



LINK

THE VOICE OF THE VOLUNTARY SECTOR

Our voice, our strength

A real understanding of the issues facing local communities is one of the great strengths of the voluntary and community sector.

Organisations build relationships over long periods and are often trusted by the vulnerable and voiceless in ways that statutory agencies are not. It is this bond that roots the voluntary sector in the community and it is why the sector has a key role to play as a champion of the disadvantaged.

Our voice is never more urgently needed than at a time when cuts to services and the erosion of living standards are having a real impact on so many.

Whether it's those who stand to lose out if free 'social welfare' legal aid is cut or those that are finding life in Kensington and Chelsea unaffordable due to the housing benefit cap, our communities are facing hardship and upheaval to an extent they haven't experienced for a generation.

However recent research by the Baring Foundation's voluntary sector Independence Panel has found that some organisations are reluctant to speak out. *Protecting Independence: The Voluntary Sector in 2012* states "Some organisations that rely on state funding are fearful of challenging government or local authorities, in case this could lead to reprisals."

This applies to organisations that have had a traditional advocacy role as well as those who don't. But by not speaking out we leave the voiceless without a voice and the true human cost of the cuts goes unreported.

Our right to campaign is enshrined in the Charity Commission's Guidance to Charities. It states that "*The experience of charities means that it is right that they should have a strong and assertive voice.*"

This is something the Social Council strongly believes in and by confronting decision makers with evidence of the human cost of their policy decisions we believe the sector is exercising that right.

We should also remember that an important aspect of civil society is being an active citizen, getting involved and taking action on matters of concern. The Social Council aims to inspire local voluntary organisations to debate the issues and to unite as a voice when addressing social disadvantage to decision makers.

We know that by working on the frontline you will have accumulated lots of knowledge on what is happening to communities. Whether you have

statistical or anecdotal information we would like to hear it. We have launched a poverty watch working group to help coordinate a stronger voice for our communities. Poverty Watch aims to collate evidence and be a local voice on the impact of welfare changes on our community. You can find out more about poverty watch at www.kcsc.org.uk/povertywatch



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Kensington & Chelsea Social Council (KCSC)

works to support locally focused voluntary and community organisations serving local residents.

The views expressed in Link are not necessarily those of KCSC.

Introducing the Kensington and Chelsea Infrastructure Consortium

The Borough's leading voluntary sector infrastructure bodies have come together to improve the support provided to local voluntary and community organisations (VCOs).

The new consortium will deliver the Transforming Infrastructure Kensington and Chelsea Project which has a number of strands. These include fostering closer ties with local business and increasing corporate volunteering and giving, supporting VCOs to access contracting opportunities, integrating elements of the partner's IT systems to aid joint working and delivering financial e-learning courses.

Partners will spend the next 18 months working together with the support of a new Change Manager, Corporate Giving Manager and a Monitoring Officer to strengthen local infrastructure support. The project which is Government funded will also look at ways to make efficiencies through closer joint working and ways to generate new forms of income.

The following organisations make up the consortium:



Thinking of ways to diversify your funding?

Have you considered Social Investment?

A new guide that explains some of the ways you can use finance to generate social returns has been published by KnowHow NonProfit.



As well as explaining some of the terms like 'Equity investment' and 'Social impact bonds' the guide points you to more detailed information and uses case studies to illustrate how voluntary and community organisations can take advantage of different forms of finance.

www.knowhownonprofit.org/funding/social-investment-1



Get involved in the Golborne Road Festival

This year's Golborne Road Festival will take place on Sunday 8 July.

It will be bringing live music and entertainment, fun and games for kids and food from around the world to Golborne.

The local community is an important part of the festival and community and voluntary groups are invited to join in. If you have ideas for a fun activity, want to run an exhibition or a showcase of your work this is your chance. Stall space is available. Please get in touch.

More info: **Kuldip Bajwa**
kuldip@kcsc.org.uk **020 7243 9805**

Are you ready for commissioning?

Voluntary sector organisations are increasingly being encouraged to bid for tenders and to deliver public service contracts.

The Social Council has set up a new company Kensington & Chelsea Community Enterprises CIC. The company will look for contract opportunities, bid for contracts on behalf of local organisations and form partnerships of local organisations that will work together to deliver contracts. We will also help local organisations to develop the policies and procedures that they will need to be 'tender-ready'.

Any organisations wishing to be considered for partnership contract bids in 2012/13 must complete the new online registration process by 30 April.

More info: **Lev Pedro**
lev@kcsc.org.uk www.kcsc.org.uk/kc-community-enterprises

020 7243 9809

Nominate a young person or volunteer for free Olympic tickets

The council are offering 100 local young people and volunteers the opportunity to attend the Olympic and Paralympic Games for free.

Voluntary and community organisations can nominate a young person aged 8 to 19 (or up to 25, if they have a disability) or a volunteer that they think has earned the right to go for their contribution to local life. You may consider the person an inspiration to our community, they may be a young sporting champion, the coach who supports them or your volunteers who give their time to make a difference.

Assessors will judge the applications by looking for examples of outstanding achievement, endeavour and commitment.

Each organisation can make up to five nominations. The deadline is 10 April.

More info: **RBKC 2012 Unit**
 10am - 12.30pm, Mon - Thurs or email london2012@rbkc.org.uk

020 7361 2012

The Benefit Squeeze

A number of key changes to benefits, tax credits and the benefits system will make welfare spending more affordable but they will have a significant impact on the lives of many people.

Currently housing benefit changes are a focus for concern as the cap that was introduced in April 2011 for new claimants has been extended to cover existing tenants.

The Housing Benefit Cap and its implications

The cap on the amount of housing benefit a claimant can be paid was introduced in April 2011 for new claimants. It sets a limit on the amount that can be claimed for one to four bed properties and ends claims for five bedroom properties. In January 2012 this was extended to existing claimants and in a further change the threshold for the shared accommodation rate was increased from age 25 to 35. This means that single claimants up to the age of 35 will have their Local Housing Allowance (LHA) based on a room in a shared property rather than a self-contained one bedroom property.

The impact of this cap is cause for widespread concern as it affects a number of existing households in the borough, many of whom have lived here for years.

Kensington and Chelsea has the highest private rents in the country and also the most unaffordable. According to figures in Shelter's *Private Rent Watch Research Report – Oct 2011* average rent for a two bedroom property makes up 89% of the average (median) take home pay in the borough. For Westminster in second place it's 82% whilst the London average is 60%. Anything over 50% is classed by Shelter as "extremely unaffordable".

The housing benefit cap, means that at a stroke, most privately



rented properties become unaffordable to people on benefits regardless of how long they have lived there or how long they have been part of the local community.

Whilst it was hoped that the cap would force rents down, they are in fact on the rise. The cap on housing benefit affects 2341 households in Kensington and Chelsea out of the total 2771 (84.5%) currently in receipt of the LHA.

As a result single residents and families are being forced out of the borough in search of more affordable accommodation. This has an impact not only on people's ability to hold down a job and on children settled in education but also on the wider community.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that up to 50% of pupils at one school in Earl's Court are affected. As a result some are likely to move out of the area and have their education disrupted as they are forced to change school.

What is the council doing?

All tenants affected by the cap were sent an initial letter informing them of the changes. The council has also

put in place a scheme to provide further information three months in advance of when the changes will affect them. Advice sessions have been held to explain the changes and options available and households with members over 70 years of age have been offered home visits. Generally take up of this offer has been poor to date but the council will continue to offer advice.

Financial support is being provided to help those that are forced to move via a £350k Private Rented Access Scheme. The scheme is intended to cover the cost of a deposit and the initial month's rent expected to average £2,500 per household. This scheme has come in for criticism from some quarters for not doing enough to address the additional, non-financial difficulties people will face in relocating.

Whilst politicians stress the importance of cutting the welfare bill to reduce the budget deficit the real impact of policy should not be ignored. We believe that every effort has to be made to support those who are being forced to move or facing a reduced income.

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tem are planned over the next few years. These are designed to make
 act on some of our poorer communities, both those in and out of work.

What can we do?

We need to urgently collect the stories of those that are affected to combine this with the statistics and strengthen the case for additional support.

We believe the voluntary and community sector could play a role in ensuring families that do move are put in touch with the support services that can make their move easier. If you are

aware of families that are affected and in need of advice and support we suggest you first refer them to the council Housing Benefit department for advice from housing officer. Voluntary sector advice agencies can also offer support.

Please visit the Advice Now website for details of these.

www.advicehubkc.org/housing

POVERTY WATCH

Help us build the evidence of how the benefit changes are affecting local residents.

Send us your stories and information you have collected.

Contact Angela Spence to find out more angela@kcsc.org.uk

www.kcsc.org.uk/povertywatch

The Housing Benefit Cap in Numbers

Figures for Kensington and Chelsea (Feb 2012)

- 2771** households are in receipt of the Local Housing Allowance.
- 2341** (84.5%) have rents that exceed the capped rates that applied from January 2012.
- 2159** (77.9%) have rents that exceed the capped rates by more than £25 per week.
- 803** (34.3%) out of the 2341 that have rents above the caps, are households with 1 dependent (up to the age of 20 in full-time education) or more. **1309** dependents are affected in total.
- 788** (36.5%) of the 2159 that have rents more than £25 per week above the caps, are households with 1 dependent or more. **1288** dependents affected in total.

Campaigning against cuts

Whilst housing benefit caps are causing immediate concern other planned benefit and tax changes have yet to be implemented or become law. These changes are facing significant opposition. For more details of ongoing anti-cuts campaigns visit www.falseeconomy.org.uk

Some of other the major benefit changes that will come into effect over the next 18 months include:

- **Universal Cap** – A proposed universal cap will place a ceiling on the amount of benefits a claimant can receive in total. The current proposal set out in the Welfare Reform Bill places the limit at £26,000 which is equivalent to the average working family income after tax.
- **Tax Credits** – Changes to the working families tax credits will mean that from April 2012 a couple with children must between them work 24 hours rather than the current 16 to qualify for the annual saving of £3,870.
- **Child Benefit** – Proposed changes to child benefit will cut the entitlement for families where there is a high-rate tax payer in the household from January 2013. This is under review.
- **Disability Living Allowance (DLA)** – A change from the DLA to Personal Independence Payments will require all claimants to undergo an 'objective assessment' to confirm eligibility from April 2013. A 20% cut in costs is expected by 2017 as a result.
- **Council Tax Benefit** – From April 2013 Council Tax Benefit will be replaced by new localised schemes which aim to cut costs by 10%. This will only apply to people of working age.
- **Universal Credit** – From October 2013 the current system of separate benefits and Tax Credits will gradually be replaced by a single, new benefit. The phased transfer should be complete by October 2017.

The threat to legal advice services

The legal aid bill is currently working its way through parliament. Despite several defeats in the House of Lords it is due to become law in October 2012. The bill proposes to cut the right to legal aid in a number of 'social welfare' areas including housing, welfare benefits, debt, employment, immigration and education.

In Kensington and Chelsea 75% of Legal Help Funding will be lost – this is the highest reduction facing any London Borough and these cuts come at a time when legal advice services are already under pressure.

We spoke to Harry Tedstone, Co-ordinator of Advice Now about what the cuts mean for local advice agencies and residents.



How will the cuts affect advice services in the borough?

The precise details of how the agencies will be affected are not yet known. However, the reduction in funding will inevitably lead to a reduction in services especially at the specialist level. All the advice agencies will be affected to a greater or lesser extent and cuts in central and local government funding at the same time could easily act as a "double whammy" to the sustainability of some organisations.

Locally, how many people will be affected?

We currently advise **2540** people via Legal Help funding. This figure will reduce to **635** which will only be in a few cases in housing and debt. However, the number of people affected may be much wider as many voluntary sector services run very tight ships financially and the withdrawal of one part of their funding could easily tip the scales of their financial viability.

How are agencies working to limit the impact of the cuts?

A lot of agencies are looking to use volunteers to maintain their capacity, many of whom have been trained by Advice Now. In Kensington and Chelsea the local authority and the advice sector are working together to cope with the reduction in funding to provide services, recognising that local knowledge is vitally important to understand and deal with local need. The voluntary sector generally is known for its agility to adapt to a changing environment. However, with tri-borough issues still unknown, and both central and local government not providing any vision for the future it has been challenging to develop any long term business plan.

Is anybody challenging the cuts?

There are many national campaigns fighting the cuts – **Access to Justice Campaign** being the most high profile. Locally the importance of the voluntary advice sector is recognised at officer level.

I believe that the cuts not only have to be challenged but ultimately managed. The local voluntary sector in the Borough has a long history of working together in the

best interest of those who live work or study here. Its focus will remain the same - to provide a quality advice service to those in most need in our community.

Where can people find out about the advice services that are available in the borough?

The Advice Now partnership has worked hard with the rest of the voluntary sector community and the local authority to create better pathways to advice. The issue for me is maintaining the quality of the advice given.

I always say the best thing an adviser can know is "What you don't know!" and then they need to refer a case to someone who does know.

We have provided training to many local community client specific groups who are now equipped to recognise issues that residents may require advice on, where they can assist in giving initial advice and where they recognise that they should refer to a specialist adviser.

For more information see www.advicehubkc.org or ring **0300 012 54 64**.

The Kensington and Chelsea Advice Forum brings together the borough's main advice providers. It meets five times per year and its next meeting is on Thursday 12th April.

All advice providers are welcome.

www.kcsc.org.uk/kcaf

Measuring your Social Value

Social value is the additional benefit to a community over and above the direct specific impact of a particular programme or activity.

Community Matters gives this example: *'the direct value of a project to teach IT skills to the unemployed would be an increase in IT skills in the workforce and fewer unemployed. But its social value might extend to and include an increase in the confidence of people who have been through the programme which might lead to greater participation in local decision making'*.

Why is Social Value flavour of the month?

The public services bill is set to become law meaning all public sector contracts will need to include social value provisions. This follows the government's 'Best Value' guidance last year

that said that local authorities should consider the wider social value of a service when making commissioning decisions. This will have big implications for voluntary and community organisations wishing to deliver public contracts as our work often has a wider social impact than that of private sector organisations.

Why is Social Value worth measuring?

'Doing more for less', is a common mantra and often this translates into 'value for money'. A requirement to demonstrate 'added value' to funders is likely to improve your chances of success in securing a contract. And no doubt other stakeholders too will be interested to hear about the difference you are making to your local community. Working through a social value measuring tool can help you understand, articulate and communicate the value of what you do. It can also help you



reflect on your organisation's strengths and weaknesses and areas for improvement to maximise your impact.

Measuring your Social Value

Measuring your social value is not straightforward and there can be difficulties in proving a certain outcome was a result of your intervention rather than a consequence of many other complex factors. However there are a number of tools that have been developed that provide useful frameworks for getting started, below are two you may want to consider:

Social Return on Investment (SROI)

SROI is a well recognised and sophisticated technique that measures social value and converts it into pounds and pence.

For example a training programme for ex-offenders may show that for every £1 invested £10 of social value was created. Applying a monetary value to social outcomes is clearly attractive to funders and the SROI approach has been championed by central government. However SROI can be a complex and time consuming process which can also be expensive as you may need to buy in support from an SROI practitioner.

Visit the *New Economics Foundation (NEF)* website to find out more about SROI and also about accessing training in the technique www.neweconomics.org/projects/social-return-investment

Your Value

Community Matters has developed this easy to use tool to help voluntary and community organisations demonstrate their social value. It is a simpler and less resource intensive alternative to SROI so therefore more appropriate for smaller organisations. The tool is made up of a series of questions completed online which are then used to generate a report.

Take a look to see a demonstration of the tool here:

www.communitymatters.org.uk/yourvalue

SPECIAL DISCOUNT OFFER

The Social Council has purchased 4 Your Value accounts at a 50% discounted rate of £60 (rather than £120). These are being offered to local organisations. If you are interested in taking one of these accounts please call Siobhan on **020 7243 9807** or Siobhan@kcsc.org.uk.

We can also offer support to help you fill in the tool should you need it.

Upcoming Events

- **Information Governance for health and social care providers**
Tuesday 27 March, 9.30am – 4.30pm
 A practical workshop to help with commissioning.
- **Kensington and Chelsea Advice Forum**
Thursday 12 April, 2.30pm – 4.30pm
 Networking and coordination meeting between the borough's advice agencies.
- **Voluntary Sector Bus Tour**
Wednesday 18 April, 10.30am – 4pm
 A chance for local statutory officers to gain an insight into the work of voluntary organisations.
- **Trustee Seminar**
Thursday 29 March, 5.45pm – 8.15pm
 This seminar will focus on trusteeship in difficult times and HR issues. Delivered as part of Get on Board.
- **Health & Wellbeing Voluntary Organisations Forum**
Tuesday 17 April, 10am – 12.30pm
 Including a look at the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment.
- **Engaging Communities Voluntary Organisations Forum**
Wednesday 25 April, 10am – 12 noon
 Covering issues relating to equalities, community cohesion and sustainable communities.
- **Children, Young People and Families Voluntary Organisations Forum**
Wednesday 16 May, 10am – 12.30pm
 For all those working locally with children, young people and families.
- **Main Voluntary Organisations Forum**
Tuesday 29 May, 9.45am – 1pm
 Bringing together the borough's voluntary and community organisations to share information on local and national developments.
- **Funding Fair 2012**
Friday 1 June, 10.30am – 3pm
 Your chance to meet with funders, learn about new funding and pick up tips to help you generate income.
- **Jubilee Garden Party**
Monday 4 June, 12 noon – 6pm
 An informal get together for all of the community. Come along!

Event details including dates and times are always subject to change. Please check the Social Council website for the latest information.

www.kcsc.org.uk/events

Jubilee Garden Party

**Bank Holiday Monday,
4 June 12 noon – 6 pm**

**The Green, Thorpe Close,
Ladbroke Grove**

Come and share some healthy food and why not enter the spirit by bringing along something to share? Swap stories in our life stories tent and bring the kids to enjoy playground games and a bouncy castle. Prizes to be won in a raffle and entertainment to enjoy.

This event will be a celebration of our vibrant multicultural North Kensington neighbourhood. We hope to be joined by all ages, groups and ethnicities. Don't forget to pass on the invite!

Trustee Seminar

**Thursday 29 March,
5.45 pm – 8.15 pm**

London Lighthouse

Calling all trustees!

Have you booked your place at our Get on Board trustee seminar yet? Come along and get advice on how to guide your organisation through difficult times and put your employment related questions to a HR advisor.

Get on Board

If you are a trustee looking for support or an organisation looking for trustees Get on Board is for you.



The project run jointly between the Social Council and Volunteer Centre K&C offers help with recruitment, training, advice and networking.

www.kcsc.org.uk/get-on-board

Funding Fair

**Friday 1 June, 10.30 am – 3pm
Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith**

Make sure the date is in you diaries! Our annual Funding Fair just gets better, this year we will be co-hosting the event with our colleagues from CaVSA Hammersmith & Fulham and Voluntary Action Westminster.