

**VSCE Funding Review Meeting – 9 February 2015**  
**Notes from discussion**

Attendees:

|                                  |                  |
|----------------------------------|------------------|
| Age UK                           | Emma Bingham     |
| WHEC                             | Annette Ashley   |
| Faith Action                     | Felicity Smith   |
| CSV                              | Jemma Mindham    |
| Friends, Families and Travellers | Chris Whitwell   |
|                                  | Zoe Matthews     |
| Women's Resource Centre          | Ila Chandarvakar |
| Sense                            | Sue Brown        |
| National Autistic Society        | Sarah Lambert    |
| Voice4Change                     | Kunle Olunlode   |
| Consortium of LGBT               | Rob Cookson      |
| Rainbow Trust                    | Christina Cahill |
| CITAS                            | Malika Hamiddou  |
| Compact Voice                    | Nehal Depani     |
| London Friend                    | Monty Moncrieff  |
|                                  | Trevor Anderton  |
| Race Equality Foundation         | Jabeer Butt      |
|                                  | Tracy Bignall    |
|                                  | Megan Wong       |
| Public Health England            | Catherine Davies |
|                                  | Tricia Rich      |
|                                  | Amy Sinclair     |
|                                  | Usama Edo        |

Attendees were invited to participate in a discussion regarding statutory funding to the VCSE sector for health and social care – this meeting was looking particularly at issues around inclusion and equalities.

The aim of the meeting was to begin discussions that could feed into the review findings. The notes from the meeting are shared below and it is hoped that discussion around the issues raised will continue online.

Notes:

1. What are the particular challenges faced in achieving funding and building partnership for organisations working with specific communities, or groups with protected characteristics?

- **Lack of funding for advocacy and infrastructure organisations**
    - Need to link the national and local; otherwise small groups don't have influence. This is the role of advocacy and infrastructure organisations
  - **Funding focuses on 'innovation'**
    - At the same time evidence is required, meaning it cannot be innovative
    - Contract arrangements do not favour innovation
  - **Increasingly less funding**
    - No coherent policy around where grants or commissioning is or should be used
    - Current financial climate necessitates we make savings and do more for less. This not always realistic as addressing inequalities isn't cheap
  - **There is a move towards generic services provided by big contracts**
    - Large providers promise to deliver things that can't because they don't have the specialist knowledge
    - When a big provider wins a contract, they then come to the smaller organisation for help, only giving them a small amount to carry out the work
    - Almost impossible to build tender partnerships. Partly due to the timescales with not enough time to consider relationship and power dynamics
    - It feels like bigger providers are favoured – commissioners have a lack of resources and therefore prefer a relationship with a single, generic provider
    - Small organisations aren't able to negotiate with large numbers of LAs. So it is difficult to ensure LAs consider the needs of our communities/ groups in contracts
    - Smaller contracts go to bigger charities meaning small charities still miss out
    - Larger charities should actively seek the expertise of smaller charities, currently the other way round
    - Commissioning tends to deal with symptoms rather than taking a holistic view
  - **We don't get sought out by local commissioning groups**
    - There is no standard when it comes to CCGs, some are good and some are bad.
    - CCGs may seek out large organisations, but they don't seek out small, local ones
    - Organisations face difficulties when they work across more than one LA with different commissioning practices
- Q. *What could be done in response to this challenge?*
- Example: PHE guidance around drug and alcohol, this prompt made it difficult for commissioners to ignore the issue

Q. *What could the systems partners do?*

- The guidelines that go out to local commissioners needs to encourage partnership working and engagement with protected groups for example. Anything that encourages commissioners to think about what service

specifications they are going to set. And performance management, if you're going to get serious about working with protected groups then you need to set group specific outcomes

- Systems partners could help us build partnerships and relationships
- 2. Some charities and causes are more appealing to the general public than others. Should central government or local statutory organisations focus more support on those charities or causes less likely to attract charitable donations because they are less well-known or popular, or which affect a smaller group or community?
- 3. There is evidence that work with some groups and communities is more likely to be affected by funding cuts than others. Should central government or local statutory bodies direct their funding to compensate for any disproportionate impact?

- **Politics can get in the way of meeting need**

- Prevented from working with groups that might bring in adverse publicity
- If the JSNA doesn't prioritise your group/community/area of work then this isn't going to be a part of their service
- Lack of long-term understanding; if you don't deal with the health issue at the start (even if it starts in an unpopular group) then it becomes much worse and more expensive to deal with. And, can spread to the wider community.
- Need to (and can) demonstrate the impact of cuts to funding and services

- **Need to support for smaller organisations**

- Sustainability: large organisations are seen as more sustainable and so are more likely to receive funding. This married with short-term funding means smaller organisations cannot become sustainable.
- Capacity building: need to support the capacity of smaller organisations to tap into funding

- **'Success' can bring challenges**

- Outcomes should use cyclical measurements rather than linear analysis

- **What are we missing?**

- Need to ensure we are not missing groups in commissioning
- This includes vulnerable groups that are less able to have a loud voice
- We should be looking after the people who really need our help. If you are trying to look out for the most excluded 1% you will spend more and get less in terms of outcomes. But this is the ethical necessity at the heart of this section.

- **What could be done?**

- Ring-fenced funding for the most vulnerable (although this was challenged as potentially allowing for mediocrity)
- Capacity building might support better access to funding, this could be for those not achieving much funding for missed causes

- Wanted to hear more about the social value act and the impact that could have

4. A key feature of the VCSE sector has been its willingness to challenge discrimination and inequality. Do new models of funding compromise the sector's independence? What examples are there of how the statutory and VCSE sectors can work together to maintain VCSE organisations' role as critical friend and champion of those who are excluded or marginalised?

- **What works well?**

- Funding of engagement work
- Strategic Partners Programme

- **What is more difficult?**

- Results of work carried out are ignored by systems partners because they are challenging – leads to question of ownership of research as if report is 'sat on' but owned by the statutory organisation that funded it, it is a way of silencing VCSE sector
- Fear that being critical could lead to withdrawal of funding or not getting contracts
- VCSE organisations bang the drum for their own causes without considering how they could work together to get support
- Too much of a focus on cheapness on the part of commissioners – rather than long-term value
- Translating national policy into delivery – needs someone/organisation at grassroots level driving change
- Challenges from within the sector include: competition between organisations (rather than co-operation), high staff turnover etc.

- **What could be done differently**

- Support from strategic partners should go beyond money
- VCSE sector needs to learn how to be critical while not alienating SPs