



Subject Response to Camden's VCS Grant Review
From Monica Olusola, CBMEA Director
To Christine Collins, LB Camden
CC Gerri Scott, LB Camden

Date December 2006

Information		Consultation		Action	
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Introduction

1. Camden BME Alliance (CBMEA) welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Council's voluntary and community sector (VCS) review paper.
2. We recognise that the implications of this review are far-reaching, for the broader VCS and the BME sector in particular. CBMEA also recognise that as an umbrella body, representing 40 BME VCS organisations, it is important that we respond robustly to the proposals that have been put forward.

Summary

3. This paper sets out CBMEAs formal response to Camden Council's VCS grant funding review. It should be stated that our collective view is one of great concern about this process and its outcomes. Detailed feedback is set out further on in this briefing. However a bulleted summary of our collective thoughts are set out below:
 - The review appears to be clearly driven by financial imperatives and motives, rather than the sustainability of Camden's VCS
 - There is a lack of clarity regarding the Council's vision and ambitions for the VCS
 - There is little by way of innovation and creativity in the proposed funding regime
 - It is abundantly clear that the Council has given no consideration whatsoever to CBMEAs earlier proposals, forwarded earlier in the year
 - There is a general sense that the conclusions to this review have probably been drawn some time before the review was conducted

Background and context

4. The VCS in Camden is well established. The scope and range of activities undertaken by VCOs in the borough is wide ranging and includes service provision, facilitation and lobbying. Robust networks mean that our reach extends to the least accessible in the borough. The sector therefore brings a wealth of knowledge and expertise to the table and is a significant asset to the community of Camden.
5. CBMEA acknowledges that the Council is clearly operating within a highly pressurised environment. As a recipient and custodian of public funds the Council has a statutory duty to demonstrate value for money and meet local and national efficiency targets. The additional pressures of internal scrutiny, by Council Members and external assessment, through bodies such as the Audit Commission only underline the necessity for financial prudence. As part of this, the Council must look at all its resources and CBMEA appreciates that the public would not expect VCS funding to be exempt from this.
6. In recognition, CBMEA has actively contributed to the discussion on future VCS grant funding. Our proposals paper 'Strong, Vibrant, Sustainable' (see Appendix B attached) specifically addressed the above challenges within a wider context of

a long term vision for the VCS sector (specifically those affecting the BME sector).

Specific issues

7. CBMEA has carefully considered the Council's VCS funding review and our broad observations are set out under the sub headers below.

a. vision

8. Even after a third reading of the paper, it is unclear exactly what the Council's long term vision is for the sector. Logically, the Council should first set out a clear unambiguous vision for the sector and its development. Once the vision is clear then a more substantive discussion can take place about its resourcing. The lack of clarity over a long term vision for the sector suggests that the drivers for the review are financial and have nothing to do with the sustainability of the VCS going forward. This is profoundly troubling and calls into question the Council's commitment to VCS growth.

b. freedoms and flexibilities

9. In CBMEAs vision paper 'Strong, Vibrant, Sustainable' we clearly articulated ideas for the development of an incentives and rewards programme for the VCS. The idea is that this would support increased creativity and innovation amongst VCOs. Despite our proposal, there is not even a single mention of any such programme of incentivisation. This despite the fact that the Council itself benefits from a range of freedoms offered by Government.

c. grant funding models

10. In CBMEAs vision paper 'Strong, Vibrant, Sustainable' we clearly articulated a range of grant funding models including ring-fenced grants, transitional awards, explorer funding, contracting arrangements and commissioning. Whilst the Council does see contract commissioning as part of its future plans it has studiously avoided any reference to any of the other innovative proposal put forward by CBMEA.

d. safeguarding infrastructure

11. The Council is specifically proposing to cut funding to infrastructure organisations such as CBMEA. Whilst CBMEA understands that the Council is clearly motivated by the need to place greater emphasis (as per Gershon) on the frontline, the Council misses the point. Within the borough, VCS infrastructure still requires significant development. Many VCSOs (in particular those in the BME sector) require major support in the areas of research, policy, performance management and business planning. Increased facilitation in these areas will strengthen capacity in the sector and over time fewer organisations will be reliant on VCS grant funding as greater numbers tap into alternative financing.
12. Further comments on the broader impact of the reviews proposals made by a selection of individual organisations can be found in Appendix A of this report.

Urgent responses sought from Camden Council

13. The above issues raise a number of major questions, which CBMEA would like the Council to urgently address. These are set out below.

- What is the Council's long term vision for the VCS?
- Does the Council explicitly and unreservedly share the vision for a strong, vibrant and sustainable VCS? If so, how does it see this vision expressed in its VCS review?
- Could the Council explain what plans it has to introduce or engage the VCS in a discussion about freedoms and relaxations? In particular could it explain how it proposes to incentivise added value service delivery?
- Could the Council formally address CBMEAs proposals for future VCS funding models as set out in 'Strong, Vibrant, Sustainable'?
- Could the Council indicate how it proposes to mitigate the negative impacts of funding cuts to infrastructure organisations and those they support?

APPENDIX B



'Strong, Vibrant, Sustainable'

A 10-year vision for Camden's BME voluntary
and community sector

A Proposals Paper by

Monica Olusola, Director of the Camden BME Alliance

December 2006

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A 10-year vision

1. Fundamentally the long-term vision for the voluntary and community sector (VCS) cannot be one given to us. Rather it has to be one that we have for ourselves, informed by our longstanding service to the people of Camden and our close appreciation of their needs, wants and aspirations. Yet at the same time, the VCS must also remember that it cannot realise its vision alone. At a basic level we rely on our partners, in particular the local Council to share our ambition and reflect this in terms of policy, strategy and investment.
2. A shared vision has to acknowledge that the sector is a community asset, with the potential to create new pathways to communities and achievement of outcomes previously thought unachievable. Furthermore, the sector itself has to be helped to grow and alongside our partners we need to agree definitions and metrics by which 'growth' can be clearly measured.
3. So what does a strong, vibrant and sustainable voluntary and community sector (VCS) mean? Set out below are the three priority building blocks, which are seen as integral to the vision.

A strong voluntary and community sector

4. A strong VCS is one that is self-aware, better understands what it does well and maximises opportunities to do things better. It is well informed and strategically influential, with an increased capacity to shape local decisions and improve local lives. It is also agile and flexible, able to respond to existing need and anticipated demand.

A vibrant voluntary and community sector

5. For Camden, a vibrant voluntary and community sector is one that reflects the rich diversity of the borough, in a way that makes the most of the various skill and knowledge assets available to it. This is crucial in order that the sector can be sensitive to the wide ranging needs and wants of people living in the borough and bridge the gaps to those communities that are least accessible, through barriers of language, trust, education, geography or other factors.

A sustainable voluntary and community sector

6. There are many measures of sustainability but the greatest measure is that of growth. Growth in terms of diversity of provision and provider, growth in terms of attracting inward investment from a wide range of sources and delivering value for money. And growth, in terms of ability to develop innovative pathfinders and trailblazers that become models of excellence and templates for mainstream service provision.

Summary

7. The purpose of this paper is not to rehearse the value and importance of the VCS to Camden. This is a given. Instead its purpose is to explore and articulate a long-term vision for the VCS in Camden and help prepare the groundwork for a strategy. The paper considers where we are now, where we need to get to and how we need to get there. It also considers how various factors are likely to impact upon the way, such as local and national policy drivers.
8. Fundamentally, it is an ambitious and practical vision for the future. It recognises that infrastructure changes, though critically important, are change agents not change deliverers. It therefore explores environmental factors and cultural issues and recognises that, if nothing else, delivering a long-term vision is about evolution not revolution.
9. The vision set out in this paper also focuses on partnership, particularly the VCS / Council partnership. As community leader, the Council has a statutory role to play in doing 'anything to promote the social economic well being of those living in the area.' This role needs to be more clearly defined as it relates to the VCS and it is hoped that the ideas set out further on can help inform the Council's thinking.

National policy drivers

10. There are a number of dominant drivers impacting upon the sector right now. Fundamental to these is the Treasury's Crosscutting Review of the VCS,¹ which set out an ambitious vision for the progressive development of the sector, backed up by significant investment in the development of its capacity. As an example of this the 'Futurebuilders' programme has made tens of millions available to be ploughed into the sector to support its public sector delivery role. Similarly, the ChangeUp agenda is focusing upon a wide range of infrastructure support areas critical to the VCS's long-term effectiveness.
11. The central government's focus on neighbourhoods and communities² also has profound implications for the sector. Particularly as it relates to the devolution of decision making beyond town halls to neighbourhoods themselves. Devolved decision making to localities places the VCS right at the very centre and challenges both the Council and ourselves to think through the broad range of issues and potential implications.
12. Never before has the VCS had so many potential suitors clamouring for its collective attention and never has there been such a time as this to be operating in the sector.

¹ Crosscutting Review of the Role of the Voluntary and Community Sector is Public Service Delivery - HM Treasury, September 2002

² Citizen Engagement and Public Services: Why Neighbourhoods Matter - ODPM/ Home Office, 2005

Local policy drivers

13. In 2003 the Council conducted a review of support to the VCS³. The review was wide ranging and followed on from an earlier best value review. Amongst others the review proposed aligning grant aid funding to Community Strategy themes as part of a priority-led funding framework. Proposals were also put forward for the resourcing of core funding to the VCS and to support the sector with the premises. The broad outcomes of this review have been carefully considered in the development of this paper and it is right that they should inform part of the ongoing dialogue between the Council and the VCS on the way forward.
14. Aligned to the above, it is also worth noting that Camden is now reviewing its Community Strategy. The current Strategy was launched in 2001 and provides a priorities backdrop for VCS activity in the borough. The new Community Strategy is due for launch in March 2007 and should address afresh, how the sustainability of the VCS will be supported. It is therefore hoped that this paper and subsequent discussions will contribute to those conversations.
15. The compact⁴ between the VCS and public sector bodies in Camden is another key local driver. The compact provides the basis within which the VCS and public sector bodies (the Council, the police, the Primary Care Trust, Job Centre Plus and others) will work together locally. The document contains guiding principles for inclusiveness, integrity, transparency, open dialogue and equality of opportunity by which the VCS and public sector bodies should engage.
16. Elsewhere, Camden has now developed a local area agreement (LAA)⁵. The LAA framework marks a significant shift in the way in which organisations work together in the borough. Essentially it focuses on partnership working, collective decision-making and rationalisation of a wide range of funding streams in the borough. LAA marks the beginning of what is to be a significant and profound change in VCS support and funding.
17. A focus on the key local policy drivers would be incomplete without a mention of the events of 07/07/05. Camden found itself at the epicentre of the attacks which took place on that day and since this time the Council has acted swiftly to bring community leaders together in an effort to re-affirm our shared desire for social harmony and peaceful co-existence. The events of 7/7 have reminded us of the importance of community to our borough. Crucially, the VCS has a major role to play in helping to build relationships within and between communities in the aftermath of those events.

³ Executive Report of Review and Support to the VCS in Camden, LB Camden 2003

⁴ A Compact for Camden: A Framework agreement between the Voluntary and Community Sector and Public Sector Partners

⁵ Local Area Agreement: A prospectus, ODPM, July 2004

A priorities framework for the VCS in Camden

18. Few would argue with the idea that the work of VCOs should be strategically coherent. Specifically, Camden residents and taxpayers should be able to see how the sectors work is contributing to the themes of Camden's Community Strategy. Such a link is important because it will better enable both the VCS and the Council to pinpoint where funding is being targeted, assess the balance of funding between key priorities and inform the conversation as to whether the alignment of funding to priorities accurately reflects existing or unmet need.
19. As part of the Council-led review of support to the VCS in Camden a framework linking funding to priorities was in fact proposed. The Council and the VCS should once again revisit this proposal and see how it can be taken forward.
20. In addition to the service delivery outcomes for the sector there also needs to be recognition of development priorities for the sector itself. Again, although at the highest level Camden's Community Strategy⁶ provides some recognition of the sector's development needs, these actually need to be properly identified.

Overview of VCS funding in Camden

21. In 2003-4, the Council funded VCOs in the borough to the tune of £14m. This sum represents the largest VCS budget of any borough in London. There is a critical point to be made in respect of the grant aid budget, as two strands of thought have emerged. One focuses purely on the budget quantum in comparison to other boroughs. Whilst the other sees Camden as a borough that values its VCS and is prepared to invest in its development. This is a critical point, as whichever perception holds sway will determine the long-term policy vision for the sector.
22. It is worth noting that the sector also secures funding from other sources too, including grants from Non-Government Public Bodies, income from the provision of contracted or commissioned services (such as through Supporting People and neighbourhood renewal), funding through other statutory bodies, private donations or other income generation activity.
23. Looking purely at the Council grant funding to the sector, approximately 102 VCOs currently receive grant aid from the Council. These organisations, which tend to be smaller in size, operate borough wide and reflect much of the rich diversity of our population. Their services are critical in reaching into service delivery gaps to meet the needs of communities that would otherwise go unmet. Indeed, much of the real work of these organisations can never really be measured through formal measurement techniques. How for example does one gauge the true value

⁶ Our Camden Our Future: Camden's Community Strategy - Camden Local Strategic Partnership, 2001

of work that builds bridges of trust with an inaccessible community that does not engage mainstream services?

24. Financial pressures, the need to meet efficiency targets⁷ and the increasing public demand for value for money are good reasons to look at doing things differently. But they cannot, by themselves, form the basis of the Council's longer-term relationship and dialogue with the VCS. That would be a purely one-dimensional approach and ultimately undermine the longer-term sustainability of the sector.
25. The Council should not simply be looking for ways to cut grants to the VCS. Rather it needs to set out a clear vision and engage the sector in a qualitative and wide-ranging conversation about the future. Engaging the sector in this way is crucial to building confidence and ensuring ownership of outcomes and is therefore a must-do if long-term ambitions are to be realised.
26. Let us be clear, it is not in the near or long-term interests of the VCS to develop 'learned helplessness', through over-dependency on grants from the Council. The sector does not want to become dependent, it wants to be independent, autonomous and empowered. Some money must always be made available to support the sector but we need to re-badge this in a way that clearly presents as support for growth rather than a statutory stipend.
27. Clearly the thinking around funding needs to be re-defined. It is important to note that this is not Council money, it is council taxpayer's money and public money. Ideas around how the Council and the VCS might want to approach this task are set out further on.

Incentives and rewards

28. Incentives and rewards, by themselves, cannot secure long-term sustainability. However, they are important levers and change agents. It is therefore proposed that consideration should be given to the introduction of an incentives and rewards package for the VCS. It is worth noting that, for many years the statutory sector has been a beneficiary of incentives from central government. For example, the freedoms and flexibilities available through the comprehensive performance assessment for local government or the statutory relaxation's that have created new powers for Councils to trade and generate income.⁸
29. Others include the performance reward grants available, to councils, through Local Public Service Agreement⁹ and the planning delivery grant also available to councils for their performance in turning around major and

⁷ The Efficiency Technical Note for Local Government - ODPM, December 2004

⁸ Local Government Act 2003

⁹ LPSA 2G: Building on Success - ODPM, December 2003

minor planning applications. One could go on and on here, but the point being made is clear.

30. Clearly, resource constraints dictate that, by itself, Camden is limited in terms of what it can agree to. But that should not be a barrier to discussion and it is worth noting that freedoms do not all have to be financial. The key issue here is that the Council needs to engage the sector in a conversation and explore feasible options. Indeed it may well be that as part of this conversation, the Council and its VCS partners approach Government with one or more pathfinder proposals in an effort to secure support for a specific initiative.
31. Some possible areas that the Council might wish to explore with VCS colleagues are set out under the various sub-headers below.

Freedoms and flexibilities

32. As part of this, the Council might negotiate with the various funders of a VCISO and agree a freedom whereby the separate reporting requirements to different bodies could be relaxed. In its place a single line reporting to the Council would be created for all funding being received by that VCO. As part of this the VCO would report on performance, for all its funding, once a quarter directly to the Council. The Council would then take on the responsibility for certifying performance and spend on behalf of this group to the various funding bodies.
33. Other freedoms could include more risk based audit and monitoring up to and including monitoring and audit holidays for sustained and improved performance or as means to enhance VCS efficiency.

Developmental schemes

34. Thought should be given to the setting up of perhaps two developmental schemes. The first would be a basic level incentive scheme which could offer negotiated monitoring holidays, invites to attend Council run training programmes and support to organise a local event (for under 50 people). Qualification for this would be open to all VCOs, although an accessibility standard would need to be agreed.
35. To complement this a reward scheme could be created, which could offer monitoring and audit holidays, financial rewards, freedoms to roll over unspent funds from one year to the next and opportunities to deliver pathfinder projects. Access to this scheme would need to be based on set of criteria such as positive monitoring reports, adoption of a quality standard (ie: PQASSO), processes and procedures in place and good governance.

Future grant funding models

36. It has already been noted that the vision set out in this paper cannot be realised overnight. The move to new models and implementing change will need to be phased and structured, with key milestones and measures of success along the way. Proposals for new grant funding models are set out under the sub headers below.

Ring-fenced grants

37. It is proposed that a ring fenced grant regime could operate on three levels. In the first instance funding could be ring-fenced to specific communities. This would prevent the effective monopolisation of grant funds by a single provider. The second proposal for ring-fencing could be on the basis of a priorities vision. In this case the Council would set the grant funding priorities for the year and next year, and then make grant funding allocations on the basis of amounts ring-fenced to each priority.

38. The third proposal for ring-fencing is that it be used as a tool to maintain diversity and choice in the VCS marketplace. As part of this, the Council would set aside an amount each year, as a sustainability fund for smaller community groups. Setting aside provision in this way would minimise the risk of smaller community groups being squeezed out by medium or larger VCOs.

Transitional grant award

39. The proposal here is for some element of the VCS grant aid pot to be set aside for use as a transitional grant award. The transitional award would be for a period of 12 months and its purpose would be to assist a VCSO to move to a sustainable funding regime, either through commissions or contracts, within the 12-month period.

40. The transitional grant would be awarded subject to the development and agreement of a transitional plan. The plan would have to set out what steps the VCSO would be taking to secure sustainable funding over the 12-months of the transitional period. Practical support from the Council would be a key part of the implementation of the transitional plan and this would help assist VCSO to secure sustainability funding by the end of the 12-month period.

41. If the VCSO were unable to secure alternative funding it could not apply for transitional grant again the following year. This would free up grant aid to be redistributed to new areas of unmet need. The proposal is that, if transitional grant award proves successful, the percentage of the grant set aside for this purpose could be incrementally decreased year on year.

Explorer fund

42. The proposal here is that a component of the VCS grant aid budget be set aside for explorer partnership, pathfinders and pilot projects. These could be specific projects developed jointly by the VCS and the Council or those that either the Council or VCOs would like to be commissioned. The aim is that any projects piloted would be funded for a year and, if successful, would be supported to access mainstream or external funding.

Contracting models

43. The Council could explore the possibility of piloting locality contracting. This would be based on a detailed appraisal of a local areas need. Information available at super-output level (1500 people) means that this type of service could be very effectively targeted. As part of this the Council could assess the service need of an area and agree a locality contract with a local VCS partnership to deliver various services.
44. Contract variations could also include 'added value contracts'. These contracts would essentially require providers to deliver an agreed additional level of performance for a reward element. Both the additional performance and the reward element would be negotiated between the Council and the VCSO.
45. Other specific contracts could be offered to VCOs to promote 'twining' between at least two organisations, which would be contracted to deliver a specific contract. The purpose of this would be to assist and incentivise VCOs who want to collaborate with others.

Commissioning

46. The proposal here is that a proportion of the grant aid budget could be set aside for project commissioning. Here there could be scope for flexibility to commission strategic partnerships of VCOs to provide specific services such as housing, health and education in line with an overarching theme such as 'services that promote social cohesion'. Or indeed to undertake specific developmental work such as research projects through which to 'break the back' of longstanding problems and provide detailed intelligence regarding the needs of service users, reasons for service failure etc.

Promoting a mix of approaches to VCS growth

47. One of the key challenges here is that the VCS is not a homogeneous group. Therefore even within the sector, growth may be defined differently. For some it may be defined in terms of an ability to develop social enterprise capacity to leverage in additional resources, whilst for others it may be defined in terms of remaining small but increasing the quality of services to existing users. For others it may be defined in terms of remaining independently constituted, whilst for others it might be defined in terms of merging with others to maximise economies of scale.

48. In line with other comments in this paper, promoting sustainable growth in the sector requires a mix of approaches. It should recognise that some organisations may want to set up social enterprise or community firms, whilst others may want to establish collaborative ventures with new partners. In other instances some organisations may want help to expand or diversify their service delivery, whilst others may simply want to be able to target existing clients more effectively. In other instances peer support may be required to develop new skills, whilst for others incubation support may be desired.
49. Set out under the sub-headers below are some ways in which VCS growth could be facilitated with Council support.

Safeguarding unique service provision

50. There are many VCS providers operating effectively at a one or two person level and delivering excellent services. The uniqueness of this type of provision needs to be recognised, nurtured and not pressured into taking on greater responsibility at the risk of losing their funding, ability to meet needs or their unique identity. Structures put in place for VCOs of this kind will ensure that this type of provision can be sustained within the borough, for the benefit of our local communities.

Promoting collaboration

51. VCOs should be given every opportunity to work alongside others to deliver services, share skill and expertise and maximise economies of scale. This proposal has already identified contracting arrangements that could support this kind of activity, which it is proposed, could contribute usefully to the growth of the VCS.

Incubation and peer support

52. The objective here is to develop organisations that would, in effect provide buddies for other VCOs that needed developmental support specifically targeted to their need. The type of support provided could range from provision of premises and use of office facilities to more bespoke support such as developing business plans or writing funding applications. The programme would work on the basis of an agreement or a more detailed plan. The important point to make here is that the sector needs to be supported and encouraged to perform this role by itself and for itself.

Stimulating the VCS market place

53. The Council could play a key role in the development of the 'market place' for VCS services. This would be a crucial pathway through which organisations could develop capacity to sell services or skills and develop their income generating capacity (licensing of products, consultancy branded services, online subscriber services).

54. The VCS 'market' place could also have more practical uses too, as an annual community fair through which funding agencies could 'shop' for services and by which VCS organisation could be encouraged to showcase their services.

Joint ventures and community firms

55. Building upon statutory powers Councils have to trade (LG Act 2003), the Council explore opportunities for joint ventures with VCS organisations. As an example, the Council may be able to use its influence to facilitate the development of three party 'public interest partnerships' which would also include the VCS and private sectors and through which profits would be invested back into the development of the local community.
56. Another idea could be the development of a community firm, which would be based in a neighbourhood area and with a management board comprised of local partners and resident representatives. The firm would have its own devolved budget and VCOs providing services in that area would also be part of that firm. Its aim would be to bring decision making closer to local people and enable them to have greater say over how services are delivered in their area.

Policy and research

57. The capacity of VCOs to effectively engage in research, policy and strategic development represents one of the greatest developmental opportunities across the VCS in Camden. Indeed it is worth noting that it is only with relatively larger organisations or to some extent those providing infrastructure support that this kind of capacity is apparent or can be budgeted for.
58. In any future vision for the sector, every organisation should be able to understand the link between research, policy, strategy, budgeting and service delivery. The proposal here therefore is to provide greater support to the sector to help it understand these tools and their value. At the heart of this would be a training and support programme for VCOs and small grants scheme to assist them in carrying out discrete pieces of social research in their areas through focus groups, surveys or evaluations.
59. Encouragement could also be given to the development of community based policy and research groups or 'community sounding boards', through which VCSO could be supported to 'culture' policy issues before bringing them into the public arena.

Developing the vision in partnership

60. It is proposed that the process for overseeing the development of the long-term vision for the VCS should be overseen by a VCS 'futures board'. As

well as representation from VCOs and the Council, representation on the 'futures board' could include:

- Other statutory bodies funding the VCS such as the Primary Care Trust
- Non-Government Public Bodies such as the Big Lottery
- The Social Enterprise Unit
- Camden Chamber of Commerce

61. The group's role will be to talk through and explore the wide range of options available and try to fashion these into workable models for the future.

Conclusion

62. The ten-year vision described in this paper is predicated on the assumption that the Council also shares it and is willing to take a share of the responsibility for its realisation. The objective here is to some extent test the Council's own ambition for the sector. Fundamentally, however, it recognises that the VCS must have a vision for itself, which we need to own.

63. There are a number of ideas contained in this paper and that is how they should be seen - as ideas. Nothing here is set in stone. However, the VCS would like to have an open dialogue with the Council about the proposals here. As part of such a dialogue, it could be we find common ground on some of the ideas in this paper, whilst others may be deemed unsuitable. Fundamentally, however, it is only through a qualitative dialogue that agreement on what the future should look like can be reached.