

UNITARY AUTHORITIES AND THE FUTURE OF YOUTH WORK. SUMMARY OF PRESENTATION.

1. The Process.

1.1. Local government in Wales is about to be reorganised for the second time in twenty years. As from 1st April 1996, the present county councils and district councils will be dissolved and replaced by twenty two "all - purpose" unitary authorities. Today, 4th May 1995, these new councils are being elected, and from tomorrow they will work alongside representatives of the existing councils as "shadow authorities", deciding their policies and strategies, appointing staff, and drafting their service delivery plans. They will assume full control on 1st April next year.

1.2. In 1974, when local government in Wales was last reorganised, the reorganisation amounted to little more than a few new boundaries and appellations, with the new authorities so created functioning pretty much in the mould of their predecessors.

1.3. The 1996 reorganisation will be different. As last time, there will be boundary and name changes, and there will be mergers and separations. But it is intended that there will also be a fundamental change in the concept of how local authorities should act in discharging their duties and powers.

1.4. It is this conceptual change which will provide opportunities for voluntary sector organisations. But they too will have to be willing to change, and to change continuously if they are to take full advantage of these opportunities.

2. The New Authorities: Duties, Expectations, and Legacies.

2.1. Most people seem to take little interest in local government. National and international politics dominate the air waves and cover acres of newsprint. Local government, which affects our communities very directly and controls budgets totalling many hundreds of millions of pounds in Wales, is rarely considered worth a mention even in the local press, except when there is some absurdity to ridicule, a contentious school closure proposal, or when the councillors' expenses are announced. Comparatively few of us turn out to vote in local elections, and this second reorganisation in the space of twenty years has hardly raised an eyebrow. Arguably, our indifference and ignorance have made existing local government remote and perhaps inconsequential.

2.2. Central Government claims that the new authorities will be " better understood, more accountable, better able to coordinate services, more efficient, and more cost effective".

2.3. They will be responsible for land use and economic development; social services and housing; aspects of emergency planning; aspects of highways and transportation; and "education, cultural and leisure services" which includes the statutory duty to

secure adequate facilities for further education, including the Youth Service. Although there are suggestions of "lead authorities" and inter-authority collaboration, most of the unitaries will want to stand alone and take full control of the services they have the duty or power to secure.

2.4. Their over-riding duty will be to secure for the people of their area high quality services which are relevant and cost effective.

2.5. They will have a vision for their area and they will have a strategy for making that vision a reality. They will be entrepreneurs, quality controllers, customer carers, enablers, and collaborationists.

2.6. They will be enablers in two ways. Firstly, their services will be designed to enable communities and individuals to become empowered and self-sustaining so that they can achieve their full potential. Secondly, it is intended that they will be enablers in the sense that they will, in time, *secure* more services than they will provide directly themselves. That means that they will act as commissioners, deciding the services they want for their area, the range and quality of those services, the amount they are prepared to invest in them, and ensuring the quality of services. They will then purchase these services either from their own "in-house" organisations or from the voluntary sector.

2.7. It is this commissioning of services which is a crucial change, and it is this which gives voluntary sector organisations opportunities to play an even more significant part in delivering services and in contributing to the development of individuals and communities.

2.8. Indeed, the White Paper which heralded Reorganisation emphasised the importance of the voluntary sector and made it clear that Central Government will expect the new authorities to:

" co-operate fully with the voluntary sector";

" submit proposals for working with the voluntary sector";

" work with the voluntary sector in the development of the Youth Service".

2.9. The new authorities will inherit the challenges faced by their predecessors. These include: the protection and development of the Welsh Language; the economic, cultural and environmental concerns of rural Wales; the decline and disappearance of traditional industries elsewhere; lack of jobs and job security; poverty and homelessness; changing family patterns; the role and aspirations of women; the ageing of the population; and the criminality, disaffection, alienation, apathy and distrust which is prevalent in some communities. They will have greater responsibilities and the demand for their services will inevitably increase, but their powers will be curbed and their budgets will be reduced year on year. The wise among them will look for help, and where better to find it than in the voluntary sector.

3. The Youth Service in the New Authorities.

3.1. "*Building the Future*" sets out what the Youth Service in Wales is or should become. It was commissioned by the Wales Youth Agency from a small advisory group of people working in various capacities in the maintained and voluntary youth work organisations. It describes youth work, explains why it is important, and suggests how its adequacy and quality can be assessed, and how youth work provision might be best organised and delivered. A draft was widely distributed for comment, and the final document was generally well received. It is fair to say, therefore, that it expresses a consensus view of what youth work in Wales is, and should be, about.

3.2. The Agency has sent copies to members of transitional committees and the officers who advise them, to officers and key staff in the maintained and voluntary youth work organisations, and to the Welsh Office where the new local authorities will be sending their service delivery plans for approval.

3.3. The document states unequivocally that the Youth Service is an education service. It is concerned with the welfare, the well-being and the development of young people. It is mandatory, and it is delivered by the maintained and voluntary sectors in partnership.

3.4. Its clients are young people aged 11 to 25, with priority given to those aged 13 to 19. Young people who are at risk or alienated should be its special concern.

3.5. Its purpose is the empowerment of all young people so that they can achieve their full potential. Its values include tolerance, trust, optimism, and equality of opportunity and equity for all.

3.6. The document endorses an earlier publication, *the Youth Work Curriculum Statement for Wales*, which was produced by a similar process of consultation. Both publications agree that the Youth Work curriculum should be educative, participative, empowering and expressive. It should be designed to help young people to build and sustain relationships; to understand and value themselves and others; to be compassionate; to become assertive and responsible; to develop self confidence and self reliance; to be dependable and inter-dependant; to develop existing skills and interests and to discover new ones.

3.7. In Youth Work, processes are far more important than instruction. What matters is the ethos of the organisation, the values and demeanour of youth workers and the quality of their relationship with young people, and the range and quality of the learning opportunities.

3.8. Youth Work takes place in a variety of settings; it is a partnership between the maintained and voluntary sectors; and it should be an inter-agency partnership also.

3.9. Various systems of delivery exist or are envisaged, including informal and formal neighbourhood consortia. There are sometimes local advisory groups or area management committees, and business plans, service level agreements and contracts are beginning to emerge.

4. Some Implications for Voluntary Youth Organisations.

4.1. Voluntary organisations will have to decide whether they want to take up the challenges and opportunities which Reorganisation brings. If we do, we will need to review our policies and practices and if necessary be willing to change radically.

4.2. We must review our values, beliefs and principles and re-state them in language which is easily understood by our clients, by our funders, and by the general public. We must also ask ourselves whether they are relevant to young people in the 21st Century or whether they are still couched in the language and the concepts of the 19th.

4.3. Many of us adopt a policy of "come any come all", but we are unlikely to be able to sustain this in future. We must decide who are our priority clientele, our favoured customers, and what is our core business. It is these customers and this core business which must occupy us to the exclusion of all else.

4.4. We must be precise about the services we are going to provide, why, and what outcomes and benefits will result. These must be services which young people and the new authorities want and will support.

4.5. We must adopt the practices and terminology of commerce: strategic planning, business plans, maximum output for minimum investment, and constant measurement and assessment.

4.6. We must develop a strategy for ensuring quality in all features of our work with young people.

Quality is now recognised as fundamental in all commercial and public enterprises, and the new authorities have a statutory duty under the F&HE act 1992 to ensure the quality of the provision they make or secure. We can no longer, therefore, hide behind the cloak of noble intent and lack of resources.

4.7. We will see our clients as customers, and customer care and customer satisfaction will be one of our prime concerns. We will draw up, publish and enact charters of entitlement and redress.

4.8. We will have systems to select, support and care for our staff, whether they be paid or unpaid. These will be included in a staff development policy which embraces all aspects of the employment process from recruitment to exit.

4.9. We will devise effective marketing strategies which will tell our customers, our communities, and the new authorities, that we exist, what we are trying to do, how well we are doing it and what benefits result.

4.10. We must ensure that our management committees *actually manage*. They must act as boards of directors, therefore, running the company, devising and directing

policies, securing and controlling finance, supporting staff, and assessing effectiveness, efficiency and quality. They will need to be carefully selected, and constantly up dated and trained.

4.11. We shall need to adopt a new terminology for the job titles of some staff and perhaps alter their job descriptions to correspond. "General Secretary" and "Leader" might no longer be appropriate. "Manager" and even, in some cases, "Chief Executive" might be more apt.

5. The Change Process.

5.1. We can imagine the process of change to be a journey, even a pilgrimage, towards something better. So we will need to decide where we are going, by what route, who are going with us, and how we are to be equipped and resourced.

5.2. We must realise that the journey is arduous and we must find ways of supporting our companions when they are plagued by the terrors which loom up in the mist. These include disruption, discomfort, disorientation, destruction, despair, grieving, stress and wild determination.

5.3. We must also clear the obstacles that lie in our path. These are likely to be binding tradition, rigid regulation, hierarchical structures, complacent voluntary-ism, and weary cynicism.

5.4. We must help our companions find in the change process refreshment, renewal, stimulus, inspiration, opportunity and challenge. We must also help them gladly accept that this journey has no final destination, because the process of change is continuous and endless.

5.5. Charles Handy uses the Sigmoid Curve to show how human relationships, individuals, empires, institutions, and organisations all develop to a peak and then decline. He argues that these can avoid decline if they begin the process of change and renewal when all is going well and before they reach their peak. Unfortunately, at that time they don't usually see the need for change and tend to wait until the decline has started. Then it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to bring about the changes which will save them from decline and eventual extinction.

6. Likelihood.

6.1. Will the new authorities in fact develop the attitudes and adopt the practices which are being urged upon them and sail on to new horizons? Or will they cling to the wreckage of the past, reworking a narrow parochialism and half-digested and outworn ideologies? There is room for optimism on several counts.

6.2. Being new, with new designations, titles and responsibilities, their officers and members are likely to be fired with enthusiasm and might want to search for new approaches and solutions.

6.3. The present Government have been the scourge of existing local authorities. For the rest of their term, and if they are re-elected, they will coerce them into compliance.

6.4. Tony Blair has signalled the Labour Party's change of attitude to the voluntary sector:

"Labour has learnt from the mistakes of the past. The state does not have the solution to every problem. Nor do people want the state to intervene in all areas of their lifeParts of the left saw the voluntary sector as a threat to the things government should be doing. The right saw the voluntary sector as relieving government of its own responsibilities." He has set up a review of the party's policies towards the voluntary sector under Alun Michael who is a former youth and community worker.

6.5. Whatever happens, the reorganisation of local government in Wales is an opportunity for new thinking and new launchings. The voluntary sector must take this opportunity if it is to continue to make a worthwhile contribution to the development and well-being of young people for the rest of this decade and into the 21st Century.

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