

Minutes of Harrow Voluntary & Community Sector (VCS) Forum
First Annual General Meeting held on 25 June 2016, 11:00 am – 1:00 pm
Kids Can Achieve, Chicheley Road, Harrow, HA3 6QH

Attendance:				
Attendee	abbreviation in minutes	Organisation	abbreviation in minutes	Forum Role
Carol Foyle	CF	Kids Can Achieve		Forum Chair and VCS Representative
Alex Buckmire	AB	Voluntary Action Harrow Co-operative	VAHC	VCS Representative
Linda Robinson	LR	Friends of Bentley Priory Nature Reserve		Forum Vice-Chair Minute Taker
Varsha Dodhia	VD	Harrow Interfaith Council		VCS Representative
Sania Sehbai	SS	Harrow Women's Centre		VCS Representative
Thanuja Pereira	TP	South Harrow Christian Fellowship		VCS Representative
Julian Maw		Hatch End Association		
Rachel Wright		Harrow Community Action	HCA	
Rowena Jaber	RJ	The WISH Centre		
Dannie Darko	DD	The WISH Centre		
Kamal Shah		North Harrow Community Library		
Richard Egan				
Asia Chetouani		Voluntary Action Harrow Co-operative	VAHC	
Trevor Chisholm		Business Crest		
David Phelops		More than Just a Choir		
Fran Smith		Kids Can Achieve (The Westminster Society For People With Learning Disabilities)		

Invited guests:				
Cllr Sachin Shah		Leader of Harrow Council		
Cllr Sue Anderson		Culture & Resident Engagement Portfolio Holder, Harrow Council		

Apologies:				
Gerry Devine	GD	Harrow Community Transport		Forum Vice-Chair
Richard McCaffrey		38 Degrees (Harrow Local Group)	38D	
Jenny Stephany		Positive Connections		
Jan Irwin		Harrow Domestic & Sexual Violence Forum		
David Griffiths		Harrow Bereavement Care		
Carol Grant		Harrow Street Pastors		
Quinton Stowell		Harrow Street Pastors		
Sarah Kersey		Harrow's Happiness Campaign		
Robert Pinkus		Harrow Patient Participation Network		
Mary Lauder		The Disability Foundation		
Nigel Long		Harrow Association of Disabled People		
Mary Fee		LETSlInk London		

Item	Minutes	Action by whom	Action by when
1.	<p>Welcome, Introductions, Apologies</p> <p>1.1 CF welcomed all to the first ever AGM of the constituted Harrow Voluntary & Community Sector Forum. Everyone introduced themselves and their organisations. CF handed the floor to the new Council Leader.</p>		
2.	<p>Harrow Council</p> <p>2.1 Cllr Sachin Shah was proud to have become the Leader of Harrow Council, having grown up and lived his life in the borough. Already it felt like longer than the five weeks he had been in the post, during a period dominated by the Referendum on Britain's membership of the European Union (EU). Whilst he was pleased that the majority of Harrow's electorate had voted to remain in Europe, he was worried that the national vote to leave it would result in uncertainty for Harrow, with probable business failures and increased homelessness. Resulting changes meant the council must be ready to offer more support where needed. He had identified three priorities for his leadership: addressing inequalities, improving the council's responsiveness, and moving forward its regeneration programme. He intended to use council policies to tackle the inequalities between the richest and poorest in Harrow. By responsiveness, he meant the way the council dealt with issues such as fly tipping and litter. The £1.75 billion regeneration plans would bring 5,000 new homes and 3,000 jobs. More infrastructure would be needed to support extra demands. Existing owner occupiers would benefit from the collection of</p>		

	<p>increased council tax and business rates. Although the council's income had halved, he was optimistic that the VCS could access other sources of funding not available to local authorities. His administration's Voluntary Sector Review was almost concluded and would be published in a few weeks with recommendations and responses to the sector's input to the consultation.</p> <p>2.2 Cllr Sue Anderson, as Community, Culture & Resident Engagement Portfolio Holder with responsibility for the voluntary sector overall and for services like libraries, saw the Voluntary Sector Review as an opportunity for the council to keep the sector involved. She gave an example of Bernie Flaherty, Director of Adult Social Services, working on a project with Kenmore Neighbourhood Resource Centre to ensure that all needs were co-ordinated. She referred to meetings arranged for 13 and 18 July about the council's Advice & Information Strategy consultation and co-production, saying Advocacy tied in with this but was separate. The consultation results were awaited. All relevant VCS organisations were encouraged to attend and contribute, even if only for part of the sessions. There would be further such meetings to come. In response to an assertion from the floor, she acknowledged Harrow's diversity of faiths as an asset. Faith groups were often the first port of call for newcomers seeking information, advice and signposting. It was sad that Harrow Equalities Centre and other VCS organisations had ceased to operate due to a lack of core funding. The council was considering longer funding timescales but the future was uncertain now that European funding streams, such as the European Social Fund, were expected eventually to be withdrawn. Working with the VCS was a way for the council to make savings, as in the recent successful efforts to avert the threatened closure of mental health services at the Bridge. CF called for the council to invest in supporting small groups that would be left behind by the prevailing commissioning regime; otherwise they would cease to exist.</p>		
<p>3.</p>	<p>Annual Review</p> <p>3.1 Forum background & aims – CF thanked all those who had brought the Forum to its first AGM, especially former Chair Sarah Kersey. VAHC's help and co-ordination had been invaluable. Meeting records and follow-up action had improved thanks to excellent minute-taking. Summarising the aims of the adopted Constitution, CF noted that increased engagement was indeed being sought by statutory authorities like the Harrow Council and Harrow Clinical Commissioning Group, whose requests for representation from the Forum were driven by their own imperatives to consult the sector. This created both concerns and opportunities.</p> <p>3.2 Key achievements & report – CF ran through a list of what the Forum had been doing since its constitution (see Appendix I). She added that, after the latest approvals (see item 5 below), the membership list was expected to total 61 organisations which crucially included many small community groups.</p> <p>3.3 Objectives going forward – CF welcomed Sachin Shah's priorities for improvements. To help the council move forward with these, CF had requested a glossary of the terms now being used, such as 'co-production', 'social prescribing' etc., in order to establish a common understanding. Some comments from the floor reported experiences of meaningless lip service and arrogant, obstructive behaviours from some councillors and council officers. It was hoped such a culture would cease.</p>		

4.	<p>Finance Review</p> <p>4.1 As no Forum bank account had yet been set up, and no monies were held in its name, there were no finances to report. Available funding was so far being held and used by VAHC under its original, extended council contract via HCA.</p>		
5.	<p>Membership Update</p> <p>5.1 AB had received five new applications for Forum membership:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Harrow In Leaf <i>represented by</i> Frances Goldingay • Harrow Counselling Centre <i>represented by</i> Lisa Noone • Young Harrow Foundation <i>represented by</i> Dan Burke • Greenwich Co-operative Development Agency <i>represented by</i> Meera Siyani • Bipolar UK (Harrow Branch) <i>represented by</i> David Serota <p>5.2 AB explained that Dan Burke had until now represented the Ignite Trust, which would now be represented by Daniel Haigh instead. Questioned about the eligibility of the Greenwich Co-operative Development Agency, AB clarified that it was undertaking project work in Harrow.</p> <p>Agreed: Five new members to be accepted.</p>		
6.	<p>Minutes of the last Forum Meeting of 23 March 2016</p> <p>6.1 Accuracy – It was agreed to review and approve the minutes of the previous Forum ordinary meeting. They were agreed as a true record.</p> <p>6.2 Matters Arising – Items 8.1 and 8.2. The outcomes of the Voluntary Sector Review (see 2.1 and 2.2 above) were not yet known. AB reported that input from the sector had been included in Volunteering Strategy business case which the council's Strategic Commissioning Division had prepared for consideration by its commissioners</p> <p>Item 11.2. It had not been agreed to accept Harrow Healthwatch as a Forum member. Nevertheless, a meeting had taken place between its Chair, Arvind Sharma, and members of the Forum's Management Board. More such meetings were expected as Arvind was determined to work more effectively with the sector in the future.</p> <p>Item 12.2. LR had contacted Manize Talukdar at Democratic Services about the potential for a Harrow TTIP Free Zone, and followed her advice to email the then Leader, Cllr David Perry. No further response had been received from either of them. It would be for 38D to follow up if required, but the campaign was deemed to have been overtaken by the decision for Britain to leave the EU.</p> <p>Item 14.3. CF had asked Bob Blackman MP to address the Forum on housing and homelessness, but had received no reply.</p> <p>Item 15.2. Details of meetings about information, advice and advocacy (IAA) had been circulated as planned. In response to a question from DD, VD confirmed that the sessions had taken place but that only about eight organisations had attended so not much progress had been made, which was why further sessions had since been arranged (see 2.2 above). AB said that the</p>		

	<p>council officer responsible, Jasbinder Baddhan, had been conducting telephone interviews with some organisations. RJ commented that the questions asked had not been appropriate for services aimed at young people.</p> <p>Action: 13 and 18 July dates for the council's IAA/co-production discussions to be added to the Forum's online calendar.</p>	AB	by 27 Jun
7.	<p>Elections to the Management Board</p> <p>7.1 CF handed over to AB to oversee the election of the Forum Chair and Vice-Chairs. AB stated that one valid nomination had been received for the Chair's role, CF, and two valid nominations for the Vice-Chairs' roles, LR and GD. In the absence of any contest or objections, all three nominees were unanimously elected to continue in these positions.</p> <p>7.2 No nominations had been received for the vacant VCS Representative role. As any interested member could be nominated at any time to this position and elected at any Forum meeting, nominations for this role would remain open. Until then CF would continue to act as a VCS Representative in addition to being Chair, and current elected VCS Representatives AB, VD, SS and TP would continue to serve their two year terms.</p>		
8.	<p>Any Other Business</p> <p>8.1 No other matters were raised.</p>		
9.	<p>Dates of future Forum meetings</p> <p>9.1 It was proposed to hold the next general meeting on 27 July with a theme of Children & Young People, but this had not yet been confirmed.</p> <p>Action: Forthcoming meetings to be arranged and confirmed to members.</p>	AB	by end of July
10.	<p>Summary & Roundup</p> <p>10.1 CF summarised the discussions, gave thanks to KCA for hosting the AGM, and looked forward to the lunch provided by VAHC and the entertainment provided by More Than Just A Choir.</p>		
	<p>Meeting closed at 12.50 pm</p>		

Since June 2015, when we first elected a Chair and Management Board members under the newly adopted Constitution, the VCS Forum has:

- conducted further successful elections to keep Management Board roles filled; established comprehensive role descriptions; provided and reinforced clear guidance on what it means to be a representative of member groups and of the wider sector;
- welcomed over 50 organisations as registered members;
- introduced a Members' Code of Conduct, covering meeting rules, conflicts of interest, confidentiality and grievance procedures;
- addressed the historic lack of transparency, accountability and inclusivity in representing groups and feeding back to them; improved the quality of the Forum's record keeping and follow-up on discussions and decisions;
- held 12 productive meetings of the Management Board;
- attracted an average attendance of 23 at six general meetings, including themed sessions to discuss and share information on Health & Wellbeing, Housing & Homelessness, and Disability;
- made meetings more accessible for diverse groups to attend by varying meeting times and venues instead of always holding them on Monday mornings at the Civic Centre;
- created a Forum website and branding, a Forum Facebook page, a generic email address and marketing and publicity materials; regular, dedicated e-bulletins to keep members and the wider sector informed of the Forum's progress;
- set up scheduled 'surgery sessions' and open invitations for groups to meet ad hoc with VCS Representatives, to discuss relevant issues face to face;
- instigated 'members' offers and wants' sections in meetings and online, for organisations to highlight their services and needs;
- agreed two priorities – 1) tackling barriers to engagement with health bodies, and 2) improving communication with the council – after identifying barriers experienced by members;
- offered VCS Representatives to meet regularly with the Council Leader and Chief Executive, (although this offer has not yet been taken up);
- provided a VCS Representative to act as a 'stakeholder' on the selection panel for the appointment of the council's new Corporate Director for Community (although the final decision disregarded the VCS Rep's input);
- deflected an attempt by the council to appoint one person to the role of "non-executive member on Cabinet" to represent the whole of the sector; considered this an unrealistic expectation and a risk to future challenges of council decisions by members;
- input to the information gathering for the council's Voluntary Sector Review by meeting with the councillor responsible and also discussing with him the need to update the expiring Third Sector Strategy;

- encouraged community groups to take part in the council's draft Events Policy consultation, resulting in the scrapping of some unviable costs and restrictions on groups' use of public spaces;
- contributed to the updating of the council's Volunteering Strategy, its mapping of Information, Advice and Advocacy services, and a peer review of the council's performance;
- facilitated a 'focus group' session with the council's Public Health department to feed into the review of its Joint Strategic Needs Assessment; circulated members' contributions and distributed the resultant summary of the new draft plan for comment before expected approval by the Health & Wellbeing Board;
- formed a Health & Wellbeing Advisory sub-group from a cross section of organisations to consider ways of fairly and feasibly representing the sector on the Health & Wellbeing Board and in other health settings; provided an interim non-voting VCS advisor to sit on the Health & Wellbeing Board, pending the outcome of the sub-group's deliberations;
- helped Harrow's Clinical Commissioning Group and the council's Public Health department towards developing the required Sustainability and Transformation Plan;
- pushed for clearer definitions and accessible events for the council's Information, Advice & Advocacy Strategy/Consultation;
- brought together local voluntary and community groups enabling joint campaigns, volunteering and events.