

Introduction

HOUNSLOW'S THRIVING COMMUNITIES STRATEGY

DRAFT FOR CONSULTATION

Please send us your feedback by visiting: www.hounslow.gov.uk

This is a draft strategy for people to talk about and share their ideas

- It sets out the council's plans for working with our residents to develop thriving communities across the borough, supported by a strong voluntary and community sector.
- It has been written by the council's Community Partnerships Unit.
- We want to know what you think about these plans.
- Please read through this document and then give us your feedback on the separate survey document.

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Introduction

Introduction by Cllr Katherine Dunne Lead Member for Communities & Workforce

Hounslow's Thriving Communities Strategy (2019 – 2023) is an ambitious programme which sets out how the council will work in partnership with our residents, Hounslow's voluntary and community sector, other public bodies and businesses to deliver positive and lasting benefits for the many different communities across the borough.

Only by working together can we continue to improve our approach to collaborative working and deliver what the community and the voluntary and community sector (VCS) are telling us they need.

In 2015 we launched our *Thriving Communities and VCSE Sector Strategy (2015 – 2019)*. This presented our key priority of building stronger local communities in which the voluntary and community organisations in Hounslow play a leading role. This strategy was the first of its kind for Hounslow and one of the few examples of an integrated strategy being adopted by a local authority in England as a way of supporting stronger communities and creating a more effective voluntary and community sector. After four years we have come a long way in achieving this goal and this new strategy will build on the successful outcomes of our work over the last four years.

But these are challenging times. We face austerity in public sector funding, increased demand on council services and increased competition for our resources. The financial climate for all public sector organisations has been, and will continue to be, harsh for the foreseeable future. Hounslow Council has had to make £92 million in savings over the last 4 years and needs to find further savings of £29 million by 2021. This unprecedented level of cuts has forced us to review the way we provide services and support residents and this new strategy aims to address the challenges faced by individuals, communities and VCS service providers in the 2019 - 2023 period.

What is a thriving community?

Communities are defined by the bonds that they share, and Hounslow's residents share many common bonds. From interests and hobbies to faith and culture, we come together with friends, family and neighbours to join in celebrations, learn from and support one another and voice our concerns.

As tends to be the case across London, we know that Hounslow's residents identify more strongly with their immediate local area than they do with the borough as a whole. We are lucky that Hounslow's residents are supported by a strong voluntary sector, and that community groups across the borough take a lead on bringing residents together, whether for activities and events, or with the aim of shaping their local area.

Residents that participate in their community and are engaged in local activities have a greater sense of belonging and build stronger relationships and social connections with their neighbours. They are less isolated, and more integrated into their community, they look out for others and know where they or those around them can go for help, should they need to do so.

If a thriving community is one in which residents have influence, which makes the best use of its assets, where people get on well together and are supported by a responsive and effective voluntary and community sector, then Hounslow already has the right foundations in place.

What do we want to achieve?

We have identified four key outcomes for this updated strategy which will guide how the council connects communities and the voluntary and community sector (VCS) with the resources to develop and respond to the needs of everyone that lives in our borough. It will also help us to shape how we will fund and commission the VCS sector to provide services.

- 1. There is an active and sustainable voluntary and community sector in Hounslow that meets the needs of our residents.**
- 2. All residents and communities can play a role in shaping the place they live and the services they receive.**
- 3. Our residents have the opportunity to lead independent, healthy lives with the skills, confidence and resources to support each other.**
- 4. Hounslow is a borough where all communities get on well together, people know their neighbours and they feel safe**

But reductions in local government funding mean voluntary groups are under increased pressure, both to fill gaps in local provision where services have been cut, and with more demand for existing services. The council is making tough decisions and needs to involve a wide range of residents if it is to understand their true impact. Demand for volunteers is high, and residents need to know how they can get involved. Community groups need spaces to meet and operate from, and we all need to be aware of and responsive to the tensions that may arise when groups feel they are competing for limited resources.

What is a thriving community?

For Hounslow's communities to really thrive, all of us, from residents and community and voluntary groups to the council and local businesses, need to play our part. We have identified what we think are the building blocks of a thriving community and through this strategy we invite you to work with us to develop them over the next four years.



“If you’ve got all of those, you’ve got a thriving community because you’ve got people working together, communicating, getting the information they want, getting the right information honestly presented and having the services that meet their needs.”¹

¹ M.e.I community workshop – October 2018

Effective social action and volunteering

• Effective social action and volunteering

In a thriving community there will be a wide range of opportunities for people to make a difference in the area where they live, study or work through volunteering or social action. Volunteers will be valued and their contribution recognised.

People choose to volunteer for a variety of reasons; a chance to give something back to their community or an opportunity to develop new skills or meet new people. Volunteering is beneficial for health and wellbeing. It reduces isolation, can improve an individual's confidence and self-esteem and fosters a sense of pride in the community.

People across the borough make a difference every day to the places they live in or the causes they believe in. This bank of skills, energy and commitment is a valuable resource for the borough and we need to make the best use of it by supporting people to come together through charities, community groups or just groups of neighbours with a common interest.

“The council could do a better job at recognising volunteers”²

You have told us

- Many residents have some spare time to give to their community but are not sure how best to use it or how to go about finding opportunities to volunteer.
- Residents who do give up their time to volunteer often feel under-valued and feel that their efforts are not being properly recognised. This is particularly true of residents who volunteer informally, for example by helping their local tenant's and residents' groups or giving a few hours to a local community group.
- Our latest Residents Survey indicates that only 14%³ of residents in Hounslow have said that they take part in some sort of volunteering activity, which is lower than the national average of 19%. But our experience of working with local communities is that many people who give up time for their community do not consider that it is *real* volunteering – such as people who help in their place of worship, or at their children's school or at events on their estate. Consequently, we believe that the rate of volunteering in the borough is actually much higher than that formally reported.
- Many community organisations struggle to find people to volunteer as trustees or to provide specialist support or advice - such as people skilled in finance, business planning and IT.

What we will do

- Better promote and celebrate the huge impact that volunteers make across the borough.
- Encourage and widely promote more good quality volunteering opportunities across a range of roles and sectors.
- Work with volunteers and the voluntary sector to commission a volunteering support service which best meets their needs.
- Support people who experience the greatest barriers to volunteering such as people with long-term health conditions or disabilities and those with low levels of English and explore ways of engaging residents who are currently less likely to volunteer.

² M.e.I community workshop – October 2018

³ This is the figure from the 2016 Resident's Survey. The figure from the 2018 Resident's Survey will be added to the final document.

Effective social action and volunteering

- Support local groups, especially smaller organisations, to raise the profile of their volunteering opportunities and put in place systems to manage and support volunteers.
- Work with other stakeholders to expand and promote reward schemes for those who volunteer, such as the Hounslow *ValueYou* scheme.
- Develop a council volunteering policy, encouraging and supporting the 2,400 council staff to take part in some sort of volunteering in the borough.
- Work with the private sector on how they can best support local community action and the work of the VCS sector including through skilled volunteering and employee supported volunteering schemes.
- Support more youth social action, allowing young people to shape the areas they live in and build their leadership skills.
- Our Public Health Team will continue to encourage students at West Thames College to volunteer to arrange for relationships and sex education sessions which are facilitated by the young people's sexual health advisor.
- Help more volunteers to support the delivery of our Over 60 activity programme with its focus on community led activities for older people.
- Continue to support and promote the many exciting volunteering opportunities that are available in Hounslow's unique Arts & Culture venues, such as Gunnersbury Park and Museum, Feltham Arts, Hogarth House and Waterman's Arts Centre.
- We will continue to promote Community Roadwatch, an initiative to improve road safety by reducing speed on local roads. Volunteers work in partnership with the police and use speed detection equipment to identify speeding motorists.

So that by 2023

- It is easier for people to volunteer and get involved in social action in a way that works best for them.
- We provide better support for our volunteers and they feel that we recognise the vital work that they carry out across the borough.
- More organisations are able to offer good quality volunteering opportunities.
- A wider range of people in Hounslow volunteer in their community.

The benefits of volunteering; Marilyn's story...

Marilyn volunteers with Hounslow Heath Green Gym most weeks. Hounslow Heath Green Gym volunteers take part in activities that combine conservation and gentle fitness, such as planting trees, sowing meadows and scything scrubland.

"I retired fairly recently. I missed the social interaction and needed to get out and about a bit more. I thought about volunteering, checked the Volunteering Hounslow website and found Green Gym. The hours suited and there was no experience needed. Fortunately I loved it! For me it ticks lots of boxes: I've made friends with people who are diverse, young, old, all walks of life, and it's out in the open so it's healthy, and it can be as strenuous or non-strenuous as you make it. I've done things I never thought I'd do, such as learning to scythe. My favourite thing about volunteering is meeting people every week and maintaining relationships. There's also that feeling of doing something for the community, seeing an immediate result, giving something back and feeling proud of it – you have a vested interest. Volunteering like this gets you out from your home and comfort zone. And you learn stuff – 30 years behind a desk, I never thought I'd look forward to wheelbarrowing!"

Strong and sustainable community groups

• Strong and sustainable community groups

A thriving community is one in which community and organisations in the voluntary and community sector are valued by all and have access to the support they need to flourish.

There are well over 600 voluntary and community organisations active in the borough of Hounslow ranging from medium sized charities to much smaller Friends Groups, sports clubs, residents' associations and informal community groups.

Most are small or micro charities, most with turnovers of less than £150,000 and many are run solely by volunteers. They operate very differently to larger, more formal charities, but they all play a vital role in shaping the borough and meeting the needs of our communities.

These grassroots organisations have built strong relationships with residents and developed a clear understanding of the needs of our different communities. They are often trusted by those who find it more difficult to access public sector services and are well placed to identify issues and needs at an early stage, preventing problems from escalating to the point where more expensive statutory support is needed. We recognise that maintaining a strong and collaborative relationship with the voluntary sector will help us achieve much more for residents.

We currently support voluntary and community organisations through contracts, grants, reduced rents on council owned community buildings, providing shared office space and two commissioned support services - Volunteering Hounslow and the Hounslow Voluntary Sector Support Service. We appreciate the challenges faced by the sector and while our ability to support groups through grant funding is limited we can use cross-council resources more strategically to more effectively support to the sector.

“We want to develop a self-sustaining model rather than relying on grant funding.”⁴

You have told us

- Demand for services from the voluntary and community sector is increasing year on year, often because of reductions in public services.
- Recruiting staff and volunteers with the right skills and within available resources can often be a challenge.
- Accessing grant funding, especially for core costs, is very difficult with many external funders focusing entirely on new or innovative projects.
- Given the day to day pressures to deliver services and source funding, smaller charities often struggle to make time for longer term business and strategic planning and are less prepared for future challenges or potential opportunities.
- Smaller groups have been less successful in managing the transition from grants to contracts, often due to the wide scope of many contracts, bid requirements, tight timescales or payment by results models.
- While requirements around social value present many opportunities for the VCS sector many do not have the systems in place to adequately measure or demonstrate their impact.
- The council needs to be better at informing the VCS sector on changes or issues that may have an impact on it or its service users and provide meaningful opportunities to respond or shape the development of policy.
- We will support and encourage resident-led groups as well as small charities and voluntary groups to access available support services

⁴ Annual VCSE Survey 2018

Strong and sustainable community groups

- The council should make more use of the valuable knowledge that grassroots organisations can provide about the local community.

“If a resident has a problem, they usually go to the council first. A council that really believes in a thriving community should give that resident their local association or community group contact, as well as trying to deal with it.”⁵

Raising awareness of the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS)

One of the messages that we have taken from the research and consultation exercise is the need to better publicise the services provided by the VCS sector. Therefore we will promote the sector and its unique contribution to the life of Hounslow’s residents by raising its profile amongst residents, funders, commissioners and potential referral partners and help VCS groups to better promote and market its services.

Here's how we will do it:

- Increase the circulation of the council’s fortnightly newsletter, *Evolve*, which is the most up-to-date guide to the activities week by week of Hounslow’s voluntary and community organisations
- Continue to develop our new online Community Information Guide, which provides groups with an accessible online platform to promote their services.
- Promotional campaigns and sharing information via the Council’s website, social media platforms and the magazine *Hounslow Matters*.

⁵ M.e.I community workshop – October 2018

Strong and sustainable community groups

What we will do

- Engage with and support small local community organisations and local residents' groups as well as larger charities and commissioned services, so that we better understand the needs of the whole VCS and the communities they serve.
- Facilitate greater networking between VCS organisations including opportunities for collaboration on funding bids, service design and delivery and sharing experiences.
- Continue our work with organisations such as Hounslow Community Network, the tenants and residents' forums and Hounslow Friends of Faith and support the development of a new Young Hounslow Foundation.
- Review existing partnership boards and other formal structures (such as the VCSE Partnership) to help build stronger cross-sector relationships and a greater understanding of the respective issues and challenges that they face.
- Raise the profile of the *Hounslow Compact* to ensure there is awareness of and buy-in to the commitments within it.
- Work with the sector to commission and monitor a local infrastructure support structure that best meets its future needs.
- Continue to recognise the place for grant funding alongside contracts and maintain a grant funding pot to support local service delivery and community activity
- Provide clear and accessible information on grant opportunities, ensuring that sufficient time is given for developing bids and that application and monitoring processes are transparent and proportionate
- Support local groups to bid for external funding and widen their income streams.
- Continue to build our relationships with local, regional and national funders, ensuring they are aware of the needs of the VCS in Hounslow.
- Support more VCS organisations to bid for contracts by
 - Raising awareness of the Council's Annual Procurement Plan, ensuring VCS groups have timely information on commissioning opportunities
 - Ensuring that our requirements are proportionate and that we provide clear guidance and training on our process and how to bid
 - Support the development of consortia bids where these are appropriate and there is interest from the VCS sector.
 - Introduce VCS groups to the prime or lead bidder in larger contracts where appropriate
- Ensure that we account for social value in contracts in ways that will deliver the greatest opportunities for residents and help meet the strategic aims of cross council services.
- All council let contracts require the successful provider to offer the London Living Wage, supporting the greater financial resilience of local employees.
- Strengthen partnership working with the VCS sector to raise awareness of and prevent abuse of vulnerable adults including through the Adult Safeguarding Board.
- Continue to communicate with residents, communities and the VCS sector the council's priorities around tackling Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) and encourage schools, residents, faith and local community groups to deliver activities aimed at raising awareness on VAWG.
- Social Workers are based in the community, alongside voluntary sector partners, engaging with residents at an early stage, linking them into a range of support services.
- Continue to develop the Friends of Parks groups to involve local volunteers in the management of their local green spaces and work with the VCS sector on programmes including Health Walks to increase residents' use of outdoor space.
- The Housing Management Service Housing Officers will continue to support residents to either set up resident associations or to get involved with existing associations.

Strong and sustainable community groups

A voice for the community

Hounslow Community Network (HCN) provides a collective voice for the voluntary and community groups in the borough. In five years HCN has grown from 90 to over 350 members and is continuing to expand. They hold regular general meetings and consider issues affecting the local voluntary and community sector with representatives from key services in the borough such as the council, NHS and Police.

The council works closely with HCN and has a very productive relationship with them.

This partnership is bringing many benefits for the community groups in the borough and we would encourage any local community group, no matter how big or small, to join them.

Joining is very simple and free of charge.

Their website is: www.hounslowhub.org.uk

So that by 2023

- Voluntary and community organisations receive the support, training and advice that they need to continue to deliver important services for residents, helping to reduce the demand for more expensive statutory services.
- Groups and organisations in the VCS have a better understanding of the strategic priorities of the council and how they can play a role in helping us to meet them.
- There is more external funding coming into the borough and VCS groups have successfully widened their income streams.
- The council has a better understanding of the different types of voluntary and community groups in the borough - from resident groups to religious groups and from small independent charities to national and international organisations - and that because we understand the diversity of the sector, we understand what issues will be relevant for which groups.
- The council uses a proportionate and simple commissioning and procurement process, including grants where appropriate.
- Voluntary and community sector services are helping people to live more independent and healthier lives by giving them greater choice and control over their care and support options, maximising their social support systems and strengthening support in the community.

Our survey said...

Every year the council's Community Partnerships Unit carries out a survey of the voluntary and community groups in the borough. The response rate is around 20%, which is relatively high for a survey of this kind and shows the willingness of the VCS groups to engage with us and to develop a stronger partnership with the council.

We use the findings to shape our work supporting the sector and use long-term trends to inform the development of this strategy.

Here are some key observations:

- Over 75% of VCS groups in the borough have seen increased demand for their services from 2014 - 2018 caused by:
 - Welfare reform and changes to benefits, particularly Universal Credit.
 - Local government cuts caused by central government funding reductions.
 - Increased poverty and cuts in support services.
 - A greater need for services as the level of deprivation increases.
- A key finding is the willingness of community groups to work more closely together, to form new networks and to look for more support from local businesses.
- Inevitably the greatest challenge to the organisations in the sector, particularly the smaller ones, is being able to survive in the current harsh financial climate.

A strong and influential community voice

• A strong and influential community voice

A thriving community is one where everyone has the opportunity to have their say in local issues and influence the decisions that affect them.

Our approach to community engagement is about making sure that people can take an active part in influencing decision-making and service delivery.

We aim to be responsive to the needs of the community and recognise that residents are best placed to tell us what they need.

If we want people to have a greater say in what goes on in their communities, we need to make it worth their while to get involved.

“The best ideas always come from service users.”⁶

You have told us

- Communication on decisions being taken is not good, meaning that residents are often not aware of opportunities to influence decisions, or when and why decisions are taken.
- The council often only involves residents once a decision has been made, we need to be willing to relinquish some control early on in the process, when there is an opportunity for meaningful involvement.
- The council needs to be out and about more at a grass roots level so they have a real understanding of local issues.
- While some council departments are very good at consultation, this is not the case across the board. There needs to be a consistent approach.
- More work needs to be done on ensuring affected residents are aware of consultations, by promoting them more widely and ensuring that their feedback is properly considered.
- Some residents see lobbying their local Councillors as an effective way to get their views across, though many feel there should be more face-to-face interaction between Councillors and their local communities. Only x⁷ of residents could name one or more of their local Councillors in the latest Residents' Survey.
- Residents find the Area Forums and other council meetings difficult to engage in. The processes and systems are difficult to understand and the language and tone of events not welcoming.
- Awareness of the Area Forums is low. Those residents that are aware of them feel they are too tightly controlled and that the focus of them needs to be shifted to emphasise contributions from residents and allowing their voices to be heard.
- The existence of forums at which residents and community groups can air their views is welcome, but there is a need to consider what could be done to increase how representative and how influential these are (see below)
- Residents and organisations feel that they are surveyed or asked for their opinions too often but they are not really being 'heard'
- There are very few resident's groups in some areas of the borough, and the council should be doing more to support residents to work together to influence their communities and the decisions that affect them.

⁶ M.e.I community workshop – October 2018

⁷ This figure, from the 2018 Resident's Survey, will be added to the final document

A strong and influential community voice

- Innovation in the way the council engages with the community is impossible if residents do not first feel valued and listened to. We have to get the basics right first.
- The council hears from the same people that are easy to reach out to. Although it is useful to talk to these groups, we need to make the effort to reach audiences that do not regularly participate, by going to them rather than expecting them to come to us.

What we will do

- Work with key teams to develop a new approach to communicating on both upcoming decisions and decisions that have already been made.
- The Housing Management Service will continue to engage with residents' forums to ensure they are kept informed of any service developments and to listen and respond to any issues that are of concern to them.
- Continue to work with teams across the council to encourage better consultation and engagement, including better targeting of consultations at affected parties.
- Bring together relevant council teams, residents and community groups to explore ways of improving the transparency and openness of all council meetings.
- Encourage residents who contact us regarding transport issues to discuss and develop proposals with their neighbours. This helps build community consensus around potential solutions and, where appropriate, we support residents' groups to build on this "single-issue" relationship to form longer-term residents' associations with a wider focus on improving other aspects of their neighbourhoods.
- Develop a programme of work with ward Councillors to understand their current engagement with their local communities and how this could be strengthened.
- Look at ways of making the Area Forums more inclusive where residents and community groups have more of an opportunity to have their views heard and improve the way we publicise and promote the various Forums that exist for residents to express their views.
- Explain the format of council meetings so that residents have a better idea of the processes that we use.
- Widely promote the benefits of meaningful engagement, showcasing occasions where engagement has influenced the final outcome helping to create an organisation-wide culture in which the benefits of resident involvement are widely recognised.
- We will ensure that the community engagement being carried out by different teams across the council is joined up, reducing duplication.
- Work with service areas of the council to raise awareness of the broad range of voluntary, community and resident groups present in the borough, and encourage them to think about which groups should be involved in which decisions.
- We will continue to include young mothers on the Board of the Family Nurse Partnership, sharing their insights and being involved in the recruitment of new nurses.
- Map engagement blackspots, where there are not established voluntary and community groups, and consider how we better reach residents in these areas.
- We support a volunteer estate inspection scheme where residents are encouraged to carry out estate inspections and become more involved with the development of our services.
- The council's Education & Early Intervention Team is building an understanding of local democracy and decision-making processes amongst young people by working with schools and the Youth Parliament.
- Continue to ensure that young people are well engaged with the sexual health outreach service and are actively involved in the development of targeted campaigns and promotional material for sexual health services.

A strong and influential community voice

So that by 2023

- We have improved our communications across the borough throughout the decision-making cycle, informing all stakeholders of the available opportunities to influence upcoming decisions and increasing awareness of decisions that have been made and why.
- Residents see council meetings as more welcoming and transparent, where the language being used is easy to understand and, where possible, where the processes are clearly explained.
- The council asks once and listens – and is moving away from asking residents the same questions repeatedly.
- A consistently-good approach to consultations is embedded across the council.
- Opportunities exist for all types of resident and community groups to influence decisions, services and their local area - whether they represent private or social housing residents or a specific characteristic or interest
- The council is thinking more creatively when it comes to community engagement; with a better understanding of who we need to reach and what is the best way of engaging with them.

Forums

One of the ways in which the Council engages with residents is through a range of Forums. Some forums are open for any resident to attend, while others are aimed at specific groups, such as disabled residents or residents living in Sheltered Accommodation.

Forum name	Who can attend?
Area Forums	Any resident of the area covered by a specific forum
Disability Community Forum	Hounslow residents with disabilities
Hounslow Housing Disability Group	Elderly and disabled Hounslow Housing tenants
Hounslow Housing Leaseholders Forum	Any Hounslow Housing leaseholder
Hounslow Housing Tenants Forum	Any Hounslow Housing tenant
Resident Associations Forum	Chaired by Lead Member for Citizen Engagement, any resident association or community group can send up to two representatives.
Sheltered Accommodation Residents Association	Hounslow Housing Sheltered Accommodation schemes each elect up to three representatives to the Forum.

Feltham students leading a new way of engagement

6th Form students from Rivers Academy West London have worked with the council on an engagement project relating to the regeneration of Feltham High Street. The students conducted primary research with residents in Feltham to find out what they would like to see from the regeneration. This has given the students direct involvement in the future of their community.

This project and the partnerships it has created can be seen as a model of how a school, the council, local residents and the local business community can work together to use the views of local people to improve local neighbourhoods.

Good quality community facilities and spaces

• Good quality community facilities and spaces

We are fortunate to be a borough rich with parks and open spaces, with council owned community buildings dotted across the borough, and many other local spaces managed by community organisations, sports groups or faith communities. However, across Hounslow too many community spaces are not utilised to their full potential and there is scope to make greater use of our schools, libraries, leisure centres, parks and other public buildings to deliver more accessible services to residents.

As the demand grows for more community-based services, the need for accessible, affordable and good quality spaces becomes more important. There is a risk that without an agreed strategic approach to our community assets we will not maximise the benefit of community buildings and open spaces that could be used to deliver vital community services, improve wellbeing and build community cohesion.

You have told us

- Many of the community spaces in the borough need substantial investment but it is difficult for voluntary sector management groups to access grant funding or other support due to existing lease lengths and conditions.
- It is difficult to access reliable up-to-date information on what buildings and spaces are available for community use and you sometimes find it difficult to access them.
- Difficulty in accessing affordable and suitable spaces prevents organisations from delivering services in areas where they may be most needed or scaling up service provision to meet demand. Raising income is seen to be prioritised over the wider social, community and wellbeing benefits of services provided.
- Many groups would like more support and guidance on managing community spaces and meeting all legal requirements.

What we will do

- Work with residents and community groups to ensure we have a better understanding of what they need from community spaces in different parts of the borough
- Build a comprehensive guide of available community spaces across the borough and how to hire them through our new Community Information Guide
- Work with colleagues in Corporate Property and other relevant service areas (housing, libraries, parks, education) to develop a Community Assets Strategy to include an agreed approach to Community Asset Transfer.
- Consider how lease arrangements, disposal of underutilised assets or asset transfer could help to leverage significant external funding to improve and maintain assets for community benefit in the long-term
- Provide transparent information about all council buildings available for lease including how to express an interest; the leases terms and condition, and how rent levels are determined.
- Consider the feasibility of developing a network of Community Hubs across borough which will help support outcomes around health, wellbeing and personal development, skills and employability
- Support co-located working including CAN Mezzanine, our current shared office space for the sector, and potential new opportunities offered through future new developments and initiatives

Good quality community facilities and spaces

- Work with other service providers such as Hounslow Clinical Commissioning Group, housing associations, and faith groups to widen access to their buildings and spaces for community activity and explore opportunities for wider collaboration and co-location e.g. with the private sector
- Identify the support needs of individuals and groups managing community building and put in place a package of training, support and information
- Support greater collaboration and networking opportunities for those managing community buildings e.g. shared staff roles, joint purchasing, shared equipment etc

So that by 2023

- It is easier for residents and community groups to access good-quality, well-equipped community spaces across the borough at affordable rates, both for one-off events and longer-term hire.
- Residents can easily find accurate and comprehensive information about the facilities that are available across the borough and how to hire them.
- There is a clear process in place for deciding the future of council - owned community facilities which takes proper consideration of the social value and community benefit being offered and maximises their use.

Safe and respectful community relations

• Safe and respectful community relations

We want to ensure that Hounslow is a place where everyone who lives here has a shared sense of belonging and feels safe, irrespective of their background.

This means improving relationships between different communities but also within communities themselves. It is not just about the relationship between different ethnic groups; it is also about the relationships between young and old, disabled and able - bodied people., long-term residents and new arrivals, affluent and those living in poverty. Achieving a high level of community cohesion is important to us, because if people are unable to get on, tension and intolerance will start to emerge, which can lead to fragmented neighbourhoods and increase the levels of anti-social behaviour and incidents of hate crime. Lack of mutual understanding and ignorance of one another can serve to undermine cohesion and integration. This can be easily exploited by those who seek to create divisions and confrontation.

It is a council priority to support new communities who face particular challenges integrating into the borough and we work with asylum seekers and refugees to help them settle into Hounslow and access the services and support that they need.

“...one gel that brings people together is children, they have no concept of differences, they don't care who they play with and then that brings the families together and they start chatting.”⁸

An integrated community in Hounslow

The domestic political agenda, for national and local government and the Mayor of London is increasingly focused on building social integration where people, whatever their backgrounds, live, work, learn and socialise together, based on shared rights, responsibilities and opportunities.

In Hounslow achieving this has always been one of our priorities and integration and cohesion are a fundamental part of all of the council's work with communities.

We support Hounslow's diverse communities to feel confident and proud of their identity and their heritage and to take full advantage of the opportunities that the UK offers – especially women and girls who are too often denied these chances.

You have told us

- Around 9 in10 (87%) residents agree that their local area is a place where people from different backgrounds get on well together – this is an increase of 3 percentage points when compared to the 2014 survey (84%).⁹
- You are reassured by how the borough implements the government's counter-radicalisation strategy, Prevent, and that the support we provide to communities contributes to the borough being a safe place to live, work and study.
- All parts of the community need to be alert to the challenges we all face from extremism and the dangers that it can present, and that we should be aware that many groups of people in Hounslow are vulnerable to being exploited.

⁸ M.e.I community workshop – October 2018

⁹ The figures from the 2018 Resident's Survey will be added to the final document.

Safe and respectful community relations

- Social housing tenants feel that there is still significant stigma attached to living in social housing.

The importance of faith groups in Hounslow

According to the 2011 Census, the London Borough of Hounslow is one of the top five London boroughs whose residents consider themselves to be part of a religious community, with almost 86% of our residents identifying with a religion. The religious landscape within Hounslow is extremely diverse with over a hundred different places of worship. Christianity is the largest religious grouping, and that community is extremely diverse in itself, reflected not only through the multitude of Catholic, Anglican, Evangelical churches, but also as the home to the Diocese Cathedral for the Russian Orthodox Church in Great Britain and Ireland alongside a thriving Coptic Church. The faith communities in Hounslow are extremely active and influential and Hounslow Council works closely with individual religious communities such as Hounslow Jamia Masjid, one of the largest Masjid in West London, Sri Guru Singh Sabha Gurdwara and many others. Much of our interfaith work is carried out in partnership with Hounslow Friends of Faith who we support to bring people of different faiths together and to promote the positive contribution that faith groups can make to the communities in Hounslow. Significantly, Hounslow Friends of Faith also works closely with the British Humanist Association and other people of no faith.

What we will do

- Improve community cohesion by delivering activities and projects that promote equality and inclusion as well as social and cultural understanding and integration.
- Work with the voluntary and community sector to provide opportunities for residents to meet each other and get involved in community life, and to provide facilities for them to meet and get together.
- Safeguard and protect vulnerable individuals from the threats of radicalisation and grooming. The council takes a pragmatic approach to the Government's Prevent Strategy, which means encouraging conversations between people to ensure that it is delivered in a way which promotes confidence within the wider community and ensures community groups, voluntary organisations and establishments of education positively engage with the council.
- Organise community projects such as special training for SEN pupils and providing training to improve critical thinking among school pupils, particularly regarding threats that they may face online. The team also runs the borough's Junior Citizen Scheme which supports schoolchildren in their last year of primary school to deal with the new challenges that they face at secondary school.
- As part of the council's responsibilities under the Government's Counter Extremism Strategy, we will continue to focus on helping local groups to apply for grant funding and in-kind support to run projects that create more resilient and integrated communities, stand up to extremism and offer vulnerable individuals a positive alternative;
- Support community events across the borough such as Remembrance Sunday events, annual processions for Vaisakhi, Good Friday and Ganesh Chaturth as well as the Joint Services Open Day.
- Support events promoting the rights of minorities such as Black History Month, International Women's Day and Pride.

Safe and respectful community relations

- Develop and promote projects aimed at removing the stigma attached to social housing.
- Continue to work with residents, communities and the VCS sector on delivering the council's priorities around tackling Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG).

So that by 2013

- Young people in Hounslow are better equipped to deal with online threats and safely navigate social media, the internet and other online platforms
- Faith and community groups will have been helped to access grant funding to support their communities through projects around the themes of cohesion and integration.
- The council will have incorporated the government's Integrated Communities Strategy into appropriate policies and have a plan of work for implementing the strategy.

Supporting community events together

Increased pressures on the police services in Hounslow has meant that they are no longer able to provide support for public events such as the annual Vaisakhi celebration.

As a solution to this problem the Sri Guru Singh Sabha Gurdwara have taken the initiative to train stewards from among their own congregation to manage the traffic at this large public event.

Following the successful management of Hounslow's Vaisakhi Procession, the Gurdwara have provided support to the wider community for the traffic management of other events, including Remembrance Sunday Processions and the Ganesh Chaturth celebrations.

Refugees Welcome Hounslow

In 2015 Hounslow Council committed to welcoming 10 Syrian refugee households to the borough through the government's *Vulnerable Person Resettlement Scheme*. At an initial meeting called by Hounslow Friends of Faith over 140 Hounslow residents came together to consider how it could support the council's offer. From this meeting Refugee Welcome Hounslow (RWH) was established to: "promote, encourage, co-ordinate and organise where needed, the welcome to Syrian refugee households settling in the London Borough of Hounslow" Its 50 active volunteers, plus many other supporters donating items and raising funds, have played a key role in making the eight households who have arrived by November 2018 feel part of the community. They have organised befrienders for each family, helped to find, decorate and furnish properties, linked families to local services and helped them to get to know their community and, most importantly, have provided welcoming supportive faces at a time of huge change and uncertainty.

Talk English Hounslow

Talk English Hounslow is part of a nationwide project working with isolated people with low levels of English to help them improve their language skills, access services and get more involved in the community.

Talk English provides free, informal ESOL classes, as well as enrichment activities for Muslim women, with no English, or very low level English skills. Our aim is to work in partnership with local community groups in a familiar, friendly and supportive local centre such as a school, community centre or place of worship.

Talk English Hounslow is delivered by volunteers, who receive full training and equipment and resources for training.

Everyone plays their part in the community

• Everyone plays their part in the community

Through actions large and small, people across the borough make a difference every day to the places they live in or the causes they believe in.

This bank of skills, energy and commitment is an invaluable resource for the borough and we want to support our residents to come together either through charities, community groups or just groups of neighbours with a common interest.

Stronger collaboration and closer partnerships will enable everyone in the community, residents, the community and voluntary sector, businesses, social landlords and public-sector bodies, to achieve the best possible results for their local community.

Hounslow is fortunate to have a thriving business community; from large corporates based on the Golden Mile and around Heathrow Airport, to a thriving community of SMEs (small and medium size enterprises that employ fewer than 250 people). There are many current examples of businesses and VCS groups across the borough working together but in many cases the relationship is often short-term and small, involving one-off volunteering opportunities or small cash or other donations. This type of support is useful but is unlikely to support the VCS sector and communities to deliver any significant longer-term impacts. In some cases brand management and publicity may be the driving force for businesses while for the VCS groups it may be about income generation resulting in a huge missed opportunity for both sectors to deliver meaningful outcomes for communities.

There has been a 50% reduction in council grant funding between 2014 and 2018 which means that finding external funding is increasingly important in helping community and voluntary sector groups to survive and to continue their work supporting our residents. While many groups have successfully bid for grants, some of the major funders in the UK have told us that they would welcome more and better quality bids from VCS groups in Hounslow.

“Our biggest achievement is being able to continue to run a successful service in light of all the cuts being made”¹⁰

You have told us

- There is a lack of trust between the council and some residents, and significant effort will need to be made if we are to create positive relationships between these groups and move beyond a ‘them and us’ approach to a properly integrated community.
- More should be done to educate residents, especially young people, on the benefits of being an active citizen.
- Projects that bring residents together in their local areas generate longer-lasting community outcomes than just the initial benefits of the projects themselves.
- While there is considerable appetite amongst both the business community and the VCS sector to work more closely together, most are unsure about how to start.
- There is a lack of clarity around what businesses and VCS groups need and what they can offer each other. This can mean that the support that is being offered does not best meet the needs of the VCS groups.

¹⁰ Annual VCSE Survey 2018

Everyone plays their part in the community

- Meeting the real needs of residents in an effective way requires joined up, place-based working supported by a wide range of different groups in the community, such as health services, social landlords, VCS groups and the council.
- Community leaders come in all shapes and sizes, from the head of a residents' group to a Play Street champion and from a local Councillor to a community activist. There are many people playing this role across the borough.
- The extent to which Councillors see themselves as community champions varies greatly, all Councillors should be supported to fulfil this role.

Representing the community

There are 60 Councillors in the London Borough of Hounslow.

They represent everyone who lives in the area they are elected into and work in partnership with local communities and organisations, including the public, voluntary, community and private sectors, to develop a vision for their local area.

Their role is to represent the concerns of the community and provide a bridge between the community and the council as well as being an advocate for local residents and signposting them to the right people to deal with their concerns.

Community leadership is at the heart of modern local government and councillors have a lead role in this process, working collaboratively with the local community to improve services and quality of life for the residents of Hounslow.

For more information about your local Councillor please visit: www.hounslow.gov.uk

What we will do

- Create opportunities for businesses and the VCS groups to build stronger working relationships with each other to deliver improved results for residents and their communities.
- Promote more skilled volunteering, encouraging employees in local businesses with specific skill sets to offer pro-bono support to VCS organisations. This may include mentoring and support with business planning, help with managing the group's finances, improving their IT skills or administering their HR systems.
- Through the new *Hounslow Giving* project (see below) we will create networking opportunities based on local areas which bring together larger voluntary groups, smaller community and resident groups, and residents, businesses, ward Councillors and council officers to develop joint priorities and agree joint solutions.

Hounslow Giving – unlocking local partnerships

This is an innovative new *local giving* scheme for our borough. Hounslow Giving is all about bringing people, businesses and community organisations together who have a shared connection to the place they live and work in. In Hounslow we know that people do not identify with the borough as a whole, but with their local area such as Brentford, Isleworth, Feltham or Osterley. Each area has its own particular character, its own challenges and its own sense of how it wants to develop.

Hounslow Giving enables businesses and residents to become more involved with their community, tackle local issues of concern and provide increased support for the most vulnerable people who live there.

The scheme is funded through grants from Hounslow Council and City Bridge Trust and founding members include Hounslow Community Network, Volunteering Hounslow, the Hounslow Voluntary Sector Support Service, Inspire Hounslow, Hounslow Chamber of Commerce and Hounslow Council.

Everyone plays their part in the community

- Encourage and support all Councillors to play an active role in their local community as community champions alongside others.
- Support the development and the nurturing of community leaders who can take an active role in supporting their own community and explore the feasibility of developing a network of community champions which could act as a go-to group for developing new ideas.
- Work in partnership with other stakeholders, including Registered Social Landlords and Hounslow CCG and consider how we can best use our resources to achieve our shared outcomes together.
- Raise the profile of the borough and its VCS organisations with external funders, support groups and regional networking organisations so that our local groups can develop strong funding bids that have a stronger chance of being successful.
- Create opportunities for collaborative working and facilitate open and honest discussion between the Council and residents, with the aim of improving the relationship between us.
- Support young people to be active citizens, through initiatives such as the local Youth Council and the Junior Citizenship scheme.
- Work with the police and CCG to tackle crime and disorder issues and find opportunities to partner with them on future projects aimed at reducing the crime levels in the borough
- Encourage social and cultural street and neighbourhood activities especially those that are community-led and delivered and continue to support the development of Play Streets to new areas of the borough (see below)
- Support the three designated Neighbourhood Forum Areas across the borough and any new ones in the future.
- The Adult Social Work Team will continue to support residents to recognise their own skills and resources and achieve their own outcomes, preventing or delaying the need for them to access statutory services.
- The Physical Activity and Sport Team will continue to focus on the delivery of new Active Spaces for residents to get outdoors and get active.
- Our Homeless, Independence and Prevention Services will continue to attend patients, carers, disability and mental health forum groups, to hear from the most vulnerable residents and support them with their needs as well as adapt our offer to those who need support to live independently in the community.

Street Improvement Fund

The Street Improvement Fund supports proposals to improve the public realm in response to resident's suggestions raised through their ward Councillors. A budget of £100,000 each year, part of the council's funding allocation from Transport for London, has been shared across the borough to deliver community-focused projects ranging from restoring fountains to making streets more accessible to those with disabilities. Our new Local Implementation Plan will further embed Transport for London's Healthy Streets approach in scheme design, ensuring that equality of access and high quality public spaces will take on greater importance.

Hounslow's Promise

Hounslow's Promise is a borough-wide initiative set up by Seema Malhotra, MP for Feltham and Heston, alongside Ruth Cadbury, MP for Brentford and Isleworth. Based on five promises, it seeks to improve educational attainment, employability, leadership and social mobility of young people in the borough and was developed in partnership with local schools, business, Councillors, Hounslow Youth Council and community organisations.

"Hounslow's Promise is about coming together as a community to support our schools and parents and give our young people the best chance in life. Together we can make a difference."

Seema Malhotra, MP for Feltham and Heston and Chair, Hounslow's Promise Advisory Board
www.hounslowspromise.org.uk

Everyone plays their part in the community

Heston West Big Local - transforming the local area

Heston West Big Local (HWBL) is a long-term programme to improve and transform the look and feel of this area of the borough and council works with them to deliver this dynamic community project.

HWBL started in 2015 and £1M has been invested in the area by Local Trust. Through their Big Local programmes across the UK they inspire and motivate people to get involved and lead change in their communities.

Since it began HWBL has involved hundreds of local people and has built strong partnerships in the area – all working towards giving residents greater pride in their community and helping them to take up opportunities for training, improving their work skills and improving their health and welfare.

A strong motivation of HWBL is to increase the levels of volunteering in the community – something which we have focused on throughout this strategy.

Hounslow Play Streets

The Hounslow Play Streets project has been up and running for two years, and with around 40 Play Street applications received in 2018-19, the project is going from strength to strength. The project is supported by the council's Community Partnerships Unit, Traffic & Transport and Public Health teams, and gives residents the opportunity to close their street to traffic for a few hours, either once or on a regular basis, to give children the opportunity to play safely outside their homes.

Residents who have been involved in the project report significant benefits. As well as giving children a space to play, the events often take on a street party atmosphere, bringing neighbours together, allowing residents who have lived near to one another for years and never said hello the opportunity to meet and build relationships. Elderly residents often join in the festivities, bringing photographs, sweets and home-baked cakes, and sharing stories of street parties and street play from earlier in their lives.

In the most successful cases, Play Street events have led to residents becoming more active in civic life, setting up new residents' groups and considering ways to shape their local area.

So that by 2023

- We have built better links with local, regional and national stakeholders including funders and the GLA to ensure that the needs and opportunities within the borough are recognised and that we can take advantage of all possible opportunities to make the borough a better place to live, work and study.
- Our young residents play a more active role in community life.
- We have established a significant number of projects which promote groups of neighbours or communities of interest coming together and meeting one another and influencing what goes on in their local area.
- Our residents feel a greater sense of pride in where they live.
- We are supporting and developing new community leaders and community champions.
- Hounslow's business community engages more closely with local communities and the VCS organisations in the borough.
- Residents are better equipped to take the lead on improving their community, rather than relying on outside bodies to do it for them.
- The relationship between the council and residents is improved, with increased trust between the two groups.

Everyone plays their part in the community

One You Hounslow

This is the borough's integrated wellbeing service and offers free one-to-one lifestyle support and health advice to people who live in the London Borough of Hounslow and supports them to take greater control of their own health. This can involve a variety of activities, many of which are provided by voluntary and community sector organisations in the borough and which will increase the chances of adults staying healthier for longer and delaying the onset of poor health. Examples include volunteering, arts activities, group learning, gardening, befriending, cookery, healthy eating advice and a range of sports. www.oneyouthounslow.org

DRAFT

Making sure it happens

- **Making sure it happens**

This strategy will only come to life and help to develop thriving communities in Hounslow if it is successfully implemented.

We established a robust and systematic approach to monitoring the previous Thriving Communities Strategy (2015 – 2019) and will take on board the lessons learned during that process to ensure that the implementation of this new strategy is also effectively monitored over its four-year period.

The public sector and the VCS will retain oversight of the strategy through the council's Community Partnerships Unit and the cross-borough VCSE Partnership (see below) and take responsibility for monitoring how the different elements are being implemented and how successfully the six building blocks are being developed.

Monitoring the strategy – the VCSE Partnership

The Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) Sector Partnership is a strategic group bringing together Hounslow's voluntary, community, social enterprise and statutory organisations

It provides a forum to address key areas of work that impact on the voluntary and community groups in the borough and has helped shape the development of the *Thriving Communities Strategy 2019-2023*. It will coordinate how the delivery of the revised strategy is monitored.

The VCSE Partnership meets quarterly is made up of:

- Senior staff from the London Borough of Hounslow staff from all relevant Directorates.
- Representatives from key voluntary and community groups
- Hounslow Together VCS representatives
- Hounslow Community Network
- Lead Cabinet Member for Communities and Workforce

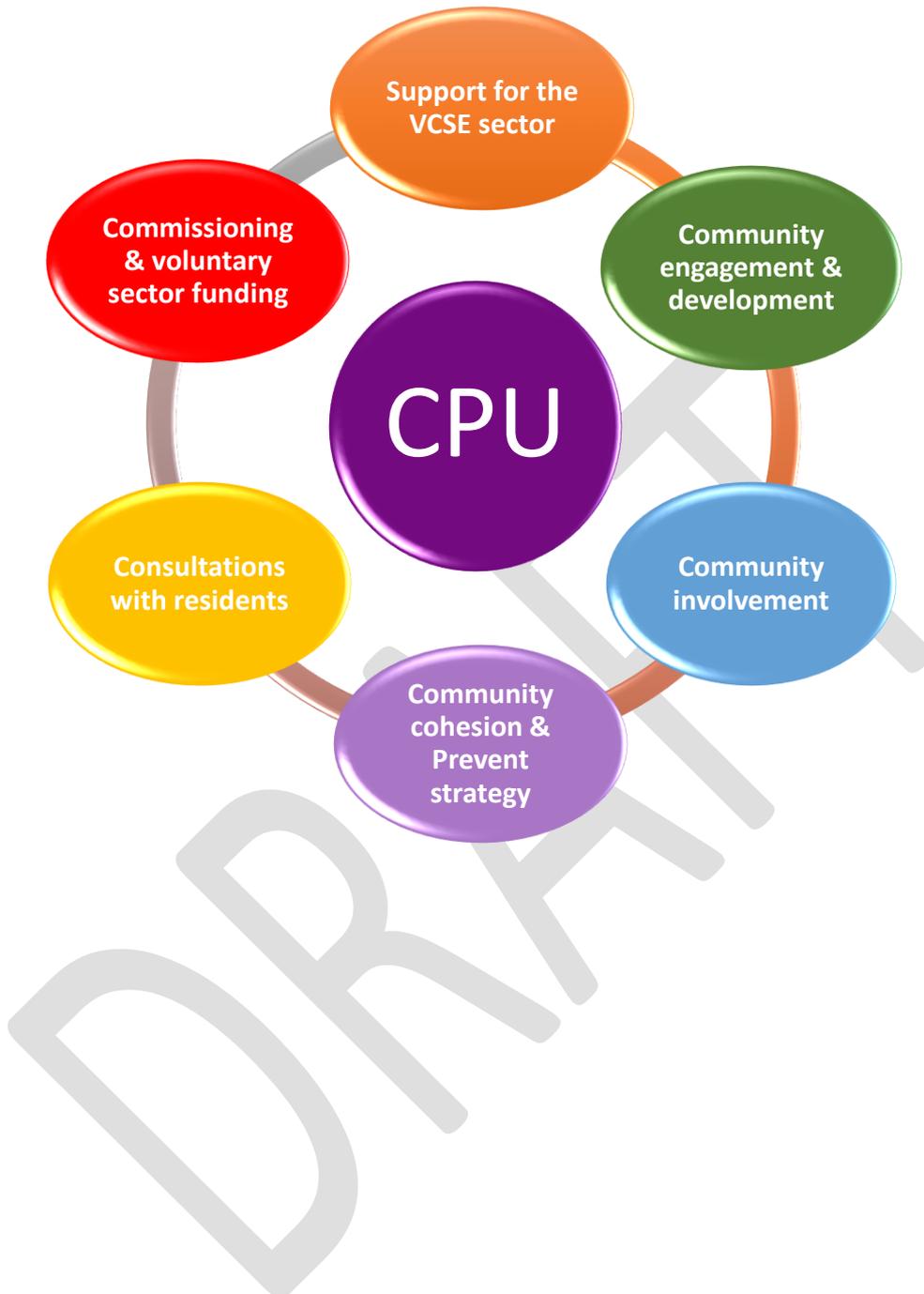
The Community Partnerships Unit (CPU) is the team in Hounslow Council that champions the outcomes of this new strategy by:

- Encouraging & involving local people in local decision making
- Helping residents to become more active in their community
- Supporting communities to become more independent
- Working to make Hounslow a more cohesive community
- Supporting the voluntary and community sector

In Hounslow there are many ways to become more active in the local community and the CPU team is here to help residents to get more involved in community life.

Their role is also to support and develop closer relationships between the council, local communities in the borough and the voluntary and community sector.

Making sure it happens



How the strategy was developed

• How the strategy was developed

Since the implementation of the *Thriving Communities and VCSE Sector Strategy (2015 – 2019)* external and internal partnerships have been playing a crucial role in sustaining and improving the wellbeing and resilience of our communities and the VCS sector.

Collaborative working is the main theme of this new strategy and we have made it a priority to ensure that the aims of this strategy correspond with the needs, requirements and aspirations of the residents of Hounslow

As part of engagement process we have undertaken a programme of workshops, focus groups and listening events, together with surveys and reviews of the previous strategy to identify the opportunities, barriers and challenges facing our residents and the voluntary and community sector in Hounslow

- Annual survey of the voluntary and community sector in Hounslow.
 - Annual feedback from over 100 VCS organisations on their relationship with LBH, their support needs and the challenges that they face
- February 2018: 4 resident engagement workshops run by m.e.l research
 - The sessions contained a mix of residents with differing demographic profiles
- March/June/September 2018: Drafting of the new strategy monitored by the VCSE Partnership Group
 - April – September 2018: comprehensive review by Rocket Science of the relationship between LBH, its partners and the VCS sector in the borough of Hounslow.
- March/ June/September 2018: Hounslow Community Network - feedback on the structure and themes of the draft strategy.
- September 2018: Residents Association Forum - commented on the structure and themes of the draft strategy
- September – November 2018: input from cross council services areas
- October 2018: 4 Engagement workshops, run by m.e.l research, with representatives from the community voluntary sector and residents groups.
- November 2018: Workshop with Hounslow's Councillors on their role as community leaders in support of this new strategy.
- Formal Consultation: December 2018 - January 2019
- Implementation by LBH Borough Council: 26 March 2019