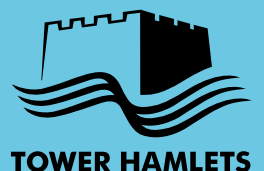


# Voluntary and Community Sector Strategy

2016-2019  
Summary



TOWER HAMLETS

# What is the Strategy about?

The Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) Strategy sets out how the council will work with the VCS over the next three years to deliver vital local services. It will drive a significant change in the way the council currently works. Established ways of working will be redefined, so communities get the help they need in a way that demonstrates that the best use is made of limited resources.

The vision of the strategy is to develop a strong, independent and thriving voluntary and community sector that works well in partnership with the council. This means a sector which has the resources and confidence to provide high quality services and support all parts of the community in Tower Hamlets.



## Stage one

Consultation ran from September to December 2015, with key stakeholders, including VCS organisations, to understand how the council could develop a more strategic relationship with the VCS to deliver shared priorities.

- ◆ Workshops were hosted with the VCS, Councillors and Council Officers
- ◆ One-to-one discussions took place with sector wide bodies such as Tower Hamlets Council for Voluntary Service (THCVS)
- ◆ An online survey open to the public with 76 responses (mainly from VCS organisations).

The findings of the first stage consultation indicated general support for the direction of the Strategy including the four provisional objectives, but did raise the need to build the capacity of the local VCS to deliver against these ambitions and compete effectively with the private sector and national charities.

# Who was involved in developing this strategy?

Extensive consultation and joint working with the VCS and other stakeholders was undertaken to ensure a range of opinions informed the development of the Strategy. The views expressed have decisively shaped the development of the strategy and issues and ideas identified by stakeholders are referenced throughout the document. Similarly, the action plan reflects the priorities of the VCS and their desire to be full partners in delivering improvements. The consultation consisted of two stages:



## What does the Strategy say about its objectives?

There are four objectives in the strategy. Within each objective are a number of actions that the council and VCS are committed to delivering in partnership to support the local community. The council wants this strategy to be supported by partners and stakeholders, therefore actions reflect the interests and priorities of those who took part in the consultation.

### Stage two

A draft strategy was published and consulted upon during January and February 2016. The findings of this stage focused on the four objectives of the strategy and how the issues flagged up in the first phase consultation had been addressed in the draft strategy.

This stage of consultation involved:

- ◆ Holding workshops for all four stakeholder groups i.e. VCS, Business, Council Officers and Cabinet Members
- ◆ A public online survey which received 56 responses.
- ◆ Discussions with business stakeholders.

There were high levels of support for the draft strategy however, several improvements were needed. These included clearer definitions of terms such as co-production, collaborative commissioning and community leadership; and the council supporting the VCS by improving the skills of volunteers, helping them find alternative funding sources and building networks with local businesses.

### Objectives

1

**Promoting co-production and sustainability**

2

**Maximising the value from resources**

3

**Creating a sea change in volunteering**

4

**Bringing together businesses and the VCS**



# Promoting co-production and sustainability

Commitment to co-production is at the heart of the approach in the strategy. This means the VCS will be an equal partner in shaping what the council does with the resources available; and working closely with partner agencies and people who use services to make sure local priorities are identified and delivered.

Measuring what is being achieved will ensure that resources are used to do the most good for the greatest number of people in the community. The council will define the social value it wants to see achieved and build these into how services are commissioned. Examples could include better training opportunities for people seeking employment, more child care places in local nurseries or more activities for young people.

## Key Consultation Findings and Strategic Response

Stakeholders want the council to facilitate and support the development of VCS organisations so they can work effectively in a commissioning environment and bid for contracts. The council has agreed to work with Tower Hamlets Council for Voluntary Service (THCVS) to organise this support and foster greater co-operation within the sector by supporting THCVS to help VCS organisations set up consortia and buddying arrangements. The consultation also indicated that stakeholders want the council to commission services at a local level, with the specific interests of distinct communities

in mind and where VCS organisations can compete on equal terms. The council has committed to ensuring its procurement arrangements enable this to happen where possible, whilst staying within legal and regulatory frameworks.

## Key actions for this objective include:

- ◆ The council, Tower Hamlets Council for Voluntary Service (THCVS) and the local voluntary and community Sector will develop a Compact setting out each other's roles and responsibilities.
- ◆ The VCS will become more involved in shaping what the council does as an equal partner, working closely with other providers and service users to jointly assess and define local needs;
- ◆ The council will work closely with THCVS and VCS organisations to support them to build their organisational and business capacity so they can successfully bid for and run commissioned services.
- ◆ Smaller organisations will be brought together and expertise and resources pooled, larger organisations will partner smaller ones;
- ◆ Services will be commissioned in a way that takes account of the distinctive needs of the local community





# Maximising the value from resources

In 2014/15 the council spent £5.7 million in grant funding and £14 million in commissioned services. Given the scale of the investment and the reality of significant cuts in council budgets, it is essential the council gets value for money in terms of the outcomes achieved with the money that is spent.

The emphasis in the strategy has shifted to commissioning services, which means services are specified, based on an assessment of need and then tendered through a competitive bidding process. Overall, this method of funding will be preferred in future rather than grant funding, which is money given directly to organisations to deliver defined projects based on their track record. Some grants will still remain for specific purposes, for example, where this helps VCS organisations improve their capacity or upskill the work of volunteers. This model will ensure that funding processes are transparent and fair and prove how spending on specific services contributes to achieving outcomes.

If the local VCS is to compete on an equal footing with the big national charities and the private sector, more must be done to improve their financial sustainability. The council will work with THCVS to support the VCS to access new income streams and look at options to guarantee existing funding and support for longer periods.

## Key Consultation Findings and Strategic Response

The consultation indicated there was strong support from stakeholders for retaining some grant funding in specific areas, particularly where this helps build community capacity or provides services where the impact could not be easily measured. The intention is therefore

to retain grant funds for specific types of work, including these. Further details of these specific areas can be found in the strategy. Stakeholders also want more long term funding and support to build resilience and give them more financial security in future. The council will look at introducing multi-year funding deals and will work with THCVS to help VCS organisations bid for other sources of external funding.

## Key actions for this objective include:

- ◆ Ensuring measurement and delivery of outcomes for Council funding;
- ◆ The range of council resources (grant and commissioning funds, use of buildings, data, promotional resources community leadership, etc.) will be more effectively co-ordinated to maximise the impact the council has in working with the sector;
- ◆ All funding will be reviewed to ensure it is contributing to priority outcomes and there will be a general preference for commissioning services, rather than providing grant funding, although grants in specified areas will be retained;
- ◆ Grant funding will be part of a single, streamlined small grants pot; funding bids will be open and competitive and based on the needs and priorities set out in the council's community strategy and strategic plan;
- ◆ Grant monitoring will be robust, with defined, and measured outcomes and evaluation of the impact of spending against them.
- ◆ The Council is considering how to increase the period it funds VCS organisations, from providing one year funding towards moving to multi-year deals.



# Creating a sea change in volunteering

Working together, the council and VCS will seek to expand volunteering opportunities in the borough and make local people more aware of what's available. There is a particular need to develop highly skilled volunteering, for example using the skills of people who have been successful in their career.

The potential for introducing new opportunities for people to help their community will be actively investigated, for example the successful time banks in Bromley- by- Bow and Stepney could be expanded to other neighbourhoods.

## Key Consultation Findings and Strategic Response

On volunteering, the consultation with stakeholders revealed a desire for a more co-ordinated approach to manage volunteer opportunities and align them to local priorities. Stakeholders felt that more could be done to champion volunteering and the introduction of recognition schemes for outstanding achievements would be welcome. The consultation also revealed that the VCS would welcome the development of a dedicated site which brings together information on volunteering opportunities, funding opportunities and advice on business support, etc. The strategy therefore commits to working with THCVS to achieve this.

## Key actions for this objective include:

- ◆ The VCS will lead an audit of community need and volunteering capacity, to develop a better understanding of the potential and options for volunteering in the community;
- ◆ New schemes will be developed that encourage council employees to volunteer with local VCS organisations
- ◆ Introducing new schemes that recognise the achievements of volunteers and the value of volunteering
- ◆ Establishing web resources which bring together all information on volunteering and the VCS
- ◆ Volunteer placements will be made available within the council;
- ◆ Digital technology such as social media will be used to identify and match volunteers to opportunities in a targeted way.

# 4

## Bringing together businesses and the VCS

The strategy puts a strong focus on building relationships with the business sector and increasing the opportunities local companies have to contribute towards delivering better outcomes for local communities. A key way of doing this is for businesses to get more involved in Corporate Social Responsibility initiatives. One of the things CSR means is companies asking employees to volunteer to work with local communities and use their skills and expertise to deliver projects. With more effective co-ordination, all partners will have a better understanding of what is needed in the community. Understanding what is available in terms of how business volunteers can be better used to perform specific tasks that matches need with availability and enhances support to local projects.

### Key Consultation Findings and Strategic Response

The consultation told us that stakeholders wanted the VCS and local businesses to collaborate more effectively by building closer ties and developing stronger working relationships. The needs of local VCS organisations can be better matched with the resources local businesses can offer and that opportunities such as networking events could help to achieve this. The council will work with THCVS to help build a thriving relationship between businesses and the VCS.

### Key actions for this objective include:

- ◆ Working with brokerage organisations, such as the East London Business Alliance (ELBA) to broker relationships between businesses and the VCS to develop closer working in future;
- ◆ Supporting opportunities to bring the VCS and local businesses closer together, such as networking events;
- ◆ Developing a toolkit to promote Corporate Social Responsibility and support relationships that mutually benefit both business, the community and the local VCS;
- ◆ Use clauses in council contracts to lever additional support for voluntary and community organisations in the borough.

