

Report on Third Sector Interface Forum Consultation Event 14 December 2010

1. Background information

The aims of the event were

- To inform the Third Sector about Interface developments
- To consult on the work of the Interface over the next 1-2 years
- To consult on the establishment of a Glasgow Third Sector Interface Forum and agree the structure and remit of such a Forum.

The event was attended by 36 people – most of whom had representative roles, being from member networks, intermediaries or forums that collectively represented 1663 third sector organisations in Glasgow. This is the largest representative gathering to have come together in a Scottish Local Authority Area to discuss the plans for its Third Sector Interface.

2. Introduction

Gerry Higgins from CEiS introduced the day by covering a brief history of the development of the Glasgow Interface. This included outlining the national recession, public sector cuts and the need for a new relationship with the Third Sector. The Interface developments in Glasgow has brought together GSEN (represented by CEiS), GCVS and the GVC to ensure the sector is better organised, more effectively supported and that it has a new influencing role.

3. Format of event

The event looked at three key areas of Interface development

- The issues and challenges facing the sector
- Prioritisation of support services based on sector needs.
- Gaining commitment for a Forum and discussion on how it should be structured.

The format of the event involved partners giving a brief introduction to topic leading into three separate round table discussions in four groups.

4. Discussion notes and decisions

Below is a synopsis of the discussion and decisions that took place.

4.1. Challenges facing the sector – Facilitated by Liz McEntee, GCVS

Liz McEntee contextualised the discussion by feeding back some of the issues coming from the recession research/survey work that GCVS has been doing with the sector over the past few years.

4.1.1 For your organisation, or your sector, what are the greatest challenges you face at present, or in the coming year?

Key Issues

- Funding and resources were a key issue for many of the organisations present with many organisation having faced years of frozen funding or cuts

- A feeling that everything was moving to income generation when not all organisations could be social enterprises
- Much tighter, bigger contracts often freezing out voluntary sector organisations – particularly small community based providers
- Increased competition from private sector and ALEOs
- A huge impact on sector pay and conditions
- A general feeling that the sector is not engaged in policy, planning and process and that things are done to them.
- A move to big and merged as opposed to small and local – with little consideration given to the impact on communities and the value of good local projects and services.
- Fear that inequalities will grow in the drive to save money.

4.1.2. *What is required to overcome these challenges? (being as realistic as possible)*

- Interface provided huge opportunity for
 - a collective voice for the Third Sector
 - better articulation of the scale, relevance and importance of the sector and the knowledge and experience that it brings to the City
 - space to discuss and prepare for the challenges faced by the sector and not always being in a back foot in terms of responding to change.
- The Third Sector needs to
 - Learn to embrace change and take ownership of its own responses e.g. share services better, work better together, reorganise around organisational goals or priorities
 - Be better informed on policy, structures and funding issues
 - Try to secure as much of their own funding as possible
- Statutory Partners need to
 - Understand the importance and relevance of the sector to the City outcomes including what small community based organisations bring to the City
 - Engage with the interface and the forum in a mutually respectful way
 - Involve the Third Sector fully in planning and decision making
 - Support the provision of adequate resources to ensure that the role the sector plays is well mapped, understood and articulated.
 - Support for volunteering
 - Support for the sector to contract for services

4.1.3. *Are there any new opportunities from the current economic situation that you would/could avail yourself of?*

- There will be more opportunities for volunteering and using volunteers within organisations
- Commonwealth Games contracts and sub contracts and other engagement e.g. volunteering
- Responding to need created by poverty and crisis (unfortunately)
- Delivery of public services
- To engage in reshaping public and health services e.g. reshaping older people's services
- Community clauses in tenders will open up opportunities

4.2. Priorities for Support Services – Facilitated by Helen Scammell - GCVS

The SG Interface support services funding available was contextualised early in the discussion,, as a small proportion of the overall budget the 3 agencies controlled and delivered (£300k of £6M+)

The expectation within the Workshop was that the 3 Interface support agencies would manage their affairs collectively to deliver the support services, informed by the insights, intelligence and feedback of their individual member agencies and each other, and not specifically by the Forum which would concentrate on external relations / Community Planning.

Priorities were identified as

- Change management including shared services, working better together, exit strategies, scenario planning, diversifying funding, enterprise development, mergers etc
- Learning events which inform and engage the sector in policy and change
- Tendering support
- Support for volunteering and volunteering organisations
- A continuation of good governance and employability/HR support e.g. pension work, redundancy support, equalities and health and safety.
- Continuation of good business development support
- Importance of continuing to support small organisation and new organisations
- Support for community enterprise and development
- One to many support e.g. training and events

4.3 Formation of a Glasgow Interface Third Sector Forum – Facilitated by Julian Clarke, Volunteer Centre Glasgow

Julian outlined the idea of a Voluntary Sector Forum which would work as part of the Interface and which have a remit of engaging with Community Planning.

4.3.1. *Do you think a new relationship with Glasgow CPP is a good idea, what would your priorities be to ensure this is meaningful?*

- It needed to be effective meaningful and mutually respected representation not tokenistic.
- Information and paperwork from CP being presented in good time especially when consultation was essential
- ideally there would be parity of representation between the public and voluntary sector but essential that there should be more than one representative on CP structures
- There was need for public sector leaders to come and speak to the sector more often - not just by committee.
- Forum's responsibility to ensure views are best represented but difficult to have one voice.
- A Forum could provide positive feedback to CP partners – not just criticising them, but praising them for providing resources to enable the sector to meet targets, and deliver quality services
- Should be a place to air views, share experiences, reflect reality, and help shape service delivery in the city to meet the changing circumstances in the city

4.3.1 *What kind of structure should the forum take and how could it organise the sector to engage with the public sector and with each other more effectively*

There was general agreement on the following

- The Interface Third Sector Forum itself should include any Third Sector organisation that wished to participate
- The Forum Executive being made up of representative bodies such as third sector network, intermediaries and forums to meet regularly to take forward the business of the Forum and communicate with the three Interface agencies
- There was a need for the development of Third Sector Strategies (and implementation plans) to inform the work of the Third Sector Forum and the Interface agencies, including their representation on community planning and other public sector structures. It was important that factions did not control agenda's.
- There should be at least one annual meeting of the full forum but possibly more depending on need. Possibly the first meeting agreeing the content of the strategies and looking at priorities for the Forum and Interface agencies.
- There was support for an interactive ICT platform of some sort to inform, communicate and consult with the wider Forum and having a communication strategy will be important
- Accountability was discussed in two of the round tables and it was felt that it was more important that the Forum was influencing the work of the three partner agencies and Third Sector strategies in the City.
- Relationships were felt to be more about influence, mutual trust and respect more than accountability for a small pot of money. It was felt that accountability for Interface money should be with the funding body/ies.
- Managing expectations needs to be addressed.
- Need to set out good processes and support for representatives.
- Review should be built in to ensure the Forum was working.
- Arrangements around the Forum – role, remit, accountability, responsibilities, reporting mechanisms structures of Interface - would need to be very clear, transparent, and have proper buy-in from the sector
- Address confidentiality of paperwork, advance notice of key issues, CPP will need to recognise that engagement will require some work.
- There could be an annual Conference, and in-year meetings
- The Forum would engage externally, but would also be a really valuable and important mechanism for the sector to meet and talk and pursue its own sectoral agenda, share information, develop ideas, and work more coherently together

5 Summary - Helen McNeil from GCVS

The formal business was closed with a short summary from Helen indicating that the mood of the day was a clear indication that a Third Sector Forum was needed and that there was enthusiasm from Third Sector Organisations to put time into its creation and operation. Participants had placed as much emphasis on the potential of the Forum to add value between third sector organisations as well as the opportunity of ensuring the Third Sector is a more effective partner with public authorities through representation on Community Planning and other relevant Forums.

The Interface support service partners indicated that notes of the session would be circulated, additional information regarding network membership would be gathered, and consultation to identify key networks and forums would continue so that a Third Sector Forum Executive or Management Committee could be formed in order to nominate a representative to engage with the CPP Executive, and to plan the business activities of the Forum for the year ahead.