

Birmingham Community Matters (BCM) Evaluation Report Launch & Workshop: the 'power of little': Monday 15th October 2018: Stirchley Baths 2pm to 4pm

Contextual Background to development of BCM:

From 2005 to 2010 government programmes, including Capacity Builders, supported substantial investment in building the infrastructure of development support to voluntary and community groups. Such investment has significantly declined over the last 10 years. An economic recession, public sector funding cuts and welfare reforms have impacted on voluntary and community organisations.

Whilst the delivery of policy objectives (from cohesion to community safety, wellbeing) has increasingly been driven down to the level of communities and neighbourhoods, the infrastructure necessary to support groups operating at a local level has been significantly reduced. Those agencies with a capacity building remit now have limited capacity to offer face-to-face development support and/or have had to restrict support to on-line information portals. This has created a strain on resources, reducing the capacity to meet an increasing demand on services. Political expectations of the roles and responsibilities of individual citizens have, at the same time, increased. Citizens are no longer only consulted about service configurations, but are being actively encouraged to take on either direct service delivery (such as libraries or parks and open spaces) or manage assets previously owned by local authorities – often on a voluntary basis.

The NCVO Almanac, published annually, highlights the deep and long-lasting effects of reductions in government funding on local charities and the people they support. It shows how disproportionately small and medium sized charities have been affected by this reduction. [In 2014-15](#), nearly half of all UK charities had an income of less than £10,000 (known as 'micro'), with another third defined as 'small' organisations with an income of less than £100,000. However, collectively, these organisations account for just 4.5% of the sectors total income and comprise around 83% of the voluntary and community sector. Their ability to reach out and work with members of a community that public sector agencies and larger voluntary organisations find difficult to reach makes them an essential and critical part of the fabric of civil society. Furthermore, the ability to build relationships increases social support networks for those more vulnerable in society. Through experience of participating in community activity, it enables them to learn new skills and knowledge that provide practical benefits for individuals as well for the community.

It was against this background that, BCM came into being, operating as a peer-to-peer learning network providing face-to-face support for small community and volunteer groups and for individuals with ideas about contributing to civil society.