

**Minutes of Harrow Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) Forum meeting
held on 02 June 2014, 10:00 – 12:00 hrs
Venue: Harrow Civic Centre, Station Road, Harrow, Committee Rooms 1&2**

| Attendance: | | | | |
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| Member | abbreviation in minutes | Member Organisation | abbreviation in minutes | Forum Role |
| Steve Porter | SP | Third Sector Potential CIC / Capable Communities | | Forum Chair / VCS Representative |
| Alex Buckmire | AB | Voluntary Action Harrow | VAH | |
| Linda Robinson | LR | Friends of Bentley Priory Nature Reserve | | Meeting Minute Taker |
| John Hunter | JH | Crossroads Care Harrow | | |
| Gerry Devine | GD | Harrow Community Transport | | |
| Leonie Hanson | LH | Home-Start Barnet – the Harrow Project | | |
| Gilly Chowdry | GC | Home-Start Barnet – the Harrow Project | | |
| Varsha Dodia | VD | Harrow Interfaith Council / Namaste Care CIC | | |
| Deven Pillay | DP | Harrow Mencap | | VCS Representative |
| Pamela Fitzpatrick | PF | Harrow Law Centre | HLC | |
| Ramesh Perinparaja | RP | Third Sector Potential CIC | | |
| Tajinder Nijjar | TN | Harrow Citizens Advice Bureau | | |
| Mike Bradley | MB | Workers' Educational Association, Pinner & Hatch End | WEA | |
| Dan Burke | DB | Ignite Trust | | |
| Caroline Mascarenhas | CM | i-solution 4 isolation | i4i | |
| Cabdul Qadir | CQ | Harrow Association of Somali Voluntary Organisations / Somali Cultural & Educational Assn. | HASVO / SCEA | |
| Frank Anti | FA | Harrow Equalities Centre | HEC | |
| Sanjay Dighe | SD | (Harrow Clinical Commissioning Group)/Third Sector Potential CIC | (CCG) | |

| Apologies: | | | | |
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| Member | | Member Organisation | | Forum Role |
| Avani Modasia | | AGE UK Harrow | | VCS Representative |
| Sarah Kersey | SK | | | |
| Keith Chilvers | | Harrow Community Radio | | |

| Item | Minutes | Action by whom | Action by when |
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| 1. | <p>Welcome, Introductions and Apologies</p> <p>1.1 SP welcomed all, especially new attendees, and facilitated a clockwise round of introductions.</p> <p>1.2 SP ran through the apologies he had received, as recorded.</p> <p>Action: 'Apologies' to be included as part of the title of the first item on future agendas.</p> | SP | for next meeting |
| 2. | <p>Approval of Minutes of VCS Forum meeting on 16 March 2014</p> <p>2.1 In the apologies list, DP pointed out that his organisation was called Harrow Mencap, not Mencap Harrow. Also in the apologies list, it was realised that Harrow Healthwatch was not a member of the Forum represented by Harrow in Business (HiB). Instead, HiB was a member in its own right as a voluntary sector organisation, whereas Healthwatch had been set up under statute by the local authority.</p> <p>2.2 On Item 4.2.1, JH denied using the phrase "ordinary people" when demurring at plans to allocate Hardship Fund monies to VCS groups. What he had said was that the funds should go directly to people in need.</p> <p>Action: Master copy of the minutes to be amended with the above corrections.</p> <p>2.3 LR praised SK's minute taking, which represented an exceptional improvement since the end of outsourcing to Ealing Community and Voluntary Service (ECVS).</p> | VAH | before next meeting |
| 3. | <p>Matters Arising</p> <p>3.1 On Item 4.3 (Small Grants Appeals), SP had put forward VD's name to the council's Kashmir Takhar as the Forum's appointee to advise at the Grants Advisory Panel's expected meeting on 08 April. However, neither SP nor VD had heard anything further. It was not</p> | | |

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| | <p>known whether or not the meeting had taken place. Members agreed that attendance by a VCS representative was an important principle for which the Forum had had to fight. To be left in the dark about the appealed decisions was not acceptable.</p> <p>Action: Kashmir Takhar to be asked for an explanation of what happened about the VCS's attendance at the Panel on 08 April.</p> <p>3.2 On Item 4.3.1(Outcome Based Grants), SP had compiled a list of the delays experienced by organisations due to receive grant instalments from the council. It had not been possible to pursue a Compact complaint about this issue during the purdah of the recent Local Elections. PF confirmed that the delays were still ongoing and causing concern at HLC. Even after meeting the onerous authorisation requirements, invoices still took 30 days to be paid. VD suggested producing a “roadmap” to help new grant applicants understand the complex payment system. DP added that payments for organisations’ services commissioned via the Adults’ and Children’s departments were not affected by the same problems.</p> <p>Action: Outcome Based Grant instalment delays to be raised as an official complaint under the Harrow Compact.</p> <p>3.3 On Item 7.1, SP had invited the Advocacy Forum to this meeting, via its Chair at Harrow Association of Disabled People (HAD), but it had been unable to send a representative. He had come across some contention about the legitimacy of the Advocacy Forum in representing the VCS when its members had been appointed by the council to comprise only those who were “accredited” in advocacy, whereas many other VCS organisations considered themselves also to offer advocacy services. The Advocacy Forum’s Terms of Reference were not known and members expressed concern about its potential lack of transparency. JH recalled the council’s Mike Howes previously wasting £¼ million on a messy Health Advocacy project which had failed. DP cautioned against jumping to negative conclusions before the remit of the new Advocacy Forum was more clearly understood.</p> <p>Action: HAD and Mike Howes to be asked to provide the Advocacy Forum’s Terms of Reference or equivalent, for future discussion and potential invitation to address the VCS Forum.</p> | <p>SP</p> <p>SP</p> <p>SP</p> | <p>before next meeting</p> <p>before next meeting</p> <p>before next meeting</p> |
| <p>4.</p> | <p>Constituting the Forum</p> <p>4.1 SP recapped the background to the proposals to make the VCS Forum into a formally constituted body, able to apply for and manage its own funds. The idea had gained approval from the Board of Harrow Community Action (HCA – see Item 8.1 below), which itself had been unable to access certain available funding streams such as the John Lyons Trust (JLT). JH, GD and LR were keen to stress that HCA and JLT should not be the main stimuli for constituting the Forum.</p> | | |

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| | <p>4.2 DP felt that, as the Forum already held a measure of legitimacy with the council, it was important to strengthen, refresh and utilise it, and not to lose it. During the discussion, adverse comments were made about whether certain types of organisation should belong to the Forum. PF raised an objection to such criticisms of fellow members, which was endorsed by others and upheld by SP. VD wanted all groups from the sector to feel comfortable to contribute. FA advocated creating a Code of Conduct in tandem with any constitution adopted.</p> <p>4.3 SP explained that although SK had resigned as a VCS Representative and was no longer with VAH, she had expressed a willingness still to be part of a working group to look at drawing up a constitution. AB advised that HCA newsletter appeals to the membership for interested individuals to join such a group had resulted in only two responses including LR. PF, GD and VD also volunteered to be part of the group. VD asked for a suggested constitution to be submitted to the group for consideration. LR offered to conduct an interactive paper exercise with the group to help shape its thinking.</p> <p>4.4 VD commented that morning meetings were not accessible for many small organisations that would prefer to meet in the evening. DP stated that evening meetings had been tried in the past without success. SP said that meeting times could be looked at along with developing a constitution.</p> <p>Action: Constitution Working Group meeting to be arranged to draft a suitable Governing Document, including a Code of Conduct, and recommendations on meeting times.</p> | AB | by end of June 2014 |
| 5. | <p>Harrow Strategy Day</p> <p>5.1 SP had attended a council event on 07 April with all of Harrow's statutory partners. Sub-groups had discussed separate issues, which had resulted in the formation of pilot working parties for Mental Health and for Volunteering. No minutes of the day had yet been received. Further advances had been delayed by the Local Elections. Strategic plans would need to be agreed with the incoming administration and would involve the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG – see Item 11 below). VD welcomed the prospect of such a big piece of work leading to a stronger voice for the VCS.</p> | | |
| 6. | <p>Representative Elections</p> <p>6.1 SP referred to previously agreed procedures for electing five VCS Representatives. There were no plans to change the way this was carried out, although SP wondered whether the number of Reps should be reduced to four. Of the Reps elected last year for two</p> | | |

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| <p>years, Angela Dias and SK had since resigned and so had the Reserve Rep, Julie Browne. Although the Chair of the Forum did not necessarily have to be one of the Reps, SP had also been elected as Chair for one year, which would soon be over although he was willing to continue to act as Chair until the next Forum meeting. SP outlined the boards and meetings that the Reps were expected to attend.</p> <p>6.2 JH pointed out that the VCS was also said to be represented in various ways elsewhere, for example with Healthwatch, which could not legitimately represent the sector and which in any case might lose its contract after two years. FA wondered how many other council statutory decision making bodies the VCS might need to influence. SP counselled against allowing the council to pretend it had consulted with the sector after meeting only with individual organisations. VD saw a constituted Forum as a way to develop resilience and leadership in the sector.</p> <p>6.3 JH was disappointed to have seen no evidence of a mandate from the sector for any representations made. SP reminded members that the VCS Reps had used to report their activities regularly to the Forum, admitting that this feedback had been missing since Forum meetings had been restructured. DP recalled a previous era in which VCS Reps had been totally separate from the Forum and not in any way accountable, after which he and others had pushed for more accountability via the Forum. DP did not support the idea of having fewer than five Reps, because of the workload and because of the need for smaller community groups to step forward and be fairly represented. There had been a lack of new volunteers for the role, and existing Reps might be reluctant to continue as there was little recognition for the work they did. Nevertheless, having won a voice at the Chief Officers' table and with the Health & Wellbeing Board, DP was anxious not to lose it.</p> <p>6.4 It was agreed by members that the Forum should stick to having five elected Reps and proceed with the elections for the two vacancies and the Chair. LR remembered the shambles that had prevailed when ECVS had been in charge of conducting the last elections, and called for better attention to detail this time.</p> <p>Action: Nomination papers, role descriptions, background information and a briefing about the elections to be drawn up and sent to all Forum members.</p> | <p>SP</p> | <p>by 06 June 2014</p> |
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| 7. | <p>Volunteers' Week</p> <p>7.1 Acknowledging the commencement of National Volunteers' Week on 01 June, SP gave details of an opportunity for members to recruit volunteers and trustees on 04 June with leaflets on stalls outside The Wealdstone Centre from 14:00 to 17:00, and afterwards to celebrate volunteering at a free event inside the Red Brick Café from 18:00 to 19:00. Alderman Keith Toms would be speaking about volunteering and the council would be promoting its "Harrow's Heroes" awards. TN asked how to ensure that special individual volunteers could be celebrated at the event. She was told that further information could be obtained from SP after the meeting.</p> | | |
| 8. | <p>Harrow Community Action</p> <p>8.1 SP summarised the history that had led to the birth of HCA as a Community Interest Company (CIC). It had won the council tender to manage Harrow's Third Sector Support Services. DP highlighted that Harrow was paying £75,000 per year for this, compared with a £900,000 equivalent in Barnet. HCA could be described as the "delivery partner" of the VCS Forum. Its website could be found at www.harrowca.org.uk. HCA had appointed separate organisations to run individual services, with VAH handling representation and co-ordination functions; Capable Communities covering fundraising and capacity building; and Big Society Funding CIC providing support. HCA's Launch event would be held at the Civic Centre on 18 June from 17:30 to 20:30, where Forum members could find out more about the services offered.</p> | | |
| 9. | <p>Request from Harrow for sector engagement in a new festival</p> <p>9.1 SP had been informed of a one-off festival being organised by the council to celebrate 50 years since becoming a London borough. A meeting arranged to plan the event had been postponed and SP was waiting to be advised of a new date for it. He and others hoped that genuine involvement of the sector would be better than past experiences of the usual Under One Sky festival.</p> <p><i>Action: Members to be kept informed about the progress of plans for the new festival.</i></p> | SP | When new planning meeting date known |

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| | <p>Thankfully, some other CCGs had given their surpluses to Harrow. Harrow was lucky that its GP members were dedicated and scrupulous about conflicts of interest. DP also attested to their willingness to engage, and their passion without arrogance.</p> <p>11.3 JH was worried that the council-controlled Overview & Scrutiny Committee and Health & Wellbeing Board would undermine the CCG. SD gave reassurances that the CCG's GPs were strong enough to stand up to the council. FA queried the nature of the CCG's relationship with Harrow Healthwatch. SD clarified that Healthwatch was an independent body that had a seat on the CCG. VD sought an opportunity for the VCS to feed into decisions about local spending of the National Health Service's new Better Care Fund. SP thanked SD for coming and offered to forward any further questions from members to SD after the meeting.</p> | | |
| <p>12.</p> | <p>Date of next meeting</p> <p>28th July 2014, 10:00 – 12:00 at the Civic Centre Committee Rooms 1&2</p> <p>Dates, times and venue for forthcoming Voluntary and Community Sector Forum Meetings in 2014: 15th September, 10:00 – 12:00 at the Civic Centre, Committee Rooms 1&2 24th November, 10:00 – 12:00 at the Civic Centre Committee Rooms 1&2</p> | | |
| <p>13.</p> | <p>Meeting closed at 12:03</p> | | |