

Summary of responses to the consultation paper 'Camden Council and Camden's Voluntary and Community Sector: Investing in a Sustainable Strategic Relationship'

November 2015

1. Introduction

This report summarises responses to the consultation on Camden's Voluntary and Community Sector relationship and funding proposals. Consultation closed on Wednesday 4th November 2015. The consultation phase was a culmination of nearly a year of engagement and consultation events, discussions and debate on the future of the VCS investment programme. We have had a strong response from voluntary and community sector representatives across the borough both through written submissions and participation at the events.

The engagement stage started in December 2014 and culminated in four options for future VCS funding outlined in a paper 'Investing in a Sustainable Strategic Relationship' published in May 2015. Over 100 individuals from a total of 84 organisations shared their views during the engagement stage which ended in July 2015. The key themes highlighted by respondents at this stage were:

1. Funding needs to adopt an approach that is based on gaps and needs of Camden residents.
2. Rent relief is neither strategic or equitable.
3. The approach should foster flexibility and innovation.
4. The approach should value diversity of the sector and also have space for smaller organisations.
5. The approach should not be based on historical patterns but linked to outcomes and impact.
6. It would be useful to share learning from evaluation of the current programme

The consultation document was a result of the feedback from the engagement phase. The engagement phase was particularly helpful in shaping proposals in the consultation document relating to the strategic relationship between the Council and the VCS and the proposed changes to rent relief for VCS organisations in council property. It also enabled further thinking to be developed into how funding could be based on identified community needs.

Following the publication of the consultation document in September 2015, 51 responses were received from 74 organisations, some as joint responses. A further 9 responses were received from individuals. We have analysed the responses and used them to develop and finalise a support and investment programme for the sector from January 2017. The three key types of organisations responding to the consultation were:

- Community centres (responses from 16 organisations)
- Equalities groups (responses from 18 organisations)

- Unfunded organisations (responses from 10 organisations and a joint submission from Voluntary Action Camden)

There was some overlap between equalities and unfunded groups with 2 responses being analysed under both categories.

The vast majority of questions in the consultation were open so cannot be reported in terms of, for example, X% of respondents agreed with proposal Y. Therefore, the points outlined below do not always reflect a consensus – there were very different views from different groups. Where relevant, a difference of opinion between these three key groups is highlighted. In addition some key questions were raised on issues to consider when developing future VCS strategy particularly by Voluntary Action Camden (VAC) who submitted a response on behalf of 23 organisations. The consultation document outlined three key aspects of the new VCS investment programme:

1. The strategic relationship: how the Council and the VCS work together in future
2. The Strategic Partners Fund
3. Community Impact initiatives

2. Strategic relationship

2.1. Developing a more strategic relationship

Key Points made:

- To be strategic and to have any significant impact the consultation proposals should encompass all of the Council's investment in the sector and not just the £1.5 – 2 million per year that sits in Culture and Environment. In Children's Schools and Families there is a budget of £11million per year, Health and Social Care invest £15 million per year and Public Health £3.8 million. In addition there is the investment in the borough from the Camden Clinical Commissioning Board and other key players.
- Departments across the Council should listen more to the sector, not just to those that shout the loudest, but to all organisations with the expertise and ability to help the most deprived. In addition, the Council needs to provide feedback and evidence of how VCS input has or has not influenced the Council's thinking.
- Some organisations were unhappy with the way the engagement and consultation process was conducted and felt it didn't show the Council as a listening organisation. For example, a number of organisations had not stated a preference for a community impact fund during the summer engagement phase and this is still a feature of current proposals. Some respondents were concerned about the relatively small amount of time between the consultation closing (4th November) and the decision being made by Cabinet (16th December).

- The VCS relationship with the Council should extend across departments to ensure a joined up coherent approach. This should consider how VCS (including smaller local organisations) can deliver commissioned services. One system for applying for funding should apply across all departments.
- The Council also needs to work with external partners to encourage them to engage with the VCS. This could be done through a local Compact.
- Recognition needs to be made of the on-going cumulative impact of the cuts on the VCS. This has led to an increased demand for VCS services, whilst at the same time seeing reduced council funding and commissioning across a range of activities.
- The Council needs to be more innovative in its approach to work with the VCS and look to other areas for best practice, such as ways of keeping money within Camden, and enabling the sector to be independent and sustainable.

Other points:

- There has been emphasis on resilient and cohesive communities' role in the context of the ongoing cuts in public funding. Resilient and cohesive communities require active and involved citizens. It is important that resilience, active citizenship and the infrastructure needed to support this are also taken into account when determining need and allocating funding and should be part of longer term strategy.
- The Council should promote the value and contribution of VCS, its ability to tap into local assets, bring in external funding from a range of sources, support volunteering and look at how to use this to address any funding gaps.
- No mention has been made of how the Council and the VCS can maximise existing assets and businesses or how to tap into inter-borough funded projects.

2.2. Establishing a VCS Advisory Group

Key points made:

- The proposal for a VCS advisory group was viewed favourably by the majority of respondents.
- The advisory group needs to be strategic and work across the Council.
- Currently there are a number of different relationships between the Council and the sector to which people do nominate themselves. This is neither representative or joined up.
- The Council needs to oversee nominations to ensure a balance and avoid the tendency to listen to the same old voices. This process should ensure that smaller groups and a range of representative equalities groups are facilitated to attend. There are time and capacity issues for all organisations to attend such a group which can be prohibitive, especially for smaller organisations.
- Representation of the VCS sector needs to be defined. A clear Terms of Reference and mandate for participating organisations is needed, including how they will represent and communicate with the sector. Resources are needed to support the group, with an independent chair and secretary.

- The advisory group should work across the Council as a whole, involving the VCS in decision making at an early stage (e.g. before papers are published) and ensuring representation from across the Council.
- There were several suggestions for the administration of the group. One recommendation was that it be chaired by a Cabinet Member. Others recommended an independent chair and secretary. Yet others felt that such a group should be facilitated independently of the Council by Voluntary Action Camden (VAC).

Other points:

- One recommendation was to re-launch the VCS Strategic Forum run by the council in partnership with VAC through which council officers and people from the voluntary and community sector met to discuss strategic matters and to input into the debate. People were invited to attend according to their particular interests and expertise. One recommendation for the makeup of the group was for one representative per investment area with the role being rotated, and categories for the borough-wide partners.

2.3. Sharing Data

- The vast majority of people were willing to input data and recognised the value of sharing data to help demonstrate impact and evaluate services, as long as issues such as data protection, confidentiality and transparency of use were addressed.
- There were some concerns around making sure it is worthwhile (as there was an assumption it could be time-consuming to input data) so would need to be evaluated and come with training, data-sharing protocols and capacity building. Resources would be needed to support and maintain the platform, especially if it is to be truly shared.
- Suggested that a pilot be run first, could be an opportunity to work with businesses with their CSR work.

2.4. Rents and leases

Key points made:

- There were mixed views on the future of rent relief. The majority of community centres were against the proposals to end rent relief whilst concerns were also voiced from some equalities groups and unfunded organisations about the knock on affect for them. Community centres in particular, many of whom occupy council property emphasised the negative impact of the rent proposals on organisations and their users.
- Many felt that rent increases would have to be passed on to smaller organisations using community buildings at low or no cost. This in turn would see an increase in charging for services.
- Some organisations felt that the costs for organisations paying rent will see a reduction in income to spend on frontline services.
- Whilst the consultation document appears to encourage strategic partners to provide space for community services this needs to be balanced against the need to attract inward investment through renting space out. How much will

the local authority seek to micro-manage versus empowering organisations to maximise the use of this resource?

- Where organisations are currently receiving rent relief only (and no other funding from the Council) this can act as a lever to attract additional funding from elsewhere. The three year transitional rent support with a cut after that time would not help organisations in raising income from funding bodies who are looking for longer financial stability.
- Many groups, especially those in council property, felt a further discussion is needed about rent relief and leases with a breakdown of actual rent from Council properties provided.
- Many VCS services deliver Camden Plan outcomes, why is the Council charging rent when it could be offering peppercorn rent at 10% of market value?

Other comments:

- A change in rent policy requires Camden Council to accept full cost recovery in their contracts to those in council property.
- The Council should consider community assets transfer for buildings and empty spaces for community use. The wellbeing powers set out in Local Government and Public Involvement Act 2007 allows a waiver from “best value” disposal in cases where there is community benefit.

3. Strategic Partners Fund

3.1. General comments on the Strategic Partners Fund

Key points made:

- Some unfunded organisations felt the Strategic Partners Fund was too structured and would favour organisations who had an existing relationship with the Council.
- The consultation has raised an expectation that a large number of previously unfunded equalities groups will be receiving funding via the new funding programme.
- There was a mixed response to the idea of a cap on funding. Smaller unfunded organisations and smaller equalities groups tended towards recommending a cap to ensure that funding could be distributed more widely and fairly. The majority of community centres and some equalities groups were against the idea of a cap.
- Whilst some welcomed the stability that a seven year funding programme could provide, reservations were raised about the flexibility of such funding to address changing need and to provide funding to new and emerging groups. There was a recommendation that break clauses would allow more flexibility.
- More clarification was requested on how outcomes and impact would be measured for this fund.

3.2. Equalities strategic partners

Key points made:

- The majority of respondents thought this would still struggle to have impact on tackling some of the entrenched inequalities in Camden. However, many were also pleased that the proposals acknowledged the need for core funding for equality groups.
- Equalities groups already receive less funding proportionately, and some were concerned these proposals may make that situation worse. If not implemented correctly it may undo a lot of good work that is currently happening.
- Respondents requested a more detailed definition of what counted as an equality group and which inequalities need to be addressed through this fund.
- Equalities should be core to all funding, recognising that equalities issues are often interrelated and should not be viewed in isolation. Whatever their background or persuasion people are going to use a range of services and undertake a range of activities.
- Small equalities groups need a lot more support; resources and training if they are to participate in partnerships.

3.3. Neighbourhood strategic partners:

Needs as a basis for allocating funding

Key points made:

- The majority of respondents agreed that “funding should be targeted at need” but many questioned how you define and measure need.
- In addition to identifying needs, work is needed to map how needs are already being met. Allocation of funding should be based on a significant gap in interventions and resources to address that particular need. Asset mapping and investment mapping is therefore needed to supplement the Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD).
- There was concern about how prevention sits in relation to the emphasis on need? A focus on need may see investment ‘downstream’ when investment in prevention ‘upstream’ could stop a need from developing or mitigate its impact.
- A focus on deprivation need should not be to the exclusion of community cohesion activities which bring diverse communities together and can reduce inequalities.
- There was some confusion amongst respondents about how data would be used. Some respondents required more clarity on whether the IMD would be used as a tool to calculate how funding would be distributed across the borough or to provide a structure for developing programme activities.
- The IMD should not be relied on as the only measure of need as it quickly becomes out of date, is broad brush and doesn’t provide a detailed analysis of inequalities.
- Some respondents recommended supplementing IMD data with data from the JSNA and other Camden departments such as Community Safety and Children Schools and Families. There were also suggestions of using

intelligence from users, organisations and members as to current service use and their impact.

- Having a potentially exclusive focus on investing in need carries the danger of undermining social interaction, association and activity across geographical and communities of interest. It is this weaving together of the richness of civil society in Camden that is central to building community cohesion and resilience.

Other points made:

- The Camden Plan articulates challenges for the Borough very well and highlights priorities for support and development. Camden should focus its Voluntary and Community Sector expenditure on the key needs identified by its own Equality Taskforce, namely: employment, educational attainment, and suitable and affordable housing.

3.4. Eight investment zones

Key points made:

- Two thirds of respondents did not support the zone approach as set out in the consultation document.
- Individuals move throughout the borough to access services to meet their needs, so a reliance on zones based on need may not give the full picture.
- Many felt that the eight investment zones create an additional layer of complexity. The majority of VCS organisations currently direct time and resources to ward or borough wide activities or work with public bodies who have other geographically defined areas such as the District Management Committee boundaries, or NHS/Clinical Commissioning Group boundaries. The eight zones cut across several neighbourhoods. A focus on investment zones will require a shift in analysis and resources for organisations which could be time consuming and bureaucratic.
- Respondents called for more transparency in how the eight zones had been identified and how the approach would work in practice. There was confusion as to how the zones would be used in practice. Respondents asked for more clarification about whether there are plans to “pre-allocate” funding to the 8 zones ahead of the funding applications?
- Concern shared by many was that a geographical approach may disregard pockets of deprivation within relatively affluent areas

Other points made:

- It was recommended that organisations in the different zones should get together to better understand needs across the borough.

4. Community Impact Fund

Key points made:

- The response to this proposal was broadly positive - that it would be a good opportunity to try new solutions.
- Respondents felt there was a lack of detail about how the scheme would operate and this lack of clarity had not improved since the proposal was first discussed at the engagement stage. Further consultation was requested to discuss more detailed proposals. Some recommended that a smaller amount of funding be provided to pilot this initiative.
- Despite the lack of detail many respondents viewed this as an opportunity for a flexible approach, allowing for pilot projects to test-drive solutions. A suggestion was to pilot a theme and a model to gain learning to be used for long term initiative as this funding approach has not been tested in the UK most of the evidence is from the US.
- Expectations also need to be managed as the example objectives are still disproportionate to the size of funding which is relatively small.
- A general trend in the responses indicated that community centres were more inclined to a strategic partners approach and recommended funding be redirected to that fund, whereas unfunded organisations tended to favour the Community Impact Fund over the Strategic Partners Fund.
- Equalities and unfunded groups were generally unsure of the Community Impact Fund and felt that it might tackle larger issues but may not be best suited to tackle issues faced by equalities groups.
- This fund is seen as a good way to get partners from many sectors together. But partners need to provide resources, requiring a high level of buy in from all parties and a balance in the different cultures of working. The sector needs to understand how partnerships will be formed, how issues are identified and who bears the risk.
- A very wide range of issues were suggested as ingrained problems the fund could tackle. These ranged from health, the working poor, domestic violence, social cohesion and poverty. Respondents recommended that these issues needed to be based on evidence of need and some suggested issues could be debated and agreed by the VCS Advisory Group.

Other points:

- Organisations should be able to apply to both funds, as strategic partners should be in a good position to help tackle ingrained issues.
- Volunteering could be supported through this fund.
- This could be an opportunity for smaller organisations to deliver services – but some felt only as subcontractors. Smaller organisations will need extra support from the Council to take part.

5. General funding comments covering all new funding proposals

5.1 General comments

Key points made:

- How will the Council manage the balance between competition for funds and collaboration?
- Monitoring the impact is crucial to measure the worth of investment. Monitoring needs to be robust across the board, with support to be available to small organisations to help them meet requirements.
- Smaller organisations are particularly vulnerable as they are in competition with each other, and larger organisations and private sector – there doesn't seem to be anything suitable for smaller organisations who are not as able to bid for Council contracts and rely on small grants.
- Need to be aware that VCS have to work with other external partners aside from the Council and the balance that has to be made across all parties.

5.2 Partnerships

Key points made:

- It takes time, resources and expertise to form a good partnership, build trust and agree processes. There is not enough time to set up effective partnerships with the timescales that are being suggested. Forced partnerships almost always fail.
- Equalities groups felt there was a risk that equalities groups would be included as an afterthought in partnerships, or squeezed out by larger groups.
- Respondents recommended that funding be provided to enable small organisations to take part in partnerships.
- Camden Council can provide some practical and strategic support in terms of matching potential partners and providing necessary templates. However, many felt it is not best placed to facilitate partnerships which would best be facilitated by a strong infrastructure organisation independent of the Council.
- There are many existing partnerships in Camden that can be built on.

6. Key changes proposed following consultation

The whole proposal reflects considerations from the consultation and many of the suggestions above are already reflected in the proposal. However, specific proposed changes following consultation include:

1. The proposed minimum funding amount for the Strategic Partners Fund has increased from £1.8m to £2m following consultation. We acknowledge the call for funding to be available to smaller organisations. However the Council does not have the resources internally to manage smaller grants pots and regular funding rounds hence its decision to fund strategic organisations for a longer period. We believe this will have good outcomes for residents as these organisations will demonstrate how they can maximise their assets for local benefit and addressing needs.

2. Flexibility to rolling over the Community Impact budget from one financial year to the next if unspent is in response to the view that the approach should be piloted in the first instance.
3. The remit for the proposed VCS advisory group would cover the Council's whole relationship with the voluntary sector.
4. We recognise that IMD alone is too narrow a measure and any new programme development will look at needs in a wider sense as highlighted by the consultation responses.
5. Funding would not just be limited to areas with high levels of relative deprivation, with significant investment retained in all parts of the borough.
6. Changing demographics and local need would also be used (in addition to reduced grant from central government) to determine how funding changes in year 3 for the Strategic Partners Fund.
7. We would design bespoke monitoring for each funded organisation that sits within a standard outcomes framework designed to measure distance travelled of the fund and investment programmes overall journey.
8. We acknowledge the concerns of small organisations regarding ensuring the programme is inclusive and will work with the sector to design specific interventions to address this. This could include remunerating smaller organisations for providing their expertise in the design of Community Impact Initiatives.
9. A concern raised in the consultation by some smaller organisations was that they could be charged much higher prices for space or rent by larger organisations; it would be an expectation of any Strategic Partner that they consider the needs of smaller organisations.
10. The consultation has raised an expectation that a large number of previously unfunded equalities groups will be receiving funding via the new funding programme. This may not be feasible given the reduced amount of overall funding available. A key element of infrastructure support will also focus on support for small groups.

Organisations who submitted consultation feedback individually or as part of a group submission:

1. Abbey Community Centre
2. Bengali Education Centre
3. Bengali Workers' Association
4. Bloomsbury Baptist Church
5. British Somali Community
6. C4
7. Camden Afghan Community
8. Camden Arabic Association
9. Camden CCG
10. Camden Community Law Centre
11. Camden Community Nurseries
12. Camden LGBT Forum
13. Camden People First
14. Camden Supplementary School Partnership
15. Castlehaven (Director; Youth services; Trustee)
16. CCWO
17. Chinese Community Centre
18. Clean Break
19. Coram's Fields
20. Elfrida Rathbone
21. Fitzrovia Youth in Action
22. GOAL
23. Hampstead Community Centre
24. Healthwatch
25. Highgate Newtown Community Centre
26. Holborn Community Association
27. Hopscotch
28. Kentish Town City Farm
29. Kings Cross Bengali Men's Project
30. Kings Cross Brunswick Neighbourhood Association
31. Kingsgate Community Centre (Director, Trustee)
32. Learning & Development Centre
33. Maiden Lane Community Centre
34. Maths on Toast
35. Monte Carlo
36. Narcotics Anonymous
37. North London Cares
38. Queen's Crescent Community Association (Chair; Trustee; Director)
39. Scene and Heard
40. Sidings Community Centre
41. Somali Cultural Centre
42. Somali Elderly and Disabled Centre
43. Somali Youth Development Resource Centre (x2)
44. Somers Town Community Association
45. St Pancras Community Association (Director; Office)
46. Swiss Cottage Community Association
47. The Winch
48. Training Link
49. Voluntary Action Camden (based on reflection of 13 individuals and 23 organisations 11 of whom also submitted separate responses)
50. West Euston Partnership
51. Women and Health
52. Talacre Playcentre

Plus 11 responses from individuals