



## VALUE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE AGENDA

**6.00 pm**  
(please note time)

**Thursday**  
**22 November 2012**

**Town Hall, Main Road,**  
**Romford**

Members 6: Quorum 3

### COUNCILLORS:

**Conservative Group**  
**( 4 )**

Robby Misir (Chairman)  
Ted Eden  
Billy Taylor  
Damian White

**Residents' Group**  
**( 2 )**

Ray Morgon (Vice-Chair)  
Ron Ower

**For information about the meeting please contact:**

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## **AGENDA ITEMS**

### **1 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Chairman will announce details of the arrangements in case of fire or other events that might require the meeting room or building's evacuation.

### **2 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND ANNOUNCEMENT OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS**

(if any) - receive.

### **3 DISCLOSURE OF PECUNIARY INTERESTS**

Members are invited to disclose any pecuniary interest in any of the items on the agenda at this point of the meeting.

*Members may still disclose any pecuniary interest in an item at any time prior to the consideration of the matter.*

### **4 MINUTES** (Pages 1 - 6)

To approve as a correct record the minutes of the meeting held on 11 October 2012 and authorise the Chairman to sign them.

### **5 PRESENTATION ON PROPERTY MANAGEMENT**

Presentation on Property Management i.e. how the Council keeps a check on owned land to avoid encroachment/illegal use etc.

### **6 PRESENTATION ON CRM SYSTEM**

Flow chart presentation on Customer Relationship Management (CRM) including statistics for Street Care enquiries.

### **7 MONITOR OF CABINET REPORTS**

The Committee is asked to consider taking updates at its next meeting on progress in the following areas where the relevant Cabinet reports are now due for review.

1. Corporate Strategy 2011-2014
2. Localisation of Council Tax Support

**8 HOMES & HOUSING -AGE OF RENT DEBT** (Pages 7 - 10)

Report attached

**9 VOLUNTARY & COMMUNITY SECTOR ORGANISATIONS SUMMARY OF FUNDING - UPDATE** (Pages 11 - 20)

Report attached

**10 URGENT BUSINESS**

To consider any other item in respect of which the Chairman is of the opinion, by reason of special circumstances which shall be specified in the minutes that the item should be considered at the meeting as a matter of urgency.

**Ian Buckmaster  
Committee Administration &  
Member Support Manager**

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**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE  
VALUE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE  
Town Hall, Main Road, Romford  
11 October 2012 (7.30 - 8.55 pm)**

**Present:**

Councillors Robby Misir (Chairman), Ray Morgon (Vice-Chair), Ted Eden and Damian White

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Ron Ower and Billy Taylor.

The Chairman reminded Members of the action to be taken in an emergency.

**11 MINUTES**

The minutes of the meetings of the Committee held on 12 July & 31 July 2012 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the chairman.

**12 PRESENTATION ON THE WORK OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT OMBUDSMAN**

At the request of the Committee, the Manager of Committee and Overview & Scrutiny Support provided an overview of the work of the Local Government Ombudsman.

The Committee was taken through the role of the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) and the various stages before a case gets to be reviewed by the Ombudsman service.

The Committee was informed that the LGO has jurisdiction over the following public services:

- Local authorities
- Greater London Authority
- Police, fire and waste authorities
- School admission and exclusion procedures
- Environment Agency (flood protection issues)

The LGO's role was to investigate complaints of "maladministration that had caused an injustice"

If the Ombudsman's recommendations have found maladministration then the recommendation was that this must be reported to full Council.

As regards housing complaints, even during the period when housing was managed by Homes in Havering, the Council remained responsible in Ombudsman's eyes. Under the Localism Act 2011, housing complaints would transfer to the Housing Ombudsman with effect from April 2013

Under the new procedure, complaints about housing management could **only** be made by:

- An MP
- A Councillor
- A "tenant panel"
- The complainant – but only once internal complaints procedures had been exhausted and at least eight weeks have passed since then.

The Housing Ombudsman's findings were enforceable by a court order

The presentation also detailed the total decisions on complaints about the council between 1 April 2011 and 31 March 2012. The decisions were laid out by service area involvement.

The Committee **noted** the presentation.

### **13      CORPORATE PERFORMANCE REPORT 2011/12 - QUARTER 1**

The Committee considered a report that set out the Council's performance against the Value Living Ambition Goal for Quarter 1 of 2012/13.

Cabinet had directed that all of the Council's Corporate Performance Indicators would be reported to Value Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The report outlined the performance of the Council's Corporate Performance Indicators for the first quarter (April-June 2012) against the five Living Ambition Goals of the Corporate Plan.

Following the abolition of the national performance framework at the end of 2010 and the requirement for local authorities to report on a statutory set of National Indicators, the Council had undertaken a comprehensive review of all indicators and, in consultation with Services, had rationalised the number that would continue to be collected locally.

The list of performance indicators was reviewed again for 2012/13 and the revised list was approved by CMT and Cabinet. The list included 68 Corporate Performance Indicators, 39 of which were measured quarterly and reported to CMT, Cabinet and the Value Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the remaining indicators were collected and reported on an annual or bi-annual basis only.

The report before the Committee identified where the Council was performing well (Green) and not so well (Amber and Red). The variance for the 'RAG' rating was:

- Red = more than 5% off the Quarter Target
- Amber = up to 5% off the Quarter Target
- Green = on or above the Quarter Target

Where performance was more than 5% off the Quarter Target and the RAG rating was 'red', a 'Corrective Action' box had been included in the report. This highlighted what action the Council was taking to address poor performance where appropriate.

Also included for indicators measured quarterly was a Direction of Travel column which compared performance in Quarter 1 2012/13 with performance in Quarter 1 2011/12.

The report detailed that of the 39 indicators measured quarterly, 37 had been given a RAG status in Quarter 1. For one indicator a RAG status was not applicable and for the other indicator the information was not yet available. In summary 26 indicators (70%) were rated as 'green' and 11 indicators (30%) were rated as 'amber' (1 indicator) or 'red' (10 indicators).

The Committee considered the Corporate Performance report for Quarter one. The relevant Head of Service were present and had the opportunity to outline the challenges that has led to their respective services missing their targets.

The Head of Development & Building Control explained that there was a rush of planning applications earlier in the year, seeking to be approved before the Mayor's new Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) came into effect. The performance in the first quarter of this year reflected the fact that the planning service were still catching up with the backlog this had caused.

The Head of Housing & Public Protection outlined that the economic climate had impacted on performance for this indicator. In order to address performance issues, Homes in Havering and now Housing had produced a 52 week projection of arrears and debits to identify previous trends. As well as this, new reports would be developed to give details of potential weaknesses in the way arrears are collected.

The Interim Head of Children & Young People Services informed the Committee that the percentage of placements lasting at least 2 years was a measure of the stability of placements for looked after children. The performance in this area was not considered good enough, particularly in the area of teenagers where foster care placements can tend to break down. A review of this area had been undertaken. This had resulted in increased work to recruit foster carers and also different procedures which offered greater support to the foster care placements when they came under

pressure. This was an area that was being prioritised for improvement within children's services.

The Head of Adult Social Care outlined that these indicators were in relation to hospital discharges. The first indicator was an overall partnership indicator that measured the total number of delayed discharges across the system including in the hospital itself which was still higher than it should be and was not yet showing improvement. The second related to delayed discharges for which Havering was responsible. This was reducing due to work being undertaken within social care and the numbers of delays were lower than last year. The indicator was shown as red despite the reductions because a tougher target has been set indicating Havering's intentions to continue to improve its services in this area. The Council continued to work with health partners and with the other local authorities who were served by BHRUT to improve systems and processes to improve care in the community in order to prevent unnecessary hospital admissions, particularly of older people.

A more stretching target had been set for this indicator than last year in order to continue to increase the amount of self determination and choice for social care clients. The Committee was informed that performance was already higher than last year, but had not yet met the new stretch target.

The Head of Customer Services explained to the Committee that the indicators relating to Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit were recession related. There had been an increase in the numbers of people claiming housing and council tax benefit and needing to be assessed for those benefits because of changes in their circumstances. This increase had put substantial pressure on the staff processing these claims and some additional resources have been brought in to clear a backlog that had developed. Given the upturn in demand/activity it was anticipated that, despite the additional resources, performance would not substantially improve during quarter 2. A review of overall demand was being undertaken as this upturn had knock- on effects on the customer services function while it was continuing to implement the new customer services processes.

Members were informed that a large proportion of Member/MP enquiries and corporate complaints relating to Housing were as a result of the benefit reforms, rather than an enquiry about the service. To address performance, complaint owners would be reminded to respond to enquiries within the required timescales. Additional resources would also be put in place in those services where the number of enquiries had increased.

In general the Committee was assured that improvements would be apparent by next quarter but it was not certain that the services would be on target.

Members requested to receive raw data in respect of the Member Enquiries and Corporate Complaint indicators. They also requested the same of Housing, in respect of the age of the rent debt. They were of the opinion that



this would enable them understood the challenges that led to missed targets by the services.

The Committee noted the report.

#### 14 **HAVERING STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP**

At the request of the Committee, Members received an annual update on the Havering Strategic Partnership. The report outlined the Havering Strategic Partnership (HSP) 7<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference and the outcomes from the event.

The 2012 conference celebrated the work of the partnership over the last ten years and the many successes that had been achieved by working together.

Following the conference, an evaluation was undertaken to determine the value of holding an annual conference. Overall, feedback from partners was extremely positive.

The report informed the Committee that partners were also asked as part of the feedback if there were any topics they would like to see at future Havering Strategic Partnership events. The feedback showed that they would like to see more local business involvement and business related topics, and more workshops on what partner organisations were doing. Ensuring that partnership working was kept as a priority for the borough even after the demise of the Local Area Agreement was also an emerging theme.

The Committee noted the report.

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**Chairman**

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**Havering**  
L O N D O N   B O R O U G H

MEETING	DATE	ITEM
<b>VALUE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE</b>	<b>22 November 2012</b>	<b>8</b>

## **Update to the Committee on Aged Debt Profiling of Arrears Cases over 2 Years**

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## Aged Debt Profile Report – Rent Arrears Cases at 13 November 2012

The table below is a summary of rent arrears cases which have had rent arrears owing more than 2 years. The data is a snapshot of the number of cases broken down into the no. of weeks the account has owed rent with the last action taken when the report was run.

No of Weeks debit owed*	0-10	11-20	21-30	31-40	41-50	51-60	61-70	71-80	81-90	91+	No of cases
No current action to pre notice stage	30	2	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	36
Current Notices	60	23	9	5	6	2	0	1	0	5	111
Court stage	38	22	4	5	1	1	0	0	0	3	74
Court orders	86	72	40	30	19	8	10	12	4	60	341
No of cases	214	119	55	41	26	11	10	13	4	68	562

\*this is the value of rent arrears based on the weekly debit of the individual cases

- Of the 576 cases reported on 23 October, 11 have cleared their arrears and 3 are now voids leaving the current number of 562 cases.
- Profiles – of the 562 cases that have been in arrears over 2 years, 36 are on no current action to pre-notice stages, 111 have current notices against them, 74 cases are at court stage while 341 have court orders against them.
- Specifically relating to the one case which has been in arrears for 91+ weeks at pre-notice stage, this is a vulnerable case where work is being done through an agency. The tenant has an arrangement which is being kept.
- Cases with no current action are generally because the arrears owed are less than 2 weeks debit or they have a repayment arrangement in place.
- Cases remain at the last action they were on regardless of the amount of debt owed and only go back to no status when the account has cleared.
- Cases at court stage are not progressed if (a) there is a repayment arrangement in place (b) the amount owed is less than £150 if only water rate payments or less than 4 weeks full rent.
- Court orders include all cases that have been to court and have orders including warrant suspensions.
- Notices are served when an account is £50 in arrears if water rate payments or 4 weeks full rent. Where there is an arrangement in place, these are re-served to protect the Council's interest as notices expire after one year.

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# VALUE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

22 November 2012

## REPORT

**Subject Heading:**

Summary of funding awarded to voluntary and community sector organisations during 2010/11 and 2011/12

**CMT Lead:**

Cynthia Griffin, Group Director, Culture & Community

**Report Author and contact details:**

Claire Thompson, Corporate Policy and Community Manager,  
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01708 431003

**Policy context:**

The Council commissions services from the voluntary sector to deliver a wide range of services in the community on its behalf.

<b>SUMMARY</b>
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This report provides Members with an overview of the grants and contracts in place with voluntary and community sector (VCS) organisations over the last two financial years.

In 2011/12, the total value of grants and contracts awarded by council to the VCS was £7.16m, and in 2010/11 it was £7.75m. Some of this funding comes from the Council's budget, and some from external grants it receives, such as the LAA performance Reward Grant, which funds the Community Chest grassroots grants programme. Despite the reductions in government funding, the Council has largely cushioned the voluntary sector from the impact of these cuts, with funding remaining fairly constant between 2010/11 and 2011/12 - reflecting the important role these services play in the community.

The Council adopts a mixed grants and commissioning approach, depending on the nature of the service and size of the grant, and aims to get maximum value for money out of all of its investments into the sector.

The Council is developing a community engagement strategy, which will set out a new relationship between the council and the community, and a commitment to working closely with the voluntary and community sector in Havering in delivering services for local people and improving the quality of life in Havering.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

This report is for noting only.

## **REPORT DETAIL**

### **1. BACKGROUND**

- 1.1 Members requested an overview of the funding allocated to the voluntary and community sector by the Council.
- 1.2 This report sets out the total amount of funding allocated between 2010 and 2012.

### **2. PREVIOUS SCRUTINY REVIEWS**

- 2.1 In 2004 a comprehensive review of the voluntary sector was carried out by the Culture and Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee, and a report produced for Cabinet in March 2005.
- 2.2 In 2010/11, the Partnerships Overview and Scrutiny Committee undertook an investigation around the Council's relationship with the voluntary sector, and at its meeting in March 2011 heard presentations from council officers on the council's strategic approach to grants, its commissioning approach in Adult and Childrens services, and presentations from HAVCO as the main infrastructure body for the sector in Havering and from Crossroads, an organisation in receipt of council funding for the services it provides to carers.
- 2.3 In October 2011, the Value Overview and Scrutiny Committee were presented with an overview of the grants and commissioned contracts that the council had in place during 2011/12. At this time, the review was incomplete and Members were asked to note that work was continuing to map total spend across the Council. This work has now been completed and this report provides Members of a complete picture for 2010/11 and 2011/12.



### 3. THE GRANTS AND COMMISSIONING PROCESS

- 3.1 Each year, the Council will provide funding to the voluntary and community sector to deliver services on its behalf, and is committed to investing in the local sector to support the statutory services, such as social care, which the Council provides.
- 3.2 This is done through either a grant or through a contractual arrangement. A grant is an arrangement for smaller sums of money, for specific purposes. Funding allocated to organisations for the delivery of services through the commissioning process is usually for larger sums, with specific conditions and performance management arrangement in place. The commissioning process also usually follows a formal competitive tendering process (depending on the value of the contract).
- 3.3 The Council adopts a mixed approach to grants and commissioning, depending on the nature of the service and the amount of funding available.
- 3.4 The table below shows the different ways that the Council invests in the voluntary and community sector, through small grants, and commissioning/contractual approaches.

<b>Approach</b>	<b>Grants</b>	<b>Mixture of grants and commissioning</b>	<b>Commissioned Services</b>
<b>Guide amount</b>	Usually below £10,000	£500 - £150,000*	Usually over £60,000 per annum
<b>Characteristics</b>	<p>Open bidding against specified priorities</p> <p>Voluntary sector specific</p> <p>Often one-off projects</p> <p>Broader definition of outcomes, but clear links to Living Ambition Goals</p>	<p>Open bidding against specified priorities</p> <p>Voluntary sector specific</p> <p>Strategically important activity</p> <p>Sometimes used to strengthen a weak market</p> <p>Used for testing new concepts / models of service delivery</p> <p>Broader outcomes</p>	<p>Contestable market</p> <p>Non-voluntary sector specific</p> <p>Defined outcomes</p> <p>Service specification based on needs analysis</p> <p>Statutory or required services</p> <p>Full cost recovery</p>
<b>Processes</b>	All grants must be advertised, with an open application process for eligible groups to apply,	Funding agreement against specified priorities with a SLA	<p>Pre-Qualification Questionnaire</p> <p>Tender</p>

	against set criteria  Carry out checks of health of the organisation and eligibility  Panel selection  Evaluate delivery	Appropriate monitoring to track performance	Contract  Regular performance management  Exit strategy
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\*Awards over £60,000 will be considered on a case-by-case basis in relation to EU procurement legislation

#### **4. TOTAL INVESTMENT IN THE VOLUNTARY AND COMMUNITY SECTOR**

- 4.1 The review on grants has now been concluded. In 2011/12, Havering Council awarded a total of £7.16m of funding to the voluntary and community sector, investing as grants and commissioned services.
- 4.2 In the previous year, 2010/11, the Council awarded a total of £7.75m of funding to the voluntary and community sector, as grants and commissioned services.
- 4.3 Some of this funding came from the Council's mainstream budget, and some from external grants it receives, such as the one-off LAA performance Reward Grant, which funds the Community Chest grassroots grants programme.
- 4.4 The largest proportion of investment into the voluntary and community sector is in the form of commissioned services, mainly in Childrens' and Adults' social care services. Across the Council, there are also some smaller grant pots for funding specific community activity that are commissioned on a yearly or twice-yearly cycle, including the Havering Strategic Partnership Community Chest small grants fund, which awards grants to small community groups to fund a range of important community facilities, services and activities.
- 4.5 These grant pots are advertised widely to all eligible voluntary and community sector organisations, both through universal methods such as the Council's website and Living magazine. The council also advertises grant opportunities through the HAVCO newsletter which goes out to all its member organisations.

#### **5. CORPORATE FUNDING CRITERIA FOR GRANTS**

- 5.1 When making decisions on allocating funding to the voluntary and community sector through grants, there are a number of core principles the Council will follow. It will always:
- Be transparent
  - Look to gain maximum value for our investment

- Ensure that funding allocations align with the Living Ambition priorities as set out in the Corporate Plan 2011-14.
  - Comply with the principles of the Havering COMPACT agreement and Codes of Practice (see Appendix A for more detail)
  - Where possible, and in line with EU procurement regulations, the Council will always try to support the local Havering voluntary sector when making grants and commissioning investment decisions
- 5.2 In times of significantly limited resources, the Council is keen to support services run by consortia of voluntary organisations working together to share back office costs and enabling similar services to be delivered collectively. For example, Care Point, the Council's new information and advice service, commissioned as a single service but run by a consortia of voluntary organisations, provides early help and advice to the public on matters relating to health and wellbeing.
- 5.3 With the exception of commissioned services in health and social care, in general, the Council will not fund organisations who:
- Are not based in the borough of Havering
  - Are based in Havering **but do not** serve local residents
  - No evidence of community need
  - Are not properly constituted
  - Do not have policies and procedures in place covering Health and Safety, child protection, adults safeguarding or equal opportunities, where relevant to their organisation and the people they work with.
  - Do not demonstrate clear financial procedures and are not willing to share information on their accounts with the Council

## **6. IMPACT OF THE RECESSION**

- 6.1 The Council has, to a large extent, cushioned the impact of its funding cuts on Havering's voluntary sector, despite a 20% reduction in its funding between 2010 and 2014. However, it is even more paramount that the Council receives the best possible value for money for the Havering taxpayer out of the grants and contracts it makes, and this has been a priority in adults and social care commissioning in particular.
- 6.2 One of the recommendations in the 2005 Review of the Voluntary Sector was to offer more longer-term funding agreements over a period of say 3 years, to give voluntary organisations the certainty that their funding is in place and in turn improves the stability of the services they are able to offer.
- 6.3 Since then, however, the economic climate has changed dramatically, with the Council likely to experience further savings requirements in future years, as part of the national policy to reduce the deficit. Therefore, it will not always be possible to commit to making long term investments when the Council's own funding is itself subject to uncertainty. The council is also currently unable to provide inflationary increases on grants that it provides over concurrent years.

- 6.4 Regardless of the duration of the funding agreement however, there will still be the provision for the council to ensure that it is receiving good value for money from these investments, with the option to terminate funding arrangements if these conditions are not being met.

## **7. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY**

- 7.1 The Council is developing a community engagement strategy, which will set out a new relationship between the council and the community, and a commitment to working closely with the voluntary and community sector in Havering in delivering services for local people and improving the quality of life in Havering.
- 7.2 It is anticipated that this strategy will go out for consultation in December and will be ratified by Cabinet in March.

### **IMPLICATIONS AND RISKS**

#### **Financial implications and risks:**

As this is a report for noting only, there are no direct financial implications.

The figures quoted within this report are as provided by the respective service areas, and are funded via various budget streams.

#### **Legal implications and risks:**

As this is a report for noting only, there are no direct legal implications.

#### **Human Resources implications and risks:**

There are no HR implications arising as a result of this report.

#### **Equalities implications and risks:**

The majority of voluntary sector grants and commissioning arrangements made are from social care and learning, for services targeted at some of Havering's most vulnerable residents. These services provide vital support to the community.

All grant programmes run by the Council, such as the Community Chest pot, require applicants to demonstrate how projects or services promote equality and reduce inequality. The existence of small grant pots will continue to be advertised as widely/accessibly as possible.

All contracts in place through the commissioning process are required to comply with the council's equality policies and are expected to comply with the Public Sector Equality Duty.

<b>BACKGROUND PAPERS</b>
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Cabinet Report "Havering Voluntary Sector Review" 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2005.

## APPENDIX A: THE COMPACT

The COMPACT is an agreement with all spheres of Government and the voluntary sector on how to work better together. It contains a number of 'Codes of best practice' around funding processes, consultation, enforceable rights, and an overall improvement in working relationships.

In September 2011, the Department for Communities and Local Government published 'Best Value Statutory Guidance', which set out the Government's commitment to the national COMPACT and urged local authorities to maintain and uphold their COMPACT agreements locally.

Havering adopted its first COMPACT in July 2003, and over the years that followed, the Council has worked with the Compact Steering Group, led by the Voluntary sector, to develop our local codes of practice. This was re-freshed in 2010, following a review of the Compact.

### The 2010 Compact Commitments

#### Commitments by all partners

Together we will;

- Work together to meet the needs of the people of Havering and implement the Havering Sustainable Community Strategy 2008-2013 (the "*Living Ambition*")
- Respect the principles and other aspects of the Compact
- Participate in reviews of the Compact
- Participate as equals in building the capacity of the Compact, recognising the contribution of all partners
- Have a commitment to openness and the sharing of information.
- Work in partnership to ensure that all consultation is inclusive and reflects the breadth of experience within the borough
- Consider and decide, jointly with other partners, how existing partnerships can implement the Compact
- Use the terms of reference of the Compact to help assess new policies and plans for their impact on the partners
- Ensure that policies and practices in relation to the partners and their users promote equality and social inclusion

#### Commitments by Public Bodies

We will;

- Recognise the right of the Voluntary and Community Sector bodies to manage their own affairs within the law and pursue their aims independently, including a right to campaign on issues
- Allocate resources to the Voluntary and Community Sector in Havering fairly, in line with clearly stated objectives and priorities and to principles of equality, efficiency, effectiveness, best value, fairness, sustainability and accountability
- Ensure that the Compact is adopted by all the public bodies at all levels and to designate a named point of contact Compact for Havering Document
- Promote a strong and effective infrastructure for the Voluntary and Community Sector in Havering

- Involve the Voluntary and Community Sector where appropriate in the process of developing and monitoring public policies, strategies and priorities and to ensure that consultation processes with the sector are timely, transparent and inclusive
- Create an environment for a thriving third sector/Voluntary and Community Sector
- Allow genuine and early involvement in decision making and treat the Voluntary and Community Sector as an equal partner

### **Commitments by Voluntary and Community Sector**

We will;

- Recognise the breadth of obligations of public bodies and their right to manage their own affairs
- Represent the views of users and other stakeholders to public bodies
- Ensure that the Compact is discussed and endorsed by the appropriate management bodies of each organisation or group
- Ensure that the principles of the Compact underpin working relationships with the partners

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