departments); the third sector; and the Carnegie Trust UK. The third sector was asking from this meeting that the relevant departments of the Assembly Government, under the auspices of the Minister for Rural Affairs' Department, would look at the recommendations to consider what could be taken forward. Graham Benfield stated, *'We believe that the Charter makes sense of rural community development, and makes the coherence and rationale for a strategy [for Wales], based on what people [communities] have said.'*

Graham Benfield went on to demonstrate the potential breadth of engagement across Welsh Assembly Government departments. For instance 'optimising assets' includes land and buildings, linking to activity such as the Community Land Trust addressing the need for affordable housing, but also links to investing in communities to generate local resources. WCVA is already committed, with support from Carnegie, to a conference in 2008 on asset transfer. 'Fairness' links to the Financial Inclusion Strategy and the work of the Citizens Advice Bureaux on what support is needed for local campaigns to ensure money is brought into the local community and kept in the local community. 'Local governance' is about community councils and their role and also community planning and how this fits into Community Strategies: currently there is Carnegie funded action research in both Pembrokeshire and Powys which will inform Community Strategy guidance. 'Financial resources' focuses on making access to funding simpler, how to replicate success, and a longer period for rural development: WCVA can contribute by creating a Wales Rural Funders Forum giving a rural focus that does not exist at the moment.

Peter Owen pointed out that the links with the work on the Third Sector Action Plan, (the Carnegie Charter is referenced in section 5.17), and that the department action plans offered the potential for ensuring not only that the distinctive needs of rural communities were included in the mainstream activity of public/private/third sector interaction, but also gave most of the actions for the Rural Affairs department action plan.

The Minister welcomed the Charter's recommendations as good and focused actions, and that she wanted to see what might be workable in the Welsh

context. Elin Jones invited the third sector to '*work with us on working through its recommendations*'

**Action Point:** Business Unit to circulate Charter to Rural Affairs divisions and;

- Undertake an exercise to match policy commitments to the charter;
- Gain feedback to where Charter actions could be incorporated into current/future Rural Affairs policy

### **3. Budget report from the Rural Affairs Department**

The Minister asked the group to note the following amendments to the report:

The 2008-09 budget should read a 9% increase in 2008-9 (not 4%) and a further 2% (not 3%) & 2% year on year increase in subsequent years.

Business Unit officials were asked to identify the location of the funding streams for the third sector such as for the Rural Forum Website and the Rural Regeneration Unit

**Action Point:** Business Unit to identify funding streams to the third sector outside the meeting.(Huw Davies)

### **4. Report from the Minister on progress made implementing the Voluntary Sector Scheme**

The report was welcomed by the Group and it was suggested that it:

- Could include case studies from the Rural Affairs Department and third sector
- Be circulated to the third sector for input prior to meeting

**Action Point:** Progress report to become a joint report for the next meeting (Patrick Isaac and Constance Adams)

### **5. Report from the Welsh Assembly Government on their intention to legislate for circuses**

The Minister invited Alun Streeter to present the paper.

It was noted that:

- The paper presented was self explanatory.
- There are no Circuses based in Wales.
- The Circus report from Defra looked critically at transport and circus housing, and showed that animal welfare was acceptable in the winter quarters. It found no evidence of welfare abuse
- Mori poll indicates use of non domesticated animals in circuses is unpopular.
- Any proposals for legislation would apply to non domesticated animals.
- Would apply to a total of 47 animals across Great Britain so there is an issue of proportionality.
- Minister confirmed she would be meeting the independent Chair of the Circus Working Group report, in February 2008.

The Minister invited the third sector to comment on the paper:

Claire Lawson reported that the third sector were disappointed with the Circus report from Defra itself. The research appeared to be based on market concerns and not animal health and welfare issues.

There was also concern over a declaration in the executive summary of the report that the decision must be based on scientific evidence; all other considerations (e.g. public opinion) being made extraneous in the context of section 12.

Claire Lawson went to state that an All Party Group would be responding to the Assembly Government on the report, alongside a public campaign.

The Minister noted the concerns and offered to raise them with the Chair of the Report at their meeting in February 2008.

## **6. AOB**

It was agreed that the next meeting to be organised for June 2008. April 2008 as a small interim meeting to enable progress on the Carnegie Charter recommendations.

Third sector suggestions for agenda items to be included: (i) Bovine TB (ii) Rural Development Plan (iii) the report from action point 2 on taking the Carnegie Charter recommendations forward linking with the Third Sector Departmental Action Plan.

**Action Point:** Business Unit to arrange next meeting.