

# Community Base

## A Review

### Interim findings

Jeremy Spafford  
February 2007

#### 1 Introduction

Over the past few months a row has erupted at Community Base, which has caused upset and damage. Opinions vary about the causes, content and implications of the row but all are clear that it has been extremely unhelpful and all are hoping to move forward positively by learning lessons from the experience. At their meeting in November 2006, the trustees of Community Base asked for an independent consultant to be appointed to carry out a review and this was endorsed by a meeting of members at an Extraordinary General Meeting (EGM) in December 2006. At this meeting, three motions were passed (Appendix A). Following the meeting, Terms of Reference were produced (Appendix B) and I was appointed. This report contains the key findings from a period of research and includes recommendations from me about possible ways forward.

***Please note that I am not able to provide legal advice and none of the statements contained within this report should be regarded as constituting legal advice.***

#### 2 Methodology

The director of Community Base established a review web page and email group and posted links to various documents, which could support the review process. He also produced a questionnaire setting out scenarios for those working in the building to comment on. Some people regarded this as unhelpful though others saw it as an opportunity to share ideas about a range of complex issues. 30 responses were received and they are posted on the website.

I divided my contribution into two phases. The first phase culminates in this report; the second phase will come out of this report.

Apart from an interview with the director and two trustees prior to my appointment and some background reading, my first contact with Community Base was a meeting with participant groups, trustees and staff of Community Base on 7<sup>th</sup> February 2007. 22 people attended all or part of the meeting. At this meeting we did four things:

- Shared expectations of the meeting
- Clarified the issues that were causing concern
- Identified what we considered to be the core purpose of Community Base
- Identified the objectives of the review and a way of meeting them

I then went on to interview a self-selecting range of stakeholders over a two-day period. Interviewees were encouraged to describe what they considered to be the key issues that need to be addressed and how best to tackle them. Interviewees agreed that the fact that they had been interviewed would be public but their comments would be made anonymous so that they could feel free to speak as openly as possible. I met with 12 people in 10 interviews. A further five people were interviewed via telephone and another five people sent in comments via email. All those directly involved in this consultation exercise are listed in Appendix C.

### 3 Terminology

Throughout this report I use the word 'trustees' to mean the trustees of Community Base and 'director' to mean the director of Community Base. Those occupying space in the building are described variously as 'licensees', 'members' and 'participant groups' depending upon the context. This is significant as each term has a different implication, as will be discussed in the report, but in most cases organisations are all three. I use the term 'participant group' when describing those occupying space in the building in a general way and licensee or member when discussing their specific status.

### 4 Context

4.1 It is important to start by noticing that Community Base is extraordinary. I have not done extensive research but I know of no other facility quite like it. In Community Base you have a resource which most voluntary and community sector groups across the country would describe as ideal. It is well situated, well appointed and well managed. It is designed exclusively for voluntary and community groups and provides accommodation to an extraordinarily varied range of organisations. It is also self-financing (on the revenue side) which is very rare. These are not bland feel-good observations: they are recognition of a reality, which in my view needs to be treasured. Those responsible for conceiving, developing and maintaining this resource deserve great credit. As one interviewee put it: *'We mustn't throw the baby out with the bathwater'*.

4.2 Furthermore, it seems that most participant groups are happy at Community Base most of the time. The last survey of participant groups in January 2006 produced an average rating of 4 out of a possible 5 for all of the services provided by Community Base to those groups. Indeed, there are currently 29 groups based in the building, of which only 17 have chosen to be involved in this consultation exercise to date. Of those seeking to contact me in person, by email or via telephone, only six participant groups were represented by people that are not also Trustees. No doubt there are a range of reasons for this but it does indicate to me that, at worst, most groups regard the arrangements at Community Base as good enough for them not to want to commit time and energy to a review process or, at best, find the arrangements in line with what they need and want.

4.3 That said; there are clearly problems. The recent dispute has been described as *'catastrophic'* and I have read and heard a great deal of detail about various disagreements that have arisen over several years. I do not believe it is useful for me to rehearse that detail in this report. Instead I will focus on the issues underlying those disputes, which have been presented to me, and I will offer my thoughts on what lessons can be learnt and how we might move forward.

4.4 Participant Group interviewees were keen to emphasise how much they valued the resource and the way it is managed on a day-to-day basis. If they had complaints, these were to do with security of tenure and styles of governance and management. Some comments were made about specific service problems in the building but, again, those details will not be looked at by this review.

4.5 This is a difficult report to write because the issues are many layered.

- There are structural and systemic issues internal to Community Base that may need reaffirming or changing.
- There is a challenging external environment, which presents both opportunities and threats to the voluntary sector as commissioners involve themselves more closely in the detail of how the sector is structured. Differing ideological and pragmatic perspectives affect how these are interpreted and managed.
- Several people have been hurt by things that others have said or written and this has led to strong feelings associated with mistrust.

- 4.6 These factors and others have led some people to interpret the same information completely differently to others. So much so that it is sometimes hard to believe that they were in the same meeting. To complicate things further, some people who have not been involved directly in a discussion have arrived at another version of what has taken place, which confirms their existing view of the attitude or motives of the various parties. On several occasions, I realised I was uncovering parallel understandings of the truth without having a mechanism to determine what had actually taken place. As I write I am aware that statements I make may be interpreted by some as proof that their analysis is correct and by others as proof that I have misinterpreted the situation. This leads me to the open statement made by one participant group representative at the extraordinary general meeting asking for dialogue and defining this as *‘the skilful exchange or interaction between people that develops shared understanding as the basis for building trust, fostering a sense of ownership, facilitating genuine agreement and enabling creative problem solving.’* I regard this as a helpful place to start.
- 4.7 Another important consideration is that the tragic death of the highly valued receptionist Sue Cole has affected many at Community Base very deeply. *‘She was a root. We have had one of our roots dug up.’*

## **5 Structure of this report**

It is my view that, although it is necessary to learn the lessons from what has taken place, it is now time to agree a way forward. I am reluctant, therefore, to go into the rights and wrongs of various actions and statements in the past for fear of stirring up fresh disputes. Having said that, those involved in the consultation process need to know that their concerns and opinions have been heard. In the body of this report, I have therefore confined myself to drawing out what I consider to be the key issues and added some recommendations. I have attached as Appendix D a range of statements that all derive from interviewees and which point up the diverse perspectives conveyed to me.

The review process has created the following agenda for Community Base, which includes the issues raised by the EGM motions.

- Confirming ethos and strategic direction
- Improving dialogue
- Clarifying decision making processes and governance arrangements
- Reviewing policies and procedures
- Reviewing security of tenure

I have used these headings to structure the remainder of this report. Under each heading I have described the issues presented to me by interviewees, made some recommendations and suggested an immediate way forward. Some of these recommendations have already been agreed and are being actioned.

## **6 Confirming ethos and strategic direction**

### **6.1 The issues**

- 6.1.1 At the initial review meeting on 7<sup>th</sup> February, participants produced statements about what they considered to be the core purpose of Community Base. The detail is presented in Appendix E.
- 6.1.2 The meeting went on to summarise the findings by identifying four core functions:
- Providing an affordable well managed building for voluntary and community groups
  - Providing an opportunity for informal resource and information sharing and networking between groups housed in the building
  - Providing an external face for voluntary and community groups
  - Delivering services to the public in response to demand where this is an efficient use of resources
- 6.1.3 All agree that the first and most essential function is the provision of a building and do not want any other functions to distract from this. All also seem to agree that Community Base is more than just a building and that the benefits of being with other voluntary and community groups and being associated externally with the building are hard to measure but are important.
- 6.1.4 The delivery of services such as the guide to local services is regarded as a positive bonus if it can be shown that it is an efficient use of the budget and the time of the Community Base receptionist and is responding to local need. I am aware that there are concerns that Community Base could be offering services that should be provided by others.
- 6.1.5 The external environment is changing rapidly. New community buildings are planned for Brighton, which may affect the ability of Community Base to attract new licencees. I understand that the building currently has its first void since 1998. This is likely to be very short term as there are still plenty of agencies wishing to move in but the situation needs watching.
- 6.1.6 Meanwhile the government's public sector reforms are inviting (or requiring) voluntary sector bodies to work in ever closer partnership with statutory bodies. This includes tendering for the delivery of statutory functions and the acceptance of public sector secondments and/or staff transferred from statutory agencies under TUPE arrangements. Community Base clearly should be working collaboratively with statutory partners but it does not have to for financial survival. Most voluntary agencies do not have the same level of independence.
- 6.1.7 Some regard these changes as an opportunity and others as a threat. Some have strong ideological objections fearing the gradual erosion of the independence and self-determining variety of the voluntary sector.

### **6.2 Recommendations**

- 6.2.1 The neat dividing line between the sectors is not as clear as it was. However, it seems to be important to all parties that Community Base does not become simply an office block for anybody so the question of how to decide who can work here and how that should be policed remains open.
- 6.2.2 I am not convinced that it is possible or necessary to find a universally shared ethos but I think there are some basic principles that we could agree. This will inform strategic direction which must be settled to enable the staff to get on with their jobs. After 10 years in operation, now is an excellent time for all parties to engage in debate so they understand the issues and have an opportunity to influence forward planning. Community Base Trustees, staff and members should see this as an opportunity to think carefully together about what matters most about Community Base and how to ensure that the organisation

survives and thrives in the future. Critically, this needs to result in a decision by trustees, informed by members, that enables staff to negotiate effectively with licensees and enforce rules when necessary.

6.2.3 With regard to the specific point of Community Base offering services to the public it seems to me that simple, cost effective interventions which provide services that are in demand and valued by the public should be welcomed.

### **6.3 Way forward**

The meeting planned for 16<sup>th</sup> April will focus on the following questions:

- What do we mean by ethos? What ethos do we want at Community Base?
- What are the external pressures?
- Where do we want Community Base to be in 5 years time?
- What needs to be done in the next year to ensure the direction of travel is right?
- What are the implications for who can work at Community Base?

I propose to write a short report summarising the outcomes of the meeting.

Trustees could then agree proposals for the licence at its subsequent meeting in May.

## **7 Improving dialogue**

### **7.1 The issues**

There is bad feeling between some of the people working at Community Base. I have heard accusations of rudeness, intimidation, undermining behaviour and malicious gossip.

### **7.2 Recommendations**

I recommend focussing on trying to understand the differing perspectives and trying hard to avoid personalising the debate. It may be that there are some irreconcilable views in the building. If this is the case, it is our duty as professionals to ensure that decisions are made using robust and reasonable processes and then accepted.

### **7.3 Way Forward**

People often behave badly when they feel under attack. If we can reduce the feeling of being attacked then we may reduce the bad behaviour. I hope this review and the passage of time will help.

I regard it as the responsibility of the trustees and managers of each organisation to ensure that their staff behave properly and offer support, training or challenge to them if they need it. I advise against getting involved in how other organisations do this.

The way forward must be to share responsibility for making positive progress and to engage with this review.

## **8 Clarifying decision making processes and governance arrangements**

### **8.1 The issues**

- 8.1.1 As with most charities, Community Base is governed by its Board of Trustees: the Board is the Landlord. Officers are accountable to the Trustees and act on their behalf. Trustees bear ultimate responsibility for all legal and financial issues and are also responsible for setting policy and strategy. They appoint a chief executive officer (known as the director) and are responsible for ensuring that he or she works in line with their policies and strategy and carries out functions effectively. Trustees can only reasonably be expected to accept this responsibility if they have the power to make decisions and give delegated authority to the director for operational decisions. It must be possible, therefore, for the director, on behalf of the trustees, to enforce rules.
- 8.1.2 However, the Trustees are formally elected by members and act 'in trust' on behalf of the membership and are accountable to that membership for their actions. This leaves the Landlord (ie the Trustees) answerable to the licensees (ie the members). Who then is in charge?
- 8.1.3 When individuals act as Trustees, they act for the Trust and put aside the interests of their own organisation. Indeed they are required to declare any interest and withdraw from decision-making if they have one. When acting as members of Community Base, participant groups should do the same. If they want the power to influence decision-making, they have to act solely in the interests of Community Base and set aside the interests of their own organisation. If they wish to advocate for the interests of their own organisation, they are moving over to be a licensee and should do so knowingly. This requires a level of sophistication and self-awareness, which may be unfamiliar to some participant group representatives that may not have much experience of governance.
- 8.1.4 It is perfectly reasonable for participant groups to choose to opt out of active participation as members and stick to the role of licensee. These groups need only to be reassured that rules are clear and reasonable and should be content to accept whatever decisions are made. If they wish to participate more, they will have to engage with the concept of membership.
- 8.1.5 There are several routes through which participant groups can influence decision-making. As members, they can do so formally through the AGM and EGMs. As licensees, they can do so informally through participant group meetings, subject-specific consultations, the email group, the annual survey and the annual meeting with the director.
- 8.1.6 Interviewees expressed concerns about some of these:
- AGMs are rarely used as a space to debate and are poorly attended
  - Participant group meetings are valued as an informal opportunity to share concerns and get to know each other but are not regarded by some as formal enough to deal with difficulty
  - The annual meeting with the director is an opportunity to discuss any areas of concern in depth and is welcomed by many. Some however believe that it is not possible to be open in these meetings.
- 8.1.7 Some interviewees have expressed concerns about how effective the Trustees are at setting strategy and holding officers to account. It has been suggested that the Board tends to rubber stamp decisions made by the director and that it does not have the range of skills required to ensure effective governance. Others counter this forcefully describing Trustees as skilled and rigorous in carrying out their duties.

## **8.2 Recommendations**

- 8.2.1 Community Base is not a cooperative and is not member led. It would not be run so efficiently if it were. Trustees must be allowed to govern and the director must be allowed to manage.
- 8.2.2 It is accepted practice for Trustees to undergo skills audits on an occasional basis in order to check that the range of skills required is present. With three new members on the Board, now would be good time to carry out such an audit. The process may confirm that no change is required or may point up some gaps, which could be filled at the next AGM. I suggest that the Trustees consider this and manage this themselves if they think it is appropriate.
- 8.2.3 The director is doing a difficult job and has had a particularly difficult time over recent months. I suggest that the supervision arrangements for the director are reviewed to ensure that he has the support, challenge and training opportunities that all employees need.
- 8.2.4 Those participant groups wishing to be more actively involved in decision making now or in the future should be made aware of the difference between being a member and being a licensee and could be encouraged to attend regular but infrequent meetings as members to discuss how Community Base is developing. These members' meetings should be formalised so that notes are taken without becoming full general meetings. To avoid creating too many meetings, these could be attached to the regular monthly participant group meetings twice a year and should be reviewed after a year to check that they are useful.
- 8.2.5 Participant group meetings should continue to be completely informal and remain an opportunity to talk about the day to day running of the building and get to know each other better.
- 8.2.6 The annual meeting with the director should continue with notes and actions from the meeting shared and agreed afterwards.

## **8.3 Way Forward**

At their meeting in March, Trustees could consider the following issues and report back to the proposed EGM:

- Whether to conduct a skills audit and review supervision arrangements for the director
- Making a statement explaining the difference between being a licensee and a member
- Ensuring members have an opportunity to contribute to wider debate about Community Base outside of the formality of the AGM.
- Confirming that licensees/members must accept the need to allow Trustees to make decisions and delegate operational authority to the director.

## **9 Reviewing policies and procedures**

### **9.1 The issues**

- 9.1.1 The EGM motion specified that the following policies and procedures should be reviewed or created:
- Allocation of Space
  - Disputes
  - Complaints
  - Bullying and harassment
  - Communications
- 9.1.2 It should be possible to produce a basic response to this motion which is 'good enough'. However I think it is very difficult to create policies and procedures that deal with inter-agency relationships because the power relationship (and therefore the focus of responsibility) is not clear. This power relationship is critical and is discussed in section 8.
- 9.1.3 The wording of policies and procedures is notoriously difficult to finalise. There is a danger that all parties will get bogged down in detail when there are bigger issues that need to be addressed.
- 9.1.4 Some interviewees have expressed concern that the mechanism for allocating space is not clear. The criteria seem to me to be clear but the process for deciding how best to choose between applicants may be less so. ALL interviewees agree that the procedure around issuing a notice to quit and appealing that decision should be formalised.

### **9.2 Recommendations**

- 9.2.1 I suggest that participant groups and Community Base staff/trustees content themselves with producing minimum safeguards and mechanisms for resolving issues rather than lengthy documents attempting to cover all possibilities. One safeguard that should be standard is a regular review of policies and procedures. I understand that trustees conduct this review annually; it may be worth reminding participant groups that they can comment before that review as a matter of course.
- 9.2.2 If this process throws up areas of complexity or disagreement, I suggest that trustees recommend basic policies and procedures to the EGM and ask the director to create a work plan for the coming year to look at policy development involving specialist advice where necessary.
- 9.2.3 There is, however, one policy that is currently missing and which ALL interviewees have agreed is necessary and should be created immediately. The process of serving a notice to quit and a mechanism for appealing that decision should be explicit (see section 10). This is different from agreeing what reasons should be given which is a separate debate.

### **9.3 Way forward**

A process has already been created for the review of policies and procedures as follows:

- The director has asked participant groups to submit suggestions
- The director will draw up some draft policies and procedures
- An open meeting will be held on Friday 2<sup>nd</sup> March to discuss them
- Draft versions will then be submitted to the Board of Trustees for approval on 13<sup>th</sup> March
- The Board will recommend these, as amended if required, to the EGM which is expected to take place on 16<sup>th</sup> April.

## **10 Reviewing security of tenure**

### **10.1 The issues**

- 10.1.1 Participant groups, or their parent body, are licensees and interviewees have confirmed that there is general acceptance that it is not in the long-term interests of Community Base, and therefore of its members, to change that arrangement. This leaves a great deal of power in the hands of Trustees who are legally able to give notice without a reason. Interviewees have confirmed that the Trustees have never done this but the fact that it is possible is disconcerting for licensees (especially if relationships are soured).
- 10.1.2 Whatever the reasons for licensees feeling insecure (reasonable or otherwise) the onus is on the Trust to be ensuring that systems are in place to make sure that all notices are issued reasonably and are seen to be done so. This will be a process between the Trust and the licensee involved which may need to remain confidential to the parties but which can be complicated by other licensees wanting to understand and be reassured by it. If a robust process is in place, licensees that are not involved will need to accept the outcome of disputes without necessarily being aware of all the details.
- 10.1.3 Article 21 of the licence agreement has become contentious. It states that the licensee agrees *'not to allow any organisation other than the licensee to provide services from Community Base or manage or employ or place seconded workers, volunteers or students in the designated space without the written permission of Community Base.'* I have not heard anyone suggest that licensees should be allowed to sub-let. However, there seems to be agreement that volunteers and placement students should be able to work for any participant group without permission and that the names of all those working for a group should be given to Community Base for health and safety and administrative reasons (eg directing post). Several also argue that seconded staff should fall into the same category as they are working to the aims of the host organisation and therefore fit within the principle of retaining use of space exclusively for meeting the organisational aims of the licensee.

### **10.2 Recommendation**

- 10.2.1 As a minimum, a simple policy should be drawn up which confirms that a reason will always be given for issuing a notice and allowing a licensee a formal and timetabled mechanism for appealing the decision so that they can be sure that trustees are fully aware of all facts and all available interpretations of the facts.
- 10.2.2 Article 21 could be revised to reflect the need for licensees to inform Community Base who is working for them but not requiring permission.
- 10.2.3 A new article clarifying who can work in the building and the process for negotiating this and gaining permission can be taken to the May Board meeting following further discussion on 16<sup>th</sup> April.

### **10.3 Way Forward**

- 10.3.1 Policies reflecting recommendations 10.2.1 and 10.2.2 could be adopted through the process outlined in section 9.3.
- 10.3.2 The question of when or whether permission to employ or host staff is required and how that permission is sought will be debated at the meeting proposed for April 16<sup>th</sup> and could be agreed at the subsequent meeting of the Trustees.

## 11 Summary of suggested immediate ways forward

The process that has already been created for the review of policies and procedures should be pursued as follows:

- The director invites participant groups to submit suggestions
- The director draws up some draft policies and procedures including how a notice to quit is issued and an appeals mechanism
- An open meeting discusses them on Friday 2<sup>nd</sup> March
- Draft versions are then submitted to the Board of Trustees for approval on 13<sup>th</sup> March

At its meeting on 13<sup>th</sup> March, as well as considering the policies and procedures, the Board of Trustees considers the following:

- Whether to conduct a skills audit and review supervision arrangements for the director
- Making a statement explaining the difference between being a licensee and a member
- Ensuring members have an opportunity to contribute to wider debate about Community Base outside of the formality of the AGM.
- Confirming that licensees/members must accept the need to allow Trustees to make decisions and delegate operational authority to the director.
- Revising article 21 of the licence to state that licensees will inform Community Base of all people based in their office.

The Board also decides whether to call an EGM for 16<sup>th</sup> April to present its recommendations for approval. This could then be followed by a debate facilitated by Jeremy.

If agreed, the meeting for all Community Base Staff and Trustees and Participant Groups planned for 16<sup>th</sup> April will focus on the following questions:

- What do we mean by ethos? What ethos do we want at Community Base?
- What are the external pressures?
- Where do we want Community Base to be in 5 years time?
- What needs to be done in the next year to ensure the direction of travel is right?
- What are the implications for who can work at Community Base?

Jeremy will then write a short report summarising the outcomes of the meeting.

Trustees could then agree proposals for the licence at its subsequent meeting in May.

## 12 Conclusion

Some interviewees have expressed real concern that the excellent work of Community Base could be put at risk if stakeholders do not engage positively in seeking to resolve issues. This requires a level of generosity and acceptance that not everything will be sorted out at once. The key thing is to make sure we are moving in the right direction.

Many thanks to all those that have engaged so positively to date.

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## **Appendix A**

### **Motions passed at the Community Base extraordinary general meeting on 14th December 2006**

#### **Motion one**

We the Community Base Members instruct the Community Base Trustees: To adopt new best practice, transparent and accountable policies for the efficient running of Community Base, drawn from the Member's resources. Specifically: Allocation of Space, Disputes, Complaints, Bullying & Harassment and Communications. These policies and procedures to be approved by a meeting of Community Base Members held before May 2007.

#### **Motion two**

We the Community Base Members instruct the Community Base Trustees: To draw up options for current licensees that strengthen licensees' security of tenure, to be approved by a meeting of Community Base Members held before May 2007.

#### **Motion three**

We the Community Base Members instruct the Community Base Trustees: To work with Community Base Members to develop a shared vision, mission and strategic objectives for Community Base that strengthens partnership, collaboration and decision making accountable to Members, for the purpose of promoting the voice and interest of the local voluntary and community sector.

## **Appendix B**

### **COMMUNITY BASE REVIEW TERMS OF REFERENCE**

#### **BACKGROUND**

Community Base is a charity providing a home for community and voluntary groups in Brighton and Hove. In 2006 a dispute arose between Community Base and one of its licencees, Brighton and Hove Community and Voluntary Sector Forum (the forum), over the forum's decision to employ the manager of the local ChangeUp consortium, a cross-sector partnership, in the space it licencees at Community Base.

The dispute revealed a range of opinions and a lack of clarity within Community Base about what licencees are, and should be, able to do with the space they licence at Community Base especially in the areas of joint working, sharing space with other organisations and starting new projects. This lack of clarity makes some participant groups feel insecure about their right to stay at Community Base. It also makes it difficult for Community Base staff to enforce rules designed to ensure that Community Base remains a home for community and voluntary groups rather than other kinds of organisation.

#### **THE SCOPE OF THE REVIEW**      The review will look at

- what we mean by being a home for community and voluntary groups
- what licence agreement regulations and other rules there need to be to ensure Community Base remains a home for community and voluntary groups, how these rules are enforced and procedures and policies relating to licencees' security of tenure and the ending of licence agreements
- Community Base's policies affecting other areas and suggestions for improving these policies
- how to improve the community spirit within Community Base.

#### **THE PURPOSE OF THE REVIEW**

The review will attempt to come to a consensus about how Community Base best provides a home to community and voluntary groups and what regulations and policies there need to be in order to minimise feelings of uncertainty while allowing Community Base to carry out its core function. The review will also look at ways of improving the community spirit within Community Base.

#### **HOW THE REVIEW WILL WORK**

Anyone working at Community Base, including Community Base trustees, can be involved in the review. An email group will be set up in January 2007 to facilitate discussion of the issues covered by the review. An initial questionnaire will be distributed to everyone at Community Base in January 2007 seeking people's views on the areas covered by the review. The results of the questionnaire will feed into an initial open review meeting in February 2007. An independent consultant will be appointed by Community Base in January 2007 to supervise the review. Community Base has proposed some ideas for how the review should work but the consultant should reach a consensus about how to conduct the review at the initial open review meeting. The review could include group meetings and individual, confidential meetings with the consultant in February and March 2007. The review will be influenced by findings at each stage and the process will change if necessary. The review will be completed in April 2007 when a general meeting will be held to discuss the outcome of the review and agree any changes that are needed.

#### **THE ROLE OF THE CONSULTANT**

The consultant will be expected to cast an independent eye over the issues and facilitate discussion with a view to creating a consensus amongst everyone at Community Base on the issues under review. Specifically, the consultant will

- read current relevant policies and some background material
- review the findings of the questionnaire
- review emails on the Community Base review email group, responding to emails if this would be useful
- facilitate an initial review meeting and other meetings as agreed at the initial review meeting
- report the outcome of the review to a Community Base board meeting in March 2007 ahead of a general meeting in April 2007.

While supervising the review the consultant will

- identify areas that are working well and areas causing concern
- ensure concerns are shared and understood
- plan to resolve areas of dispute and seek consensus around the areas covered by the review
- support productive working relationships.

## **Appendix C**

### **Those attending the review meeting on 7<sup>th</sup> February 2007**

Annette Moss - Community Base (CB) Staff  
Bethan Bridger - Crossroads  
Bob Cristofoli - CB Trustee  
Colin Chalmers – CB Staff  
David Botibol - Assert  
Debbie Charman - Carers Centre (late arrival)  
Deborah Sprackling – CB Staff  
Duncan Blinkhorn - Community and Voluntary Sector Forum  
Emily Crozier - Carr Gomm  
Hong Lu - Chinese Centre and CB Trustee  
Jane Frost - Assert + CB Trustee (morning only)  
John Holmstrom - Brighton Housing Trust  
Melanie Matthews - TB Alert  
Michelle Bridgeman - The Gender Trust (morning only)  
Mike Holdgate -The Scarman Trust  
Naima Nouidjem - Mosaic (late morning arrival)  
Paul Evans - NHS Support Federation and CB Trustee  
Peter Mason - SCIP (late morning arrival)  
Ros Cook – aMaze (morning only)  
Sylvia Alexander-Vine - CB Trustee  
Tina Harrison - TB Alert and CB Trustee  
Trish King - Mencap (in and out - on call)

### **Interviewees**

#### **In person**

Ros Cook – aMaze  
Jane Frost – Assert + CB Trustee  
Bob Cristofoli – CB Trustee  
Paul Bramwell – Working Together Project  
Michelle Pooley - Working Together Project  
Louise Stone - Working Together Project  
John Holmstrom – Brighton Housing Trust  
Paul Evans – NHS Support Federation + CB Trustee  
Naima Nouidjem – Mosaic  
Debbie Charman – Carers Centre  
Emily O'Brien – Community and Voluntary Sector Forum  
Colin Chalmers – CB Staff

#### **By telephone**

Annette Moss – CB Staff  
Arran Evans – Sussex Interpreting Services  
Lucy Stone – CB Trustee  
Mel Shad – Carr Gomm and CB Trustee  
Sylvia Alexander-Vine – CB Trustee

#### **Additional input via email:**

Duncan Blinkhorn - Community and Voluntary Sector Forum  
Emily O'Brien – Community and Voluntary Sector Forum  
Michelle Pooley - Working Together Project  
Naima Nouidjem – Mosaic  
Sally Hiscock - Community and Voluntary Sector Forum

## Appendix D

### Findings

I have set out below some of the contradictions and ambiguities that emerged from the consultation process. These statements are all based on comments made at the initial review meeting or in interviews.

- The recent serving of a notice to quit to a licensee was one of several which had uncovered an underlying feeling of insecurity amongst some participant groups. Because some scenarios are not black and white, participant groups that are in an ambiguous or grey area may avoid opening up debate in case this means that they will risk eviction.
- *The trustees inhabit this grey world as well and appreciate the complexity. They welcome discussion and negotiation and are really concerned if participant groups feel insecure. It is in nobody's interest for that to be the case.*
- Because the licence does not require the trustees to have grounds or provide a reason there is a risk that the trustees, through the director, could behave oppressively or intrusively. Formal processes have not worked and some groups feel that they are at risk of being 'picked on' by the Trust.
- *Although it is legally the case that the Trust does not have to give a reason for issuing a notice to quit, this has never happened and the Trust would never gratuitously 'pick on' a participant group. All notices have been issued in line with the policy of the Trust at the time.*
- Participant groups are asked to comment on policies and procedures and are encouraged to be involved but most are too busy or too content with their lot to get involved. When a problem arises, the participant group is sometimes unaware of what policies and procedures are in place or finds them inadequate. This is despite having been asked to comment on them when they were being drafted.
- *Policies and procedures are not adequate or robust and participant groups are not properly consulted before they are adopted.*
- Governance arrangements are not properly communicated so it is very difficult to get involved and assert democratic rights as a member.
- *The governing documents, policies, procedures and, following a request from participant groups, board minutes are posted on the website. Significant issues are always notified to participant groups via the email group.*
- The trustees debate all issues carefully and are very open. They hold officers to account but do not micro-manage.
- *Board meetings of the Trust are often poorly attended and tend to simply approve whatever the director recommends. Trustees do not actively manage the director.*
- Members should have the power to decide how the building is managed,
- *Community Base is not a cooperative. The building needs a leader who has delegated power to enforce the rules. Otherwise the building would no longer run smoothly and important decisions would not be taken.*
- The annual review meeting between the director and each participant group is an opportunity to have an open discussion about how things are going and share any concerns.

- *The annual review meeting can feel intimidating as participant groups can feel they are being checked up on and therefore feel they have to be careful what they say.*
- Community Base is just a building and the staff should simply run the building.
- *Community Base is an important part of the voluntary sector infrastructure in Brighton and Hove and the staff should be working in partnership with the wider sector and statutory agencies..*
- Community Base is well placed to identify the needs of the public and community groups based on the enquiries of people coming into the building and should respond to those needs when it can.
- *Community Base should confine itself to running a building and not involve itself in offering services, which could or should be delivered by others.*
- The director's management and negotiating style is sometimes intimidating and decisions sometimes appear arbitrary.
- *The director is firm, rigorous and very fair. He can be uncomfortably blunt at times but his commitment and integrity should not be doubted. He is not always properly appreciated for the work he does. Some people are ganging up on him.*
- The new world of partnership working requires Community Base to be more flexible about how it relates to the statutory sector. It is no longer possible or desirable to operate independently.
- *True partnership working is important but not when it is a cloak to undermine the independence of the voluntary and community sector. Community Base must remain true to its roots.*
- There is a tendency in some parts of the voluntary sector to avoid making decisions by endlessly discussing process. This means that it is impossible to get commitment to a binding decision.
- *The world is too complicated for simple rules. It is important to understand the complexity of the environment within which agencies are operating and keep talking.*
- Voluntary and Community groups have enough difficulty meeting the conditions of funders without having to meet restrictive demands from their landlord.
- *Community Base needs rules to be able to ensure that the building is safe and is being used in line with its policies. Participant groups have to buy into the Community Base ethos and accept how things are done.*

### **What is the core purpose of Community Base?**

Contributions from participants at the initial review meeting on 7<sup>th</sup> February 2007

- A home for voluntary and community groups in Brighton and Hove, providing accommodation, services and mutual support.
- Provide a home for community and voluntary groups
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- Provide a home for community and voluntary groups
- Provide a home for community and voluntary groups
- Supported home for independent and voluntary sector
- A home for the voluntary sector and provide support services to help the organisations to carry out their work
- A shared facility for community and voluntary groups
- A place where voluntary organisations can have stable, cheap home to help them thrive and develop
- A safe space for community and voluntary organisations and their clients
- Decent accommodation for voluntary sector groups
- Affordable office space for charities and voluntary sector
- Place where voluntary sector groups can operate freely and cheaply
- Tailored/appropriate to NGO needs
- Provide environment so better services can be given to service users
  
- Provide an accessible alternative to commercial landlords
- Clean affordable accommodation
- Minimal charges
- Better 'deal' than the market alternative
- Managed office space
- Good value – not for profit
- Affordable
- Affordable
- Affordable and secure office facilities
- Affordable and secure office facilities
- Affordable office space for charities and vol orgs
- Subsidised and central
- IT internet
- Bulk purchasing
- Quality office space with the same expectation as business accommodation rather than leaky church hall
- A colourful bright place not dingy or second rate
- Well established
  
- Comfortable
- Safe
- Friendly
- Collegiate environment
- Reliable
  
- Reducing carbon footprint – can be good example of green agenda improvement
- Reducing environmental impact – good example

- Part of VCS infrastructure
  - Good for Brighton
  - Multicultural – lots of different groups/cultures getting on without being the same
  - Hub for groups – network in building
  - Place to share knowledge and expertise
  - Think tank
  - Shared values
  - A physical and tangible manifestation of the community and voluntary sector
  - Place which encourages common altruistic values
  - Synergy
  - Synergy
  - A feeling of belonging
  - Brings VCS together (under one roof)
  - Informal networking opportunities
  - Gain some support from others in the sector
  - Shared resources
  - Shared resources
  - Shared resources
  - Shared resources
  - Shared resources
  - Shared resources
  - Protection for voluntary organisations
  - Shared values of all participating organisations
  - Collaboration across local/national, big and small, diverse organisations
  - Strengthens and validates the voluntary sector ethos in Brighton and Hove
  - Give opportunities for NGOs to network
  - Networking possible
  - Not isolated – mutuality
  - Independent
  - Local landmark! Raise profile of groups to be proud of voluntary sector work
  - A central point of contact and information for community and voluntary sector services
- 
- A home for the community
  - A wide range of services
  - Information and help
  - Information Centre
  - Safe and welcoming place for vulnerable and needy people
  - Point of contact for public to many groups
  - A building that the public can see as not the govt/council where they can go for help
  - A welcoming environment for service users who can access different services under one roof