



The CIU's regular update for voluntary & community groups in east London • Number 14

Government Announces Survey of Third Sector on Local Councils' Performance

The government's Office of the Third Sector has announced, in a briefing to Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs), that it intends to survey voluntary and community groups across the country to measure the contribution local government has made to "the environment in which independent third sector organisations can operate successfully."

This provides a welcome opportunity for voluntary and community groups in east London to have your say on the way your work is valued by local authorities.

The new performance framework for local government includes 198 National Indicators and performance indicator 7 will look at voluntary and community sector perceptions of how local councils give recognition to our importance to "strong active and empowered local communities." It also looks for our views on how much value is placed on the work of voluntary and community groups in providing responsive and effective local government and what positive influence local councils can have on issues such as consultation, partnership working and funding relationships. The survey will be conducted in two waves, in Autumn 2008 and 2010, with headline results published in the following year.

Under the new 'local area agreements' (LAAs) made with central government, local authorities can also choose 35 of the indicators as priorities, with specific improvement targets for each. Many, including Newham council, have yet to agree that National Indicator 7 will be one of its LAA

preferences. Central government is, however, arguing that Local Strategic Partnerships should choose this indicator for inclusion in their LAAs because "a stronger third sector would be an asset to every local authority" and that making National Indicator 7 a priority would be "the fastest route to achieving this."

Councils To Conduct Local Surveys

One of the drawbacks of the national survey is that it will focus solely on incorporated organisations, including registered charities, companies limited by guarantee and Community Interest Companies. Intriguingly, however, it will include Housing Associations, who have seldom been seen as part of the voluntary and community sectors. However, the Office of the Third Sector has also said that it is "keen to work with local authorities who might wish to survey local organisations outside of the main survey."

In Newham, the council has indicated at a recent meeting of the "Building an Active and Inclusive Community" partnership board that it intends to conduct such a local survey. This is an opportunity for the whole of the third sector - over 1000 organisations - to give their views.

Newham's second-tier groups, including the Community Involvement Unit, will seek to find out more information from the borough's Adults, Culture, Community and Customer Services department about how - and when - this local survey will be carried out and who will be asked to participate. We will also ask how we can help to ensure the maximum level of participation. ■

Why East London's Civil Society Matters

Speakers and workshops confirmed for Community Involvement Unit's Annual Conference

The Community Involvement Unit has confirmed a number of national speakers for its annual conference, which will take place this year on Thursday 6 November at Durning Hall Community Centre.

We are delighted that **Stuart Etherington**, Chief Executive of the National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO), has agreed to make a keynote speech. As independent voluntary and community groups are increasingly encouraged to become more like businesses, often by those who often fail to understand our role, Stuart will explain why we should celebrate the ways we are different from profit-making organisations.

Stuart will be joined by **Lisa Greensill**, from the Government Office for London. In east London, third sector organisations employ hundreds of people, involve thousands in voluntary activities and bring millions of pounds into the area, making them essential to communities and the economy. Lisa will discuss the growing recognition within government that without the voluntary, community and faith sectors, local authorities would struggle to develop and maintain active, cohesive, vibrant communities.



Jeff Masters [left] from the government's Office of the Third Sector, with Aston-Mansfield's Chief Executive, Ian Powell, at last year's conference.

Finally, the conference will hear from **Penny Waterhouse**, from the National Coalition for Independent Action, who argues that voluntary and community action forms an essential part of the checks and balances we need within our democracy. To play this role effectively, we must be able to act independently from local and central government and from other powerful interests. Penny will talk about the need to promote and demonstrate the value of independent voluntary and community action and, where it is needed, dissent.

This year, there will be five workshops (see left), repeated in the morning and afternoon sessions, that will look in more depth at some of the issues that highlight why civil society in east London is so important to encouraging stronger, more active and more participative local communities.

Registration for the conference costs £10 per delegate from voluntary sector organisations and £20 from statutory sector organisations. Voluntary and funded community groups who register by **1 September 2008** will be able to do so at a 50% discount – so make sure you book early! You should receive a registration form in the CIU Mailing..

For further information please contact Kevin Blowe, the CIU's Coordinator, on 020 8536 3825 or e-mail kevin.blowe@aston-mansfield.org.uk ■

Conference Workshops

Workshop A

Why demonstrating our credibility matters - getting governance right.

Workshop B

Where civil society excels - the value of community arts and sport

Workshop C

How do partnerships with the third sector benefit the statutory agencies?

Workshop D

The heart of the third sector's identity - why volunteers matter

Workshop E

Can trade unions and community groups work together to bring about change?

CIU publishes report on council commissioning

A survey carried out by the Community Involvement Unit for Newham ChangeUp asked voluntary and community groups in January 2008 about their experiences of the London Borough of Newham's "Grants-to-Commissioning" process. Our research found that many felt confused by the quality and consistency of information available and by the support they received for preparing bids.

Groups who completed the CIU's questionnaire, which was developed on behalf of the Newham Capacity Builders Working Group, shared common concerns about the tight timescale of commissioning and, with so many groups embarking on a largely unfamiliar process, about the amount of work that was therefore necessary to prepare and submit bids. Our research found evidence from respondents that the issue of allowing sufficient time for the process may not have been given sufficient weight in its planning.

There was also some criticism of the quality of the service specifications themselves and how they fitted with other services. Organisations that participated in consortium bids were more unhappy about the support they received than those who bid individually and a number were wary of the competitive nature of the partnerships that emerged.

There were clearer differences in opinion between larger, more experienced organisations and smaller groups, with concerns about a lack of confidence in skills and preparedness for commissioning as important to the level of information that was available. Throughout the responses to the questions we asked was a general lack of self-assurance about the process, especially amongst smaller groups.

On 3 April, Newham's executive Mayor, Sir Robin Wales, met the voluntary groups awarded contracts to deliver public services on behalf of the local authority and confirmed that Newham council will be conducting its own Commissioning Review, with an panel chaired by Marie Gabriel, the chair of Newham Primary Care Trust.

The decision to appoint a genuinely independent review panel is a very welcome development and the CIU urges local organisations to participate in its deliberations.

If you would like to be e-mailed a copy of the CIU's report "How Was Commissioning For You?", please contact us at ciuenquiries@aston-mansfield.org.uk ■

Important changes within the CIU

Amy White, the member of our Community Development Team who coordinated the *Next Steps* programme, has moved on to a new job with Westminster City Council. *Next Steps* is now run by **Jacqui Cocker**, following the end of funding from Capacitybuilders for our *Helping Communities to Grow* programme for refugee community organisations.

The **Local Network Fund** for Children & Young People is now closed, after five successful years that have seen £2 million awarded to more than 300 groups in the borough. **Marilyn Garber**, who took on the role of LNF Grants Administrator from Dennis Mensah in 2007, has moved on to work for a new charity based in Waltham Abbey.

The reduction in the size of our staff team, although we hope a temporary one, will have an impact on the capacity-building support we are able to offer to small organisations. Until we secure new funding, we cannot guarantee to see groups as quickly as we have been able to in the past and we ask that you bear with us until this situation changes. ■



Aston-Mansfield

Generating community wealth for social change

Community Involvement Unit

NETWORKING LUNCH

From Pocket To Project

Fundraising with
Individuals and Supporters

Wed 25 June

DURNING HALL CENTRE • 12pm to 2pm

- Sponsored Events • Online Fundraising •
- Using eBay • Motivating Supporters •
- Building Relationships •

BEGINNERS LEVEL ★★☆☆

See the CIU Mailing for a registration fee or contact Kevin Blowe on 020 8536 3825 or e-mail kevin.blowe@aston-mansfield.org.uk

YOU MUST REGISTER
IN ADVANCE

registration: **£3**

ESOL Exchange Network Goes From Strength To Strength

CIU coordinates new network planning conference in late May

The CIU has become increasingly aware, from feedback from local groups, of problems with co-ordination of ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) provision in Newham. Small community groups are struggling to signpost users, whilst voluntary sector community centres hosting ESOL classes are seeing a gap between what people need and what is available.

As a result, a small working group met to discuss ways forward and consulted with 25 community groups known to provide or regularly signpost to ESOL classes. This consultation provided evidence of gaps and barriers in relation to existing provision, and supported a proposal for the creation of an Information Exchange Project.

An initial ESOL Exchange event was organised by the working group in February 2008. This was attended by 28 people from 21 voluntary and statutory sector organisations, including the lead for a national consultation on ESOL at the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills. Participants gave a clear mandate to progress plans for establishing the ESOL Information Exchange and identified gaps and barriers with current provision. They also offered details of 34 sources of ESOL provisions locally. Almost half the participants volunteered to join a steering group that is now progressing plans for the

project's development, including a conference on 28 May 2008 in conjunction with NewCEYS.

A small grant from ChangeUp is covering the costs of a community development worker from CIU until June 2008 to begin a mapping exercise and support the steering group as it progresses its plans. If further funding is secured, the new project will:

- Build on the mapping process to develop and maintain a resource base of information on ESOL provision in Newham that is accurate and accessible to individuals and organisations.
- Develop and maintain an ESOL Exchange Forum for ESOL providers, student representative organisations, funders and facilitating organisations in Newham.
- Influence and negotiate locally, regionally and nationally, to improve communication and collaborative working between stakeholders involved in ESOL provision and participation.

If you would like to know more about the ESOL Exchange project, please contact Anne Crisp on 8536 3822 or e-mail anne.crisp@aston-mansfield.org.uk ■

NEWS IN BRIEF

New Quality Standard Agreed For Organisations Supporting Local Groups

The CIU has led on the development of a locally agreed set of 'capacity building standards' for second-tier organisations in the borough. Called **Capacity Building Newham**, these standards will enable voluntary and community groups in Newham who approach second-tier or 'local infrastructure organisations' for organisational development support to have a much clearer idea of the service they can expect to receive.

For a copy of the Capacity Building Newham standards, contact Ali Ahmed at Newham Voluntary Sector Consortium on 020 8519 9500 or e-mail ali@nvsc.org.uk

Community Centre Managers Publish Guide to Hiring Costs

The Community Centre Managers and Coordinators Forum, which is administered by the CIU, has published the 2008 edition of its **Centres Hiring Guide**, which includes information on the cost of venue hire for 15 voluntary sector managed centres in Newham.

A limited number of printed copies are available to our statutory sector partners but are also available electronically to any group who requests them.

If you would like a copy sent to you, please e-mail the CIU at cioenquiries@aston-mansfield.org.uk