

2009-2010



Supporting the Voluntary
and Community Sector in a
Changing Environment



Chair's Report

This is my second and potentially penultimate year as Chair of the Trustees of Kingston Voluntary Action. It has been a period of continued growth and stabilisation, in which the organisation has constantly adjusted to the changing needs of its members and funders.

There is a justifiable feeling of uncertainty for the future, but the KVA management team is cautiously optimistic that it is able to react swiftly to the challenges presented by the impending austerity measures proposed for the UK economy, in general, and the voluntary sector, in particular. Undoubtedly, there are projects which will cease due to the ending of their funding, but there will be others that will develop on a 'needs must' basis.

KVA retains its reputation as a 'can do' organisation and will always be in the vanguard of looking for new opportunities and raising the support to fund them. Several planned new projects will be brought to fruition in the next 12 months as funding arrives.

From my viewpoint, KVA is still an exciting, but challenging group to work with and I have no doubt that the management team have the talents to deal with the opportunities and impending changes facing it in the immediate future.

Paul Cox
Chair



The State of the Sector

Kingston Voluntary Action conducted a survey of the local voluntary and community sector. Ninety-two organisations responded, representing approximately 24% of those surveyed.

The responses highlighted the diversity of the voluntary and community sector, in terms of organisation activity, size and income - the latter ranging from no income up to £1,900,000. The results also illustrated the importance of the sector to the local community and economy, with the estimated number of service users over the last year being 59,500, a total income of over £4,677,000, 885 people employed (full or part time) and over 3,500 involved on a voluntary basis (as volunteers or trustees).

Over 26% of respondents are anticipating operating at a deficit this year and whilst only 23.5% are currently involved in commissioning, 46% are looking to develop this further in the future.

The Big Society

The Big Society is the Government's vision for change, which aims to give more power and responsibility to individuals, communities and local government, rather than central government.

The Voluntary and Community Sector is vital to the Government's plans to deliver the Big Society, in particular in delivering the following aims (which are quoted in detail throughout this review):

- Give communities more powers
- Encourage people to take an active role in their communities

- Support co-ops, mutuals, charities and social enterprises

By its very nature, the sector is, in many ways, working towards these goals, but the changes in the economic, political and social environment will make this all the more important. Equally, these principles already underpin the work of Kingston Voluntary Action, however, this presents a good opportunity for KVA to examine how it has been doing this over the past year and how it plans to develop these ideas further to give local organisations and communities the support they need.

Give communities more powers

“ We will train a new generation of community organisers and support the creation of neighbourhood groups ”

Capacity Building and Training

KVA has a long history of providing capacity building training, advice and information and also community development/engagement support to voluntary organisations and community groups in the borough. A diverse range of organisations, including newly emerging small community groups, have accessed one-to-one advice and support sessions (e.g. starting a group, registering as a charity, fundraising - 106 in 2009/10) ranging from children and young people, disability, BME and older persons' groups.

Funding from the BIG Lottery has enabled KVA to further develop as the key infrastructure centre for information, communications, workforce development and training.

As well as providing two Capacity Building Training Programmes per year (276 people from voluntary and community organisations attended courses in year one), we have been developing other services. These include: KVA's information resources e.g. monthly e-bulletins and



development of baseline data about the local sector; developing networks and forums e.g. the Community Development Network; supporting the development of Management Committees to improve their governance; assisting organisations to improve their own communications e.g. developing their own websites. Also supporting the role of Community Development Workers by providing the Development Skills Training Programme - a series of five courses designed to develop local community development and engagement skills in the community, further enabling the support and development of neighbourhood/community groups in the borough.

Working at Neighbourhood Level

“ We will radically reform the planning system to give neighbourhoods far more ability to determine the shape of the places in which their inhabitants live ”

KVA recognises that localism is the way to achieve the Big Society and as a key partner in the Kingston Strategic Partnership, has consistently advocated stronger links to be developed between the four neighbourhoods and the Community Plan. It has been central to the KVA core aim to lead on Community Development and that this locality-based approach be embraced at all levels.

Kingston is one of only 9 boroughs in the UK that is taking part in the Local Integrated Services (LIS) pilot. A LIS represents an extension of Place Based Budgeting allowing local statutory bodies extended budgetary freedoms from central Government department control. KVA, as member of Kingston Strategic Partnership, will be driving forward the community engagement aspects that are so important to the success of the LIS Pilot.

Encourages people to take an active role in their communities

“ We will take a range of measures to encourage volunteering and involvement in social action ”

Promoting Volunteering

Some of the key changes that the recession has had on Kingston Volunteer Centre is the huge increase in the number of people from all walks of life registering with us as potential volunteers for local organisations. Many people want to take part in voluntary opportunities that will help with future employment prospects. We have seen an increase in the number of highly skilled professionals who have been made redundant or had to take early retirement and who want to use their skills and develop new ones in order to change career. More young people are registering for one-off episodic volunteering opportunities where they don't have to commit on a regular basis and are therefore, available for work.

Another key impact is the demand from potential volunteers for different types of voluntary activity they would like to get involved in. As a result, KVC is doing a lot of work in helping organisations develop new and diverse roles using technology for marketing, promotion, business development and so forth.



We are asking organisations to be creative when identifying the tasks that would help their organisation to grow and respond to new and increased demands on their services.

Whilst we at KVC welcome the government's acknowledgement of the impact of volunteering in contributing to stronger, more cohesive society which benefits communities in so many of ways, we wait to see what kinds of financial help they will give to support the volunteering infrastructure. It needs to be noted that, although volunteers give their time and skills freely, there is a cost involved in managing voluntary activity and this investment needs to be made in best practice in volunteering management for the future.

Supports co-ops, mutuals and social enterprises

“ We will support the creation and expansion of mutuals, co-operatives, charities and social enterprises, and support these groups to have much greater involvement in the running of public services ”

A Credit Union mutual to tackle financial exclusion

The Borough of Kingston-upon-Thames is often characterised as one of leafy affluence within which there are pockets of deprivation. Many people living in these 'pockets' cannot access mainstream financial services such as bank accounts, insurance and low cost loans. This is a situation that has undoubtedly increased since banks have tightened up their lending criteria and many low income households are likely to be excluded for the foreseeable future. These people become locked in a cycle of poverty and financial exclusion, where the only options available to them are the high interest loans from home credit companies, money shops, pawn brokers and 'loan sharks'. There is also evidence linking financial exclusion with other forms of social exclusion, such as crime,

unemployment and poor levels of health and education.

Kingston Voluntary Action is committed to developing a local Credit Union which is proven to break this cycle, helping to ensure that more people are able to pay their debts, with residents and workers in the borough benefitting from affordable loans, as well as flexible and ethical savings accounts. Initial steps have been taken with links being made with neighbouring Credit Unions, research into payroll deduction schemes and the re-establishment of an ABCUL (Association of British Credit Unions) study group. We have very good volunteer support ably assisting us with all the necessary groundwork to take this forward.

Social Enterprise Support Programme

There is an established consensus in the UK that the Social Enterprise movement is gaining significant momentum. In a current assessment of awareness of Social Enterprise in Kingston, it was clear that there exists a good understanding of what this involves. Local Voluntary and Community organisations would now benefit from a programme of learning and development to assist them in making any necessary transitions they may feel beneficial to the well being of their organisations.

KVA is initially working with Social Enterprise London (SEL), RBK's Voluntary Sector Unit and the borough's Social Entrepreneur in Residence to construct the bespoke components of the Support Programme. One old chestnut is the language used whenever people start talking about Social Enterprises. It does put people off, as does most jargon. There is a range of Finance issues so it is important that we engage our local Community Accountancy project in this



work. Alongside this, there are questions on Governance which must be tackled and Business Planning remains a key priority.

KVA will aim to source private sector sponsorship to fund the various elements of the Support Programme and will also be looking to identify a Social Enterprise Champion locally.

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