

North Yorkshire Council

HARROGATE AND KNARESBOROUGH AREA COMMITTEE

COMMUNITY AND VOLUNTARY SECTOR WORKING GROUP

Notes of the virtual meeting held on Monday 18 November, at 10:00.

Working Group Members Present: Councillors Peter Lacey (Working Group Chair), Chris Aldred, and Michael Harrison.

Officers and Attendees Present: Frances Elliot (Harrogate and District Community Action), and Edward Maxwell (Senior Democratic Services Officer).

Apologies: Councillors Sam Gibbs and Monika Slater.

1. The Working Group Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting, reiterating that its general purpose was to bridge the gap between the disbandment of Harrogate Borough Council in April 2023 on the establishment of North Yorkshire Council (NYC), and the establishment of Harrogate Town Council in May 2025. This meeting was intended to hear from front-line community organisations, to understand the challenges they face and how NYC and the Area Committee (AC) can support them.
2. Frances Elliot (HADCA) was invited to deliver a presentation following on from their recent Chief Officers' and Chairs meeting. This brought together leads from Voluntary and Community Social Enterprise (VCSE) Sector to provide feedback to the AC through the Working Group. It was recognised that the presentation would cover a wide range of issues, some local and some national, and some which would be beyond the power of either the AC or NYC to address. Nevertheless, the challenges reported by the sector would be reported, to give a complete picture of the situation.
3. **What are the main challenges the sector faces?**
 - a. The perceived wealth of the town was highlighted as a key challenge, as it meant the area was not a priority for funding and unlikely to be successful when bidding for grants. There were a range of key challenges and issues which the relative affluence of Harrogate obscured, including poor mental health, drug use and county lines, domestic abuse, and the suicide rate.
 - b. Further to this, the perception of the area as being a happy and successful place to live, regularly listed in the media as one of the top areas to live in the UK, added a stigma to those seeking help for such issues.
 - c. The challenge of supporting and operating VCSE organisations through grants and short-term funding was highlighted, since each funding stream required a period of setting up and preparation, before immediately needing

to start preparing for the next application. Short term funding made long term planning and staff recruitment difficult, and it also was often tied to newer and more specialist projects, rather than longer term services which were in growing demand.

- d. "Members discussed historic HBC rates relief schemes, and highlighted the need to prioritise community organisations for high level rate relief. It was agreed that EM would investigate the current arrangements in place following LGR".
- e. The housing situation had a knock-on effect for the VCSE sector, since high prices and rents meant that new residents required a level of long-term income stability which employment in the VCSE sector could not offer. This made recruitment and retention particularly difficult.

4. What support did HBC offer?

- a. The close working relationship between the sector and long-serving HBC staff who lived and worked in Harrogate was particularly valuable. Following LGR in 2024, it was recognised that staff turnover associated with the team restructures meant that some of those relationships were lost and work was ongoing to rebuild them.
- b. A successful example was the provision of the You Are Not Alone leaflet, which summarised financial and healthcare support available to residents. This was produced and distributed by HBC within their budget.

5. How can the Harrogate and Knaresborough AC help represent your interests to NYC?

- a. Areas such as communicating with the wider council to highlight the specific challenges faced by Harrogate were discussed. The role of the Local Lotto was highlighted as a way for funding to be drawn into the sector. The license was currently under review.
- b. An offer for visits was also made, so that staff and councillors could meet and understand the challenges faced by staff.
- c. The ongoing NYC asset review was discussed, and the need to advocate for the VCSE sector and the potential needs for facilities and space.

- 6. The Working Group Chair also discussed potential future work, including HADCA's feedback on the establishment of the Community Anchor Organisation. The opportunity to share best practice with Scarborough at the time of their own town council establishment was further discussed. There was also a need to further explore the best way for support to be provided, whether in direct funding or grant application support, or training and staff assistance.

It was agreed that the points made in the presentation would be summarised in a letter to the AC, which would be included in the papers for the next meeting on 28 November, along with a copy of the presentation.

The Working Group thanked FE for attending and delivering the presentation.