



News Release

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Civil Society Minister champions work of local community organisation in Chelmsford

Minister for Civil Society, Nick Hurd, today visited the Melbourne Project in Chelmsford to see first hand how the local grassroots project is providing vital services for their community. The project is run by Sister Margaret and Sister Moira, members of the Community of Canonesses of the Holy Sepulchre.

Minister for Civil Society, Nick Hurd, said:

“The Melbourne Project is a really impressive community organisation which provides help and support tailored to the needs of the local area. It is a great example of how a voluntary run organisation can make a real difference to a community. The support, advice and services Sister Margaret and Sister Moira provide is invaluable in helping local people of all ages.”

“Big Society is all about empowering local people and communities to bring about the changes they know their community needs. I would like to see many many more people giving time to make positive changes in their local area.”

The community project, which was set up by Sister Margaret and Sister Moira seven years ago, was initially run from their front room to provide help and support to people in the local area. The project has received significant funding from Essex Community Foundation and has been able to expand its services to include a

homework club, mother and toddler group, an older people's club, holiday activities and a cookery project.

During his visit the Minister took a short tour of the Melbourne Estate with Sister Margaret and Sister Moira, before joining the mother and toddler group where he met members of the group to discuss how the project has helped them.

Sister Moira said:

“We are thrilled that the Minister is so quickly prioritising gaining first-hand experience of grassroots projects which work to support the most vulnerable people in our society. We hope that his visit will lead to greater insight into the situations of people living on the margins – on estates like ours throughout the country. We hope that this will be one step towards building policies which are effective in creating a more just society.”

Later in the day the Minister also chaired a roundtable discussion at the local CVS to discuss the Big Society and what could be done to support and strengthen the voluntary and community sector in Chelmsford. Participants in the roundtable included Laura Warren, CEO of Essex Community Foundation, Brandon Hallam, Director of Policy at Essex County Council, June Claire, Deputy CEO at Chelmsford Borough Council and Martin Solder, CEO of Essex Boys and Girls Club.

Mr Hurd ended the day with a short tour of the Meadows Shopmobility and Community Exchange in Market Square. Evelyn Mochrie, the manager of the shop, set up the Community Exchange in a previously empty unit in High Chelmer. The use of the building was extended from wheelchair and scooter hire for shoppers with a mobility problem, to transforming the unused space into a charity shop, to further serve the local community.

Notes to editors:

Full list of attendees at the roundtable discussion on volunteering in a big society:

- Laura Warren, OBE DL, Chief Executive, Essex Community Foundation
- Brandon Hallam, Director of Policy at Essex County Council
- June Claire, Deputy CO at Chelmsford Borough Council

- Martin Solder, CEO of Essex Boys' and Girls' Club
- Malin Blom, Community Development Worker
- Caroline Taylor, Programmes Director, Essex Community Foundation
- Debbie Ladds, Deputy CEO, Community Development Foundation (CDF)
- Lorraine Jarvis, Chelmsford CVS

The Government announced putting Big Society at the heart of public sector reform. The cross-Government policy programme will create a climate that empowers local people and communities, building a Big Society that would roll back big government, bureaucracy and Whitehall power and includes supporting mutuals, co-operatives, charities and social enterprises and giving them greater involvement in the running of public services.

Funds from dormant bank accounts will also be used to establish a Big Society Bank, which will provide new finance for neighbourhood groups, charities, social enterprises and other non-governmental bodies.

More information about Big Society can be found at:

http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/newsroom/news_releases/2010/100518-news-big-society-launch.aspx

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