

London Borough of Hackney

Voluntary and Community Sector
Strategy 2019-2022

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Foreword Cllr Selman

Although Hackney has undergone significant change and transformation over the past 15 years, it has retained a unique character based on a strong sense of identity and community as well as openness and diversity. Hackney's strong, vibrant and diverse Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) is part of the fabric of the borough and has helped define what the borough is like today.

The partnership between the Council and the VCS has been very positive and productive for many years. The Council recognises the unique position and role of the sector. The contribution of the VCS is apparent in every part of the borough. Activities like culture, sport, play and food growing animate spaces, the VCS reaches out and supports the most vulnerable, they inspire, empower and develop people of all ages and help build connections and bonds between people through community events and through volunteering.

The borough has seen vast improvements, to education, transport, the economy and our parks cultural offer, but Hackney still experiences unacceptably high levels of poverty. We are seeing growing inequalities that threaten to undermine the high levels of community cohesion enjoyed in the borough. We need a really strong VCS to work with us to tackle these inequalities. However the sector has been weakened by years of central government austerity, which has reduced the levels of funding available. As with the public sector, the VCS has also seen an increase in demand and people coming to them with more complex needs.

We know that there is unlikely to be an end to austerity in the near future. We therefore need a step change in way we design and deliver public services and the way we work in partnership with the VCS, so that we are changing the way we work to meet needs rather than managing decline. Over the last year we have been working with the VCS to identify and define the challenges and actions needed so that the VCS can continue to thrive and maintain its unique role in supporting Hackney's residents and so that partnerships between the Council and the VCS can be as impactful as possible. This strategy sets out what we have learnt with the sector and how we will work together in the future to provide the best for our communities.

Introduction

Why we need a Voluntary and Community Sector Strategy

The context we are operating in

Our commitment to a Voluntary and Community Sector strategy recognises the contribution that local voluntary and community groups, organisations and networks make to Hackney. The sector plays a vital role in maintaining strong local communities, reaching residents that statutory services may struggle to reach and empowering and supporting community and individual resilience.

That commitment is reflected in the fact that we have continued to invest in the sector (through grants, commissioning and subsidies that include reduced rents for Council buildings and Discretionary Rate Relief) and have protected the grants programme budget, despite significant challenges to our budget. In 2016/17 this investment was approximately £23 million (including commissioned services, grants and subsidy from the general fund).

The local sector is large and diverse and remains successful in attracting inward investment. From just 19 known funders the sector brought in £31,361,444 of additional cash resources to Hackney between January 2015 and December 2016 (an average of £15m per year).

However as with public services, the VCS faces significant challenges. The impact of austerity has created an increasingly challenging environment as competition for national and regional funding increases, office and community space becomes more unaffordable, and there is increasing demands for their support locally.

In order to meet these challenges the VCS needs to go through a similar process to the public sector, undergoing radical transformation with new business models and quality services that empower people and help them to thrive and succeed as independently as possible.

The Council's new Community Strategy acknowledges that the current ways of providing services are not going to be sustainable over the next 10 years. Rather than manage decline the strategy sets out how the Council will target limited resources in a way that ensures the most vulnerable people in our communities are protected and supported. However we also need to find new ways of preventing people from needing to rely on public services over the long term. This will mean working with partners in the VCS to better understand some of the underlying issues driving demand pressures in public services such as physical, mental and emotional ill health, poverty and debt, inaccessible or unsafe places, and discrimination. Whilst services will need to be redesigned the Community strategy acknowledges that it is also about making better use of community networks and community assets, building on the very strong partnerships we have in the borough including those with the voluntary and community sector.

Responding to this context

There are good examples of organisations that have made progress in adapting and which are now trying to embrace ongoing change however we know there are particular challenges for VCS organisations in responding to this challenging context:

- To transform the way the Council works, we need to work in partnership with the sector to develop new ways of working, designing, testing and learning together. This cannot be achieved simply by describing the transformation needed or writing it into commissioning specifications.

- The competition for external funding has increased dramatically placing huge funding pressures on local organisations, whilst demands have increased and become more complex. Many small and medium size organisations have had no choice but to manage decline, reducing their services and activities. They may not have the capacity, knowledge, expertise or working capital to respond more creatively, which also involves taking a risk.
- The VCS rely largely on the capacity of their own individual trustees and management and the support of local infrastructure organisations. In common with the wider VCS, many of these infrastructure organisations have also been hit by funding cuts which has affected their capacity, at a time when they have needed new skills and understanding to transform.
- The very organisations that work with the most dependant or vulnerable residents, can be the part of the sector that is least resourced, in terms of funding, governance and staff, when they should be the most robust and highest quality organisations.

Over the last two years we have been working in partnership with voluntary sector providers of advice services to undertake a full review of advice services. The work we have done to try to transform advice services has exposed these challenges but has also demonstrated what is possible by working together and taking a different approach. Changing grant priorities and requirements was not enough; we found that we needed to work with the advice sector directly in rethinking the system and in identifying different ways of working together. The systems review of advice services has begun to reset the relationship between the Council and advice providers in the borough, enabling the exploration of new ways of working together to address some of the most challenging issues facing Hackney residents.

How we developed this strategy

Engagement with the VCS has enabled the Council to develop a better understanding of the sector's resilience and their views on intervention and strategic support needed. The Council has also considered its own strategic objectives and associated actions with regards to its relationship with the VCS and the future direction of any strategic support and investment, driven by wider corporate and community priorities, including the need to find further savings, to redesign services and to re-set expectations with residents.

In June 2017 using a social research approach the Council and Hackney CVS hosted a workshop with 24 invited local organisations broadly reflecting the diversity of Hackney's sector. The organisations spent a day exploring the key challenges for the sector and what could be done to respond to these challenges by working together.

The day provided leaders in the sector with some space to deliberate on the challenges many organisations are facing and the aspirations for Hackney as a whole as well as for the sector itself.

The workshop provided the sector with an opportunity to be more analytical of the challenges, exploring some of the key pressures and the reasons for these. The neutral space of the workshop enabled the organisations present to acknowledge that some behaviours and attitudes have not served the sector well and have been counter-productive for the VCS as a whole.

Using the report produced as a record of the outcomes of the workshop a series of four open invite focus groups were held providing an opportunity for any local groups that wished to do so to contribute to the development of the strategy. The focus groups attended by 25 small, medium and large organisations provided a useful test for the findings from the workshop, identifying any gaps and refining some of the issues and solutions identified.

Using the findings from the workshop and the focus groups a series of discussion papers were developed structured around the key themes that had emerged from the engagement with the sector and which have defined the structure of the strategy.

The discussion papers were then used to undertake internal consultation with key officers within the Council and representation from the CCG to further explore the issues raised from the Council's perspective and develop further possible solutions. A series of five open invite workshops with the VCS were also held providing a further opportunity to explore the issues and possible solutions.

Key themes

The themes are:

- Culture, attitudes and behaviour
- Investment and commissioning
- Property
- Volunteering and social action
- Infrastructure and capacity building

There are many relationships and inter-dependencies between the different themes and these are articulated through the strategy. For example the section which explores how to best help meet the property requirements of the sector has highlighted a need to better understand the overall funding and levels of subsidy to ensure that the Council's investment is targeted and maximises impact.

The Strategy considers each theme in turn, identifying the key issues and the priority areas. The Strategy is deliberately high level. The priority areas provide a shared direction of travel, which can then frame any reviews of existing policies and commitments and the development of new policy.

Culture, attitudes and behaviour

Introduction

There is widespread recognition that the role of public services has increasingly shifted from solely focussing on delivery towards being more responsive and enabling. This is accompanied by a need to change expectations amongst residents of what local authorities can and should provide, and sharing power with citizens so that they have more of a say in local services. This has the potential to strengthen relationships between people within their community as well as between people and the services they use.

The VCS has a vital role to play in helping to transform public services, with its diversity being a real strength that can bring creative solutions to identifying and addressing inequalities, and providing a much needed tier of preventative support. The VCS in Hackney has a long and proud history in the borough of independence - campaigning, advocating for communities and reaching the most marginalised.

An element of positive disagreement and tension can and should exist in the relationship between the Council and the VCS, with each being a critical friend to the other. There is considerable value in appreciating each other's strengths (and weaknesses), and for the Council to avoid prescribing how the VCS should work.

Whilst relationships between the Council and the VCS in Hackney are largely positive, there are long standing cultures, behaviours and attitudes which still shape interactions and ways of working together. This means that progress towards working in partnership and moving beyond traditional approaches can sometimes be hampered. The strategy will help us to identify current understandings of these issues, feedback to date and what needs to happen next to shift some of the dynamics between the Council and the VCS.

What is the issue?

There are three interrelated areas that can hinder productive relationships between the Council and the VCS; an absence of a shared commitment to co-production approaches that might help address power imbalances between the Council, organisations and residents and forge new ways of working together, historical relationships, and difficulties faced by the VCS in adapting their ways of working to reflect the current context of service provision and delivery.

The VCS has acknowledged that it needs support to adapt and change across a range of areas including working in partnership and increasingly agile ways to support residents to be as independent as possible, and radically transforming their operations and sustainability through developing new business models.

Funding pressures can create disincentives to collaborate, as many VCS organisations are in competition with each other for scarce resources. Feedback and consultation with the sector has led to an awareness that the VCS itself needs to develop its willingness to share and collaborate, be more transparent, and adaptable.

Where more negative relationships exist between the Council and the VCS, these can disproportionately feed into a wider set of behaviours and attitudes that cloud more positive examples of transformation in both sectors. This is exacerbated by the way that some parts of the Council engage with the sector in an overly reductive way. This may be because they are working to a very defined set of outcomes, but the outcomes may be too narrowly defined. In these circumstances, the

relationship between the Council and the VCS can feel top down and directive, rather than collaborative and enabling trust.

VCS organisations often have to work with many different public sector agencies and stakeholders in delivering their work and can often see where ‘system blockages’ or inefficiencies exist. This insight can be shared with relevant strategic partnerships to drive systems change at all levels, both strategic and operational. There has been recognition that the VCS does not always promote and prioritise the voice of its users, or empower people to help themselves. Whilst there is a strong willingness to embrace co-production, and examples of good practice, this is not widespread. A shift in approaches and methods from the Council and the VCS are necessary in order to make this more the norm.

Why is it important to address this?

Hackney’s Community Strategy outlines how persistent inequalities in the borough cannot be addressed through doing more of the same or by managing decline. It sets out how the Council, public sector, local businesses and the VCS can work together to find new ways to deliver services, whilst building stronger communities where residents can play their own part in shaping the future.

Transforming the way services are delivered and finding innovative solutions to more intractable problems requires changes in relationships between the Council and the VCS. If these are not addressed, progress in other strands of the VCS strategy risk being undermined. This means understanding how existing cultures, behaviours and attitudes are hindering progress in partnership working, what has driven these, and what actions are needed to break these cycles. This requires a significant shift, but there are strong partnerships and approaches to build on. For example, the systems thinking approach that was used in the debt and advice sector work. Other examples have been initiated by the voluntary and community sector, but rely on cross sector partnerships and collaboration. In all cases, culture change is needed to shift from ‘command and control’ to one of shared priorities and shared responsibility.

Moving beyond consultation, involvement and participation the review of the local advice system has adopted a truly shared approach to transforming services. This has been made possible by the Council and partners in the VCS challenging their thinking and revealing how the Council has driven behaviours that prioritise easily understood and managed standards and targets, rather than the complexity of people’s lives and how to achieve sustainable outcomes for people using the service. It has required a resetting of the relationships between the Council and advice providers and a shift in the power relationships that has enabled an open, transparent and no blame exploration of services and their redesign. The approach to delivering advice has explored a radically new way of engaging and consulting with providers and service users. The review of advice services has created a change in the relationships between the Council as the funder and the organisations delivering advice and the relationship they have with their clients, as all have been central to ongoing exploring, learning and understanding the system.

Review of advice services

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What needs to happen next?

We can build a stronger shared understanding between the Council and the VCS, enabling each to understand the strengths and challenges faced in their respective roles. A changed dynamic will be manifested in a more equal partnership, built on trust and common purpose.

A more collaborative culture will mean that it is possible to think beyond traditional organisational boundaries and share ideas, intelligence, expertise, as well as creating opportunities for more creative partnerships, joint bidding, and shared services. Ultimately, this will help to benefit residents in Hackney with cross sector working focusing on different ways to address the needs of the most vulnerable in the borough.

It will be important to start with an openness and honesty about the factors that can hinder effective working, as well as recognising that conflict and difference will remain – but does not need to be a negative force.

In order to make progress on this issue, the following priority areas have been identified:

| Action | Rationale | Considerations |
|--|---|---|
| <i>Improve knowledge across the Council of the VCS</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is a need to develop and embed understanding across the Council of how the VCS operates, its strengths, independence, unique characteristics, and the constraints it faces • There is an opportunity within the VCS Officer Strategy Group to initiate and sustain these conversations – focusing on working with senior managers and directorates on how to change relationships. | <p>There are many good examples to draw on from across the borough which show how a more relational way of working can be beneficial for the Council, VCS and residents. These should be drawn upon to help illustrate the potential in the VCS and how different parts of the Council have nurtured these relationships and commissioned services.</p> |

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| <p><i>Work with the VCS to shape and support new ways of working</i></p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is value in the Council and the VCS continuing to discuss how to work together in a different way • Support and encouragement for the VCS are required - identifying ways to overcome the blockages that exist to changing relationships | <p>This will not happen by chance – the Council and VCS need to frequently come together to hold each other accountable to changing attitudes, cultures and behaviours.</p> <p>Existing and potential networks focusing on service areas bringing together service provision cross sector and commissioners will support this process.</p> |
| <p><i>Identify further opportunities for approaches to services that use a systems thinking approach</i></p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is a need to focus on ways to encourage greater collaboration and joint working – for example, looking at place-based funding opportunities, developing more network approaches to strategic priorities • The work with the debt and advice sector involved a way of working which fostered a shared responsibility and a more relational way of working together | <p>This connects closely with the investment and commissioning, and civil society support strands of the VCS strategy.</p> <p>The systems thinking approach took time to develop but it changed the dynamic between the Council and the VCS in a way that is replicable for other thematic areas or issues.</p> |
| <p><i>A firmer commitment to co-production</i></p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The benefits of involving service users in the commissioning, design, planning and delivery of services is well evidenced and it provides an opportunity to explore new ways of working • There are undoubtedly more opportunities for co-production to be embedded in the work of the Council and the VCS in the design and delivery of services • A framework or charter for co-production would help to develop understanding about what it means and when it is appropriate. | <p>This would require a shift from some parts of the Council, and there is a need to further develop what this looks like in practice and where the opportunities are. This needs to link with any work being undertaken under the investment and commissioning strand of the VCS strategy</p> |

Investment and commissioning

Introduction

The Council currently invests in the VCS in Hackney through a combination of grants, commissioning and subsidies that include reduced rents for Council buildings and Discretionary Rate Relief. In 2016-17, this investment was approximately £23m - of which £18.9m was for services commissioned by the Council. Alongside this, the VCS attracts investment into the borough from other agencies and external funders. From just 19 known funders the sector brought in over £31m of additional cash resources to Hackney between January 2015 and December 2016

The Council's grants programme has been one of the main mechanisms to ensure that the VCS in the borough can survive and grow in strength. This enables organisations to continue to deliver services for local residents, but it is also the intention that the funding will help to build capacity in organisations to secure additional investment and funding from elsewhere.

At the heart of the VCS strategy is a recognition that the VCS plays an important role in the delivery of many services across the borough. The Council's new procurement strategy includes an emphasis on innovative solutions to promote sustainability – making the best use of collaboration and partnership opportunities that can help support communities and neighbourhoods.

However, in common with many other areas across the UK, current commissioning practices can be inconsistent, operate in isolation, and fail to incentivise creative solutions and social value from the VCS.

What is the issue?

Consultation with the VCS has highlighted a persistent set of challenges. These can be summarised as:

Traditional commissioning processes and behaviours: The way that the Council commissions services from the VCS has encouraged a certain way of working that does not easily foster collaboration, shared learning or joint bidding. Investment is managed through a top down approach, where a need is presented, and a set of targets that organisations are expected to meet. Whilst procurement rules can pose some challenges in terms of encouraging consortia and co-production approaches to service design and delivery, rules can be applied in a risk averse way, requiring evidence of transparency that does not help to understand if best value is being achieved.

Parts of the commissioning process can also place additional burdens on organisations that reduce the efficiency of the Council's investment – for example, not sharing timeframes for commissioning, or due diligence data. Barriers arising from commissioning processes or contract design (for example, missed opportunities to parcel contracts into smaller lots) are likely to impact on smaller organisations in particular. There are a range of positive examples of VCS led consortia in the borough. As they have developed organically and with sufficient time they have allowed the sector to successfully co-deliver services.

The current situation means that there is little scope to be responsive to residents or adopt a more person-centred way of working. Organisations are pushed into narrower, more transactional relationships, with siloed working between statutory and non-statutory services. In addition, whilst there has been a strong emphasis on prevention in the Community Strategy, the experience of the sector is that commissioning has not necessarily caught up with this and is still funding the cause, rather than investing further upstream.

Whole borough approaches: Investment across the Council, thematically and geographically has not been analysed in a consistent way within the Council or by other funders. This means that understanding of gaps in provision, where areas of the VCS are well supported, and what investment is going to other sectors (for example, social enterprises) is limited. Improving knowledge of where the Council needs to fund strategically important organisations is vitally important – as these organisations play a role in their communities that extends beyond the services they deliver.

Limitations of grant funding: This tends to be short term, and largely delivery and project based. The open grants process is competitive which can create mistrust in the sector, and also means that the Council might not be supporting organisations that are strategically important to the borough or most at risk. Grant funding in itself is no longer sufficient to support the sector and has not resolved financial difficulties for some organisations who are having to use their reserves to maintain delivery, whilst at the same time lacking capacity to fundraise or look for alternative forms of investment.

External funders: At the moment, the Council and external funders do not work closely enough together to understand or influence their investment priorities, or help them to appreciate the local context and the role of small community based organisations. Despite being situated on the edge of the City, investment from business has been hard to access. In comparison with other inner London boroughs, Hackney organisations do not attract the same levels of funding – and reasons for this include the culture of over reliance on the Council that has arisen, as well as challenges in redefining the relationship with new ways of working together.

Social Prescribing

Social Prescribing is becoming a recognised way of linking residents to the VCS provided support they need. Hackney was an early adopter of Social Prescribing and the CCG have been funding it since 2013. Hackney have a good service but the VCS realised that the model in Hackney does not enable them to see if the services people are linked into have a positive impact on their health and reducing isolation. Hackney CVS put a business case to the IT Enabler Board of the Integrated Commissioning Board to scope and gain funding for a digital referral platform. The scoping identified that a platform could close the loop and feed data back to GPs who do the original referral. This will mean that the value of grassroots as well commissioned VCS can be demonstrated, as all will be able to provide information on outcomes back to GPs. This will then be anonymised and fed into a shared dataset across health and social care. The platform will also enable organisations to collate evaluation data about the people they work with that will support them in fundraising, and enable residents to see improvements in their health

Why is it important to address this?

Whilst there are many examples of local VCS working with the council to attract external funding there is a need to have a more proactive approach to working together to seize opportunities as they arise.

The current investment and commissioning approach is not working for the Council or the VCS, and hampers creative responses or the ability to change cultures, attitudes and behaviours outlined elsewhere in this strategy. Funding and investment into the sector needs to be better understood in order to make strategic decisions about future investment. There is a need for greater clarity and consistency in commissioning, whilst also adopting more sophisticated approach – for example, longer lead in times that support early engagement with organisations to develop collaborative approaches.

This will help to rebuild trust, and promote more positive attitudes and behaviours as well as developing more creative and long term solutions.

The Council is not simply buying a service from the VCS, and the unique way the VCS works risks being overlooked. At the same time, a different relationship will involve the VCS recognising the bigger picture beyond their own organisation, and the fight for immediate survival. There is an opportunity to target resources more strategically, and extend the impact of funding by supporting and encouraging organisations to stretch their ambitions, abilities and capacity. This could be through new business models or ways of working with funders, using targeted support that focusses on the longer term in order for the VCS to grow in a sustainable way.

Despite the patterns outlined above, there have been strong examples in recent years of working in a different way to ensure that investment and commissioning processes are more sophisticated. Hackney Council, City and Hackney CCG and City of London Corporation have begun jointly commissioning health, public health and social care services. This new and collaborative approach aims to reduce duplication and bureaucracy, make the most of the organisations' shared knowledge, experience and resources, and improve health outcomes by better meeting the diverse needs of communities. The VCS have a key role to play as one of the partners delivering health and wellbeing services and providing insight into system blockages.

The lessons so far from this work illustrate the importance of collaboration and challenge. It also emphasises that commissioning should not be approached in a piecemeal fashion, and the value of co-production approaches where the Council has to relinquish some of its power.

Hackney has just adopted a new Sustainable Procurement Strategy, which build fairness and inclusion into the way the Council procures. There is a commitment within this strategy to working with VCS to develop and share best practice in sustainable procurement.

Transforming Health and Social Care

Effective navigation is a key element of delivering coordinated, person-centred care and support. 'Care navigators' can play a crucial role in helping people to get the right support, at the right time to help manage a wide range of needs. This may include support with long term conditions, help with finances and signposting to a range of statutory and voluntary sector services. VCS initiated networks have become part of the workstreams of the transformation of health and social care. An example of this is the work around navigation roles that has been incorporated into the neighbourhood pilots. This should result in clearer pathways for residents to relevant support.

What needs to happen next?

There is an opportunity to make changes over the short and long term to develop a different approach to investment in the VCS that involves investing in purpose and longer term outcomes. The Council will still need to understand the difference that is being made through its investment but through a longer term strategy it will potentially help to free up the sector to operate in an enterprising way. This will help to support other parts of the VCS strategy where resources are required to deliver changes in the sector and focus more on sustainability.

Coproduction can be an effective way of improving the commissioning process. Working in this way does require a distinctive skillset, confidence and capacity. There are constraints at present in moving

towards this which need closer examination. This links with some of the issues identified in the culture, attitudes and behaviour strand.

There is a need to harness all the opportunities to tackle entrenched issues across different sectors in the borough, valuing the qualities each can bring. For example, the social enterprise sector in Hackney is growing. Hackney has now been recognised officially as a Social Enterprise Borough by Social Enterprise UK in 2017. There are at least 300 emerging and bona fide social enterprises operating in or from Hackney. Procurement processes have the potential to support this, rather than a narrow focus on best value.

In order to make progress on this issue, the following priority areas have been identified:

| Action | Rationale | Considerations |
|---|--|---|
| <p><i>Use current intelligence from across the Council about what is being funded and how to direct future investment</i></p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Understanding and aligning cycles of investment can help the sector and the Council to better prepare for changes to the funding landscape and the impact these may have ● Investment intelligence can support more effective funding relationships e.g. consistency in management and monitoring | <p>This should align with the other mapping exercises being proposed as part of the VCS strategy – for example, on property, and support needs in the sector</p> |
| <p><i>The Council should develop a new framework for its approach to grant investment and how resources are deployed.</i></p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The Council's investment needs to be more flexible and able to prioritise strategically important organisations/services who fulfil a clear purpose, whilst responding to organisations in crisis if necessary ● There is a need to move away from project funding, to investing in what is needed for Hackney and its residents – with organisations funded in the longer term on their ability to help deliver the outcomes in the Community Strategy ● There is a need to define what should be measured and understood – moving away from a narrow focus on monitoring and management. | <p>The experience of using systems thinking in the debt and advice sector work is a strong starting point, learning from what this approach enabled.</p> <p>The Council is already looking at how to reshape procurement. The interpretation of procurement rules will need to be considered as part of this process in order to rethink how social value can be harnessed across a range of sectors.</p> |

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| <p><i>Work with the sector to identify how investment can be used to prioritise flexibility, and increasing capacity</i></p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The relationship between the Council and the VCS has the potential to be more relational – with the Council funding organisations in a way that enables them to focus on maximising their capacity and resources. | <p>This should be considered alongside the role of council officers in supporting grantees – at the moment, this relationship is primarily a monitoring one. The Council could develop its own grant officers that work in a more supportive and enabling way with organisations and build relationships over time.</p> |
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Property

Introduction

Many voluntary and community sector organisations in Hackney currently access property in the borough to run their organisations and deliver activities in the community.

Challenges around the affordability, suitability and flexibility of the spaces have been identified, combined with significant underuse of some existing community assets.

The needs of the VCS are complex with regards to property, and there are differing requirements for spaces reflecting the diversity of the sector. These can range from informal community use through to larger buildings that can fulfil a key role in opening up community assets in local neighbourhoods. Spaces are required for one-off use for a particular activity, through to more permanent spaces for offices and delivering services.

Current policy and practice both within the Council and across the VCS has led to a situation which neither addresses the changing needs of the sector, nor the Council. There is a desire from both to make progress on changing cultures and behaviour with regard to the use of property. This section sets out the current issues, feedback to date and what needs to happen next.

Redmond Community Centre- Woodberry Down for Everyone

As well as new homes, regeneration in Hackney will bring a host of new community and commercial facilities to the area. The Redmond Community Centre opened in 2012 and is the home of Woodberry Down for Everyone. The centre strives to deliver community services by focussing work around five keystones: empowering, connecting, creating space, influencing and creating a sustainable organisation. Activities and learner programmes are largely based on local needs and are informed from the grass-roots level. This enables activities to have support from the community and have on-going sustainability as well as empowering and training the local community to take control of and lead activities. Manor House Development Trust uses the Redmond Community Centre as a key space to host diverse activities that have wide appeal and benefit. The centre enables the community to come together on a regular basis for long-term activities and courses as well as for festivals, events and celebrations.

What is the issue?

The current situation means that existing properties and spaces are not always being used in the most effective way, with a low level of understanding of what is available, how these spaces could be better matched to organisations of different sizes and scale, and where future opportunities for more flexible spaces are.

The Council's property provision for the VCS sector is primarily through the leased portfolio which consists of 45 units. The lettings policy in 2011 helped to regularise the use of buildings in the portfolio – moving from largely historic arrangements to establishing eligibility criteria, the type and length of lease and rent levels. However, a number of issues have persisted. A relatively small number of VCS organisations have access to the portfolio, rents have not been reviewed since 2011, and the portfolio is subsidised by the Council each year. The leased portfolio does not maximise income for the Council.

Alongside the leased portfolio, there are a potentially large range of assets in the borough which could be used to better support VCS organisations of different sizes – including other property owned by the Council (for example, libraries and community halls) and public and private sector partners (for example, RSLs, social enterprises, the NHS, and businesses). Whilst there are some good examples of flexible shared use, this is not commonplace, and there are significant gaps in understanding what exists, and how it could be used differently.

The Council's portfolio has largely been managed in isolation, which means that potential connections with other sectors and developments in the borough are being missed. For example, organisations such as Hackney Cooperative Developments provide affordable workspace to a number non for profit organisations, matching them to suitable premises, and providing business development support, affordable meeting rooms and networks. The opportunities in regeneration areas and in new developments have also not been considered through the lens of how these spaces could help support the VCS.

Why is it important to address this?

Hackney's Community Strategy emphasises the importance of building community resilience and opportunities for residents to come together, meet their neighbours and lead active and independent lives. There is recognition in the strategy that accessible community spaces can help promote this – for example, by encouraging healthy lifestyles, providing routes into volunteering, and workspaces that can help new businesses get off the ground. Neighbourhood hubs bringing together different organisations, services and projects are also already evident in some parts of Hackney.

The availability of property can play a key role in supporting place-based approaches to grow in an organic way. Hackney benefits from many community assets, but a lot of these spaces are not being used in a way that can help to support the ambitions in the Community Strategy, and open up access to residents, community groups, and organisations. In addition, the Integrated Commissioning Programme requires looking across a range of different assets - including property – in order to identify what can support and embed this new model of working.

Many of the buildings in the leased portfolio require significant investment in order to become vibrant community assets that are better placed to meet community needs. There are existing barriers around the use of community halls, with spaces being underused or managed inefficiently – for example, as office space for tenants groups, rather than for community hire. Smaller volunteer-led community groups struggle to comply with the requirements to hire and use space especially given their need to prioritise funding on project activities rather than management

The current arrangements do not help to support new ways of working (for example, in a place-based way to fit with the health and social care neighbourhoods), or foster improved relationships between the VCS and the Council. There are also a number of practical barriers that VCS organisations face - office costs can be a drain on funding, and short term leases can create barriers in securing additional funding streams. Many have also highlighted challenges in capacity and ability to manage spaces, particularly when this requires providing staff cover when the building is being used outside of office hours.

Underpinning these challenges is a recognition that some in the sector are reluctant to co-locate services or share spaces, largely centred on the competitive environment they are operating in and fears around confidentiality.

At present, there is little incentive for VCS organisations in the leased portfolio to behave differently. The 2011 lettings policy discourages shared use and prohibits sub-letting which is a barrier to creating

more flexible options for VCS organisations. The lease arrangements do not encourage organisations to build their capacity or secure different income streams, with no targets set, development support, or means to support organisations to become more sustainable.

Consultation with the VCS has indicated that there is a strong desire to engage with the Council and other agencies to jointly develop a new approach to property. There is recognition that whilst the Council will need to change some of its policies and approaches, the sector will also need to challenge itself on how to use spaces in a more dynamic way, changing mindsets and overcoming fears, organisational obstacles and reluctance to collaborate and share.

What needs to happen next?

Hackney needs a more flexible and responsive offer for the VCS across a range of different assets. The new approach should explicitly focus on making the best use of what is available, using spaces in a creative way with collaboration across the Council and between sectors taking a ‘whole place’ approach. This will also involve ensuring that there is a better fit between the activities/focus of VCS organisations and the accommodation they are accessing.

Work is already underway to gain a greater understanding about different needs for spaces in order to help deliver a manifesto commitment to create a Hackney Space Bank. This will help to ensure that residents and community groups can access spaces they need for free or at low cost. This will include Hackney Council spaces and facilities, as well as those provided by others, and be promoted via an online platform.

Ultimately, this will help to ensure that the use of property in Hackney is more accessible to residents and VCS organisations – and enable increased benefits for the community.

In order to make progress on this issue, the following priority areas have been identified:

| Action | Rationale | Considerations |
|--|--|---|
| <p><i>Work with the formal and informal sector to understand needs and develop solutions together which are forward looking and address current and future needs</i></p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● There is a need for more intelligence to understand the diversity in the sector and their accommodation needs, and to recognize that as civil society, ways of working and behaviours change, needs will also change ● The Council and the VCS should work together to identify practical ways to build the willingness and confidence of organisations to think differently about their accommodation needs and how they are managed ● This could involve learning from those in the borough who have successfully implemented these approaches | <p>HCVS are undertaking a survey with VCS organisations to explore current tenure, affordability, co-location arrangements. This should be monitored to see how representative respondents are and what the main trends are</p> <p>‘Discovery’ work is planned as part of the Space Bank commitment</p> <p>A spirit of collaboration is required – exploring with the sector what future use of properties might look like and how to free up space</p> |

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| <p><i>Understand the properties and assets that are available for community and VCS use across Hackney</i></p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is a need to take a more strategic view of assets across the borough as a whole, and from different sectors. Until more is known about the spaces that are available, it will be challenging to maximise their use, and be more flexible and responsive to needs. • This should encompass the existing VCS property portfolio, other council owned spaces, the wider public sector, and social enterprises • There is appetite for a shared directory to make this information more accessible | <p>Following the mapping exercise more will be known about sector needs, assets across the boroughs and where more appropriate matches might be made.</p> <p>The Council will have a clearer sense of which spaces might encourage co-location, flexible use, and the assets that can be opened up to the wider community.</p> |
| <p><i>Reviewing existing LBH policies and policies</i></p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Council will need to review its own portfolio and be clear about where some of the limitations are in current policies which place constraints on the use of property by the VCS • This could include looking at the approach to allocations, eligibility criteria, and leases that support more flexibility • The Council needs to ensure that their approach to VCS property aligns with other sectors | <p>This involves the Council being clear about what is possible, and what it can no longer do – moving from a more top down approach focussed on a narrow portfolio to looking across and facilitating access across the local system.</p> |

Volunteering and social action

Introduction

Volunteering is a distinguishing feature of the VCS, and many organisations in Hackney rely on volunteers to deliver their services. Anyone can volunteer, regardless of age and background, and there are various models of volunteering evident in the borough covering administrative roles, more formal governance roles, and supporting service users directly. Volunteering brings benefits to individuals, communities and organisations.

Within the wider context of public spending cuts, people's aspirations for their community are changing. Through the 'Hackney: A Place for Everyone' consultation it was evident that there is a strong appetite for residents to contribute to their community, connect with their neighbours and take more responsibility for their local area. Many of these actions are at a more grassroots and social action level where communities identify and solve problems together. These shifts are also influencing the nature of the relationship between the Council and residents.

What is the issue?

There are a number of existing support structures and new initiatives in place in Hackney to promote and support volunteering, as well as build the skills and confidence of residents to get involved in their local communities. Volunteer Centre Hackney brokers formal volunteering opportunities but also leads projects such as Our Place. Their current proposal to the Big Lottery/DCMS as part of the Place Based Social Action programme (a decision is due January 2019) has its roots in social action and informal volunteering, focussing on bringing people together to discuss their concerns and ideas and grow these into community projects.

Whilst these are positive developments, the potential benefits of volunteering are not always fully understood or communicated, and how these are manifested at different levels and across different timescales. For example, at the more formal end of volunteering, immediate changes can arise from volunteering through providing a pathway for an individual back into employment. Learning from the Integrated Communities project has demonstrated the impact of supported volunteering to help residents make this step. Social action can help people to form connections and feel empowered to influence change in their local area – potentially then leading to increased confidence and wellbeing. Joint marketing campaigns between the Council and the sector like Volunteering for Hackney have proven to be effective to help raise the profile of volunteering across the borough.

The Council has primarily focussed its support on the formal voluntary sector in recognition of the dependence that many organisations have on volunteers. However, whilst there is evidence of willingness to volunteer in Hackney, organisations often struggle to attract, manage and work with volunteers due to issues with capacity, or the time taken to recruit, train and secure necessary permissions such as DBS checks. The VCS has highlighted that volunteer manager roles have been reduced due to the need to make savings in core support teams – and many smaller organisations did not have these roles in the first place. In addition, patterns of volunteering are not consistent.

Patterns of volunteering are not uniform and do not fit into a standard offer from an individual to an organisation. Some people may be happy to volunteer on a regular basis, whereas others might prefer one-off opportunities. Many people are primarily motivated to invest very locally in the immediate area where they live. Considerable support is needed to help organisations adapt their roles to meet the time constraints of volunteers.

As outlined above, there has been an increasing focus on smaller grassroots organisations and the informal activities and social action that takes place at this level. It has been recognised that much of this activity is below the radar of both the Council and traditional VCS infrastructure and support.

The Volunteering for Hackney one year pilot (which has recently ended) supported nine grassroots organisations to develop their activities and become more sustainable whilst retaining their volunteer-led focus. The pilot has helped to increase awareness of the potential of the community sector to tackle social problems through social action, but has also revealed that the Council is not yet equipped to work effectively to support the community sector and enable social action across the borough.

Our Place – asset based community development

Volunteer Centre Hackney has been delivering the skill-share project Our Place on the New Kingshold estate for three years, during which time they have supported over 300 residents to come together, form supportive relationships and design and deliver their own activities. Activities are based at a local flat where people share ideas and initiate social action. Activities include a women's development group, family holiday fun club, children's play group, gardening and an arts and crafts club. Last year Our Place won the Groundwork UK Award for best community group contribution to community cohesion.

The community hub uses an asset-based approach, utilising and building people's skills, confidence and ambitions, to provide local activities that meet local need. Through empowering residents to recognise their abilities, and their role in wider society, their community is strengthened, and able to better meet needs as they arise.

Through sharing skills, residents build confidence and resilience, and form new friendships. Residents support each other to access services including debt and literacy support, share their gardens, furniture and children's clothes. One resident said:

"I've gained friends, family, new community links. It's opened my world. I now have people to share activities with – and with my children".

Why is it important to address this?

Hackney's Community Strategy emphasises the importance of an open, cohesive and supportive community, with residents working together and volunteering is a key part of this. Consultation to date has evidenced that there is increased interest from residents and organisations in volunteering. However, the full benefits of volunteering are not being realised, and the focus has, until recently, been too skewed towards formal volunteering.

There is a need to improve the way volunteering is promoted, understood, and match opportunities to skills in a more sophisticated way. Volunteering should ensure that the most vulnerable and disadvantaged benefit, as well as providing opportunities for residents with skills to offer to put these to good use. For example, the VCS have identified the importance of improving their capacity around governance and finances, and there are volunteering roles that can help to address this. However, considerable support is often needed to support local groups to understand their needs and host and support volunteers with those skills. Residents with different skills and backgrounds undoubtedly have a lot to give, but at present, are not easily able to find out about opportunities, and there can be little flexibility in the roles that are available.

In the more informal community sector, more can be done to develop knowledge about the conditions needed to harness people’s willingness to contribute – for example, how people navigate the processes of establishing new groups, their needs for physical space, support, and volunteering roles. Networks and relationships are also important for social action to flourish and grow, and can entail peer support as well as access to infrastructure organisations. However, existing networks in Hackney are not well understood, and whether there are neighbourhoods and estates where opportunities are being missed. Whilst social action has a long history in the borough, it sometimes happens despite of rather than because of support from the Council.

What needs to happen next?

Making progress on these issues involves creating the right environment where the Council is an enabler, alongside other key organisations such as schools, RSLs and health that can support volunteering and social action at a very local level. Volunteering and social action have significant potential to strengthen bonds within Hackney’s communities and help to maintain cohesion, and be a significant part of the way we respond to community need. The learning from the Volunteering for Hackney pilot is a solid basis to work from, as it helped the Council to understand how to more systematically support smaller organisations.

The following table outlines some areas for action:

| Action | Rationale | Considerations |
|--|--|---|
| <i>Developmental work to further understand the role of social action and the community sector</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is a need to understand and define more clearly what the Council’s role is with regards to social action taking place in the community sector, and how best to support and enable this activity • Networks of small community organisations are essential to foster connections and provide mutual support but there is a lack of intelligence on these. • The current infrastructure offer around volunteering is still developing and is not yet appropriate for small grassroots organisations. | <p>There is learning from the Volunteering for Hackney pilot and VCH Our Place work to draw on.</p> <p>The VCS led Neighbourhood pilot due to start April 2019 will be mapping and supporting networks in one neighbourhood, with the aim that this can be extended to other neighbourhoods if successful.</p> <p>There are strong links here with the actions in the property strand – for example, having accessible space that is flexible and can accommodate small groups more easily.</p> |

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| <p><i>Reviewing Council policies to help support more informal models of working</i></p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are some barriers that have been identified by small community groups in particular • There may be small steps that can be made internally which help to remove some of the obstacles and reduce bureaucracy requirements from the Council's side | <p>This needs to be combined with messaging to the community sector about where the limits are around the Council's capacity</p> |
| <p><i>The Council should champion and promote volunteering at all levels</i></p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is a need to lead by example and promote volunteering within the Council, as well as out in the community • This will entail understanding first what institutional barriers or limitations there might be • The need to promote new ways to match volunteers to opportunities and different ways to give time | <p>The Council is working already with VCH on the matching issue and this needs to continue to be a focus. However, 'leading by example' from within the Council will also help to raise the profile of volunteering more broadly.</p> |

Developing the voluntary and community sector

Introduction

In order to support a thriving and confident VCS, access to good quality support is necessary. This can take the form of training and advice on practical issues that help organisations develop including governance, safeguarding and finances, as well as strategic advice to aid organisations with defining and implementing their vision and priorities.

There are a number of infrastructure support organisations in Hackney, including Hackney CVS, Interlink, Volunteer Centre Hackney and Hackney Play Association, which have a close relationship with the Council. Hackney CVS and Interlink play a crucial role in building capacity, developing networks across the sector, and creating partnerships for new pieces of work. Examples include:

- The Young Black Men programme where Hackney CVS have worked in partnership with LBH, the VCS and other agencies to shape and deliver solutions with young people at the centre, and with an understanding of the multi-dimensional factors that are driving inequalities for this group.
- Interlink's focus on improving the links between the public sector and representatives of the Orthodox Jewish/Charedi community through strategy groups that focus on different inequalities and how to solve problems in a more collaborative way.

However there can be challenges in reaching parts of the sector that might benefit from capacity support often due to gaps in knowledge about smaller community organisations in particular. This can limit effective outreach and targeting.

This section presents the current issues, the views gathered from consultation with the VCS and the steps that need to be taken in order to make progress on improving support for civil society in Hackney.

What is the issue?

The funding landscape for second tier organisations has changed considerably in recent years. In Hackney, the Council still funds second tier organisations in the VCS through specialist grants. However, at a regional level, London Councils now no longer funds infrastructure organisations, and London Voluntary Service Council closed in 2017. In 2016, regional stakeholders from across different sectors came together to develop the Way Ahead Vision which ultimately aims to improve support available to organisations at the frontline, through a new London Hub. The Hub will also include a stream of work on data literacy for civil society – with real time intelligence and support for organisations to understand and improve their data collection.

Whilst this development is positive, progress towards realising the Hub has been slow, and there are more pressing challenges for VCS organisations in Hackney in accessing appropriate development support. Apart from work with specific cohorts outlined below the current offer tends to be generic which meets organisations ongoing training needs but is not focussed on helping organisations to change their business model or become more sustainable. Peer networks and forums do exist (largely coordinated by Hackney CVS) which have helped to bring parts of the sector together where they are working on a set of themes and geographies. However, these networks are at different stages, with some not yet fully realising their potential.

Feedback from the VCS has highlighted issues around time and capacity to access support. The sector is diverse, and their needs reflect this. For example, organisations in precarious financial situations

inevitably have to prioritise fundraising and delivering activities rather than exploring organisational growth and alternative delivery models, which has the knock on effect of preventing them from finding ways to become more sustainable. Others can struggle to identify their needs in the first place, or know how and where to access support due to the lack of strategic targeting. For those organisations that might be more willing to embrace new ways of delivering services, there are challenges in finding and resourcing the kind of support (either locally or regionally) that will help, and stretch them to think differently.

The Council does not have the funds to continue to support second tier organisations indefinitely, and existing support organisations do not always have the capacity to develop more creative and developmental work with the sector. In addition, large grant making organisations have increasingly entered this space, with the Big Lottery offering more grants to second tier civil society organisations and many funders providing 'Funder Plus' support where grantees can access additional capacity and development opportunities. City Bridge Trust has recently announced a Cornerstone Fund of £1.5m to support second tier organisations to bring about systems change and test different approaches to using assets and resources in civil society to benefit communities.

Foundations and trusts such as Trust for London and the Tudor Trust are funding development work with VCS organisations in the borough. However, this investment has not been systematically mapped at a local level, and the Council has not had the capacity itself to take forward discussions with foundations to share strategic priorities and understand the role the Council and infrastructure organisations can play in helping to secure investment in Hackney.

Community African Network (CAN)

Communities have different levels of community infrastructure and in general the longer communities have settled in Hackney the more established their peer led provision is. People from Africa make up 11% of Hackneys population but the African led community sector was fragmented and poorly funded. Community African Network (CAN) was set up four years ago and is a partnership of organisations with origins in East / West and Central Africa and covers the francophone (French speaking African community). CAN is made of small community organisations who have interest in promoting health and wellbeing of Hackney residents of African descent. CAN run a sexual health programme in partnership with Hackney CVS and Brook that has successfully signed up over 1000 people per year to a free condom programme, which helps prevent the spread of HIV. CAN subsequently successfully gained funding from the CCG to promote awareness of TB and is running a programme of events and is currently piloting an externally evaluated Bowel Awareness programme based on a community champion model working in partnership with GP's.

Why is it important to address this?

Many of the organisations that need support to develop their capacity are critical to Hackney's civil society. The support underpins the Council's investment in the sector and needs to ensure that the current offer is fit for purpose and has been based on an analysis of gaps and need in the local VCS.

New ways of working require new skills and knowledge such as how to access different forms of funding and investment, how to co-design services working across sectors and with residents and how to best use local data and intelligence on local issues.

More effective support can help Hackney organisations have the edge in a competitive regional and national landscape of funding but this will require more collaboration, sharing and learning rather than continuing to pursue individual pots of money, or focussing on day-to-day operations.

Indeed, as the funding context remains very challenging and demands increase, the sector also needs challenging, robust and well informed support and advice about organisational change. This might include advice about co-location, formal co-operations and collaboration, organisational review and even mergers and closures.

Consultation to date with the VCS indicates that there is awareness of the need to shift the way support is provided. However, unless this focusses on development and capacity activities, the current situation will not change. Infrastructure organisations have a role in engendering culture change in the sector, including considering new business models and creative responses to local challenges. Examples of this include the work Hackney CVS has done with a cohort of Black and Minority Ethnic and Refugee (BAMER) organisations to support them to collaborate, evidence their reach, their ability to work with residents to make lifestyle changes, and to evidence long term savings to the system.

The Council and VCS have been developing place based approaches in recent years to improve engagement and reach with residents. This focuses on areas where there is greater need, but takes an asset based approach, building on the strengths and aspirations within the area. This is placing more of an emphasis on how we work with local community anchor organisations that serve as a focus point for local communities and community organisations in a local area, enabling informal and formal groups to deliver positive activities within their communities.

What needs to happen next?

A new position on infrastructure support is needed to help the Council understand what is needed for both capacity building and networking support across the sector. This will be increasingly important as new opportunities for funding arise, and there is a need to quickly mobilise partnerships.

Effective infrastructure support will ensure that there is voice for both beneficiaries and the VCS as a whole – providing intelligence, insight and policy support, as well as facilitating connections and effective communication.

In order to make progress on this issue, the following priority areas have been identified:

| Action | Rationale | Considerations |
|--|---|--|
| <i>Prioritise working with the sector to explore solutions for back office costs</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The sector has highlighted that back office functions such as IT, HR etc are increasingly unaffordable and this can hinder development activities | This is an issue that is repeatedly raised in conversations with the sector – there is potentially an opportunity to explore learning from other sectors and areas to provide a practical way forward. |

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| <p><i>Develop a formal capacity building offer with the VCS</i></p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The initial work in developing the VCS Strategy has allowed a set of issues around how the sector currently operates to be surfaced and further explored – these now need to move forward by identifying what support is needed to increase the effectiveness and sustainability of the VCS, including practical actions on a day-to-day level through to longer term investment in strategically important organisations to enable them to thrive. • There is work underway with the refugee sector, supported employment sector and via neighbourhoods to refine the support offer to be more sophisticated and segmented, using a combination of peer and specialist support • This will involve assessing whether existing networks are the best way to ensure effective working relationships, partnerships and collaboration, and whether they are providing what the VCS and local communities need from them. • There is potentially an opportunity to tap into the resources and expertise of national organisations based in Hackney. | <p>These conversations are underway with organisations such as Hackney CVS but also need to align with the offer across London through the London Hub.</p> <p>There is already work underway to look at the role of VCS networks and forums and how to make these more useful. This closely overlaps with the strand of the VCS strategy which focusses on culture, behaviours and attitudes.</p> |
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| <p><i>Understand the current needs, and investment flows in the VCS</i></p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is limited understanding at present of where some of the gaps are in the VCS in terms of support for capacity and development, and how LBH could better support anchor organisations that will enable them to fulfil a role in place-based approaches. This will be important in terms of understanding where external investment exists already, where it is required and how it could be targeted – particularly as public sector resources continue to reduce. | <p>This work needs to link with any mapping/surveying taking place as part of the investment and property strands in the VCS Strategy. Using publicly available data on funding in Hackney could help, and existing infrastructure organisations could provide more evidence of their support, take up, and feedback.</p> |
| <p><i>Scoping a different role for the Council around infrastructure support</i></p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are other local authorities that offer their own Funder Plus support which involves a more intensive role for the Council in supporting organisations over longer time periods This has been trialled in the healthier hackney fund – be useful to review how that has worked • The Council can play a role in brokering access to City investment • There is currently no longer term strategy around these approaches | <p>There is the opportunity to learn from other inner London boroughs on this issue. It is important for the Council to be clear about the limits of its role and explore alternatives that bring external investment into infrastructure organisations in the borough</p> |
| <p><i>Develop a better understanding of local infrastructure or community anchor organisations, of their offer and of how we can work in partnership</i></p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Council has been developing place-based approaches in recent years to improve engagement and reach. This is placing more of an emphasis on how we work with local community anchor organisations that serve as a focus point for local communities and community organisations in a local area. | <p>Work such as the VCSE led neighbourhood pilot, Pembury Children’s Community and Sport England Pilot is highlighting the need to better understand how the community sector is supported and developed.</p> |