

# Chief Officers Group in the Third Sector (COGITS)

## Note of meeting

22 April 2021

**Attendance:** Pamela Deans (DG Advocacy), Phil Stewart (DAGCAS), Clair McFarlan (Solway Firth Partnership), Sharon McMullan (TPS), David Barr (Aberlour), John Dougan (Relationship Scotland), Roland Chaplain (Glenkens Business Association), Craig McEwen (Inspired Community Enterprises), Grace Cardozo (Sleeping Giants), Emma Scott (Support in Mind), Ed Forrest (Galloway and Southern Ayrshire Biosphere), Senga Armstrong (DG ME & Fibromyalgia Network), Debbie Cochrane (Stewartry Care), Alex Dickson (DG Befriending Project), Perter Duncan (Dumfries Historic Buildings Trust), Kalpana Ratnam-Roarty (UCI), Trisha McWilliam (DG Care Trust)

**Present:** Anna Fowlie (SCVO), Norma Austin Hart (TSDG), Claire Brown (TSDG)

**Apologies:** Claudine Brindle (DG Carers Centre), Carolyn Kennedy (Better Lives Partnership)

Norma welcomed everyone to the fourth meeting of COGITS and apologies were noted. Attendees gave a brief introduction of themselves and their organisations.

### Scottish Parliamentary elections 2021

Anna Fowlie, CEO of Scottish Council of Voluntary Services led a discussion around the Scottish Parliamentary elections 2021 and the implications for the third sector (TS). Anna started by giving an overview of her thoughts on the impending election and the recent SCVO hustings:

- Two main issues identified – independence and Covid.
- Prevalence of on-line electioneering and social media
- SCVO hustings
  - identified 3 main themes: role of TS in Covid recovery, financial sustainability and climate emergency.
  - Party leaders appeared to understand the value of TS fairly well and understood that the sector plays a role in all aspects of society, but lack a real understanding of the scale and diversity of the sector, challenges of funding and the difference between the third sector and ‘communities’.
- Political manifestos included importance of TS in recovery (recognising that TS jobs are critical to recovery), a commitment to consider multi-year funding, digital inclusion, transport, parity of esteem and a ‘third sector first’ approach for public sector delivery.
- Apparent narrative that the TS is a good thing, but with a parallel narrative that where the sector is funded by the public sector, especially the Scottish Government then the sector is silenced.  
**Action:** Anna asked if people had experienced this and if so to contact her.
- Important to hold MSPs to account and deliver on promises.

The discussion was then opened to the wider group with the question ‘what do the group think are the important issues?’. The following points were raised:

- Perceived silencing of the sector
- Words not translating into action
- Importance of local decision making; work in a way that is right for our communities
- Relationship between local and national government; concern that centralisation is taking away from local government
- Devolving decision-making to people; communities are not the same as the TS – TS can be a route to communities.
- Community Empowerment Act reform – extend the Act to make it more impactful; how do you get to the people who really don’t have a voice?
- Shift of funding from public to third sector; invest in prevention to save money longer term.
- How does single-year government funding at both Westminster and Holyrood translate into delivering on a commitment to multi-year funding?
- Clear discrepancy between public sector and TS workforce conditions; despite single year funding at Government level public sector staff are not issued with redundancy notices, unlike TS reliant on short-term funding.
- TS income - increase independence by increasing income from grants and trading
- Fragility of TS at all sizes of organisation and the increased dependence on Government funding; but without these organisations key services would be lost.
- Shared Prosperity Fund – SCVO involved in the proposal for a replacement fund; could come through City Deals and initiatives like Borderlands.
- Ladder of participation; importance of meaningful, effective and inclusive partnerships to ensure genuine input into decision making – concern that engagement can be tokenistic and used by the statutory agencies to avoid responsibility.
- Voice of the sector – not enough to have one token rep around a table

### **Mentoring**

Norma gave a presentation on exploring the development of a formal mentoring model for individuals working in the third sector. Click [HERE](#) to access the presentation.

There was general support amongst the group for the proposed model.

Norma invited members of the group to participate in a short-life working group to take forward the development of a mentoring model.

**Action:** members to indicate their willingness to participate in a working group

### **Future meetings**

The next meeting of COGITS will take place on 19<sup>th</sup> August 2021.

The focus of the meeting will be the Regional Economic Partnership and development of the Regional Economic Strategy. SOSE will be invited to a future meeting to focus on food and energy.