

8 March 2017

Dear Colleague

Response to the Charity Commission consultation on the annual return for 2017

Newcastle CVS is the lead infrastructure organisation for Newcastle and Gateshead's voluntary and community sector. As well as developing and supporting voluntary and community organisations to be more sustainable and resilient, we organise networks and events and represent the voluntary and community sector in strategic discussions. We carry out research and produce policy studies. We have over 750 member and associate organisations that are local voluntary and community organisations.

One of the roles of Newcastle CVS is to provide governance advice, information and support. We also run Ellison Services, our charity accountancy trading arm, and support a number of organisations to submit their annual returns. Most of the groups we work with have an income of less than £50,000. Of the 165,000 charities in England and Wales, more than half have an income of less than £10,000. Our reach and experience means we have a good understanding of the needs, everyday experiences and the reality facing smaller charities. This response is written from that perspective.

We agree with the need to refresh the annual return, but we would suggest that, if possible, it should be kept in the same format for some time as many smaller organisations get confused by having to return different forms each year.

1 Fundamental information updated

We would agree with this, but believe you should list what is required in this list, eg trustee information, address etc. Will there be a timeframe and how realistic will this be for very small volunteer-led groups?

2. Focussing the questions

The trigger questions would need to be carefully phrased so charities were very clear whether this applied to them or not. So a local community organisation might not appreciate it had responsibilities in relation to safeguarding. Who defines whether a category / theme is necessary to be answered? What if an organisation decides if a theme is not relevant to them, but the Charity Commission differs?

Questions about terrorism and extremism would need to be asked carefully else they could be perceived as being discriminatory.

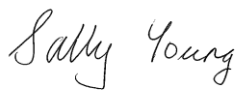
It isn't clear how proportionality works so although the questions will not be triggered by a charity's level of income (as now) it is unreasonable to assume the same level and detail of response from a charity with a turnover of £10,000 to a charity with a turnover of £1million or even £100 million.

We welcome any attempt to streamline information and reduce the burden of regulation on charities, whilst still having transparency, accountability and fairness as key principles.

3. Next steps

We welcome be asked to participate in any future consultation.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Sally Young".

Sally Young
Chief Executive