LONDON COMMUNITIES COMMISSION

Draft Recommendations for Action in partnership with
THE VOLUNTARY AND COMMUNITY SECTOR

Paper 5, May 2016

Foreword

This is the sixth in a series of short papers and draft recommendations from the London Communities Commission. This independent Commission was set up in September 2015, with eleven Commissioners from the private, public and voluntary sectors, convened by the Paddington Development Trust and supported by London Funders and City Bridge.

Its task is to look into how citizens and communities in London's most deprived areas might be strengthened and supported in these times of austerity.

This is in response to growing concerns that, without such support and the active engagement of local people, the quality of life there may continue to deteriorate to levels that not only destroy the well-being of tens of thousands of citizens, but pose a threat to the social and economic sustainability of the whole capital.

We have amassed a wealth of evidence and are in a position to make recommendations to various bodies and institutions to tackle priority unmet needs and disadvantage in London's most stressed neighbourhoods.

I am extremely grateful to all those who gave their time by submitting evidence and sharing such impressive ideas with us.

The proposed actions in this paper focus on what might be achieved by close working on agreed priorities with the voluntary and community sector. Our approach has been clear that any solution must be led by local citizens. We are publishing this draft paper for discussion with the sector in order to develop a commonly-owned strategy about the way ahead.

I look forward to the discussions - and thereafter to work with all the partners to implement the final recommendations fully over the challenging years ahead.

Sir Stephen O'Brien
Chair of the London Communities Commission

Introduction

In setting up the Commission, the Commissioners clarified the context and purpose of their work as follows:

> The full weight of austerity is falling onto the shoulders of the most disadvantaged and poorest members of communities all over London. There is an expectation that citizens themselves have to step up and fill gaps created by reductions in funding and services. While this might be a noble aspiration, it is made difficult without the continuity of a local voluntary and community-based infrastructure that supports what is a complex journey to self-determination and empowerment, for both individuals and local communities. Despite austerity, there is evidence of successful community and citizens' action in hidden pockets across London and the Communities Commission will promote and shine a light on achievements to date. Crucially, the London Communities Commission will examine further ways whereby local third sector partnerships can work together with citizens and communities to develop bottom-up, collaborative and trusted relationships with a coalition of like-minded philanthropists, Local Authorities, public commissioners and private businesses committed to a unity of purpose in eliminating inequalities and widening opportunities in London.

The Commission decided to focus on three pilot areas, Paddington, Tottenham and Newham. All three are home to vibrant but vulnerable communities. All three neighbourhoods, like scores of others across the city, have been quietly doing something extraordinary for London communities through long established community groups and networks that have made a tangible difference to their areas through the many phases of London's economic cycles. The pilot areas are not representative of all deprived areas in London. *Each area is unique*. But they give us the possibility to develop a sense of the challenges London faces now and they provide pilots where we hope to test our conclusions and recommendations in the future.

Our evidence has raised some issues which communities in stressed areas will need to address if they are going to retain the capacity to provide solutions with partners to priority unmet needs. This report summarises those issues and makes draft recommendations to be discussed both in the priority areas and among the wider voluntary and community sector in London.

The Commission's Approach

The Commission were aware of complementary initiatives particularly the work of London Funders, with London Voluntary Service Council (LVSC) and Greater London Volunteering (GLV) *The Future of Civil Society Support in London* [1] and we sought to build on this. We also wanted to ensure a fresh and focused approach - one that brought together the private, public, funders and voluntary and community sectors genuinely working with common aims to an agreed, shared programme and one which started from the citizen rather than

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[1] http://londonfunders.org.uk/what-we-do/london-funders-projects/review-londons-civil-society-support The final report *The Way Ahead: Civil Society at the Heart of London* was published in April- see: http://londonfunders.org.uk/sites/default/files/images/SME574%20London%20Funders%20Report_For%20Web.pdf

institutions.

We sent out a call for evidence in September 2015 and subsequently held a series of Hearings in October and November, publishing our Report of Evidence in February. This can be found at http://londoncommunities.co.uk/ The report highlights the crucial role of citizens within deprived areas. It has evidenced how the significant reduction in funding, being experienced by much of the community sector, means the best organisations are redesigning their own model and approach and introducing new ways of working that harness the skills and passions of local citizens.

Based on the evidence, we found that an area-based approach had demonstrably worked well and while actual solutions in each area will be different there are some common pointers to what created success. These included new ways of working which allowed residents to define the outcomes, a genuine cross-sector approach, individual and organisational leadership from a core voluntary sector body, a local focus, the inclusion of smaller groups who had the ear of the local community, and clear accountability.

We then developed these conclusions into a set of specific proposals for a way forward in the difficult current climate. We believe that significant impacts can only be made over the short to medium term if there is a genuine spirit of co-operation and if a geographic focus is called into play. That is why we have presented a set of draft actions for the incoming Mayor of London as he/she will have a clear role to play alongside others, not least the boroughs, in protecting the social and economic sustainability of London. We have requested that the Boroughs join with the Mayor in setting out a clear vision, a sense of direction and ambition for the future of London which shows how they will work with partners to tackle poverty, deprivation, poor health and the increasing polarisation that threatens London's sustainability. We have also published recommendations for the London Boroughs, Commissioners and the Business Sector (see https://londoncommunities.co.uk/downloads/).

We have called on these partners to see and to cast the role of communities and their representative organisations as the core of the solution, not the problem. As our report evidences, local community organisations are renewing themselves, harnessing the new energy and approaches in citizen involvement, so our call for support from the public and private sector is not an attempt to preserve the status quo but to get recognition of the benefits of new ways of working and to build on some of the fresh and exciting opportunities that are emerging.

We have asked the Mayor, together with the London Boroughs to identifying a number of priority areas (which we have called Community Action Neighbourhoods) on the basis of need and the capacity of the community to lead new ways of working. In each of these Community Action Areas we have suggested that a Joint Action Board (JAB) is set up with a lead community anchor organisation, other partners from the statutory services, private sector, academia, funders and trusts. This Board, based on local knowledge, would agree the actions and outcomes to be achieved over a 5-7 year programme in a way that ensured the involvement of smaller voluntary organisations. The whole Board could meet once a year to agree the overall programme (and subsequently monitor and adjust it as necessary

and agree its annual outcome report). Operational matters could be dealt with through task groups reporting back to the full Board annually. Thus, whilst the areas themselves would be set strategically, the programmes, actions and outcomes would be determined locally, would differ according to the needs and history of each area and would lever in independent money and the knowledge, time and skills of local communities.

In this model, citizens would lead the way by identifying priority unmet needs and the outcomes they want to pursue to progress to greater social and economic independence and sustainability. They would work with commissioners to co-design contracts as outlined in our commissioning paper. The focus would be on preventative action, addressing problems before they become severe; on outreach so that that those who are isolated and do not engage with statutory service providers can be supported; and on capacity building and new ways of working so that the resources local communities offer, in terms of knowledge, relationships, skills and their passion and enthusiasm about making a difference to the areas in which they live, can be developed.

But we have been clear that this model requires greater support to build the capacity of anchor organisations and to develop the capacity in the community. This is also recognised in the review of the future of civil society support in London commissioned by London Funders, working closely with Greater London Volunteering and the London Voluntary Service Council[2]. We have made recommendations around improving relationships, funding, commissioning in different ways that will impact on the funders, business sector, statutory sector and lead politicians. Below we look at the issues raised in relation to communities themselves and put forward draft recommendations to address these for discussion.

Issues raised by those giving evidence to the Commission

1. Priority Unmet Needs

Two issues emerged on priority unmet needs. Firstly there had been limited discussion within our pilot communities on reaching agreement on these needs. Tottenham had gone some way in this direction through Our Tottenham. 55 community groups and networks have affiliated to Out Tottenham and signed up to its charter, thereby demonstrating shared values and aims. But in all the areas further discussion was required to identify the priority outcomes that a programme funded through a Joint Action Board might deliver. This might require new mechanisms for participative democracy.

The second issue that emerged was that there were several small voluntary organisations (such as Haringey Migrant Support Centre or BME Health Forum) which were tackling issues that were seen as priority needs in the community but were not a high priority with funders. Such organisations were struggling to meet increasing demand on diminishing resources. It is vital that any initiative is set up in a way that protects and empowers such small local organsations that are very closely involved with their client groups and understand their needs.

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[2] See footnote one on Page 3

2. Disjointed begging bowls

As one witness put it: 'the VCS tends to be a 'mosaic of different organisations operating in relative isolation and with no overall co-ordination or collaboration'[3]. Funders and the business sector complained that there was a tendency for small community organisations to go to corporates with 'a begging bowl for cash' to support their current programme. This led to many demands, often for similar programmes. There were limited attempts to co-ordinate requests for funding; to look at how resources, other than cash, could be contributed; to explore the potential benefits to companies of being involved in an initiative and therefore to 'sell' the requests for support effectively; to explore how new support could support new ways of working which the sector was already developing. The current system wastes resources in a bidding process rather than bringing together a new partnership of those who wish to achieve the same outcomes and working together to generate new solutions.

3. Leadership capacity

There was general agreement that more investment was required to build up the community leadership of the future. It was particularly important to focus on leadership of ethnic minority and new refugee communities, putting resources into training younger community leaders who would be there for the next generation.

In some areas there is also no clear leadership from an anchor organisation or a partnership of anchor organisations. To be successful there needs to be the infrastructure support to nurture small community organisations, create partnerships of service providers, host community organisers and 'animateurs' and stimulate community enterprise and community-led economic development. The report on the *The Future of Civil Society Support in London,* referred to above, has emphasised the importance of such organisations and also how they struggle to get funding. Such leadership organisations need to have the trust of the community, the ability to be an accountable body and have the stewardship capacity to manage funds that will deliver the agreed outcomes. The Commission heard about the Islington Giving scheme. None of our three areas had an agreed local philanthropic broker to manage such schemes on behalf of the community.

Finally leadership has an important advocacy and campaigning role. Many witnesses emphasised the importance of citizen leadership developing a strong set of narratives that is backed by the community, young people and commissioners working together and is used to campaign for more resources and support.

4. Dumping poorly funded services and assets on poor communities

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[3] Professor Nick Bailey, University of Westminster

The Commission heard that in this period of austerity many statutory providers are seeking to shift costs to the community. They are happy to devolve a library or similar community asset without the funds to run and maintain such assets. There is also a failure to fund infrastructure support and core costs. Those giving evidence emphasised that citizens want to be involved in genuine co-production where there are resources and they can improve a service. They do not want to be involved in consultations with no outcomes.

The Communities Commission was told that the voluntary and community sector and citizens need to be aware of the risk that volunteers being asked to plug the gap of declining statutory services. Community groups need impartial advice and support to be able to judge if they are being invited to assist in co-production or if a service is being dumped on them so that they can resist being made responsible for under-funded services.

5. Accountability and Transparency

There is a risk that the collaborative commissioning that we are advocating creates a cartel or monopolistic model of VCS delivery which will be in no-one's interests, least of all the service user. Structural decisions need to be made locally, highlighting inclusion, transparency and accountability.

Evidence also suggested that while the VCS is clearly playing a major role in addressing needs it is still struggling to provide a clear and recognisable way in which it can demonstrate impact and outcomes.

6. Campaigning for change

The success of citizen-led campaigns, such as London Citizens' campaign for a living wage, was highlighted in evidence to the Commission. Financial pressure and the absorption of the voluntary sector in delivering state services are reducing the capacity of communities to campaign. It remains essential that campaigns continue because issues around displacement, housing and poverty that were brought to the attention of the Commission cannot be solved by citizen action alone but require changes in government policy.

Recommendations

1. Develop a democratic action partnership among local community groups that can identify shared values, aims and objectives and the priority unmet needs they wish to tackle. Develop consensus decision-making processes where all voices (particularly those of the powerless) can be heard. In doing all this, it may help to start by defining what local residents believe would make their area a success, i.e. what outcomes they wish to achieve.
2. Help develop a positive narrative to support funding demonstrating the importance of place, passion, evidence and local knowledge. Promote the advantages and successes of an asset based, citizen-led approach.
3. Consider how leadership can be grown, particularly leaders from young BAME adults who, when appropriately upskilled, will be able to proactively and sustainably serve

within our ever diversifying communities over the next 25 years. Release the energy of the many by developing the capacity of those 'extraordinary' people who are rooted in their community and have commitment, passion, skills and time.

4. Engage the business sector and increase understanding of how business can benefit through putting resources into stressed communities.

5. Encourage partnerships of NGOs to pool resources and approach commissioners and companies with a co-ordinated proposal on how things could be done better and differently by collaboration.

6. Develop anchor organisations (or anchor consortia) that have capacity to facilitate the process, provide the philanthropic broker role with stewardship capacity, and that operate with full transparency, accountability and trust in their community. Such organisations should be able to encourage collaboration and foster smaller organisations

7. Challenge and campaign for change that can deliver sustainable communities with decreasing inequality and poverty, strong supportive relationships, security in housing and a voice for all members of the community.

8. Consider how to evaluate and evidence success both for funders and commissioners, and to build confidence in the community itself and share with other Community Action Areas.