



## Sean Baine, Chair of the London Civic Forum, describes how the voluntary sector has developed and responded to new approaches

**O**ver the last five years London's voluntary sector has continued to change in response to the changing needs of London's people and the changing external environment.

Changing needs have been most graphically shown in the increasing number of black, minority ethnic and refugee groups that have appeared in nearly every London borough. These groups have provided a sense of identity and continuity to many of London's newer arrivals as well as negotiating the interface with the providers of services.

# Changing times changing structures

At a London level the emergence of the Black Londoners Forum with around 1,000 members has shown that many of these groups are determined to come together to provide a more coherent voice. The Trust and Foundation have been an important resource in this area not just in funding the Forum but also in supporting refugee groups with the Refugee Education Unit, the Resource Unit for Supplementary and Mother-tongue Schools and work around exclusion from school.

There have been other developments reflecting new needs and concerns. Environmental groups continued to grow – one example is the expansion of the Groundwork network to more boroughs; another is the creation of the London Sustainability Exchange. There has been more emphasis on advocacy projects and on

the development of user-led services and forums.

Services for carers have expanded dramatically, nearly all provided within a voluntary organisation setting (and supported through the Foundation's Carers' Programme). So, as for the last hundred years, the voluntary sector has continued to adapt and to innovate.

Within London, as nationally, the context in which the voluntary sector has been operating has changed significantly. The Labour government has produced a stream of initiatives that have included the voluntary sector as key partners e.g. SRB partnerships, New Deal for Communities, Neighbourhood Management, Sure Start, Healthy Living Centres and the Children's Fund.

There are now over 200 area-based partnerships in London. These have produced new funding opportunities and have also put pressure on voluntary bodies to be partners and to take part in developing proposals and in assessing projects once programme approvals have been given. The Foundation has supported four local area initiatives to test out partnership ideas and new approaches.

At a Borough level the voluntary sector has also become involved in Local Strategic Partnerships and, in the more deprived boroughs, in administering Neighbourhood Renewal Fund, Community Empowerment Fund and Community Chest money.

At a London level perhaps the most important single development has been the creation of the Greater London Authority with a Mayor and Assembly and functional bodies for transport, economic development, the police and the fire service. The early years of the new authority have mainly been about the development of London-wide

strategies which have provided a range of opportunities for voluntary sector involvement – the LVSC-based GLA Involvement Project has been important in this context.

Discussions have started on a Compact between the sector and the Mayor, London Transport and the London Development Agency. Already one voluntary body has been successful in reversing an important recommendation from the Mayor – the London Cycling Campaign got cycling reinstated in the transport budget.

The coming of the Greater London Authority has not been the only important change in government structures. Training and Enterprise Councils have become Learning and Skills Councils, Primary Care Trusts have come into being as has the Connexions service and Employment and Benefits services are combining into a new Jobs Plus Service.

Voluntary organisations have had to understand and adapt to these changes, e.g., a developing community health and regeneration agenda and new ideas about continuing education and the provision of more unified services for young people (this last area being supported by the Foundation through its Youth Programme).

All this external change has meant that the voluntary sector has had to be more visible in taking part in partnerships and new government-inspired initiatives as well as having an eye to exploiting all the new funding opportunities. This has made the voluntary sector more entrepreneurial and has created a new breed of voluntary sector managers – and a new need to provide appropriate training and support for them.

In addition there have been pressures to respond to a quality agenda. These have been partly inspired by Best Value regimes within local authorities and partly by a need to demonstrate quality and competence if becoming more heavily involved in the direct running of services.

## February 1999

The Stephen Lawrence Inquiry report accuses the Metropolitan Police of “pernicious and institutionalised racism”. It makes 70 recommendations, encompassing law and race-awareness education, including changing the law so that suspects can be re-tried if new evidence emerges.

## April 1999

John Smallwood retires as a Trustee of CPF after 30 years service including 12 years as Chairman.

Violence hits the streets of London when nail bombs explode in Brixton, Brick Lane and Soho, resulting in three deaths and many injuries. In May, David Copeland is arrested for murder, and states that his aim had been to start a race war – though the final bomb was aimed at the gay community. A year later Copeland is given three life sentences.

The National Council of Voluntary Organisations has promoted the Excellence Model as a framework and the Association of London Government has its own Quality Assurance Measures while there is increasing use of PQASSO from Charity Evaluation Services. More and more service providers are being asked to define their outputs and to agree to a number of performance indicators in service level agreements.

All of these developments have made life for the voluntary sector more complicated over the last five years. Funding sources are volatile, e.g., the Community Fund brought enormous growth to the sector but is now having to cut back while many regeneration or charitable programmes only last for a limited time. On the other hand, life has also become more exciting.

As always the voluntary sector has shown itself flexible enough to respond and to see all the changes as opportunities – opportunities to continue to meet the diverse needs of an increasingly diverse London. And the Foundation has been an important resource in piloting and developing work in many of the key development areas for the sector.