

Tracey Crouch MP
Parliamentary Under-Secretary (Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport)
Department for Culture
Media & Sport
100 Parliament Street
London, SW1A 2BQ

Dear Tracey,

UK Civil Society Strategy – London CVS Directors Response

This response to the Civil Society Strategy is the shared views of Directors of Council for Voluntary Services (CVSs) and local infrastructure organisations across London – apologies for the late submission. We are the London CVS Directors Network which represents organisations providing local infrastructure support to charities and local community groups across the majority of London boroughs. There are 29 infrastructure organisations in our network which are listed in Appendix A. Between us we support nearly 20,000 voluntary and community organisations in our local areas.

The CVS is also known as a Local Infrastructure Organisation (LIO) and we see ourselves as an essential player within the vision and system of civil society as identified within The Way Ahead report¹.

Our role and commitment as CVS Directors was captured in a report in March 2017² in response to The Way Ahead strategy. Our commitment to the philosophy and implementation of ‘The Way Ahead’ was underpinned by good practice principles contained within the report.

We are organisations placed within the heart of communities where our core purpose is to develop and support a thriving local eco system where a diversity of charities and community groups can bring about social change. We believe strong civil society can only be achieved when residents and communities are part of the process for bringing about that change. This requires empowerment, empathy, time and resources to get right and we all have a long history of doing this well in London – although there is always room for improvement!

We generally welcome the Civil Society strategy, recognising that this is the biggest strategy to emerge since the Big Society Strategy in 2010 and hope this prepares the way for positive change for Londoners. The development of the strategy provides a marked opportunity for close collaboration with CVSs and local infrastructure bodies. We seek to optimise the relationship between the CVS and wider civil society, and the strategy can both inspire and nurture this.

Our response focuses mainly on the value and importance of small and locally based voluntary and community organisations (VCOs) that form part of the local eco system. Within this we include VCOs

¹ https://londonfund.org.uk/sites/default/files/images/SME574%20London%20Funders%20Report_For%20Web.pdf

² <https://expertsinvolunteering.files.wordpress.com/2017/12/the-way-ahead-commitment-from-lcvsdn-peach-consultancy-170324-fi.pdf>

which are BAME led and exist primarily to support the broad range of BAME communities in London as well as predominantly volunteer led local grassroots organisations which form the majority of our respective membership/service users across London.

As CVSs, embedded within local communities, we have a key role to play in building the capacity and skills of VCOs and to work with residents to build human and social capital in a way that is coproduced and empowering wherever possible. We are in an ideal position to unlock the assets within communities to make change. This is because:

- We often are the first port of call for disadvantaged communities with particular issues
- We can see across both the public sector and voluntary sector landscape and regularly play a critical friend role at strategic decision making tables, so that the contribution of local charities and community groups are respected and built upon
- We regularly survey or assess levels of need with local communities
- We have many trusted relationships which help to foster the right culture for joint work between sectors and help find or facilitate the right solutions which are 'bottom up'
- We have many years' experience of delivering successful projects using traditional asset based community development (ABCD) techniques which supports co- production with communities
- We can trial new approaches, build on existing good practice and in some cases operate at scale to coordinate large scale delivery partnerships of local VCOs

Ultimately, we believe strongly that, with the right resources and support, local people and communities can be at the heart of the solutions to the problems they face.

Independence, Voice and Reach

The CVS movement is committed to providing voices to communities who are often unheard or who do not have the agency to represent them, particularly around strategic public sector led partnerships. Our role as facilitators of 'speaking truth to power' is extremely important and something we do constantly.

The independence of the voluntary and community sector is vital to ensure that voices from across the sector can be heard for and on behalf of the communities they support. We believe the strategy must acknowledge the importance of ensuring the quietest of voices can be heard if we are to tackle social and economic inequality. Our role of sharing the lived experiences of individuals and communities with key decision makers is most effective when we are free to work with civil society organisations to lobby for change.

Acting as facilitators requires resources as it often involves gathering community intelligence and insight as well as representing this in ways that are consolidated for the public sector. In some cases, we receive funding from our local authority to provide this critical friend function but not always.

The CVS movement provides a mechanism by which we can continue to facilitate local voice. Across London we all have large individual databases of local VCOs which we use to target services to local communities. Whilst we recognise that this is only one part of a wider picture of ensuring residents

are central to decision making, our reach into local communities makes hearing the diversity of community voices easier and more effective for decision makers.

Small and local

The local CVS is ideally placed to understand the needs of local voluntary organisations and community groups and to work collaboratively with frontline organisations to address need – whether they be social, economic or environmental.

In order to play a greater role in civil society these frontline organisations need help with their governance, staff development, policies and procedures (including around such essential issues as safeguarding) as well as support to develop funding bids and address their long term sustainability. This is the traditional domain of CVSs. However, the resources to support this core work are few and far between and government should seek to ensure that funding is available for infrastructure to provide this foundation for social action.

Grants play an essential part in supporting a stable voluntary sector and core funding is essential to maintaining vital services for the community. Some of the CVSs across London are involved in running small grant programmes on behalf of funders such as the local authority, Clinical Commissioning Groups or Big Local. CVSs can, and often do, play important roles in influencing local and national funders to ensure that their grant programmes are accessible and monitoring requirements are proportionate to the level of funding given. Many of us are working with local authorities and the NHS to mitigate the impact of austerity on local communities by ensuring that investment reaches those that need it most.

CVSs are also managing whole grant programmes, developing monitoring frameworks and providing the back office function of collating and assessing outcomes of grant programmes to try and influence local funders to continue to invest in small grant programmes. This has also helped to raise the platform for BAME organisations where the CVS has been able to demonstrate the impact of the services they provide.

The BAME Voluntary and Community Sector

Due to the diverse population of London, the membership of the CVS across London reflects this. In some boroughs the CVS naturally has a larger proportion of BAME organisations proportionate to the borough population. Due to the barriers which face the BAME communities, the voluntary sector is naturally over-represented in this area by BAME organisations and community groups striving to support their communities.

The BAME sector is wide and varied and often faces dual challenges of navigating mainstream services that they feel are not able to adequately provide the support they need. There is real concern that, as the pool of available funding gets tighter at the local level, this will have an irreversible impact on the BAME sector unless attention is given to strengthening the structures required to enable BAME organisations to survive and to thrive.

CVSs have a particular role to play in this area and recognise the need to ensure that success comes with working collaboratively together with BAME organisations. CVSs can do work closely with

BAME organisations in a variety of ways and are in a position to go further to ensure that BAME organisations are not missing out of opportunities that enable them to continue to provide much needed support to communities that are culturally specific and dynamic in their reach.

The individual CVS can play a vital role in brokering relationships with local decision makers. Together the CVSs across London can be a powerful mechanism by which we can channel the diverse voices of the voluntary and community sector at the London regional level. BAME communities across London want a coordinated voice to ensure issues such as race inequality and injustice can be channelled upwards effectively. BAME communities also want to ensure that issues specific to their own diverse needs are heard and this can be channelled through the organisations set up to support them. The CVS and BAME organisations working together alongside their communities to get their voices heard is one such mechanism which can be utilised through the implementation of the civil society strategy.

CASE STUDIES

Redbridge CVS recruits and employs a team of Health Buddies from communities affected by particular health conditions, such as TB, and gives talks to local voluntary and community groups. The simple, non-stigmatising messages are then cascaded out to the wider community. The CVS has also provided a range of training to local BAME faith and community leaders to help them respond to mental health crises amongst their communities, as they are very often the first points of contact for people experiencing mental health issues.

Merton CVS worked with local BAME organisations and community leaders to set up BAME Voice. The organisation facilitated their places on strategic partnership boards and working groups, including Compact Board, VCS Strategy Review Group, Health & Wellbeing Board's Diabetes Truth Commission and a CCG Community Reference Group for a new Health & Wellbeing Centre. They lead and deliver services on behalf the Local Authority and Clinical Commissioning Group. The CVS jointly recruited a Development and Campaigns Officer to facilitate and empower BAME communities with the skills to influence housing policy and provision, particularly in four social housing regeneration areas.

Merton CVS also supported the Ethnic Minority Centre to move from the risk of closure to diversifying its income, improving its reputation and delivering wellbeing services to many more residents.

Developing the capacity of VCOs

Below are short examples of the work that is being done by CVSs through a variety of ways to develop the capacity of VCOs and to influence service provision. Recognising the need to always continue to reflect the changing environment we are able to share good practice and also join together to work collaboratively across boroughs. Examples of how we work include:

- **Co-Production around important issues**
Enfield Voluntary Action and Hackney CVS are working with their local councils, schools and parents to improve parental involvement in their children's education and in reducing school

exclusions. Hackney CVS is also bringing community organisations together to tackle youth violence and empower parents, working closely with the Council and public agencies. Tower Hamlets CVS is co-producing the council's new grants programme with its local sector to ensure grants meet local need.

- **Collaborations and Consortia**

Areas such as Bromley and Hackney have set up special purpose vehicles to strengthen opportunities for local organisations to deliver public sector contracts in partnership. Many CVSs have been central part to the setting up and running of youth foundations such in Camden, Brent, Westminster, Hammersmith & Fulham and Ealing. Redbridge CVS has developed a multi-borough partnership to deliver employment and skills contracts. Other such as Aston Mansfield in Newham are working collaboratively with Academia (UCL East) to bring together post graduate students and VCSEs to work together on evaluation projects.

- **Capacity building**

All CVSs are involved in assisting new start-ups particularly for supporting under represented communities and to bridge identified gaps in service provision.

In some cases such as Voluntary Action Camden and Kensington & Chelsea Social Council, the local CVS has established relationships with professionals to provide pro bono leadership coaching and mentoring for workers within the voluntary and community sector.

Merton CVS has provided office space to 10 emerging organisations whilst providing governance and funding support which has helped some of the organisations make significant strides in delivering excellent services.

- **Enabling social action**

In other areas CVSs support the development of seed projects by hosting resident led projects within the CVS or holding funds for new ideas whilst supporting the formal setting up of new organisation to take projects forward. Croydon CVS has been involved in establishing participatory budgeting schemes

Supporting consortia and partnerships

The CVS is ideally placed to help shape consortiums or partnerships ensuring they are inclusive of BAME organisations and can provide capacity building support to aid full participation within consortia.

The CVS can pull together coalitions across civil society and because our core purpose is infrastructure and not front line delivery, most of the local investment goes to the frontline organisations/service providers.

However, collaborations take time, energy and resources. This is an area which the CVSs are more than able to lead on, but this needs recognising within the Civil Society strategy, along with an appreciation of the time it takes to build capacity and trust for consortia to flourish.

CASE STUDIES

In Kensington and Chelsea a newly formed BME consortium is working with the CVS to align capacity building needs and development, voice and representation with that of their consortia members.

Hackney CVS has helped a consortium of African organisations (Community African Network) to deliver health interventions which have increased the uptake of condoms and, more recently, increased the uptake of cancer screening by building the capacity of the organisations and providing small payment by results contracts to them to deliver. This approach has given the NHS reach into communities it was struggling to engage.

Through its special purpose vehicle ('City and Hackney Together') Hackney CVS was able to secure resources of over £1.5m from the City & Hackney CCG for local VCOs to deliver interventions which reduce the pressures of those with long term or acute health conditions on the health system. Developed through an Alliance commissioning approach, One Hackney and City Integrated Health and Social Care was a pilot project, designed to provide more coordinated services for the most vulnerable, high risk patients in the City and Hackney through a Quadrant based system of highly integrated working, with 4 dedicated multi-disciplinary core teams (Social workers, Care Navigators based at Hackney CVS and Care Coordinators). At its heart it was about integrated working with wider project teams - Community Nurses, IIT, ACRT, and Mental Health Alliance, alongside local VCOs who were commissioned by Hackney CVS. The key aims of One Hackney and City were to reduce inappropriate Hospital Admission/ Support timely hospital discharge; decrease the use of emergency bed days; decrease the number of readmissions; and increase the number of people dying out of hospital (where that is their choice). The One Hackney and City project worked with over 2000 patients with complex Health and Social Care needs.

Kensington & Chelsea Social Council is contract-managing a social prescribing programme with a consortium of 9 small and medium sized voluntary sector providers. To date £0.5m has been invested by the CCG and the programme evaluated to show the social return on investment.

Merton CVS, in partnership with the Council's Public Health and the Clinical Commissioning Group, piloted social prescribing in East Merton, the deprived area of the borough. Over 300 patients were referred from two GP practices. An independent evaluation of the service after 12 months found 77% of people referred to the service with improved wellbeing, 33% percent reduction in GP appointments at three months and 50% fewer A&E visits after twelve months. The CVS has also worked with voluntary sector health, social care and wellbeing providers to set up Merton Accord, a local consortium and is working collaboratively with cross sector agencies.

Ealing CVS has set up a 'Help Through Crisis' consortium of local advice agencies to support local people in severe financial crisis via local foodbanks and at local county courts.

Since 2008 Aston Mansfield (Newham's CVS) has facilitated an ESOL exchange that brings together organisations working with potential and actual ESOL learners including VCOs, public and private organisations. The Hospital's New Entrants service and the community policy team have joined along with the libraries, neighbourhood centres, community centres, housing associations and

formal and informal ESOL providers in the voluntary and community sector. The CVS has developed a number of resources, lobbied for ESOL, organised and delivered CPD classes for tutors and coordinated responses to research the profile of ESOL and integration. DCLG has made the organisation a point of contact in the borough for organisations that have been awarded contracts on new ways to deliver ESOL.

Working with volunteers

Where CVSs are also Volunteer Centres they can actively recruit residents to support civil society activities and active citizenship. Ealing and Hounslow CVS have set up a 'Help your Health' programme supporting people with long term health conditions to take up volunteering and train volunteer Community Health Champions in areas such as cancer and dementia. Such programmes have a double impact - not only on the community - but also on the individuals as they develop their own skills and knowledge when they volunteer.

Working with businesses and philanthropists

CVSs are also able to help lever in additional funding and pro-bono support into local areas through working with corporate and local businesses around philanthropic causes.

CASE STUDIES

One Westminster is currently working with the City Council to be the 'go to' place for businesses wanting to develop their CSR to support VCOs, building on their highly successful Time and Talents corporate brokerage programme.

Hackney CVS established Hackney Giving in 2014. Working with partners such as the East End Community Foundation it secured over £300k from corporate companies to provide grants for small scale community projects led by local people. They also co-hosted local giving events whereby local people pledge funds directly to three participating charities. Over £10k is raised at each giving evening.

Ealing CVS, which also delivers support to charities in Hounslow which has no CVS, is in the process of setting up a new Local Giving Scheme in the borough. Other CVSs have also been instrumental in setting up local giving schemes including Islington, Sutton, Barnet, and Camden.

Enfield Voluntary Action is facilitating a small grants programme for a specialty chemicals company. Every month one local organisation receives £500 to assist with their work with the community. EVA supports organisations with application forms, which are entered into a monthly draw from which 3 ideas will be presented to company employees and voted for. Enfield Voluntary Action also holds Community Conversation events where private sector and voluntary sector organisations can meet to plan work together.

Merton Means Business, a CVS and Chamber of Commerce partnership linking businesses with voluntary organisations, has raised over £40,000 annually for local charities in cash and in kind. Increasingly, businesses and their employees are choosing a local charity of the year and supporting them through leadership development and fundraising.

Tackling big societal issues and being catalysts for system change

Whether at the local level or at regional or national level the voice of local organisations are often channelled through the CVS. A number of CVSs are involved in large strategic approaches around working interdependently with the public sector to create lasting change. Again, if resourced appropriately, CVSs can play a hugely important role as local innovators, brokers and engagers which can bring services closer to people and save the public purse through better coordination and targeting, coproduction with residents and shared goals.

CASE STUDIES

Barnet CVS developed a health commissioned integrated wellbeing service delivered through a multisector/multiagency partnership of charities, health and care providers with residents with poor mental wellbeing working together. Developing a non-clinical engagement tool, a pool of community organisations providing 'socially prescribable' services and underpinned by a clinical safety net has resulted in positive service feedback and 40% reduced presentation for acute admissions. This has resulted in significant savings to public services. This approach has resulted in a mental wellbeing movement with increased confidence and a local narrative and evidence base demonstrating that when agencies work together it is possible to demonstrably improve and quantify outcomes. Statutory commissioners are more confident of commissioning from the VCS and the Network wants to test the approach using this funding.

Hackney CVS is working with Hackney Council and public partners to implement a 15 year strategy which will improve outcomes for young black men. This approach covers a number of key areas including: improving education outcomes; reducing the risks of youth violence; embedding culture and identity; embedding a culture of inclusive leadership and supporting parents to become champions. Throughout the development of this approach, Hackney CVS has created a cohort of young black men who act as leaders for their peers and as a sounding board for the plans we have developed. Crucially the young men requested a much bigger focus on mental health and their need for positive identity and role models which has in turn shaped the focus of interventions going forward.

Ealing CVS has set up a Muslimah Matters project working with grassroots BMER groups to support Muslim women and Girls to tackle radicalisation.

Brent CVS is addressing the needs of emerging communities and community cohesion as they provide support to Eastern Europeans as they settle within the borough.

Hackney CVS is one of 14 areas delivering the Ageing Better programme, funded by The Big Lottery Fund, to reduce social isolation amongst older residents. Part way through the 6 year programme, Hackney CVS has already engaged over 2500 older people, utilising local VCOs to deliver a variety of interventions and working with the public sector to implement system change.

We see now more than ever the need for more local place based action. It does not need to take a tragedy on the scale of the Grenfell tower fire to recognise that communities work together. This is happening all over the country in a variety of ways stemming from asset based approaches.

CASE STUDIES

Following the Grenfell Tower Fire, Kensington & Chelsea Social Council worked with London Funders to support the quick response to fund organisations who were coping with the aftermath. The organisation worked quickly to develop the Grenfell directory of services which was used by relief agencies to help contact voluntary and community organisations. The organisation is now part of several multi agency partnerships working with local community groups and residents to aid better coordination of services and longer term planning for the recovery of North Kensington.

Following the 2011 riots Hackney CVS held 3 community reassurance meetings for local people which engaged them in conversation about their perceptions about why the riots happened with the Council and Police. They also provided 23 small grants to community groups who gathered community insight in many different ways. Working with IPSOS MORI, Hackney CVS presented the findings to the Local Strategic Partnership which then kick started a series of programmes focussed on building young people's engagement with the police, the establishment of a youth stop and search monitoring group, dedicated employment programmes for young people and also a greater local focus on the importance of culture and identity for many communities. The stop and search group, facilitated by Hackney CVS, worked with the police to dramatically reduce the number of unnecessary searches and improve the quality of interactions.

What more is required?

Within the Civil Society strategy, the London CVS Directors Network would advocate for:

- Specific reference to the role of infrastructure in the implementation of the strategy
- More up to date resources that support good practice in partnership working
- Stronger mechanisms put in place to ensure the voices at the local level can be heard across government departments on a regular basis so that it becomes normality rather than a special requirement of information gathering
- Greater recognition of the voluntary sector at central government level that the work of small and local voluntary and community organisations contribute to better quality of life for their users of their services.
- For the VCS to thrive and for LIOs to make the most of their role – greater collaboration between funders and improved funding and commissioning practices to support infrastructure and locally led interventions.

We have a shared set of values as the CVS Directors network that binds us together in seeking to make a difference at the local level and together at regional level. We would like to see our role reflected in being a part of civil society solutions for London.

Should you wish to meet with us as a network we would be more than delighted to host a visit. We look forward to hearing back from you and once again apologies for the late submission of this response.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'JF', with a stylized flourish extending to the right.

Jake Ferguson

Chief Executive Officer, Hackney CVS
Chair, London CVS Directors network on behalf of 29 members (details in Appendix X)

APPENDIX A:**List of local infrastructure/CVS Directors**

Borough	Name	Organisation	Email
Barking & Dagenham	Rita Chada	Barking and Dagenham Council for Voluntary Service	trustees@bdcvs.org.uk
Barnet	Julie Pal	CommUNITY Barnet (CB)	julie.pal@communitybarnet.org.uk
Bexley	Vikki Wilkinson	Bexley Voluntary Service Council	vwilkinson@bvsc.co.uk
Brent	Anju Bhatt	CVS Brent	a.bhatt@cvsbrent.org.uk
Bromley	Colin McLean	Community Links Bromley	colinm@communitylinksbromley.org.uk
Camden	Simone Hensby	Voluntary Action Camden	shensby@vac.org.uk
Croydon	Steve Phaure	Croydon Voluntary Action	steve@cvalive.org.uk
Ealing*	Andy Roper	Ealing Community and Voluntary Service (also cover Hounslow)	andy@ealingcvs.org.uk
Enfield	Jo Ikhelef	Enfield Voluntary Action	j.ikhelef@enfieldva.org.uk
Greenwich	Naomi Goldberg	GAVS	naomi@metrocharity.org.uk
Hackney	Jake Ferguson	Hackney CVS	jake@hcv.org.uk
Hammersmith & Fulham	Sue Spiller	Sobus	sue.spiller@sobus.org.uk
Haringey	Geoffrey Ocen	Bridge Renewal Trust	geoffrey@bridgerenewaltrust.org.uk
Harrow	Rachel Wright	Voluntary Action Harrow Co-operative	rachelwright@voluntaryactionharrow.org.uk
Havering		No provision currently although some work in borough by Redbridge CVS	
Hillingdon*		Supported by West London CVS Network	
Hounslow*		Supported by West London CVS Network	
Islington	Guljabeen Rahman	Voluntary Action Islington	Guljabeen.rahman@vai.org.uk

Kensington & Chelsea	Angela Spence	Kensington and Chelsea Social Council KCSC	angela@kcsc.org.uk
Kingston	Hilary Garner	Kingston Voluntary Action	hilaryg@kva.org.uk
Lambeth	Conrad Hollingsworth	Lambeth Voluntary Action Council	Chiefexecutive@lambethvac.org.uk
Lewisham	Tony Nickson	Voluntary Action Lewisham	tony@valewisham.org.uk
Newham	Caroline Rouse	Aston Mansfield	caroline.rouse@aston-mansfield.org.uk
Merton	Khadiru Mahdi	Merton Voluntary Service Council MVSC	Khadiru@mvsco.co.uk
Redbridge	Ross Diamond	RedbridgeCVS	ross@redbridgecvcs.net
Richmond	Kathryn Williamson	Richmond Council for Voluntary Service	kathrynw@richmondcvcs.org.uk
Southwark	Gordon McCullough	Community Southwark	gordon@communitysouthwark.org
Sutton	Alison Navarro	Community Action Sutton	alison@suttoncvcs.org.uk
Tower Hamlets	Damian Brady	Tower Hamlets CVS	damian.brady@thcvcs.org.uk
Waltham Forest	Gordon McCullough	Community Waltham Forest	gordon@communitywalthamforest.org
Wandsworth	Tina Champion	Lifetimes	ceo@life-times.org.uk
Westminster	Jackie Rosenberg	One Westminster	j.rosenberg@onewestminster.org.uk

* Ealing CVS coordinates West London Network (WLN) which is the sub-regional body for the voluntary and community sector (VCS) in West London, covering the seven boroughs of Barnet, Brent, Ealing, Hammersmith & Fulham, Harrow, Hillingdon and Hounslow.