28 July 2008

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It was good to meet you at the conference 'Trumpeting the Voluntary: Social Conscience and the Third Sector' at Cumberland Lodge last week. In the discussion session on 'How to make public sector partnerships work' which you chaired, you may recall that I asked a question regarding equality and human rights issues that relate to contracting out public services to religious organisations.

The policy of contracting to religious organisations has become a major research and campaigning area for us over the last year or so, and in November last year we published our report on the subject, 'Quality and Equality: Human Rights, Public Services and Religious Organisations', which I have enclosed for your information.

As is discussed in our report, a key area of concern in addition to those on discrimination and lack of human rights protection is that of accountability and, not least, how the money that religious organisations receive to provide public services will be monitored. We have concerns, for example, that public money may be used by some to further the religious functions of the organisation rather than used solely on providing the contracted service. Certainly, indications from the DWP so far have been that, at present, how religious (and I assume other third sector) organisations use the money they have received to provide public services is not currently monitored in detail.

We have done some work with Government and the EHRC on these issues but I would welcome a meeting with you, in particular to discuss our concerns in relation to accountability when contracting to third sector, religious organisations.

Hanne Stinson
Chief Executive