

**Harrow Voluntary & Community Sector (VCS) Forum
Ordinary Meeting held on 4th December 2018, 5pm to 7pm
Alec Spence Room, 64 Pinner Road, Harrow HA1 4HZ**

Attendance:				
Attendee	abbreviation in minutes	Organisation	abbreviation in minutes	Forum Role
Varsha Dodhia	VD	Harrow Interfaith	HI	Co-Chair/meeting chair
Bill Phillips	BP	Harrow Association of Disabled People	HAD	Forum Co-chair
Tajinder Nijjar	TN	Citizens Advice Harrow	CAH	VCS Representative
John Higgins	JH	Harrow Voluntary and Community Sector Forum	HVCSF	Cabinet Representative
Gerry Devine	GD	Harrow Community Transport	HCT	Vice-Chair/note taker
Linda Robinson	LR	38 Degrees (Harrow Local Group)	38D	
Ray Barber	RB	St Albans Church, North Harrow / North Harrow Community Library	SAC NHCL	
Julian Maw	JM	Hatch End Association	HEA	
Cathy Westhead	CW	University of the third age	U3A	
Steve Williams	SW	Watford FC Junior football and Young Harrow Foundation	YHF	
Brian Whitehead	BW	Welldon Centre Activity Group	WCAG	
Pamela Swain	PS	Friends of the Earth	FoE	
Mrinal Chaudry	MC	London Kalibari	LK	
Cabdul Qadir	CQ	Somali Cultural & Educational Association	SCEA	

Apologies:				

Item	Minutes	Action by whom	Action by when
1.	Welcome VD welcomed all. She said that this meeting had been re-arranged due to non-availability of key speakers for the scheduled topic and apologised for the short notice of the change.		

<p>2.</p>	<p>Feedback from John Higgins – VCS Cabinet advisor JH gave a brief introduction, giving his background and why he applied for the role. He has been attending meetings since September, but due to process overload within the Council his role had only become fully effective since November. He explained that Cabinet meetings are where decisions are signed off but it tends to be a scripted process. The formative stage before items reach the meeting is when the input needs to be made to officers who write papers for discussion at the meetings. The Forward Plan is produced 3-4 months in advance and shows what is on the agenda for future meetings. JM queried this and LR said the plan is available to the public and she would provide the link, which can be found at http://www.harrow.gov.uk/www2/documents/s153414/KDS%20December%202018%20final.pdf JH reported that the November meeting approved the Harrow Lottery, next week's meeting will consider the cultural strategy, and in January the agenda includes the climate change strategy. He asked if the Forum could agree a process to make sure the sector's views are fed into the appropriate agenda items when cabinet papers are prepared. Time scales are critical because once the papers are made public the week before the meeting, it is too late to make any substantive changes. After discussion it was agreed that a monthly email would be circulated but to avoid blanket emails, members would be invited to let John know which topics they would be interested in. The process would be 1. Discussion by Forum, 2. Appropriate sub group(s) to provide views 3. Input to cabinet advisor It was agreed that the reports listed on the plan need to be more specific. Eg, 'Fees and charges' are on the January agenda, but there is no indication of what these apply to. <u>Climate change strategy</u> John thanked the Environmental sub group for their comprehensive briefing about this but explained that it turned out to be mainly about energy saving measures fro Harrow schools rather than the wider brief indicated by the title. LR said that if the January agenda item was much narrower than originally indicated by the Council, what was happening to the full climate change strategy? JH would find out from Paul Walker, Director for communities. <u>Consultation process</u> LR also said that the cabinet post should close some gaps in the consultation process – eg Harrow Public Transport Users had not been consulted about the Local Implementation Plan which had recently been prepared for submission to TfL (It had been included on the consultation website but this did not reach everyone). JH said it is still early days and suggested we try the proposed process and then review its effectiveness in getting a balance of viewpoints and ideas across the sector. MC queried which services sector members use, and GD said this covered a wide spectrum of council activities, not all of which were clear to members of the sector. The Cabinet Advisor role would be valuable in helping clarify matters which needed more transparency.</p>	<p>LR to provide link to Forward plan</p> <p>All groups to email JH stating key topics</p> <p>JH to request more detail on fwd plan items</p> <p>JH to query full climate change strategy</p> <p>Review input to Cabinet Advisor All</p>	<p>Done</p> <p>Jan 19</p> <p>Jan 19</p> <p>Jan 19</p> <p>Mar 19</p>
<p>3.</p>	<p>Harrow Community Lottery JH gave a summary of the lottery proposal. It would start in April and tickets would cost £1, 60% of which would go to local charities (to be decided by a representative group which would invite applications for funding) and the balance to crowdfunding (open to application by groups which were unable to support the lottery due to religious beliefs etc) and running costs. A report would be distributed with the notes of the meeting.</p>		

4.	<p>Building community resilience</p> <p>BP circulated a copy of the draft report by LTRL. (copy attached) TN suggested that this should be reviewed by members of the Forum and comments collated, with suggestions to be forwarded to the Council. Next steps would be discussed with the council, who would be holding a workshop on the report next week. Concerns were expressed about the quality of the report and the thoroughness of the research which went into it.</p>	Review LTRL report All	Jan 19
5.	<p>Harrow Council Budget 2019/20</p> <p>BP had attended a briefing by AS Swersky (AS), portfolio holder for finance and the VCS Forum was one of the four infrastructure groups invited, the others being Voluntary Action Harrow (VAH), Harrow Community Action (HCA) and Young Harrow Foundation (YHF).</p> <p>AS said that since 2013 the Government support grant has been reduced year on year and will disappear altogether in 2021. Currently there is a funding gap of £125 million if we were to deliver services at their 2013 levels. (about 25% of the council's income). Historically, council tax and business rates represented about 20% of the council's income now they represent 70%. AS equated Harrow's position with other local Boroughs, in particular Hillingdon where the council income is significantly increased by the commercial activity surrounding Heathrow Airport. Also Harrow has traditionally been a Borough with low reserves.</p> <p>The council has prioritised adult and children's services. He expressed pride in the Ofsted "Good" that Harrow receives for these services and contrast that with an adjoining significantly richer Borough that only recorded "Good" last May after a period "Requiring Improvement" to these services. AS indicated that these services will remain a priority to Harrow.</p> <p>He said that currently the demand on Adult services is increasing and that they have an over spend of around £5 million. The budget going forward is facing further Government cuts. They are working on reducing a £17 million gap in 2019/20, a £16 million gap in 2020/21. After this year's budget, the gap will be zero in 2019/20, it is still projected to be a further £13 million gap in 2021/22 followed by a £9 million gap in the following year. So, presumably, there are still further cuts in Council services to be made.</p> <p>Harrow will raise its council tax by the maximum permitted before having to call a local referendum. This will be a 3% council tax increase plus a further 2% for Social Care. Some of the cuts in services currently being looked at are that the only direct access by phone to the council will be to Adult and Children's services, all others will have to be through a newly improved Harrow website. Community space, such as Parks etc will continue to rely on the user communities for support.</p> <p>There was a discussion about ways that the voluntary sector could help the council. We indicated that we were aware that the pressures from the revenue earning areas of the council were adversely affecting the work of some community organisations. BP gave examples of this citing hitherto peppercorn rents being made fully commercial when reaching a rent review and small community based organisations like scout buildings being reassessed for full business rates. AS said that he would explore how the council could address the concerns.</p>		

	<p>VD thanked BP for the report and said that the overdevelopment of Harrow with tall blocks of flats made it difficult to sustain community life. BP said that MIND workload has already increased due to the poor quality and lack of space in some developments. Also the lack of affordable office space due to housing conversions was forcing some voluntary and community groups out of the borough. GD said that the asset management workstream of the Council VCS review programme was addressing this and Glen Hearnden's presentation at the [previous Forum had offered a partial solution through community hubs with accommodation for voluntary groups and charities. BP agreed that voluntary groups needed to forge partnerships with the council and cited the Preston model which aims to keep services local where possible, rather than going to national and multinational organisations to provide them.</p>		
<p>6.</p>	<p>Update from Sub-groups Environment and sustainability was the only group with recent activity to report. LR was thanked for co-ordinating the input to the climate change strategy. Although the Council's remit turned out to be narrower than originally envisaged, the work would be very useful for the full strategy when the Council re-drafts it. LR said that there had been a good session of the E&S subgroup in early autumn with Lorene Cavanagh, Harrow's recycling & waste strategy manager, who had presented a refreshing and encouraging view of how Harrow's waste is managed and outlined plans to improve the borough's waste management and recycling services. The next meeting of the sub-group would be on water quality and management, date to be advised.</p>		
<p>7.</p>	<p>Review of Forum activities over the past year Discussion highlighted the things which have worked well:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Cabinet Advisor post agreed and appointment of John Higgins 2. Rocket Science work produced a good basis for improved relationship with Harrow Council 3. North Harrow Community Library opened – a valuable community space run by volunteers 4. Survival of the Forum despite reduced admin support – it makes an impact 5. Diversity of Harrow is a strength, as shown by Harrow Interfaith Forum and Young Harrow Foundation, an excellent model which is being replicated elsewhere. Its Needs Analysis report is a good platform for future funding bids. Proposal that Harrow Youth Parliament should be involved in the Forum <p>Things which need improvement:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Need for better publicity 2. Communications have been intermittent – need to draft full 2019 programme and publicise as soon as possible, including timings and venues of meetings. 3. Still concerns about buy-in of certain council departments and officers to VCS participation. New CEO of Harrow Council to be invited to a future Forum 	<p>VD to invite Harrow Youth Parliament to join Forum</p> <p>Management committee to set out programme for 2019</p> <p>New CEO to be invited</p>	<p>Jan 19</p> <p>During 2019</p>

8.	<p>Questions</p> <p>1. What happened to payments to Forum by VAH? (LR) - The reps stipend payments stopped after 2017/8. £500 is paid to the Forum for running expenses via VAH but the Forum now has its own bank account. Financial arrangements for Cabinet Advisor role still to be resolved. (VD)</p> <p>2. Is the Cabinet Advisor role a 'two way street'? (SW) - Yes, they look to the sector for information via the advisor. The important point is to exert influence earlier on the Council's decision process. (JH)</p> <p>3. Will the Cabinet Advisor feel able to make public criticism if decisions don't go in favour of the sector? (JM) - Yes, the meetings are held in public and any dissent will be on the record (JH)</p>		
9.	<p>Any other business</p> <p>PS said that Janet Parsons was convening an event for Neighbourhood Champions this Thursday at the Civic Centre, 6-8pm</p> <p>Harrow Interfaith are holding a policy session at North Harrow Community Library. VD to circulate details</p> <p>LR said that an exhibition of outline plans for redevelopment of the area round Harrow on the Hill station would be held on 6th Dec 2-8pm and 10 Dec 10-2pm at the ARC café in Lowlands Recreation Ground.</p>	VD to circulate	
9.	<p>Next meeting</p> <p>Date to be advised, early 2019 Topic: Crime and Domestic Violence Venue: tbc</p>		
Meeting closed at 6.58 pm			