



Looking to the Future: Continuing our work with children, young people and families in 2011 and beyond

A conference for voluntary and community
sector organisations in the West Midlands

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Conference Report
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Children England

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1. Background

Children England is the leading membership organisation for the children, young people and families' voluntary and community sector. Our mission is to create a fairer society for children, young people and families by championing the voluntary sector organisations which work on their behalf.

Through our VCS Engage programme Children England is working collaboratively in the West Midlands to improve the effectiveness of the children, young people and families sector. The Looking to the Future conference was part of this work, seeking to support organisations facing significant uncertainty about the future through providing a space for organisations working with children, young people and families to:

- Get up to date with policy and other developments affecting their business, what they can do and how to get involved;
- Develop their capacity, skills and knowledge to see them through the tough times ahead and into the future through high quality training workshops; and
- A space to reflect, share and network with colleagues from across the region.

The aim was to have a positive day which acknowledged and skills up organisations to address the immediate difficulties as they approach the end of the financial year, but looked forward positively and supported organisations to be ready to engage in the 'new world' post March 2011. The conference consisted of two key note speeches and a choice of five training workshops.

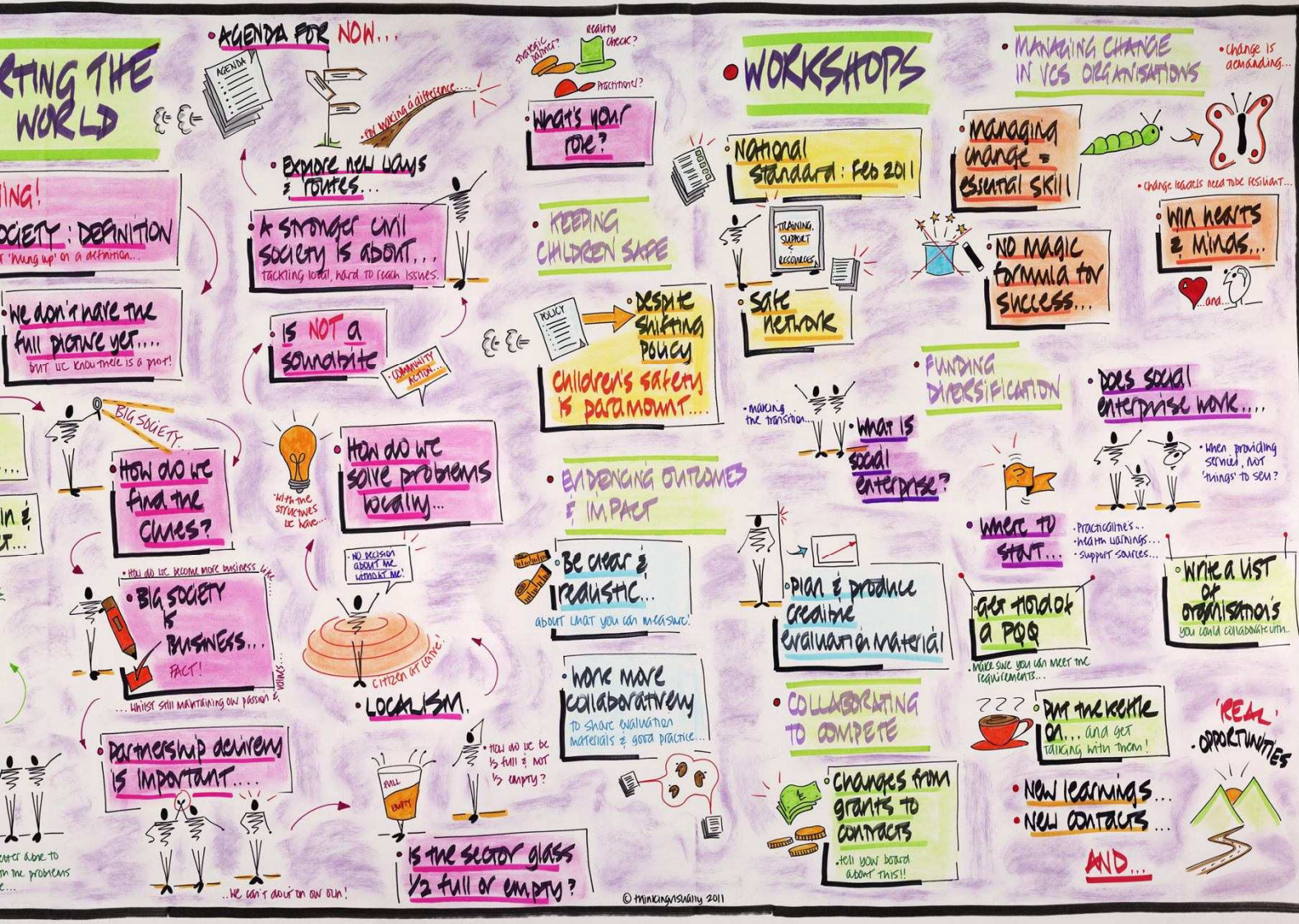
Children England were also commissioned by **RAWM**, who supported this event, to produce a research report to showcase the quality and breadth of voluntary and community sector provision for children, young people and families across the region and to highlight the key challenges facing these organisations.

This research was commissioned as part of RAWM's Sustaining Influence and Change Programme which is working to ensure that the voluntary and community sector has voice and influence in local and regional decision making.

The conference was therefore also used as an excellent opportunity to gather information from delegate organisations about these key issues to cross reference with more in depth telephone interviews already completed as part of the research project.

The key messages from the day including key note speeches and workshop content were capture graphically by Thinking Visually and provide a useful summary of the day. The graphic is presented overleaf followed by an overview of each section.

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3. Key Note Speeches:

3.1 The children, young people and families VCS: A National Perspective

Maggie Jones, Chief Executive of Children England gave an inspiring speech on the continuing role of the voluntary and community sector in meeting the needs of children, young people and families in their communities. She explained that the sector has many dangers to navigate as we move into 2011 and beyond including increased demand for services; uncertainty and churn in funding, structures and policies; waiting for new funding mechanisms; and application of payment by results.

However the sector must not lose sight of the fact that we have much to bring to the table in terms of current government thinking on meeting the needs of communities. Big Society, volunteering, self-help, prevention, community action, reaching out to communities, these things are the bread and butter of our sector. We have a long history of providing tailored, or personalised services to meet individual need, to mixing and matching funding as will be required by place based budgeting, working locally and building from the bottom up.

To meet the challenges ahead our sector will need to change. There will be a need to collaborate more, build partnership and work across traditional boundaries; evidence and shout about what works; skill up for new forms of finance and new service models; prove value for money and efficiency, cutting costs where possible; and tackle workforce challenges. We need to do these things but do it OUR way standing together and supporting each other, being brave and persistent and building on our unique selling points of trust, access and in depth understanding of the children, young people and families we support.

“Time like these are why we are here. Children, young people and families need us on their side and by their side.”

3.1 Charting the new world: engaging with new policies, structures and people

Sharon Palmer, Chief Executive of RAWM gave an overview of current thinking on the Big Society and Localism agendas and the implications for the voluntary and community sector.

Sharon explained the five key objectives underpinning the vision of the Big Society: changing the relationship between the state and the individual; giving control to individuals and communities; changing behaviours and values; tackling social problems and improving lives; and tackling disadvantage through locally responses. The move from grants to contracts and now towards payment by results alongside the increasing requirements for partnership rather than single agency delivery are all part of the changes the sector will need to respond to as the Big Society gathers pace. In addition the restructure of benefits and public services and the concept of putting the citizen at the centre with ‘no decision about me without me’ will also have an impact.

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Putting the citizen at the centre of local decision making and services is also a core theme within the Localism agenda with the idea that people's needs should be met primarily by those 'closest to home' including friends, family and community organisations, with public services and national support targeted to those most in need. As with the Big Society, Localism presents some key challenges for the sector, particularly the changing economic landscape, the growing gap between community needs and available resources and the current uncertainty and instability of funding arrangements.

In responding to these challenges organisations need to reflect on their role and the part they want to play moving forward. Are you a strategic partner ready to step up to the mark, engage with the local authority, PCT or LEP as appropriate? If not do you know who is doing this role, what they're finding out and how you can feed in your experience to support them in advocating for the sector?

4. Workshops

To support the sector in developing the skills, knowledge and understanding to see them through the current challenging times and into the future Children England's VCS Engage programme secured and funded training workshops from experienced trainers in five key areas:

- Change management in VCS organisations;
- Funding Diversification;
- Evidencing outcomes and impact;
- Working together to compete for contracts; and
- Keeping Children Safe.

The key messages from these workshops are given briefly below:

4.1 Managing change in VCS organisations (Directory of Social Change)

- Managing change is an essential skill for managers, having good management processes and practices already embedded in your organisation will help.
- Good and timely communication is key, thinking about the culture of your organisation and the personalities involved will help you find the best approach.
- Be clear about what has already been decided and what is open to consultation.
- Effective change is a mixture of substance (the actual change) and process (the route you take to get there and whether you bring people along with you). Think hearts and minds.

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4.2 Funding Diversification (Social Enterprise West Midlands)

- A social enterprise is “...a business with primarily social objectives whose surpluses are principally reinvested...in that business or community rather than being driven by the need to maximise profit for shareholders and owners.”
- The social enterprise concept provides some useful opportunities to diversify funding in the current climate.
- Social enterprises need a clear community of benefit, a clear market to exploit, the skills required to run them.
- Its not all or nothing, you don't have to move from 'pure purpose' (VCS organisation) to 'pure profit', you could be anywhere on the spectrum and may sell some products or services to generate a profit to plough back into other key areas of your work which are under funded.
- There's plenty of help out there to get started, look at your market and develop your business model.

4.3 Evidencing outcomes and impact (CES National Outcomes Super Champion)

- In the current climate funders and commissioners will be looking increasingly to outcomes and impact as measurers of success and value for money.
- A focus on outcomes is a useful tool for planning and reviewing, focussing on clients needs, and evidencing results to funders.
- Outcomes and impact are different things.
- It's important to be clear about your aims, identify relevant outcomes and indicators, develop appropriate data collection tools and regularly analyse the information you collect.
- Plenty of support and information online at www.ces-vol.org.uk/
www.bassac.org.uk.

4.4 Working together to compete for contracts (ConsortiCo)

- The shift from grants to contracts. Aggregation agenda (collaboratively purchasing lots of services through a single contract) and the need to meet the tender requirements of these bigger contracts are all drivers towards consortia approaches.
- There are legal implications to consortia working- get advice, check your governing document and look at your organisational form and liabilities.
- Think about all the organisations in your area, make a list of those you think you could work with; put the kettle on, invite them round and get talking!
- Get hold of a pre-qualification questionnaire and make sure your organisation can meet all of the requirements.
- There are different models of consortia, each as benefits and drawbacks, ALL take time to develop so get started!

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5.5 Keeping Children Safe (Safe Network)

- Safe Network is a partnership between Children England and the NSPCC providing information, advice and guidance for the voluntary and community sector on:
 - Child protection;
 - Safer recruitment;
 - Anti-bullying;
 - Reducing avoidable accidents.
- The Safe Network Standards will be launched in February 2011 providing core standards and guidance for voluntary and community sector organisations working with children and young people.
- The standards will be a free online resource with a self-assessment tool which generates an action plan to help you address elements of keeping children safe that need attention and links you to all the resources you need with a special toolbox of resources for each standard.
- For more free information on keeping children and young people safe visit www.safenetwork.org.uk.

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5. Looking to the Future Event Key Contacts

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