

**Hastings Community Network – 4th December 2020**

**Future Priorities**

**Introduction**

**HCN is an overarching network comprising of local voluntary community and faith groups, networks and forums**. It offers communication channels between the voluntary and community sector and those who make decisions locally. We identify ways in which members can participate and influence decisions affecting the delivery of services.

HCN links with Hastings Borough Council, East Sussex County Council and is a member of the Local Strategic Partnership.

HCN events take place every 12 weeks and aim to create meaningful opportunities to share ideas, gain inspiration and collaborate in new and exciting ways. These sessions are open to all and bring together participants from across voluntary, community, public and independent sectors.

**HCN’s are either:**

* **Market place and “open-mic” sessions**, which are flexible and predominately unstructured. Offering a full morning of informal networking and relationship building.
* **Themed sessions arranged around ‘Hot Topics’** identified by HCN members and/or through feedback at previous events. Over the last year Hot Topics that have been explored include Social Prescribing, Ageing Well and Loneliness.

Each event emphasises the connectivity between all ‘Hot Topics’ and encourages participants to think, and work across boundaries, build on shared resources and value local assets.

This December event was an Open Mic session to introduce the new HCN Executives and to identify issues which will inform the HCN Executives work, to gather ideas for future themed events and to ensure that the HCN is accountable to the wider VCSE sector.

Carole Dixon, in her role as Chair of the HCN Executive, opened the event and introduced the new HCN Executive members. The new members spoke briefly about why they feel that involvement with the HCN is important at this time.

Steve Manwaring, from HVA, used a PowerPoint presentation (with Screen Share) to speak about what the HCN is and how it works, the significance of the LSP in COVID19 recovery and the ways that the HCN keeps people networked through these regular events.

The attendees were then split into two smaller groups, each led by a HCN Executive member, for 40 minutes to discuss:

* The important issues affecting Hastings and their organisations
* Suggest ideas for the HCN themed events
* Ideas which will inform the work of the HCN over the next 12 months.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **NAME** | **ORGANISATION** |
| Julie Abson | SCDA |
| Teresa Andrews | HARC |
| Godfrey Bevan | Hastings & St Leonards Men's Shed |
| Jane Caley | Association of Carers |
| Mary Carter | HVA |
| Andrew Colquhoun | HCN Executive |
| Teresa Flower | Groundwork South |
| Nicola Hawkins | Hastings & Rother Mediation |
| Larry Maurice | Hastings Street Pastors |
| Catherine Orbach | Culture Shift |
| Tracey Rose | Fellowship of St Nicholas |
| Dave Perry | Seaview Project |
| Roger Watkins | The Cranfield Trust |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **NAME** | **ORGANISATION** |
| Debby Anderson | HVA |
| Helen Bowman | ESCC |
| Roddy Crockett | Sustrans |
| Carole Dixon | Education Futures Trust |
| Alexander Francis | Quakers |
| Graham Goode | SLiC |
| Sally-Ann Hart MP | Member of Parliament for Hastings and Rye |
| Anna Herrieven | RSPCA Mallydams Wood Education Centre |
| Rupert Kirby | Lets Do Business Group |
| Steve Manwaring | HVA |
| Dawn Poole | H&R Credit Union |
| Andrea Randall-Smith | Little Gate Farm |
| Gill Reynolds | ES Health Care NHS Trust |
| John Whittington | Safer Hastings Partnership |

After the workshops, everyone returned to the main room and the facilitators of the groups gave feedback from the groups discussion.

**GROUP 1**

* Understanding of Town Deal and ensuring inclusivity
* Older people and digital literacy
* Making better use of Hastings natural environment – green and blue and engaging the community in this
* Recruitment of volunteers – particularly younger people (under 40) and also how under 18’s can be more involved in their community
* Peer mentoring support for organisations – specially to support change
* The challenges of funding into the future and impact on organisations
* Digital inclusion and lack of access for people with learning disabilities
* Transport
* Increasing engagement with people following COVID-19
* Re-mapping exercise – organisations closing and new ones starting
* Young people – mental health – young people feeling cheated – exam worries – engagement of young people.
* Staying relevant – responding to new ways of working
* There was positive feedback on the use of on-line working to deliver training meaning that the opportunities were widened and were not constrained to one place.
* How has COVID changed the infrastructure of projects? Projects have lost workers and changed working practices. Do we need some mapping about what’s here and how it works; what synergies/collaborations can be forged/reforged?
* Drawing lessons from COVID delivery – it’s enabled wider reach but what is sustainable in the longer term (i.e. where do benefits of Zoom stop)? Research or pooling ideas around supporting mixed methods (remote and face-to-face).
* Long term impacts of COVID and lockdown – expecting a delay in certain impacts (e.g. homelessness, family breakdown which are processes rather than events); continued use of foodbanks, impact of job losses and potential for increased poverty; increased mental health issues
* COVID and other initiatives such as Town Deal – use to redress/include people hard hit by COVID or with additional barriers to Zoom culture (the group talked about young people/teenagers, people with learning difficulties, the digitally excluded, public transport limitations).

**GROUP 2**

* The news about Debenhams is a stark reminder of the economic trauma which will follow in Hastings as a result of COVID 19. This will be most acutely felt among the young and poorly paid.
* The Town centre will change and ways need to be found to “reinvent” the public realm in Hastings to ensure that space was used and that empty units do not create a blight in the Town Centre. The Town Deal programme will help with this but needs to be understood and connected with.
* Network members have good links and could help and could help to promote engagement in consultations.
* During times of economic downturn, employment opportunities for those with disabilities are reduced and strategies need to be found to include them in the economic recovery.
* The Network could do an event on employment/volunteering for people with additional support needs. This could be done on the back of a Government White Paper which will be consulted in the spring.
* Those that are on low incomes will be increasingly susceptible to toxic lending with high interest rates. There is a need to find ways of creating and publicising sustainable credit via credit unions which engage with people in ways which are not exploitative.
* The importance of cycling and walking strategies was noted and the idea of 15-minute neighbourhood with good and safe links to the Town Centre.
* Identifying who will be ‘left behind’ by the economic crisis and intervening early to provide support.
* How can we link together services more effectively so that people do not get lost in the system.

After the feedback there was an opportunity for all attendees to have a discussion or ask any questions about issues that had come up in the group discussions.

The event was closed by Carole Dixon who:

* Thanked everyone for giving their time to attend the event and share their views.
* Informed everyone that a report from this event will be published by the HCN Executive group and the issues and ideas raised will be used to develop its plans for 2021.
* Mentioned that the HCN has the option to co-opt additional members to the group, to ensure that the HCN has the right mix of expertise – anyone that would like to discuss this further can do so by contacting HVA on 01424 444010.

The next HCN event will be the HBC Budget Consultation Meeting on 18th January 2021, 11am. Anyone that would like to attend this event can register to attend by following the link: <https://hastingsvoluntaryaction.org.uk/events>

It is very useful for us to hear what issues are being raised locally.

I found the discussions really interesting.

There is loads of opportunity for interconnectivity

This was my first meeting and I was impressed with the event

It was a really good event – the discussions enabled many important themes for future HCN events to be identified