

Changes to Voluntary & Community Sector Infrastructure in Manchester. An update from MACC.



You'll see elsewhere in this newsletter a letter to the sector from Manchester City Council about changes to infrastructure support for the local sector. I guess it's best to start with the story so far....

You probably know that following the survey conducted by the Council in late 2010, a "stakeholder group" was put together to discuss the future of support for the local sector. This continued working throughout much of the year. I do want to recognise & applaud the commitment of the City Council to addressing the voluntary sector infrastructure issues in the midst of all the other difficult decisions being made.

We know that there have been concerns among local groups that little information was shared about what was happening. We shared these concerns: we felt, as did others around the table, that there were several stakeholder interests not represented in the discussions. We also asked the City Council to release some key documents which came out of the process. As part of our new agreement with the City Council we've therefore assembled a library of documents which tell the story of the discussions & how we reached this situation. If you want to know more about how we reached this point, those documents are the key. All the documents are available here: www.macc.org.uk/macc/bigmacc.php

From MACC's point of view, we had to decide during what we could bring to the table in these discussions, what we could offer to do. Our Committee felt that the best thing we could do for the local sector was to let the organisation evolve in the hope of resolving some gaps in infrastructure provision which have been known about for a number of years - such as the lack of a volunteer centre. This was a tough decision for them: since it was founded in the early 1980s MACC has had a specialist focus on health & social care (in its broadest sense) & our Committee wanted to ensure that no matter what happened, that work would still be in the mix somewhere. So in the discussions with the stakeholder group, our offer was to put the whole of MACC "on the table" & restructure the organisation.

We have committed to reviewing the **management, governance & structure** of the organisation but above all to **consult with the local sector**. We've been stuck in a tricky position of wanting to talk to groups and get the sector involved in shaping the future but have held back in order to respect the process established with the stakeholder group. In the New Year we will be at last starting to have events about to talk about what the new MACC would look like. We don't want this to be a one-off exercise: it's a dialogue. Our vision is that it should be owned by & accountable to the local sector. **Watch out for these events and discussions between January and March.**

Governance

As part of the changes to our governance, MACC is currently completing the process of conversion from Industrial Provident Society to Registered Charity & Company Limited by Guarantee. This is a change which we would have had to make anyway due to the 2006 Charities Act but, as part of our offer to “put MACC on the table” we took the opportunity to review the objects of the organisation in order to create the kind of broader approach we feel is needed in Manchester. Our new objects are:

- To promote any charitable purposes for the benefit of the public, principally but not exclusively in the local government area of Manchester & its environs (hereinafter called the “area of benefit”) &, in particular, build the capacity of third sector organisations & provide them with the necessary support, information & services to enable them to pursue or contribute to any charitable purpose.
- To promote, organise & facilitate co-operation & partnership working between third sector, statutory & other relevant bodies in the achievement of the above purposes within the area of benefit.
- To promote volunteering & good citizenship.
- To promote the health & well-being of the local community.
- To promote the wider acceptance of equality & diversity in the local community.

You will see that our work around health & our focus on the voluntary sector are still there but put in a new, wider context. We’ve been doing some work to look at our new membership structure & that is one area we want to talk to the local sector about in the New Year. **We’ll also be looking to bring new members onto the MACC Board of Trustees & will be advertising for Trustees in January.**

Transforming Local Infrastructure

As the Council’s process continued, the Office for Civil Society announced the Transforming Local Infrastructure Programme in late July. Not unlike the Transition Fund, this was a process with a very short timescale & aimed to help infrastructure organisations adapt to the new landscape. It involved putting together a partnership with a single lead agency. Local stakeholders agreed that MACC should take the lead role in order to submit a single bid for the city by 31st October. There was a large number of expressions of interest from local, regional & national organisations in being involved in the development of infrastructure in Manchester: in taking the lead, MACC therefore took the opportunity to bring around the table groups & interested which had not been involved in the Council process to shape a bid which could build on the work so far. This would mean we could build on the services the City Council has chosen to invest in – again, using the feedback from the 2010 survey as our evidence of the sort of thing the sector is looking for as well as our own knowledge from talking to local groups over the years. The decision is due in late January 2012 but even if our bid is unsuccessful, it made us all think more creatively about how a lead infrastructure organisation in Manchester needs to develop over the coming years.

Volunteer Centre Manchester

Of course, the first thing you’ll really see, as reported elsewhere in this newsletter is the Volunteer Centre for Manchester. This will develop by working with all the

existing volunteering support services (including GMYN, MEV, 4CT's new Get Experienced project), filling in the gaps & providing a recognisable branded volunteering service. We don't see this as a "centre" in the City Centre: we're aiming to work in local communities & with local groups. This is putting into practice recommendations from the Volunteering Report produced by Martin Duffy in 2009: one of the documents available on the Community Central website.

Due to losing other funding streams, Manchester Youth Volunteering Project (MYVP) recently took the decision to close down & transfer their knowledge, information assets, goodwill & support to the new Volunteer Centre. All of us at MACC would like to pay tribute to their maturity & goodwill in taking this approach & thank the Board & staff of MYVP for their support for us at what is a difficult time for them. In return we have committed to ensuring that there will always be a clear identifiable strand of work to encourage young people into volunteering & community activity. I went to MYVP's "after show party" on 25th November & was very touched by the fact that while people were sad that the project was closing, they were also really happy to see that at long last Manchester was getting the Volunteer Centre it has needed for such a long time.

The Future....

There is a lot of hard work ahead for us but we recognise that we're incredibly lucky in the current environment to be starting such exciting new work at MACC. We hope our colleagues in the local sector can see how this is an opportunity for Manchester to have the kind of lead infrastructure organisation it has lacked for so long. MACC will grow but it's not our intention to have a huge organisation in the city centre. I think it's also important to bust the myth that MACC suddenly has a massive amount of new money: we don't! Compared to what was previously spent on infrastructure there's been **a cut of more than 25%** in the budget and **we have to do a lot more** with the budget than was the case in the past: the volunteer centre, for example. We want to create a simple but effective way of working which brings together general support for groups with specialist knowledge around areas such as BME groups, work with young people & our health & social care work.

However, we're very aware that we're in the position of having new opportunities when so many of our colleagues in the sector are getting bad news about funding cuts. MACC has not been immune from cuts: we suffered a major cut earlier this year & expect further cuts from some funders next year. We have lost staff & cut back expenditure to the absolute minimum. As we advised others to do last year, we did a lot of work to prepare for the "icebergs" we knew were ahead.

I'm pleased that we're at last able to start talking about shaping the future of all these new areas of work. We've lots of ideas but we really want to talk to everyone in the sector about how it should develop. This is an opportunity for us at MACC but I hope you share our view that it's really an opportunity for the whole sector in the middle of very difficult times.

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