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

**Monday 12th January 2014** (5.00 p.m. – 6.45 p.m.), **@ RedbridgeCVS, Forest House, 16-20 Clements Road, Ilford Essex**

**Present:**

**Councillors:** Bhamra, Sharma, Santos (Vice Chair), Best, Blaber.

**Voluntary Sector Reps:** John Garlick, Jon Pushkin (Chair), Nicholas Hurst, Sudarshan Bhuhi MBE

**Redbridge CCG:** Khalil Ali

**Metropolitan Police:** Chief Inspector John Fish

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

1. **Welcome and Introductions, Jon Pushkin, Chairman**

Jon Pushkin welcomed everyone to the meeting and asked everyone to introduce themselves.

**Apologies & Substitutes**

Apologies were received from Mark Simons (Fire Service) and Lorraine Silver (voluntary sector representative).

1. **Declarations of Interest**

The Chair asked for any declarations to be made at the relevant part of the meeting.

1. **Minutes of the meeting held on 22nd April 2014**

**3.1. Accuracy**

These were agreed to be an accurate record.

**3.2. Matters Arising**

There were none.

1. **Commissioning in Redbridge: Social Value and Accessibility for Voluntary Organisations**

Ross Diamond (RedbridgeCVS) gave a brief overview of commissioning and how it operates in Redbridge. He said that commissioning is best defined as “making the best use of available resources to produce the best outcomes for a locality.” He said that the voluntary sector should be invited to be involved at every stage of the commissioning cycle, (analysis, planning, delivery, review). He said that commissioning doesn’t have to imply procurement by tender, but can include grants, which should be always be considered as part of the planning phase. Ross said that some voluntary organisations want to be involved in all stages apart from the contract delivery, as they may not want to risk losing their independence and be drawn away from their original purpose and function by opting to deliver work under contracts. The voluntary sector at its best is rooted in local communities and knows the people it seeks to serve. It *can* deliver contracts very well – so long as they are well commissioned.

Ross then talked about the Public Services (Social Value) Act, which came into force in 2013. This Act aims to make a “level playing field” for voluntary organisations when competing with large companies. However, it also helps commissioning organisations to maximise the value they get by allowing commissioners to take into consideration any *social value* that tenderers can offer. For example, if a Council’s regeneration department is commissioning a service to renovate an area, and one of the tenderers says they will only employ local people with a history of mental health issues, this should be able to be taken into consideration as a *community benefit* as this will also help the commissioning organisation’s other departments with some of their aims (eg reducing local unemployment for people with mental ill health histories). Redbridge Council has a history of including *community benefit* questions in its tender processes – but with a note saying that these would not be scored as part of the process. The Act says that, for commissions over the EU threshold (€200,000) Social Value must be taken into consideration as part of the assessment criteria. Ross said that ideally all tendering processes would include this – as to do otherwise could mean missing vital opportunities for community benefit. **Action: Ross agreed to circulate information about Social Value to members.** Ross ended by quoting from a document called “Saving Money by Doing the Right Thing: why ‘local by default’ must replace ‘diseconomies of scale’” produced by Locality. This argues that mass produced poor service is more costly than personalised service that meets individual need. It argues that good commissioning will improve the lives of individuals and communities and doesn’t require any additional resources.

Cllr Sharma asked how Redbridge might work to create this “level playing field” and Ross said there are number of approaches, including for commissioning bodies to adopt a corporate approach. He gave examples of where LBR tenders are run inconsistently, with some commissions encouraging consortium and partnership bids, whilst others create unnecessary barriers to this. John Garlick said that some local commissioning is overly complex, but Khalil Ali said that some tenders are very complex so the commissioning arrangements need to reflect that. Cllr Santos said that the CCG should include social value in their tenders, and that this should be taken into account even where the benefits accrued to the Local Authority – and vice versa.

John Turkson explained the current commissioning situation in Redbridge Council and accepted that there are variations in approach, including to Social Value. He suggested that this Partnership could form a working party to look at this issue. However, he said that LBR does engage the voluntary sector at each stage, as suggested by Ross, and he has been talking to LBR’s central Procurement Unit about scoring Social Value in tenders at the PQQ stage. They also consider putting commissions into differently sized ‘lots’ to maximise opportunities for bidders.

There was a discussion of how to move this forward and it was agreed that the PaVSP would set up and oversee a working group, comprising commissioners (including Social Services, Public Health and the CCG) and representatives from the voluntary sector. **Action: PaVSP to form working group on commissioning and social value. Ross will liaise with the PaVSP Chair to establish this group.**

1. **Domestic Violence: a voluntary sector response.**

Su Bhuhi gave a presentation about a project that Aanchal Women’s Aid have been considering. This is in response to the numbers of Muslim women that they have worked with who are being abused (or are at risk) who subsequently withdraw from their services. She said Aanchal fears for these women and their children who have been brave and contacted them because of genuine fears for their safety, with whom they later have no contact. She said that Sharia Courts are sometimes advising these women to return to unsafe environments and saying that they are going against their religion if they do not. Aanchal has done lots of research into this area. It is not a predominantly Muslim organisation, and has worked with prominent Muslims in the House of Lords and some Sharia Courts in India and the UK (who have been supportive). They are now proposing to establish a Muslim women’s panel with scholars who understand British law as well as Islamic tradition and practice. Her presentation outlined the processes that they were proposing – including helplines, Counsellors etc. Su said that a key issue was that the Koran says that women may divorce their husbands if they face “hardship” – but some Sharia Courts do not accept that abusive and/or violent relationships qualify as “hardship” in this sense. She said that Aanchal has a wider remit than just Muslim women, and see this proposal as a practical response to a very real problem. They are not promoting Sharia and want the women’s panel to be a quiet practical solution.

John Anthony (LBR Head of Safer Communities) said that LBR supports Aanchal in their innovative thinking, but is aware of potential difficulties and dangers. He said it was very positive that this was not being considered as a separate tier of service but was tied in to mainstream Domestic Violence work, including safeguarding, children’s rights, child protection and risk assessments. He said that LBR is considering whether to formally support a proposed pilot scheme – and is clear that this isn’t about promoting and supporting Sharia Law, but is instead could be a practical solution to a problem.

Chief Inspector Fish asked if the police had been involved in these discussions to date, and was told that they had not. He had serious concerns about the risks to Aanchal in doing this, and the dangers of Aanchal and any partners being seen to be promoting Sharia Law. He said that a better approach would be to work with local Muslim communities to ensure they understand how to access the British legal system and how it works. Su said they would be pleased to work with the police to discuss this, and reiterated that they were not promoting Sharia Courts and were committed to working with the British court system.

Khalil Ali said he thought the approach was commendable, and asked if the pilot yet had a timescale and plans for formal evaluation. Su said this was currently being worked on.

**Action: This item would return to the PaVSP agenda in one year to consider progress.**

1. **LBR Grants Programme Update.**

Shila Barber gave an update on LBR’s Grants Programme. She said that the current Corporate Grants Programme had closed for applications on 17th December and 24 applications had been received which were currently being assessed. The recommendations will made to Cabinet on 10 March 2015. The budget available for the year is £590,879.

Shila then talked about the grants review that was still underway. Review work had been undertaken and now needed consideration in the light of the Council’s new Corporate Strategy and the introduction of the Care Act. A full report would go to Cabinet in the spring.

A proposal to continue the Council’s Community Fund was going to Cabinet on 12th Jan 2015. This had a budget of £200,000. If approved, the Fund will reopen in the spring.

Shila informed the meeting that the Community First funding (from the Community Development Foundation) had reached its final year. This was a total pot of £16,955 to be used only in Valentines Ward. £300 had remained unspent and was returned to the funder.

1. **Compact Refresh**

Ross reminded the meeting that the draft Compact document that the Partnership had approved was now out for consultation. Everyone was encouraged to comment and to encourage others to do so too. Ross will table a report on the consultation responses at the next PaVSP meeting for the members to consider. PaVSP members will then agree (either at the meeting or by email exchange afterwards) which of the suggested changes to incorporate. The final version will be agreed by the PaVSP and recommended to signatory bodies for them to adopt via their own governance routes. It is likely that the Council will sign off sometime in the summer and it was hoped to formally launch the new Compact document at the PaVSP Away Day 2015.

1. **Work Plan**

As there is only one further meeting scheduled for this cycle, the Work Plan discussion focused on the agenda for the next meeting. This will mostly focus on the Compact responses, but would also hear a briefing on the Fairness Commission, receive an update on the development of a Commissioning and Social Value Task and Finish Group and (subject to availability) hear from Redbridge CAB on its work and role as a Strategic Partner.

1. **Any Other Business**

There was none.

CLOSE