

Ms Tracey Crouch MP
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Sport and Civil Society
Department of Digital, Culture, Media and Sport
100 Parliament Street
London
SW1A 2BQ

17 May 2018

Dear Minister,

A Civil Society Strategy that empowers, enables and supports

As organisations that support and represent charities, funders and community organisations across the country we welcome the engagement surrounding the development of the forthcoming Civil Society Strategy. We are eager to ensure that it results in a robust approach which both recognises and enables our vibrant civil society to meet the challenges that all communities across the country, as well as the causes we support abroad, are facing.

We define civil society as those individuals who come together, and the charities, voluntary and community groups and organisations, and social enterprises who establish in response to a need. They seek to raise the voices of those they support, both here in the UK and abroad, and operate on a not-for-profit basis for public benefit. These actors play a vital role in our communities and society more broadly; they are driven by their mission and ethical values that place them in a unique position in society to tackle some of our toughest problems. It is essential that the Civil Society Strategy acknowledges this unique role and sets out clearly how it will work with these organisations which are at the heart of shaping a country that works for everyone.

The strategy is an opportunity for the government to cement its long-term commitment to enabling civil society to thrive, not only within the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport but right across all departments and at every level. It is critical that the strategy focuses on how government can not only better enable the sector but also provide a blueprint for long-lasting engagement. To effectively tackle the many challenges ahead, we need a living and breathing strategy that fundamentally reassesses how government works with the sector. It should not be focused on what government thinks the sector should do; this is for the sector to determine with their beneficiaries. Instead the strategy should set out how the government can support and enable civil society to achieve its potential.

For the new strategy to achieve the change that is needed, we need to move beyond transactional relationships between the sector and the government, instead working to build understanding, trust and respect, to inform better decision making and to ensure people can access the support they need. This should be built on reform in two key areas:

- **Ongoing sector engagement:** the role of charities traditionally extends far beyond delivering services, indeed many charities and civil society actors will never engage in this activity. Established to improve society, charities and community organisations have a strong history of leading social change. They have a responsibility to use their expertise, often drawn from experience of work on the ground, to speak up and campaign on injustices so that problems can be solved, not only patched up. It is in the interest of all government departments to listen and enable this expertise to be shared. The Civil Society Strategy is an opportunity for the government to set out how it will engage, listen to and work with the sector. It is critical that the strategy ensures that no government department has the power to stymie the voice of the sector, making sure that government funding supports civil society to speak out and recognising the positive impact of working with civil society to understand needs and solutions – and indeed contribute towards government achieving its own objectives.
- **Strategic use of funds:** a strong and effective civil society needs to be built on a funding system that enables the sector to deliver long-term value. The strategic use of funds is central to this. Where funds are available, such as Dormant Assets, they should be used strategically to support the long-term sustainability of the sector. Funding system reform should look at building long term sustainability, reducing long term costs, complexity and bureaucracy, with greater use of grants to enable flexibility and innovation, particularly to unlock the potential of the 97% of charities which have an income under £1m.

While each of our organisations will be submitting detailed responses to inform the strategy, and encouraging charities to respond directly, we are collectively calling on the government to ensure the new strategy has the strength to transform the government’s relationship with the sector so that we can work collectively to build a stronger society.

The strategy needs to protect and promote the sector’s critical role in raising the voices of those it supports, and importantly, ensure the government listens to and acts on the expertise shared by the sector. If we are able to improve how the government works with the sector, this consultation needs to be the beginning, not the end, of engagement. Civil society organisations are ready and willing to share the expertise that they have gained through working with communities; knowledge and experience that is the bedrock for change. This strategy provides an opportunity for government to demonstrate how it will work with civil society towards our shared vision of a country that works for everyone.

We look forward to working with you towards helping achieve this.

Yours sincerely,



Paul Streets
Chief Executive
**Lloyds Bank Foundation for
England & Wales**



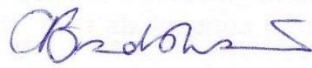
Vicky Browning
Chief Executive
**Association of Chief Executives
of Voluntary Organisations**



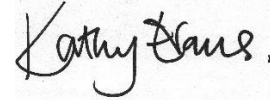
Carol Mack
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**Association of Charitable
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Judith Brodie
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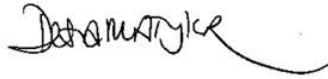
Caron Bradshaw
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