

## Cross Party Group Volunteering and the Voluntary Sector

Minute

Wednesday 23<sup>rd</sup> September 2015, 18:00-19:30

TG. 20/21, Scottish Parliament

Convenor: Margaret McDougall MSP

Topic: Participation

### **In attendance:**

Margaret McDougall MSP (Convenor), Joan McAlpine MSP, John Mason MSP, Alex Neil MSP, Laura Sexton, John Downie, Kate Wane, George Thomson, John Mullin, Margaret Starkie, Jo Pike, Paul O'Kane, Donna Morris, Niall Sommerville, Emma Whitelock

### **Apologies:**

David Karikas, Mike Melvin, Alan Bingham, Alexa Anderson, Eileen, Stephanie Guerin, Mike Melvin,

#### **1. Welcome and introductions**

Margaret welcomed everyone to the meeting, including the Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Communities & Pensioners' Rights, Alex Neil MSP.

#### **2. Minutes and matters arising**

The minutes of the March meeting were approved

#### **3. Presentation from Alex Neil MSP**

- The Cabinet Secretary began his presentation by stating his belief that volunteers and the voluntary sector are essential to all three aspects of his role as the Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Communities & Pensioners' Rights.
- The Cabinet Secretary went on to say that volunteering has to be a growth industry, especially in light of the squeeze on public finances and also that, in principle, volunteering is a good thing to do.
- The Cabinet Secretary reflected on his time as Cabinet Secretary for Health and Well-being, noting the impact of social isolation on mental health and reflected on how important volunteering is to preventing people becoming isolated. He also highlighted what he considered to be the 'virtuous circle' of retired people volunteering due to its preventative nature.
- Mr. Neil, stated that he does not support replacing professionals with volunteers, but believes that volunteers can complement service provision.
- He also reflected that the Third Sector Interfaces (TSIs) have been a boom, linking the non-homogenous third sector together. The Cabinet Secretary said he appreciated the difficulties of consulting such a diverse community especially given the sheer number of third sector organisations out there. Which is a good thing but resources are required.

- Mr. Neil noted that volunteers and the voluntary sector help our society to work at every level, as voluntary organisations create solidarity. He went on to highlight the work of Men’s Sheds, where people use their skills to aid their community and themselves.
- In conclusion, the Cabinet Secretary said it was important for government at local and national level to support the voluntary sector, and stated that the Scottish Government will continue to do everything it can to support volunteers and the voluntary sector.

#### **4. Q & A with the Cabinet Secretary**

- i) Jo Pike from the Scottish Wildlife Trust said that we need to think about why people might want to get involved in making Scotland a better place, noting that citizenship, collaboration and leadership are key. She asked how can we tell the story – of the benefits of volunteering - to people. Jo also noted that people participate in something they believe in and that’s when we see results. She also reflected from the perspective of the Scottish Wildlife Trust that people are happier when they have access to outside spaces. Bring the different aspects of the community together to participate. The Cabinet Secretary responded by reflecting on the importance of the testimonial and the success of the grapevine, stating that the best way to recruit new volunteers is through the old ones. He noted, however, that sometimes the benefit of volunteering is not overtly clear to the community.
- ii) Donna Morris from Shelter raised her concerns about linkages between volunteering and benefits. The Cabinet Secretary responded by outlining the Scottish Government’s objection to any kind of mandatory volunteering in order to receive benefits and assured the room that when the Scottish Government has control over certain benefits in the future thanks to the Scotland Bill these would not adopt this policy.
- iii) George Thompson from Volunteer Scotland highlighted the boost to their well-being people get from volunteering and that we have an abundance of talent in Scotland but that we’re not engaging with it. George quoted the Scottish Household Survey statistics. He asked how do we create sustainable volunteering and what would it take to generate growth in volunteering. George suggested we need to focus on the person, not the role that needs to be filled, looking at people’s motivations to get involved first and the tasks they could do second.
- iv) Emma Whitelock from LEAD Scotland noted the underrepresentation of disabled people volunteering, despite the substantial impact it can have on well-being. Inclusive volunteering, feeling like an active citizen, is important but concerned that those we have greater access requires in order to volunteer may be put off as they think they’re a hassle. Mr. Neil responded by talking about the future of social prescribing and the need for people to feel they have a stake in society. People can often feel excluded, when they’re not in employment or unable to make decisions about their own lives. However, people are entitled to be involved in decision making.
- v) Joan McAlpine MSP asked about smaller scale volunteer actively, noting the response in her own community to refugee crisis. Issues like this can galvanise people. John Mason MSP noted that there are some things people fall over

themselves to volunteer for, but some activities, such as Community Councils are less popular.

## **5. Further Discussion**

Once the Cabinet Secretary has departed the discussion continued.

- Andrew Lindsay from the Big Lottery Foundation talked about the new BLF programme (commencing around the end of 2015) which is people-led. BLF want communities to tell them what they need. Andrew also noted that previously, those projects that have received BLF funding has resulted in strong networks of voluntary enterprises, which have continued to operate once BLF funding has ceased.
- Feel good factor is important.
- Potential for gathering information about participation beyond the Scottish Household Survey.
- In/Formal local/national
- Training for volunteers
- Language is important. What does participation mean? We could work together to create something. 'Help make your community a better place.'
- Measure of success needs to be beyond number of volunteers and the hours spent.
- Fear for the future of some organisations due to the lack of formality in how things are run – dedication of volunteers. Need to build capacity but balance is important.
- Capacity for volunteers from other sectors
- Where will the growth come from?
- Easier for me to volunteer here as they know my needs. Accreditation.

## **6. Any Other Competent Business**

It was raised that the Convener had been approached by the CPG on Sport about the prospect of the CPG joining them for their next meeting which will discuss the Scottish Volunteering Forum's Case for Change document.

The Convener welcomed the kind offer from the CPG on Sport for this to be considered a joint meeting between the two groups. It was agreed that we would accept the offer and hope that – despite the short notice- members of the group would be able to attend.

John Mullin expressed his concern about the lack of mention of the Third Sector in the Community Justice Bill. It was agreed that the group write to Michael Mathieson and to the Justice Committee Clerk expressing our concern and asking for this exclusion to be addressed.

Also, it was agreed that the group write to Alex Neil thanking him for his presentation.

## **7. Date of the Next Meeting**

- The next meeting of the CPG will take place on Tuesday 24<sup>th</sup> November at 13:00.
- We will also be part of a joint meeting with the CPG on Sport on Tuesday 5<sup>th</sup> October at 17:30.

## **ACTIONS**

- The group will write to Alex Neil MSP thanking him for attending our meeting. We will also raise some of the key points from our further discussions after the Cabinet Secretary had left.
- The group will write a letter to Michael Matheson MSP, the Cabinet Secretary for Justice to raise its concerns about the Community Justice Bill.
- A discussion on the forthcoming Scottish Government Lobbying Bill will be added to the agenda for November's meeting, provided that the Bill has been published by this point.