

The Kruger Report - Levelling up our Communities

Summary and Commentary

At a time when voluntary and community groups are recognising that COVID-19 is going to with us for the long haul and the longer term impact that is going to have on service provision and delivery, it is heartening that Danny Kruger's Levelling Up report recognises that more support in the short term and during a future recovery phase will be crucial for charities. This report identifies the importance of civil society to government and how vital charities are in the country's recovery from the pandemic and 'levelling up' agenda.

Below details elements of the report that could impact on the voluntary and community sector in the county if implemented. Whilst the Prime Minister has welcomed the report he is yet to commit to act on it. Government will need to work closely with charities in its implementation without delay.

What could the report mean for the voluntary and community sector in Northumberland?

Power

- The report recognises how integral communities have been to the response to COVID-19. Recognising the vital role of local people acting together to deliver the kind of neighbourhood they want, a social covenant is proposed. A mutual commitment for the public, VCS and public sector to work together for the common good of all. Decisions on what is done in local places being taken by people as close to the ground as possible, ideally the people who actually live there.
- The report proposes a declaratory Community Power Act, which affirms the right of ordinary people to effect meaningful change in their own neighbourhoods. The Act should make two key provisions: the Community Right to Serve, giving local people the power to challenge for responsibility in areas of public policy which would be better delivered by, or in partnership with, communities themselves; and Community Improvement Districts, bespoke arrangements in particular places to experiment with a series of community-led innovations. This enables charities, residents' groups to lodge a claim to be involved in the design or

delivery of a public service, with an obligation on the public agency to respond to the claim reasonably and publicly.

- Using dormant assets to create a permanent endowment for communities – the Levelling Up Communities Fund (LUC). One option would be to distribute LUC Fund income through local trusts, like the Community Foundations.
- The importance of digital technology and data to empower individual and communities is recognised and the need to develop a strategy to enable digital inclusion for all. It also recognises the need to speed up work to agree a means of accurately measuring civil society activity and value.
- The report states that public bodies **must** account for social value in public service contracts. Whilst it may take some time for commissioners to adapt to this, it potentially provides an opportunity for improved collaboration in terms of commissioning and service design.

People

- Recognising the value of volunteering through the pandemic and make volunteering easier and help address some of the barriers, a volunteer passport is proposed to help volunteers move between opportunities. Suggests that Volunteer Passport holders would undertake work in one or more of the following three categories: The National Volunteer Reserve, Community Support, and Public Service.
- As part of the Opportunity Guarantee, a structured programme for young people to serve their local areas in meaningful roles, building skills and sense of public duty.
- For each faith group, the offer would include the commitment to mobilise their congregations and commit their resources to tackling one or more besetting social problem in our society.
- Creating a single day in the year when neighbourhoods are encouraged to celebrate together but only if public support.

Places

- Decision-makers should work together, and with communities, to create more bespoke local policy. Neighbourhoods should be able to develop their own Social Value Plans to set the parameters of public procurement locally.
- Need to do more to help communities retain public buildings as neighbourhood assets
- Local Area Coordinators can work with anyone and, within a framework of principles, organise any support or service that is appropriate to the people they are helping. Rather

than working with individuals or households, Community Organisers work with communities to identify and realise local goals.

- Government should engage communities in an analysis of what combination of Social Action Hubs, Family Hubs, Wellbeing Hubs and other coordinated services, would be appropriate in different places. The objective should be to ensure joined-up support services for residents, reducing duplication and lack of communication between different statutory services. Government should make a major commitment to support the local library as the hub of the 21st century community.
- Make it easier for charities to access the benefits of charity status, and where needed, support them to improve their work and to sustain their existence. This particularly applies to the mutual aid groups which have emerged in recent months and which have an important role to play in the recovery phase.
- Government should engage with the sector to help nurture a revived, modernised version of the CVS. This could include full-time resources, accessed through the new funds. The modernised CVS should promote not just charities but all organisations, including those focused on trading, that have social purpose as their mission. It could also involve charities accessing advice and support from businesses, the public sector and elsewhere in civil society.
- The government should establish a 'MatchTrade' scheme where public money is used to match the revenue social enterprises make through trading.
- We need a better culture of giving. Engage seriously with the wealth and philanthropy sectors to see how greater philanthropy could be induced through changes to the tax system. Perhaps a role for MPs in spearheading diaspora philanthropy drives in partnership with their local councils and civil society.

Comment

It is welcoming the recognition that has been given to how integral communities have been to the national response to COVID-19 and their importance in long term recovery. Also recognising the importance of 'people power' and investing in communities with a dedicated fund.

Recognition of the value of infrastructure organisations and to be fully funded is to be welcomed. The report clearly recognises that this provision has been lost in some areas hence reference to revival but in terms of modernising, infrastructure organisations continue to develop and adapt to circumstances and many would state that they are in place to and support all voluntary and community organisations with social purpose including social enterprises.

As a VCS infrastructure organisation we have for a long time had a commitment and promoted community led local development which is also stated by Northumberland County Council as the right approach, supporting independent social action, so it is pleasing to see this approach promoted

in the report. This would provide opportunities to increase community resilience and strengthen social infrastructure.

In relation to service provision for example, the importance of NHS collaboration with community groups is stated and Job Centre Plus and DWP working closely with the VCS in relation to employment support, the latter in particular is progressing across sectors in the county.

Making it easier to volunteer is to be welcomed but there is a need to recognise the greater flexibility that volunteers require in their roles in terms of commitment of time, motivation and skills that should be given priority. However, promoting volunteering is to be welcomed

The sector whilst recognising it has value has often struggled demonstrating its value, numerically and a nationally agreed measure might be helpful in doing this. However, this should not detract from the qualitative outcomes that provide 'flesh to the bones' in demonstrating the value and outcomes achieved by the voluntary and community sector.

Improved opportunities for philanthropic giving and raising the importance of social value are particularly important in supporting the voluntary and community sector.

The report promotes the important role and value the voluntary and community sector has in supporting government with the 'levelling up' agenda and whilst one might not agree with all the elements in the report there are interesting issues raised that the VCS can take away and give further thought to.