

## ‘Not in our name’ - Open letter to sector ‘leaders’ on occasion of their expressed support for the Coalition government’s Open Public Services White Paper

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We, the undersigned – along with many people active in voluntary, community and campaigning groups – disagree profoundly with much of the content of this letter. These national bodies do not speak for, or lead us.

We take issue on two matters of principle. Firstly, the letter commits to a party political agenda: the Open Public Services agenda. This policy is code for privatisation and termination of public services. We question whether the sector can be supportive, since charities are forbidden at law from engaging in party politics. We also question whether we should connive in delivery of policies about which there is growing evidence of damage to our common wealth and to vulnerable people. Our starting point should always be the expressed needs of our beneficiaries and those with whom we stand in common cause.

The letter uses the term “public service reform” without any recognition of the diversity of views that exist about the types of reforms needed. We find the letter’s references to government welfare reforms particularly disingenuous, because these are not reforms. They are cuts, the effects of which we observe daily, and are being monitored nationally. The clear inference is that the sector is, through these leaders, offering through increased levels of volunteering to compensate for shrinking public services. This is an untested and dangerous assertion that is being increasingly challenged in the academic and professional worlds, and from within local communities.

Secondly, the letter shows no understanding of the diversity and independence of voluntary action: between national and local organisations, and between service delivery and campaigning bodies. These independent bodies are all corralled together to “stand ready” to help deliver key government policies. The letter fails to mention the increasingly important role that is opening up for voluntary and community groups – campaigning alongside service users, trades unions and public sector staff against harmful cuts. To suggest that the sector’s role is to “help individuals and families prepare for and manage change” or “preparing for their impact” in “this time of transition” is frankly offensive to our members, our self-help communities and the users of our services. Our duty, rather, is to listen to and understand the experiences and needs of local people, then act according to our best judgements and consciences.

One responsibility of the independent voluntary sector is – in a constructive spirit of genuine critical thought and independence – to question and challenge policies which our users and members tell us are harmful. It is certainly not to pen letters which demean us all with a willingness to connive in almost anything, however damaging.

Signatories:

Richard Anderson, Co-Chair of **Wandsworth Against Cuts**; Adrian Barritt, **National Coalition for Independent Action** (NCIA); Michael Bell, Project Manger, **Patchwork Project**, Newcastle Upon Tyne; Sandy Bennett & John Stevens, Co-Chairs & Janice Marks, Head of Agency, **Federation for Community Development Learning** (FCDL); Linda Burnip, **Disabled People Against the Cuts**; Gaynor Clarke, Project Manager, **Scotswood Area Strategy**, Newcastle Upon Tyne; **Professor John Diamond**; Dr Simon Duffy, **The Centre for Welfare Reform**; Paul Feldman, author Unmasking the State & communications editor, **A World To Win**; Val Harris (Chair) **Endorsement and Quality Standards Board for Community Development Learning** (ESB); Vera Martins, CEO, **42nd St**, Manchester; John McArdle Co-Founder, **Black Triangle Campaign**; Denise McDowell, Director **Greater Manchester Immigration Aid Unit**; **National Community Activists Network** (NatCAN) Admin Team; Lesley Pollard, **Chilypep**; John Page, secretary **Hackney Unites**; Steven Rose, Chair English Steering Group, **Campaign for a Fair Society** & Chief Executive **Choice Support**; Sarah Sherif, **Muslim Community Helpline**; **Stroud Against the Cuts**; Dr. Henry Tam, Director, **Forum for Youth Participation & Democracy**, University of Cambridge; Tony Taylor, Co-ordinator, **In Defence of Youth Work Campaign**; Joy Warmington CEO, **BRAP**; Dexter Whitfield, Director, **European Services Strategy Unit**; Maurice Wren, Director **Asylum Aid**.

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This letter was subsequently signed by another 111 individuals.