

## GOVERNMENT AND THE VOLUNTARY AND COMMUNITY SECTOR IN NORTHERN IRELAND: TIMELINE OF KEY DEVELOPMENTS

1. The purpose of this briefing note is to provide a timeline of some of the main developments in the relationship between the voluntary and community sector in Northern Ireland. The timeline is not necessarily definitive but does provide useful background information and links to key publications.

### TIMELINE OF KEY DEVELOPMENTS

**October 1998:** The [Joint Government Voluntary and Community Sector Forum](#) is established to give the voluntary and community sector the opportunity to meet regularly with Government Departments. The Forum is responsible for continuously reviewing and improving the channels of communication between Government and the Voluntary and Community Sector. The forum consists of Government representatives and a cross section of representatives from the voluntary and community sector. The forum meets three times a year but there is flexibility to hold additional full meetings on issues of immediate concern. The forum has also developed sub-groups, for example, the sub-group on the Review of Public Administration<sup>1</sup>.

**December 1998:** A '[Compact](#)'<sup>2</sup> Between Government and the Voluntary and Community Sector in Northern Ireland' is published. The Compact is a "jointly prepared, agreed statement of the general principles and the shared values which will govern the further developments of the relationship between Government and the voluntary and community sector in Northern Ireland". The remit of Compact is to clarify respective roles in the relationship between Government and the voluntary and community sector; establish the shared values and principles which underpin the partnership; and, identify commitments to ensure values and principles will govern future relationships between Government and the sector.

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<sup>1</sup> Information extracted from the CommunityNI website – further information on the forum is available at [www.communityni.org/index.cfm/section/article/page/Joint%20Forum](http://www.communityni.org/index.cfm/section/article/page/Joint%20Forum)

<sup>2</sup> NIO (1998) Compact Between Government and the Voluntary and Community Sector in Northern Ireland. [www.dsdni.gov.uk/building\\_real\\_partnership.pdf](http://www.dsdni.gov.uk/building_real_partnership.pdf)

- April 2000:** A [consultation document](#)<sup>3</sup> on funding for the community and voluntary sector is published. The document is based upon a report from an inter-Departmental review group on future funding for the voluntary and community sector. Issues explored in the consultation included the level of consistency in funding for the voluntary and community sector; the sustainability of the sector; the extent of complementarity and interdependence between Government and the Voluntary and Community Sector; the scales and types of funding; and the scope for further diversification in the sector.
- June 2001:** 'Partners for Change'<sup>4</sup> (2001-2004) the Government's strategy for the support of the voluntary and community sector is published for consultation. The strategy set out a programme of action across every government department over a three year period. The publication of the strategy was listed as a policy priority in the Programme for Government under the heading of 'Working Together'. Commitments are made in the areas of neighbourhood regeneration, the economy, transport, the environment, rural development health and social services, education, training, the arts, sport, and EU funding programmes<sup>5</sup>. The 'Partners for Change' strategy was to underpin and take forward the principles agreed in the Compact between Government and the Voluntary and Community sector.
- October 2001:** The Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action (NICVA) publishes a [response](#) to the consultation 'Partners for Change' 2001-2004<sup>6</sup>. NICVA welcomes the publication of the strategy but highlights a number of concerns.
- February 2003:** Des Brown, MP, then Minister with responsibility for Social Development, establishes the [Task Force on Resourcing the Voluntary and Community Sector](#) in Northern Ireland<sup>7</sup>. The Task Force were set the challenge of developing a strategy identifying the action to be taken to ensure that the voluntary and community sector could continue to make a substantial contribution to the achievement of Government objectives and to the well-being of the Northern Ireland community. The Task Force was to identify the impact of changes to the funding programmes and highlight what action was necessary to diversify support for the sector.

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<sup>3</sup> Department for Social Development (2000) Consultation Document on Funding for the Voluntary and Community Sector. [www.dsdni.gov.uk/harbison\\_report.pdf](http://www.dsdni.gov.uk/harbison_report.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> Department for Social Development (2001) Partners for Change: Government's Strategy for support of the voluntary and community sector 2001-2004, consultation document. Available from the NI Assembly Library.

<sup>5</sup> Department for Social Development. News Release. 'Partners for Change: a major new strategy for support of the voluntary and community sector'. 26 June 2001. <http://archive.nics.gov.uk/sd/010626a-sd.htm>

<sup>6</sup> Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action (2001) Response to Partners for Change. [www.nicva.org/uploads/docs/p\\_partners\\_11022003.pdf](http://www.nicva.org/uploads/docs/p_partners_11022003.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> Department for Social Development. Press Release. 'New Task Force to Shape the Voluntary and Community Sector'. 7 February 2003. <http://archive.nics.gov.uk/sd/030207a-sd.htm>

- October 2004:** Publication of '[Investing Together](#)' the report of the Task Force on Resourcing the Voluntary and Community Sector<sup>8</sup>. The Task Force made recommendations in a number of areas including, funding approaches; community development; internal governance, management and accountability; and the review of structures for engagement between the voluntary and community sector.
- March 2005:** The Department for Social Development publish '[Positive Steps](#)'<sup>9</sup>, the Government's response to the report of the Task Force. Proposed action to be taken forward as a result of 'Positive Steps' included the establishment of a Community Investment Fund to support community development activity; a Modernisation Fund to promote modernisation and change within the sector; the movement towards a longer-term funding and planning framework; improving the system of governance and accountability in the community and voluntary sector; and streamlining the audit and accountability of funding to the sector. Positive Steps also recommended the establishment of an [Implementation Group](#) consisting of senior officials within each Department and Chaired by the Minister responsible for Social Development to ensure the momentum generated by the Task Force was maintained.
- July 2005:** A [Best Practice in Manual on Finance and Governance](#)<sup>10</sup> in the Voluntary and Community Sector is launched. The manual was developed by a working group consisting Northern Ireland Government Departments representatives in partnership with representatives of the Voluntary and Community Sector. The manual covers areas such as financial planning, risk management, governance and accountability, fraud and irregularities and auditing.
- February 2007:** Publication of [Deloitte research report](#)<sup>11</sup> on the Voluntary and Community [Support Services Strategy](#). The Government's response to the Task Force on Resourcing the Voluntary and Community Sector, Positive Steps, confirmed that DSD would lead the development of a strategy for support services which would address benchmarks and performance standards for support organisations to help ensure consistency of service provision. The research outlines the core functions of support services, principles governing support services, information

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<sup>8</sup> Department for Social Development (2004) Investing Together: Report of the Task Force on Resourcing the Voluntary and Community Sector. [www.dsdni.gov.uk/investing-together.pdf](http://www.dsdni.gov.uk/investing-together.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> Department for Social Development (2005). Positive Steps: The Government's Response to Investing Together: Report of the Task Force on Resourcing the Voluntary and Community Sector. [www.dsdni.gov.uk/positive\\_steps.pdf](http://www.dsdni.gov.uk/positive_steps.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> Department for Social Development (2005) Setting Standards, Improving Performance: Best Practice in Finance and Government in the Voluntary and Community Sector. [www.dsdni.gov.uk/finance\\_and\\_governance\\_for\\_vcu.pdf](http://www.dsdni.gov.uk/finance_and_governance_for_vcu.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> Deloitte MCS Ltd (2007) Voluntary and Community Sector – Support Services Strategy Report. [www.dsdni.gov.uk/support\\_services\\_strategy\\_report.pdf](http://www.dsdni.gov.uk/support_services_strategy_report.pdf)

from interviews with organisations providing support to the sector, and the opinions of agencies which fund support work.

**March 2007:** Publication of '[Evaluating Progress: Government's report on the Implementation of Positive Steps](#)'. The report stated that there had been considerable progress against the majority of recommendations contained within Positive Steps but recommended that further implementation and monitoring of progress be taken forward by the Positive Steps Implementation Group.

**July 2007:** The Minister for Social Development welcomed the Executive's endorsement for '[Partners for Change' 2006-2008](#)<sup>12</sup> a cross departmental strategy for partnership with the voluntary and community sector<sup>13</sup>. Partners for change covers the period up to 2008 and was developed in response to a commitment given in the Compact to develop a supporting strategy to implement the Compacts values and principles. The strategy is described as an Action Plan that identifies the work that Government Departments plan to undertake in partnership with the Voluntary and Community Sector. Each Department has provided a statement of its commitment to work with the Voluntary and Community Sector. The Voluntary and Community sector participated in the development of the plan through the Strategy Sub-Group of the Joint Government/Voluntary and Community Sector Forum.

**September 2007:** Publication of '[Opening Doors](#)' the Strategy for the Delivery of Voluntary Advice Services to the Community. The strategy is designed to ensure that advice centres are available in areas where they are needed most and to ensure that there is no duplication in service between service providers. The Department for Social Development is to work in partnership with the Advice Services Alliance (ASA) to look at issues such as the recruitment, training and retention of staff providing advice and support services<sup>14</sup>.

**September 2007:** Publication of '[It's all about time](#)<sup>15</sup>', a research report into volunteering in Northern Ireland. The report was produced by the Voluntary Development Agency and was funded by the Department for Social Development. The research is part of the Department for Social Development's work on the

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<sup>12</sup> Department for Social Development (2007) Partners for Change (2006-2008) Government's Strategy for Support of the Voluntary and Community Sector. [www.dsdni.gov.uk/partners-for-change-2006-08.doc](http://www.dsdni.gov.uk/partners-for-change-2006-08.doc)

<sup>13</sup> Department for Social Development. News Release. 'Ritchie welcomes executive support for partnership with voluntary and community sector'. 5 July 2008. [www.northernireland.gov.uk/news/news-dsd/news-dsd-july-2007/news-dsd-050707-ritchie-welcomes-executive.htm](http://www.northernireland.gov.uk/news/news-dsd/news-dsd-july-2007/news-dsd-050707-ritchie-welcomes-executive.htm)

<sup>14</sup> Department for Social Development. News Release. 'Advice services must be directed at those most in need – Ritchie'. 10 September 2007. [www.northernireland.gov.uk/news/news-dsd/news-dsd-september-2007/news-dsd-100907-advice-services-must.htm](http://www.northernireland.gov.uk/news/news-dsd/news-dsd-september-2007/news-dsd-100907-advice-services-must.htm)

<sup>15</sup> Volunteer Development Agency (2007). 'It's all about time: Volunteering in Northern Ireland'. [www.volunteering-ni.org/pdf/ItsAllAboutTimeFullReport2007.pdf](http://www.volunteering-ni.org/pdf/ItsAllAboutTimeFullReport2007.pdf)

development of a [Volunteering Strategy for Northern Ireland](#). The Department have established a Volunteering Strategy Steering Group. The Volunteer Development Agency, in partnership with the Institute of Volunteering Research, will work with DSD to produce a draft consultation document for the Minister to consider and approve. It is intended that consultation on the strategy will begin in autumn 2008 with the final strategy being published in 2009<sup>16</sup>.

**October 2008:** NICVA publishes its final [monitoring report](#) of the impact of 'Positive Steps'. NICVA has conducted a twice yearly assessment of the perceived progress of Positive Steps over a three year period. The report states that overall respondents believe that there is more awareness of Positive Steps and the implementation process and that progress has been made. However, the report also states that there remains a sense amongst the voluntary and community sector that it has been a missed opportunity to radically overhaul the funding environment and how the Government and the Sector interact<sup>17</sup>.

**October 2008:** NICVA issues a [report](#)<sup>18</sup> calling for the Northern Ireland Executive to agree to develop a White Paper on the relationship between the Government and the voluntary and community sector.

**November 2008**

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<sup>16</sup> Information extracted from the Department for Social Development website - [www.dsdni.gov.uk/index/voluntary\\_and\\_community/vcni-volunteering-strategy/vcni-about-volunteering-strategy.htm](http://www.dsdni.gov.uk/index/voluntary_and_community/vcni-volunteering-strategy/vcni-about-volunteering-strategy.htm)

<sup>17</sup> NIVCA (2008). How Positive was Positive Steps?: NICVA's final evaluation of the impact of Positive Steps. [http://www.nicva.org/index.cfm/section/publications/key/Positive\\_Steps\\_final](http://www.nicva.org/index.cfm/section/publications/key/Positive_Steps_final)

<sup>18</sup> NICVA (2008). The potential for a White Paper on the relationship between government and the voluntary and community sector in Northern Ireland. [www.nicva.org/index.cfm/section/news/key/White\\_Paper](http://www.nicva.org/index.cfm/section/news/key/White_Paper)