

Harrow Voluntary & Community Sector (VCS) Forum
Ordinary Meeting held on 25th January 2018, 10.30am – 12.30pm
Kids Can Achieve, Cedars Hall, Artillery Place, Harrow, HA3 6QJ

Attendance:				
Attendee	abbreviation in minutes	Organisation	abbreviation in minutes	Forum Role
Gerry Devine	GD	Harrow Community Transport	HCT	Vice-Chair – Meeting Chair
Shona Duncan	SD	The Westminster Society	WS	Vice-Chair
Deborah Schofield	DS	Harrow Women's Centre	HWC	VCS Representative
Thanuja Pereira	TP	South Harrow Christian Fellowship	SHCF	VCS Representative
Bill Phillips	BP	Harrow Association of Disabled	HAD	VCS Representative
Varsha Dodhia	VD	Harrow Interfaith	HI	VCS Representative
Alex Buckmire	AB	Voluntary Action Harrow Co-operative	VAHC	Minute Taker
Linda Robinson	LR	38 Degrees (Harrow Local Group)	38D	
Jan Irwin	JI	Harrow Domestic and Sexual Violence Forum	HDSVF	
Julian Maw	JM	Hatch End Association	HEA	
Kathy Westhead	KW	Harrow University of Third Age	HU3A	
Ghafoor Nabi	GN	Afghan Association of London	AAL	
Ray Barber	RB	St Alban's Church North Harrow	SACNH	
Mick Oliver	MO	Harrow University of Third Age	HU3A	
Olivia King-Boateng	OKB	Harrow Parents 4 Disabled Children	HPDC	
Tajinder Nijjar	TN	Citizens Advice Harrow	CAH	
Jenny Stephany	JS	Positive Connections	PC	

Apologies:				
Carol Foyle	CF	Kids Can Achieve	KCA	Forum Chair
Alex Burton	ABU	St Mark's Foundation	SMF	

Item	Minutes	Action by whom	Action by when
1.	<p>Welcome, Introductions, Apologies and Conflicts of Interest</p> <p>1.1 GD welcomed all. Apologies had been received as listed above. No conflicts of interest were declared in relation to the agenda topics. GD established that all were happy with the agenda's content and sequence.</p>		
2.	<p>Leader of the Council (18th December 2017) Meeting Report</p> <p>2.1 The main topic of discussion was the Cabinet post, which had been offered to the VCS by the Harrow Labour Group in 2014. The Leader of the Council was still willing to support this role.</p> <p>2.2 The VCS Review was also discussed to ensure the Executive Summary was finalised before the next Forum meeting.</p> <p>2.3 GD & SD remarked that Harrow Council were keen to work more closely with the VCS.</p> <p>2.4 GD stated Alex Dewsnap (Divisional Director, Strategic Commissioning) and Councillor Sue Anderson (Community, Culture & Resident Engagement Portfolio Holder) were the main contact points for Community Development.</p>		
3.	<p>Cabinet Advisor Role</p> <p>3.1 JM proposed that the Chair of the Forum should be the representative on the Cabinet, due to having the mandate of the VCS. BP supported the proposal, however explained the amount of reading and time needed to effectively carry out the role would be off-putting. GD agreed the Chair being the Cabinet Advisor was good in principle.</p> <p>3.2 A lot of workload for the role would be preparation and briefing before Council meetings, so establishment of effective relations with officers and members was important to exert most influence.</p> <p>3.3 GD went through the final draft of the Cabinet Advisor Role Description [pdf]. It had been edited slightly to ensure the £6,780 allowance wasn't seen as paid employment. GD confirmed that if this was just to cover expenses it would not be directly taxable, but it would need to be declared on the appointee's income tax return. LR stated this could affect people's benefits.</p> <p>3.4 The Leader of the Council would not be part of the selection process, but would meet the selected individual to confirm the selection. GD explained this was just a formality, but acknowledged that it could be might be interpreted as a political football. If the Leader of the Council changes, then the appointment lapses, meaning the new Leader would have to reconfirm the appointment.</p> <p>3.5 AB queried who is responsible for management of this Advisor, and who they would be accountable to. VD explained the Forum would be responsible for managing the role, and would need to establish itself as an entity with a bank account to reimburse them. She and BP also felt that a reserve member could be needed.</p>		

	<p>3.6 AB questioned if the Forum was employing this person. VAHC was worried the role looked like employment and wasn't sure if it met Human Resource (HR) legal standards. AB encouraged the Forum Management Board to seek HR legal advice before pursuing nominations.</p> <p>3.7 JM queried the clause about VCS Representatives not being eligible to be Cabinet Advisor and suggested getting rid of all the criteria. AB explained that Harrow Council's Legal Department had already looked at the criteria and that it was needed to protect the political neutrality of the post. BP thought the role not being allowed to be a VCS Representative should only apply if they also sit on as an advisor on another Harrow Council committee.</p> <p>3.8 RB saw a potential conflict of interest with the role, stating if the Advisor is not going to be part of a call-in process and has to stand away from any call-in procedures, what would happen if a call-in was raised by any of the groups of the Forum? BP and GD thought it would be unlikely to be a problem due to the very small probability of a successful call-in.</p> <p>3.9 LR reminded attendees that Harrow Law Centre would leave the Forum if someone was appointed to the role. This was because it felt it would legally compromise the members of the Forum should they wish to challenge the Council, or take them to court. LR stated the Council should be listening to and involving the VCS already without the need of such role. GD said whilst that would be most unfortunate if the Law Centre left the Forum, he thought that the broader interest of the sector should prevail. GD believed the VCS Review would alleviate concerns about compromise. TP didn't think any decisions made at Cabinet would affect the VCS Forum Members as it is a non-voting role.</p> <p>3.10 AB stated that once the process of nominations has been sorted out, there should be a Forum Member vote even if there is only one nomination. VD objected as it would elongate the process. GD suggested an online vote would be possible and not too time-consuming. Agreed it should be a democratic process.</p> <p>Actions:</p> <p>Seek HR Legal Advice on role in parallel to carrying out nominations.</p> <p>Any nominations received will go out to Forum Members to be voted in.</p>	<p>Forum Management</p> <p>Forum Management</p>	<p>ASAP</p> <p>ASAP</p>
<p>4.</p>	<p>VCS Review Update</p> <p>4.1 GD presented the VCS Review Executive Summary [.pdf]. The document shows a willingness to work together for the good of the Harrow population.</p> <p>4.2 The report recognises that Harrow Council officers have sometimes acted dogmatically which has been to the detriment of Harrow residents. The report addresses this, in particular highlighting areas where we can help alleviate some of Harrow Council's budgetary constraints.</p>		

	<p>4.3 JS asked what the next steps were. GD explained the launch event would be the start of the changes recommended by the review. OKB recommended using it as a chance to show the strength of the sector with many VCS groups showcasing their work. DS suggested workshops would also be helpful on specific topics. GD saw the document being used as a manual for the VCS. VD stated it would also be used to inform the Forum's work plan for 2018 and 2019.</p> <p>4.4 JI was worried about social care dominating this, she wanted to make a plea that there are many issues within the VCS and how it needs to represent everybody.</p> <p>4.5 BP welcomed more flexibility with current competitive procurement arrangements which cost approximately £45,000 to undertake. LR hoped there was inclusion of VCS groups who don't competitively bid or have Harrow Council grants. News was also shared that Brent & Harrow's shared procurement service was no longer seen as viable.</p> <p>4.6 There was concern that these new intentions in relation to working alongside the sector were not being supported, as Harrow Council have recently announced increases in letting prices which will affect VCS activities.</p>		
<p>5.</p>	<p>Harrow Council Budget 2018/19</p> <p>5.1 GD gave an overview of Harrow Council's budget position for 2018/9, as presented by Cllr Swersky to representatives of the sector on 11th January. (Cllr Swersky had hope to attend the forum to present this personally but had to send apologies). Harrow will see its main source of central government grant funding reduced by 97% over a 7 year period, reducing the Revenue Support Grant from £53m in 2013/14 to £1.6m by 2019/20. This funding cut, increased demand for services and cost inflation mean that over the period 2015/16 to 2020/21 the Council needs to fund £125m of pressures in order to achieve balanced budgets in each year. A balanced budget is proposed for 2018/9 but the Council has reluctantly had to make cuts to achieve this and has to generate money and start commercialising their services. Council tax is also likely to increase. The 2019/20 financial year promises to be an even greater challenge.</p>		
<p>6.</p>	<p>Membership Update</p> <p>6.1 AB gave details of two Forum membership applications received:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hoi Polloi Permaculture represented by Fraser Dodwell • Afghan Association of London represented by Ghafoor Nabi <p>Agreed: New members accepted.</p> <p>6.2 Thirteen members did not renew their membership.</p> <p>Actions: To be reminded again.</p>	<p>Forum Management</p>	<p>ASAP</p>

<p>7.</p>	<p>Subgroups Update</p> <p>7.1 MO updated on the progress of the Environmental & Sustainability Subgroup. Councillor Graham Henson (Environment Portfolio Holder) hosted a meeting of the group which explored areas such as the development of Harrow's Recycling Centre, air quality, parks, and waste collection. They have also met with Paul Nichols (Divisional Director Regeneration and Planning) where they explored Harrow's support for Heathrow expansion which seems to be economically rather than environmentally driven. News was also shared that Persimmon's Harrow's View West updated planning application was turned down by the Planning Committee. Harrow is also yet to sign up to the Mayor of London's rogue landlord and agent checker.</p> <p>7.2 VD provided an update on the Harrow - Accountable Care System Development Programme [.pdf]. VD stated there wasn't any additional money attached to the scheme. BP confirmed that the right mix between social care and health care has worked in other parts of the United Kingdom, and should be more effectively implemented in Harrow.</p> <p>7.3 BP wants to set up an Information Technology (IT) Subgroup to help VCS groups that use IT, social media and other systems to find out which are the best to use and work with.</p> <p>Action: All who are interested in joining an IT Subgroup to contact Bill (bill@pinn.co.uk)</p>	<p>All interested</p>	<p>ASAP</p>
<p>8.</p>	<p>Feedback from Domestic Violence (DV) Forum</p> <p>8.1 SD had attended the DV Forum and wanted to feedback that it was a well-run event which they got a lot out of. JI was happy to speak about the DV Forum at future meetings.</p>		
<p>9.</p>	<p>Future Structure of the Forum</p> <p>9.1 Agenda item deferred to next meeting.</p>		
<p>10.</p>	<p>Minutes of the Last Meeting and Matters Arising</p> <p>10.1 The minutes of 28th September 2017 [.pdf] were approved as a true record, with the addition of OKB in the apologies.</p> <p>10.2 Matters Arising – Phil Bryson did get in contact with Kew Gardens, but did not receive a reply. LR stated at the Harrow Parks Forum they were dissuaded from contacting Council Officers, such as the Tree Officer, via email with specific problems.</p>		

<p>11.</p>	<p>Any Other Business</p> <p>11.1 TP suggested that if anyone was interested in setting up any subgroups on specific topics to get in contact with Forum Representatives.</p> <p>11.2 LR commended the Environmental & Sustainability Subgroup as a good example of small and volunteer-led VCS groups. Strong subgroups were recognised as a good mechanism for small groups to get involved.</p> <p>11.3 GD announced that TN has been nominated for VCS Forum Representative.</p> <p>Agreed: TN confirmed as a VCS Forum Representative.</p>		
<p>12.</p>	<p>Dates of future meetings</p> <p>12.1 Wednesday, 28th March 2018 - 6pm to 8pm – Location TBC</p>		
	<p>Meeting closed at 12.52pm</p>		