

## Workshop 3 Notes

### 2007: A Vital Year For Influencing Policy

**Facilitator:** Sally Reynolds (Social Firms UK)

Sally listed some of the current initiatives that are happening (relevant to Social Firms) and asked the group if there were any missing in their opinion.

- Welfare Reform Agenda
- Freud
- Leitch
- Review of Disability Employment Programmes
- Remploy Modernisation

Everyone agreed that Pathways To Work should be added to the list for paying attention to.

Re. Pathways, a regional procurement approach is being taken. It will be measured on outputs. There are 8 national contractors. The consensus was that, for Social Firms, the potential opportunity was around being viewed as an 'employer', and that as soon as the contracts are announced, Social Firms and emerging Social Firms should make themselves known to those who have been awarded the contract.

Sally outlined the discrepancy, as she viewed it, between DWP and other EU countries' Ministries of Labour, in that they viewed any initiative to get excluded groups into employment as their 'business' whether that was through Social Firms, self employment etc. or not. In the UK, however, DWP only viewed its purpose as getting people into open labour market jobs rather than creating employment through enterprise. The group agreed that we should continue to seek comparisons on this point from other EU countries, but also start the discussion with DTI and get DWP/DTI to talk to each other about how Social Firms could/should be supported.

A suggestion was made to lobby Sir Digby Jones in his new role, and take up the EU issue with Jim Murphy in his new role as Minister for Europe (he's aware of our existence through the DWP lobbying). Some funds might be levered directly from Brussels as well which would assist this on a national scale, as the new round of ESF is being distributed and managed at a regional level only (making it impossible for Social Firms UK to do anything on behalf of the sector).

The message from Freud is that employment of the most disadvantaged people in society is not just a DWP issue, so the urge to have more joined up thinking is on the agenda.

We need to focus on cost efficiency savings of Social Firms, complicated by the fact that government departments have a 'silo'd' approach in that DWP wouldn't consider health savings by a Social Firms as significant, for example.

Social Firms UK members really need to feed into the consultation on the Freud paper to add weight to Social Firms UK's case for considering a separate national sectoral contract with the Social Firm sector under Welfare Reform.

With regard to the role of the new part time Policy Officer at Social Firms UK and how best to engage members in our policy work, people said that we should pull out key

messages under any consultation demystify the policy question and summarise so that Social Firm members could respond more easily.

Someone recommended that it would be useful to talk to ERSA and/or BASE – ERSA especially circulate some very useful policy-based information on a regular basis.

There was some discussion around recovery of overhead costs under contracts and the danger present with the new contracting system that, rather than being squeezed out of the process completely, some VCS organisations would take contracts and actually lose money on them, risking their own sustainability. Everybody agreed that this was a real concern while the government was seeking to reduce the number of overall contracts they enter into. OSW (Off The Streets And Into Work) were trying to influence government to adopt a standard of third sector contract so that the parameters of terms and conditions were respected under this new system.

Everyone also agreed that the use of personal stories in the lobbying work would be extremely useful – Ministers love stories about individuals whose lives get changed. Sally should work with Social Firms to share such life experiences where people were happy to share them.