

The Wheel 20<sup>th</sup> Summit, Croke Park, 23<sup>rd</sup> May, 2019.

Messrs Kevin Molloy and Noel Stacey of Wexford PPN attended the above event.

The Summit took place in the context of climate change, the housing crisis and long waiting lists for health and social services to skills shortages, global inequality and Brexit.

Charities, community and voluntary groups or social enterprise will continue to be there supporting people and advocating for change. This Summit 2019 is focused on how we can promote innovation in the community, voluntary and charity sector to unlock a brighter future for all. It brought together 36 top speakers and over 500 delegates to discuss these challenges.

The Plenary Panel presented powerpoints on Slaintecare, the new Charities Code and the transformation of the Department of Justice and Equality and the Panel discussed the range of ideas and proposals and outlined what the main stakeholders in the sector are doing.

Some issues facing the sector and society generally were highlighted:

Public trust and confidence remains low.

There is a greater expectation for services than ever before.

Costs around governance compliance are growing.

A greater profile of the sector is emerging in terms of volunteers, directors, costings etc. This is known as the third sector.

Increases in compliance requirements, health and safety, human resources etc.

An increasingly challenging and competitive funding environment.

Charities Governance Code regulation.

Climate change and decarbonisation.

Environmental degradation: plastics, pesticides, extinctions.

Migration and integration.

Polarised politics, populism and division.

Inequality, poverty and marginalisation.

Gender inequality.

Disruptive potential of 'fake news' through social media.

Our sector is at the front line of all of this, advocating for the changes needed and providing supports and services. The direct challenges are:

Recruiting and retaining staff, in light of the funding inadequacy, especially on remuneration pay restoration.

Recruiting board members (volunteers carrying the legal governance responsibilities).

Ongoing increase in demand for services, whilst seemingly powerless to address due to lack of funding.

The impact of greatly increased compliance requirements.

The rising cost of insurance and threat to work of charities.

A profile of the sector shows:

29, 300 organisations,

163,000 employees,

81,000 directors and trustees

€13.8 billion spent annually

€5.9 billion state funding

Eight workshops took place, two of which we attended:

Board Diversity examined the issue of ensuring that as many persons under the equality legislation were included on Boards to help formulate policies and to bring fresh ideas and experiences to Boards and organisations.

The panel include a young person, an immigrant and a woman, all of whom outlined their views and experiences.

It was suggested that there should also be linkage groups formed by such companies and boards to facilitate ideas and ensure that the views of diversity are heard.

The engagement of the youth on Boards was also discussed as to what is needed to make their involvement meaningful.

A sector which was highlighted at the session which requires engagement with is those from the lower socio economic groups, whose own experience would be beneficial in enhancing Board expertise.

The second workshop was about autonomy and accountability and looked at the stringent audit and reporting mechanisms in place for charities.

The extent to which each can forge its own destiny is dictated by ever restrictive service level agreements between them and their parent funding bodies.

The voluntary sectors time is taken up with compliance, health and safety, insurance and governance issues as opposed to getting on with the business of providing service, looking at strategic development implementation etc. and is off putting for attracting new persons onto Boards.

Grant funding applications for example or Garda vetting a mountain of bureaucracy must be faced for even the smallest grant application.

No solution was forwarded except that it would be hoped that over time Boards will become expert in applying for funds and that once, for example, the corporate governance is in place that the burden will be reduced.

The Summit was addressed by the Taoiseach, Mr. Leo Varadkar, TD.

His speech and more information on the Summit are available on the wheels website:

<https://www.wheel.ie/sites/default/files/media/file-uploads/2019-05/ALL%20SLIDES.pdf>