

Review of Council support to the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) through Grants, Community Lettings and Community Premises

Focus Groups & Meetings

Voluntary & Community Sector Forum	8th December 2010	10am	Harrow Civic Centre
Community Premises User Group Meeting	9th December 2010	6pm	Community Premises
Public Meeting	10th January 2011	2pm	Harrow Civic Centre
Public Meeting	10th January 2011	6.30pm	Harrow Civic Centre
Community Lettings Users	11th January 2011	6.30pm	Harrow Civic Centre

Summary of Issues, views and comments raised by delegates at meetings.

Voluntary & Community Sector Forum 8th December 2010 10am Harrow Civic Centre

- **Commissioning:** tender documents are more relevant to the private sector than the voluntary sector.
- **Smaller organisations** need funding for ongoing services that should be proportionate to the project being delivered. Tender specifications need to include “pick and mix options” that involve organisations working together.
- **Working with partners** time needs to be invested to forge partnerships. Templates to be produced for organisations working together as a partnership. Workshops should be available to support this.
- **Model of good practice** through competitive dialogue
- **Transparency** is important.
- A new system could create the **potential for new initiatives** and pilots.
- **General support for a directory of the council's own venues for hire including schools.** Directory of venues offering concessionary rates.
- **Directory could include** libraries as community resources and hiring out equipment.
- **Commissioning** HAVS to provide resource sharing for equipment expertise and HR services.

Appendix 1: Focus group meeting notes

Community Premises User Group Meeting 9th December 2010 6pm Community Premises

- The groups requested confirmation that this was a **true consultation and a decision has not yet been made** – this was confirmed.
- Clarification was requested on **which services will be commissioned**, otherwise it was difficult to make an informed choice in responding to consultation questions. Officers advised that this had not yet been decided.
- **Telephone and broadband** should be provided in resource centre offices.
- **Commissioning**: training opportunities should be provided before going over to a new system of commissioning.
- **Request for clarification of timescales**: It was possible that this could be implemented in 2012/13.
- **Clarification requested as to whether or not commissioning was about saving money**. At this stage there was no proposal to reduce the available budget.
- Request for a mapping of council and other **premises that could be available for community groups** to use for office space.
- Clarification required as to **who pays for accommodation costs**. Currently all costs for Community Premises are paid by the Council.
- Groups requested a financial breakdown of **running costs for community premises** of £105,000 a year.
- There was a suggestion that a **community trust could run the existing community premises** accommodation instead of Harrow Council.
- Request from organisations for the **free use of Halls** for functions.

Public Meeting 10th January 2011 2pm Harrow Civic Centre

- Clarification was sought on whether or not **organisations hiring rooms through community lettings have a 50% concession**. This was confirmed.
- Confirmation that a **full list of organisations receiving grants** is posted on Harrow Council website and is available from the Internet. Request that in **future list contains more information about the details** of the project to enable an understanding of what the money was spent on.
- Clarification given about the processes of **commissioning**. An initial stage is the identification of need followed by the development of a service specification that would be provided by the council.
- Harrow Council is working on developing a **database of organisations**.
- Clarification that **individual schools decide on which, if any, space is available** to hire through the current community lettings administration – this was confirmed.
- Request for a **steering group** representing the voluntary and community sector to consider the results of the consultation.
- It is proposed that the **new system could be in place for 2012/13**.
- Confirmation given that **organisations not currently in receipt of a grant can apply in any new grants round**.

Appendix 1: Focus group meeting notes

Public Meeting 10th January 2011 6.30pm Harrow Civic Centre

- Verification requested about the application process for **community premises**. This is a **rolling application process**, and organisations can apply at any time. Currently, individual office space is not available, as all of this accommodation is already allocated. Hot desking facilities, postal address and use of meeting rooms are currently available.
- A representative from an organisation stated that there is a major problem in getting people to help and finding volunteers. Consequently, **organisations need funding to employ people, and therefore need a grant year on year.**
- **Demands on the grants budget are likely to increase** as a result of cuts elsewhere.
- A question was asked by a delegate, whether or not the **personalisation agenda** was part of the grant funding that is being consulted about. It was confirmed that this funding was not related to personalisation. Adults & Housing and Children's Services, together with Community Development are working together in a coordinated way.
- In response to a question about strategies to ensure that some services were not missed out, it was explained that **prioritisation would be part of the strategy for identifying needs, and that this would be linked with key priorities for the residents of Harrow.**

Community Lettings Users 11th January 2011 6.30pm Harrow Civic Centre

- Currently, some schools hire their accommodation through community lettings, some only by hiring directly to organisations, and some a mixture of both. **If the community lettings administrative system stopped, then each school would operate its own room hire system independently.** Schools operate as independent bodies through their governing body. **The council cannot determine what schools will charge** for the use of their own accommodation. **Organisations were concerned that charges set by schools would be too high** to be affordable for organisations currently using community lettings. **Realistic rates need to be set by schools.**
- There were **identified benefits for organisations to have a direct relationship with schools** to include booking and day-to-day communication.
- Some schools have told organisations that the current system does not work for them as the school is not reimbursed appropriately to cover costs. **Schools have told organisations that they welcome the consultation as the current system was not fit for purpose.**
- A **directory of school accommodation** available for hire, with comparable costs will be helpful.
- Statement that there should be **an income threshold for organisations applying for small grants.**
- A view was stated that **appeals need to be heard before the final grant funding decision was made.**
- Organisations that were not successful in applying for funds should be given **constructive feedback** to enable them to **learn** from this.
- It was suggested that **support should be given to the voluntary and community sector,** to enable them to be in a position to **tender successfully.**
- The sector **should be involved in developing specifications** for future commissioning.
- **Larger organisations could partner with smaller organisations** to deliver projects.
- In the current difficult financial times, with funding streams drying up, it was suggested that the council could help and support the **voluntary and community sector develop a more businesslike approach.**

Appendix 1: Focus group meeting notes

- Consideration was given to the **optimum length of service level agreements for commissioning** 1, 2 or 3 years.
- Adults & Housing and Children's Services, together with Community Development are **working together in a coordinated way**.
- **A needs analysis** needs to be carried out as part of commissioning.
- The **outcome should be stated**, rather than how to achieve the outcome (commissioning process).
- **Community premises**: a view was stated that **old groups need to move out** so that **new organisations can move in**.
- A view was expressed that some organisations **expected everything at no charge**.