

## **HOUNSLOW COMMUNITY NETWORK: BRIEFING NOTE AND INITIAL CONSULTATION PAPER**

### **BACKGROUND**

West London Network has been commissioned by Hounslow Council to work with local VCS groups to set up a new Hounslow Community Network. This would provide an `overall voice for the voluntary sector` in Hounslow.

There will be a 10 month programme of consultation-aiming to launch a new Hounslow Community Network by June 2012. Hounslow Community Network would then be handed on to a local Hounslow lead organisation.

West London Network (WLN) covers Hounslow, Hillingdon, Harrow, Hammersmith, Brent and Ealing. WLN was previously based in CVS Hounslow but following their closure the WLN host role has now passed to Ealing CVS.

The main project worker on a Hounslow Community Network will be Fuad Uddin (WLN Manager). Fuad previously worked for CVS Hounslow and is a Hounslow resident.

Additional support will be provided by:

- Andy Roper: Chief Executive of Ealing CVS but also the elected Chair of Ealing Community Network. Andy has been a resident in Hounslow for over 15 years.
- Carmel Cahill: Previously Coordinator for Ealing Community Network. Carmel has also been elected as Chair of Ealing LINK.

There will be an initial consultation workshop on a new Hounslow Community Network at a joint event with Hounslow Council on Friday 14 October (see enclosed booking form). This will be followed by a series of in-depth presentations to local Hounslow VCS forums and further open meetings for all Hounslow VCS groups.

This briefing paper sets out more information and some initial consultation issues for 14 October. But if you are not able to attend and have comments, questions or ideas on a new Hounslow Community Network, please e-mail these to [fuad@westlondonnetwork.org.uk](mailto:fuad@westlondonnetwork.org.uk).

### **WHAT IS A COMMUNITY NETWORK AND WHY HAVE ONE?**

Community Networks already exist in Ealing and other London Boroughs. Membership of a Hounslow Community Network would be open to all VCS groups in Hounslow. During 6 years membership of Ealing Community Network has increased from 100 to over 450 local VCS groups.

The basic aim of a Community Network is simple- by coming together local VCS groups will have a more effective voice with the local Council, local NHS, local Police , Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) and other statutory partners.

But a Community Network can have additional important roles:

- Ensuring VCS reps on local partnerships are elected by the whole local VCS and not just selected by local partners.
- Providing a collective VCS response on key local policy issues and national consultations.

- Supporting increased networking by VCS groups working in different sectors or in different parts of the borough.
- Giving smaller VCS groups an `equal voice` with larger groups.

A new Hounslow Community Network would not replace existing local VCS forums (though this may be an opportunity to review the number of local forums and see if there are any gaps). A Community Network would bring together current forums together with individual VCS groups who are not members of local forums.

Community Networks do make a difference. Taking Ealing as an example, Ealing Community Network has:

- Reduced proposed cuts in Council grants budgets by 50%.
- Persuaded Ealing Council to ring-fence £500,000 of returned London Councils funding for local VCS use this year, plus £200,000 in each of the next 3 years.
- Prevented cuts in local charity rates relief for small and medium size groups.

But Community Networks are not just about funding. Again in Ealing, Ealing Community Network has:

- Persuaded the Ealing LSP to give a bigger role to the local VCS in delivering the new Ealing Community Strategy.
- Set up an `Ealing Equalities Group`, giving grassroots equalities groups input to new strategies by the Council and NHS.
- Elected VCS reps, not just onto the LSP, but onto local Council scrutiny panels, local NHS partnerships, Ealing Community Safety Partnership and other decision-making bodies.

Finally Community Networks can have practical benefits e.g. setting up an online `Community Calendar`, so VCS groups can promote their events to each other, providing free web pages to small VCS groups who cant afford their own website.

To get an idea of what a Community Network can do, have a look at the Ealing Community Network website ([www.ealingnetwork.org.uk](http://www.ealingnetwork.org.uk)).

That said, a Hounslow Community Network would be **your** Network - how it might work, membership structures, key issues to be raised with statutory partners, coordination with other local Hounslow VCS forums, how to involve and engage local VCS groups, election of a future Hounslow Community Network Chair, Vice–Chair and Executive Committee and selection of a future local VCS host organisation – these will all be matters for Hounslow VCS groups themselves to decide.

#### POTENTIAL HOUNSLOW COMMUNITY NETWORK MODELS

Based on other London boroughs, there are two core models for a Community Network:

An `open model`: Under this model, all key policies are decided at open meetings, which all local VCS groups can attend but with an Executive (made up of both individual VCS groups and reps from local VCS forums) to consider urgent decisions and prepare recommendations for decision at the wider open meetings.

A `forum of forums` model: Under this model the Community Network is simply made up of reps from all the key VCS forums in the borough - with wider VCS groups consulted via email or online and then sent information on decisions.

For your information, Ealing Community Network has adopted the open model – with all key decisions made at open meetings of local VCS groups 4 times per year, but with an Executive meeting in between; Hounslow VCS groups may prefer alternative models.

#### COMMUNITY NETWORK CORE PRINCIPLES

Ealing Community Network works on two core principles:

`One organisation, One vote`: When policy decisions are made at open meetings, all organisations have one vote (so a small neighbourhood group will have an equal voice with a large VCS organisation).

`Election Not Selection`: VCS reps on local partnerships should be elected by the local VCS (not simply chosen by the Council or other partners) and should regularly feedback through the Community Network. Positions should be up for re-election annually or every 2 years.

It is down to you to decide if you should adopt, amend or even add to these principles for your own Hounslow Community Network.

#### HOUNSLOW COMMUNITY NETWORK STEERING GROUP

We would like to set up a Steering Group of local Hounslow VCS groups to advise on the development of a new Hounslow Community Network and discuss draft proposals before these are brought back to future open meetings of all local VCS groups.

At the event on 14 October we will be asking people to put themselves forward to sit on the Steering Group. If you are not able to attend and would like to be a member of the Steering Group please e-mail [fuad@westlondonnetwork.org.uk](mailto:fuad@westlondonnetwork.org.uk) .

Hounslow Council have also said they would like to use the Steering Group as an interim forum for consultations with the VCS on key issues (until a full Hounslow Community Network is formally launched).

#### NEXT STEPS

Following the initial workshop on 14 October, during Nov-Jan we will be holding more detailed presentations with local VCS forums in Hounslow. At the event on 14 October, you will also be able to sign up to receive future short `e-news` updates. If you are not able to attend but would like to receive `e-updates` on Hounslow Community Network please e-mail [fuad@westlondonnetwork.org.uk](mailto:fuad@westlondonnetwork.org.uk) .

In addition we will be:

- Carrying out an `E-Engagement Survey` to consult all Hounslow VCS groups about a Hounslow Community Network.

- Setting up an online Community Feedback Board on the WLN website for you to post additional ideas or questions.
- Mapping current VCS engagement forums in Hounslow and identifying any `representation gaps` for further discussion by the Hounslow Community Network Steering Group.
- Meeting with statutory partners - LB Hounslow, Hounslow NHS, Hounslow Police, Hounslow Job Centre Plus - to get their ideas on a Hounslow Community Network.

We will then aim to hold two major additional events for all Hounslow VCS groups:

In February: To discuss and agree a final model, structure and key principles for a Hounslow Community Network.

In June: To formally launch a new Hounslow Community Network, adopt a constitution and other model documents (e.g. an equalities policy), elect a first Chair/Vice Chair and Executive Committee and agree a future local lead host organisation.

#### INITIAL CONSULTATION ISSUES

Set out below are some initial issues for discussion at the workshop event on 14 October. These will be followed up by further consultations on more detailed issues and practical arrangements for a Hounslow Community Network over the coming months.

- Do you support the idea of a new Hounslow Community Network?
- Do you have any concerns - if so what are these?
- What would be your top 3 priority issues you would like a Hounslow Community Network to address or raise with Hounslow Council or other statutory partners?
- Membership: What should be the criteria for membership of HCN? Should HCN be open to all VCS groups based or working in Hounslow or just VCS groups based in Hounslow ?
- Core Model: Should HCN be based on an `open model` or a `forum of forums` model?
- Core Principles: Should HCN adopt the principle of `one organisation, one vote` and `election not selection` for VCS reps on local Hounslow partnerships and decision making bodies?
- HCN Executive: Should this include both individual VCS groups reps and VCS forum reps? Should places be reserved for small groups?

We look forward to discussing these with you on 14 October or you can e-mail comments to the project worker, Fuad Uddin at [fuad@westlondonnetwork.org.uk](mailto:fuad@westlondonnetwork.org.uk).