



**INFRASTRUCTURE SUPPORT FOR THE
VOLUNTARY & COMMUNITY SECTOR
SOFT MARKET TESTING
MEMORANDUM OF INFORMATION**

February 2017

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1. Forward

The Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames (RBK) is undertaking a commissioning exercise to determine future delivery options for infrastructure support for the local voluntary & community sector (VCS) and building capacity in Kingston's communities, for instance through volunteering.

To compliment this soft market testing questionnaire and further inform future commissioning activities, workshops are being held on **28 February 2017 (which will focus on infrastructure support for the VCS)** and **1 March 2017 (which will focus on volunteering)** to enable potential providers to hear directly from commissioners and the local VCS and discuss with them the intentions behind the range of services to be commissioned. More information on these workshops (including how to register to attend), as well as information on other work streams that will be informing this commissioning process, can be found in Section 4.

The purpose of this document is to provide information regarding the context in which this service is being commissioned, the local landscape in which the service will operate and more detail about the work streams informing this commissioning process. It accompanies a soft market testing questionnaire which interested parties are asked to submit **via the [London Tenders Portal](#)** no later than **Monday, March 13th at 12pm (noon)**.

All answers provided will assist the Council in shaping and scoping requirements and will provide insight into the most suitable procurement route. Any information provided will be strictly confidential and non-binding. The Council is committed to ensuring fairness, openness and transparency, and to follow EU procurement regulations. This soft market testing exercise does not constitute any commitment by the Council or any of its stakeholders to undertake any public procurement exercise in the future. Interested parties will not be prejudiced by any response or failure to respond to the soft market testing exercise and the completion of the questionnaire does not guarantee any invitation to

participate in informal discussions with the Council or any future public procurement process that the Council may conduct.

This soft market testing activity does not constitute a call for competition to procure any services, supplies or works for the Council and the Council is not bound to accept any proposals offered. The Council is not liable for any costs, fees or expenses incurred by any party participating in the soft market testing exercise. Any procurement of any services, supplies or works by the Council in due course will be carried out strictly in accordance with the provisions in the UK and EU Procurement Regulations.

2. Introduction

The Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames is proud to have a thriving local voluntary & community sector (VCS) that provides a diverse and wide range of services to everyone who works, lives and studies in the borough, as well as being a crucial partner for the Council in terms of strategic planning.

The VCS is funded from a variety of sources, including commissioning arrangements with statutory partners (including the Council), successful bids for external funding and charitable donations from residents.

The vast majority of RBK funding to the VCS is via a diverse range of commissioning arrangements, including integrated contracts with pooled funding. Core to this is the Council's commissioning approach, which seeks to enable the VCS to bid for funding in a competitive way while still encouraging innovation, fairness and transparency in the process.

Despite challenges caused by austerity and increasing demand on services, RBK is committed to embracing innovation and pioneering ways of working to provide the best outcomes for our residents. [Destination Kingston 2016-20](#) outlines the Council's medium term financial plan and details how we intend to meet these challenges, and also emphasises the need to shift the existing mind-set that the Council is always best placed to deliver a solution to an identified need or problem. Kingston has many strengths across its public sector organisations, amongst the businesses that operate here, in the VCS and in individuals and community groups.

It is with this outlook that RBK wishes to conduct soft market testing for commissioning infrastructure support for the local VCS in Kingston. A crucial part of this will be exploring how the VCS can be supported or enabled to mobilise communities and individuals in the most effective ways possible, recognising the changing landscape in how public sector services are being delivered.

3. Background

A local voluntary sector organisation is currently grant-funded to provide infrastructure and volunteering support; this grant funding comes to its natural end on 31 March 2018. Infrastructure support involves strategic engagement, communication and representation for local voluntary sector groups and organisations across all services (including adults, children's, environmental issues, sports and arts & culture, to name but a few), as well as personalised development and support for issues like business planning, premises hire and leasing, accounting etc. Volunteering support involves providing organisations with advice and guidance as well as helping to match volunteers with local opportunities, amongst other things.

The Our Kingston Programme has identified infrastructure support, capacity building and supporting the VCS to grow and be successful as key to building the resilience of the Royal Borough of Kingston's communities ensuring local people enjoy happier, healthier and better lives in a great place.

The Kingston Strategic Partnership (KSP) is made up of public sector, private sector and VCS organisations within Kingston who want to play a role in shaping the strategic direction of the borough. The KSP is currently engaged in formulating The Kingston Plan, a borough-wide plan which aims to identify the key shared future outcomes for Kingston borough, and how partners can pool their resources to meet those outcomes.

The Council is keen to build on existing strengths of the current service offer, although is not necessarily seeking to commission "like-for-like"; outcomes, delivery models, procurement routes and other requirements of the new service will be informed by a range of exploratory work streams detailed in Section 4 (below).

4. Activities to inform this commissioning exercise

The below activities will inform this commissioning exercise. Bidders are reminded that choosing to participate (or not) on any or all of these activities will have no bearing on the outcome of the commissioning process; the Council is simply seeking to gain an in-depth understanding of how the voluntary sector and the communities we both serve can best be supported now and in the future:

1. Soft market testing questionnaire

The soft market testing questionnaire (which adjoins this Memorandum of Information) is targeted at providers who would potentially be interested in delivering an infrastructure support or volunteering service, or organisations who have an insight on how these services could be delivered.

The purpose of this soft market testing exercise is to gain input from a range of potential providers to inform potential service outcomes or delivery models, as well as inform the procurement route and shape that the contract(s) may take (for instance, being broken down into Lots).

2. Workshops

There will be two workshops to complement the soft market testing questionnaire. Please note that bidders are not required to attend these workshop(s), and may choose to solely submit the soft market testing questionnaire. Details of these are as follows:

Infrastructure Support for the VCS

28 February 2017

2pm - 4pm

Kingston Quaker Centre (Main Hall)

Kingston upon Thames

KT1 2PT

Volunteering

1 March 2017

2pm - 4pm

United Reform Church (Main Hall)

Kingston upon Thames

KT1 1HZ

All interested organisations **must** RSVP by emailing the Council's Community Development Team (Community.Development@kingston.gov.uk) no later than **Thursday, February 23rd**. Please note that, due to space, bidders may only nominate **one** attendee to each of the above workshops.

3. Survey

There will be two surveys (one focusing on Infrastructure Support and the other on Volunteering) that are targeted at groups who use infrastructure support services, residents who volunteer and groups who use volunteers. The purpose of these surveys is to gain a general overview on these topics and give individuals or groups who use infrastructure support services an opportunity to feed into this commissioning process.

4. Interviews

The Council is undertaking in-depth interviews with local voluntary & community organisations of different sizes and experiences to gain a deeper understanding of the support we wish to commission. These interviews will complement the survey, and will give the Council opportunities to explore any challenges or receive feedback via the survey.

5. Service description

The scope of this commissioning process has not yet been determined, and will be informed via this soft market testing, alongside activities detailed in section 4; the Council is seeking to gain information on any activities that could relate to this exercise to gain an in depth, systems-wide understanding of the local VCS and volunteering landscapes in the borough.

As a starting point, the Council is keen to preserve and build on strengths in the local VCS. The current grant-funded service covers the following broad areas:

- Supporting and coordinating the voice of the VCS in strategic developments in the borough,
- Supporting groups to secure leasing arrangements and premises to operate from,
- Leading, coordinating, facilitating and/or brokering partnership working arrangements to enable the VCS to bid for contracts and other funding,

- Increasing capacity in the VCS to manage financial resources effectively, meet funders' requirements and promote best financial practice,
- Designing and delivering training and development in line with changing needs, particularly in the context of commissioning,
- Supporting the VCS to exploit opportunities presented by ICT,
- Providing funding advice to local VCS groups,
- Equipping Trustees and Boards with up to date information and opportunities for skills development and networking,
- Exploring innovative ways to grow funding for the local VCS, for instance with legacy funds, and,
- Engaging the VCS with commissioning in children's services.

RBK is keen to encourage and see fresh thinking about how best to strengthen, support, challenge, inspire and drive innovation within Kingston's VCS to produce lasting, sustainable positive impact to Kingston's communities.

6. Timetable

Indicative Date	Activity
February - March 2017	Survey
23 February 2017	Deadline to RSVP to Infrastructure Support and/or volunteering workshops
28 February 2017	Infrastructure support workshop
1 March 2017	Volunteering workshop
13 March 2017 at 12pm (noon)	Soft Market Testing Questionnaire deadline (responses to be submitted via the London Tenders Portal)
February - April 2017	In-depth interviews
March - April 2017	First draft of specification published for comment (via London Tenders Portal)
May 2017	Publish tender opportunity, if appropriate (via the London Tenders Portal)
August 2017	Contract Award
1 April 2018	Service Go-Live