

London Borough of Islington

VOLUNTARY AND COMMUNITY SECTOR COMMITTEE
18 April 2013

Minutes of the meeting of Voluntary and Community Sector Committee held at the Town Hall, Upper Street, London N1 2UD on 18 April 2013 at 6.00pm.

Present:

Councillors: Richard Greening and Barbara Sidnell

Observers: Janet Burgess and Theresa Debono

Councillor Sidnell in the chair

85 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Item A1)

Received from Councillor West.

86 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (Item A2)

None.

87 ORDER OF BUSINESS (Item A3)

The order of business was as set out on the agenda.

88 CONFIRMATION OF THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 5 MARCH 2013 (Item A4)

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 5 March 2013 be confirmed as a correct record and the Chair be authorised to sign them.

89 LOCAL INITIATIVES FUND (Item B1)

A revised version of Appendix A was laid round, which set out full details of the bids received, which would be interleaved with the formal record of the meeting.

RESOLVED:

(a) That awards be approved as set out in revised Appendix A to the report of the Executive Member for Tenants, Residents and Communities and attached to these minutes, subject to the Assistant Chief Executive (Strategy and Community Partnerships) being satisfied that all necessary checks have been made and any other issues resolved.

(b) That the Ward budgets for 2013-14 in revised Appendix A be noted, including the unallocated funding carried forward from 2012-13 and minor budget amendments resulting from project underspends

Reason for decision

To assist in developing and sustaining a healthy voluntary and community sector in Islington.

Other options considered

None.

Conflicts of interest/note of dispensations granted

None.

90 COMMUNITY FESTIVALS FUND AWARDS 2013/14 (Item B2)

RESOLVED:

(a) That Community Festivals Fund grants be awarded to the following:

- Angel Canal Festival
- Archway Town Centre Group
- BVMO / Team Cally
- Caxton House Community Centre
- Claremont Project
- Cubitt
- Holloway Neighbourhood Group
- Islington Arts Factory
- Islington Exhibits
- Key Changes (Islington Music Forum)
- Kings Cross Church
- Little Angel Theatre
- Manor Gardens Welfare Trust
- New River Baptist Church
- Newington Green Action Group
- St Luke's Parochial Trust
- Peel Institute
- Reel Islington
- Rowan Arts
- St. Mary's Church
- Yaram Arts

(b) That the entire budget of £16,000 be allocated to the summer events programme and the firework element of the programme be withdrawn

Reason for decision

To support local organisations to develop and deliver a broad range of events for local residents, by way of a clear and transparent process.

Other options considered

None.

Conflicts of interest/note of dispensations granted

None.

91 PRESENTATION FROM RUTH HAYES, CENTRE DIRECTOR OF ISLINGTON LAW CENTRE (Item B3)

Ruth Hayes gave a powerpoint presentation to the Committee on the Government's welfare reform proposals, the economic impact on Islington, legal aid changes and current and proposed legal advice services available in the Borough.

The following points were noted during discussion:

- Finsbury Park Ward had the second highest level of child poverty in the Borough.
- A representative of one of the organisations present stated that their organisation lacked capacity and that people they encountered were very worried about welfare changes
- The Advice Alliance had seen a rise in numbers of people using their services but had increased capacity to deal with enquiries. They were able to guarantee that people would be seen within four weeks. An information leaflet had been produced to explain to front line services and those who wished to use advice services what happened during the four week period pending the appointment. A request was made that the information leaflets be circulated to councillors who would find them useful when advising constituents
- Those present were invited to inform anyone wishing to apply for discretionary housing payment to attend one of the 40 form filling sessions available per week at Islington Law Centre

Voluntary and Community Sector Committee – 18 April 2013

- Although people were in debt, many of them were not approaching advice agencies. It was acknowledged that it was difficult for many people to trust in outside agencies and people were worried, for instance, about their landlords finding out about their financial difficulties.

Debt relief orders meant that people who were £15,000 in debt, with less than £300 capital, could have their debts voided.

Debt management sessions were provided by Camden CAB

- There was currently only one housing association acting as a partner in the Islington food bank scheme. More housing associations should be encouraged to participate.
- The changes in welfare and benefits would impact on local shops and the local economy.
- Some employees were vulnerable to employers who mistreated them/and or dismissed them.

Ruth Hayes expressed concern that the loss of legal aid for employment cases would deter people from pursuing their cases. She would look into the possibility of running group sessions on employment issues with some City law firms for Islington residents

- There was an issue with private landlords evicting their tenants, sometimes without warning or reason.

Ruth Hayes stated that the Law Centre would be producing some advice leaflets for private tenants, arising from an advice session hosted by Jeremy Corbyn, MP, on this same subject

- Some women from ethnic backgrounds who had participated in a survey were unaware of the forthcoming changes to welfare and did not know where to go for advice. A particular problem seemed to be access to and ability to use computers.

It was likely that the problems associated with use of IT would be exacerbated when housing benefit had to be applied for online. Cllr Sidnell acknowledged that community centres/hubs should provide facilities and support to assist people who needed this kind of help.

Councillor Janet Burgess, whose portfolio included library services in the Borough, said that she would liaise with the manager of the Library Service to investigate whether it would be possible to extend IT sessions to two hours for those users who were completing benefit applications.

RESOLVED:

(a) That Ruth Hayes, Lorna Reid and all others who attended and participated in the discussion be thanked for their participation and contributions.

(b) That the fact sheets produced on legal services available be copied to all councillors for information.

The meeting closed at 7.10pm

Chair