

## lottery funding



# The big argument

The concerns some in the sector have about the new Lottery funding arrangements may be understandable, but that doesn't mean they are right, says Sir Clive Booth

**T**he start of 2005 is an exciting time to be involved in the Big Lottery Fund. This is the year when we launch the full range of our new programmes to replace those which the New Opportunities Fund (NOF) and the Community Fund (CF) ran. And it will be the year, I hope, when we can demonstrate that we have been listening to all our stakeholders, including the voluntary and community sector, about their key concerns.

I think the concerns voiced by some in the voluntary sector can be summed up in three words: funding, independence and consultation.

Taking funding first, our top priority is, of course, the beneficiaries and outcomes of our programmes. Nonetheless, there will be more funding for the voluntary and community sector from the Big Lottery Fund than from the bodies it has replaced. We are committed to providing between 60 and 70 per cent of our funding direct to the sector. I have heard it said that this is just "smoke and mirrors" – simply aggregating the voluntary sector funding of NOF and CF. That in itself would be good news. But the facts are that under 60 per cent of the funding from the CF's and NOF's combined budgets went to the voluntary sector. We will have a budget of over £600m a year; that will mean substantial sums available to the voluntary and community sector. In other words, the sector will gain.

The second concern is that the merger of the CF and NOF will lead to a loss of independence, with the Government taking too much control over how we work and what we fund. It is true that the Big Lottery Fund isn't a repackaged CF, simply running a larger version of the so-called open programme for the voluntary

sector. But neither are we a repackaged NOF solely running specific initiatives with ring-fenced funding. The Big Lottery Fund is a non-departmental public body and it is perfectly proper for the Government to set out our strategic framework. What is important is that we are then able to determine our programmes and how they are delivered, and to make decisions on the grants that we award.

This is precisely the approach which we have negotiated with the Government. When the strategic framework proposed by Government was announced in August 2004, Tessa Jowell said: "Designing programmes, identifying the most appropriate means of delivery, choosing partners and selecting projects will be the responsibility of the Big Lottery Fund." I couldn't agree more. Not only that, as chair of the fund, I will defend that position vigorously. There were newspaper stories at the end of last year about me feeling "compelled to threaten to resign" to defend our independence. I can but smile wryly at the journalistic skill that can produce such headlines, because my Board and I have an excellent relation with the Secretary of State and with Government. In a purely hypothetical situation where Government did try to interfere with the decisions of my Board, maybe the headlines would have more meaning. In reality, we will choose, freely, to work with a wide range of partners, including the Government, and, where it adds value, we will have no problem in funding in a way which complements Government policies and programmes.

Finally, are we consulting on the development of the Big Lottery Fund and are we listening to the views of the

voluntary and community sector?

Since I took up my post in June 2004, the Board and my senior staff have made consultation a key priority. Our phase 1 consultation – focusing on how the Fund should operate – started the same day the Fund was launched on 1 June, 2004. By the time the consultation period finished in September 2004, we had received over 3,000 written responses and over 2,000 participants had joined in regional and national consultation events. We also saw some 100,000 hits on our website over the summer, including hundreds of posts to our consultation forum. The full report of our findings from this consultation – including details of the actions we have decided to take – has now been published, as promised.

After more details of our strategic framework were announced in August, we launched a phase 2 consultation focusing on our funding outcomes and priorities. Again, as soon as we analyse the responses from this consultation, we will make the findings public.

I fully concur with the Secretary of State's view that we need a "continuing conversation" with the public and with those with an interest in what we do, to build support and understanding for our work. If, in 2005, we need to consult further on individual funding programmes so that they take on board the views of all the various sectoral stakeholders, including the voluntary sector, then we will do so.

This year will be the year when the voluntary sector will be guaranteed to gain from a Lottery Distributor that listens.

**Sir Clive Booth is chair of the Big Lottery Fund**