



Dear Reader

Regular review of our activities is encouraged, so here you are. Since an emergency issue of the ARVAC bulletin in March 2007, when ARVAC lost all staff, this is the sixth issue of the bulletin. For the more quantitatively minded amongst you, half a dozen, in which 16 contributors provided 34 articles. Modest in numbers? Maybe. Insightful beyond numbers? Absolutely!

In August 2007 I wrote that "*We will not need to speak with one voice and we certainly do not need somebody claiming that they speak for all of us*", and I am grateful to all the contributors who have helped to live up to that expectation. The bulletin received contributions from across the UK as well as very personal accounts from practitioners. The expertise of contributors

helped to set into context a variety of subjects important to the Voluntary and Community Sector such as the Centre for Charitable Giving and Philanthropy and the Centre for Third Sector Research but we also learned about emerging unease, for example, expressed by the National Coalition for Independent Action.

In this bulletin I am particularly grateful to Richard Gutch who provides his assessment of the role of Local Infrastructure Organisations and again, I am sure not all of you will agree with his assessment, but this should be the forum where these issues can be discussed. Colin Rochester also encourages you to overcome consultation fatigue and comment on the latest vision of the conservatives for the Voluntary and Community Sector.

I am grateful to all contributors that they did not let the voice that this bulletin has provided for so many years fall silent.

A question usually following the review of activities. Where next?

I am suggesting that in addition to the Bulletin's role as a forum for more than one voice it will now also endeavour, over the next issues, to seek out the voices less often heard contrasting them, if possible, with those more well known.

I need you to help with this. Write for the bulletin, suggest contributors or subjects to be reviewed. I am asking nothing less of you than to take steps to become involved in this next phase of the bulletin

Jurgen Grotz
(editor)

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Richard Gutch

LOCAL INFRASTRUCTURE ORGANISATIONS ARE MORE NEEDED THAN EVER

Over the past few months, Richard Gutch has interviewed the chief officers of some of the larger metropolitan councils for voluntary service. The interviews form part of a project he is undertaking for the third sector recruitment agency, Prospectus, to find out about the challenges and opportunities third sector chief executives are facing. He has also just been co-opted as a trustee of the National Association for Voluntary and Community Action (NAVCA). This article sets out his reflections on the role of local infrastructure organisations based on his interviews and experience so far.

The need for effective local infrastructure organisations (LIOs) is as strong as ever. If they did not exist, the local third sector would very quickly be inventing them. Yet they face numerous challenges as they strive to develop in a relevant and sustainable way.

Policy context

One only has to have a quick look at today's policy context for the third sector to see why LIOs have such an important role to play. The sector's role in public service delivery, as well as its representative 'voice' role, are now at the forefront of government policy. Local Strategic Partnerships and Local Area Agreements are well established as the mechanisms for discussing and planning the sector's role locally, whilst the Compact, currently under review nationally, sets out ground rules for how effective partnerships should work.

The new National Performance Indicators for local government include promotion of volunteering and development of a thriving third sector. Two thirds of local authorities have prioritised these two indicators, whilst all of them will have their progress measured against them.

Localism is now firmly established as the direction of travel for government. The Community Empowerment White Paper spells out ways of ensuring local people have opportunities to influence the planning of local services and the shaping of their local areas.

In health and social care, service user involvement is being promoted through the establishment of Local Involvement Networks (LINKs) in every local authority area, whilst Every Child Matters promotes the role of the third sector in working with children and their parents. Similar initiatives have been developed in the field of employment training, work with ex-offenders and other areas of government.

Social enterprise is being heavily promoted as a new way of running services, combining business approaches and social objectives. As a result, the third sector now embraces a much wider and more diverse range of organisations. One of the persistent challenges is to ensure that small and medium sized organisations survive in this new world and that organisations serving particular groups, such as black and ethnic minorities, have the opportunity to grow and flourish.

Roles for LIOs

This fast moving, and ever changing, policy environment presents many challenges for the third sector, which they need help in responding to. LIOs are the bodies to provide this help. The four roles identified for them 30 years ago in the Wolfenden report on the future of voluntary organisations continue to be relevant, albeit played out in different ways today:

- Development e.g. helping new groups form to meet new needs like Voluntary Action Leicester's work with Somali groups or supporting the development of new ways of working like Voluntary Action Sheffield's work helping partnerships and consortia form to bid for public services, often in opposition to larger national organisations.
- Support e.g. meeting the organisational needs of local groups be it through Liverpool Charity and Voluntary Services community accountancy service or London Voluntary Service council's HR and legal service, as well as helping groups respond to new needs like tender readiness or responding to the personalisation and individual budgets agenda.
- Liaison e.g. working with the local authority on areas of common concern like Birmingham Voluntary Service Council's work with the City Council on commissioning or developing structures for enabling the third sector to contribute to the LSP, like Birmingham's Third Sector Assembly.
- Representation e.g. ensuring that the interests of the third sector are represented in policy debates and service plans.

The exact configuration of LIOs required for performing these roles in any given part of the country will vary according to history, geography, demography and other local factors. In Leeds, for example, there are 24 different LIOs – some providing specialist services (such as funding advice, HR and accountancy); some serving different groups (BME and disability, for example); Leeds Voice performing the representative role; and Voluntary Action Leeds per-

forming a generic information, advice and coordinating role.

At the national level, the National Association for Voluntary and Community Action (NAVCA) has now broadened its membership criteria to embrace the full range of LIOs, in addition to its traditional CVS membership.

Funding

Securing sustainable funding is a constant challenge for LIOs, especially since most funders prioritise front line service delivery rather than infrastructure support. Nevertheless, the past few years have seen an unprecedented level of investment through Change Up (Capacitybuilders), BASIS (Big Lottery Fund), LSPs (local authorities/PCTs) and LINks (Dept of Health via local authorities) with the prospect of funding for 'community anchors' through Communitybuilders (DCLG) next year. The big question is how sustainable all this funding will prove to be in the longer term and, in particular, how willing and able LSPs are going to be to provide continued funding.

A constant issue for LIO funding is how far they should be expected to generate income from fees for their services or how far they should be core funded. The attraction of the market model is that it ensures LIOs provide the services which local groups want and are prepared to pay for; the problem with it is that the very groups who most need the services are least likely to be able to afford them, unless funders specifically provide them with the resources to buy in the support they need (which may itself lead to fragmentation of services and unnecessary competition for scarce resources).

The core funding model, on the other hand, is generally preferred by NAVCA and LIOs because it can be used to encourage greater collaboration between support providers.

The downside is that it can perpetuate the survival of LIOs that operate within their own comfort zone. The tension between these two approaches is likely to continue, but LIOs are increasingly wanting to generate income from their services (to ensure greater independence), whilst grant funders, and LIOs themselves, will have to develop better ways of measuring LIO performance.

The move towards commissioning for services also has direct implications for LIOs, as local authorities increasingly decide to put LIO services, or aspects of the LIO role, out to competitive tender. In Manchester this resulted in the Scarman Trust (now the Novas Scarman Group) winning at the expense of Voluntary Action Manchester, whilst in Leeds, the Shaw Trust won the tender for the LINK service. These developments raise concerns about the potential disaggregation of the LIO role, the degree of local control of the LIO, and the extent to which the local third sector is involved in helping determine its priorities. Much depends on the way the service is specified for the tendering process and whether the need for local involvement is explicitly stated.

One development which is becoming increasingly common in the larger cities is the establishment of third sector resource centres, usually run by the CVS, with office premises for local groups as well as conference and training facilities for hire. Voluntary Action Sheffield recently opened the Circle, a new £5m centre for the sector, where VAS is based along with 10 tenants. Similar centres exist or are planned in Manchester, Nottingham, Leicester, Liverpool, Birmingham and Leeds. As well as providing a tangible focal point for the sector in the city, these centres have the potential, over time, to generate valuable unrestricted income.

Looking ahead

The continuing need for effective LIOs is unquestionable. The issue is how to ensure they are both effective and sustainable. We can expect to see more mergers along the lines of the CVS' in Cumbria, which have come together to form one LIO. With shared support services and a network of specialist and generic services across the county, integrated through modern IT systems, the county LIO is now better placed to provide a range of sustainable services to local groups across the area. Similar arrangements may be needed to ensure the survival of specialist LIOs serving the needs of, say, black and minority ethnic groups. By collaborating with generalist LIOs and working out who does what best, it should be possible to end up with a complementary set of, sustainable, services, serving a diverse range of groups.

Meanwhile, the development of commissioning will provide opportunities for expansion for some, whilst threatening the survival of others. The National Performance Indicators for local government will also provide opportunities for more work with local authorities to ensure the development of a thriving third sector and the promotion of volunteering.

The main cloud on the horizon is the likely squeeze on public sector spending and the probable end to some of the major grant programmes like Capacitybuilders in 2011. LIOs locally and bodies like NAVCA nationally will need to mount strong arguments to demonstrate that LIOs are an essential part of third sector infrastructure – in both good times and bad.

Richard Gutch has held a number of senior roles in the third sector, most recently as chief executive of Futurebuilders England. He is now an Associate with Prospectus, a third sector recruitment company.

Colin Rochester

A new conservative vision for Voluntary Action

The Shadow Minister for Charities, Social Enterprise and Volunteering, Greg Clark, has described an important new book on “helping deprived communities to help themselves” published by the School for Social Entrepreneurs⁽¹⁾ as “a polite, but unmistakable, eviction notice to the established order”. He might equally well have applied this description to his party’s Policy Green Paper on Voluntary Action in the 21st Century.⁽²⁾

This is a remarkably well written and readable polemic whose critique of government policy towards the voluntary and community sector will make very uncomfortable reading for ministers, civil servants and the small coterie of national voluntary agencies who have associated themselves with the government’s agenda since 1997.

The tone is set in David Cameron’s foreword:

... our aim is not to change the voluntary sector, which is more than capable of changing itself as it sees fit. Rather, our aim is to change government: from being an object that gets in the way of civil society to being a force that gets behind civil society, open to and supportive of, the energy and initiative of a free and civilised nation.

A Stronger Society is rather more convincing as an attack on the current position and recent experience than as a set of proposals for the future and its analysis of what has gone wrong hits a series of nails firmly on the head. It begins by suggesting that the current government’s interest and investment in the vol-

⁽¹⁾ *Sustainable Paths to Community Development: Helping Deprived Communities to Help Themselves* by Don and Charlotte Young will be reviewed in the next ARVAC Bulletin.

⁽²⁾ *A Stronger Society: Voluntary Action in the 21st Century*, Responsibility Agenda Green Paper No 5 available to download from www.conservatives.com

untary sector - including the creation of an Office of the Third Sector with its own minister and the expenditure of millions of pounds of public money on new initiatives – “has not been an unalloyed boon”. There are real anxieties about the “Government’s determination to apply bureaucratic-age practices to a sector which embodies vibrancy and diversity. It has too often regarded charities and voluntary groups as bodies that are to be instructed, rather than trusted.”

This approach, which the Green Paper describes as treating sector organisations as “not partners but servants”, is particularly wrong-headed when it comes to the delivery of public services where the government uses “targets, directives, legislation, inspection regimes and conditional funding to force people ... to operate in the approved way”. In the process it has lost sight of “Beveridge’s key insight that people and organisations are more ... ‘vigorous and abundant’ ... when given the freedom to act on their own initiatives than when ordered from above”. And it has led to the wholesale replacement of financial support through grants with contracts and a draconian commissioning regime.

The authors also argue that the Government’s approach to promoting volunteering has brought little return for the amount of time and money invested in it. This is because it is fundamentally flawed: instead of “directing support to grassroots volunteering organisations” Ministers have preferred to use a top-down approach and “lavish public funds on their own quangos, complete with the usual paraphernalia of such enterprises: designer logos, flashy websites, regional offices, PR consultants and expensive advertising campaigns”.

A third charge is that the Government has wasted a great deal of taxpayers' money on the ChangeUp programme and other attempts to build the sector's capacity. The Conservatives describe the implementation of these schemes as a "fiasco" which could have been avoided had it been shaped by the views of the sector rather than the preferences of Ministers. "We will have to wait for the NAO report to find out how many millions have been wasted as a result of these debacles, but our understanding is that this tale of woe is far from over."

And, finally, the establishment of the Office of the Third Sector has achieved little: "with very little clout with those departments and agencies which really matter to the voluntary sector, its real function is as a distributor of funding and as a setter-up of quangos – all founded on the presumption that a small group of Whitehall bureaucrats is best placed to shape the future development of Britain's charities and social enterprises".

This is a picture which may be highly coloured but is recognisable to many of us and it provides a stunning indictment of the way in which the relationship between Government and the sector has developed since 1997. But what would the Conservatives do to rectify the situation? Part of their answer is simply to "do no harm: we will value and protect the voluntary sector we've already got – one that sets its own priorities, raises its own resources and works for social change beyond the limits of the state". Similarly, their approach to promoting volunteering not only includes the need to encourage and invest but also "where necessary, simply get out of the way".

More specifically, the Green Paper envisages a return to grant-based funding for many kinds of activity with contracts re-

served for areas where they are essential: "it should be possible for government bodies and local authorities, who are familiar with the work of charities and voluntary bodies over a period of time to trust them to make good use of public funds". The National Lottery would be reformed to ensure that funds were directed exclusively to the voluntary sector and not siphoned off for public policy purposes. Support for volunteering would be directed to grassroots volunteering organisations and the administration of funds for capacity building would be simplified by eliminating unnecessary layers of bureaucracy. Finally, the OTS would be replaced by a beefed-up Office for Civil Society "at the heart of government".

Overall A Stronger Society represents a radical rethink of the relationship between the voluntary sector and the state which goes beyond party-political point-scoring. After all, the key features of the current policy mix – emphasis on the delivery of public services; contracts; and major centralised initiatives in volunteering - are not inventions of the Labour administrations in power since 1997 but have their origins in the earlier governments led by Margaret Thatcher and John Major. It is therefore a significant document and it is to be hoped that voluntary sector organisations will be able to shake off the "consultation fatigue" that affects us all and respond to the invitation to comment on the proposals.

Responses should be sent to: James O'Shaughnessy, Conservative Campaign Headquarters, 30 Millbank, London SW1P 4DP 020 7222 9000

Colin Rochester is a Visiting Research Fellow at the Centre for the Study of Voluntary and Community Activity at Roehampton University.

Steven Howlett

Just another year for ARVAC?

Members and bulletin readers will be only too well aware that the last couple of years have been ones of re-building for ARVAC. We were always a small organisation but having paid staff sometimes made it feel we were much bigger. Life as a membership only organisation has of necessity been lived at a slower pace. This will not sound unfamiliar to many people reading this who themselves are part of community organisations. Trustees have never doubted that there is a role for an organisation like ARVAC to support community research, to bridge the gulf between practice and academia and to be a gateway into the sometimes mysterious world of research. And we have been lucky to be able to draw on the skills and knowledge of people who have been involved in this field for a long time. Last year I am pleased to say the trustee group grew adding more experience, but also different perspectives with board members from practice orientated organisations joining. There is however always room for input from members and we remain open to, indeed we invite, your ideas.

That ARVAC is needed is proven by the regular questions and queries that come via the website and by the growing list of people reading the bulletin. Research is always something people want to call upon to inform policy and practice but too often it is assumed it comes without any investment in developing good researchers, or infrastructure to support solid, practical research by communities and community groups. That is changing at last; as many of you will know a new Third Sector Research Centre funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), Office of the Third Sector (OTS) and The Barrow Cadbury Trust, is up and running.

Led by Professor Pete Alcock it has the grand aim to *conduct research and analysis to strengthen the evidence base for the entire third sector, including charities, social enterprises and small community organisations. It will work to deliver research into the effectiveness and impact of third sector organisations; mapping of the sector, and an enhanced understanding of its dynamics; specific research programmes of direct relevance to third sector policy and practice.*

Right from the outset Pete Alcock has made it clear that the Centre wants to work with ARVAC and partner us to reach organisations researching at the community level. And so I would draw your attention to our AGM and seminar of November 10th in Islington where Pete will be outlining further the research Centre's work and strategy. The seminar will be providing workshops of interest if you have never done research before, if you have experience, or if your job is to support community research or work with the results of community research. At the event we will be re-launching our guide to community research 'Getting Started' as a free download. I urge you to come along to this event. The event is being promoted with CUE East, Beacon for Public Engagement at the University of East Anglia, who also see the role ARVAC can play in making research accessible to the community and ARVAC thanks CUE for helping support the accessibility of this event.

We look forward to seeing you!

Steven Howlett
Vice-chair of ARVAC

The British Academy (2008) *Punching our weight: the humanities and social sciences in public policymaking. A British Academy Report.* British Academy: London.

Web: www.britac.ac.uk

Reviewed by: Fiona Poland, University of East Anglia

26th Sept 2008

A strategic objective of the British Academy (BA), which represents humanities and social science research, is to “contribute to public debate, foster knowledge transfer, and enhance... contributions of the humanities and social sciences to the nation’s intellectual and economic health and prosperity” (British Academy Annual Report 2006-7). This BA report seeks to do so by identifying barriers for government decision-making in drawing effectively on humanities and social sciences research (HSS) and to provide better evidence for public policy making, and recommending some ways to address the problems. These are organised in relation to knowledge use, knowledge production and ‘co-production’. This offers a chance to reflect on what the policy-relevant engagement of HSS researchers in public debate and knowledge transfer might offer for strengthening the community research input to policy making and through what means.

Most contemporary challenges facing policy makers (globalisation, needs for innovation, increasing life chances, for addressing ageing, changes in ideas about personal responsibility, welfare and participatory politics) are seen to cut across disciplines and departments. The report argues that HSS researchers can and do contribute distinctively to each of these areas by offering diverse concepts, evidence and ways for policy makers can access HSS contributions. Here they highlight the role of Third Sector organisations as intermediaries and champions for academic research in HSS disciplines, especially through policy networking.

The report is critical of the short-termism of most government research budgets, often commissioned through tender rather than peer review. Such research is less likely to generate a robust and culturally-sensitised evidence base to help horizon-scanning in uncertain times. They recommend more transparency in developing and commissioning policy relevant research and more publication of such research, which could also encourage broader

public access to and deployment of research available to policy makers. The report usefully notes a variety of existing Research Council and HEFCE-funded knowledge transfer schemes which again also could be more widely tapped into by communities and community researchers.

The limited range of incentives for policy engagement within the academic research funding system is identified as hampering policy-relevant HSS knowledge production. Research Councils and HEFCE and Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS) are urged to do more to equip HSS researchers to meet the needs of different user communities, increase the impact of research, enable multidisciplinary training and networking through academic centres. They also warn against adopting narrow measures of research performance, whether in assessing organisational or individual performance, act as disincentives to research which impacts on policy making.

The Academy’s discussion of ‘co-production’, bringing researchers and policymakers together to facilitate knowledge innovation and knowledge transfer, recognises the need for more dialogue in shaping both research and policy making. They call for the strategic Research Council forums to include a wider range of representatives from other sectors including the Third Sector. They also propose the BA should create awards for HSS researchers, policy makers and others who boost research and public policy engagement.

This report marks a move to build a role for HSS as facilitators of public policy engagement, through identifying ‘cross-cutting’ challenges and topics for strategic initiatives. It offers some insights for community research for areas of possible alignment of interests with this group and resources through which to build policy making partnerships.

Fiona Poland is a Senior Lecturer in Therapy Research at University of East Anglia

EVENTS

if you want to tell us about upcoming events please email me on j.grotz@roehampton.ac.uk and we try to include it in the next edition

A Regional Studies Association Working Group

on

Leading citizen- driven governance:

Collective regional and sub-regional leadership in the UK and beyond

at

Foresight Centre University of Liverpool

Monday 24 November 2008, 9.30am – 4pm

Organisers:

Professor Joyce Liddle, Nottingham Business School, Nottingham Trent University, Professor John Diamond, Edge Hill University and Dr Pip Tucker, Devon County Council

This is the second meeting of the research group in a series of three (the other will be held in Bristol early in 2009). It is open to academics, strategic and operational policy makers and practitioners from across the public and third sector agencies. We are particularly interested in the ways in which 'spaces' open up at the local level and the extent to which it is possible to observe how 'participation' influences and informs decision making. In Liverpool we want to explore the tensions this may create and how knowledge and understanding are 'created'.

We particularly welcome the attendance of early career researchers and PhD students, and a limited number of small travel bursaries will be made available for attendance. Numbers will be capped, so please register your interest early. A comprehensive programme for the day's events will be available on registration.

Please email your interest in this event to: diamondj@edgehill.ac.uk

The NCVO/OnBoard Trustee Conference, Governance that works: Leadership that inspires 6th October 2008, London.

Are you looking to improve your board's effectiveness? The NCVO and OnBoard Trustee Conference will provide delegates with practical advice, legal updates, tips and solutions to a wide range of governance issues.

All delegates will receive a copy of the revised and updated Good Trustee Guide. Book online at www.ncvo-vol.org.uk/events or for further information

call 020 7520 2511 or 020 7520 2509.



**Community Research: Getting Started, Moving On
Islington Central Library. 10th November 2008
1pm – 4.30pm**

The Association for Research in the Voluntary and Community Sector (ARVAC) in partnership with Islington Voluntary Action Council (IVAC) is hosting a half day seminar on community research.

The seminar includes a re-launch of ARVAC's widely utilised research toolkit 'Getting Started' and a number of practical workshops covering diverse issues related to conducting community research. This seminar and toolkit will be of interest to community groups wishing to begin or to support research within the sector.

Keynote Speaker: Professor Pete Alcock

Head of School of Social Sciences University of Birmingham and Director of the new Third Sector Research Centre Presenting The Third Sector Research Centre and its plans for working with researchers and practitioners in the sector.

WORKSHOPS

Community Research: Getting Started. Key issues in approaching community research
Giovanna Speciale, Independent trainer and former ARVAC Community Research co-ordinator

Community Research in practice: Connected Care.

A research project involving training community members to become researchers to find out about the health, housing and social care needs of their community.

Kate Jones, Senior Research Advisor, Turning Point and Connected Care Community Researchers.

*Please turn over
for more information*

Community Research in practice: Croydon Community Against Trafficking (CCAT) a volunteer-run project reflecting local concerns about prostitution and possible trafficking. Anne Marie Simmons, Coordinator, CCAT.

Exploring funding sources for community research: Elizabeth Spratt and Helen Sender, research officers, Community Development Foundation.

Governance: Using the 'governance pages project web site' to improve governance. Kevin Nunan co author of the Joseph Rowntree Foundation governance report 'A lighter touch'

Information stalls

A number of stalls offering information, advice and resources on Community Research and the launch of Islington Library Community Research resource.

This seminar will be preceded by ARVAC's AGM which starts at 11.30 in the main hall to which all are invited

For more information, accessibility requests, to book workshop places and stalls please contact:

Louisa.hernandez@ivac.org.uk Tel: 020 7354 6376

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ARVAC thanks CUE East, Beacon for Public Engagement at the University of East Anglia, for helping support the accessibility of this event.



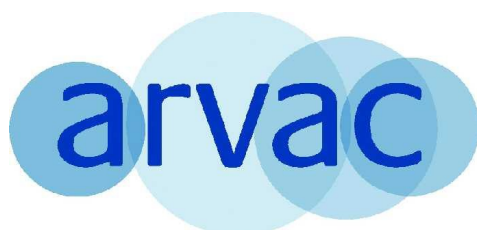
And Islington Central Library

The forum is open.

We launched an email discussion forum to encourage debate about issues raised within the bulletin. Everyone who has comments or questions about what is said within this bulletin can join. You will be able to read others' comments and post your own.

The forum is free and open to any reader of the bulletin. The forum will exclusively deal with discussion and not bombard you with general postings.

To join or to tell us why you don't think it's a good idea simply email ARVACGROUP@TISCALI.CO.UK.



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promoting effective community action
through research

About ARVAC

ARVAC (The Association for Research in the Voluntary and Community Sector) was established in 1978. It is a membership organisation and acts as a resource for people interested in research in or on community organisations.

We believe that voluntary and community organisations play a vital role in creating and sustaining healthy communities, and that research plays an essential role in increasing the effectiveness of those organisations involved in voluntary and community action.

We want to hear from you:

Please send us:

- News items
- Details of new publications, resources or websites
- Information about research in progress
- Meetings or events you would like us to publicise
- Comments or opinion pieces you would like to share with other ARVAC members

by e-mail to
j.grotz@roehampton.ac.uk