

Report of the Launch Event on 3 February 2010

Introduction

Following consultation with the local voluntary and community sector to ascertain their views, the Local Government Re-organisation Project Implementation Team (LGR PIT) began work to establish two Assemblies, one for organisations operating within Central Bedfordshire and one for organisations operating within Bedford Borough.

Central Bedfordshire Third Sector Assembly

This report has been produced following the launch event of the Central Bedfordshire Third Sector Assembly held on 3 February 2010. The organisation and administration of the event was undertaken by Voluntary and Community Action, supported by the other members of the LGR PIT.

The event, running from 9.45am to 3.00pm, took place at the Rufus Centre, Flitwick where full catering services were also provided.

Objectives for the Launch Event

The objectives, detailed within the Event Programme of the launch event were to:

- provide opportunities for the third sector to influence statutory sector policies, strategies and decisions
- ensure effective third sector representation
- ensure successful partnership working with the statutory sector.

To ensure the objectives were met the following activities were planned into the event programme:

- Presentations on our key challenges by guest speakers
- Facilitated round-table discussions
- Opportunity for verbal and written feedback.

Delegates were asked whether the event objectives were met to their satisfaction.

Yes	No	Partially	No answer
58	1	15	5

The majority (58%) of delegates who returned their Evaluation Sheet felt the event objectives were met through the delivery of the programme, with just 1% indicating they believed the objectives were not met.

However, the written comments in response to this section suggested a number of delegates did not fully understand the proposals for the Assembly or even the objectives

of the event itself. This misunderstanding and/or confusion was balanced by other comments; one respondee felt the event helped give them 'a clearer understanding' of the Assembly objectives while another commented on the 'good start' although they were not clear how the Assembly would be progressed.

Evaluation of the Event

In addition to the various methods provided for delegates to give feedback against the discussion topics, each delegate was also asked to complete an Evaluation Sheet to provide their views on specific aspects of the event organisation.

To encourage the return of completed Evaluation Sheets, all those returned were allocated a number and three were selected using a random number selector program. The delegates named on each of the three Evaluation Sheets each won a signed copy of Kriss Akabusi's book *Success Comes in Cans*. The winners of the books were:

- Tony Mitchell from Bedfordshire Climate Change Forum
- Wendy McGauley from Leonard Cheshire Disability
- Sharon Rogers from Rethink.

71% of delegates returned their Evaluation Sheets.

The Evaluation Sheet was divided into five sections and allowed for a quick tick box rating to be selected as well as written narrative to support any view indicated. The written comments detailed on the returned Evaluation Sheets have been reproduced at Appendix A.

Section 1 allowed for both written comments and ratings to be indicated against specific aspects of the event, as follows:

- pre-event information and booking arrangements
- the venue
- catering arrangements
- the speakers
- the handouts provided to delegates.

The ratings have been converted into percentages and are detailed at Appendix B.

Attendance

The event was attended by 112 in total, including 98 representatives of third sector organisations. Arrangements were in place to accommodate 120 delegates (including speakers and organisers) and we had to inform 6 late registrations that the event was full. On the day 14 people did not attend and 6 turned up without previously registering.

Although some public sector colleagues were specifically invited we discovered that others had also decided to attend the event. This was partly because of the wide circulation and/or interest in the event. For future Assembly meetings closer attention will need to be paid to those who register to attend and turn away those who are not from third sector organisations or invited guests.

Pre-Event Information and Booking Arrangements

An A3 colour leaflet promoting the event was widely circulated within the sector, along with information published on the website. Further information on the event was circulated to all delegates a week before the event.

Delegates indicated a 79.75% satisfaction rate with the pre-event information and booking arrangements. Comments submitted on the Evaluation Sheets included reference to the 'excellent reference pack' but also to the lack of detail about public transport to the venue and how the availability of the proposed structure/framework and Terms of Reference of the Assembly prior to the event would have been appreciated.

Venue and Catering Arrangements

The event was held at The Rufus Centre, Flitwick because of its central location and as a venue with a large hall.

Delegates indicated an 82.00% satisfaction rate with the venue and a 77.5% rating for the catering. Comments made in relation to the venue and catering arrangements made reference to the standard and number of toilets for such a large venue to be surprisingly low, another referred to a lack of space at the venue.

Welcome and Introduction to the Third Sector Assembly

John Gelder, Director, Voluntary and Community Action and Vice-Chairperson of Central Bedfordshire Together, chaired the event and delivered the Welcome and Introduction. This included normal 'house-keeping' arrangements for the venue, an overview of the programme, details on the speakers, the exhibitors and the opportunities for discussion and feedback. An introduction to the purpose of the Assembly, how it aligns with statutory sector partnership structures and the benefits it will bring were also covered.

Delegates were not specifically invited to indicate their satisfaction on this aspect of the Assembly however, one comment referred to this session as being lengthy.

Getting Third Sector Representation Right

Robert Beard, Improving Local Partnerships Policy Adviser of NAVCA, delivered this presentation at very short notice in place of Kate Housden. He set out what partnership working is and isn't, how representation should be authentic, effective and accountable and explained the role of the third sector within Local Strategic Partnerships and how they help the statutory sector meet government set targets and objectives.

Delegates indicated a 79.50% satisfaction rate with Getting Third Sector Representation Right. Two of the received comments made specific mention of Robert Beard as being the most useful aspect of the event and how he set the scene well, however, this was countered by another saying the subject was 'very dry, would have gained more if the speaker had been more exciting – really could just read his presentation.'

Partnerships for Success

Kriss Akabusi, Sports Personality and Founder/Chairman of the Akabusi Trust delivered the second presentation of the event. His motivational speech drew on his relevant life

experiences and at each appropriate point he related these directly to the positives of partnership working, and provided examples of the successes strong partnerships can bring. He made the message he was asked to convey understandable, exciting and real.

Delegates indicated a 96.50% satisfaction rate with Kriss Akabusi and his presentation. This session, unsurprisingly, brought forth numerous comments which referred to it being motivational, inspirational, mesmerising and empowering, and how it reminded delegates of why they worked within the third sector. A number repeated some of the quotes from Kriss's speech; 'okay to taste defeat', 'history is for reference not for residence.' These comments were countered by just one that referred to this session as being the least useful at the event.

Building Stronger Voices

John Gelder delivered this presentation which provided background information to the creation of the Assembly, its purpose and activities, the role of Assembly representatives and the next steps. This led to facilitated round-table discussions on each table where delegates were given specific questions to debate and discuss. At the end of the session each facilitator provided brief feedback to all delegates from their discussions.

Delegates indicated a 79% satisfaction rate with this session. A notable number of comments received included positive reference to the opportunity provided for discussion and feedback, others referred to having gained a 'clearer understanding' of the objectives of the Assembly and were looking forward to seeing how the Assembly developed. Delegates indicated that in the main they believed their comments and contributions were welcomed and valued. These views were balanced with questions about the need for another layer and some delegates found it difficult being asked to comment on the Assembly without seeing the framework document prior to the event.

Sustainable Community Strategy

Peter Fraser, Head of Partnerships and Community Engagement at Central Bedfordshire Council delivered this presentation on the Sustainable Community Strategy. An explanation of the Strategy and what it sets out to address and achieve were provided, along with an explanation of the Partnership structure within Central Bedfordshire Council (CBC). Information on key priorities and challenges that CBC were facing was provided and the session finished with group discussions about what delegates think is special about Central Bedfordshire and what they believe the high level priorities and key challenges are.

Delegates indicated an 80.50% satisfaction rate with this session. Comments were received which stated that the discussion session needed to have been facilitated. There was a mix of opinions about whether the presentation and information provided were found as the most useful aspect of the event or not.

Community Engagement Strategy

Janet Ridge, Chief Executive BRCC and Stronger Communities Theme Lead for Central Bedfordshire Together delivered the final presentation of the event. The presentation provided an explanation of community engagement and why it is important, the need for a strategy and the 5 principles it is based upon.

Delegates indicated a 74.25% satisfaction rate with this session. Despite the satisfaction rating of this session being comparatively low a number of comments referred to it as being the most useful aspect of the event and only one comment made reference to it as being least useful, stating 'by the time Janet spoke I think the room had been talked at for long enough'.

Closing Remarks

John Gelder closed the event by thanking everyone for their effort and input towards making such a positive beginning to the Assembly. Future updates of the Assembly and its activities would be published on the VoluntaryWorks website and through occasional newsletters.

John informed all present that the draft framework document would be updated from the feedback received from this event, and then published for consultation.

Conclusions

Delegates were asked what aspect of the event they found most useful. This question brought forth the most written responses. Unsurprisingly, a large number of the respondees detailed Kriss Akabusi and the inspiration he instilled as being the most useful aspect of the event. However, the written responses suggest every aspect of the event was found valuable to a lesser or greater degree.

Delegates were also asked what aspect of the event they found least useful. The responses to this question brought an interesting mix of opinions. A number of the responses referred to the length of the day and the programme; they felt the day was too long and the programme was too full. A few also referred to the afternoon discussion session and suggested that it should have been facilitated in the same way as the morning discussion session. Again the point was made that some found being asked to comment on the Assembly without having seen the detail beforehand hampered their discussions.

Interestingly, one respondee detailed the lack of public sector representatives being invited as least useful, while another commented that not enough representatives of the third sector were present.

In general the written responses suggest delegates believed their comments and contributions were welcomed and valued during the event, although this view was tempered with the thought that 'time will tell' as to whether their opinions are taken account of.

From an organisational point the event ran to time and without any hitches on the day. The comments submitted on the Evaluation Sheets highlight a number of aspects that could be taken into consideration when arranging future Assembly events e.g. shorter programme, no whistle to halt feedback, inclusion of local travel details etc, but on the whole it would seem reasonable to conclude that the LGR PIT successfully delivered an event 'fit for purpose' which was enjoyed and valued by delegates.
