



Policy report November 2011

1. Influencing government

Minister for Civil Society Nick Hurd visited Oxfordshire on 14 November. He took part in a round table with representatives from the local voluntary and statutory sectors about the changing face of public service provision and the impact on the voluntary sector. He was keen to promote business engagement with the voluntary sector and very eager to see the new Big Society Capital fund growing to provide a substantial level of financial support to civil society. This is of course loan finance to provide working capital in a model that is familiar to business but not to voluntary organisations. He also wants to see a reduction in waste, duplication and unnecessary bureaucracy and very supportive of what the voluntary sector has to offer in terms of service provision. He talked about the need to reform commissioning so that providers are better able to help shape services. He thinks the Right to Challenge will be an important tool for communities to use. Voluntary sector representatives were able to express concerns about initiatives such as the Work Programme, which are not offering the opportunities to subcontractors that might have been originally envisaged. There was also discussion of payment by results, which was agreed to be desirable but not if layered on top of a restrictive regime of payment for activity.

2. Social care (information from VCS meeting with Alan Sinclair)

- **Day Opportunities** All meetings with elected members at Locality Boards have now taken place. Service providers in each locality have now been notified of service specifications for day opportunities. Bids will be evaluated by the end of November.
- **Home Support** Over 261 people using the service have now transitioned to new arrangements with a further 119 still to be transitioned. There are currently 91 staff supporting existing users of the service. There are concerns about sourcing care in time, and about staffing levels. (This may be because OCC paid £8 an hour and agencies pay £6 an hour.)
- **New Crisis Response Service** Internal Home Support did provide an informal crisis response, so this is a replacement for that. It will provide 72 hours of crisis care and should respond to any eligible referral with 2.5 hours. Initially it is funded to provide 14-15,000 hours of care. It is, in effect, a pilot project to ascertain how much crisis care is really needed, why crises occur and if other systems aren't working as effectively as they should.
- **ACE Partnership** The ACE (Appropriate Care for Everyone) Partnership Programme has appointed Jon Ray as Programme Manager. He will report to

the GP Consortium. This is to tackle the continuing problem of delayed transfer of care (bed-blocking).

- **Independent Living Service** This service for people with a learning disability will be outsourced. Supported Living will transfer first and should be completed by August 2012. Daytime Support services for people with a learning disability will follow and the transfer should be complete by April 2013.
- **Existing Contracts** There is continuing confusion and anger about contracts for 2012/13. Timescales for decisions are still not clear and Age UK is threatening to go public on service cuts and staff redundancies if the situation is not clarified by the last week in December. Organisations with more than one contract under £25,000 don't know if their contracts will be packaged up, taking them over the £50,000 or possibly even the £75,000 thresholds which means a more complicated procedure for renewal. On the other hand, if contracts are dealt with individually, organisations with more than one will be dealt with last and live with uncertainty for longer.

3. Health

Alison attended a full day QIPP (Quality, Innovation, Productivity, Prevention) event with the Oxfordshire Clinical Commissioning group on 3 November. This was attended by GPs, hospital managers, senior staff from adult social care, voluntary sector representatives, and staff from the PCT. The overall message was that there was still a long way to go in terms of meeting savings targets of £37 million in 2012/13, although there have been successes in some areas such as the cost of GP prescribing. Bed blocking was of course on the agenda but the financial information clearly showed that the biggest costs are in carrying out operations. Interestingly, it was not possible to get an answer to the question 'what happens if savings targets are not met?' Attendees were encouraged to come up with innovative ideas for working more cost effectively together. There was a willingness to engage with the voluntary sector and quite a good understanding by some GPs working in deprived wards of what the sector might be able to offer. OCVA needs to move ahead with plans for another health-focused event where voluntary agencies can promote themselves to the commissioners.

Health and Wellbeing Board

The Director of Public Health has produced a structure which is expected to be adopted where the new Health and Wellbeing Board is a formal committee of the county council chaired by the Leader of the council. There is no voluntary sector place on this Board. Beneath it are three boards: Health improvement, Adult health and social care, and Children and young people. Voluntary organisations will be represented on these. Underpinning these will be a Public Involvement Board. This will be developed alongside the new Healthwatch, which is replacing the LINK. This is where the public, service users, carers and advocacy groups will

have their voice. The council is currently consulting on the design of Healthwatch. OCVA aims to attend the consultation events and will report back.

4. Children, young people and families

Early Intervention Hubs:

- All up and running apart from Witney, due to open in February 2012.
- Currently undergoing a review of children's centres. Trialing payment by results.
- Currently working with Volunteer Co-ordinator for Early Intervention Hubs to identify appropriate opportunities for volunteers.
- Concern over political focus on youth rather than the younger age groups the hubs are supporting.
- Will continue 'steering group' until governance structure is arranged for the hubs. Lindsay to continue attending.

National news of interest:

- Senior roles at the Department for Education have resigned over the pace of the radical changes in their department.
- Adopted Children will be given priority of school places.
- Rise in Ethnic Minority young offenders in custody.

5. Learning and Skills

National context

Consultation

The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) invests £210 million per year in Informal Adult and Community Learning (IACL) through the Adult Safeguarded Learning budget. Skills for Sustainable Growth announced the protection of this budget in the government's 2010 spending review settlement, subject to a review of BIS-funded IACL in order to maximise its role in:

- supporting relevant government policy objectives, such as building the Big Society
- motivating people from disadvantaged groups to learn and progress, including to further learning and employment.

In line with the government's localism agenda, the IACL consultation also asks important questions about how to achieve an appropriate balance between national policy objectives and local planning and decision-making. Over the summer and autumn period a consultation took place to help shape the future of IACL. The findings are now being considered and final recommendations will be published before Christmas. Kate encouraged OLN members to put forward a response to the consultation.

Local context

1) Oxfordshire Skills Board

The inaugural meeting of the Skills Board took place in September with representation from business sector including BMW, small training providers, schools and colleges, county and district councils. Kate has a place on the board

representing the OLN as learning providers mainly from voluntary sector but also as an employer in Oxfordshire. No chair has been elected to that group yet whilst the group agrees on a remit and how to take forward learning and skills. The main area of work initially is to work up a Skills Needs Assessment for Oxfordshire bearing in mind current needs around science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM) and future changes to the economy that will require new skills such as the expertise in science required for workers in Science Vale UK as this expands, the need for retail skills when the Westgate development in Oxford moves on etc. The Local Enterprise Zone funding awarded to the LEP will create new opportunities and schools and colleges need to be sure to be providing a workforce to the market with the skills they need.

2) LAA Reward Grant

In September a PQQ was circulated that was intended to be a vehicle for groups who were interested in delivering learning for Oxfordshire Adult Learning. It was discovered later that this was also intended to include those who might want to deliver work funded from the LAA Reward Grant on learning and skills. This was not clearly communicated at the time. The PQQ was very complicated and required detailed information to be provided. It is not known how many OLN members and other VCS groups completed it but the format of the PQQ was off-putting to many groups in particular the smaller ones and including OCVA. The proposal for a 'back to work baccalaureate' was put forward at the Skills Board meeting, but this has now changed to become a proposal to deliver training opportunities to young people especially NEETs via 'coffee clubs'. This would involve local champions to signpost individuals to opportunities. It would also involve building the capacity of groups to provide training to a minimum required standard. It is still not clear how the distribution of the funding would be managed. The next Learning and Skills Board meeting is at the end of November. More clarification is required on how this will work in practice and more consultation is needed to ensure that this is delivering what is needed and there is an opportunity for groups in OLN to contribute to this learning as they will be able to reach the individuals the funding is intended to support.

3) ESOL

This remains a big issue but there are differences of opinion about how much need for more ESOL provision there is, and the level of impact the availability of ESOL provision has on communities according to who you speak to.

Oxford City Council has identified ESOL as an issue that its proposed East Oxford Forum will address. This forum will mainly pick up issues relating to the BME communities as they are so prominent in East Oxford. Organisations involved include EMBS, Refugee Resource, Somali community, Pakistani, Asian Cultural Centre, local mosques and job centres and all these organisations all have identified ESOL provision as a barrier for people they work with and support getting into work. A need for both formal and informal ESOL provision has been

identified and a coordinated approach to ESOL provision would seem to make sense but there is still a lack of funding in this area.

Spires Academy has a language speciality and they also have a strong community and outreach focus. The school has recognised that parents with low English skills are a barrier to children's attainment at school as they don't get the support they need in the home with their education and so they are putting on classes and support for parents.