**Notes of the meeting: Public and Voluntary Sectors’ Partnership,**

**Monday 11th January 2016** (5.00 p.m. – 6.45 p.m.), **@ RedbridgeCVS, Forest House, 16-20 Clements Road, Ilford Essex**

**Present:**

**Councillors:** Hussain (Chair), Bhamra, Santos, Lambert, Best (from item 6 onwards).

**Voluntary Sector Reps:** Jon Pushkin (Vice Chair), Rita Chadha, Jon Abrams, Nicholas Hurst.

**Redbridge CCG:** Khalil Ali.

**Fire Service:** Gary Norris.

**Officers in attendance:** Ross Diamond (RedbridgeCVS, note taker), John Turkson (LBR).

**Guest Speakers:** Toby Bennett (Spacehive), Johnathan Lloyd (LBR)

1. **Welcome and Introductions**

Jon Pushkin, Vice Chair, opened the meeting, welcomed everyone and asked everyone to introduce themselves.

**Apologies & Substitutes**

Apologies were received from Cllr Blaber, Nigel Turner, Chief Inspector John Fish and Tom Hook

1. **Declarations of Interest**

The Vice Chair asked for any declarations to be made at the relevant part of the meeting. There were none.

1. **Minutes of the meeting held on 6th October 2015**

**3.1. Accuracy**

These were agreed to be an accurate record.

**3.2. Matters Arising**

LBR had circulated its response to London Councils to all PaVSP members, as agreed at the last meeting**.** Rita Chadha asked if LBR was planning to respond to the next phase of London Councils’ consultation on its grants programme. Cllr Hussain confirmed that they were intending to write with comments and confirmed that she would be happy to discuss LBR’s potential response with local voluntary organisations (via the PaVSP) who could inform the Council’s thinking.

1. **LBR Code of Conduct Undertaking**

In response to discussions at the previous meeting, John Turkson had spoken to LBR’s Constitutional Services team. They confirmed that all voluntary sector reps on the PaVSP had signed the Code of Conduct Undertaking – and that LBR does now have an Equalities Strategy (which was referenced in the Undertaking, but which until recently had not been updated and adopted by LBR). He also confirmed that the Equalities training that was referenced would now be added to LBR’s Member training programme.

Rita Chadha suggested that there was a wider issue relating to why voluntary sector members of this Partnership – who are there to represent the voluntary sector - should be subject to LBR’s governance rules and corporate strategies. There was discussion about the status of this partnership, which had been referred to in the past by LBR as an “advisory committee of Redbridge Council.” The minutes are reported to LBR via the Strategy and Resources Service Committee, and the meeting is not serviced by LBR. The meetings are ‘public’ in that anyone can attend as an observer and the minutes are published. **Action: Cllr Hussain to get statement on the status of this committee and circulate to PaVSP members (via RedbridgeCVS) for response – and would use this to consider whether to invite Constitutional Services to a future meeting.**

1. **Update on Grants Review and Grants Programme 2016/17**

John Turkson reported that LBR’s corporate grants round is now closed, with the Council currently assessing the applications received. They have received applications for all Strategic Partner roles. The Community Fund/ENNI fund has received applications worth around £250,000, with £300,000 being available. Officers reviewing the applications will make recommendations to the Service Committee in February – subject to approval of the Council’s budget. Unless it is decided to take the final recommendations to Cabinet for approval, the awards will then be made. All applicants will receive letters informing them of the Council’s recommendations at least 5 days before the Service Committee – with information on how to appeal/raise concerns.

Rita Chadha said that some BAME groups feel that their applications to these LBR funds have, in the past, been misunderstood as ‘duplicating’ the work of mainstream organisations. John Turkson said LBR recognises the specialist and complementary role of such groups’ work. He said that LBR tries to learn every year from its grants processes. Funding decisions involve considering the impact that the limited grant funding can have, to ensure best value for money. This does not mean that LBR will not fund BAME specialist groups (or other smaller providers) where their applications meet relevant criteria and demonstrate good value.

Jon Abrams asked if any underspend would be retained for future voluntary sector funding rounds and John Turkson said this would be for the Council to decide. Rita said that the low level of funding requested showed evidence that local voluntary groups don’t feel confident in LBR’s grants processes. Cllr Hussain said that this would be considered fully in the forthcoming grants review.

John Turkson said that the October 2015 Cabinet meeting had agreed for a comprehensive review of LBR’s voluntary sector grants programmes. John will attend a forthcoming Redbridge voluntary sector Network meeting to begin engagement with the sector, which will be ongoing. LBR is recruiting an independent consultant and the formal consultation will begin once the consultant is appointed (which should be by the end of January). The aim is to take a recommendation paper to Cabinet in July.

Rita asked John if he felt that LBR has enough resources to manage a grants programme, given that his team has been greatly reduced and John is moving to a new team, without additional support for working on the grants. John said he did expect to get additional support for this work. In response to questions from Jon Pushkin, John said that arts grants would be included in the review, but voluntary sector commissioning would not. Cllr Hussain said that commissioning (including of the voluntary sector) was included in the Fairness Commission recommendations, so this would be worth discussing at the next PaVSP meeting in April, by which time the Council’s formal response to the Commission’s findings would have been published.

1. **Spacehive – Crowdfunding**

Toby Bennett, Account Executive for Spacehive spoke about their “civic crowdfunding platform.” This aims to help local people to raise funds for local public space projects, such as improving parks and playgrounds. Their aim is for lots of people to donate money (including small sums) for the benefit of their communities via the Spacehive website. Toby said that the scheme also encourages in-kind donations (eg skills or products). Once a potential crowdfunding project has been assessed for viability (by Spacehive’s partners, “Locality”), Spacehive then helps groups with launching and managing their campaigns. Redbridge Council is funding Spacehive to support this work in Redbridge and they are currently looking for 3 or 4 exemplar projects to inspire others to try to raise funds in this way. Wanstead Playground and Ilford Lane Pocket Parks are currently on the Redbridge Hive website. Members were asked to inform John Turkson or Spacehive if they know of other relevant groups with ideas that might make good exemplars. LBR has put aside some funding to match-fund crowdfunded projects. Once the exemplar projects are up and running Spacehive will run workshops to promote this way of fundraising to other groups. Spacehive has been doing this work with 15 local authorities in London and the Mayor of London’s office, and is now starting up in Redbridge.

Jon Pushkin said that the first round of the Mayor’s High Street Fund, which Spacehive had been part of, was a confusing process. Toby said that lessons had been learned and the later rounds of this funding are being managed more effectively.

Toby was asked if working in this way could exacerbate inequalities, eg, would areas with wealthier residents find it easy to raise funds for local projects, thereby making their areas better, whilst localities home to residents with less disposable income could end up with much poorer public spaces. There was a query about whether projects might be linked, so that residents were donating to two projects, one in their particular area and one elsewhere in the borough. Toby said this would not be possible – but said that most Spacehive projects are developed in deprived areas. He said that 90% of donors are individuals who contribute around 10% to the overall project funding, with the rest coming from other partners (such as local businesses). John Turkson said that LBR was considering using Community Infrastructure Levy funding as match funding for crowd funding projects. He also confirmed that LBR would not see this as a replacement for voluntary sector grants.

There was a discussion about other crowdfunding platforms, which don’t all focus on public space in the way that Spacehive does. It was confirmed that currently LBR has no plans to engage with other platforms, but they could still be used for local projects.

1. **Lighthouse Furniture Project/Teen Challenge.**

Brian Darwood, Chief Executive of Lighthouse Furniture Project gave a presentation about the work they were planning in Redbridge, in partnership with Teen Challenge, at their large building in the south of the borough. Brian explained the history and ethos of the Lighthouse Furniture Project as a Christian charity that exists to relieve poverty, reduce landfill use, provide work experience and training, and educate people about homelessness. They take donated furniture and household goods (including computers etc.,) which they repair and refurbish as necessary, and sell these – along with some new products – in a pleasant showroom style environment. They can then deliver large items (for a small fee) to people’s homes. Anyone can shop with them, but they also take referrals from a range of agencies and can issue vouchers for goods for those most in need. They involve many volunteers and are always keen to recruit more. The sales aren’t used to generate income to fund other activities: they sell the goods in order to help people in need. Brian said that Teen Challenge is current preparing to add a training element to the Redbridge work, with vocational skills alongside basic literacy and numeracy. They currently work with LBR Waste Department, Work Redbridge and Volunteer Centre Redbridge and are keen for more partners. Press releases and other information will be widely circulated once they are ready to launch the Redbridge service. Brian said they are part of the Furniture Re-use Network/London Re-Use Ltd, through which they access donated goods from large corporations and Local Authorities etc.

In response to a question about whether their Christian background and ethos impacts on their staff, volunteers and service users, Brian said that they have a very diverse workforce and are open to people from all backgrounds. They are always keen to recruit local volunteers who speak a range of languages other than English. Cllr Lambert asked if they work with SSAFA (for ex-servicemen). Brian said that they don’t at present, but would be pleased to do so in future. Khalil Ali asked if their work might affect the livelihoods of people doing similar work commercially (such as ‘Rag and Bone men’) and Brian said he hoped not as there was a lot of second hand around, and they would not compete with shops as they make no profit from sales and only exist to serve people in need. Brian invited everyone to visit the Teen Challenge/Lighthouse Project in Redbridge once it is fully open.

1. **LBR Transformation Plans**

Jonathan Lloyd from LBR’s Corporate Transformation Team gave a presentation about how LBR is changing the ways it operates in order to meet the current financial challenges. Her said that LBR ‘s priority was to protect front line services, so was considering a range of options including procuring services more effectively and efficiently, innovating to transform service models, generating income and cutting those services that provide the lowest return on investment. Changes were likely to include moving contacts online where possible, centralising the Corporate Landlord role. LBR has completed several reviews and made relevant changes including Facilities Management, and Civic Pride and Enforcement. Jonathan then updated the meeting on four key transformation projects: Rethinking support services; Customer Access; Smarter ways of working; and Improvement of insight and analytics. Jon Abrams expressed concern for those who did not use the internet and quoted from LSE research into a “digital underclass”. Jonathan said that LBR understood this issue and was keen to work with the voluntary sector to support more people to access online services, and would ensure that face to face and telephone engagement remains possible for those without digital access. (This was not be part of any outsourcing programme however.) Rita encouraged LBR to review its website which, she said, is hard to navigate and use, and also noted that LBR waste’s money dealing with complaints when sometimes a quick and honest apology for poor services or responses is all that people want. Jonathan said that this was understood and was being addressed in the reviews. Rita also encouraged LBR to work more effectively – including with its partners in the voluntary sector – on bringing in external funding. Ross Diamond said he was aware that LBR was looking into an External Fundraiser post that should address this issue.

1. **Redbridge Compact**

Ross informed the meeting that a new Disputes Resolution procedure had been adopted by the Redbridge Compact Champions group. An Easy Read version of the Compact document has been commissioned from Healthwatch and should soon be available. Ross also informed the meeting that NELFT was now committed to signing the Compact.

Rita asked if Vision should sign the Compact, as it is a voluntary organisation. Ross explained that not all voluntary organisations are asked to formally sign it. There was a brief discussion about the role and status of Vision, which was an independent organisation which had been a “spin out” from Redbridge Council. Rita and Cllr Santos agreed to continue this discussion outside of the meeting.

Ross updated the meeting on the national Compact Awards, at which the Sycamore Trust’s Autism Ambassadors and Redbridge Autism Awareness Roadshow Project had won an Innovation Award and the HENCEL Deaf inclusion project, led by Redbridge Healthwatch, had won an Advancing Equality Award. (In addition RedbridgeCVS’ Fit For Fun and TB Awareness projects, and the Redbridge Faith Forum’s Dementia Awareness Project, had all been shortlisted but not won Awards.)

Cllr Barbara White, the Mayor of Redbridge had attended with the shortlisted nominees in her capacity as Compact Ambassador for Redbridge, and Rob Wilson MP, Minister for Civil Society had presented the Awards.

1. **Any Other Urgent Business**

There was none.

1. **Dates and Agenda Items for Future meetings**

The next meeting of the Public and Voluntary Sector’s Partnership will take place on Wednesday 13tyh April 2016 at 5 pm in RedbridgeCVS 5th Floor training room.

The meeting briefly discussed topics for the meeting which would include:

* Updates from the Fire Service and Metropolitan Police
* Update on LBR’s formal response to the Fairness Commission recommendations
* Update on the LBR voluntary sector grants review
* A speaker from a small voluntary organisation serving a new community or from a geographically isolated part of the borough.

**Work Programme**

It was agreed that the PaVSP would invite Mark Green from LBR to discuss the planned move to allow Council’s to keep their Business Rates at a future meeting. It was also agreed that there should be agenda items on the outcomes of the Fairness Commission and about crowdfunding – in the light of the support LBR is giving to ‘Spacehive’, a crowdfunding platform. (Rita noted that some of the information emerging about this had suggested that LBR was intending to use this as a way of making savings. John Turkson was clear that this was not the case, so it was agreed that the messaging on this new development needed to be clearer.)

1. **Any Other Urgent Business**

There was none.

1. **Dates of Future Meetings**

It was agreed that the next meetings of the PaVSP will take place at 5pm at RedbridgeCVS on

* Wednesday 13th April 2016

CLOSE