

## Law Family Commission: *Unleashing the Power of Civil Society*

January 2023

<https://www.probonoeconomics.com/unleashing-the-power-of-civil-society>

The final report of the two year *Law Family Commission on Civil Society* was published on 26 January 2023. The Commission researched how the potential of civil society could be unleashed 'to harness and enhance the powerful community bonds that exist in the nation.' It has produced a plan to 'create the conditions for civil society to thrive, so it can better fulfil its broad range of varied and vital roles, supporting economic and social wellbeing across the whole of the UK.' The report acknowledges that achieving this ambition requires action from every sector, leadership from government and the business community, as well as from within civil society itself.

The report is extensive running to 100 pages, and makes recommendations under six broad headings:

1. Building productivity and organisational effectiveness
2. Creating timely, accessible data and robust evidence about the sector
3. Improving the scale, distribution and impact of funding for the sector
4. Bringing businesses and civil society together
5. Strengthening relationships with policymakers
6. Unleashing potential at local and regional level

Local infrastructure is mentioned frequently, particularly in relation to the necessary capacity building it provides for the VCSE but also in the need for secure, long term, flexible funding; consistent quality; and strategic partnership working [something that it acknowledges happens already].

NAVCA engaged with the later stages of the Law Family Commission, particularly in relation to focused work on charity productivity where much of the references to local infrastructure in the main report originate from. *Productivity of purpose: Bringing charities into the UK's productivity drive*, 20 January 2023. <https://www.probonoeconomics.com/news/commission-calls-for-productivity-boost-in-charity-sector-to-unlock-full-potential>

Core to the recommendations are improved gathering and use of data of all types and the call for the creation of 'a new Civil Society Evidence Organisation (CSEVO), which is essential for improving the availability and spread of evidence across the sector, reducing duplication and increasing best practice.' Additionally, there are consistent calls throughout the report for long term funding including for core costs and buildings. It also suggests much closer working between businesses and civil society to work together on shared goals and strength businesses' engagement with civil society. The Commission also recognise the importance of charities and civil servants working more closely together including better representation of civil society within departmental advisory and consultation groups.

All the recommendations are of direct relevance to local infrastructure but there are some very specific ones that NAVCA wants to prioritise and work on quickly. NAVCA will want to work with you

– NAVCA members, Pro Bono Economics and other partners, local and national government and funders to take forward the recommendations.

### Recommendations of specific relevance to local infrastructure

#### 1. Building productivity and organisational effectiveness

4. Led by a partnership between the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) and the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), the UK government should carry out a 'root and branch' review of local social sector infrastructure, which is the first critical step towards revitalising local infrastructure, so that it can act as a 'diffuser' of evidence and knowledge; and a 'convener' to support collaboration, networking, peer support and information exchange among local charities, as well as connecting them to specialist skills providers.

5. The newly-created Vision for Volunteering team, business organisations and the UK Pro Bono Network should work together to maximise the level and effectiveness of skilled volunteering, which holds huge potential.

#### 3. Improving the scale, distribution and impact of funding for the sector.

10. As part of a radical shift in their funding, more grant-makers should offer long-term, flexible funding, invest in building charities' capabilities, and streamline their application and management processes. They should be encouraged and supported in this by the Charity Commission, infrastructure bodies and independent benchmarkers, making this core part of how charities operate a priority.

#### 4. Bringing businesses and civil society together

15. Business and charity infrastructure bodies should urgently form a partnership focused on raising awareness of the benefits of links among both businesses and charities, to create opportunities for both sectors to come together where they have shared goals, and to spread resources that provide both sectors with the tools to overcome the barriers to working together. Tackling the current cost of living crisis should provide the initial impetus and focus for this, given the relevance for both sectors.

#### 5. Strengthening relationships with policymakers

19. Charities and governments (both the UK government and devolved governments) should jointly create more opportunities for civil servants and charities to work together, through an annual 'Chevening' event for permanent secretaries and sector 97 leaders, revised training for civil servants, and increased secondments and volunteering opportunities.

20. The social sector should continue to increase the quality of its evidence and campaigning, enabled by more support from funders for these activities.

#### 6. Unleashing potential at local and regional level

22. Local policymakers and civil society leaders should shift from fragmented individual relationships (often transactional and focused on procurement or funding) to creating strategic relationships with the social sector as a whole.

23. Local authorities need capacity internally to create and sustain relationships with civil society. This means dedicating staff time and resources to this.
24. Local civil society organisations must be willing and able to work in a coordinated way, engaging strategically and looking beyond individual organisations' interests. Effective, independent and well-resourced local infrastructure is vital for this.
25. Senior leaders on all sides must demonstrate commitment to this vision. Strong personal relationships across sectors are crucial, with effective structures and processes to spread joint working throughout organisations and avoid overdependence on specific individuals.
26. Civil society organisations need funding which enables them to engage effectively in strategic relationships and promotes collaboration, rather than competition.

If you want to discuss this further, or be involved in building on these recommendations to support and develop local infrastructure, please contact Jill Hopkinson, Policy Manager

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