

Reportback on CCEN Review 2008

Background

The Review was held to look at how well this has worked in enabling groups to participate – what we have done well / what we could improve on - identifying gaps and making suggestions as to how we move forward.

The event took place over two half day sessions – both focussing on the same issues. Participants at the morning session were from front line organisations whilst those attending in the afternoon were nearly all from infrastructure organisations.

Programme

After an initial 'fun quiz' to get people in the mood, participants were asked to look at 6 areas of work of the CCEN, each of which was broken down into 2 or 3 statements, and to decide whether they strongly agreed / agreed / disagreed / strongly disagreed with the statement or didn't know . We then looked at these in more detail and had a discussion about how we could move forward on some of the issues.

The areas of work were:

- Communication and Information
- Organisational Capacity & Learning
- Inclusivity
- Representation and Accountability
- Local Strategic Partnership
- Influence & Impact

Communication and Information

Participants broadly agreed that this was an area where CCEN was achieving what it set out to do – although scoring ranged from Strongly Agree to borderline Agree/Disagree.

Strengths

- It was felt that the CCEN website was very good and was a source of useful information but concern was raised about those groups who do not have access to the internet and how they would access this information
- Email bulletins were effective and a lot of information from VCS groups is received as a response to the bulletins and seminar information going out by email.
- The CCEN role in networking and disseminating information through the networks operating in Camden was also seen as very effective but was reliant on those networks then disseminating the information down to their members.

Weaknesses

- Some concerns raised were about the spread of CCEN membership both geographically, activity and community of interest.
- Participants reported that some groups were uncertain about the CCEN's identity within VAC and we need to clarify where we differ and where we complement
- Whilst the website is a good source of information we need to think more creatively about how we can raise the profile of the CCEN – in libraries, at events held by other groups (AGM's etc)

Suggestions for way forward

- Mapping exercise to identify groups who are members or who are contributing to seminars etc by area/ward, by user /client group by activity so we can pinpoint where the gaps are
- Feedback from CCEN seminars could be published in Voluntary Matters
- CCEN Executive Board members to talk about their role on CCEN when attending other meetings

Organisational Capacity & Learning

All participants were in agreement with the statements under this area of work – that our structures and procedures are clear and transparent and that we provide opportunities for VCS to develop skills to engage with strategic bodies.

Strengths

Spread of organisations / communities of interest / users represented on the CCEN board

Weaknesses

Participants felt CCEN did not utilise their expertise enough –

- members should list all the networks / meetings etc they are involved in and should regularly report back on what is happening in those meetings to the CCEN.
- Members should be talking about the CCEN and what it does when they are attending other events so as to raise the CCEN's profile.

Suggestions for way forward

- CCEN Board members to map out what meetings etc they are involved in and to report back to CCEN about what is happening in those meetings
- CCEN should organise an event about the Compact – why we have a Compact and what impact it has had on the way the council and other public bodies work with the VCS

Inclusivity

The majority of participants either strongly agreed or agreed that the CCEN did its best to involve all VCS groups. One person disagreed mainly because they felt we did not encourage asylum seekers to engage – however it was pointed out the CCEN is about organisations and not individuals and we do have a number of groups who work with asylum seekers and refugees who participate in our activities.

Strengths

- It was acknowledged that CCEN has developed an excellent system of referrals to specific issue / community networks who have the specialist knowledge and who in turn advise CCEN on issues concerning their community/users.

Weaknesses

- Lack of input from Somali community on the CCEN Board – although we do have the CBMEA who are a voice for BME communities in Camden and other infrastructure groups who work with the Somali community

Suggestions for way forward

- CCEN should look at attending events run by other organisations – AGM's, festivals etc to raise profile of CCEN

Representation & Accountability

All participants were in agreement with the statements under this area of work

Strengths

The CCEN Election process was felt to be very open and transparent – GoL used it as an example of good practice and the process has been copied by a number of networks when recruiting representatives to sit on Strategic partnerships

Suggestions for way forward

No specific weaknesses were mentioned and the suggestions made were about making the processes even clearer.

- Election papers to be sent out to various people within the organisation – not just the Chairperson
- Publish the timescale for the elections at the beginning of the year elections will take place so that organisations can begin to discuss how they will get involved
- CCEN should emphasise the value of engaging with the CCEN – engaged, well networked groups are usually more successful – CCEN needs to look at how we can demonstrate this for example through training being delivered by various projects (e.g. management committee, organisational development,) forum meetings etc.

Local Strategic Partnership

This area of work caused some dissent among participants with one strongly agreeing, one agreeing two not sure whether they agreed or disagreed and 2 disagreeing about the role the VCS play on the LSP

Strengths

- Participants felt that the LSP responded to VCS on a personal level but that it was not inclusive in the way it operates
- CCEN contributions to the Community Strategy reporting has been very successful
- CCEN involvement in EPPG group is an achievement

Weaknesses

- Participants recognised that decisions are made behind the scenes and that maybe CCEN needs to build up alliances with other partners outside the LSP
- General feeling that the VCS needs to raise its perception of itself – 3rd sector does not mean least.

Suggestions for way forward

- The general feeling was that the LSP needed to have a Review day where members need to talk amongst themselves about how the LSP is working and what could be done better
- Mapping relationships of board members to other LSP partners
- Participants felt we need to encourage more debate about the Community Strategy reporting and issues that arise from that report through the LSP.
- We need to raise the level of discussion about monitoring processes and their relevance to the VCS
- We need to forge better connections with other partners on the LSP – not just the council

Influence & Impact (re LSP)

Participants views on what impact and influence CCEN has over LSP were mixed with the majority feeling they mostly agreed but with a couple of disagreements

Strengths

Participants felt that what we were doing we were doing well but a lot more needed to be done.

Weaknesses

Participants felt that LSP members and the CCEN Executive need to know what's achieved and we need to be much better at informing them of this

Participants recognized that some issues were not in the hands of the CCEN for example:

- Need changes to be made about how VCS is viewed at Audit Commission level
- LSP does not look constructively/critically at where the Community Strategy has got to
- Different attitudes of different personnel who are unsure where the sector fits.
- CCEN need to be seen differently by LSP – needs to happen above the LSP where decisions are taking place

Suggestions for way forward

- We need to ensure that monitoring is relevant to the VCS – by possibly having a CCEN/ Officer session?
- We need to show that VCS can compete at any level and with high standards – quality marks etc
- CCEN Board members should be making more of a connection with Assistant Directors etc
- CCEN needs to do more outreach in promoting CCEN
- Need to publish the achievements of the CCEN
- Need to be looking for common interests between VCS and small private businesses as they will soon be competing against each other

Conclusion

Input from the event and from a number of questionnaires received from those unable to attend the event show that the CCEN is doing well in involving and engaging with the VCS on LSP business. However there was an interesting difference between participants from front line groups and those from infrastructure organisations on the role of Executive members and how they could be more involved in raising the profile of the CCEN with other partners on the LSP and with VCS groups.

Another issue where there were differences was in the field of outreach to groups. The frontline groups felt that CCEN should be going out to the smaller groups more whilst the infrastructure organisations recognised that while a certain amount of outreach took place, CCEN relies on the various networks it works with to disseminate information down to their member groups to keep them informed.

Whilst all participants felt that the CCEN relationship with the LSP and its partners had improved over the year there was still a feeling that this was still an area of concern.

Recommendations

- To look at the opportunities presented by the Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) and the Audit Commission
- CCEN carries out a mapping exercise of groups who do get involved by ward, type of group/function to be able to better identify gaps
- CCEN to identify contacts in organisations who have specific remit for various issues so can ensure we contact the right person
- Revisit CCEN's publicity with a view to making it more focussed and practical and down to earth and demonstrating the benefits for VCS
- CCEN Executive Board members map out what meetings they regularly attend
- Develop feedback process so CCEN board members can feed issues / concerns from meetings they attend into CCEN
- Crib sheet on work of CCEN and its achievements so CCEN board members can raise the profile of CCEN when attending meetings / events
- CCEN to have regular article /seminar feedback in Voluntary Matters
- Work with networks to ensure that CCEN information is disseminated to their members
- CCEN to publish annual calendar of events including Election process timetable
- CCEN to have presence at other groups events – AGM's etc.
- Develop working links with officers in LSP partners to enable CCEN and them to work together on issues of concern.
- Organise events around Compact and LDF to inform and engage more groups

Flip Charts

Communication and Information

All CEN members need to be well informed about what is happening at the LSP. The CEN needs to ensure that it is adequately informed about different community needs and aspirations. It also needs to facilitate communication between the voluntary and community sector (VCS) and the LSP.

1. The CCEN have up to date information about the Voluntary and Community Sector

Morning Group

100% (5) agree although 20% (1) sat on the fence between agree and disagree whilst 20% (1) felt it was borderline

Comments:

- What is the incentive for small groups to get involved?
- Suggested mapping of groups who do get involved by ward, type of group/function to be able to better identify gaps
- It was pointed out that the Exec board is top heavy with groups in the Kings Cross area.

Afternoon Group

40% strongly agreed and 60% agreed with this statement

2. Information about the CCEN, its role and opportunities for involvement, are effectively disseminated to the VCS

Morning Group

40% (2) agreed with this and 40% (2) were fence sitters with disagree. 20% (1) person – who is not a member of the CCEN Executive Board - didn't know

Comments:

- How good is the address list?
- Some felt it would be useful to look at the VAC/CCEN context; that the connection could be useful in explaining the CCEN and what it does.

Afternoon Group

80% agreed with this statement and 20% (1) didn't know

Comments:

- More information on what goes to the LSP and what comes back on the website in a separate summary

3. CCEN effectively communicates with VCS

Morning Group

80% (4) Agreed to a certain extent – 60% (3) were unsure – sitting on the fence between agree and disagree 20% (1) didn't know.

Comments:

- Publicise what we do as an output – in more creative ways - libraries, community centres etc.
- Embed thinking at strategic level in VCS.
- Plan and summary report of what the CEN has done this year should be published in Voluntary Matters

Afternoon Group

100% (5) agreed with this statement

Comments:

- Website is useful and good online presence but there what about the digital divide?
- Use of networks
- Value to organisation – networks
- CCEN should have a presence at AGM's, meetings etc.
- Name checks in events
- CCEN Executive members should mention their involvement in CCEN in Annual Reports

Organisational Capacity and Learning

The CEN needs to be effectively organised and to ensure that members have the skills and knowledge they need to get the views of the VCS heard by the LSP. It needs to have a clear purpose, to be active and to be forward thinking

4. The CCEN's organisational structures and processes are inclusive and transparent

Morning Group

100% (5) were in agreement with this statement

Afternoon Group

100% (5) were in agreement with this statement

Comments:

- Avoiding 'usual suspects' comments?
- Clear information about CCEN's work etc – dramatize what we do, be more explicit and publicise our achievements

5. CCEN provides opportunities for VCS to develop the skills and knowledge to operate and engage with strategic bodies like the LSP

Morning Group

100% (5) were in agreement with this statement

Afternoon Group

100% (5) were in agreement with this statement

Post it Note

Not sure whether this goes beyond the CCEN LSP representatives

6. CCEN is effectively relating to the LSP, including the council's Planning and Performance Group , Compact and Change Up groups

Morning Group

20% (1) Strongly agreed and 80% (4) agreed with this statement

Comments:

- Exec members felt we CCEN should utilise them a lot more to raise the profile of CCEN
- CCEN board members who sit on other groups should list the groups they are involved with and report back about these to CCEN.

- Members felt there was a need for a seminar about Compact – the history behind why we have a Compact and the impact it has now.

Afternoon Group

100% (5) were in agreement with this statement

Inclusivity

The CEN needs to ensure that it encourages the involvement of all community groups.

7. The diversity of local communities is reflected in the CCEN and by those acting / speaking on its behalf

Morning Group

20% (1) strongly agreed and 80% (4) agreed with this statement

Comments:

Need to do mapping exercise to see where the gaps in membership are

Afternoon Group

60% (3) agreed although one was borderline with disagree. 20% (1) disagreed and 20% (1) disagreed strongly

Comments:

- Language issues for refugees – multiple identities
- Issues / responses raised at LSP
- Referral of issues to other networks

Post It Note

Don't often hear the views of asylum seekers

8. CCEN creates opportunities for a range of groups to participate

Morning Group

40% (2) strongly agreed 20% (1) was borderline strongly agree and agree and the other 40% agreed with this statement

Comments:

The issue of participation from the Somali community was raised as there is no direct Somali representation on the CCEN Executive Board

Afternoon Group

20% (1) Strongly agreed and 60% (3) agreed (although one was borderline with disagree and 20% (1) disagreed with this statement

Comments:

- CCEN should look at getting out to events held by other infrastructure organisations etc., to raise profile of CCEN work

Post It Note

Seminars could be held in Gospel Oak (For example) to enable Somali (other communities) to engage

Representation and Accountability

The CEN needs to ensure that VCS members are properly selected. It then needs to ensure that they are equipped to provide an effective VCS viewpoint at the LSP, to make an impact and to be accountable back to local groups

9. VCS members of the LSP are elected through a transparent election process

Morning Group

100% strongly agreed with this statement

Comments:

- Some participants felt that it would be a good idea to advertise an annual timescale highlighting the election process
- Election papers to be sent out to a variety of people within organisations (not just the Chair)
- Emphasise to Chairs that elections are a management committee subject
- Look at having a session on the importance of CCEN membership/involvement in training for management committee members through VAC's training programme

Afternoon Group

60% (3) Strongly agreed and 40% (2) agreed with this statement

10. CCEN supports VCS members of the LSP to play an active role

Morning Group

60% (3) Strongly agreed 20% (1) agreed and 20% (1) did not know

Comments:

Afternoon Group

40% (2) strongly agreed, 40% (2) agreed and 20% (1) didn't know

11. VCS members of LSP meet regularly, are briefed prior to LSP meetings and have an opportunity to feedback

Morning Group

60% (3) Strongly agreed 20% (1) agreed and 20% (1) did not know

Afternoon Group

40% (2) strongly agreed, 40% (2) agreed and 20% (1) didn't know

LSP

Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) prepare and implement and monitor the Community Strategy, and performance manage the Local Area Agreement. VCS play an important role in this

12. LSP decision making processes include VCS members as effective partners

Morning Group

On this issue on 1 person (20%) agreed 40% (2) were unsure whether they agreed or disagreed and 40% (2) disagreed

Comments:

- Participants felt that the LSP included the VCS on a personal level but was not so inclusive in the way it operates
- The general feeling was that the LSP needed to have a Review day where members need to talk amongst themselves about how the LSP is working and what could be done better
- Participants recognised that decisions are made behind the scenes and that maybe CCEN needs to build up alliances with other partners outside the LSP
- VCS could become allies of other partners by lobbying on their behalf
- General feeling that the VCS needs to raise its perception of itself – 3rd sector does not mean least.

Afternoon Group

20% (1) Strongly agree and 80% (4) disagree with this statement

Comments:

- Impact on LSP – lot of work to do with other members – undermine CCEN work – CCEN & VCS need to look at
- Burying old prejudices – no longer the ‘us and them’ we should all be working together.
- Informed networking
- Mapping relationships of board members to other LSP partners
- Rules of engagement need to be clear – what CCEN Board say when talking about CCEN to other organisations

13. CCEN LSP members are supported to participate effectively at LSP and to raise the profile of VCS work

Morning Group

80% (40) agreed with this statement 20% (1) didn't know

Comments:

- Participants felt we need to raise Community Strategy reporting and issues that arise through the opportunities the LSP presents
- We need to raise the level of discussion about monitoring processes
- We need to forge better connections with other partners on the LSP – not just the council

Afternoon Group

20% (1) Strongly agreed 60% (3) agreed and 20% (1) didn't know

Influence and Impact

This is about the VCS exercising greater influence and responsibility over the decisions made by LSPs and other partnerships, in ways that improve the quality of life of the communities they work with

14. CCEN support has enabled local VCS to have a stronger voice.

Morning Group

100% (5) agreed with this statement

Comments:

- Participants felt that LSP members need to know what's achieved and we need to be much better at informing them of this
- We need to ensure that monitoring is relevant to the VCS – by possibly having a CCEN/ Officer session?

- CCEN Board members should be making more of a connection with Assistant Directors etc
- Possibility of entertainment budget – for breakfast / lunch time meetings?

Afternoon Group

20% (1) strongly agreed and 80% (4) agreed with this statement

Comments:

- Observers at CCEN meetings
- Outreach and promoting CCEN
- CCEN board – two roles expressed
- VCS knowledge of other strategic networks

15. CCEN contributes effectively to LSP

Morning Group

60% (3) agreed with this although 20% (1) was borderline between agreeing and disagreeing. 20% (1) disagreed and 20% (1) didn't know

Afternoon Group

20% (1) Strongly agreed, 40% (20 agreed, 20% (1) disagreed and 20% (1) didn't know

Comments:

- VCS are competing with private businesses CCEN should look at common interests
- Publicising achievements and clear message about CCEN

Post it Note

To offer an opinion on this statement would require views of other LSP members and concrete examples of where change has occurred

16. CCEN is helping the LSP to better understand the VCS

Morning Group

60% (3) agreed with this although 20% (1) was borderline between agreeing and disagreeing. 20% (1) disagreed and 20% (1) didn't know

Comments:

- LSP does not look constructively/critically at where the Community Strategy has got to
- CCEN need to be seen differently by LSP – needs to happen above the LSP where decisions are taking place
- We need to show that VCS can compete at any level and with high standards – quality marks etc
- Need changes to be made about how VCS is viewed at Audit Commission level
- VCS needs to show that it is prepared to change and address issues

Afternoon Group

80% (4) strongly agree and 20% (1) agree with this statement

Comments:

- Need to keep emphasising the value of the sector and what that value is
- Different attitudes of different personnel who are unsure where the sector fits.

Post It Note

Although much more work is required. Officer attitudes / treatment of VCS is still (regularly) unacceptable.