



# Comprehensive Spending Review: Review of the future role of the Third Sector in social and economic regeneration – joint Cabinet Office and HM Treasury consultation with the Third Sector

## Introduction

Barnardo's is pleased to have the opportunity to respond to this consultation from its position as a leading children's charity. The response is based on its knowledge and experience as a third sector organisation delivering services to the most vulnerable children, young people and families across the United Kingdom, and its vision for the future. Currently Barnardo's 380 projects work with over 110,000 children, young people and families each year who experience poverty, abuse and discrimination.

The Third Sector as a whole is diverse, and while Barnardo's perspective is from the position of a large player its response acknowledges that conclusions for the sector as a whole must also take account of the presence and consequences of many small community organisations, and their particular contributions across all six themes.

Each of the six themes is considered below in turn:

### 1. Cohesive communities and building voices for citizens

At the present time many local authorities are preoccupied with the changes that they are facing and adapting to their own new structures. Building working relationships with local communities and smaller charities is often at an early stage, although a few authorities appear to be beginning to realise that the new contracting culture is not accessible to many of them.

Local communities will need considerable support to ensure that their voices are heard. Culturally specific voluntary organisations and services have the capacity to outreach to a wider range of communities, but may need the support and infrastructure of larger charities acting as lead agencies. Barnardo's has more than 40 services where over 50% of the service users are from black and minority ethnic communities, and in a number of instances they are successfully working in partnership with local community groups. This helps the local community to access resources to develop local services, whilst providing the local authority funder assurance of a greater degree of representation of diverse groups.

It is possible to frame funding in such a way that consultation with the community is a prerequisite for service development and that local contributions, for example through volunteering, membership of steering groups and feedback on community satisfaction are encouraged. This will go some way to addressing the concern that services are imposed or reflect narrow interests, rather than derived from local needs. As a result service take-up is enhanced and more staff are employed from local, diverse communities, contributing to local social and economic regeneration.

Diverse groups can contribute to shaping the mechanisms and systems needed to address the overall high level needs of the local communities, without losing their own identities or distinctive solutions for particular communities where applicable. For example a Barnardo's project which responds to domestic violence in a local South Asian community can also contribute its knowledge and learning to service development in the locality around domestic violence across communities.

## **2. Partnership working to deliver a shared agenda**

Partnership working will only be effective if the parties have respect and understanding for each other – moderated by sanctions if the reasonable and agreed expectations of either party are not met. At the present time the compact, particularly at local level is either unknown or ignored in many authorities. This does not form a good basis for partnership working.

Examples from regions include the arbitrary withdrawal of funding, lack of clear feedback on unsuccessful contract bids, and a definition of local authority full costs which, because of local authority pricing mechanisms, exclude costs which the third sector cannot ignore and survive.

There is an urgent need in some local authorities for action to be taken to shift the culture to work more effectively with the private and third sectors. To argue that little can be done centrally is not convincing as there are a number of tools available to central Government to assess what is occurring and implement change. When a third sector service provider is delivering effective outcomes five year contracts make much more sense. Shorter contracts destabilises the workforce across the voluntary sector and has a direct impact on future abilities to provide public services in partnership. When this occurs it is interpreted as a weakness of the sector rather than a weakness in partnership working.

Partnership working can be hindered by tensions and unnecessary competitiveness between third sector organisations. These tensions may be fuelled by, for example, limited funding and opportunities for influence, and assumptions about levels of knowledge and understanding of other diverse, different, groups. If needs assessments are used and targeting is transparently based on this some problems can be resolved, but others based on inherent conflicts of ideas and interests cannot be readily resolved in the short term.

Barnardo's has had, and continues to develop, a wide range of successful partnerships with the private sector which can enhance service delivery of projects. Contributions can range from one-off assistance with decorating to, with the appropriate CRB checks and references, mentors for children and young people. Employees Supported Volunteering (ESV) can be cost effective and also

contributes to more cohesive communities by engaging different members of the community. It is suggested that ways in which companies can be provided with financial incentives to develop these initiatives should be explored.

### **3. Promoting innovation and enterprise**

Local authorities are increasingly recognising that the third sector is in a strong position to provide innovative and imaginative approaches to the delivery of new work for users. Barnardo's is very interested in trying new ways of working with children, young people and families in partnership with local authorities who recognise the potential of working with organisations such as ourselves to improve public services.

Commissioning to outcomes and engaging the widest range of providers in the discussion about the shape of future services, where this is occurring, is a significant step towards promoting innovation. One Barnardo's regional Director commented "Local common sense and imagination applied to the motivation to achieve better outcomes is a great spur to innovation".

Service development in Barnardo's is characterised by a real commitment to the participation of service users in the design, delivery and review of services. This leads to positive, and sometimes radical, changes. If service users become part of the problem solving process, they often offer a unique insight into possible solutions.

Social enterprises within the third sector offer an alternative means of funding services. Barnardo's itself is at an early stage in the development of a number of social enterprise initiatives which will maintain its ability to invest in areas of work where funding is more limited.

### **4. Creating a culture of volunteering and mentoring**

Steps to encourage a culture of volunteering assist the development of more cohesive communities as in most cases understanding of other groups, with different needs, is enhanced by the volunteer's experience. It also enables the community to access additional resources.

Funding support for volunteering infrastructure, particularly at a local level in the form of volunteer centres, is welcomed and helpful. However charities such as Barnardo's, with more than 11,000 volunteers, also provide a wide range of volunteering opportunities. There is still a significant untapped resource across all ages here, from which communities can gain.

It is important that the benefits system enables people to volunteer and seek employment rather than discourage volunteering. The recent decision on lunch allowances for volunteers gave an important message about the Government's understanding of and interest in volunteering which was heard and appreciated across the sector.

Often a prime barrier to volunteering is the uncertainty that exists about the nature of the task. Barnardo's has found that different ages and groups require a differential response to engage them in volunteering. For example we are currently reviewing our procedures in relation to refugees and asylum seekers, examining how to reward and motivate older volunteers who tend to stay longer, and developing "fixed term" volunteering for young people.

## **5. Future role of the sector in shaping and delivering public services**

Looking to the future the model of public services would be rooted in a strong preventative culture from the earliest age with emphasis on the child as part of the family in the community. Social care provision would be based on effectiveness not habit or tradition, and the mix between public, private and third sector would vary regionally according to this rather than other criteria. There would be local pride in the services available, and they would be accessible to all communities on the basis of need not postcode.


The role of the sector is a major challenge for the third sector for the future. At the present time it does not have many opportunities for shaping the direction and delivery of public services – it is, in the main, the commissioners who do this. If the voluntary sector are full members of bodies such as Children's Trusts there may be some opportunities to influence change. However at a local level as long as money is channelled purely through local statutory services it is likely that this problem will continue.

Mechanisms to ensure funding of the sector could include top-slicing some money to a more independent body to fund work by the sector. Alternatively and perhaps preferably, Government could take steps to ensure that there are significant incentives for the statutory sector to involve the third sector in the development of public services as well as their delivery. The local community should also have a voice to express what works for them and their views on the role of the third sector.

Effective activities by the third sector would have a greater chance of being replicated if mainstream public services were more rigorously evaluated. This would create a healthy and open debate about effectiveness and alternative methods which would open up mainstream services to scrutiny and wider discussion about what is and should be "mainstream" and where the third sector could deliver these services more cost effectively and to the greater satisfaction of local communities.

## **6. Creating a sustainable resource base**

Looking ahead ten years ideally, the proper implementation of needs assessed planning through transparent joint commissioning would lead to a wider range of third sector providers engaged in multi-agency service delivery at all levels of social need. The sector will have better infrastructure enabling consistent and accurate representation, and support for capacity building. In repositioning the importance of preventative work the sector will be able to reconstitute the role of social work beyond the limited range of tasks and responsibilities of current local authority practice, as



well as generate a wide range of 'para-professional' job descriptions permitting less well trained staff to use their skills in a professionally supervised and safe context. Funding will reflect both the need for secure core funding and the on-costs of specific service delivery, with 'true cost' comparisons being easily accessible between the third and statutory sectors.

Small community based organisations which can evidence a need will have security to sustain their core structure and access to capacity building to ensure professional standards of delivery and administration. Mutually useful partnerships will exist between themselves and private, public and third sector organisations.

If local authorities prove unable to reconfigure their services to allow scope for a wider range of providers in response to community demands, then it may be necessary for more deliberate action to be taken to facilitate the opening up of public service delivery. Otherwise public investment in services will continue to produce less effective services to communities than is possible.

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