

Voluntary Sector Forum

1 July 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.

Following the elections, the administration is keen to be a Council for all – one which takes every opportunity to hear from residents and communities, which serves every resident and every part of the borough, and welcomes challenge and scrutiny. These forums are a well-established opportunity to do this, and for the administration to hear from and share plans with the voluntary sector.

2. **Shaping Futures: Supporting and Nurturing Youth Talent in Richmond** - Polly Persechino, Head of Economy, Skills and Employment & Rachel Bennett, Strategic Lead for the South London Careers Hub, South London Partnership

The South London Partnership (SLP) is a voluntary collaboration of five south London boroughs, across Richmond upon Thames, Kingston upon Thames, Merton, Sutton and Croydon, collaborating across areas including economy and growth, health and care, infrastructure, place and skills and jobs.

A recent review into young people and the workplace found that nearly one million people aged 16-24 in the UK are not in education, work or training

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/young-people-and-work-interim-report/young-people-and-work-interim-report>

Youth unemployment is increasing, with over 100,000 unemployed people aged 16-24 in London. Barriers include:

- Lack of work experience.
- Limited professional networks.
- Growing competition for entry-level roles.
- Rising mental health and confidence challenges.
- Some young people face additional barriers due to disability, caring responsibilities, SEND, ethnicity or family circumstances.

Young people are recognised as vital to the future economy, success and vibrancy of Richmond. As major employers, community anchors and opportunity providers, the VCS can create opportunities and unlock doors for young people. SLP can provide support to create meaningful experiences and nurture the future talent pipeline.

VCS organisations already provide trusted relationships, local knowledge, mentoring and support and volunteering opportunities and are often the first place where young people can gain confidence, discover their strengths and develop employability skills. Young people can

themselves offer fresh ideas and perspectives, future workforce development, stronger links with local communities, and increased organisational resilience. Investing in young people is not just good for young people but strengthens organisations and communities.

Some of the challenges highlighted by VCS organisations include lack of capacity, small organisational size and not knowing where to start. But a range of support and collaboration is available from an array of partners including schools, colleges, youth services, the Council, and employers, and opportunities can be short-term and flexible. No single organisation can solve the challenge alone, but working together, we can create a stronger pathway from education and employment.

VCS organisations could engage in a range of different opportunities, for example career talks, workplace visits, volunteering, project-based work, skills workshops, mentoring, work experience, work shadowing, youth panels, supported internships, part-time employment and apprenticeships. VCS organisations are also invited to join the Youth Integration Network, a collaborative initiative across London aiming to support young people aged 16-24 to overcome barriers and transition into education, training and employment.

Support available from SLP:

- Connect – introductions to schools and colleges, connections with employability programmes, links to youth services and partners
- Support – templates and guidance, advice on placements and opportunities, good practice examples
- Promote – celebrate success, share success stories, build a youth network

Useful links:

- Youth Jobs Grant – employers can claim £3,000 if taking on an eligible young person who has been out of work for six months <https://www.business.gov.uk/campaign/recruit-with-jobcentreplus/build-your-future-workforce/>
- Apprenticeship Incentives – employers can access financial support for hiring young apprentices <https://find-employer-schemes.education.gov.uk/interim/get-financial-support-to-offer-apprenticeships>
- Jobs Guarantee – national rollout of a scheme guaranteeing fully funded six month paid jobs to eligible young people who have been looking for work for 18 months is expected in the autumn of 2026 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/jobs-guarantee>
- Further information and support is available from South London Partnership for:
 - Employers <https://southlondonpartnership.co.uk/employer-resources/>
 - Skills and Employment Practitioners <https://southlondonpartnership.co.uk/practitioner-resources/>
 - Job-Seekers <https://southlondonpartnership.co.uk/organisations-that-support-people-into-employment-and-training/>
- South London Careers Hub- links local businesses to schools and colleges <https://southlondonpartnership.co.uk/skills/south-london-careers-hub/>
- Richmond Work Match supports local people to access local jobs and training, including free recruitment services and access to a local talent pool <https://www.richmondworkmatch.org/>

- AfC Virtual School – contact Michael Guard to explore supporting care-experienced young people into employment michael.guard@achievingforchildren.org.uk

Contact details:

Rachel.bennett@southlondonpartnership.co.uk

Polly.Persechino@southlondonpartnership.co.uk

3. **AI and the Voluntary Sector: From Everyday to Strategic Opportunity**- Julie Gavin, Chief Executive Officer, Richmond CVS

A survey of those in the room found that AI was being used for a range of purposes including administrative, communications, and fundraising. Organisations were using a variety of different AI tools, with CoPilot being the most common. Richmond CVS highlighted that among organisations who have developed an AI strategy, they were finding it quickly needed to be updated as use of AI evolved. Below are the Mentimeter results from the organisations in the room.



 What AI tools are you using right now?

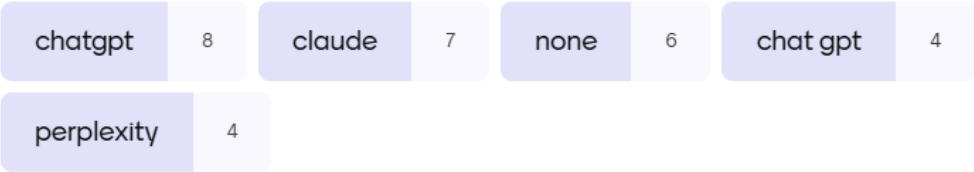
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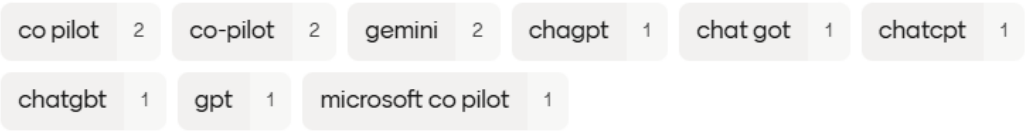
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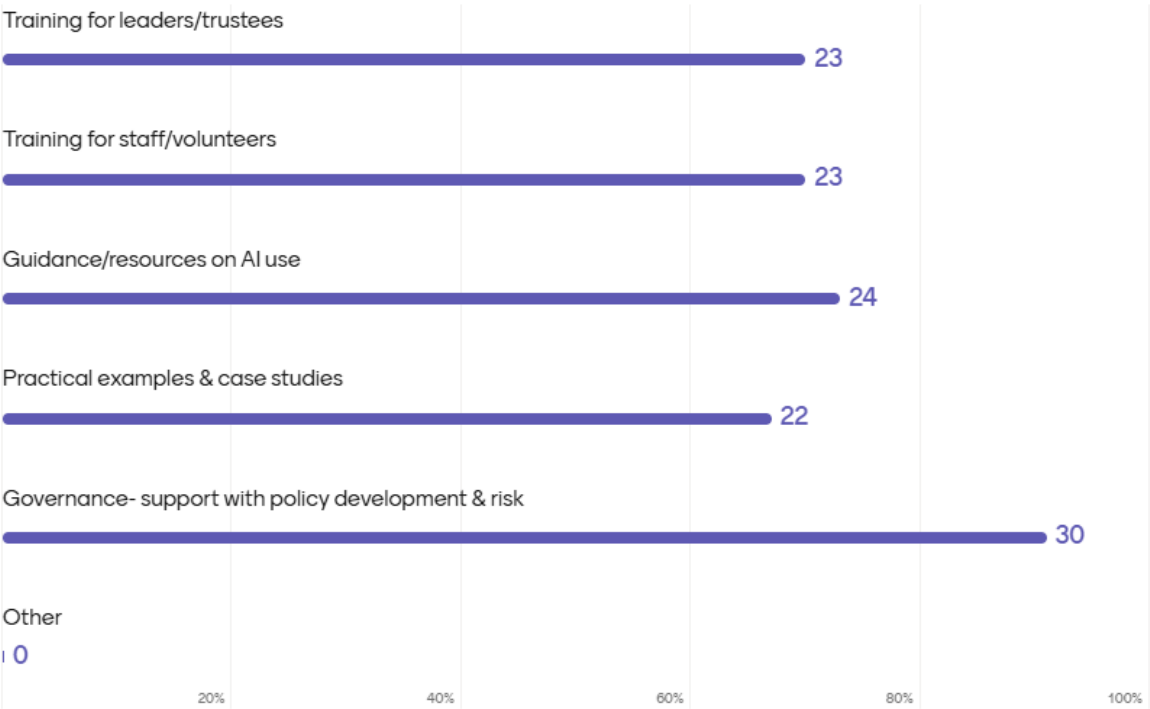


Other responses



 What do you need in order to move forward with your AI use?

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Key insights from ‘Early insights of the Charity Digital Skills Report 2026’:

- AI is now mainstream in the VCSE – 88% of charities report AI being used in day-to-day work
- Use is moving faster than strategy – 46% of charities are actively using AI tools, but only 28% are developing an AI strategy.

- AI use is concentrated in administrative and operational tasks – 71% are using AI for admin/project management but only 13% are using in service delivery
- There is a growing governance and leadership gap – only a small proportion (4%) are using AI strategically
- Skills and confidence are now the primary constraint – 55% cite lack of skills as the top barrier
- Concerns are shifting from ‘whether’ to ‘how’, with rising concerns about issues including ethics and bias, environmental impact and overreliance on AI
- The sector is negotiating its relationship with AI

Richmond Borough Mind shared their journey of how they are using AI in practice, building confidence across the team, the guardrails and policies being put in place and the internal conversations and ethical considerations underway. This included:

- Setting parameters, only using CoPilot for internal documents and not publishing anything externally without first factchecking it.
- Calling an amnesty and asking all staff to fill in an anonymous survey about how they were using AI. This identified that a wide range of AI tools were being used, and for diverse tasks including funding applications, tender documents, transactions, minute-taking, design ideas and spreadsheet management.
- Looking at how to build skills and confidence across team
- Discussing identified concerns including how to use it safely, how to use it well, what happens to data inputted, and ethics and environmental concerns
- Redeveloping the organisational AI policy which was then reviewed by staff and trustees.
- Another guardrail was installing a no-blame culture, encouraging staff to declare when a mistake has been made to enable learning from experience and mitigating future issues. Staff are encouraged to ask if ever in doubt.
- Considering environmental impact – keep use to a minimum, ask people to use brain first, and then use AI to supplement, then factcheck. This includes looking at how the organisation can encourage critical thinking.
- Keep data anonymous – no personal identifiable information.
- Use of appropriate prompts, plus human check before publishing
- AI psychosis has also been considered. Examples have been seen of service-users who have become addicted to AI and are finding it increasingly confusing to determine what is real and who can be trusted. An organisation response to this is currently being explored.
- Lastly looking into how they can ensure the organisational culture, passion for the mission, accurate case studies and reference to the local environment is not lost when using AI– factchecking and human touch remain very important.

Useful links:

- Richmond CVS have compiled a list of useful resources on AI for local voluntary and community sector organisations
[Artificial-Intelligence-Resource-for-VCS-organisations.pdf](#)
- Results from the full 2026 Charity Digital Skills Report are expected to be published in July <https://charitydigitalskills.co.uk/>
- Richmond Trustee Network AI session 6 July

<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/richmond-trustee-network-artificial-intelligence-tickets-1990651896409?aff=oddtcreator>

- Richmond CVS are also available for support and advice, peer connections and to access templates and tools action@richmondcvcs.org.uk

4. **Richmond Borough of Sanctuary** - Aaron Hardy, Head of Refugee Services, Richmond Council

It was outlined that a sanctuary seeker is a person who has experienced forced migration in the last five years. Richmond upon Thames has a rich history of welcoming sanctuary seekers and was proud to become a Borough of Sanctuary in June 2024. There are four main locations that sanctuary-seekers living in Richmond come from – Ukraine, Hong Kong, Syria, and Afghanistan.

The council provides a range of services for sanctuary seekers and refugees in the borough, including:

- Housing- preventing homelessness, reducing temporary accommodation and procuring properties, for example working with Ukrainian individuals whose sponsorship is coming to an end
- Resettlement – supporting Afghan and Syrian families, ad hoc support for other cohorts
- Homes for Ukraine – administering the scheme and supporting hosts and guests (currently 60-70 hosts in the borough)
- Policy – Borough of Sanctuary Strategy and Action Plans, Richmond Sanctuary Partnership, grant schemes, Refugee Week
- Finance/Data - supporting better services

Ways of working with the VCS:

- Richmond Sanctuary Partnership – meets three times a year, share opportunities information and available support
- Borough of Sanctuary Grant Scheme – about to be launched again after the summer - £100,000 available to fund projects (grants of up to £10,000) that support sanctuary seekers. This is open to new organisations and those who have received funding under previous rounds.

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

- Cross signposting – building a network of available services to signpost service users.

Useful links:

- Information about Richmond's status as a Borough of Sanctuary
https://www.richmond.gov.uk/services_for_refugees/borough_of_sanctuary
- Services for Refugees including refugee welcome packs https://www.richmond.gov.uk/services_for_refugees
- Sign up for the Richmond Refugee Services Newsletter
https://www.richmond.gov.uk/services_for_refugees/borough_of_sanctuary#Newsletter

- Borough of Sanctuary Grant Scheme – grants up of to £10,000 are available. Round three will open later in 2026
https://www.richmond.gov.uk/services_for_refugees/borough_of_sanctuary/borough_of_sanctuary_grant_scheme
- Contact the Refugee Services team
BoroughofSanctuary@richmondandwandsworth.gov.uk

5. **Trustee Forward: Strengthening Leadership for the Future** - Santiago Torchiaro, Project Coordinator, Richmond CVS

Richmond CVS in partnership with the Richmond Foundation have been evaluating the learnings from the first cohort of the Trustee Forward programme. 22 new trustees and aspiring chairs participated, receiving training, mentoring and peer support.

Key learnings included:

- The mentoring model was a major strength of the programme – very positive feedback from participants, and allowed the programme to be tailored to meet the needs of individual trainees
- Progress was documented across all outcome measures, including increased confidence, feeling supported and gaining in knowledge
- Participants highlighted the flexible delivery structure as an asset – trustees are busy and time can be a challenge, so the flexibility was helpful to enable them to engage effectively
- Many participants indicated that their organisations had benefited from strengthened governance as a result

Based on the positive first year, the programme will be continuing for a further two years.

- Cohort 2 – Summer 2026 - Spring 2027
- Cohort 3 – Summer 2027 – Spring 2028

Applications are now open for participants (deadline 29 July 2026, although priority given to those applying by 1 July) and mentors (deadline 8 July 2026) to join the second cohort of the programme. <https://richmondcvcs.org.uk/trustee-forward-developing-trustees-growing-impact/>

Applicants are especially welcome from those from backgrounds that are underrepresented on boards.

An alumni programme will also be established for ongoing learning of former participants. The model is also being explored to see how it can be replicated for CEOs and other senior leader roles.

Contact Santiago for more information santiagot@richmondcvcs.org.uk

6. **Protecting Served Communities from Hot Weather Harms** - Fenn Porter, Public Health Lead – Health Protection, Richmond Council

There are four main actions the VCS can take to help protect residents from hot weather harms

- Register for Heat-Health Alerts
- Have up to date local plans and identify service users who may be at risk
- Spread the word – promote Public Health messages around hot weather harms
- Register to be a cool space

The Heat-Health Alerting system is operated in partnership with the Met Office. Heat-Health Alerts provide information about the weather forecast, the effects of the weather, and advice about what to do to stay safe.

Anyone can become unwell if they get too hot. Some people are more at risk than others, for example adults aged 65+, young children, pregnant women and people who are ill or on certain medications. Also, outdoor workers and those doing manual labour, those who spend long periods outside, or people experiencing homelessness.

VCS organisations can display and share Heat-Health resources across their organisations. There are various resources to support this including infographics and downloadable posters.

Richmond Council have partnered with Shade UK to create a series of training videos to support people who work or volunteer in community-facing organisations to protect their own and others' health during hot weather.

VCS organisations are also invited to register as a Cool Space - indoor accessible community spaces where people can take refuge from extreme heat. Venues can register if they are open to all, free of charge, accessible and staffed.

Useful links:

- Council Heatwave resources [Heatwave - London Borough of Richmond upon Thames](#)
- Register for [Heat-Health Alerts](#)
- Implement [Location Action Cards](#) when necessary
- Identify [vulnerable groups](#) you support who are at higher risk in hot weather
- Familiarise yourself with [simple actions to stay safe](#) in hot weather
- Promote Public Health messages about hot weather, health harms and water safety — share and display the [Beat the Heat poster](#), [Heat Health infographics](#) and [water safety](#) poster
- Register to be a [cool space](#)
- Complete the [training for health in hot weather](#) in collaboration with Shade the UK

7. Open Forum and Q&A

VCS Hub: Civic Centre Shared Workspace Concept - Craig Woods, Richmond Council

The refurbishment programme at the Twickenham Civic Centre includes the creation of a VCS Hub – a flexible workspace available for use by the VCS, aiming to provide a mix of space depending on needs (meeting space, workspaces etc. It is expected to be available from early 2027. Richmond Council will be reaching out to local organisations to ascertain appetite and explore how the space can best be configured to meet needs. To find out more or express interest in using the space

contact voluntarysector@richmondandwandsworth.gov.uk

SSAFA: The Armed Forces Charity - Hugh Smith and Rod Croucher, SSAFA

The organisation has been operating since 1885 providing practical, emotional and financial support, and works across five London boroughs (Richmond, Wandsworth, Merton, Kingston and Sutton).

In 2025, the SSAFA London Regional Office supported 133 members of the Armed Forces community. £162,000 was raised to support people who are or have served.

VCS organisations are encouraged to ask service users if they are veterans and if so, provide contact information for SSAFA. To find out more or seek support for veterans contact London SW Branch London.region@ssafa.org.uk

Food Partnership Network – Santiago Torchiario, Richmond CVS

Over the coming year RCVS will be looking to re-establish the Food Partnership Network and build connections between members involved in tackling food poverty (e.g. those involved with cooking groups, allotments etc). There will be quarterly meetings, starting with the first one on 2 July. Over the coming months they will be working with the Council to develop a Food Poverty Action Plan. For further information contact Santiago santiagot@richmond cvs.org.uk

Visit Richmond – Angela Ivey, Richmond Council

VCS organisations are invited to list your events and activities for FREE on VisitRichmond, which had over 650,000 unique visitors last year. <https://www.visitrichmond.co.uk/>

Events can also be included in the monthly What's On Brochure, see this month's example: [What's On Richmond - July2026](#)

Bookable experience can also be featured: [Bookable Experiences - VisitRichmond](#)

You can also subscribe and submit events to the newsletter [Enewsletter Sign Up – VisitRichmond](#)

Funding Opportunities:

- **Climate Action Microgrants** – up to £500 for projects promoting positive behaviours around climate change and sustainability, next deadline for community groups is 28 August
https://www.richmond.gov.uk/climate_action_microgrants
- **Full of Life Fund** – is back for its fifth year and will run alongside the Full of Life Fair on Friday 30 October, International Day of Older Persons and Silver Sunday. The fund supports a range of events that help older residents connect with local activities and groups that support their health and wellbeing. Up to £250 can be awarded for projects providing activities for older residents and carers, deadline 3 August, outcomes will be communicated by late August.

https://www.richmond.gov.uk/full_of_life_fund

- **Civic Pride Fund** – accepts applications year-round for projects making a positive difference in the borough, up to £5,000 for constituted groups, up to £1,000 for individuals or informal groups

https://www.richmond.gov.uk/services/voluntary_and_community_sector/voluntary_and_community_sector_support/grants_and_funding/civic_pride_fund/about_the_civic_pride_fund

- **South Asian Heritage month** – South Asian Heritage month takes place in July, and this year's theme is Unity in Diversity. If you are hosting a South Asian Heritage Month event this year or would like to share your story, please contact communitynews@richmond.gov.uk
- **Richmond Town Centre Myths Festival** – Richmond's biggest free cultural weekend of the summer, Richmond Myths will be taking place 17-19 July 2026, providing three days of live music, street performances, workshops, food markets, family activities and creative experiences. More details of the programme are available here https://www.richmond.gov.uk/news/news_june_2026/centre_stage_richmond_myths_programme_revealed
- **Community Energy** - An event will be taking place in Patch Twickenham on the evening of 23 July, providing more information about the Richmond Community Energy Cooperative, and how to get involved. Initial stages will involve forming the cooperative, and setting up the Richmond Community Energy Accelerator Fund, which is due to launch in early 2027. https://www.richmond.gov.uk/community_energy

Date of the next meetings: The mornings of Thursday 1 October 2026 and Thursday 3 December 2026

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