

Community Base participant group meeting 27th March 2008

The meeting was attended by Annette (Community Base), Tina (TB Alert and Community Base trustee), Mel (TB Alert), Ros (Amaze and Community Base trustee), Colin (Community Base), Richard (Carers Centre), Leah (Carr-Gomm), Lindsay (Mencap Pathway Employment Services), Emily (Community and Voluntary Sector Forum), Sally (Community and Voluntary Sector Forum), Jane (Assert and Community Base trustee), Paul (NHS Support Federation and Community Base trustee) and Liz (Assert)

1 2008-13 Budget and assessment of risks to development

Colin said that a budget and assessment of risks to development for 2008-13 had been agreed at the February board meeting and published on the website. Colin said the 2009-14 budget would be reviewed by the board later in 2008 after an options appraisal for the installation of new windows had been considered. It was agreed that new windows would significantly improve working conditions for everyone at Community Base by reducing heat loss in winter and overheating in summer and would reduce energy waste but would be expensive.

2 Annual review of policies

Colin said the board had carried out its annual review of all policies at its February meeting and made some minor changes that he had listed on an email to the email group. There were no comments on these changes.

Emily suggested that a clause should be added to the policy on relationship with participant groups requiring the board to bring any proposed change to a policy to a participant group meeting before implementing it. Emily felt the policy on partnership working had just appeared and not been discussed by a participant group meeting first.

Ros said this was an issue of governance and that the board had to have the right to make decisions. Colin said that consultation was important but his concern about Emily's suggestion was that it would take a long time to make even minor policy changes. Colin said the board was consulting this participant group meeting about the policy on partnership working and always consulted on major changes.

Liz suggested that special participant group meetings could be called for some issues. Emily suggested a sub-group be formed of people with expertise in an area when changes were to be made. Mel said the issue was not a lack of expertise but the need for people to have an opportunity to have their opinions heard.

Tina said that the review had led the Community Base board to introduce robust consultation procedures including monthly participant groups where any issue could be raised. Emily disagreed, saying she thought the feeling of the review was that Community Base should develop these procedures.

Paul said there was ample opportunity in the current system for discussion, including two participant group meetings in March and April for discussion of the policy on partnership working. Ros acknowledged that some people might feel they were not being consulted when a policy is changed and thought this could be softened. Sally suggested policies should be brought as drafts to participant group meetings.

Paul said that participant group meetings were not usually well attended but there were ample opportunities for people to give their views. Ros suggested people should be reminded of the opportunities that existed for discussion and feedback. Emily suggested that if a policy involved substantial change a participant group meeting should be consulted before it became policy.

3 Banner display

Colin said that a new banner display with a new design would be installed next month.

4 Washing up

Jane said that the kitchen on the 2nd floor always had lots of dirty pots in it which made it unpleasant to use. Tina agreed and said that the teaspoons were always missing. Mel suggested that a cutlery amnesty could be held so that all the stuff taken whilst drying in the kitchen could be returned.

5 One Cups

Sally said one of the one cups in the conference room was not working properly when she was using the room last week. Annette said people should tell reception about problems like this so they could be sorted.

6 Open Day

Colin said he had received a lot of films from participant groups to show at the open day on 17th April. These films, with talks and discussions, would be shown in the conference room followed by a discussion involving guest speaker Caroline Lucas MEP then a party with live music from Mel's Allstars. Colin said there would be a competition on the day and catering all afternoon, including a delivery service for people in their offices.

7 Policy on partnership working

Colin circulated copies of the policy on partnership working. The board had agreed the policy as reflecting current practice on how Community Base promoted partnership working by participant groups while maintaining Community Base's identity as a home only for community and voluntary groups. The board had asked Colin to table the policy at a participant group meeting before the board reviewed the policy at its May meeting.

Colin asked if there were any points people agreed on. Everyone agreed with points 1-5 and point 8. Emily said her concern was that point 6 of the policy did not seem to reflect the ethos of the review, in particular point 2.4 of the review final report. Sally said it was the ethos and specifics, in particular the statement that networks and partnerships could not have a home at Community Base. Colin said the policy referred to statutory network not networks in general. Sally said she had thought it meant any network.

Paul said that what was unique about Community Base was that it was a building only for community and voluntary groups. Sally said that Spoke magazine was a voluntary sector magazine because the Community and Voluntary Sector Forum was the accountable body for the Brighton and Hove ChangeUp Consortium which published Spoke. Sally said the review had pointed out that some projects may be seen as statutory or cross-sector but in reality were community and voluntary sector because of their accountable body.

Jane said that point 2.4 of the review said that participant group projects can grow and become new organisations that are outside their licence agreement with Community Base. Jane said she thought Spoke was a cross-sector project with council involvement. Sally said it was a community and voluntary sector magazine with one council adviser. Colin said Spoke had a cross-sector editorial board. Sally said it was an advisory group. Liz said the policy needed to be tested against another example.

Emily said that the review and a general meeting had agreed that ChangeUp could be based at Community Base and the board could be in breach of their memorandum and articles if they did not allow this. Colin said that the review had agreed, and the policy on partnership working stated, that participant groups can devote staff and resources to partnership working but cannot state that the partnership is based here.

Colin asked if anyone could think of any other examples to test the policy. Ros said she understood that many groups did partnership working and that this was acknowledged in the new policy; what the policy did was clarify that groups can do partnership working but not make Community Base a home for cross-sector partnerships or projects without licences.

Emily said what if a group got money for an employee to deliver a project? Lindsay said that if they were an employee of the group this should be ok. Sally asked how Spoke was different to this. Colin replied that whereas Dialogue had been a forum magazine Spoke was not a forum magazine and was therefore not a forum project in the way that the Young Carers Project or the Travellers' Women's Health Project were projects that were part of a participant group.

Paul said the board has to produce policies that will draw boundaries to maintain Community Base's identity. Sally said the forum's trustees would not allow the forum to do anything that would harm Community Base's identity. Ros said it would be wrong for Community Base's trustees to rely on this as they were separate organisations. Emily said there was a balance to be struck in getting involved with the way groups were run. Sally said that if the policy stands the forum would have to move out. Ros and others said this was not the case. Colin said the forum had been asked not to give Community Base as Spoke's address and this could be done.

Colin said that he dealt with enquiries every week from cv groups wanting to move into Community Base with around 20 currently on the waiting list so there was a clear demand for one building with a clear non-statutory, non-commercial identity. If Community Base became a home to partnerships this identity would disappear.

Emily suggested an email discussion on the issue. Ros said people don't always contribute. Liz said this meeting was more informative than an email discussion. Emily asked if the policy could be redrafted and come to the participant meeting after the next board. Tina said the next board meeting would be reviewing the policy and the policy could be discussed at the April or May participant group meeting.

Tina said she felt that at least through the discussion people had seen each others point of view. Sally said things were at an impasse as the forum are still being asked to remove Community Base's address from Spoke.

Ros suggested that groups who think the policy may impact on them be asked for their opinions, maybe finding more examples to test the policy. Jane suggested putting the policy in the email in full as people don't always use the link. Colin agreed to send an email out asking groups for their views.