

PR 688

## Voluntary and community organisations have a key role to play in place shaping

Sir Michael Lyons, Acting Chairman of the Audit Commission and Head of the Lyons Inquiry into Local Government, will call for a closer relationship between local government and the third sector with the objective of building prosperous, diverse local communities and improving local quality of life.

Speaking at the Three Sector Summit in London today (22 June 2006), he says: 'Local government and the voluntary sector share a common root stock – a commitment to improving the social fabric; protecting the weak and engaging people in the life and governance of their own communities. This needs to be strengthened and renewed if we are to rise to the challenges of greater devolution and local choice.'

'The public of this country have a growing expectation of what they should be able to expect from the public sector and yet are understandably reluctant to pay more in tax. The solution to these pressures must be a combination of greater value for money from the tax pound and more matters left to local choice.'

'The voluntary and community sector can make a valuable contribution on both fronts, bringing a track record for innovation and special expertise in getting closer to the needs of different user groups and different local communities.'

Sir Michael emphasises the importance of involving people more directly in the design and delivery of services.

He says: 'There is growing good practice in both public services and the voluntary sector in empowering people to play a fuller part in the design and delivery of their services. This offers the opportunity for a better fit with needs and a greater contribution from the service user. The end result is high satisfaction and better value for money – a real win/win outcome.'

Sir Michael also referred to his recent Lyons Inquiry report *National Prosperity, Local Choice and Civic Engagement* in which he emphasises the place-shaping responsibility of local councils.

He says: 'Voluntary and community organisations can play a crucial role in high quality place-shaping. Working closely with local councils, charities, tenants' groups and social enterprises can all contribute towards the improvement of our villages, towns and cities.'

Simultaneously addressing economic, social and environmental issues offers the prospect of creating more prosperity and better quality of life.'

Sir Michael encourages closer working between local government and the third sector, urging them to transcend sometimes difficult local relationships to concentrate on shared ambitions.

## **NOTES TO EDITORS**

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