**Public and Voluntary Sectors Partnership**

**Minutes of meeting held on 13 March 2019 at 103 Cranbrook Road, Ilford**

**Present**

**Members:**

LBR Cllrs Shamshia Ali, Helen Coomb, Sareena Sanger, Jamal Uddin

Vol Sector Jon Abrams, David Pomfret, Cathy Turland, Nigel Turner (Chair)

Health Marie Price

Police Steve Valentine

**In attendance**

**Speakers:**

Dawn Cove, LBR Head of Benefits

Patrick Williams, Redbridge Foodbank Volunteer Coordinator

Susanne Rauprich, Citizens Advice Redbridge CEO

**Officers:**

Ferzanah Ahmed, LBR Policy Lead

Liz Pearce, RedbridgeCVS (Minutes)

Randal Smith, LBR Interim Head of Policy

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|  | **Agenda item** | **Action** |
| 1 | **Welcome and introductions**The chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and all introduced themselves. |  |
| 2 | **Apologies and substitutions**Val CumminsBushra TahirElise Gellatley (now moved to new role at Scotland Yard)Kevin Sole |  |
| 3 | **Declaration of interest**The chair reminded everyone of the need to declare any relevant interest on any agenda item. |  |
| 4 | **Minutes of meeting held 29 January 2019**These were agreed as a true record, with the correction under item 8 that the sentence which read “… less than 1%” should have read “around 1%”. |  |
| 5 | **Matters arising****Vice Chair:** Elise Gellatley had agreed to act as Vice-Chair at the last meeting. A request was made for another nomination from public sector colleagues. Marie Price was nominated and agreed to take on the role.**Co-production training:** Randal is was working on arranging this. **£17m VCS spend:** Randal had discussed the request to provide a breakdown of this with procurement and was unable to release this information as it is deemed commercially sensitive as some contracts are coming up for procurement. Jon commented that this information is publicly available on Redbridge-I, but not very easy to interpret. He also asked if the £17m included Vision and Randal confirmed that it did not. Nigel asked for the information in a format that showed a broader split which didn’t reveal individual contracts with groups and organisations. Randal to provide this information. | **RS****RS** |
| 6 | **The impact of Universal Credit rollout in Redbridge**Liz declared an interest in this item as a trustee of Redbridge Foodbank.The Chair reported that the expected speaker from JCP had sent apologies just prior to the meeting.**Patrick Williams, Redbridge Foodbank**Patrick reported that the Foodbank had seen an incredible increase in the number of clients accessing Foodbank services since the introduction of Universal Credit (UC) in Redbridge. Foodbank have a paper based trail that shows who food parcels go to and why. 5,350 parcels distributed in the last year – up about 1,000 from the previous one. Of the 2,900 adults who received assistance, 1,795 were referred by JCP, with the remainder from 278 other referral agencies.Virtually all of the JCP referrals attributed their attendance at the Foodbank to UC, and it is clear that it is having a devastating effect on people’s lives. Trussell Trust have been collating data on a national basis and say that, “When Universal Credit goes live in an area, there is a demonstrable increase in demand in local Trussell Trust foodbanks. On average, 12 months after roll-out, food banks see a 52% increase in demand, compared to 13% in areas with Universal Credit for 3 months or less. This increase cannot be attributed to randomness and exists even after accounting for seasonal and other variations. Benefit transitions, most likely due to people moving onto Universal Credit, are increasingly accounting for more referrals and are likely driving up need in areas of full Universal Credit roll-out. Waiting for the first payment is a key cause, while for many simply the act of moving over to a new system is causing hardship.”Many of clients presenting at Foodbank can very hostile to the frontline staff due to frustration and anger at their situation and being forced to ask for help. Foodbanks do signpost clients to other organisations for relevant assistance and support. Jon asked if Foodbank have data on disabled people accessing the service. One of boxes on vouchers is ticked for disability or sickness, but doesn’t identify what the issue is. The Benefits Team from the Council have been attending Foodbank sessions on Wednesdays and some Saturdays, and have been actively engaging with clients.Shamshia commented that when she was working for a referral partner agency there did seem to be rise in working poor as well and asked if there was evidence to confirm this. Patrick responded that there are many Foodbank clients who are working. Sareena wanted to know if the increase in clients was putting pressure on resources. Patrick commented that there were times when food stocks ran low, and there was also a great deal of pressure being placed on staff and volunteers. Liz added that it is not just food donations which are required by the Foodbank, but that there is a need to increase the number of regular financial donations to ensure that the service can continue to run. She did report that negotiations were at an advanced stage with the Council for the Foodbank to take on warehouse premises in Ilford which would provide storage facilities for all of their stock and allow sorting activities to take place in one location which will reduce some of the pressure on the Foodbank’s operations. She also noted that they had recently been successful in securing 5 year funding from the National Lottery Community Fund to employ a part time Volunteer Coordinator and a part time Administrator, which would reduce the pressure on the Project Manager who is currently the only paid member of staff. The Foodbank rely on their 125 active volunteers to ensure the service continues to meet local demands.**Dawn Cove, LBR Head of Benefits**Dawn reported that 9 months into full live UC service in Redbridge there were around 1,000 claimants which had had an effect on a number of Council departments:(i) The Benefits section workload increase had been phenomenal, in spite of Government predicting that it would be lower. On average, they are receiving 350 additional notifications from DWP each week, but have no additional resources to deal with them. Front line staff are particularly seeing increases in the length of time it takes to conduct interviews. The Council do not have access to individual’s UC records and have to provide advice and support to clients based on the documentation they bring in with them. Individuals have always been reluctant to go to JCP for advice and so come to the Council instead. (ii) Housing: 303 Council tenants are UC recipients. Of these, 227 have rent arrears totalling over £200k. (iii) Adult Social Care: Now reporting picking up bills for utilities and other day to day living costs, as well as dealing with immigration issues since UC rollout. As an example, Dawn referred to day 1 of the rollout out when a very vulnerable gentleman attended for advice and support. He had never used a computer and needed to register online for UC. It took staff 2.5 hours to get him registered. She expressed real concerns about how vulnerable people are managing the online systems and the use of the online journals which they are supposed to log in to daily. Have been referring clients to Work Redbridge for IT literacy support, but some are not suitable for this.Managed migration has been halted now so that more robust systems can be put in place. At the sessions run at the Foodbank the Benefits Team have found that people are scared of UC and that they’re going to be worse off as a result of it. There is a definite lack of information provided by DWP about what it really means for people, but the Council have produced quite a lot of their own information.The contract for providing support to UC users moves to Citizens Advice Redbridge in April, but there is no provision within it for budgeting support advice. There have been some welcome changes for those on disability benefit who get severe disability premium, but the Council don’t support the mixed age drive to UC rather than pension credit coming in from May. Letters went out from the DWP about this and, again, the lack of proper information has caused a large increase in queries to the Benefits Team. Because there is no data sharing agreement with DWP and discretionary housing payments are still administered by LA who don’t know if clients are eligible for it or not. Clients can’t give permission to the DWP to share their information, and DWP are adamant this won’t change but local authorities still continue to apply pressure through London Councils.Jon asked about the process for housing payments. These never went directly to clients who were council tenants before, but now it does and many don’t know how to pay rent. He also commented that signing up to Verify was not easy, particularly for disabled and disadvantaged people, and he said that the design of UC was flawed from the start. Dawn replied that the Council are putting much more resources into supporting people but the DWP administration grant keeps going down and this is not sustainable longer term.Randal asked about council tenants’ rent debts, and whether clients were facing eviction. Dawn replied that housing staff are doing a lot of work with this group and the bigger concern is that they have no idea what is happening to people in private sector accommodation. People have to be 8 weeks in arrears before the LA can ask for direct rent payments to be taken from them. There is a real lack of debt management and budgeting advice for UC clients.**Susanne Rauprich, Citizens Advice Redbridge**CAR currently have 229 clients, facing 240 issues such as:* Clients whose benefits were stopped
* Change in circumstances, e.g. long-term health condition
* Referrals from local authority because of rent arrears

Some of the issues they are facing are:* Computer literacy
* Challenging decisions through the journal
* Delays in payments leading to use of foodbanks
* People being wrongly advised to apply for Universal Credit when they should not.
* ESA
* Third party deductions
* Incorrect  right to reside decisions

She gave an example of a client who had a child with mental health problems and sight impairment. The client made her UC claim in April but did not receive payment until June. She was also eligible for Child Tax Credit but had not been paid for the full period of her entitlement. With the support of CAR she was successful in getting back payments of CTC and the advisor also assisted her to make a DLA claim.Susanne went on to talk about “Help to Claim” which CAR will be running from April. This is a national service supporting people to make a Universal Credit claim - from initial claim to first full payment. The service will provide support to Redbridge residents from April 2019 - March 2020. It doesn’t include managed migration. The service will be accessible through JCP, the Council, self-referrals and other support agencies, on the basis of “no wrong door” policy. Support may be offered face to face; over the phone; online. A help to claim check will be carried out followed by an individual needs assessment. Clients will then be offered support to start a new claim, followed by the completion of the claim, dependent on level of need. Referrals will be made to other support services for clients in need of ongoing support.Nigel asked how many referrals CAR were expecting. Susanne replied that the target is 1800 but that this may not be met. In response to a comment that vulnerable people don’t necessarily know where to go for help and support she said that their website citizensadviceredbridge.org.uk has details of services in Redbridge and that they are working with other organisations to promote where help can be found. The Redbridge Advice Network no longer runs, but CAR hopes that organisations involved in providing advice could meet regularly to improve signposting mechanisms. Suggestions were made that the RedbridgeCVS eNews, Faith Forum mailing lists and Redbridge Life were all possible mechanisms for promoting the service. It was also noted that other VCS organisations do work with individuals, particularly from BME communities, to provide help and support.CAR currently have 8 paid staff, which will increase to 12 from April. The bulk of advice is delivered by volunteers. CAR are recruiting new volunteers now and Susanne will provide the recruitment leaflet for promotion by the partners.The chair thanked the speakers for their contributions to an interesting, if distressing, discussion. | SR |
| 6 | **Compact 2019-2022**Comments had been sought on the previous draft version and Liz reported that those returned had been included within the current final draft document. There had also been some editing to remove duplication of information, and two new sections added on co-production and social value.It was **agreed** after discussion that the previously agreed definition of co-production be replaced with:*“Co-production is an important principle that involves residents, service users, carers, voluntary and community sector groups and public sector bodies as equal partners in making decisions about future service delivery”*There was discussion around the content of the document and all members were asked to let Liz have any further comments for inclusion ASAP. The document would be circulated to partners for approval by their organisations and any further changes to it would be circulated prior to the document being presented to the RedbridgeCVS Voluntary Sector Network meeting on Wednesday 10 April. A workshop would be run at this meeting to help VCS organisations understand the purpose and value of the Compact.All partners would then sign up to the new Compact for the beginning of the Council’s municipal year at the beginning of May. Randal is to check the process for agreement by Council. Cathy requested that an Easyread version be produced at the same time as the hard copy and also a BSL version of it for websites. She will provide costs to Randal to see if this can be resourced.  | **All/LP****All****CT/RS** |
| 7 | **Social value procurement – Ferzanah Ahmed, LBR Policy Lead**Ferzanah had tabled a document outlining the approach that LBR are taking to ensuring that social value is built into their procurement processes. This includes a national framework of measures which should be considered.The broad approach is to assess what LBR need to do better to maximise social value in contracts. Work Redbridge have a good track record of pointing out the need to include training provision, local employment etc. in contracts, but the approach across the Council is not consistent. Previously, LBR had considered any social value in contracts, but not looked at what the priorities should be. She gave the example of equalities seeming to be hidden in the past. A review of all large contracts will take place over the next year. Cathy asked about pre-commissioning consultation and involvement of service users. Farzanah responded that this should happen automatically and was not part of this process.In response to a query about where the national framework had come from, she replied that Social Value Procurement produced it and it is now used widely across councils. Social Value should account for 10% of total score in the local commissioning process. Key indicators, relevant to the contract, would be picked for bidders to respond to, but they would also be referred to the framework to see which other indicators they were also going to deliver against. A key one for members would be around utilising local employment. Marie made the point that the NHS also needs to think about how it relates to them.  |  |
| 8 | **Voluntary sector grants review – Randal Smith, LBR**Randal updated the meeting on progress to date. Small grants have now ended. Meeting held recently with Strategic Partners and discussed what will happen next March. The Council will not be focusing on partners meeting KPIs this year and want them to focus on advocacy, representation and sustainability leading to a resilient and robust voluntary sector. Reporting requirements for grant recipients will be minimised this year, while a new VCS grants policy is being developed. There will be a need to discuss with the sector what criteria might be, and consultation will take place, but not yet reached that stage. Currently the £17m spend is being reviewed, and the need to make savings of £680k savings over 3 years. Better commissioning should deliver most of savings of around 1.5-2%. The Council are keen to progress with sharing data on demographics with local VCS organisations so that external funders are getting consistent data around the needs of the borough. The aim of the review is to get something agreed around October 2019, but the better commissioning process might take place over a couple of years with transitional arrangements in the interim. |  |
| 9 | **Any other urgent business**None |  |
|  | **Date of next meeting: 5pm Wednesday 17 April** |  |