

Voluntary Sector Forum

5 February 2026 – 1pm-3pm

The Salon, York House, Twickenham

Notes of the Meeting

1. **Welcome and Introduction** - Cllr Nancy Baldwin, Spokesperson for Communities, Equalities and the Voluntary Sector
 - **Young Carer's Charter** - The new Richmond Adult and Young Carers' Charter has now been launched. It represents a shared commitment from the Council, statutory partners, and the voluntary and community sector to recognise and value carers, and to ensure they can access the support they need. The charter is based on the 2025 consultation with unpaid carers. Local organisations are invited to pledge their support to shared priorities.
More information is available on the website:
<https://www.richmond.gov.uk/carerscharter>
Pledge your organisation's support [here](#)
 - **Community Heroes Awards** – Nominations are now open for the eighth annual Community Heroes Awards, celebrating residents who make a positive impact across Richmond. With nine award categories, the programme recognises individuals, groups, organisations and local businesses who give their time and skills to improve their communities. The deadline for submitting nominations is **Sunday 8 February**. Further information on the awards and how to nominate is on the website https://www.richmond.gov.uk/community_heroes_awards#nomination
 - **Climate Action Microgrants** - A new round of Climate Action Microgrants is now open for applications until **Friday 27 February**. Grants of £100–£500 are available for individuals, groups, voluntary organisations and schools running projects that encourage positive community action on climate change and sustainability. Funding can support new initiatives or help expand existing ones.
Apply here https://www.richmond.gov.uk/climate_action_microgrants
 - **Voices of Richmond** - Voices of Richmond is a project celebrating the borough's diversity by gathering stories and photos from residents who have moved here from other countries, or whose families have. A series of workshops is taking place, using photos and documents from local libraries and archives, and inviting residents to share their own stories and images. The next workshop will be held on **Wednesday 25 March** focusing on the theme of gardening.
More information [here](#).
 - **In Memoriam** – tributes were shared in memory of Chris Manning and Andy Sutch, valued and longstanding members of Richmond's voluntary and community sector who recently passed away.

2. Council Update

Clare O'Connor, Director of Climate Change, Policy and Communications, Richmond Council provided an update from the council in relation to recent developments following the national Fair Funding Review and potential significance for the voluntary sector in Richmond.

Clare provided an overview of how funds in the borough are currently spent, summarised the Fair Funding Review 2.0 and the impact on reduced future funding for Richmond. The Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement (PLGFS) sets out the funding allocation for the next three years and will see reduced funding of £29 million by year three (2028/9). The Council has strongly challenged the new, which has led to some adjustments from the much higher reductions originally proposed. The phased introduction does allow some time to plan for the changes.

Two additional changes also recently announced were the:

1. Mansion Tax – additional tax to be levied on houses valued over £2 million – currently in consultation. Will affect around 6,000 houses in Richmond. It will create challenges for residents who are asset-rich but cash poor. As the government grant will reduce in parallel with income raised through this levy, it will not increase funding for the borough.
2. Tourism levy for London – many cities worldwide have a tourism levy which is used to fund local services. Currently the proposal is for the levy to go to the London Mayor and then be allocated out to the boroughs. Richmond Council are inputting into the consultation process and pushing for the borough to receive a fair share.

The recently published Richmond Growth Plan sets out a framework to attract more investment, workers and visitors by 2036, and is one way the Council is seeking to generate more income for the borough to offset the reduction in government funding.

More information [here](#)

There are challenges ahead, but the Council will continue to support the hardest-hit and focus on improving outcomes for residents and in the meantime is undergoing an ambitious transformation programme. The council is experienced in transforming, and the shared arrangement with Wandsworth Council and other innovative ways of working have already saved millions of pounds over recent years. Future priorities will include a focus on prevention, and a focus on place, both of which offer engagement opportunities for the VCS. This will include looking at data to work smartly and looking for new approaches to work together differently.

3. Crisis and Resilience Fund

Bethany Pepper, Cost of Living Programme Manager, Richmond Council provided an overview of the new Crisis and Resilience Fund.

- Launches April 2026, runs for three years
- Will replace Household Support Fund and Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs)
- Provisional allocations suggest a 21.5% reduction in overall funding for Richmond
- Guidance has only just been issued, so still scoping out how this will look in practice.

- Expected main objectives
 - Provision of effective crisis support
 - Improving individuals' financial resilience
 - Bolstering the local-level support landscape
- Principles of approach: person-centred and respectful, meeting underlying needs, not just crisis symptoms, trauma informed, integrated support, and use of warm referrals to connect people to services effectively without need for repeating stories to access the next level of support.
- Four funding strands: Crisis payment, Housing payment, Resilience services, Community Coordination
 - Crisis payments have a narrower definition than currently used.
 - Housing payments for individuals have a ringfenced budget.
 - Resilience services will build financial resilience for individuals or communities.
 - Community coordination – joined up working e.g. directories, shared training.
- Implications for the VCS and supported residents:
 - Improved investment in resilience and strengthening referral routes
 - Overall, less funding
 - End of Holiday Food Vouchers scheme after Easter 2026
 - Focus on resilience services to support affected families
- Key areas of future focus: working Citizens Advice Richmond/Richmond Aid to shape crisis payments, exploring resilience strand including building on successful aspects of Cost-of-Living Programme, strengthening support for families who previously received Holiday Food Vouchers, strengthening connections and warm referrals process

Group discussions focussed on

- Gaps in existing services that could be met with this fund
- Which existing services to prioritise for investment
- Supporting families previously in receipt of Holiday Food Vouchers
- Improving connectivity (e.g. digital referral routes, convening networks, shared training, co-locating services, investments in printed materials)

For further information on the Crisis and Resilience Fund, contact bethany.pepper@richmondandwandsworth.gov.uk

Information about current benefits and sources of support is available [here](#).

4. Day Services Alliance

Rachel Soni, Director of Commissioning, Adult Social Care and Public Health, Richmond Council

- There are currently three council-run day centres in the borough (Sheen Lane, The Woodville Centre and the Access Project). Recent years have seen a reduction in the number of people accessing the centres and using services. There is a need for modernising assets, supporting sustainable charging models, maximising utilisation, finding efficiencies and integrating with wider provision so that people can progress

- through services as needed. The Council has been consulting with a range of stakeholders and experts to review potential improvements and reshaping of provision.
- o Will be consolidating Access Project services into the Sheen Lane centre and upgrading facilities, whilst ensuring that there is still borough-wide coverage.
 - o Currently working through the complexities e.g. adapting and decarbonising buildings, redesigning services
 - o Long-term intention is for voluntary sector to take on delivering services through a new partnership approach - Day Services Alliance. Some organisations have already come forward to express interest in this. Currently HomeLink and Age UK are going through due diligence process and are now working together on design and planning.
 - o Ultimately aim to provide prevention services and support people through their long-term care journey
 - o Transport has been identified as a key issue and a transport review is underway.
 - o Also aiming for a person-centred approach, and to develop a single point of access across the alliance

5. Refugee Services

Michela Pomati, Refugee Services Programme Manager, Richmond Council provided an update on the Council's commitment as a Borough of Sanctuary to welcoming and supporting sanctuary-seekers.

Richmond Council was accredited as a Borough of Sanctuary in 2024 and has a related strategy and action plan, in which the VCS plays a key role.

For more information, contact BoroughOfSanctuary@richmondandwandsworth.gov.uk

The accreditation lasts for three years, and then the Council will reapply to maintain the status. The Council welcomes ideas for priorities in thinking about reaccreditation, for example inclusive practices, gaps in services, evidence of needs. Input is especially welcomed from people with lived experience.

Michela talked through the role that the VCS can play in Borough of Sanctuary accreditation, for example

- o Contributing examples of inclusive practice, service data and lived-experience involvement
- o Joining partnership activity supporting re-accreditation
- o Helping to embed welcoming, safe and accessible services across the borough

Various tools and resources available include

- o Streams of Sanctuary guidance (sector-specific networks eg health, arts, faith)
- o Practical toolkits, templates and case-study examples
- o Support to apply for Sanctuary Awards
- o Local support is also available through the Richmond Borough of Sanctuary Grant Scheme (Round 2 closed in September 2025, Round 3 opens later this year)

More information is available here <https://cityofsanctuary.org/resources/>

Richmond Borough of Sanctuary Grant Scheme:

https://www.richmond.gov.uk/services_for_refugees/borough_of_sanctuary/borough_of_sanctuary_grant_scheme

Other support and updates:

The council's refugee services will soon be launching a **bi-monthly newsletter**, providing information and opportunities for service users, sign up [here](#)

Refugee Week Funding 2026 – Grants of up to £2,000 are available for activities aligned with Refugee Week 15-21 June 2026 and the theme of Courage. Grants awarded on first-come-first-served basis, closing 27 **March 2026**. Apply for Refugee Week Funding [here](#).

Richmond Borough of Sanctuary Grant Scheme provides grants of up to £10,000 for projects supporting sanctuary-seekers. Each round has a priority theme. The third round is expected to open in late spring/early summer. More information [here](#)

Welcome packs – **Refugee Welcome Packs** are available for sanctuary-seekers who have arrived in the borough, providing an overview of how to access services provided by both the council and VCS. More information available [here](#)

Home Office Consultation – following the Immigration White Paper published in May 2025, the government is currently holding a consultation open until 12 February 2026. Some of the key proposed changes include

- Extending the qualifying period for Indefinite Leave to Remain
- Changes to the qualifying period depending on circumstances (e.g. for public service professionals e.g. nurses)
- Removing access to public funds until settled status is granted

It is not yet clear how the proposals will affect people already in the UK or on the path to settlement. Richmond Council have prepared some guidance to support those wanting to input into the consultation. This will be sent around by email to attendees.

6. Open Forum and Q & A

Lee Pittock, Public Health Lead, Richmond Council highlighted the Healthier Catering Commitment – local cafes and restaurants that have signed up to offer healthier food options

More information on the commitment here:

https://www.richmond.gov.uk/services/public_health/your_health/healthy_lifestyle/healthy_eating/healthier_catering_commitment

A list of local businesses signed up here:

https://www.richmond.gov.uk/services/public_health/your_health/healthy_lifestyle/healthy_eating/healthier_catering_commitment_business_list

If your organisation is hosting community meetings over a meal, please consider using businesses signed up to the commitment – there are currently 22 businesses in Richmond participating.

If you have any feedback on using these venues, or questions on the wider work that is happening in the borough relating to healthy weight management, please contact

publichealth@richmondandwandsworth.gov.uk

Date of the next meeting: TBC

To sign up to hear details of future forums – sign up for alerts [here](#)

For suggestions on future agenda items, or ideas to keep improving the forums, please contact voluntarysector@richmondandwandsworth.gov.uk