

*We're not an arm of the state – we have our own arms*

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**Newsletter 18**

**October 2010**

## **The Emperor has no clothes**

As I finish off this newsletter the Government is back-peddling on its announcement to withdraw Child Benefit from high earners by offering a tax break for married couples. This reveals a number of things, including the positive thought that resistance is not futile, even if it comes from the middle class trying to hold onto its pile. But more significantly, it confirms two things that are evidenced everywhere around us - firstly, the Conservative Party continues its long tradition of paying more attention to the needs of rich people than poor people (they are not taking much account of a 'backlash' on cutting Housing Benefit). This, of course, is **not** in contrast to the New Labour Government which also paid more attention to the needs of rich people. Secondly, it's very clear that they are making it up as they go along. And nowhere is this truer than in the ConLib's intentions for the voluntary and community sector. Read this newsletter and you will find many examples of double-speak - different people saying different things, and the same people saying things that do not stand up to scrutiny. And the biggest contradiction of all is the simultaneous message that public expenditure is going to be slashed at the same time as we are all going to start volunteering to look after our neighbours and run public services.

Now, as usual, the problem for me is not what the politicians and the state is up to; the problem is our response to it. The issues raised by the Big Society Show are, of course, completely relevant to the principles and practice of voluntary action. The trouble is that the Government is involved and this renders it almost impossible to have a meaningful discussion. Everywhere, organisations who ought to know better are 're-branding' their perspectives with the BSS logo - NAVCA's upcoming conference being a gross example. Presumably this is about being seen to take the politicians seriously and retaining a 'seat at the table'. But maybe it's another example of the old maxim - 'don't confuse access with influence'. Some of the re-branded material is, of course, good stuff - nef's

paper on ten big questions, or Matt Scott's paper on deprived neighbourhoods, for example, both referenced in this newsletter. But by falling in with the top-down framing of the issues, one gives credibility to policies and initiatives that don't deserve it, and in the process corrupt your own narrative of who you are and what you think you're doing.

The other thing that does my head in, is why there are so few people saying these things. Is it because we don't take state money, is it because we're nutters, is it because we're wrong? Everywhere we go, people tell us they basically agree with our Coalition stance. A recent survey, reported here, concluded that less than half, of 266 charities asked, thought that the Government's ideas for the BS were achievable even if they were provided with sufficient funds, which of course, they won't be. So how bad do things have to get before they stand up and say so?

## **News from the Coalition**

### **The Coalition has co-ordination!**

Melaina and Rachael, our job-share National Co-ordinators, are now nicely ensconced in friendly office surroundings and they will be happy to hear from you. Their full contact details are as follows:

Melaina Barnes & Rachael McGill  
NCIA,  
c/o Aston Mansfield Community Involvement Unit  
Durning Hall  
Earlham Grove  
London E7 9AB  
Direct line: 020 8536 3828  
[rachael@independentaction.net](mailto:rachael@independentaction.net)  
[melaina@independentaction.net](mailto:melaina@independentaction.net)

### **The cuts: how do we respond? Next Assembly meeting 26<sup>th</sup> October**

The next NCIA Assembly meeting will be on Tuesday October 26th from 1.30pm to 5pm at the Institute for Family Therapy, 24-32 Stephenson Way, London NW1 2HX (nearest tubes Euston or Euston Square). The subject will be 'Cuts: how do we respond?' The focus will be on people's experiences locally and what they are doing. We will start with tea, coffee, biscuits and introductions. We then have three speakers who will speak very briefly, followed by workshops exploring different ways of looking at the situation we are in and opportunities to work together:

§ *Denise McDowell - Greater Manchester Immigration Aid Unit* - Will talk about GMIAU's experience of mobilising people locally to challenge cuts to the organisation

§ *Romayne Phoenix - Coalition of Resistance* - Will talk about how the Coalition of Resistance started and how people can use it to build a stronger anti-cuts and anti-privatisation movements through local campaigns

§ *Julia Slay - New Economics Foundation* - Will talk about the research work of their social policy team about the impact of the cuts and the 'Big Society' agenda on public services.

We may be able to refund your travel expenses if you're coming from outside London. Contact Rachael or Melaina for more information. We would love to see you there! Please RSVP

to [rachael@independentaction.net](mailto:rachael@independentaction.net) or [melaina@independentaction.net](mailto:melaina@independentaction.net).

## **Coalition position on the Big Society Show**

The Coalition's Bernard Davies shared a platform with a civil servant from the Cabinet Office at the North West Activist Network conference in early September. It gave us a chance to make a few choice remarks about the 'Big Society'. You can read what Bernard said

here: <http://www.independentaction.net/?p=7363#more-7363>

And a write-up of the event here: <http://manchestermule.com/article/just-what-is-the-big-society/comment-page-1#comment-2930>

## **What next for the Voluntary and Community Sector?**

On July 9<sup>th</sup> we held an open space event jointly with LVSC's Second Tier Advisors' Network (STAN) on 'what next for the voluntary and community sector.' The report of the event is now available to download here:

<http://www.lvsc.org.uk/Templates/information.asp?NodeID=90666> (scroll down).

All the recommendations that had more than 5 votes overall are highlighted to illustrate what the group felt was most important on the day. The biggest concerns, and related actions people wanted to see, were (in order of popularity):

**The 'Big Society'** (for which participants coined a variety of alternative names, but perhaps just BS will do): need to develop a collective voluntary and community sector voice to shape it.

**Pressures on Funding:** need to increase collaboration, avoid duplication and share resources.

**'Managerialism' in the voluntary sector:** having to focus on quality assurance, PR, business planning and collecting data has taken away the time we have to

think and be active in communities. Is this engineered by the state sector to stop us from having time to cause trouble?!

**Independence of the Voluntary Sector:** need to go back to what we were set up to do and stick to our vision.

**Local infrastructure:** need for organised, local representation and influence.

**Cuts:** don't agonise - organise!

**Commissioning:** need to build up evidence about why commissioning is bad for voluntary sector services and users.

This all chimes closely with NCIA concerns and we hope that the event will have persuaded more people to question the voluntary sector world around them and get together to think about alternatives.

## **Challenging times – what to ask councillors about communities...**

Challenging Times - here Sean Creighton lists questions to ask local politicians on their apparent interest in community action, and highlights the gap between rhetoric and practice. <http://www.independentaction.net/?p=7423#more-7423>

While many people think that Government and local policies severely damage civil society, with dramatic cuts to come making the situation worse, he argues that we should still make local politicians accountable, hold to our own agendas and create ways for local people to argue their own case when faced by plans devised by central, regional and local government, landowners and developers. If you want a rather more sanitised view of the relationship between councillors and community groups, you can find it in Urban Forum and BASSAC's Handy Guide for Communities Working with

Councillors: <http://www.urbanforum.org.uk/handy-guides/local-action-a-handy-guide-for-communities-working-with-councillors>

Lots of case studies of constructive, influential and helpful councillors, and top tips about how to get the best out of them. But sadly such councillors can be in short supply in many areas. So what do you do then? The Guide says nothing about hostility, disinterest or dirty dealings, nor about the structural differences in role between voluntary action and representative politics. Whilst the Guide notes, in a final paragraph, that "the nature of change and politics is that there are always conflicts and differences", apparently this is because "not all groups or residents will agree with each other or be able to work together". So nothing to do with the politicians eh?

## **Organising, mobilising, and keeping on keeping on**

### **Felixstowe Radio – a thriving first year**

We've previously reported on Felixstowe Radio, a classic example of people just getting on with it. Initially broadcasting over the internet and from someone's

front room, the station finally got its FM license in June 2009 (107.5FM). Now, another year on, they have premises, a music shop, improved signal strength, 60 presenters, programming from 7am 'til 11pm, outside events, the beginnings of a training programme, and creative media connections with local schools. They are showing that community radio is much more than broadcasting; the studios have become "a social hub that brings together every part of the community." Our congratulations to all involved. <http://www.felixstoweradio.co.uk/>

Incidentally, there are community radio (and some TV) stations springing up all over the place - in South London, for example, there is Southwark TV, Southwark Chinese Radio and Resonance FM, the latter which describes itself as a "virtual arts centre".

## **Newham Monitoring Project celebrates 30 years with major lottery grant**

This year is the thirtieth anniversary of [Newham Monitoring Project](#) (NMP), the grassroots organisation that supports East London communities who have suffered discrimination, racism and police misconduct. Since Newham Council cut its funding in 1997 (because the Project refused to compromise on its independence), the group has experienced the familiar struggle to survive that has forced many other organisations to close. NMP's resilience has been down to the efforts of its activists, supporters and workers and at last, there is good news on the funding front - a 4 year grant from the Lottery Fund to core services. Our congratulations to NMP - its success is deserved, but it is also a victory for anti-racist campaigners and people everywhere who argue for greater police accountability.

## **TESCO Check out**

We have also reported from time-to-time local struggles to prevent the remorseless progress of Tesco's in putting local shops out of business. In Brighton a long-running battle to preserve the Lewes Road Community Garden looked bleak when the occupants were evicted and the site flattened by bulldozers. However, unexpectedly Tesco's have now withdrawn their plans and issued a statement saying that: "...the future of the community garden should be resolved locally, by the community and by its representatives. We do not think it is helpful for us to become the unintended focus of this debate, nor do we want to become an obstacle to it being resolved by the local community."

The site will now go back to the planning department and development will undergo a further consultation with the community. Some of the options being mooted are a small trader's market with social housing and gardens, something to promote local businesses where the local community will see the benefits of profit. You can catch the whole happy piece here: <http://lewesroadcommunitygarden.webs.com>

## **Breakaway dementia charity fights the corporate suits**

Disgruntled former volunteers of the [Alzheimer's Society](#) in Sunderland are to launch a rival voluntary organisation. About half a dozen volunteers broke away in protest at a restructure by the society in April. They claimed the society's decision to place local branches under the control of regional administrative centres, known as 'localities', had made the London-based organisation too centralised and unresponsive to local needs. The society said it was increasing accountability to win more contracts.

Ernie Thompson relinquished his position as chair of the Sunderland branch to set up Action on Dementia Sunderland. "Every penny we raise will go to the people of Sunderland," he said. He said at least six former society branches had formed breakaway groups and that some, including his, were in dispute with the society over the ownership of buildings.

## **RASASC funding reinstated after campaign**

After withdrawing £27,000 from the Croydon [Rape and Sexual Abuse Support Centre](#) (RASASC), Croydon Council announced last Friday that funding of £22,000 would be reinstated.

Though reduced, this cut is more in line with expectations from the National Budget and much more manageable for the organisation in terms of lessening impact on the women who use the service.

The reversal was heavily influenced by public pressure on Council Lead Mike Fisher, generated through spreading the word via social media, Women's Resource Centre, Women in London and the London Feminist Network. Local press got involved and there was a huge turnout at the council meeting after cuts were announced. In a statement, RASASC said: "With the current economic climate the way it is, the proposed cuts from London Councils and stories coming in about other local authorities across the country, this may be a timely sign that there is still power in collective action. Don't take the cuts lying down! Let's use our networks to save our services."

## **New group formed to oppose use of stop-and-search**

This month sees the launch of a new group - StopWatch - which aims to ensure that Stop and Search practices are fair and properly accountable. The high profile launch - on 18th October- will be addressed by Rev, Jesse Jackson Sr. speaking from his experience of campaigning against racial profiling. Poor Stop and Search practice continues to drive a wedge between communities and the police and creates community discontent. More information from [kam@runnymedetrust.org](mailto:kam@runnymedetrust.org)

## **Big Society roadshow given a flea in its ear**

The Communities and Local Government Department and the Big Society Network have abandoned their programme of 'town hall tours' after being given the heave-ho at the first event in Stockport, Greater Manchester. The plan had been to run 12 events to give people the opportunity to discuss what could be done locally. But at the Stockport meeting there was "shouting from members of the public..... about cuts in relation to the big society". As a result, Paul Twivy, chief executive of the network, said the tours had been "redefined" because there was no longer a need for "more vague listening exercises". Instead there will be a series of 15 "more targeted" consultation events, which would be delivered with partners such as v and BTCV, and would lead to pilot projects. Well,well.

## **Our fracturing society: Clobberings, cuts, and closures**

**"Tough but fair".... "We're all in it together" .... Oh yeah?**

Before we move into the latest litany of 'necessary budget reductions', it is salutary to raise our eyes up and clock what is happening on the wider scene, especially when Chancellor Osborne tells us how 'tough but fair' they are being with our finances. Not so tough it seems when it comes to corporate business.

For, the UK Government, in July, caved in on a claim against communications company Vodafone for tax avoidance. The claim was for around £6 billion - yes, that's £6 billion. The Government settled for £1.2b despite having fought an epic legal battle to get the dosh off Vodafone, and looked set to win the claim. But this was before the ConLib's more 'conciliatory' approach towards big business, spearheaded by the Revenue's permanent secretary for tax, David Hartnett. He moved the case from his specialists and lawyers - dismissed in comments to the FT as "very intelligent people" suffering from "a black and white view of the law" and went off to negotiate a sweetheart deal with his old colleague at the Revenue, John Connors, now head of tax at Vodafone.

Now the difference between £6b and £1.2b, for the mathematically challenged, is £4.8b - which buys quite a lot of public services.....

You can clock the whole sorry tale here

[http://www.private-eye.co.uk/sections.php?section\\_link=in\\_the\\_back&issue=1270](http://www.private-eye.co.uk/sections.php?section_link=in_the_back&issue=1270) or here:<http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/2bc71748-9686-11df-9caa-00144feab49a.html>

**Voluntary sector funding in London has been cut by £50m in a year, survey finds**

The voluntary sector in London has experienced funding cuts totalling about £50m in the 12 months to September, according to a survey by the [London Voluntary Services Council](#). The umbrella body conducted telephone interviews with councils for voluntary service in all 32 London boroughs.

The figure includes cuts to local authorities that have been passed on to charities and community groups and cuts to London-wide organisations, such as the [London Development Agency](#), which ended its £28m London Opportunities Fund programme in March.

Peter Lewis, chief executive of the LVSC, said: "We are asking government at national, regional and local level to enter into proper dialogue with charities and voluntary and community groups about any cuts they are considering. This will help decision-makers make the right decisions, protecting the most disadvantaged Londoners and making the most of their dwindling funds."

### **£330,000 cut to funding for Hampshire voluntary children's services, without a whimper**

Hampshire County Council has cut its children's services grants budget by £330,000 as part of £24.8m of savings across the department as a result of in-year reductions in government funding and anticipated further reductions in 2011/12. So far in 2010/11, the council had allocated £1.4m in children's services integrated grants and £254,000 through the Youth Opportunities Fund. It will honour its commitments to projects already funded, but there will be no further funding in grants or through the YOF for the remainder of the financial year.

No aggravation appears to be coming back from the sector. Christine Pattison, policy and information officer at county-wide voluntary sector support body [Community Action Hampshire](#), said: "We accept that in the real world there is a need for cuts. It's best that we collaborate to achieve results together. We think that's the way forward." Wonder what their members think of this robust defence?

### **Government cancels £3.3m Community-Owned Pubs Support Programme**

In a blow to those who favour the 'conviviality' model of voluntary action, the Government has cancelled the £3.3m programme that was set up to help communities turn local pubs into cooperatives. The previous Government announced the Community-Owned Pubs Support Programme in March. But now the [Plunkett Foundation](#), which was chosen to administer the fund, has been told that the programme will be replaced by guidance leaflets for communities facing pub closures.



Local government minister Bob Neill said of the programme's closure, in an excellent example of a 'day-is-night' statement: "Pubs don't want state handouts. The new government is to give local communities new powers to save local pubs. Pubs are a vital part of the fabric of community life."

But the plucky Plunketts are carrying on anyway. At a celebration to open the first cooperative pub (the Old Crown at Hesket Newmarket in Cumbria), the charity announced that it will continue supporting the 82 groups that had approached the scheme for help. I'll raise a glass to that.

## **London Development Agency scraps plans for fund to support sector contract bids**

Over here at the NCIA we may not have wanted this money spent in this way, but the decision by the London Development Agency in July to cut a £4m fund to help voluntary sector organisations win public sector contracts illustrates the incoherence of statutory sector plans for the future.

The Mayor's Incubator Fund was intended to help charities build bidding capacity, put together consortia and manage cash flow, a stated Government priority. Peter Lewis, chief executive of London Voluntary Services Council was quoted as saying: "At a time when the delivery of public services by voluntary and community organisations is being trumpeted as a core part of the big society, it is astonishing that the LDA has cut this fund."

## **London Boroughs Grants Scheme threatened**

A proposal has been brought forward to 'repatriate' 80% of the £26.4M London Boroughs Grants Scheme back to the 32 London boroughs involved. This money would not be ring fenced for VCS work and likely, therefore, to result in cuts and closures.

The Scheme was established in 1985 to fund services and projects on a pan-London and cross-borough basis. These services address a wide range of issues that concern Londoners as a whole, not only as individual geographically based communities. Over the years much of the funding has been focussed on the most marginal population groups - homeless people, people escaping domestic violence, services for children and young people, a range of services that raise the voices of marginalised communities, arts and cultural activities, services that address and prevent violent crime. Although the Scheme has been vandalised in recent years by the introduction of appalling commissioning practices, it nonetheless has provided significant support to London voluntary groups.

Interestingly, though unsurprisingly to us, this proposal actually comes from the Labour-controlled administration at London Councils. Currently funded groups

have been told that funding under current arrangements cannot be guaranteed beyond March 31st 2011.

Opposition to the proposal is being co-ordinated by the Voluntary Sector Forum - you can catch up with their manoeuvring here - <http://ctt-news.org/t/6I7-8SJD-O94A8-3KOCV-1/c.aspx> website.

## **Stockport Community and Voluntary Services goes down the chute**

Eight more jobs are lost as Stockport CVS decides to call it a day. The withdrawal of £127,000 of core funding from the local Council is what pushed them over the edge. The CVS said it was working with the council and others "to find homes for services and staff that will allow limited services to continue" and it was hoped that this will result in six staff being transferred to other organisations.

## **The pain reaches the nationals – 18 jobs to go at NAVCA**

National support agency NAVCA to cut almost half its workforce over the next six months in response to expected funding cuts of about 50 per cent. The organisation is expecting its income in 2011 to be around £1.5m - down from £3m in 2010. The main reason for the reduction is not cuts, however, but because major grants from Capacitybuilders and the Lottery are coming to an end. Chief Executive Kevin Curley said: "NAVCA in 2011 will be a smaller charity, but will remain a strong advocate for local voluntary action."

## **Get Fair Coalition loses its umphh**

The disability rights coalition *Get Fair*, has apparently thrown in the towel. Given the spending review and the impact of cuts on the sector already, the appetite to continue with the coalition and its campaigning has not been as strong as needed to continue, despite *Get Fair*'s successes. The Executive has, therefore, taken the decision to shut thing down, though there is, as yet, no indication of this on their website <http://www.getfair.org.uk/>.

## **The Voluntary sector is a cheap option think Coalition MPs**

A survey by Nfp Synergy of 150 MPs reveals that 80% of Tory MPs and just over 50% of LibDems believe that getting voluntary agencies to deliver public services will help cut public spending. It found that only a quarter of Labour MPs surveyed agreed that the provision of services by charities would help to cut costs.

Sarah Lincoln, a researcher at nfpSynergy, said charities might not welcome the fact that coalition MPs viewed them as more important in times of public sector

cost-cutting if they had insufficient support to provide front-line services. Can't argue with that.

## **Sector bodies on the bonfire of quangos**

The Commission for the Compact, Capacitybuilders and the Office for Civil Society Advisory Body are amongst the 177 organisations on the leaked Cabinet hit list for abolition. The Commission for the Compact, which was established in 2007, was allocated £5.6m between 2008 and 2011 and employs 15 staff. The Commission shares Birmingham offices with Capacitybuilders, which was set up in 2006 to oversee the previous government's £231m ChangeUp programme, aimed at voluntary sector infrastructure support. Capacitybuilders, which got £39.3m in 2009/10, employs 49 staff. Its chief executive, Matt Leach, has already announced his departure as he has got himself fixed up elsewhere.

The Office for the Civil Society Advisory Body, previously known as the Office of the Third Sector Advisory Body, replaced three separate advisory bodies when it was formed in 2008 to advise ministers on what charities want.

Not sure how much we'll miss this lot, though there are others on the list who will be missed (e.g. Health Protection Agency) as well as Advisory Bodies that do help to hold the Government to account and cost next to nothing. But it is another example of the Government saying one thing (voluntary sector is vital etc. etc.) and doing another (shut them down).

## **What's in a name?**

The strap line for ACEVO's Cuts Watch site is either a revealing Freudian slip, or another attempt to run with the hare and hunt with the hounds. The site proclaims:

**"Cuts Watch  
Supporting the third sector through spending cuts"**

<http://www.cutswatch.org.uk/main/>

## **The madness continues.....**

### **Making it up as they go along – the Big Society 'vanguard'**

Interesting insight into the inner workings of the Big Society Show comes with the story behind the launch in July of the Vanguard Projects. Liverpool, Sutton, Eden Valley and Windsor and Maidenhead (communities still being defined by Local Authority areas apparently!) have been nominated 'vanguard areas' by David Cameron to bring forward "innovative local projects which embrace Big Society principles."

In the case of Liverpool, the launch appeared to have been put together at 10 days notice with a certain amount of ad libbing. It seems that the reason Liverpool was on the list was that Phil Redmond (Chair of National Museums and Galleries Merseyside) had heard about the other vanguard project locations being proposed and asked No. 10 to consider Liverpool. The 'vanguard project' here is apparently to recruit volunteers to work alongside paid staff to enable the galleries and museums to extend their opening hours beyond 10 am to 5.30 pm. Blimey! That's original!

Neither Liverpool CVS nor the Volunteer Centre Liverpool had any foreknowledge of the Liverpool pilot and a spokesperson for Liverpool Council said: "We don't know how it's going to work. We have been given no information about this."

### **And it doesn't cut much ice with the charities**

Less than half of charities surveyed by the Charities Aid Foundation believe that Cameron's Big Society vision will work, even if given sufficient resources. 266 CAF charity customers were polled in August and only 46% said they thought the Government's ideas were achievable if they were provided with sufficient funds.

The same poll found that two-thirds of charities feared their finances would be hit in the coming year. Of those, 56 per cent expected an increase in costs, 43 per cent believed they would be hit by public sector cuts, 41 per cent predicted a drop in voluntary donations, and 38 per cent said they thought there would be an increase in demand for their services.

### **Never mind the evidence base, let's do it anyway**

A review from the Third Sector Research Centre concludes that there is little independent evidence to suggest that public services commissioned from voluntary sector organisations are better for users. The review, which examined 48 pieces of research published between 2004 and 2010, says that evidence on the impact of third sector service delivery is scarce and commissioners continue to have doubts about the capacity of third sector organisations to take on contracts. The report is

here: <http://www.tsrc.ac.uk/Research/ServiceDeliverySD/Publicservicesevidence/ereview/tabid/712/Default.aspx>

Rob Macmillan, author of the report, said more attention had been paid to how organisations could navigate and cope with the demands of commissioning than how to improve the services they provide to their users. The review says many sources had noted the need for a cultural shift among organisations to increase their understanding of new processes, build relationships with commissioners

and frame bids around what purchasers wanted to buy rather than what organisations wanted to deliver. Well, that's a pretty clear statement of what we've been complaining about. Have a look at our West Sussex report if you want some real-life examples of how commissioning can damage your health: [http://www.independentaction.net/?page\\_id=6223#more-6223](http://www.independentaction.net/?page_id=6223#more-6223)

### **Suffolk Council says let's get rid of services altogether**

Brave Tory pioneers over at Suffolk County Council are planning a strategy which says 'if it moves, outsource it'. The idea is that they become a 'virtual authority' employing only a few hundred people to monitor the contracts which will have been let to a motley mixture of private and voluntary sector providers. Since I live in Suffolk and am hardly a spring chicken, I am becoming seriously worried about my old age.... You can clock this madness here:

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/society/2010/sep/22/suffolk-county-council-outsource-services?&CMP=EMCSOCEML657>

### **Compact merry-go-round – here we go again**

Students of linguistics will have noted that the hoary old Compact is now to be 'renewed' not 'refreshed'. According to Compact Voice this is because: "the partners wished to emphasise that this process is being driven by the need to renew the entire process (as originally signalled by David Cameron earlier in the year), not just the document, to ensure that Compact principles are widely adopted and followed by Government." Hmm I thought that was what the last circus was all about.

Anyway, it *is* apparently being 'renewed' and we are all again invited to proffer our views. The draft document is out and about and is even shorter than the last version. Should be able to get it onto one side of A4 by about 2012.

However, the solid commitment of the Government to Compact principles has not got off to a good start. The consultation on the changes themselves has been cut from 12 to 6 weeks - but Compact Voice says that the change of government and the threat of severe public sector cuts justified the reduction. And then they did it again in announcing cuts to the Government's 'strategic partners programme', which has provided quite a lot of dosh to national and infrastructure agencies. No consultation period at all this time, but justified by Nick Hurd in a statement by: "the need to provide sustainability and stability for the sector, in this case, overrides the normal requirement for a 12-week consultation process". Another day-is-night announcement - apparently cuts in funding provide sustainability and stability!

## **This month's 'That Takes The Biscuit' award goes to....**

...A (sadly unnamed) senior manager from a Primary Care Trust, not a million miles from Manchester. At a recent Health Partnership meeting, she suggested that a response to the white paper consultation 'Liberating the NHS' should include the idea that voluntary organisations should have a **statutory** 'duty to co-operate' in providing services. I think maybe someone should have a word with her.

## **Next set of instructions for infrastructure bodies on its way**

Nick Hurd has announced that he will launch a consultation on plans to reform voluntary sector infrastructure bodies. Interesting! We had been led to think that there was going to be less state intervention in this Big Society we are all creating? Though the Minister has a role in deciding how to spend public money supporting such bodies, to be honest we don't see why the role and activities of infrastructure bodies is any of his business. The results of the consultation would be published in the autumn, a Cabinet Office spokesman said.

Meanwhile research from [Capacitybuilders](http://www.capacitybuilders.org) shows "the majority of public service commissioners would like to see more mergers and greater collaboration between organisations that provide support and advice to civil society groups." 157 public commissioners were surveyed for the report on *Learning from Mergers*. The report found commissioners think "mergers can deliver a positive impact across a range of areas including simpler funding relationships and easier engagement with the voluntary and community sector". Well they would say that, wouldn't they? You can download the report here: [http://www.capacitybuilders.org.uk/files/capacitybuilders/Learning%20from%20Mergers\\_0.pdf](http://www.capacitybuilders.org.uk/files/capacitybuilders/Learning%20from%20Mergers_0.pdf)

Hurd also said the government would publish a white paper on reforms to public service commissioning this autumn. He said the proposals would include longer-term, outcome-based contracts and allow charities and social enterprises that bid for government contracts to earn a return on their investment. Our Minister said he was concerned about the voluntary sector's "growing dependence" on state funding. "In the long term, the government should be a catalyst for enabling charities to get resources from non-state sources," he said. Right.

## **But is the PM on message?**

Whilst Hurd is telling us to depend less on state funding, the Prime Minister is telling local authorities not to cut spending on the voluntary sector. In answer to a question in the Commons, Cameron said: "We should say to every single council in the country: 'When it comes to looking at and trimming your budgets, don't do the easy thing, which is to cut money to the voluntary bodies and organisations working in our communities. Look at your core costs. Look at how

you can do more for less. Look at the value for money you get from working with the voluntary sector. "

Confused? I reckon so .....

## **Ideas, events, approaches, resources**

### **Nef piggy-backs on the Big Society Show**

New Economics Foundation has jumped on the BSS bandwagon with a paper called Ten Big Questions about the Big Society. Despite the dodgy affinity, the paper has some useful, relevant and challenging material - you can download it here: [http://www.neweconomics.org/sites/neweconomics.org/files/Ten\\_Big\\_Questions\\_about\\_the\\_Big\\_Society.pdf](http://www.neweconomics.org/sites/neweconomics.org/files/Ten_Big_Questions_about_the_Big_Society.pdf)

### **Asset-based Community Development**

Another one using the BSS hook, here is a video explaining the basics about ABCD from aficionado Cormac Russell. You can catch it here: <http://ict4dpwd.ning.com/video/video/show?id=4359325%3AVideo%3A4439>

### **The role of the sector in deprived neighbourhoods**

Yet again, a piggy-back on the BSS but, again, a useful paper - this time from Matt Scott of the Community Sector Coalition. You can have a peek here: <http://www.communitysectorcoalition.org.uk/Policy/The%20role%20of%20the%20sector>

### **Unison urges sector to push for equality tests**

Voluntary organisations should press councils to complete equality impact assessments if their funding is threatened, according to trade union [Unison](#). The assessments analyse the likely equality repercussions of implementing new policies or initiatives. Mike Short from Unison, said: "Councils are bound by law to assess the impact of their actions on grounds of race, gender and disability. Recent legal cases show how important it is for this to happen before councils make changes to the funding they provide to organisations running services on their behalf."

### **Housing associations are a warning to us all**

Voluntary sector organisations that run public services should be aware of the pitfalls encountered by housing associations, says a study jointly published by Joseph Rowntree and Baring Foundations.

It says housing associations have lost their independence and their role as campaigning organisations has diminished as a result of assuming responsibility for housing provision and the need to respond to government targets and demands. "It is a very long time since individual housing associations saw

themselves as campaigning bodies," says the report. "Here are voluntary organisations that are in day-to-day contact with 2.5 million families, including many towards the bottom of the social heap. They see their vulnerabilities and are shocked by neglected needs, but you will rarely hear a squeak about these from the vast majority of housing associations."

Voluntary organisations that "go the same way as housing associations" with regard to running public services could lose some of their independence. Yep, that's just about it.

### **Accommodation or resistance: the historical perspective**

Interesting post from the 'In Defence of Youth Work' brigade on the dilemma many now face about whether to compromise and accommodate to the cuts, or dig your heels in and resist. Drawing on the writings of Thucydides (431 B.C.), it tells the tale of the people of Melos, in the Cretan Sea, faced with the demands of the Athenians to submit to their authority. You can read the dialogue between them here:

<http://www.indefenceofyouthwork.org.uk/wordpress/?p=703>. Sadly, the outcome was not what one may have wished.....

### **Useful report on opposing privatisation of public services**

Arguments and resources to oppose privatisation from the Public and Commercial Services Union (PCS) can be found here -

<http://www.pcs.org.uk/en/resources/privatisation-and-outsourcing-toolkit/privatisation-forum-report.cfm>

### **In Defence of Youth Work second national conference - November 2<sup>nd</sup>**

The In Defence network is holding its second national conference in Sheffield on November 2<sup>nd</sup>. Entitled 'Defending Youth Work: Fighting the Cuts' the event will debate strategies of resistance and local and regional organizing. More information from <http://indefenceofyouthwork.org.uk>

### **Spending cuts will hit the poor hardest**

The impact of the cuts on the poorest 10% will be 13 times greater than on the richest 10%, according to a briefing from the TUC. You can see the basics and download the whole thing here: <http://www.tuc.org.uk/economy/tuc-18463-f0.cfm>

### **National Coalition of Resistance Conference - Saturday 27<sup>th</sup> November**

The Coalition of Resistance is holding a national organising conference on the 27<sup>th</sup> November. Details of the event and registration can be found here: <http://www.coalitionofresistance.org.uk/?p=317>



## **Unite calls national protest against public services cuts – Tuesday 19<sup>th</sup> October**

Protest to Parliament - Mass rally and lobby, Westminster Central Hall, London: from 12.30pm, Tuesday, October 19<sup>th</sup>. More information from [richard.munn@unitetheunion.org](mailto:richard.munn@unitetheunion.org) or [miles.hubbard@unitetheunion.org](mailto:miles.hubbard@unitetheunion.org)

## **Taking Part – Arts, Culture and Civil Society – Conference 29<sup>th</sup> October**

The provisional programme for this conference is now available. It will aim to open up issues regarding the role of arts and cultural activity in civil society, provide an opportunity to strengthen links and develop a shared understanding between voluntary and community groups and those working in arts and participation. You can see what they have lined up here: <http://www.gold.ac.uk/taking-part/programme/>.

### **About this Newsletter**

This newsletter is the voice of the NCIA. Views expressed are not necessarily that of everyone involved with NCIA. We aim to issue newsletters regularly to keep you informed of what we and others are doing or saying.

### **How Can You Participate?**

Tell us your news, write articles, sound off with your opinions and feedback but - most important - find ways of taking your own practical action to defend and protect the independence of your work and aspirations.

Talk to us and others via the Coalition website [www.independentaction.net](http://www.independentaction.net) or the Coalition email address - [indyaction@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:indyaction@yahoo.co.uk) .

We also welcome offers of help. If you'd like to help make this initiative prosper then please get in touch with us.