

Meeting:	Overview and Scrutiny Committee
Date:	9 December 2008
Subject:	Scrutiny Review of 'Delivering a Strengthened Voluntary and Community Sector for Harrow' – final report
Responsible Officer:	Myfanwy Barrett, Corporate Director of Finance (Project Sponsor) Julia Smith, Chief Executive, Harrow Association of Voluntary Service (Project Sponsor)
Portfolio Holder:	Councillor Chris Mote, Community and Cultural Services Portfolio Holder
Exempt:	No
Enclosures:	Final report of the Scrutiny Review Group including appendices

Section 1 – Summary and Recommendations

This report sets out the findings and recommendations of the scrutiny review of 'Delivering a Strengthened Voluntary and Community Sector for Harrow'. The Review Group conducted its enquiries over two phases of work between March and November 2008. An interim report of the Review Group was presented to and agreed by Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 8 July 2008.

Recommendations:

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee is requested to:

1. Endorse the report and its recommendations
2. Refer the report to Cabinet and the Harrow Strategic Partnership for consideration and agreement; and
3. Place the monitoring of the progress against the report's recommendations on the scrutiny work programme (through Performance and Finance Sub-Committee)

Reason: (For recommendation)

The completion of the scrutiny review of 'Delivering a Strengthened Voluntary and Community Sector for Harrow' addresses the needs of the scrutiny work programme for 2008/09.

Section 2 – Report

Background

The Scrutiny Review

Terms of reference

The aim of this review was to undertake a strategic review of the role the voluntary and community sector (VCS) plays, with the council and other partners, in improving the quality of life of Harrow residents. More specific aims and objectives were:

- To define the council and partners' relationships with the voluntary and community sector, how they stand as is and how they could be shaped going forward
- To evaluate how effectively the council, partners and the voluntary and community sector work together in achieving key strategic aims for Harrow as set out in the Community Plan and Local Area Agreement
- To evaluate the current Harrow Compact in the light of national policy direction and principles, as well as local circumstances.
- To evaluate the council's support to the sector and make recommendations for improvement
- To identify blockages to improving and strengthening the relationship with the sector and to make recommendations for improvement

Defining focus of review enquiries

Work was focused under four case study headings, identified as key issues to address in a Harrow context:

1. Partnership working
2. Harrow Compact
3. Funding
4. Community assets and premises

Methodologies employed to conduct review

During the course of this review evidence was gathered from a wide range of local, regional and national sources, employing a range of methodologies:

- Desktop review of literature
- Evidence gathering meetings with witnesses
- Consideration of written evidence
- Visits to other local authorities and organisations identified as best practice
- Roundtable discussion with decision-makers
- Individual interviews
- Briefings on national context and best practice
- Consultation events (conference in July)
- Mapping exercise – survey of all Council services with relationships with voluntary and community groups

Furthermore to translate findings into recommendations and models of future relationships the Review Group held:

- Workshops to model future relationships
- Conferences (in November) to test recommendations and models with the VCS

Review Group's recommendations

The final report of the Review Group is attached. Detailed below are the recommendations coming out of this review. These should contribute to the

Comprehensive Area Assessment agenda, especially with regard to having a 'thriving third sector'.

Recommendation	Timescale	Identified officer/ member/ group to action
<p>Recommendation 1: To have a Council-financed funding support officer within the voluntary and community sector (VCS) to support groups in a variety of ways e.g. grant applications, adapting to any changes in the grants process, developing funding strategies, meeting monitoring requirements, procurement processes, community assets. To work closely with the Council's external funding officer.</p>	S – within 6 months	Harrow Council Chief Executive
<p>Recommendation 2: To have a relationship manager at the Council to act as a signpost for groups in the voluntary and community sector and a support in the event of difficulties in the relationship between any Council service and any VCS group.</p>	S - Immediate	Harrow Council Chief Executive and VCS representatives on the HSP
<p>Recommendation 3: To develop a third sector strategy for Harrow that seeks to define the local relationship with the VCS and invests in VCS development in line with partnership priorities. The third sector strategy should also seek to address the recognised gaps in the models developed and proposed by the scrutiny review - Community Trust model (for example gaps in commissioning and premises) and further work on the model of commissioning in the Strategic Relationships model.</p>	M – 12 months	HSP – Harrow Chief Executives Group
<p>Recommendation 4: To ask VCS representatives on the Harrow Strategic Partnership to feed back more systematically to sector colleagues through regular emails or as updates in existing newsletters.</p>	S - Immediate	Voluntary and Community Sector Forum
<p>Recommendation 5: To recognise the real opportunity to develop volunteering in Harrow where supply of volunteers outstrips demand – investing more resource to build the capacity of the Volunteer Centre Harrow to provide an infrastructure and support to small voluntary groups in recruiting and training volunteers and coordinating skills for day-to-day management of groups.</p>	M – 12 months	HSP
<p>Recommendation 6: To advertise the Volunteer Centre Harrow on the Harrow Council website.</p>	S - Immediate	Harrow Council Head of Communications

Recommendation	Timescale	Identified officer/ member/ group to action
<p>Recommendation 7: To consider outsourcing the management of the 'Harrow Heroes' awards ceremony to the VCS so that it is a peer-led awards scheme, recognising the contribution of groups as well as individuals.</p>	S - 6 months by Spring 2009	Harrow Council Director of Community and Cultural Services
<p>Recommendation 8: To develop robust governance arrangements for the Compact, to include refreshing the document every two years, promoting the Compact and its way of working, formalising conflict resolution (providing a framework for stage 1 complaints). To be the responsibility of a new Compact Board of representatives to feed up to the HSP, and therefore not reliant on individuals.</p>	S – 6 months	HSP Board
<p>Recommendation 9: To produce a reader-friendly summary of the new compact document and distribute this to Councillors, officers and colleagues in the voluntary and community sector.</p>	S – 6 months	HSP Board
<p>Recommendation 10: To roll out training on the Compact and what it means to partnership working. To be included in members' training, management/officer training and training within the VCS and other partner organisations within the HSP, to raise awareness and understanding. a) Agree that Member development for the Grants Advisory Panel be undertaken to increase awareness of the principles of the Harrow Compact and to support Members in developing a fuller understanding of the pressures and challenges faced by the sector. (Please note that part a) of the recommendation was agreed by Cabinet through the interim report).</p>	S – Immediate (January) and ongoing	HSP
<p>Recommendation 11: To rationalise the grant-giving process – to clearly define processes, appeals mechanisms and adherence to these in order to improve consistency and transparency.</p>	M – for the 2010/11 grants round	Harrow Council Chief Executive Leader, Strategy, Partnership and Finance Portfolio Holder
<p>Recommendation 12: To move towards three-year funding commitments through grants so as to encourage stability and more scope for planning ahead within the voluntary and community sector.</p>	M – for the 2010/11 grants round	Harrow Council Chief Executive Leader, Strategy, Partnership and Finance Portfolio Holder
<p>Recommendation 13: To consider a longer-term approach (5-10year funding) for service level agreements awarded to VCS infrastructure organisations.</p>	M – for the 2010/11 grants round	Harrow Council Chief Executive Leader, Strategy, Partnership and Finance Portfolio Holder
<p>Recommendation 14: To agree that the 2009-10 grants round should be</p>	S – for the 2009/10	Cabinet – already agreed

Recommendation	Timescale	Identified officer/ member/ group to action
conducted in full compliance with the existing criteria and process and in a transparent way. Please note that this recommendation was agreed by Cabinet through the interim report.	grants round	
Recommendation 15: For the Grants Advisory Panel to engage with the VCS to consider the criteria for the 2010/11 grants round and take account of the concerns raised through this scrutiny review about the current system. To bring these proposals to a scrutiny challenge panel in preparation for the 2010/11 grants application process.	M – for the 2010/11 grants round	Grants Advisory Panel
Recommendation 16: To ensure that all procurement exercises and available premises are advertised in a regular email/newsletter and that the VCS be on that distribution list. To also raise awareness with the VCS that the Council's webpages for procurement include much help and advice on accessing procurement routes.	S – 3 months	Harrow Council Corporate Director Finance Chief Executive of Harrow Association of Voluntary Services
Recommendation 17: To optimise the VCS' access to procurement exercises through thorough and fair assessment of the procurement requirements necessary for each tendering exercise.	S – 3 months	Harrow Council Corporate Director Finance HSP
Recommendation 18: To ask the HSP partners to compile a register of their community premises/rooms and develop a protocol for their use by the VCS. To encourage a fairer and more transparent system of community lettings.	S – 6 months	HSP
Recommendation 19: To ask the relevant Council directorate(s) (concerned with community lettings especially of schools) to assess the current issues around community lettings (of schools and Council buildings such as the Teachers' Centre and community centres) and offer possible solutions to these. To articulate this assessment and present possible solutions to a scrutiny committee and concurrently feed into scrutiny's review of extended schools.	S – 6 months	Harrow Council Chief Executive
Recommendation 20: To task the HSP with creating an environment where creative people can thrive and make best use of community assets. To seek people with a passion for developing social entrepreneurship and social capital.	S – Immediate Ongoing work	HSP
Recommendation 21: To establish a Community Trust for the Council's grants administration processes (and if appropriate, those of partners) and carry out further work on how this can best be achieved - the feasibility of a community trust model for grant-giving in Harrow should be fully explored, scoped and costed, using the scrutiny proposal as a basis. To include developing a better understanding of realistic timescales with regard to implementation and the ability to serve future needs of the borough, for example with regard to the Comprehensive Area Assessment, as well as drawing	M/L – 6-8months for feasibility work Community Trust to be in place by 2011/12 grants round	Harrow Council Chief Executive

Recommendation	Timescale	Identified officer/ member/ group to action
on the experiences of existing Community Trusts and local authorities who use the Community Trust model.		
Recommendation 22: To conduct a feasibility of the Strategic Relationships Model for commissioning, using the scrutiny proposal as a basis. To include developing a better understanding of realistic timescales with regard to implementation, cultural/organisational shifts required, costs and the ability to serve future needs of the borough.	M – 12 months	Harrow Council Chief Executive

Timescales requiring action (S) immediately or short term, (M) medium term, (L) long term

Current situation

Not appropriate to this report.

Why a change is needed

Not appropriate to this report.

Main options

Not appropriate to this report.

Other options considered

Not appropriate to this report.

Implications of the Recommendation

Resources, costs and risks

The Review Group's report contains 22 recommendations for the Council and Harrow Strategic Partnership which, if and when accepted by Cabinet and the HSP, may incur additional costs and risks and have resource implications. However, care has been taken to ensure that the recommendations made allow more effective use of resources across the public and voluntary and community sectors.

Staffing/workforce

There are no immediate staffing and workforce considerations specific to this report.

Equalities impact

The provision of and access to services that meet high standards in terms of equality and that recognise diversity within the borough was central to this review.

Legal comments

Awaiting comment from legal colleagues.

Community safety

There are no particular community safety considerations specific to this report.

Financial Implications

There may be financial implications arising from the recommendations and a budget would need to be identified to meet any costs arising from these proposals.

Performance Issues

Recommendations matrix attached as appropriate.

Risk Implications

There are no specific risks attached to this report.

Section 3 - Statutory Officer Clearance

Name: Sheela Thakrar	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	on behalf of the Chief Financial Officer
Date: 26 November 2008		
Name: Hugh Peart	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Monitoring Officer
Date: 26 November 2008		

Section 4 - Contact Details and Background Papers

Contact:

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Background Papers:

All documents used in the formulation of the report are referenced in the footnotes in the body of the final report, as attached.

If appropriate, does the report include the following considerations?

1.	Consultation	YES
2.	Corporate Priorities	n/a