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The Lord Hodgson of Astley Abbotts CBE  
House of Lords  
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I thought it would be helpful to let you have an update about some of the progress we are making in implementing the (non charity law) recommendations in 'Unshackling Good Neighbours' as we are now just past the midpoint between the report's launch and your assessment of progress next May.

As I promised at the launch, we are working to progress all the recommendations. A lot has already happened and I am really encouraged by the fact that already two of the recommendations have been met. They are:

- that cheques should be retained as long as they are needed, following the Payments Council announcement on 12 July.
- the Liaison Group, incorporating representatives of both the insurance industry and CSOs to address insurance issues, held its first meeting on 21 November.

I am particularly pleased that at its first meeting the liaison group agreed to set up smaller working groups to consider:

- facilitating community volunteering and engagement, including the development of a code of practice for volunteers;
- personal liability, including informal volunteering by individuals who are doing good things in their community;
- local authority imposed obligations and unevenness of enforcement; and
- mapping insurance products and what they cover.

I look forward to hearing about the progress the group makes on these key issues for civil society organisations.



Three other issues you refer to have also seen positive change, namely:

- most Government departments have eliminated pre qualification questionnaires for contracts worth less than £100,000;
- the Association of British Insurers have clarified the position of volunteer drivers by publishing on its website (at [www.abi.org.uk/Media/Releases/2011/08/Motor Insurers Support Big Society and Give Green Light To Volunteer Drivers .aspx](http://www.abi.org.uk/Media/Releases/2011/08/Motor%20Insurers%20Support%20Big%20Society%20and%20Give%20Green%20Light%20To%20Volunteer%20Drivers.aspx)) a list of 54 insurance providers who cover volunteer driving at no extra charge. This covers 85% of all UK motorists; and
- the Department for Transport has modified the Snow Code (at [www.direct.gov.uk/en/NI1/Newsroom/DG\\_191868](http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/NI1/Newsroom/DG_191868)) so that the line about it being unlikely that volunteers will be sued does not appear in the introductory paragraph.

I will briefly highlight some of the progress made with other recommendations under the headings of the chapters of the report to which they belong.

### **What stops people giving time**

The proposals in the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Bill will implement the recommendations made by Lord Justice Jackson to rationalise civil litigation funding and costs. As you noted, there is also a need to shift the perception that volunteers are likely to be sued, and OCS is working with sector umbrella organisations and the insurance industry to assess options aimed at achieving this.

When it becomes law, the Protection of Freedoms Bill will change the CRB process to enable volunteers to only need a single check for all their volunteering activity and the checks will only be needed by those who may have regular or close contact with vulnerable children and adults. This will make a big difference to many volunteers and voluntary organisations who work with children and vulnerable adults, while still providing necessary protection for such people.

Various government departments are continuing to work to implement the recommendations in "Common Sense, Common Safety", for example following consultation, the Health and Safety Executive published clear guidance on safety in charity shops and low risk offices in October.

### **What stops people giving money?**

The report highlights licensing as being a particularly difficult issue for CSOs. DCMS has consulted on proposals to deregulate what the Licensing Act 2003 refers to as "Regulated Entertainment". The proposals include the removal in certain circumstances of the requirement for a licence in England and Wales to host a performance of a play, showing of a film, an indoor sporting event, a performance of live music, any playing of recorded music, or a dance performance. OCS is also continuing to explore with organisations such as DCLG and the Local Government Association how the quality of local authority guidance on licensing might be improved by spreading good practice

## What stops CSOs growing?

I know that commissioning was possibly the most difficult issue for the Taskforce to address, however this is an area where there is significant change in progress that is being initiated by both Government and CSO umbrella organisations.

The publication of the "Open Public Services" White Paper ([www.openpublicservices.cabinetoffice.gov.uk](http://www.openpublicservices.cabinetoffice.gov.uk)) marked the beginning of a listening exercise to get the views from individuals, communities, public sector staff, providers and others with an interest in how public services are delivered. There has been an excellent response to "Open Public Services" and we plan to publish our response soon.

In September DCLG ([www.communities.gov.uk](http://www.communities.gov.uk)) published the Compact Award winning, "Best Value Statutory Guidance", which asks local authorities to consider social, economic and environmental value when commissioning services. This has been complimented by Community Matters ([www.communitymatters.org.uk](http://www.communitymatters.org.uk)) launching "Your Value", a tool that enables community organisations who want to bid to provide public services to demonstrate their contribution to social value through a process that includes "critical friend" analysis. We understand that it has already been readily adopted as best practice by a number of local authorities.

National and local sector umbrella bodies are working extensively to encourage CSOs to form consortia to enable them to bid for more effectively for contracts to provide public services. Examples of organisations that provide support include NCVO and NAVCA and a partnership comprising ACEVO, the Social Investment Business and Voluntary Action Sheffield.

These are just a small sample of the support that is available to civil society organisations as our reform of public service contracting gathers momentum. We will work with umbrella bodies to raise awareness of the support they provide.

I appreciate that we still have a lot of work to do to implement all of your recommendations by next May. However I hope you will agree that this snapshot shows progress is being made.

We are planning to publish this letter on the Cabinet Office website.



**NICK HURD**