

Voluntary Sector Forum

1 October 2026 10am-12pm

The Salon, York House, Twickenham

Notes of the Meeting

- 1. Welcome and Introductions** - Cllr Katie Mansfield, Vice-chair Finance, Policy and Resources Committee and Richmond Town Centre Project Lead Member, Spokesperson for Communities, Equalities and the Voluntary Sector.

Cllr Mansfield welcomed attendees and outlined the agenda. The Forum marked International Day of Older Persons, and a photograph was taken to show the voluntary sector's appreciation of older residents and the importance of keeping older people involved in community life.

Attendees were reminded of the Full of Life Fair, the Richmond Community Energy Cooperative and associated Accelerator Fund, and the Climate Resilience Forum.

- 2. Fair funding: the challenges of the Council's funding position** - Clare O'Connor, Director of Climate Change, Policy and Communications, Richmond Council

The Forum heard that proposed government funding reforms would reduce the borough's core funding by £29 million a year by 2028/29, representing a reduction of nearly 60%. The Council is challenging the fairness and sustainability of the approach and is also raising concerns about proposals relating to higher-value properties and an overnight visitor levy, particularly where locally raised income may not return to Richmond.

The Council is using the Sustainable Communities Act 2007 as the tool to challenge these policies through developing proposals on behalf of residents. These focus on enabling councils to retain more locally raised income, securing funding that better reflects demand, allowing more time to adapt to significant changes, and providing greater flexibility to raise income. Voluntary sector organisations were asked to complete and share the consultation with their communities before it closed on 14 October 2026.

The Council is also considering how services can operate differently in response to its financial position. Proposals to identify £39 million in savings were being taken through committee, alongside a stronger focus on prevention, place-based work and collaboration with partners, including health and the voluntary sector.

3. Introducing the Community Sport and Physical Activity Network (CSPAN) - Ravi Arora, Chief Executive, Multicultural Richmond, and Amala Poulter, Leisure, Sport and Physical Activity Officer, Richmond Council

The Forum received an update on the third year of the Leisure Strategy Action Plan and CSPAN's work to help more residents become active. Priorities include strengthening referral and signposting routes, mapping opportunities for young children, relaunching the Richmond Moves campaign, and strengthening partnerships with voluntary and community organisations.

Voluntary sector organisations were encouraged to promote movement through everyday conversations, recommend suitable local activities, refer or signpost residents to community and home-based resources, share campaign materials, and provide case studies. Resources available include posters, downloadable materials and the Move at Home pack.

4. Development of an anti-poverty strategy - Ben Threadgold, Head of Strategic Projects, and Bethany Pepper, Cost of Living Programme Manager, Richmond Council

The Council outlined work to develop an anti-poverty strategy in response to poverty that can be uneven and hidden across the borough. Proposed themes include income and financial security, housing affordability, food security, employment skills and progression, community engagement and hidden poverty, and health and wellbeing. Early support, reducing stigma and building resilience will run across the strategy.

Engagement will refine themes and priorities, co-develop the action plan and outcomes, test the approach with partners and residents, and support implementation from April 2027. A survey will be circulated after the Forum so that organisations and communities can contribute.

5. Community Engagement - Hannah Smith, Community Engagement Manager, Richmond Council

The Community Engagement Team outlined its work to run Community Conversations, coordinate the Community Ambassadors Programme, support Council teams with engagement, and connect with residents in different ways. The aim is to create meaningful opportunities for residents to influence decisions, services and policies through ongoing, inclusive, and transparent engagement.

The voluntary sector can support this by reaching residents through trusted networks, engaging underrepresented and seldom-heard communities, sharing local insight, providing accessible venues, co-designing solutions, communicating outcomes and strengthening residents' confidence to participate.

6. Update on the Voluntary Sector Property Strategy - Juliette Martin, Senior Policy and Review Officer, Richmond Council

The Council is refreshing its strategy for Council-owned and leased properties used by voluntary and community sector partners. More than 70 properties have been identified. The refresh will focus on stronger relationships, clearer communication and more consistent property arrangements, alongside a review of the 2011 approach to property-related rent support. Consultation and

engagement are planned for late 2026. The strategy is expected to return to committee following consultation, likely in January 2027.

7. Protecting Health over winter - Melissa Barker, Public Health Lead, Health Protection Team, Richmond Council

The Forum heard how voluntary and community organisations can help protect service users during winter. Flu, COVID-19, RSV and other infections can cause serious illness, and vaccination can protect both individuals and people at higher risk.

Cold weather can particularly affect older adults, people with long-term conditions, those living in cold or poor housing and people experiencing street homelessness. Organisations were encouraged to:

- Register for Cold-Health Alerts and use the relevant voluntary and community sector action cards when alerts are issued.
- Identify service users who may be at greater risk during cold weather.
- Register eligible venues as community warm spaces where possible.
- Share messages and resources on keeping warm, vaccination, hand and respiratory hygiene, ventilation and indoor air quality.
- Signpost residents to financial and fuel support and other local sources of help.

Posters, infographics, and practical guidance are available from the Council. Organisations requiring printed resources or further information can contact healthprotection@richmondandwandsworth.gov.uk.

8. Open Forum and Q&A

No additional items were raised during the open forum and Q&A.

Date of the next meetings: The morning of Thursday 3 December 2026

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For suggestions for future agenda items, or ideas to improve the Forum, please contact voluntarysector@richmond.gov.uk.