

SELECT COMMITTEE ON CHARITIES

Call for Evidence

The Select Committee on Charities was set up on 25 May 2016 to consider issues related to sustaining the charity sector and the challenges of charity governance. The Committee, chaired by Baroness Pitkeathley, has to report by 31 March 2017.

The following is a public call for written evidence to be submitted to the Committee. The deadline is 5 September 2016.

The Committee invites interested individuals and organisations to submit evidence to this inquiry. The submissions we receive will guide the Committee's deliberations in oral evidence sessions later this year, and also inform the Committee's final conclusions and recommendations. Public hearings began in early July and will continue until early December.

The Committee's report will receive a response from the Government, and will be debated in the House of Lords.

The focus of the inquiry

The charitable sector in the United Kingdom has a long and proud history of contributing to British society. Recent years have seen an unprecedented period of change to the environment in which the sector is operating. Furthermore, within the sector there have been a number of high profile events in recent months which have called into question practice in the voluntary and charitable sector. We are looking to make sure that the attention on recent issues does not undermine the good work done by many charitable organisations.

We are looking to understand the pressures faced across the sector by charities. We will make recommendations to the UK Government, and to others, which we hope help ease these pressures, and to make sure that the charitable sector in England and Wales is sustainable for many years to come. We consider sustainability to be charities having the appropriate resources available to them to meet their charitable purposes. As the regulation of charities is a devolved matter in Northern Ireland and Scotland, we will be focusing our inquiry on the experiences of charities in England and Wales. We do however want to learn about the experience of charities in Northern Ireland and Scotland, as well as in other countries.

This inquiry is intended to be an opportunity to engage positively with charities and the voluntary sector. We are looking for examples of best practice, innovation and ideas to bring the sector together to make sure that it can thrive.

We recognise the diversity of charities in England and Wales, and we want to learn about the experiences of them all. **The questions that follow are wide ranging, and it is not necessary to answer every one.**

Questions

The purpose of charities

1. What is the role and purpose of charities in civic society in England and Wales?
 - How has this changed?
 - What makes them distinct from other organisations doing similar work?
 - What role can charities play in community cohesion and civic action?
 - How does the sector benefit from volunteering?
 - How has the status of volunteers changed?
 - What challenges do charities face in trying to fulfil their role in civic society?
 - How can these challenges be overcome?

Pressures and opportunities

2. What are the main pressures faced by charities currently, and what impact have these had?
 - What opportunities do charities have in the current environment?
 - Are there specific pressures affecting particular types of charity (for example, service delivery charities; charities reliant on fundraising income; charities with a rural focus; smaller or larger charities; or charities promoting a particular cause) that you can highlight?

Innovation

3. How do charities seek to innovate, particularly in the digital arena?
 - What more could be done to promote innovation, and by whom?
 - What barriers are there to being innovative?

Governance and leadership

4. What skills are required to lead and manage a charity?
 - How can these skills be gained?
 - What support exists to develop these skills within the charitable sector?
5. What role should trustees play in the performance and effectiveness of a charity?
 - How can trustees be best equipped, enabled and supported to fulfil their responsibilities?
 - What, if any, changes might this mean for current arrangements?

Accountability

6. How can charities ensure that they are properly accountable to their beneficiaries, their donors, and the general public?
 - What, if any, changes might this mean for current arrangements?
 - How should charities assess their long term viability and/or sustainability?

Resource management

7. What are the current challenges to financial sustainability, as well as efficient resource and risk management for the sector?
 - How can these challenges be overcome?
 - How can best practice and information be shared across the sector?
 - What lessons can be learnt from past mergers or dissolutions of charities?
 - How can charities effectively deliver services and be assured that their work achieves successful outcomes?
 - What are the benefits and challenges of funding for charities being derived from commercial contracts?

Social investment

8. What is the potential of social investment and social impact bonds?
 - What are barriers to fulfilling their potential?

The role of the Government

9. What should the role of Government be with the sector?
 - What should be the role of local Government?
 - What should be the role of the Charity Commission?
 - Have these relationships changed? If so, how?
 - How should Government (national or local) focus its resource to deliver its civil society agenda?
 - What is the likely impact of greater local devolution on the charitable sector, or particular types of charity?
 - What are the opportunities and challenges associated with local devolution?

Lessons from other sectors and countries

10. What can the charitable sector in England and Wales learn from other sectors and/or approaches taken in other countries, including from Northern Ireland and Scotland?

Please also include in your submission any information you think may be relevant to our inquiry.

How to submit evidence

Written evidence should be submitted online using the written submission form available at: www.parliament.uk/charities-adhoc-written-submission-form/

If you do not have access to a computer you may submit a paper copy to:

Clerk to the Select Committee on Charities
Committee Office,
House of Lords,
London SW1A 0PW

The deadline for written evidence is **5 September 2016**.

Short, concise submissions, of **no more than six pages**, are requested. A longer submission should include a one-page summary. Paragraphs should be numbered. Submissions should be dated, with a note of the author's name, and of whether the author is acting on an individual or corporate basis. All submissions made through the written submission form will be acknowledged automatically by email. You do not need to answer every question in our Call for Evidence.

Personal contact details supplied to the Committee will be removed from submissions before publication but will be retained by the Committee staff for specific purposes relating to the Committee's work, such as seeking additional information.

Submissions become the property of the Committee which will decide whether to accept them as evidence. Evidence may be published by the Committee at any stage. It will normally appear on the Committee's website and will be deposited in the Parliamentary Archives. Once you have received acknowledgement that your submission has been accepted as evidence, you may publicise or publish it yourself, but in doing so you must indicate that it was prepared for the Committee. If you publish your evidence separately, you should be aware that you will be legally responsible for its content.

You should be careful not to comment on individual cases currently before a court of law, or matters in respect of which court proceedings are imminent. If you anticipate such issues arising, you should discuss with the Clerk of the Committee how this might affect your submission.

Certain individuals and organisations may be invited to appear in person before the Committee to give oral evidence. Oral evidence is usually given in public at Westminster and broadcast in audio and online. Persons invited to give oral evidence will be notified separately of the procedure to be followed and the topics likely to be discussed.

Substantive communications to the Committee about the inquiry should be addressed through the Clerk, whether or not they are intended to constitute formal evidence to the Committee.

This is a public call for evidence. Please bring it to the attention of other groups and individuals who may not have received a copy direct.

You can follow the progress of the inquiry at www.parliament.uk/charities-committee

20 July 2016