

# The Way Ahead: establishing a London Hub

Interim report, March 2017

*The Way Ahead report was published in April 2016 and sets out proposals for strengthening the system of support for civil society in London, including the creation of a London Hub to provide support at pan-London level.*

*This interim report has been prepared for LVSC and its partners by Steve Wyler, independent consultant, to aid implementation of the Way Ahead report. It particularly focuses on what LVSC/GLV and their partners could be doing to establish a London Hub.*

*It should be read as work in progress, subject to amendment as further soundings are taken with stakeholders, as discussions continue, and as additional insights and ideas emerge, rather than a full or final assessment of how the proposals set out the Way Ahead report can be achieved.*

## Summary

While there has been some criticism of the Way Ahead report and process, the discussion now appears to be moving into a constructive phase. Stakeholders consulted have a good understanding of the main themes in the report and generally support them. There is widespread agreement that things need to change, to deliver better to Londoners and to civil society in London, and to promote the practice of co-production, and there are indications that some agencies are accepting the need to make changes in their own practice.

More work will be needed to develop a picture of what success might look like and to produce a simple and compelling story of change. The Way Ahead project as a whole will need to lead to actions which can make a difference (including 'early wins'), should seek out the 'willing and the brave', and while generating disruption must also build on the best existing practice rather than feel the need to start from scratch. A strong and simple brand, which can be applied not just to a London Hub, but also to others engaged in common endeavour, will be required.

For LVSC and GLV (and others affected by the withdrawal of London Councils funding) timing will be challenging, with the new financial year fast approaching. My recommendation is that a two stage approach is taken:

- The first stage (April to September 2017) would be for GLV and LVSC to model fresh forms of collaboration, in the spirit of the Way Ahead, working with and through others as much as possible. This stage would also work towards the launch of a new entity with a working title of 'Connecting Londoners'.
- The second stage (October 2017 onwards) would see the new entity up and running. This would not simply be a continuation of LVSC and GLV under another name, but would rather provide a platform for new forms of multi-agency collaboration for the benefit of London's civil society. It is proposed that 'Connecting Londoners' would initially have four key functions: improving the system of support, gathering 'real-time' intelligence about London's community life, promoting positive change, unleashing the resources of civil society – in all cases working with and through other agencies at local, borough, and London-wide levels.

## 1. Reactions to the Way Ahead

From discussions to date it appears that among key stakeholders there is a shared understanding of the proposals set out in the Way Ahead report and welcome for several of the main themes:

- **The wider focus on Londoners and civil society.** There is broad agreement that what matters most are not organisations 'per se' but rather the vitality of civil society, and in particular how Londoners themselves can be supported to take positive action, as individuals and in association with others, in their local communities or communities of interest, on their own terms.
- **The idea of 'pragmatic co-production'.** While the phrase itself is not much liked, there is a good understanding of the main principles behind it. Firstly, that more is achieved by creating the conditions for communities to produce, with others as needed, the things which will benefit their lives. This means that communities should be directly engaged in the tasks of identifying needs and opportunities, and designing and delivering services or other forms of social action to address needs and realise opportunities. Secondly, that co-production needs to be pragmatic, in two senses: a) it is not realistic to expect that all Londoners can be directly involved in everything that affects them, and b) successful co-production requires that high expectations of agencies in London are balanced by an appreciation of the constraints within which those agencies operate.
- **The ambition to create a system which will improve co-operation across all sectors in service of Londoners.** In particular it is recognised that the private sector has considerable resources which could be tapped better for London's civil society, although it is also felt that in practice this is much easier to talk about than to achieve.

There are also some criticisms of the Way Ahead analysis and process, and some suggestions for improvement:

- There is a view that the report fails to recognise something fundamental about how civil society works at community level: **many front-line organisations in London are themselves an expression of community need.** People come together in association and form organisations (informal or formal) to address needs which cannot be met by individuals acting alone, and these should be regarded as a primary asset for London's civil society: there are estimated to be 120,000 community and voluntary groups in London, most very local.
- The Way Ahead report makes little reference to **inequalities in London**, yet some communities have far greater barriers than others to overcome in pursuit of co-producing better lives for themselves. Where there is a power imbalance co-production can become co-option, allowing inequality to persist. An important goal for civil society infrastructure is to provide support in ways which can help to redress rather than reinforce this imbalance.
- There is little in the Way Ahead report about **communities of interest or identity**. This is a vital but complex area, as identity for individual Londoners takes very many forms. In different contexts people might self-identify by gender, sexuality, ethnicity, age, disability; by neighbourhood or borough or city or the place they originally came from; by occupation, class, wealth; by sports or leisure or cultural pursuits. People have multiple identities, and so their associative life and potential to contribute to civil society has multiple aspects. Support and funding for civil society should encourage and assist forms of association which allow people, on their own terms, to express solidarity, establish mutual aid, and campaign for social change, as well as building connectivity across multiple interests and identities.

- There is some feeling that to date the Way Ahead report has been designed and promoted by a relatively small alliance of London-wide agencies, and has not engaged in depth with front-line experience and debates within London's civil society – in other words, it has **not been co-produced with Londoners and London civil society organisations** in a meaningful way. Nevertheless, the Way Ahead Systems Change Group has broadened its membership, an open event on 30 November 2016 was well attended, working groups are now operating and drawing in more people, and further events are planned to broaden engagement.
- **The triage and connect proposals are felt to be incomplete.** There is agreement that a diagnostic exercise is part of what is needed, together with connections to the most useful sources of support, wherever it may be available, and not confining this to established third sector support bodies. This however requires a degree of humility by providers, and recognition that others sometimes have better expertise, as well as overcoming suspicion of the motives of others, eg large corporates, none of which will be easy to achieve.
- The report's emphasis on **centralised solutions** is regarded by some as unrealistic. There is a widespread view that many of the Way Ahead objectives do not lend themselves to a highly centralised and transactional approach, particularly given the extraordinarily diverse and complex nature of London's civil society life. It is felt that often the best support flows from the building of relationships, and the ability to help people understand why some things are not a good idea as well as why other things might be. Hands-on help at a local level can therefore be the best starting point, provided that local support providers know how and when to pull in specialists from elsewhere, rather than unproductive referrals from one agency to another.

The task of building confident and resilient communities, able to take effective action on their own terms, requires a high degree of trust, sometimes over a long period of time. In most cases this is best delivered as close as possible to a community. Therefore, there is a case for subsidiarity: strengthening the system of local, borough, and community-specific support, and building up 'horizontal' peer exchange mechanisms, at the heart of the Way Ahead project.

- **The proposals for a London Hub are felt to be unclear,** both in terms of intention and implementation. However, as London Funders have pointed out, the intention in the report was to set out a broad direction rather than a detailed implementation plan, and invite civil society agencies to respond with their proposals for establishing something which would work well and add value.
- The **language of the Way Ahead report** is regarded as impenetrable, and it is now accepted by the Systems Change Group and others that the proposals must be translated into a simpler and plain-speaking narrative, and some first steps have been taken in that direction. This is felt to especially important because the Way Ahead ambition requires a high degree of shared ambition across many agencies, and this will not happen without a narrative which key stakeholders can feel enthusiastic about and convey to others.

## 2. Is there a willingness to embrace change?

There is pride in what has been and continues to be achieved by sector support agencies, and inevitably some agencies will say, for example about co-production, that to some extent 'we are doing this already'. There is nevertheless widespread acknowledgement that they need to travel further in directions suggested in the Way Ahead report, and all the organisations I have spoken to have been prepared to be self-critical about their own practices.

There is general agreement that the benefits claimed by support organisations are often poorly evidenced or communicated. There is also acceptance that despite the existence of various quality standards the quality of support is variable, and that while there are examples of excellence, some infrastructure support has simply not been good enough. The reasons for this are varied, and can include (for example): weak leadership; a lack of sufficient funding, or unhelpful restrictions imposed by funders; dysfunctional relationships with local authorities or other key bodies; delivery models which are ineffective or out-dated. Any new infrastructure system must address this.

The view has been expressed that a 'sense of entitlement' is found among voluntary sector infrastructure organisations, and also front-line organisations. This is clearly unfair when applied to all, but nevertheless does reveal how the sector has been perceived in some quarters, and where it exists is potentially a barrier to change.

Specifically, LVSC and GLV, and the CVSs I have been in contact with, have declared an intention to move towards significant change in order to contribute to realising the Way Ahead vision, as follows:

- LVSC and GLV are in discussions to come together to create a new body, and on both sides there is a growing realisation that this must mean creating something bold and new, not simply creating a combination of the two organisations to continue their operations under another name.
- The CVS network is now willing to move beyond initial frustrations with process (some CVSs had felt they were side-lined in the Way Ahead exercise) and take a proactive and positive approach. In November 2016 a group of CVSs decided to commit their own resources to bring in consultancy and work together over the coming year on topics such as: improving definitions of a successful CVS; establishing a framework to ensure a consistently good level of service across London; developing a common understanding that resonates with key stakeholders; establishing cross borough bidding and delivery partnerships; identifying ways to increase the sustainability/resilience of some of the less sustainable CVSs and Volunteer Centres, including new business models; and building a peer to peer culture across CVSs.

### 3. Obstacles and opportunities

Timing is challenging. London Councils has decided to withdraw all funding by the end of March 2017 for a significant group of London-wide infrastructure organisations. Delays in implementation of the recommendations in the Way Ahead report have to some extent caused a vacuum: and for example the uncertainty over their future has meant that it has been difficult for LVSC and GLV to develop new projects or bid for new funding. Reserves which were never strong have been further depleted and without new funding such organisations would become unviable.

The decision by City Bridge Trust to make interim funding available for 2017/18 (grants of up to £50k per organisation) and further funds beyond in the form of a Cornerstone Fund, is hugely helpful. And there are prospects of resources from elsewhere, not least the Big Lottery Fund, but only if a clear and compelling vision can be constricted in the next few months, which demonstrates a willingness to create something collaborative, fresh and worthwhile.

There will be obstacles to change. Institutional inertia is found in every sector, and for some organisations the default position, especially when threatened by funding cuts, is to look for ways to protect current activities, and to maintain the jobs of their own staff, and these tendencies can make the necessary reassessment of purpose and function and establishing new organisational models

difficult to achieve. It is therefore paramount to build a sense of shared purpose, to overcome vested interests among individuals or organisations.

#### 4. Towards a shared purpose

The Way Ahead project lacks a vivid picture of what London civil society life might look like if the vision were to be fully realised. The Way Ahead report allows for many different pictures to emerge and it needs to be accepted that no single vision of the future will hold for long – if the exercise thrives it will be subject to continual adaptation and improvement as more and more people engage with the project and add to it. But nevertheless a provisional direction of travel is needed to build a sense of shared purpose. To give two contrasting examples:

*It is 2027, and cities across the UK and internationally are looking to London as an example of how to revitalise civic life....*

In every neighbourhood across London we have our local community resource agency, an attractive, lively and out-going sharing space, where people from all walks of life come together to give and to get: to enjoy each other's company, to share ideas and plan actions to help themselves and their neighbours and improve their neighbourhoods..... Health and social care have changed out of all recognition, Londoners are much more likely to get a social prescription in the community than a medical prescription or end up in hospital or in care, and people are better off as a result... More and more services are now designed and run by local people... Many people now own community shares, in projects they care about... Behind all this stands a well organised network of borough-wide resource agencies, stimulating volunteering, helping community action and organisations get going and run themselves well, bringing in additional expert help from the council, the NHS, businesses, specialists, linking communities of interest right across London .... Then there's 'Connecting Londoners', gathering real-time intelligence from across London, co-ordinating London-wide efforts, helping to shape London-wide policy and investment, stimulating investment and innovation.... All of this makes up the 'Connecting Londoners' project, and we know that any agency or initiative that carries the 'Connecting Londoners' brand is good at what it does.... London's community is being reborn and revitalised from the bottom up....

*It is 2027, and cities across the UK and internationally are looking to London as an example of how to revitalise civic life...*

A whole host of London agencies – voluntary groups, councils, the GLA, and business partners have created a powerful new 'Connecting Londoners' agency. Digital platforms have generated the ability for people, wherever they live or work in London, to find out what contribution they can play to London's civic life, as volunteers, as social activists and campaigners, as donors, allowing them to meet virtually and in real time, and take action for themselves and for their community of choice.... Londoners have access to an amazing on-line compendium of resources, but also real people to speak to at the need of a phone, or experts who will come out and meet you and your group and help you get things going, for free or a very modest fee.... London's business community has really bought into all this – incentivising their workforces to play their part, sponsoring a host of exciting activity, celebrating success in a big way.... 'Connecting Londoners' is producing compelling evidence about how people are connecting with each other as never before across boundaries of place, class, age, gender, race, and London is now acknowledged as the first truly socially cosmopolitan city...

Are we aiming for one or the other, or a combination of the two? Or something entirely different? This is a discussion which needs to take place before establishing a long term structure for a truly effective civil society support system for London.

## 5. Ingredients for success

The following will be needed to maximise the chances for success for the Way Ahead initiative in general and the London Hub in particular:

- **A compelling story of change:** The narrative about the Way Ahead needs to be simple and capable of winning hearts and minds.
- **Actions which can make a difference:** A 'Now, Soon, Later' approach would allow for 'baby steps' and early wins as well as long term ambition.
- **Working with the willing and the brave:** An emphasis on building a positive 'coalition of the willing' would be more effective than dragging reluctant partners to the table, and a clearer and more specific 'offer' for prospective public and private partners will be needed.
- **Building on the best:** The Way Ahead will not succeed unless there is recognition that there is good practice to sustain and build upon at local, borough and London-wide levels, rather than adopting a 'year zero' approach.
- **Championing community expertise:** Existing and new models of support and engagement which are grown from within local communities, and communities of interest or identity, should be championed, while avoiding the tendency to segment Londoners into narrow categories.
- **Building networks:** Creating distributed models for collaboration and leadership will allow insight and skills to be shared and unlikely alliances formed, taking full advantage of on-line platforms.
- **Agile working:** Small teams, able to adapt and respond quickly, can reduce the 'diseconomies of scale' which larger institutions often succumb to.
- **A strong and simple brand:** A new brand (eg 'Connecting Londoners') will be needed which can be applied to the London Hub and also to other activities connected to the Way Ahead ambition.
- **Proving and improving:** An impact evaluation strategy would be built in from the outset, which includes elements of co-production with London communities, which can tell an honest story of what is being achieved, win allies and investors, and stimulate action as needed.

## 6. What could the functions of a London Hub ('Connecting Londoners') be?

Ultimately this will depend on a deeper understanding of purpose, as set out above. However there are certain functions which a 'Connecting Londoners' operation could usefully focus on, at least in the short term:

- **Improving the system of support**  
Developing a shared support platform, for local, borough-wide, London-wide and national support providers willing to engage positively in the 'Connecting Londoners' project (including public and private sources as well as voluntary sector sources). This might include: creating a pool of open-source resources available to all support providers and those seeking support; embracing all forms of social organisation not just traditional charity models, identifying 'first

points of contact' (for volunteering, social action, governance support, social enterprise, funding advice etc), testing peer-based quality systems; building a shared brand for the system of support, and showcasing good and innovative support models.

- **Gathering 'real-time' intelligence about London's community life**  
Building a far-reaching network of agencies and volunteers who can act as the interface between civil society and the general public, and therefore offer credible insight into the lived experiences of Londoners, highlighting problems and also opportunities, with the ability to co-design potential solutions, promote social integration, and campaign effectively for change. Over time this would be a way to amplify and build credibility for the voices of London's civil society, bringing them more to the forefront of debates and decision-making within, for example, London's local authorities, CCGs, business sector bodies, and the GLA. And it could be accompanied by an annual report on London's civil society, assessing its benefits and highlighting opportunities for investment.
- **Promoting positive change**  
Making the most of its convening power to increase incubation, innovation, and acceleration of civil society projects. This would include identifying where civil society can play a bigger role (one example might be social prescribing in health and social care). In such cases the activity would support and amplify the efforts of specialists concerned, for example by making the case for investment, helping with formation of bidding and delivery partnerships, promoting innovation, and helping to make more effective alliances with London's business community and public sectors, and new alliances with universities, arts networks etc.
- **Unleashing the resources of civil society**  
Taking action to make fuller use of the resources within and available to civil society. This includes enhancing the systems of volunteering, time-banking, and other forms of mutual aid, through which the time and skills of Londoners freely given to other Londoners produce mutually beneficial outcomes. It might also include new ways of drawing on the skills and resourcefulness of voluntary sector staff and Board members, and maximising the use of buildings and other assets, to benefit London's community life.

## 7. What should a London Hub ('Connecting London') look like?

The Way Ahead report is not prescriptive about how the London Hub should be established, and is open to the idea of a new central organisation, or a voluntary coalition between independent agencies, or something in between. The following options have been considered:

- **Voluntary coalition**  
A voluntary coalition might include some of the London-wide agencies involved in the Systems Change Group, the generic borough support agencies (CVSs and Volunteer Centres), and potentially many others, such as community anchor organisations, Community Foundations, grant-makers, specialist sector support bodies (London-wide and national), local councils, private sector allies, universities, and so on. There are some inherent difficulties: the potentially large number of agencies will divert considerable effort into the management and governance of the alliance, decision making will be cumbersome, and there could be continual tensions about share of resources, sector interests, and so on.
- **Co-operative structure**  
A co-operative structure has been suggested, with a strong identity and purpose, in which a variety of main stakeholder agencies (and perhaps even Londoners) have a stake, eg by owning a

share as investors. However, it is not realistic to expect that this can be achieved within the next few months. Without well-communicated and convincing objectives, an income-generating business model, and credibility based on track record, the 'buy-in' to a co-operative model is unlikely to be sufficiently widespread to make the effort successful. However, something along these lines could be a very worthwhile longer-term ambition.

- **New charitable entity**

On balance my recommendation is that LVSC and GLV take the proactive step of establishing the London Hub ('Connecting Londoners') as a charitable entity, with the firm intention of maintaining a light touch, and working with and through partners including existing support agencies in everything it does. This means it must not judge success by its own expansion and profile, but rather by the expansion and profile of others who want to be part of the joint endeavour. It should act as a convenor and enabler, rather than direct deliverer, in effect delivering change through networks and platforms, rather than through traditional organisational and membership delivery methods.

While it will need resources to operate, it should maintain the smallest possible staff team, funding others to do as much as possible, and encouraging secondments across agencies and sectors. While it will have a 'leadership' role, it should be seen to be a model of 'generous' and 'distributed' leadership. A lot will depend on developing a distinctive brand, as a shared brand which partners can also benefit from. If successful, this approach could pull in additional resources for local and specialist support organisations so that they can be funded to deliver work on behalf of Connecting Londoners, or under the new brand.

## 8. Business model

Both LVSC and GLV are very heavily dependent on grant funding, accompanied by short-term public sector contracts. Membership income is negligible. While grant subsidy will be required for the foreseeable future, 'Connecting Londoners' should undertake a mix of activities, some of which can generate additional income for its own operations and for its civil society partners, including trading income, while at the same time contributing to its core objectives. Various ideas have emerged so far:

- **Improving the system of support**
  - New peer support mechanisms, encouraging the 'generous leadership' which the Big Lottery Fund has been talking about recently. This might for example include knowledge and skills exchange visits, and an interim management service for civil society organisations going through transition.
  - A 'Lifeboat' scheme, where expert assistance (ideally together with small grants) can be deployed to help organisations in difficulty turn themselves around, or close in an orderly fashion, while transferring their services and assets to others if possible.
- **Gathering 'real-time' intelligence about London's community life**
  - A 'co-production offer' – whereby groups of local residents, service-users etc would be identified and supported to engage in co-production exercises with statutory bodies and others wishing to apply co-production methodologies. This could include local support organisations hosting seminars/conferences on key social issues and the different grassroots-led community initiatives which work.
- **Promoting positive change**

- A social prescribing London platform, building on the 21 known social prescribing schemes already underway, to foster the maximum involvement of civil society agencies, and working with proposals by the National Social Prescribing Network to develop a London branch.
- **Unleashing the resources of civil society**
  - A consultancy pool with associates made up of the most skilled and respected civil society leaders in London, marketing its offer across sectors, and generating income for civil society activities.
  - A corporate volunteering brokerage scheme which offers London-wide packages of support for companies based in central London but whose employees live right across London.
  - A scheme to market civil society meeting rooms and conferencing facilities not just to voluntary organisations but also to government agencies, and private companies, with a central booking system and an attractive and accessible public interface.

A London-wide procurement vehicle for London's civil society organisations, to reduce costs of energy purchasing, IT equipment, insurance, etc may also be worth considering further down the line.

All of these ideas would need further investigation: to avoid duplication with existing schemes; to clarify what benefit they would bring to civil society, and ultimately to Londoners; to establish whether there is a viable business model, and to assess whether they could be carried forward with the necessary skill and flair. It may be necessary to establish a subsidiary trading company for these purposes.

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## Appendix A: Illustrations of existing civil society support in London

The following examples are presented as illustrations of existing imaginative and co-produced practice which is helping to strengthen Civil Society in London and which the Way Ahead might seek to build on. This is a small sample, many other examples could of course be given.

### **Local community anchor: Bromley by Bow Centre**

The Bromley by Bow Centre combines a community-run GP practice with a wide variety of community development activities. This combination produces a shift in power relationships, and much greater emphasis on community rather than medical models, including social prescribing (BBBC runs seminars for others on how to do this).

Other support services include:

- Beyond Business (a social enterprise start up support programme): 60 social enterprises have been set up by local people producing 400 jobs and £4m annual turnover.
- Small grants: up to £500 for a community project.
- A flourishing time bank: including group activities to grow confidence among participants.

The Centre is exceptionally welcoming, with an attractive open-access culture, and is used by a very broad cross section of its community. It also receives 1,500 visitors a year from across the country and internationally, seeking to learn from the model.

### **Equalities network: HEAR**

HEAR is the London network of equalities organisations. It operates with minimal resources (currently two part-time posts). It acts as a pan-equalities voice and a source of knowledge and expertise on equality issues. Its work is underpinned by the conviction that those who have direct experience of inequality and discrimination are best placed to develop strategies to achieve equality. HEAR achieves this through a range of activities including training, networking events and conferences and other opportunities for peer learning, research and specialist information provision. The network currently consists of around 650 civil society organisations in London.

HEAR brings together those working in different specialist equality fields, particularly on issues that are 'pan-equality' and 'intersectional'.

Pan-equality issues are those that impact on people and populations across equality characteristics, for example, Hate Crime. HEAR has started a Hate Crime network that meets quarterly to make connections between those working to combat hate incidents, harassment, violence and abuse against women, different 'races' and ethnicities, Deaf and Disabled people, older people, people of different faiths, LGBTQI+ populations and others. One outcome of this was the co-production of a list of Third Party and anonymous reporting options in London so people have 'support to report' and services know specialist organisations to refer to, e.g. Gypsy, Roma, Traveller reporting sites and those with advocacy for Disabled People.

Intersectional issues are those where overlapping identities can increase exclusion and discrimination, for example Disabled Refugees. HEAR has worked on the topic of Deaf and Disabled Refugees and Asylum Seekers, connecting organisations that work with Refugees and Disabled People Organisations to highlight the fact that rights and entitlements for Disabled People 'trump' immigration law. HEAR has co-produced accessible briefings to promote these rights. HEAR sits on the Home Office equality stakeholder group, and has produced the first ever Action Plan for Disabled People in the Asylum Process that the Home Office/UKIV has adopted. This Action Plan means the

VCS can influence the way Disabled Refugees are identified and supported in the asylum system and monitor changes and improvements for years to come.

In 2017 HEAR is also helping members get Mental Health specified in the equality objectives of Clinical Commissioning Groups (by highlighting the pan-equality and intersectional nature of mental health support needs) and connecting London's diverse LGBT community with Local Authorities and the NHS to advance the unmet needs of intersectional and underrepresented LGBTQI+ people (e.g. bisexual and intersex people and LGBT people of faith).

#### **Borough-wide support: Hackney CVS**

Hackney CVS works with local citizens and community organisations using co-production models, and builds coalitions of organisations to design and deliver programmes (often with public sector or BLF funding) which will improve community life in the borough. For example:

- The CVS set up City and Hackney Together as a trading arm, with 80 local community groups in membership, providing opportunities for small groups to participate in consortia service delivery, without the burden of bidding and management complexity, and including systems checks to ensure core standards.
- A BLF-funded Ageing Better programme, designed to overcome social isolation, included a participatory budgeting exercise: 30 expressions of interest from community groups were voted on by a meeting of 500 residents, together with a postal ballot to avoid exclusion of the local Orthodox Jewish community. Among many other activities, this has resulted in an older people's media group, run by older people themselves, to combat ageism.
- Work is underway with the local council, local schools and community organisations on a 10-15 year project to find solutions to under-achievement by young Black men in the borough, starting with the lived experience of young Black men themselves, and using community theatre techniques to provide a platform through which they can engage directly, 'all on the same level', with senior public sector officials and others. The Mayor and CEO of the council have asked the CVS to develop a 'theory of change' capable of challenging all institutions, including the voluntary sector, to change their practices in an effort to achieve better outcomes.
- A programme has been set up with Homerton Hospital to help vulnerable people leave hospital successfully by creating a voluntary sector support framework, including social prescribing, where money follows the discharged patients, and community groups can play their part.

Hackney CVS is visited by CVSs and similar bodies from across the UK, and has achieved the highest NAVCA quality rating of any CVS in the country.

#### **Support for user-led organisations: Inclusion London**

Inclusion London is a pan-London Deaf and Disabled people's organisation (DDPO) that currently provides a range of support to 76 local Deaf and Disabled people's organisations all of whom are user-led, run by and for Deaf/Disabled people. These organisations range in size from small organisations operating with minimal resources to medium sized organisations delivering a portfolio of essential services; the majority of DDPOs also carry out local voice, representation and campaigning activities. In total the DDPO sector in London provides services, support and representation to over 70,000 Deaf/Disabled Londoners. Inclusion London is a first point of contact for organisational and business advice and provides a range of bespoke information, training, advice, 1-2-1 assistance and resources tailored to meet the specific needs of DDPOs.

Inclusion London also supports DDPOs to influence local, regional and national policy on Deaf/Disability equality issues. For example, its Disability Justice project as well as building the knowledge, skills and use, by DDPOs, of key rights such as the Care Act and Equality Act also supports and facilitates strategic litigation opportunities where Deaf/Disabled people rights have been ignored or undermined by bringing together DDPOs and lawyers to identify strategically important cases, take legal action and challenge disability discrimination in a strategic way.

#### **Regional contract, local delivery: GLV and Volunteer Centres**

Greater London Volunteering (GLV) has worked with its member Volunteer Centres to bid for a number of regional contracts, where the funding body were looking for a single provider, but needed local reach. GLV were able to secure the contract, and then set up smaller sub-contracts and agreements with local Volunteer Centres to cover single boroughs, or groups of boroughs. This has worked for volunteer-facing projects as well as organisational support work, and over the last five years has enabled GLV to distribute just under £1million of funding to the network.

For reaching volunteers, GLV were funded by the Waste Resources Action Partnership to deliver the community engagement element of the "Love Food, Hate Waste" campaign. Nine Volunteer Centres were then commissioned to deliver a consistent programme of training and support, but tailoring the elements to respect London's diversity at a local level. Over the course of a six month project, the Volunteer Centres were able to recruit, train and support 2,937 volunteers to be "food waste champions", helping to spread the messages to their communities about how to avoid food waste – leading to household savings of an average of £50 per month, and the potential to save £millions from the waste collection and disposal budgets of local authorities. WRAP conducted an independent evaluation of the project which highlighted the huge reach of a project that engaged volunteers to disseminate messages at a community level (rather than a traditional "top-down" marketing approach), and the effectiveness of the work in reducing food waste in target areas.

For working with groups, GLV were funded by London Sport to develop and deliver a good practice programme of support to sports clubs across London, to enable them to increase the number and diversity of people getting involved in volunteering. The programme followed the Experts in Volunteering model, where sports clubs completed a health check survey (which was designed using feedback from local Volunteer Centres), with four Volunteer Centres funded to analyse the findings and then develop one training module each, before then delivering all the modules on a sub-regional basis to the sports clubs. This work engaged 87 sports clubs across the four centres, with the delivery partners locally able to tailor the core resources to the needs of the groups they were working with.

## Appendix B

### The Way Ahead: views from London CVSs

25 October 2016 at Islington Voluntary Action Council

The meeting was convened by Steve Wyler (acting as a consultant for LVSC) to gather views from CVSs and Volunteer Centres about the Way Ahead report.

- Attendance: Tessa Awe (Brent CVS), Siobhan Sollis (Kensington & Chelsea Social Council), Ross Diamond (Redbridge CVS), Jake Ferguson (Hackney CVS), Jackie Rosenberg (One Westminster), Khadiru Mahdi (Merton CVS), Colin Maclean (Community Links Bromley).
- Apologies: Paula Jeffery (Enfield Voluntary Action), Naomi Goldberg (Greenwich Action for Voluntary Service), Kirsty Cornell (Tower Hamlets CVS), Angela Spence (Kensington & Chelsea Social Council).

The following is a summary of the views which were expressed at the meeting.

#### Civil society and co-production

There is much to be said for the Way Ahead report's primary focus on London's communities and its emphasis on improving collaboration in order to strengthen London's civil society. The report's emphasis on co-production and asset-based approaches is particularly welcome. But CVSs felt there are weaknesses in the report:

- It proposes that identification of need in London should be co-produced, as much as possible, with Londoners themselves. However, it fails to recognise something quite fundamental about how civil society works at community level: *many front-line organisations in London are themselves an expression of community need*. While civil society includes countless individual acts of volunteering and kindness, not all needs can be met in that way, and therefore people come together in association and form organisations (informal or formal) to address those needs. It would be a mistake to imply that London-wide agencies seeking to co-produce an understanding of London's needs and to design and deliver services accordingly should somehow by-pass front-line organisations.
- *Ideally, an attempt to design a support system for London's civil society would start from the things Londoners say matter most to them*. This may include, for example, reducing poverty, improving health, overcoming social isolation, developing more affordable housing, and the exercise would start with on-the-ground discussions with residents groups and others at community level about what is needed to move things forward. This would be a better (and more co-produced) foundation for designing a civil society support system.
- *The triage and connect functions do not lend themselves to a highly centralised and transactional approach*. They require the building of relationships, and the ability to help people understand why some things are not a good idea as well as why other things might be. They also need to be followed up with hands-on help at local level wherever that can be provided successfully, as well as bringing in specialists from elsewhere. The task of building confident and resilient communities, able to take effective action on their own terms, requires a high degree of trust, sometimes over a long period of time (as the example of Big Local illustrates). In most cases this is best delivered as close as possible to a community.

Therefore, strengthening the system of local support should be at the heart of the Way Ahead project.

### **Local support**

There is no up-to-date mapping of the local support system in London, and without this it is not possible to fully understand where strengths and weaknesses lie, and to devise a plan to overcome the weaknesses and build on the strengths.

In terms of CVS/Volunteer Centres there is widespread but not complete coverage across London. Where gaps appear there are efforts to recreate something similar, and this suggests that something along the lines of a CVS/Volunteer Centre is always needed at borough level, both by the public sector and by the voluntary sector. In many boroughs CVSs have merged with Volunteer Centres, while in some cases the two remain separate but work side-by-side. At neighbourhood level there are sometimes settlements, development trusts or community centres which have a more localised civil society support function. These are sometimes described as 'community anchor organisations, although some CVSs have 'community anchor' characteristics as well.

CVSs work to tackle inequality in their areas, leading and/or supporting local civil society organisations to deliver solutions to these problems. The Way Ahead report does not discuss inequality in any substantive way. CVSs because of their unique local relationships can often bring key players and actors together and provide the reach into communities that can struggle to be empowered – this is a strength and resource within local infrastructure.

It was noted that local support requires local funding, but that the influence of the London-wide agencies (GLA, London Councils, London Funders etc) on local funders is weak.

CVSs are believed by some funders and others (including front line agencies) to have a sense of entitlement and to be variable in their quality, from the good to the poor. Such variability should not however lead to a conclusion that the borough-based support model is inherently flawed. Weak CVSs tend to be a product of inadequate funding, or difficult relationships with the local authority, or poor local leadership, or a combination of these. Where there is a weak CVS, the local authority, which is a key funder and partner and has responsibility for borough well-being, should be braver in intervening to help the CVS turn itself around.

There are good CVSs in London, and while they have a sense of pride and achievement (over the years they have created many of the significant civil society enabling mechanisms in their borough) the good ones do *not* have a sense of entitlement. They have recognised that things needed to change and evolve, and have taken action accordingly:

- Reconfiguring their activities as local needs change, for example because of demographic changes, and providing leadership to wider civil society to 'stay on top of the agenda'.
- Building much closer partnerships with their local authority and CCG so that CVS work is better aligned to that of the statutory agencies, and more can be achieved. The public sector and civil society need each other, they are interdependent ('civil society is the flip side of the public sector') and CVSs are well placed to move things beyond a 'them and us' culture. In some cases CVSs lead partnerships of local civil society organisations to deliver public services and/or community interventions which benefit disadvantaged residents. This can arise from CVSs putting business cases to the local authority, CCG or other public body.

- Recognising that CVSs can't do everything, and bringing in new allies (from the private and public sectors as well as the voluntary sector) who are better placed with resources and expertise to deliver what is needed, rather than trying to hold on to everything themselves.
- Playing a leadership and convening role to shift practice from 'doing things for people' to helping people 'do things for themselves'. This might include for example Early Action partnerships, social prescribing programmes, and a wide range of successful community development and self-help activities, based on co-production and asset-based methodologies.
- Moving away from claims to 'represent' communities, towards facilitating voices which are otherwise unheard, building connectivity, and playing a pragmatic brokerage role.
- Putting the needs of their communities before their own organisational needs, and encouraging others to do the same.

Many CVSs in London are capable and willing to move in these directions. Many want to go further, and work more collaboratively, and are prepared to challenge themselves to do so. They could therefore play a positive role in realising the vision of the Way Ahead, and would certainly want to.

### **Cross borough and London-wide support**

It is not clear what added value LVSC and GLV currently provide. Similarly, it is not clear at present what a new 'London Hub', perhaps created by the two organisations, would offer, beyond that which could be delivered by CVSs working together alongside national support agencies, and there are concerns about funders 'giving all the money to a London Hub'.

However, the following functions were felt to be needed on a cross borough or London-wide basis:

- Sharing of standard support resources (training materials, briefing and advice sheets, good practice guidance, for example). This is happening on an ad-hoc basis across some CVSs, but it should be possible for CVSs to produce a common set of core resources, which has been peer-reviewed and quality checked, and which could be made available for all to use. This would require some new funding, but at a modest level.
- Better support to organisations which operate across several boroughs. CVSs can sometimes be constrained by their borough-specific funding from working with organisations which are based on a community of interest rather than of place and which do not identify with a particular neighbourhood or borough (eg some equality campaigns or services, some refugee and migrants groups).
- Exchange of knowledge and experience and other forms of peer support across boroughs. There is a London forum for CVS CEOs but this could be improved and similar forums for other local support staff could be useful, perhaps leading to secondments/exchanges of staff across boroughs. Leadership development should not just be about trustees.
- Bulk purchasing arrangements, approved supplier lists, and other commercial activities (including some forms of corporate sponsorship), as well as shared services (HR, payroll for example) which require scale beyond a single borough. Some examples of sub-regional collaboration for these purposes already exist.

- Influence at pan-London levels. This would need to be based on real-time intelligence, channelled from front-line civil society to London wide levels, with the credibility to influence decision about policy and funding, and to stimulate new pan-London initiatives, to ensure that the views of civil society are heard in London-wide discussions as much as those of the business sector or public sector, and to achieve a better understanding of civil society's contribution to London's economy and prosperity.

There was a view that the CVSs would be able to play a positive delivery role in much of this, provided that some resources were made available to them, and that activities were well co-ordinated. There was however unease about the idea that a London Hub would determine quality of support, and it was suggested that a peer support and challenge model, which included CVSs, would be most effective in raising standards.

Various additional ideas were discussed, with a view to building on the skills and resources of London's civil society on a pan-London basis, and potentially generating income for the sector:

- A consultancy pool, with associates made up of the most skilled and respected civil society leaders in London, marketing its offer across sectors, and generating income for civil society activities.
- New peer support mechanisms, encouraging the 'generous leadership' which the Big Lottery Fund has been talking about recently. This might for example include knowledge and skills exchange visits, and an interim management service for civil society organisations going through transition.
- A corporate volunteering scheme which offers London-wide packages of support for companies based in central London but whose employees live right across London.
- A scheme to market civil society meeting rooms and conferencing facilities not just to voluntary organisations but also to government agencies, and private companies.
- A 'co-production offer' – whereby groups of local residents, service-users etc would be identified and supported to engage in co-production exercises with statutory bodies and others wishing to apply co-production methodologies. This could include CVSs hosting seminars/conferences on key social issues and the different grassroots-led community initiatives which work.

All of these ideas would need further investigation: to avoid duplication with existing schemes; to clarify what benefit they would bring to civil society, and ultimately to Londoners; to establish whether there is a viable business model, and to assess whether they could be carried forward with the necessary skill and flair.

## Appendix C

### The Way Ahead: views from Volunteer Centres

Thursday 12 May 2016 at Lift, London N1

**Present:** Alexander Buckmire (Voluntary Action Harrow Co-operative), Beau Fadahunsi (MVSC), Cam Fitzwilliam-Grey (VC Haringey), Caroline Thorogood (Richmond CVS), Catherine Bavage (Volunteer Centre Tower Hamlets), Conrad Hollingsworth (LVAC), Deborah Forster (Blenheim), Diana Leary (Voluntary action Waltham Forest), Dominic Pinkney (VC Camden, HFVC group), Erika Jenkins (Barking & Dagenham CVS), Hannah Tompkins (Sense), Joseph Morrell (Three Elements Volunteering), Kim Donahue, Lauren Tobias (Volunteer Centre Hackney), Mark Restall (Volunteer Centre Bexley), Michelle Martin (Volunteer Centre Greenwich), Nicky Judd (Groundwork), Philip Boye-Anawomah (Voluntary Action Islington), Shelley Hart (Havering Volunteer Centre)

**Apologies:** Diane Diamond (Community Links Bromley), Karen Chillman (Croydon Voluntary Action), Philip Nelson (Career Volunteer), Saskia Hornivius (Three Elements Volunteering), Theodora Panagi (Reach Volunteering). **To facilitate:** James Banks (GLV), David Rodrigues (GLV)

### Summary

James presented slides on 'What's "The Way Ahead" for volunteering? This provided an overview of the context for volunteering, the review process, the definition of civil society, the foundations for change, the proposed system and the key proposals.

The participants were then split into three groups. The groups rotated around three tables in turn at which they focused on a particular area of civil society support: front line groups, local support and regional bodies. The following outlines the flipchart notes from each table.

### Front-line Volunteers, Groups & Organisations – facilitated by Hannah Tompkins

- Volunteering is the backbone of the UK. What if we all 'downed tools'?
- Priorities to prototype: Accredited training that addresses the skills gaps e.g. boundaries, first aid. Upskilling & employment fits Mayor's agenda (Erika proposing to take this forward). – Risks of placing too much emphasis on employment though – we are aware that for many volunteers it is a long path to employment and it isn't the right thing for everyone.
- Relationships with LA Commissioners – puts us under massive pressure to meet tough targets 'Bite the hand that feeds you'. Key message to funders – we need to agree sensible delivery targets
- How does report take account of local diversity? E.g. commissioning and politics, differing levels of investment, socio- economic circumstances.
- We want to challenge big idea that groups and society will just come together and empower individuals.
- Pressure on communities to find solutions doesn't consistently work. Some good examples of when this works but it's not consistently successful.
- Risk of poorer volunteer management because of overload, sometimes one person.
- Priority campaigning message: Pan-London agreement from infrastructure – no collusion with DWP, aware of risk of pressure on small organisations to take 'Pathway to funding streams' incentives linked to employment.

Most people said we don't expect volunteering rates to change - cause to celebrate what we already achieve, 40% is great. But it's also 40% distracting and looks better that it is. Important to give context for that statistic. Risk Local Authorities and funders take it out of context. Some people felt there is opportunity for volunteering rates to change. No shortage of volunteers, just missing the

right ones. Data: Civic Core 'Third sector research' small numbers do the most, destabilising existing delivery.

- Pressure to find only skilled volunteers.  
Funding streams might be stronger for smaller organisations. CICs, Social enterprises will benefit. VC funding will go to the community for volunteers.
- Lose face to face support, people who lack confidence won't volunteer. Exclude marginalised or vulnerable groups.
- Risk of one agency having all the control & power and/or lack expertise.
- USP of infrastructure is independence and individualised support. Good practice and brokerage both essential. Triage and connect.
- Impact of austerity underestimated. Reality – privileged boroughs e.g. Richmond will be better off. Investment in co-production needs facilitation.
- GLV campaigning priority at each level: More co-ordination and collective strong voice about keeping volunteering appropriate. No 'social work by back door', making organisations aware of risk of job substitution. Do we need a management charter?
- Volunteer focus at a political level.
- We can learn lessons from Europe, France 'Meaning of Volunteering', Romania, Italy who are ahead in this journey – let's not reinvent the wheel.
- Is it our role to find out who is volunteering in the borough?

#### **First steps:**

- Clarity on 'What do we mean by success' How will it look different e.g. guidance from the reference group.
- Support us to sell it into organisations 'the elevator pitch' including using the right language 'Backbone of volunteering needs –'
- Key message: More co-ordination and collective strong voice about keeping volunteering appropriate and safe. I.e. not social work by the back door. We all have a role to play – all levels.
- We need support to change, to respond and to set up new systems.
- We want to understand funding streams.
- GLV support on co-ordination of data and an accurate picture of contributions.

#### **Local Support - facilitated by Jo Morrell**

##### Agree or Assess

- How do we enable VCs to link with informal groups?
- Co-production- enabling people to devise their own solutions, create their own groups. Volunteer motivations will steer co-production.
- Triage – it's what we're doing.
- Identify local issues – potentially. Informal groups – how to engage with your VC? Definition of volunteering needs expanding – to include Informal Groups and residents associations
- Co-production could create a danger of duplication. - Groups working toward the same cause in the same neighbourhood
- Fear that People focussed brokerage & Supported Volunteering would disappear.

##### Building on Brilliance

- Enable groups to Triage themselves? Insurance against loss of VCs. Volunteer Centres to increase their advocacy and Connect services as a local hub.
- Civil society – move towards development and support. VCs to move toward: supporting those who need additional help. Growing the “Connect” service for capable volunteers.
- Volunteer centre should groom their networks and continue to be the local connector and maintain local contacts and networks.

#### Challenges to Change

- Funding climate
- Challenge of Local Authorities working together, sharing knowledge and attitude to volunteering.
- Sharing data – big problem
- Sign-up. VCs, CVS may not partake or collectively dragged into a decision not relevant to local area.
- Need consensus, not possible to gain consensus.
- Inter borough competition for tender.
- You can't influence if you're not connected.
- Health and faith sectors missing as a consideration.

#### Priorities to prototype

- Improve data sharing
- Standardisation on impact measurement, data capture
- Demonstrate how projects can be adapted rather than 'one size fits all'
- Pilot boroughs should be carefully selected
- More Newhams to come.
- Demonstrate how to identify local needs and capacity build groups.
- Avoid re-inventing the wheel.

#### **First steps:**

- Methodology and examples of identifying local need and devising solutions.
- Local civil society needs to be more connected with informal groups.
- Standardised data capture and systematic simple reporting.
- Open sourced project / service solutions.

#### Support needed

- Be given clear goals / structure / final product to follow
- Capacity to implement on top of a full existing workload
- Resurrect London version of Big Assist to facilitate sharing, learning and discussion
- Standardised policy and procedure templates

#### Support offered

- Happy to help to guide data
- Keen to open source solutions
- Showcase of knowledge
- Shift from competition by borough
- What does success look like?

## Regional Bodies - facilitated by Cam Fitzwilliam-Grey

- More joined up working between regional organisations (GLV, LVSC, Team London etc.)
- Better ways of collecting/analysing volunteering data across London
- Bring services of regional bodies together
- Guided by needs of local civil society support that include:
  - A co-ordinated voice for the sector
  - Influencing politicians, GLA
  - Help on winning bids/securing sustainability
  - Representation of volunteering, championing impact etc.
  - Being a bidding vehicle for pan-London projects
  - Upskilling local support to maintain/improve standards
  - Relationship building/door opening with e.g. funders, CCGs and other bodies at a regional level
  - Listen and reflect voice of members
  - Help with capacity building at a local level
  - Facilitating sharing of skills e.g. corporate volunteering, supported volunteering
  - Providing networking space for sharing best practice
  - Promoting recognition of volunteering and volunteering support
  - Standardisation of measurement/impact measurement (?)
  - They don't need – prescriptive approach to funding and delivery etc.

### **First steps:**

- Promote understanding of the report
- Facilitate consultation to identify commonality on data to be collected so that impact of sector can be marketed, funders can ask for standard data. Ideally this research would be funded.

## Appendix D: List of interviewees/meetings attended

### Interviewees:

- Sufina Ahmad, City Bridge Trust/BLF
- Tessa Awe, LVSC Board, Brent CVS
- Paul Butler, LVSC Board (Chair)
- James Banks, Greater London Volunteering
- Russell Delew, Andrew Jerney-Boys, London Community Foundation
- Jake Ferguson, Hackney CVS
- Fabian French, Michael Scott, UK Community Foundations
- Christine Goodall, HEAR network
- Bob Green, LVSC Board, Stonewall Housing
- Andy Gregg, LVSC Board, ROTA
- Dan Hopewell, Rob Trimble, Bromley by Bow Centre
- Tracey Lazard, Inclusion London
- Gordon McCullough, Community Southwark
- Lisa Redding, LVSC Acting CEO
- David Warner and Geraldine Blake, London Funders
- Alice Wilcock, GLA

### Meetings:

- Meeting of Way Ahead Systems Change group, 20th October 2016, 14th December 2016.
- Meeting of London CVSs, 25th October 2016.
- Meeting with LVSC staff team, 1st November 2016, 30<sup>th</sup> January 2017.
- Meeting of London Voluntary Sector Forum, 17th November 2016.
- LVSC Board meeting, 22nd November 2016, 14<sup>th</sup> December 2016.
- Way Ahead Open Space stakeholder event, 30<sup>th</sup> November 2016.
- GLV Board meeting, 12 December 2016.