



The Change Ahead

Creating a new future for civil society in London

A report from Srabani Sen OBE & Associates

December 2015


 Srabani Sen OBE & Associates




Funded by the City of London Corporation's
charity, City Bridge Trust

Acknowledgments

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Contents

	Page
Foreword	4
Executive summary	5
1 Introduction and context	13
2 Putting Londoners at the heart of civil society	18
3 Putting civil society at the heart of London	20
4 About civil society support organisations	23
5 The need for civil society support	33
6 Volunteers and volunteering	40
7 Influencing decision makers	45
8 The role of funders	50
9 What's missing from the debate?	55
10 Conclusion and next steps	59

Foreword

London needs a vibrant civil society in order to prosper, yet these are unprecedented times economically for London's communities.

Civil society's world is changing, almost beyond recognition. Buffeted by reductions in funding, changes to commissioning, growing demand for services, the increased complexity of the issues that service users face and dents to its reputation, many in the sector have increasingly felt like victims of circumstance rather than controllers of their own destiny in recent years.

All of these issues have made the job of civil society support organisations (traditionally known as infrastructure organisations) much more complex. This, particularly at a time when civil society support organisations' own funding has been under considerable pressure. The substantial public funding cuts heralded by the Comprehensive Spending Review in November 2015 will only make matters even more challenging.

Frontline organisations clearly need support in a whole host of areas. However, for the civil society support sector to be able to deliver into the future, it will have to change. The scale of change in the environment means that the current model of civil society support is simply not sustainable. Change is also necessary amongst funders, London's leaders and civil society organisations themselves. The pace of change means that we have to act now if we are to secure the future of civil society support.

London Funders, Greater London Volunteering (GLV) and the London Voluntary Service Council (LVSC), along with the City Bridge Trust recognise that we are at a pivotal moment in the sector's history. That is why, working together, we commissioned this Review into the Future of Civil Society Support. The choice is clear. Either the sector takes charge of making changes to itself, or it will have changes foisted upon it.

This report sets out our emerging findings and analysis, and is a precursor to our final report and recommendations for change, which will be published early in 2016.

We would like to thank the members of the Reference Group whose sage advice was invaluable in shaping the conclusions of this report, and the team from Srabani Sen OBE & Associates for their hard work, within the challenging timescales of this Review. Most of all we would like to thank all those that took the time to contribute to this Review. Your views and ideas have been invaluable in shaping this report.

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Executive summary

1 Introduction and context

- The environment in which civil society operates is changing rapidly. One of the starkest changes has been the public spending cuts in recent years, which were deepened in the Comprehensive Spending Review published in November 2015.
- *The Change Ahead* summarises research carried out in stage 1 of the Review of the Future of Civil Society Support in London, which involved an extensive literature review, focus groups, 1:1 interviews, an online survey of frontline civil society organisations and written evidence submitted to London Funders.
- This Review is focused specifically on understanding and developing a new approach to civil society support. The central question this Review seeks to answer is, given constrained resources and a rapidly changing environment, how can civil society be supported to deliver the best outcomes for Londoners?
- This Review has developed the following definition of civil society support:
 - “Civil society is where people take action to improve their own lives or the lives of others and act where government or the private sector don’t. Civil society is driven by the values of fairness and equality, and enables people to feel valued and to belong. It includes formal organisations such as voluntary and community organisations, informal groups of people who join together for a common purpose and individuals who take action to make their community a better place.”

2 Putting Londoners at the heart of civil society

- Communities in London are changing rapidly. Frontline organisations report growing demand and an increasing complexity of need experienced by Londoners seeking support, Yet within the literature there is very little discussion about how the changing needs of London and its communities should shape the work of frontline civil society bodies, and therefore what support they might need to evolve their offer and their organisations.
- There is also very little published evidence about how the changing needs of communities shape and drive the work of civil society support organisations, making it difficult to assess how civil society support bodies are linking their priorities to the needs of Londoners.
- Data about Londoners’ changing needs is scattered across a range of sources and therefore hard to access or use, making it difficult for funders, frontline or civil society support organisations to plan their work effectively.

- The routes to “formal” volunteering are hard to navigate for Londoners, and the informal contribution of volunteers is largely unrecognised, making it difficult to take a strategic approach to understanding how the contribution of London’s volunteers can be woven into the overall fabric of civil society.

3 Putting civil society at the heart of London

- There is no consistent up to date, single source of data available on the most basic of issues: the size, nature and structure of the civil society sector in London and how this maps against need. Whilst data exists, it is scattered across a range of sources, with no one body taking responsibility for collecting and updating such data, analysing its implications for London or making it available to enable others to plan more efficiently. This is a significant impediment to strategic planning.
- No data was found correlating the size of the civil society sector in each London borough with the size and capacity of its local civil society support organisations. The available data mapping local civil society support organisation does not show the variation in the size, capacity and quality of local civil society support organisations across London. There is no data mapping specialist civil society support in London. The absence of this data impedes planning of civil society support to meet the needs of frontline civil society organisations and prevent duplication.
- Civil society is not part of any strategic plan for London. It sits outside mainstream thinking about the future of London, despite the fact that it is a central part of the success of the capital.

4 About civil society support organisations

- Despite the numerous reports and reviews carried out in recent years, there is still no shared understanding of the role of civil society support amongst support organisations themselves. The reviews and reports to date offer long lists of recommendations as to what civil society support organisations should do, without taking into account the limited funding and room for flexibility that their funding allows, and without prioritising roles and responsibilities.
- Civil society support organisations are not consistently funded or structured across London, factors which compound the variability of what they can offer across different boroughs.
- The literature shows a mismatch between the number and type of frontline organisations needing help compared with the support available. The primary research showed that frontline organisations are often members of several different civil society support organisations, suggesting the support they need is not available easily from a single source.

- The primary research shows that there is a plethora of specialist civil society support organisations, many focused on the needs of specific groups of Londoners, including equalities groups, some on specific topics such as property and IT.
- The literature shows that civil society support organisations are struggling to take a strategic approach to their work. This is due to a number of reasons including funding constraints, pressure resulting from high demand, and lack of sufficient impact data on which to base strategic decisions.
- There is no agreed role for regional civil society support organisations. The literature sets out long, un-prioritised lists of things regional civil society support bodies like Greater London Volunteering and London Voluntary Service Council should do. In the primary research, different stakeholders expressed different expectations of Greater London Volunteering and London Voluntary Service Council, some of which are unrealistic given the resources available to these organisations.
- Frontline organisations seek and receive support from a wide range of sources, of which civil society support organisations are just one. Other sources of support identified through the primary research were skilled volunteers, peers, consultants, businesses for pro bono support, professional suppliers such as accountancy and audit firms, think tanks whose reports are referred to for policy knowledge, universities, local authorities and other funders. This variety of sources of support is not acknowledged in the literature or in discussions amongst civil society support organisations.
- Frontline organisations report wide variations in quality of what they receive from civil society support organisations, both in terms of services and in relation to the degree to which they feel effectively represented. A theme from the primary research was that the quality of support for frontline organisations in the process of setting themselves up was good, but it was felt that civil society support organisations were less effective in offering more complex advice at later stages of organisational development.
- Whilst some local civil society support organisations are forging new futures for themselves, factors such as resistance to change, unclear connections with the communities they serve and inability to communicate with decision makers in ways which they will understand are impeding other local civil society support organisations from adapting to the changing environment, and being effective in their campaigning and influencing role.

5 The need for civil society support

- Frontline organisations want and need support. This was clear from both the literature and primary research, though the literature offered no prioritisation of the support needs of frontline civil society organisations.

- The following were commonly reported as frontline organisations' support needs in the literature and the primary research carried out for this Review:
 - Raising income
 - Developing partnerships and collaborations
 - Demonstrating impact
 - Support with business functions such as HR, IT, social media, website development, legal advice, negotiating cheaper services such as insurance
 - Intelligence about new initiatives and best practice
 - Support with influencing and campaigning, and with intelligence about the policy environment to inform this work
 - Help with campaigning and influencing
- Many of the support needs named by frontline organisations are also areas with which local civil support organisations said they themselves need support.
- When asked what support they have looked for but struggled to find, many frontline organisations named things that civil society support organisations provide, although whether this was because they were not aware of the services on offer or because these services were not of the right quality or "level" was not clear.
- Despite significant investment and focus on impact and outcomes in recent years, civil society organisations (both frontline and civil society support organisations) still struggle with defining and measuring it. Part of the difficulty in implementing impact methodology seems to be that frontline and civil society support organisations tend to have multiple funders, each with their own ways of measuring impact, which hampers civil society organisations in taking a strategic, mission driven approach to measuring impact.
- There is nothing in the literature on how civil society support organisations can enable frontline organisations to adapt their services to the changing needs of their service users, though this kind of support was prioritised by frontline organisations themselves in the online survey carried out as part of this Review.

6 Volunteers and volunteering

- London's leading role in volunteering was recently recognised with the city being named as European Volunteering Capital 2016.
- Whilst data about volunteering numbers is extensive, from the literature reviewed it was difficult to get a deeper understanding of who volunteers in which geographical and "sector" areas.
- The literature highlights two distinct groups of volunteer - the well-qualified and those who see volunteering as a way of boosting their skills and creating a route back to work. The second of these groups has diverse needs, which is putting

increasing strain on the capacity of frontline organisations to recruit, manage, train and support them at a time when their own resources are shrinking.

- There are a confusing number of routes to volunteering making it hard for Londoners to navigate the opportunities available.
- From the evidence available, the response of the civil society sector to increased interest in volunteering does not appear to have been systematically or strategically thought through across London, thus limiting its impact.
- The literature shows that frontline organisations whose business models are based on the deployment of staff are turning to volunteers to address capacity issues. However, the literature shows no evidence and offers no advice about how such organisations could or should be supported to adapt their business model to adequately embrace volunteers.
- Whilst considerable effort in recent years has been put into inspiring people to volunteer, there has been little debate evident from the literature about how volunteering can support frontline civil society organisations who engage volunteers to meet their mission and goals.
- Through 1:1 interviews, it was clear that businesses see volunteering as a key route to contribute to civil society, and many larger corporates are engaging in volunteering programmes.
- Businesses report that civil society organisations do not always have the skills or capacity to support corporate volunteering or to know how to engage with businesses. Equally, businesses do not always understand how best to engage with civil society organisations.
- Given the size, diversity and fragmented nature of the civil society sector in London, businesses find it very hard to identify the right organisation with which to partner, which is compounded by the diversity of need in the capital. This makes it hard for businesses to know where and on which issues to target their efforts.
- Overall the message from business was that civil society organisations need to get smarter in their thinking about securing business support in terms of who to ask, what to ask for and how to sell the benefits to business.

7 Influencing decision makers

- There is significant debate in the literature about the need for the civil society sector to develop a narrative about itself and its value to society. This was felt to be particularly important given the increasing need of civil society organisations for financial support and for legitimacy in campaigning on issues of importance to their service users.
- The language the civil society sector uses is opaque and acts as a barrier to the sector's effectiveness as influencers, and in communicating its value to

Londoners. The sector sometimes uses multiple words to mean the same thing. Within the sector itself, people use words interchangeably to mean different things. This compounds the difficulty the sector has in making itself understood. It also compounds the perception of civil society as being outside the mainstream of London and its success.

- The research highlighted issues around legitimacy of civil society support organisations' representational role, including questions about how civil society support organisations are hearing from frontline organisations and gathering needs data. A majority of respondents to the online survey of frontline organisations carried out as part of this research reported rarely being asked for needs data or information that would enable civil society support organisations to represent them. No one type of organisation – local, specialist or national – fared better than others on this point.
- The research shows variable degrees of effectiveness of civil society support organisations in influencing decision makers, something which support organisations themselves recognise.
- There is an absence in the literature and debate about whether civil society support organisations have the right, up to date skills to campaign and influence given the significant changes in the public policy arena in recent years.

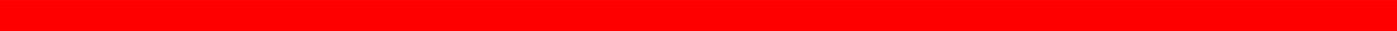
8 The role of funders

- The most notable feature of the fundraising landscape is the large scale reductions in public funding, which has implications for independent as well as statutory funders. There is no evidence of a strategic, pan London approach or response to the public sector funding cuts, either from public funders themselves or from the independent funders that form a key part of the “funding ecology”.
- Few funders are willing to fund core costs and are more interested in funding projects, particularly those classed as “innovative”, with innovation often taking priority over tried and tested ways of working. This is placing considerable strain on frontline and civil society support organisations. At a time of constrained resources it is unclear why funders prefer new projects over services that are seen to deliver for Londoners.
- Frontline organisations are turning to other forms of income generation such as individual giving, and are being encouraged to explore social investment and social enterprise models. This brings with it implications for the fundraising advice that civil society support bodies need to develop in relation to these very different forms of income generation.
- Several reports call for funders to collaborate and work more strategically together, with little exploration of what the barriers are to working in such a way or why, despite these calls having been made over the course of several years, this approach has not been adopted to date.

- Key themes that arose from civil society support organisations about how funders could work differently were:
 - Simplify evaluation requirements
 - Develop a shared approach to funding and evaluation across funders
 - Develop a better understanding of outcomes and impact evaluation, and what it involves
 - Share knowledge from the evaluation data they have collected, and use this to inform the sector
 - Fund evaluation
 - Take risks
 - Recognise frontline organisations' need for support and the contribution of civil society support organisations
- Few of the recommendations to funders in the literature appear to take account of, or acknowledge the realities of how public and independent funders actually work.
- Whilst the literature as a whole talks extensively about the civil society sector's need to get better at demonstrating impact, there is little acknowledgment of the fact that many organisations are relying on multiple sources of grants and contracts, with each funder having a different take on outcomes and reporting requirements. This raises questions about whether funders should align their outcomes frameworks.
- There is no exploration in the literature of to what extent funders themselves have a clear understanding of outcomes and impact, or whether funders know what is involved in defining, delivering and measuring them.

9 What's missing from the debate?

- The following issues were found, either to be gaps in the debate to date or not dealt with in sufficient depth.
 - Governance and leadership, including the role of trustees
 - Risk “transference” in relation to commissioning and contracts, and how to manage risk
 - How (changing) service user needs links with/ should drive reshaping of civil society support and the work of frontline organisations
 - Data on how frontline organisations map against London communities' needs, and the implications for how civil society support should be configured
 - Planning for and the impact of further devolution in London
 - Insight about those who don't use civil society support organisations and why

- 
- The need to bring the private, public and civil society sectors together to deliver better outcomes for Londoners

1 Introduction and context

1.1 Background to the Review

The civil society sector is facing a perfect storm. Continued reductions in public funding, the pace of change, the growing and changing needs of the people it serves have all placed considerable strain on civil society. The challenges this poses is brought into sharp focus in London.

The issues facing frontline civil society organisations are also impacting on the bodies that exist to support them and enable them to have a voice. Whether regional, sub-regional, local or specialist, civil society support organisations will have to adapt rapidly if they are to continue to remain relevant to the needs of those they exist to support. Some civil society support organisations have evolved and taken a strategic approach to the changes they face, but many are finding this challenging when they are dealing with reductions in their own funding and resources.

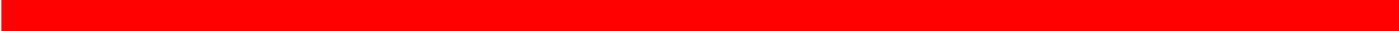
This complex picture inspired London Funders, working closely with London Voluntary Service Council (LVSC) and Greater London Volunteering (GLV) to commission this Review of the Future of Civil Society Support in London. These leading organisations recognise that incremental change is not enough, step change is necessary, but what does it look like? The City of London Corporation's charity, the City Bridge Trust was equally motivated to seek answers and to fund the Review. As London's largest independent grant-maker, and as a long-time supporter of civil society support, City Bridge Trust wanted to inform its future grant-making, especially given the current fiscal climate.

At times of challenge and change, there is also opportunity. In the Final Report and recommendations, due to be published early in 2016, the Review will be focusing on how the sector can move forward towards a more confident and certain future. This report brings to a close the first stage of the Review which concentrates on analysing where we are now, and defining the base on which we can build. The Reviewers believe that only by holding a mirror up to the civil society support sector, and by highlighting its strengths and what needs to change, can there be the honest debate needed to agree and shape the road ahead.

Please note: organisations commonly called "infrastructure" bodies are referred to in this report as civil society support organisations. This is because the term "infrastructure", to anyone outside of the sector, means physical infrastructure such as roads and bridges. The Reviewers wanted to develop a term that would have more meaning to everyone with whom civil society needs and wants to engage.

1.2 About this report

This report brings together the findings of Stage 1 of the Review, the aim of which was to research the current picture of civil society support and the factors affecting it. This research was conducted to develop an understanding that will form the foundation of developing recommendations for those involved in civil society



support, including funders, decision makers, London's leaders and civil society support organisations.

Stage 1 of the Review involved:

- An extensive literature review spanning more than 80 reports, open data sources and websites
- Ten focus groups with frontline civil society organisations, local and specialist civil society support organisations and London borough grants officers (NB. All but one group contained representatives of one of these segments of the sector; one group, a workshop run at GLV's conference in November 2016, had a mixture of frontline and civil society support organisations)
- An online survey of frontline civil society organisations
- 1:1 interviews with a range of people including funders, business representatives, equalities groups, frontline civil society organisations and civil society support organisations
- Analysing email submissions of evidence to the Review

This report sets out the results of this qualitative research and the implications drawn from it.

The purpose of this research was to understand:

- The nature of the formal elements of the civil society sector in London, its size, structure and support needs
- The nature of civil society support in London
- How the needs of service users and beneficiaries shape civil society support bodies in their work with frontline organisations
- Issues affecting funders and funding as this relates to civil society support
- Issues affecting how volunteering could be supported
- The effectiveness of civil society support organisations' work on campaigning and influencing

The question underpinning each element of research has been: how could civil society support be shaped in future to better support frontline organisations to deliver better outcomes for Londoners?

This report summarises the core themes that appear repeatedly across the literature review, focus groups, online survey, 1:1 interviews and email submissions. The evidence this report draws upon will be published separately.

Recommendations will be developed as part of Stage 2 of the Review and included in the Final Report which is due to be published in early in 2016.

1.3 Scope of the Review

There are a number of civil society reviews taking place concurrently with this Review. This Review is focused specifically on understanding and developing a new approach to civil society support. The central question this Review seeks to answer is, given constrained resources and a rapidly changing environment, how can civil society be supported to deliver the best outcomes for Londoners?

Through working on this Review, the following definition of civil society was developed:

“Civil society is where people take action to improve their own lives or the lives of others and act where government or the private sector don’t. Civil society is driven by the values of fairness and equality, and enables people to feel valued and to belong. It includes formal organisations such as voluntary and community organisations, informal groups of people who join together for a common purpose and individuals who take action to make their community a better place.”

The research phase of this Review focused on “formal organisations” within civil society and the bodies that exist to support them.

1.4 Context

London is facing enormous change:

- Plans for further devolution in London are being developed
- The Comprehensive Spending Review heralded continued cuts in public spending, following on from the £12bn of cuts announced in summer 2015, and will result in further reductions in state provision
- Commissioning is increasingly fragmented across multiple commissioners, and the reductions in staffing in commissioning teams are resulting in the loss of specialist knowledge about specific service areas
- Competition from the private sector and large national charities to win contracts to provide services to Londoners traditionally delivered by local civil society organisations continues
- Competition between civil society support organisations to win commissions and contracts continues
- As public funds are further constrained, commissioners continue to put pressure on civil society organisations to drive down costs
- Smaller civil society organisations continue to be subsumed in large scale delivery partnerships, often with an uneven distribution of risk
- London Councils’ much needed programme of funding for civil society in the capital is under review and could face change

1.4.1 Comprehensive Spending Review

On 25 November 2015, the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced the Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) and Autumn Statement 2015. Much of the media coverage focused on the £27 billion improvement in public finances forecast by the Office for Budget Responsibility, the u-turn on tax credits and the reversal of proposed funding cuts to policing. What this masked was the impact on local authority funding contained elsewhere in the CSR, and the profound impact this will have for public services over the next few years.

London Councils reports that underneath the media headlines lies a 56% cut in Departmental Expenditure Limits (DELs) which when worked through the complexity of local government funding will lead to councils losing nearly a quarter of their government funding by 2020. This is on top of the 44% cut that they have faced over the past five years.

At the time of writing the full impact of the CSR remains unknown, partly because further details are yet to be published by the Treasury. However, the implications for civil society are obvious. Further cuts are highly likely. Responding to the CSR, Sir Stuart Etherington, CEO of the National Council for Voluntary Organisations stated:

“Even though public service spending cuts are less than expected, if current trends continue, cuts to voluntary sector delivery will be deeper than cuts overall.”

New Local Government Network's Deputy Director Jessica Studdert stated:

“The ultimate message of the Spending Review for local government is simple: the age of significant redistribution and funding for services based on need is fully over. If you want more money, you need to generate it from your local economy. But as long as that freedom is trammelled by a Chancellor who still exerts huge power over local spending, localities will not be able meet their full potential.”

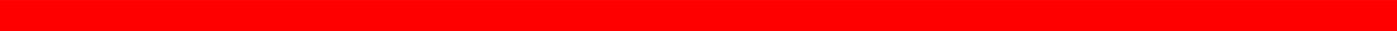
If ever a new model of civil society support was needed, now is that time.

1.4.2 London Councils' Review

London Councils is currently reviewing its civil society grants programme. London Councils' review was one of the triggers for the Review of the Future of Civil Society Support in London.

At the time of writing, it remains unclear what the outcome of London Councils' review will be, however in November 2015, the results were published of a consultation exercise carried out over the summer of 2015.

Responses were received from a range of organisations and from most London boroughs. What is clear from the consultation is that in terms of the programme as a whole, most boroughs wanted to remain involved beyond 2017, (the end date of the current programme). Civil society organisations, service users and funders valued the pan-London approach that the programme enables.



In relation to the priority on 'Capacity Building to support London's voluntary and community organisations including help with fundraising and developing partnership work between these organisations', across all responses 85% felt that this priority was either very important or important, 11% felt it was quite important and 4% felt it was not important. There was strong support across all responses for the specific areas of focus for the capacity building priority, namely:

- *"Increased ability of VCOs in London to deliver efficient and effective services"*
- *"The voluntary sector's role and capacity is understood and new opportunities for engagement of VCOs are increased"*
- *"Frontline organisations/organisations supporting a particular equalities protected group are better able to deliver well informed services that reflect needs of equalities groups"*

The Reviewers understand that further discussions are underway within London Councils about this priority and we await the outcome of these discussions with interest.

2 Putting Londoners at the heart of civil society

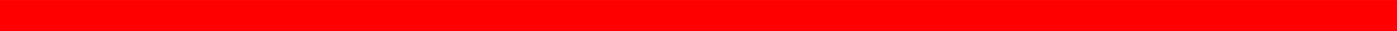
Few would disagree that the purpose of civil society is to improve the lives of the communities they serve. This desire to make a difference drives many people to join the civil society sector in paid and voluntary roles, and it also drives funders, both statutory and independent, in choices of where to invest their resources. Civil society support organisations are equally committed to improving the lives of communities.

It is surprising therefore, given the vast array of literature, that there has been very little discussion in the various reviews and reports about how the changing needs of communities should shape the nature and work of civil society. Given the centrality of communities' needs as a driver of civil society change, this gap is baffling, not to say troubling. To be clear, the Reviewers are not saying that needs data does not exist. (The issue of data is covered in more detail below.) It is that in the literature about how the sector should evolve, the link between Londoners' needs and how civil society could or should respond is missing. Civil society organisations exist to meet people's needs, they don't exist simply to perpetuate themselves. Yet much of the literature focuses on how civil society organisations can survive and thrive, with little discussion or analysis about whether these organisations are delivering the best possible outcomes for Londoners.

Campaigning and voice occupies a lot of space in the literature, much of which calls for the civil society sector to be better at influencing decision makers and shaping public policy. However, the literature often fails to take the next step by calling on civil society to be better connected to the communities they serve in order to effectively fulfil this influencing function, and to ensure their legitimacy in doing so. This issue is examined in more detail in Section 7: Influencing decision makers.

The link between communities' needs and civil society support organisations is also very thinly drawn and absent from most literature. The Reviewers have no doubt that the intent of civil society support organisations is to deliver better outcomes for Londoners, but there is no evidence that illuminates this or assesses how well it is being achieved.

There is an implicit assumption in the literature that civil society support organisations deliver better outcomes for frontline bodies that serve Londoners, which is surprising given that the literature also highlights the struggles that organisations face in demonstrating impact. It may be that more detailed work is required to shed light on this connection. It was reported anecdotally that local civil society support organisations use local needs data, for example from Joint Strategic Needs Assessments (JSNA), to inform their plans. However, as this work is internal to these organisations and therefore unpublished it is difficult to understand how needs influence strategic decisions about civil society support services. Given some of the challenges with JSNA data, it is also difficult to understand how effectively published data about local need enables civil society support organisations to respond to actual need. This would be worthy of more detailed investigation in order to fully understand the link between communities' needs and what civil society support organisations do to enable frontline organisations to meet those needs.



One of the key challenges in planning frontline services and civil society support is that needs change, sometimes rapidly and unpredictably. Not only is the population of London changing, many in the civil society sector have been pointing to the fact that a significant proportion of the people they serve are now arriving with multiple and complex needs. How can civil society support bodies and the organisations they work with, respond and adapt in an effective and timely way? There is very little in the literature about the need to be alive to new and emerging needs. Ensuring that the needs of communities are hard wired into the DNA of civil society organisations and drives their development is the most fundamental way in which they, and also civil society support bodies, can achieve their mission, fulfil their “voice” role, win the support of decision makers and ensure a more sustainable future for themselves.

Part of the answer lies in data. Yet herein lies another problem. There is no easily accessible data which maps the current and evolving needs of Londoners against the nature and location of frontline civil society organisations to inform change. Therefore it is not possible to draw conclusions about whether frontline organisations and the funders that fund them are prioritising the right needs in the right places, let alone in the right way. This also makes it difficult for civil society support organisations to plan their work. With diminishing resources, it becomes even more important to examine this issue if London’s civil society, its support organisations and their funders are to be able to make strategic choices about how best to invest limited resources. This data is also crucial to informing public sector decisions as statutory income decreases.

The issue of data is covered further in the following section.

The civil society sector has volunteering at its core, with smaller organisations often entirely run by volunteers, and volunteers in the form of trustees playing a critical role in governance across the sector. This major contribution of Londoners is barely acknowledged in the literature about how to develop civil society support. Yet how to effectively recruit, support and sustain volunteers remains a challenge in an era where resources are increasingly limited. Identifying the right trustees can also be a challenge.

For those motivated to make a difference to their community, there is no clear route to “formal” volunteering, or an effective way to match volunteers with the best opportunities for them. This speaks to the untapped potential of Londoners to make their fullest contribution to the capital. Equally, the informal work of volunteers to their communities sometimes goes unacknowledged, preventing a truly strategic approach to be developed to make London the best city it can be, with the needs and aspirations of its citizens at its heart.

3 Putting civil society at the heart of London

3.1 The need for data

For civil society to be effective it needs data about itself. Funders need data to make judgements about how best to invest precious resources. Commissioners need data to inform how they commission and which organisations they should engage. Civil society support organisations need data to plan their work with frontline service providers and to inform their role in influencing decision makers. Yet there is no consistent up to date, single source of data available on the most basic of issues: the size, nature and structure of the civil society sector in London, and how this maps against the needs of Londoners. No-one takes responsibility for collecting such data, analysing its implications for London or making it available to enable others to plan more efficiently. Is this because the sector is not considered by decision makers to be the essential part of London's fabric that, in reality, it is?

There are widely different interpretations and measurements of the size and nature of the civil society sector in London. The figure used most consistently is 60,000 civil society organisations in London. Frontline organisations are not evenly distributed across boroughs, although there is no data to illuminate whether this is due to a response to the varying levels of need in different areas of the capital, or whether this is driven by factors such as the availability of funding and local political commitment to the civil society sector.

To what degree the lack of consistent data is due to difficulties in collecting it, to the changing face of civil society and the rapidly evolving picture of need, or to the fact that no-one is taking responsibility for this vital task is unclear. It may also reflect difficulties in establishing a consistent definition of what constitutes civil society organisations or civil society support.

The data that does exist is hard to access. It is scattered across different reports and set out in different formats. A significant proportion of the data that does exist has been commissioned by London-wide civil society support organisations whose ability to consistently provide and update this data is hampered by their resource constraints. It is therefore difficult to establish a consistent and agreed picture.

No data was found correlating the size of the civil society sector in each London borough with the size and capacity of its local civil society support organisations, although it is worth noting that inner London boroughs host a large number of national and international civil society organisations who would not traditionally draw on local support bodies. The latest published data is a map of what kind of local civil society support body exists in each London Borough. GLV/ LVSC research in 2015 highlighted the current map of local civil society support across London, though the Reviewers note that the picture is subject to rapid and continuing change. Across London's 33 boroughs (including the City of London) the GLV/ LVSC report showed:

- 17 boroughs where there is an integrated volunteering and organisational development organisation (e.g. a combined Volunteer Centre and Council

for Voluntary Service) providing all local civil society support services (these are coloured orange on the map)

- 14 boroughs that have independent organisational development support and separate volunteering support organisations (coloured yellow on the map)
- 2 boroughs that have a volunteering support service but no organisation providing all organisational development functions (coloured purple on the map, being Newham and the City of London).



Orange areas: integrated volunteering and organisational support organisations
Yellow areas: separate organisational development and volunteering organisations
Purple areas: a volunteering organisation exists but not an organisational support body

What the map above does not show is the variation in the size, capacity and quality of civil society support organisations across London (see Section 4: About civil society support). For example, an integrated CVS and volunteer centre in one borough may be well-resourced but its sister organisation poorly resourced in another. In some boroughs, the model will be a traditional CVS and volunteer centre (whether integrated or separate), but in others newer providers will have won the contract to provide civil society support. The quality of civil society support in one area may be high, with poorer provision in neighbouring boroughs. (The issue of quality is addressed in Section 4: About civil society support.) All of this leads to very variable provision across London.

At a time of constrained public resources, effective planning of frontline provision and civil society support is vital, which means data is vital too, particularly



considering the high level of change within London's communities. It is in the interests of London for its leaders to tackle this issue.

3.2 Civil society is not part of a strategic plan for London

Following on from the issue of data, it is also the case that civil society does not form part of any strategic plan for London. At a local level there is a patchwork of approaches to involving and working with civil society organisations which fails to grasp the real potential of civil society to address many of London's entrenched problems and issues. Civil society is essential to London. The capital couldn't function without it. Why is this not recognised by the leaders of London who plan for the capital's future? Why is civil society not centrally involved in key decisions about the capital?

Civil society shares partial responsibility for this state of affairs. From the literature review and the qualitative research that has been conducted for this Review, what has emerged is a sector that struggles to make itself known and heard, and speaks in a language that is intelligible only to itself. This compounds its status as an outsider to the decisions about the future of London. This is not helped by the fact that civil society is not consistent in how it "connects" with the communities it serves, which leaves it open to challenge in terms of the legitimacy of what it says and does. These issues are examined further in the Section 7: Influencing decision makers.

4 About civil society support

There is no doubt that frontline civil society organisations need support. This is considered further in Section 5: The need for civil society support. The questions thrown up by this Review are what should support look like, how should it be provided and who could provide it?

4.1 Debating the role and nature of civil society support organisations

4.1.1 Lack of clear understanding of the role for civil society support

Given the plethora of reports containing recommendations about the role of civil society support organisations, it is surprising that there is still no unified understanding of what that role should be amongst civil society support organisations themselves. At the three focus groups run for local civil society support organisations, one of those run for specialist organisations and the session with borough grants officers, attendees were asked to define what should be the future, distinctive roles of local, regional and specialist civil society support organisations. No clear or unified view emerged.

At one level this lack of a unified view is not surprising. Currently there is no consistent way in which local and specialist civil society support organisations are structured and funded, so the perspectives and experience of those who work with these bodies are very varied. The reports and reviews that have been published over the years have, to some extent, added to this lack of clarity, as they set out long lists of what civil society support organisations should do. The lists include the need for civil society organisations to clarify their mission, measure their impact, lobby and provide a voice to name but a few. None of the reports attempt to prioritise their extensive recommendations. Incidentally there is no indication as to whether the recommendations from these reports have ever been followed up, or indeed, implemented, raising questions about who is providing leadership for London's civil society and driving change.

Expectations placed on civil society support organisations by these reports bear little relation to the reality of what they have the capacity to deliver. These expectations are fuelled by recommendations that don't always take into account the day to day struggles of running and maintaining a civil society support service. At a time when their income and staffing are shrinking, civil society support organisations are likely to need to prioritise ruthlessly what they do, for whom and why. In this context, the long lists from the various reports of what civil society support organisations should do are not helpful.

The literature reviewed failed to articulate a single pithy, compelling and consistently used definition or description of civil society support. For the most cogent description of the functions of local civil society support, you have to go back to the Wolfenden Report in 1978, and clearly a lot has changed since then. Much of the literature also uses the commonly used term "infrastructure", a term that means different things outside the civil society sector. The need for a clear, agreed definition of civil

society support would seem to be a pre-requisite to making a case for why it matters.

There is also an inability in the literature to shape a cogent argument in favour of civil society support in terms which are compelling to those in power. The reports are very much framed in terms that the sector would understand, thus missing the opportunity to exert genuine influence on those who have the power to make a real difference to the future of civil society support.

The need for civil society support is indisputable. As the state retrenches, civil society is having to fill the gap that is left, and support some of London's most vulnerable citizens. Frontline organisations are working to deliver for Londoners within very difficult circumstances, which is why civil society support matters.

4.1.2 Multiple memberships

The literature shows a mismatch between the number and type of frontline organisations needing help compared with the support available. Some of the reasons for this are driven by factors outside of civil society support organisations' control, such as constrained funding. However, it is worth noting from the online survey of frontline organisations, that many are members of multiple civil society support organisations. This would suggest that frontline organisations are taking a pragmatic approach and using multiple memberships to ensure they have a range of civil society support to draw on when they need it. A significant number of the respondents to this survey were not members of their local CVS or volunteer centre, although the survey did not shed light on why this was the case.

Table 4.1.1: Which infrastructure organisations are you a member of? (Note: the term “infrastructure” was used in the research and hence used to report the results)

Infrastructure organisation	Number	Percentage
Your local CVS	45	48%
NCVO	37	39%
Your local volunteer centre	25	27%
LVSC	22	23%
London Youth	9	10%
GLV	8	9%
LASA	8	9%
ACEVO	8	9%
NAVCA	5	5%
None	6	6%
Others	28	30%

Table 4.1.2: If you are a member of an infrastructure organisation other than those listed, please specify (Note: the term “infrastructure” was used in the research and hence used to report the results)

Infrastructure organisation	No.	Infrastructure organisation	No.
Advice UK	4	HEAR	1
Locality	3	Homeless Link	1
Law Centres Network	2	SITRA	1
BACP	2	National Housing Federation	1
CPAG	1	Independent Living	1
Ascension Trust	1	Independent Theatre Council	1
Clinks	1	LCRN	1
NNVIA	1	Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens	1
NHAS	1	London Reuse Network	1
RJC	1	MVSC	1
Carers Trust	1	Women's Resource Centre	1
Citizens Advice	1	Women's Aid	1
FSI	1	Disability Benefits Consortium	1
Small Charities Coalition	1	Disability Charities Consortium	1

4.1.3 Being strategic

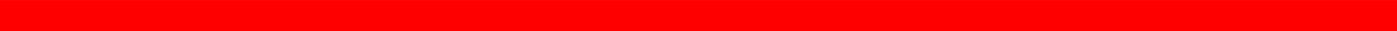
The literature pointed to the fact that civil society support organisations are struggling to take a strategic approach to their work:

- partly as there is no clear and succinct definition of what their role should be
- partly due to lack of capacity and funding
- partly due to the high demands on their services
- partly because there appears to be a lack of sufficient impact data on which to base truly strategic plans

One emerging theme from the literature is that civil society support bodies should consider prioritising which organisations they help, targeting those that can demonstrate impact. Given the diversity of frontline organisations and their outcomes, if this theme was to be followed through, clear thought would be needed in deciding how to define and prioritise outcomes, particularly as outcomes and impact measurement is so inconsistent in the sector, and some smaller organisations lack the resources to measure impact fully.

However, this theme does reinforce a key point expressed through the 1:1 interviews: the belief that organisations that genuinely deliver for Londoners are being forced to close due to lack of funding, whilst other organisations that are good at fundraising, but deliver less well for their communities, are surviving. As one interviewee put it:

“It would be wonderful if it all acted like Darwin’s theory of evolution, and if the best organisations survived, but this does not happen”.



Could there be a wider role for civil society support organisations in the debate about how to target resources to frontline organisations, given the current, apparently haphazard approach to resourcing frontline bodies? This debate will have to happen, and happen soon, whether civil society wants to engage it or not. If civil society doesn't help decide these matters for itself, it will continue to be buffeted by the environment rather than taking control of its own destiny. Civil society support organisations have the potential to take this strategic overview, though they might be required to be involved in difficult choices about how London's resources are invested. Leadership is required to make this happen, and this raises questions about who will provide this leadership. But if the sector does not help make these choices for themselves, others will.

Funders and commissioners will also clearly need to change their behaviour and attitudes, and see civil society as partners in shaping the future of London. Civil society support organisations could provide vital knowledge and expertise to ensure that the right decisions are made. Bringing together the strengths of civil society, the public sector and businesses to genuinely collaborate is the best way of ensuring the future of London.

This might be an issue for further discussion at the next stage of this Review.

4.1.4 Other issues from the literature review

Other issues from the literature review include challenges around civil society support organisations charging for services to develop new income streams and the consequent potential exclusion of some frontline organisations, especially the smallest, from access to support.

There is a recurrent theme around the need for civil society support organisations to significantly improve their ability to demonstrate impact.

There is very little debate in the literature about the nature, scale and role of specialist support organisations, which given their importance is a notable absence. The online survey carried out for this Review highlighted the existence a very wide range of specialist support organisations (see table 4.1.2). From superficial examination, the organisations listed seem very different from each other in the way they are structured and the support they provide, as well as in the "topic" of their specialisation.

With such a variety of specialist provision, it is clearly difficult to take a strategic approach to specialist provision as a whole, but is there room for "smarter" working within specific specialist areas which contain several organisations within it? Taking a strategic, pan-London approach to shaping these specialist subsectors would be a helpful way to begin to address duplication and enable organisations to play to their strengths. The Reviewers do not underestimate how challenging this would be. The 1:1 interviews raised questions about whether specialist knowledge was best placed in localities or in within specialist organisations.

4.1.5 Role of regional civil society support in London

There is some debate within the literature about the future role of the two most prominent London based regional civil society support organisations: Greater London Volunteering (GLV) and the London Voluntary Service Council (LVSC). Recommendations about their future include extensive lists of what these bodies should do but there is little if any acknowledgement in the research about whether these organisations have the capacity and resources to deliver what is being asked of them, and no attempt to prioritise.

Focus group attendees from local and specialist civil society support organisations discussed the role of regional civil society support. Local support organisations wanted to work more effectively and have better interaction with regional civil society support organisations. They also called for regional civil society support organisations to work more effectively in influencing at a pan-London level, and to open doors for local organisations to influence London-wide decision makers.

Both specialist and local civil society support organisations felt that regional bodies could do more to share best practice and to promote the value of civil society support. There were also calls for regional civil society support bodies to:

- Develop a common, London-wide outcomes framework for the civil society support sector
- Prioritise London campaigning issues, agree messages and provide a single regional voice for the sector

It is interesting to note that a number of frontline organisations sought support directly from regional civil society support bodies, including GLV and LVSC, as part of the mix of support they accessed. (See table 4.2.1)

4.2 Range of support available for and accessed by frontline organisations

Few reports recognise the full range of support that frontline organisations are drawing on, that extends beyond traditional civil society support organisations. Understanding the full range of support available would give civil society support organisations an ability to sharpen their offer, clarify their focus, and concentrate on the things that only they can do. Failing to acknowledge this wider support at best weakens civil society support organisations' ability to argue a case for themselves to funders, and at worst could make them appear out of touch and therefore less relevant to the future of civil society in London.

At the focus groups and GLV conference workshop run for frontline organisations, attendees reported accessing a wide range of sources of support:

- Skilled volunteers
- Peers
- Consultants

- Professional suppliers e.g. accountancy and audit firms
- Private sector companies e.g. technology support companies
- Businesses – for pro bono support
- Think tanks whose reports were referred to for policy knowledge
- Local authorities and other funders
- Local civil society support organisations
- National civil society support organisations such as NCVO
- A wide range of specialist support organisations ranging from those working with particular marginalised groups in society, such as equalities groups, to those dealing with particular specialist functions such as property
- Universities (for interns and advice/ expertise)

The online survey of frontline organisations dug deeper into this issue. What came through from the responses to this question was:

- The wide range of sources that frontline organisations draw on for support
- The importance of peers and networks as a source of support and information
- That organisations are accessing pro bono business support and employing consultants
- National civil society support organisations are seen as a valuable source of support and information, even for some small, community groups

Table 4.2.1: From whom do you currently seek support? (Note: the term “infrastructure” was used in the research and hence used to report the results)

Current sources of support	Number	Percentage
Peers/ personal networks	73	78%
Local infrastructure organisation (e.g. CVS, volunteer centre)	53	57%
Businesses (pro bono support)	37	40%
Consultants	37	40%
Specialist infrastructure organisations	31	33%
National infrastructure organisations (e.g. NCVO, NAVCA, ACEVO)	29	31%
Regional infrastructure organisations (e.g. GLV, LVSC)	23	25%
Business support organisations	17	18%
Larger charities	16	17%
Prime contractors (who subcontract work to you)	8	9%
Other	6	6%

Equally telling was the answer to the online survey question “who do you rely on most to keep you up to date?” The most cited source was peers and personal networks, which raises questions about the accuracy of the information they rely on. Peers and networks are a valuable source of support, but when it comes to information about technical and legal issues, there is a danger in organisations relying on informal sources which may not be the most accurate. Local civil society

support organisations were also important, followed by national and then specialist civil society support organisations.

Table 4.2.2: Who do you rely on most to keep you up to date? (Note: the term “infrastructure” was used in the research and hence used to report the results)

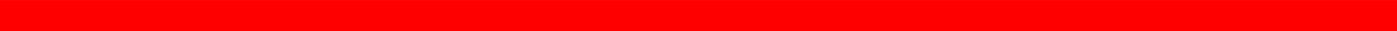
Source	Number	Percentage
Peers/ personal networks	65	72%
Local infrastructure organisations (CVS/ volunteer centre)	43	48%
National infrastructure organisations (e.g. NCVO, NAVCA, ACEVO)	26	29%
Specialist infrastructure organisations	25	28%
Regional infrastructure organisations	19	21%
Larger charities	16	18%
Consultants	12	13%
Suppliers (e.g. accounting providers, IT providers)	9	10%
Business support organisations	6	7%
Other	6	7%
Prime contractors (who subcontract work to you)	4	4%

Looking specifically at civil society support, what is clear from the online survey is that frontline organisations are accessing multiple civil society support organisations. Respondents were asked which specific civil support organisations they received support from, or had contact with, as a precursor to asking about the impact these organisations had on various aspects of their work.

Table 4.2.3: Do you receive support from or have contact with the following... (Note: the term “infrastructure” was used in the research and hence used to report the results)

Organisation	Yes	No
Local CVS	66 (70%)	28 (30%)
Local volunteer centre	57 (61%)	37 (39%)
NCVO	46 (51%)	45 (49%)
Specialist infrastructure organisation	39 (43%)	52 (57%)
LVSC	32 (34%)	61 (66%)
ACEVO	10 (11%)	82 (89%)
GLV	6 (7%)	86 (93%)
NAVCA	4 (4%)	87 (96%)

Although it is clear that there is a wide variety of services that frontline organisations draw on for support and information, these sources are uncoordinated. From the feedback received via the focus groups, frontline organisations' ability to find the right support for them relied more on their own chutzpah than anything else. This speaks to wasted energy expended in hunting for support, energy that organisations



can ill afford to lose in cash strapped times. There is also a danger that if civil society organisations struggle to find help, they may take the first offer of help they can find, whether this is right for them or not, which could take them in a direction which doesn't fully meet their needs.

Ultimately it is frontline organisations and the Londoners they serve who will suffer if there continues to be an unconnected, unsystematic approach to delivering the range of support frontline civil society organisations need. Until these varying sources of support are mapped and co-ordinated, gaps will never be effectively identified or duplications avoided, and frontline organisations will continue to waste time and effort trying to identify the right source of support for them when they could be serving their communities.

4.3 Quality

The literature outlines very mixed opinions about the quality of civil society support and highlights the fact that provision is patchy. From the evidence of the focus groups there are clearly examples of high quality civil society support and of civil society support organisations that have embraced the changes required to respond to the volatile environment in which they work. However, there is also evidence of civil society support organisations that have weak connections with their communities and the frontline organisations they serve, and provide services that only partially meets needs.

An area of concern reported by frontline organisations through the literature is that staff of civil society support bodies can be short of relevant and senior experience at the level they require. There is a lack of tailored provision for frontline organisations at different stages of their development. This theme was echoed in the focus groups. Frontline organisations attending the focus groups felt that local civil society support was good when setting up a new organisation, but once needs grew beyond the basic the support available was not always considered to be fit for purpose. Focus group attendees felt that the level of support was not adequate in dealing with more complex issues and was not always relevant.

From the focus groups there were very large variances in the way frontline organisations rated the impact of local and national civil society support organisations on their ability to be resilient and sustainable; improve services; campaign and have a voice or represent their views to decision makers. Asked to rate the civil society support organisations with which they had contact on a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 was “no impact” and 10 was “exceptional impact”, ratings ranged from 0 to 8. This suggests that some civil society support organisations are providing a good service, whilst others a poor service. A small number of specialist organisations were mentioned by name, however, regional civil society support did not feature in frontline organisations' thinking during focus group discussions about the impact of civil society support organisations on them.

Frontline organisations who attended the focus groups reported that some civil society support bodies failed to provide timely responses to queries. When specific queries were raised, what sometimes came back from local civil society support bodies was a generic response related to the overall topic of the original query, and

did not answer the specific question asked. Frontline organisations also reported that for small neighbourhood organisations, many didn't know where to go to for support, so there was an issue for civil society support organisations of raising their profile and reaching out to the full range of frontline groups in their communities.

The issue of quality was explored in more depth in the online survey of frontline organisations. Those that stated that they received support from or had contact with specified civil society support organisations were asked to rate the impact these organisations had on them in a number of different areas. They were asked to rate on a scale of 0 – 5 where 0 was “not at all” and 5 was “exceptional”. The average scores are presented in the table below.

It is worth noting that scores varied along the full range of 0 – 5, although 5s were rare and 0s were not. The relatively low average scores reinforced the findings from the literature review about the variable quality of civil society support. Some organisations were clearly perceived to be more effective than others.

The survey was structured in such a way that only those who said they received support from or had contact with specific civil society support organisation were able to rate those organisations.

Table 4.3.1: On a scale of 0 – 5 how would you rate this organisation’s ability to help you with the following...

Area of support	CVS av. score	Vol centre av. score	LVSC av. score	GLV av. score	NCVO av. score	NAVCA av. score	ACEVO av. score	Specialist av. score
Adapt to change and become more sustainable	2.3	1.8	2.6	1.8	1.8	2.8	2.0	2.2
Improve services for your beneficiaries	2.0	2.0	2.0	1.5	1.6	2.8	1.4	2.1
Influence decision makers	2.2	1.5	2.6	2.7	2.0	2.8	2.5	2.0
Represent your views	2.5	1.7	2.2	2.3	1.8	2.5	2.4	2.0
Securing change amongst decision makers	1.9	1.5	2.2	2.8	2.1	2.8	2.2	2.0
Measure your impact	1.8	1.5	1.8	1.8	1.6	2.8	1.3	2.0

4.4 Culture

Throughout the research there have been indications of a civil society support sector, some of which is inward looking. One indication is the tendency of some in the sector to either fail to recognise or to dismiss the quality of the diverse sources of support that are available, and the value that frontline civil society organisations



place on this support. Another indication is reflected in how civil society support organisations communicate, which can take little account of those they are communicating with, particularly when engaging with decision makers. This is covered in more detail in Section 7: influencing decision makers.

There can also be a lack of openness in some segments of the civil society support sector. For example there was a view repeated by local civil society support organisations through the focus groups that there was little value in asking frontline organisations what they want or what their needs are as they were unlikely to know. This view is reminiscent of an era where civil society adopted a paternalistic approach to supporting those they were set up to serve. But civil society more generally has moved on from this attitude. A belief in partnership between service users and service providers has spread from civil society into wider policy making and even into government legislation. “Co-production” is seen as the gold standard approach to service development. Yet elements of the civil society support sector do not appear to have embraced the spirit of this approach.

In face to face research carried out through focus groups there was a vocal group of local civil society support organisations that demonstrated defensiveness and resistance to discussions focussed on change. Through the research it became apparent that there were a number of quieter voices who felt more comfortable with change, and recognised the need for it, but were reluctant to voice their views more openly. At a time when the civil society support sector needs to actively debate how to ensure and create a future for itself, this state of affairs is unhelpful. The question is how do we bring the quieter voices to the fore and reframe the debate around what is possible rather than what is not possible? Where will the leadership come from to enable this debate to happen?

We are aware from anecdotal evidence that there are civil society support organisations forging new paths in London and beyond, finding innovative ways to provide the support role that is so vitally needed. Indeed some of these organisations attended the focus groups. But unless we can get to a situation where these innovators are celebrated, their ideas shared and adopted in a spirit of openness and excitement, the sector will significantly impede its ability to change, and ultimately, endanger its own future.

5 The need for civil society support

Frontline civil society organisations clearly want and need support. The literature reports that frontline organisations want support from skilled and informed bodies which build a trusting and sustained relationship with them, provided they are not competing for funding or giving grants, and thus compromising their impartiality. The literature also highlights that local generalist civil society support bodies are overloaded and in some places overwhelmed by demand for the support they offer. So clearly the demand is there. The needs expressed by frontline organisations through the primary research are covered below.

5.1 Commonly reported support needs

There are long lists of frontline organisations' needs set out in the literature, although no sense of which are the most important to meet.

Support needs that the literature highlights for frontline organisations include:

- Business expertise
- Help with campaigning and lobbying
- Support with securing sustainable funding
- Finding partners with whom to collaborate
- Training and support which meet their specific needs, beyond the “basic”

The literature highlights frontline civil society organisations' strategic needs. For example, within a context where change is the new norm, frontline organisations need to be clear about their mission and strategy, balancing this with the need to be agile. The shift away from commissioning specialist services towards more generalist services was highlighted through Reference Group discussions as a strategic challenge for frontline organisations. Competition was another strategic challenge highlighted by the literature and the primary research.

Technology and social media are an increasingly important part of the working environment and are often cited by commentators as areas on which there should be more of a focus of support. This issue was also highlighted through some of the focus group discussions, although it did not figure as prominently as expected.

According to the literature, frontline organisations' biggest need is to secure sustainable funding. This is reinforced by the results of the online survey carried out as part of this Review. (See section 5.3: Prioritising support needs of frontline civil society organisations.)

The literature calls for greater collaboration, but at the same time highlights the fact that frontline providers need support to understand how to make collaboration work. Partnerships, says the literature, seem to be being increasingly driven by funder “push” rather than mission “pull”, yet to be successful collaborations and mergers have to be driven by organisational mission and strategic imperatives. This was

reinforced in the focus group discussions with local civil society support organisations.

The themes above were echoed by attendees at the frontline organisations' focus groups run as part of this Review. What was interesting is that many of the support needs expressed by frontline organisations were the same as those reported by civil society support organisations themselves. The following were support needs frontline organisations and local civil society support bodies reported in common:

- Developing partnerships and collaborations
- Demonstrating impact
- Support with business functions such as HR, IT, social media, website development, legal advice, negotiating cheaper services such as insurance
- Intelligence about new initiatives and best practice
- Support with influencing and campaigning, and with intelligence about the policy environment to inform this work

In addition, frontline organisations' focus group attendees talked of needs around premises, support with income generation, coaching and mentoring, governance support and recruiting volunteers.

5.2 Impact measurement

The literature says that frontline organisations understand the importance of measuring impact but struggle to find the resources to do it properly. There remains confusion about what impact and outcomes measurement actually are, with people struggling to understand the terms or use them consistently. The literature repeatedly states that frontline organisations need to get better at this.

Confusion about impact reporting extended to civil society support organisations. This was highlighted in the focus groups carried out as part of this Review. All local and specialist civil society support organisations reported that they measured impact, and whilst much of what they said they measured was genuinely impact related, some of the measurement described as impact reporting was not. And the question remains if civil society support organisations are engaging in as much impact measurement as reported in the focus groups, why is the message not getting out about the difference they make?

When specialist organisations were asked in focus group discussions to state how their outcomes and impact were different from other organisations in their particular field, all the answers given related to activities and services, not to outcomes and impact. This was despite the fact that they all described activity they were engaged in to monitor impact. If specialist organisations are measuring and publishing impact and outcomes information, should they not be able to express how they are different from others in their field in terms of outcomes and impact? Are they using

the impact and outcomes data they collect strategically enough to drive what they do and to define their unique role?

The debate about needing to demonstrate impact and value is not new, yet little progress appears to have been made according to both the literature and the face to face research. Why? Is it that the methodologies available are too complex? Are they too financially or “time” expensive to implement? Is it that funders have and impose different interpretations of outcomes measurement on those they fund, which diminishes civil society organisations’ ability to develop a coherent framework that works for them, particularly if they access multiple sources of funding? Is it that funders and commissioners themselves do not fully understand impact reporting and therefore impose inappropriate measures? And is this one of the reasons funders have found it so hard to come together to develop a strategy for funding in London as so many previous reviews have exhorted them to do? Or do funders struggle for want of a common data set for London against which impact can be judged?

The lack of a unified approach to defining and measuring impact was highlighted by local civil support organisations at their focus groups, where there were a number of calls on regional bodies to develop a single outcomes and impact framework that could be rolled out across London to measure civil society support.

This issue clearly needs further examination to better understand the reasons why the sector, funders included, has struggled with impact measurement; but more than that, it needs decisive intervention. It is crucial in an era of competition and of reduced confidence in its reputation, that civil society organisations are able to demonstrate the value of their work and therefore why they should be supported, financially and otherwise. This is vital to enable civil society organisations to present a solid case for their own continued funding, and their role in making London a better place. It is equally vital that funders get to grips with impact reporting so that they know how to measure the work they fund in a meaningful way, and indeed the impact of their own work on improving the lives of Londoners.

5.3 Prioritising support needs of frontline civil society organisations

Through the online survey of frontline organisations respondents were asked to prioritise needs in relation to supporting them to be sustainable. By far the greatest support need, cited by nearly three-quarters of respondents in securing a sustainable future was raising income, which is not surprising given the current funding environment.

Three needs prioritised as second most important, were:

- Developing partnerships and collaborations
- Measuring impact
- Influencing commissioners and funders

As stated above, given the investment in recent years in supporting the civil society sector to measure its impact, it is notable that this is still an area of work with which organisations feel they need help.

That the sector is looking for support in developing partnerships and collaborations merits further analysis. Could it be about organisations experiencing difficulty identifying suitable partners for collaboration? Could it be support is required to negotiate partnership agreements and to carry out due diligence? Might it suggest that organisations are aware or have experienced that some of those collaborations driven by external demands are not easily sustained? It might of course be a combination of all of these things.

The high rating awarded to influencing commissioners and funders as a support need is again unsurprising given the significant changes to commissioning in recent years.

Just over a quarter of respondents were looking for support to develop new services, suggesting either a desire to respond to changing needs of communities, or a recognition that new services would enable organisations to bring in new funds, given funders' propensity to fund innovation, or, indeed, both.

The same number of respondents were keen to secure support to influence policy makers. Given the impact of austerity and other changes to policy affecting vulnerable communities in London, again this result was not surprising.

Table 5.3.1: To help your organisation adapt to changes in the environment and to secure a sustainable future, which three areas do you need support with the most?

Area of support needed to become sustainable	Number	Percentage
Raising income	68	73%
Developing partnerships and collaborations	32	34%
Measuring impact	32	34%
Influencing commissioners and funders	31	32%
Developing new services	24	26%
Influencing policy makers	24	26%
Improving your governance	15	16%
Digital communications including social media	13	14%
IT and technology	13	14%
Communicating with stakeholders	10	11%
Improving existing services	9	10%
Merger	4	4%
Other	0	0%

We also asked frontline civil society organisations to prioritise the support they needed to deliver more effectively for service users. The results were similar to the answers to the question about sustainability. The top support need identified by respondents to enable organisations to deliver more effectively for service users was raising income.

The next three support needs relating to delivering for service users were:

- Developing new services
- Measuring your impact
- Developing partnerships and collaborations

Table 5.3.2: To deliver more effectively for your service users, which are the three areas you need the most support with?

Area of support needed to deliver more effectively for service users	Number	Percentage
Raising income	62	67%
Developing new services	39	42%
Measuring your impact	31	33%
Developing partnerships and collaborations	30	32%
Improving existing services	26	28%
Influencing commissioners and funders	23	25%
Influencing policy makers	18	19%
Communicating with stakeholders	14	15%
Digital communications including social media	14	15%
IT and technology	11	12%
Improving your governance	4	4%
Other	1	1%
Merger	0	0%

In answer to both of the above questions, the need for support to merge was deemed either a low priority or not needed at all. Whether this is because mergers are genuinely not needed or whether it is because organisations are not recognising the need for, or opportunities provided by merger, is not clear. It is also surprising that governance did not feature more prominently in response to these questions. Given the recent attention on governance occasioned by Kids Company, the Reviewers would have expected governance to be highlighted as more of an issue. Perhaps it is only when things go wrong that organisations consider their governance. Further thought needs to be given to how civil society organisations and their support bodies could bring governance more to the fore of their thinking.

5.4 Support frontline civil society organisations found difficult to find

Through the online survey of frontline organisations and the frontline organisations' focus groups, we asked what support they had sought but found hard to find. The results below are an amalgam of answers to an open question from the online survey and views expressed at the frontline organisations' focus groups.

- Fundraising/ diversifying income.
 - “Fundraising support too focused on social enterprise and donations, need more free one to one support to write funding bids to Big Lottery and other key charities”
- “HR; legal and financial advice; mentoring and coaching for senior managers and CEOs”
- “Website and technology support can be difficult to find, especially since so much of it is vendor driven”
- “Influencing planning and commissioning of services”/ “political support”
- Accommodation/ estates management
- Measuring impact/ data analysis
- Finding collaboration partners/ collaboration
- “Advice around community asset transfer and support with dialogue with local authority and influencing important decisions.”
- “I have been trying to identify organisational merger/partnership but been unsuccessful...there is a real reluctance by charity organisations to rock the boat of independence and self determination, and I believe many think they can struggle on through the cuts.”
- “Training” (respondents didn’t specify the topics required)
- “To (sic) many to mention”
- Marketing
- Event Management
- “Help in supporting staff through change”

What is striking, looking at the list above, is that many of the services respondents have struggled to find are provided by civil society support organisations provide. Whether difficulty sourcing such support relates to civil society support organisations not effectively marketing their offer or whether what they offer did not meet the specific needs of frontline organisations is unclear.

Some comments made in answering the question above were: “Support out there but not always followed through” and “There are too many support agencies at too many levels” suggesting that even when support exists, it is difficult for frontline organisations to navigate their way to finding the right support for them.

5.5 Gaps in the literature review

There is a disconnect in the literature between what the reports say frontline civil society organisations want, e.g. one to one, bespoke support, and what civil society support organisations have the resources to provide. This disconnect is passed over in most of the reports, which, as we have seen from earlier sections of this report, often set out unfeasibly long lists of things civil society support organisations should do.

Nothing in the literature points to how frontline organisations should be supported to adapt to the changing needs of their service users groups and therefore how civil society support bodies should in turn adapt themselves. This is despite the fact that frontline organisations themselves are expressing this as a need. This is a significant gap. This is an issue that the Review will return to in later stages.

What came through the literature was a lack of a belief in frontline organisations' own ability to solve the issues they face. This is reflected in the attitude of some representatives of civil society support organisations (see section 4.4 Culture, above). Support is available in formal offers such as those provided by civil society support organisations and informal offers, such as that provided by peers who have faced similar problems and solved them. How can individual frontline organisations be supported to piece together from the menu of support available, the solution that is right for them? Would this go some way towards addressing the frequent calls by frontline organisations, as evidenced in the literature review, for more bespoke and 1:1 support?

6 Volunteers and volunteering

6.1 Nature and numbers of volunteers

London is an acknowledged leading city in the sphere of volunteering. This was recently recognised with London being named as European Volunteering Capital 2016, thanks to the work of Team London, supported by the Mayor's office, and GLV. In announcing the result Gabriella Civico, Director of the European Volunteer Centre, said:

"The city is an outstanding example of how local government, local people and businesses can strategically harness the benefits of volunteering to improve people's lives and the environment, and contribute to socially cohesive communities."

Data about volunteering is extensive when it comes to numbers. From the literature reviewed it was difficult to get a deeper understanding of who volunteers in which geographical and "sector" areas. Such data would be invaluable to any future volunteering strategy.

Much of the literature cites an increase in the number of volunteers, though that picture isn't consistent. *The UK Civil Society Almanac 2015*, (NCVO, 2015) stated that nationally, 13.8 million people volunteered formally at least once a month in 2013/14.

Trends and developments in volunteering, (IVAR presentation, 2013) reported:

- An increase in the number of people volunteering at least once a year:
 - 44% (2012-13)
 - 39% (2010-11)
- An increase in the number of people volunteering at least once a month:
 - 29% (2012-13)
 - 25% (2010-11)
- Just over one third of the population provides nearly 90% of the volunteer hours

The literature highlights two distinct groups of volunteer: the well-qualified and those who see volunteering as a way of boosting their skills and creating a route back to work. The second of these groups has diverse needs, which are putting increasing strain on the capacity of frontline organisations to recruit, manage, train and support volunteers at a time when their own resources are shrinking.

Whilst there is some outcomes data relating to the health and wellbeing benefits of volunteering to volunteers, no data was found about the impact of volunteers on the organisations that engage them or the service users and beneficiaries of these organisations. Boards of frontline organisations are themselves volunteers and so will have an impact on how an organisation delivers for its beneficiaries.

6.2 The nature of volunteering

In relation to volunteering, the lack of clarity about the size of the sector and the nature of organisations can cause confusion. *Go local and do something great for your city, Team London service plan, (GLA, 2013)* concluded there is a lack of strategic leadership, and that with more than 60,000 groups and 150 web portals and umbrella groups offering routes to volunteering “the range of options can be overwhelming”. Team London's plan suggests that Londoners need to be directed to opportunities that make the most difference to their communities and for themselves. Efforts have been made to address this, though there are challenges from this approach which are currently emerging.

The literature also describes how the nature of volunteering activity has diversified with more short term and event related opportunities, which again poses challenges for the frontline organisations that engage them and has implications for the kinds of civil society organisation that can offer opportunities or that can attract the types and numbers of volunteers they need. This in turn has implications for how civil society support organisations support volunteering.

6.2.1 Technology

The impact of new technology on volunteering features as a key issue in the literature, with implications for the recruitment and support of volunteers. The impact of new technology also means that volunteering opportunities now no longer have to be local, which clearly has implications for local volunteer centres.

However, in the literature there appears to be little acknowledgement of the impact of digital solutions with regard to how this might:

- skew the profile of those who volunteer, by putting up barriers to some socially excluded groups
- alter the opportunities on offer
- result in a support deficit for volunteers, particularly for those who are looking to volunteering as a mode of increasing their skills and employability
- affect or impede the reward, recognition and “social contact” aspects of volunteering that some volunteers value

Perhaps there needs to be a more sophisticated understanding of volunteering solutions that embraces the fact that:

- Some people can and will find volunteering opportunities online
- Some will want more traditional forms of accessing volunteering
- Technology can have benefits for those who have faced exclusion from traditional volunteering opportunities, for example disabled people



In essence, what the above points demonstrate is that one size does not fit all, and in any attempt to “rationalise” approaches to volunteering, it is important to maintain variety in terms of forms of access as well as types of opportunity.

And in a digital world, how do local civil society support organisations respond to the fact that opportunities no longer have to be local? How does this play out for those volunteering support organisations funded by local authorities that only want to invest in initiatives in their local area?

6.3 Capacity of civil society to support volunteering

Whilst considerable effort in recent years has been put into inspiring people to volunteer, there has been little debate evident from the literature about how volunteering can support frontline civil society organisations to meet their mission and goals. There is clearly huge value to informal civil society of groups of people and individuals taking action to make their communities a better place. However, for those formally constituted organisations committed to achieving particular goals, nothing in the literature pointed to how they could engage with volunteering in ways that enhance their ability to achieve their mission. There are a number of successful organisations whose delivery models are based on volunteers with an investment in training and supervision. However, the piecemeal shifting of work from employed staff to volunteers to address organisational capacity issues needs further examination.

It is often said by civil society organisations that volunteers are “not a free resource”, yet whether through reasons of government policy or economic necessity, frontline organisations are increasingly expected to or are seeking to take on volunteers as a means of addressing issues of shrinking capacity. In *The Big Squeeze 2012: surviving not thriving*, (LSVC, 2012) said 52% of organisations had taken on more volunteers while in *The Big Squeeze 2013, a fragile state*, (LSVC, 2013) 54% of organisations had recruited more volunteers.

The increased diversity of volunteers ranging from the highly skilled to those looking to develop their skills presents enormous challenges to the capacity of civil society organisations to support them. One size simply doesn't fit all volunteers, yet tailoring support to the individual needs of volunteers is tough at a time when civil society organisations' capacity is under such pressure.

There needs to be more recognition of the fact that informal groups sometimes go on to become more formally constituted and are likely to need support in doing so. It can also be the case that the work of formally constituted organisations that close due to lack of funding, can be taken up by committed volunteers. How do civil society support organisations tailor their offer to all of these volunteering scenarios?

From the evidence available, the response of the civil society sector to increased interest in volunteering does not appear to have been systematically or strategically thought through across London, thus limiting its impact. Sound, more in depth data is one factor that would enable this more systematic approach to take place.

6.4 Supporting vulnerable Londoners

Through the literature reviewed, nowhere is there discussion about the impact on end users of frontline organisations' services which increasingly use volunteers to address capacity issues. Without proper support there is a danger not just that volunteers' experience is less than would be hoped for, but that vulnerable users of frontline organisations' services may be short changed in the quality of service they receive and at worst exposed to unsafe practices. Clearly some organisations have been set up so that service delivery is entirely or largely volunteer based. These organisations' business model, systems and services are geared towards the deployment of volunteers. However, there are other frontline organisations whose business models are based on the deployment of staff but which the literature shows are turning to volunteers to address capacity issues. How can such organisations be supported to adapt their business model to adequately embrace volunteers?

There is an assumption in the literature that if volunteers come forward they should be accommodated for their own sake. But within a world of diminishing resources, when frontline organisations are struggling to meet the demands of those they exist to serve, how do we balance the needs of vulnerable Londoners with the ambition, interests and availability of volunteers?

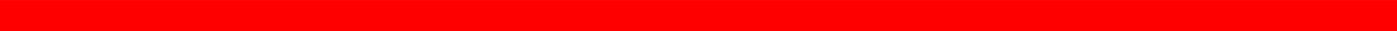
6.5 Volunteering and the corporate world

As part of this Review 1:1 interviews were carried out with representatives of business and those who broker opportunities between businesses and civil society organisations. Volunteering featured strongly in these discussions.

All those interviewed saw volunteering as a key route for business to contribute to civil society, although there was no consensus as to the nature or size of business that could or should be targeted as part of a drive to encourage greater participation.

Those we spoke to cited a series of barriers to businesses engaging with and providing volunteers for civil society organisations. Those most commonly cited were:

- Civil society organisations may not have the skills or capacity to support corporate volunteering or to know how to engage with businesses
- Whilst larger businesses will have corporate social responsibility teams, those that don't have dedicated resources to facilitate volunteering find it harder to engage
- Many in the business sector feel like they are already contributing, and risk being offended if asked to do more
- A number of respondents talked about the fact that businesses that have a bad experience of supporting civil society organisations through volunteering can not only be put off from engaging in such programmes in future themselves, but can put off other businesses from taking part as word gets out about those bad experiences

- 
- Given the size, diversity and fragmented nature of the civil society sector in London, businesses find it difficult to identify the right organisation with which to partner, which is compounded by the diversity of need in the capital making it hard for businesses to know how to decide where and on which issues to target their efforts. The lack of impact data from civil society organisations about how they make a difference to the communities they serve can also make it harder for businesses to know which organisations to engage with.

Interviewees felt the following were necessary to further stimulate volunteering and the engagement of corporates with the civil society sector:

- Better articulation of the business case for volunteering, making it clearer what corporates will get out of it
- Better articulation of the needs of London's communities and those of civil society, so that businesses can understand better how they could make a difference
- Better understanding amongst civil society organisations of the fact that businesses contain a variety of people, some of whom will be motivated by the heart and some by the head, so in crafting a case for support, both hearts and minds need to be addressed

Overall the message was that civil society organisations need to get smarter in thinking about securing business support in terms of who to ask, what to ask for and how to sell the benefits.

7 Influencing decision makers

7.1 Making the case for why civil society matters

There is significant debate in the literature about the need for the civil society sector to develop a narrative about itself and its value to society. This is viewed as particularly important as civil society looks to generate support from business and the public sector to maintain income, and also in light of recent challenges to its reputation.

Developing a narrative and communicating better with the public, decision makers, businesses and others is not a luxury. The interviews carried out with business and business brokerage organisations reinforced the fact that civil society is still difficult for those outside the sector to understand and is therefore difficult to engage with. How long can civil society remain only partially connected to the other sectors that make up London and sit outside many of the debates that shape the capital's future?

It may well be that we need to look to national civil society support organisations to lead the development of a consistent narrative about the sector, as so many of the decisions that affect London and its civil society are taken in Westminster and Whitehall. However, efforts to present the civil society sector in its most positive light need to extend across all levels, right down into the communities it serves. This will require all segments of civil society, its support organisations in particular, to speak cogently and intelligibly about the value of civil society to London.

Attendees at the local and specialist civil society support organisations' focus groups felt that there was a particular role to be played at the regional level to:

- Develop a co-ordinated approach to communicating at a pan-London level
- Work more effectively in influencing decisions taken at a regional level
- Promote the value and impact of civil society support
- Prioritise London campaigning issues, agree messages and provide a single regional voice for the sector

7.2 Language

The fact that the language the civil society sector uses is so opaque is identified in the literature as a barrier to the sector's effectiveness as influencers. How can a sector that can only be understood by itself, survive in the modern world? How can we enable the sector to understand this, and to embrace the fact that how it says what it says is as important as the content of its message? If the sector is to make the biggest difference to Londoners and to the communities it serves, it has to find a way to address this issue. Language can disconnect the civil society sector from the



public and prevent people understanding what it does, the difference it makes and why it matters.

That the sector sometimes uses multiple words to mean the same thing does not help. Within the sector itself, people use words interchangeably to mean different things. Take the word “voice”. For some people this means campaigning, for some people this means representing the views of service users, for some it means representing the views of frontline voluntary organisations, for some it means actively advocating on behalf of a particular group. The same could be said of the terms “impact” and “outcomes”, with people using them either to mean the same thing (which they are not) or using one term to mean the other. It could be that the “loose” use of the terms “impact” and “outcomes” relates to the continued confusion within the sector of what they mean and how to measure them, as reported above. This is particularly worrying in an environment which is calling on the sector to get better at demonstrating impact and outcomes. If the sector doesn't fully understand what the words mean, how can it hope to demonstrate them?

This inability to communicate effectively and intelligibly with the public and with decision makers is particularly dangerous, given the recent damage done to the reputation of the sector on issues such as fundraising and the closure of Kids Company. No longer can frontline organisations or the civil society bodies that support them, rely on an assumption that people will believe “charity is good, therefore they deserve support”.

7.3 Value of civil society support organisations' campaigning and representation work

The literature highlights that for civil society support organisations, effective campaigning and representation is a key source of their value to frontline organisations.

Through the focus groups we asked frontline organisations about their views on the value and impact of the representational and campaigning work carried out by support organisations. The results were very mixed. On a scale of 0 – 10 where 0 meant “no impact” and 10 meant “exceptional impact”, ratings for the impact of campaigning and representation work of local, national and specialist civil society organisations ranged from 1 to 9. This suggests that some civil society support organisations were deemed to carry out this role very well whilst others were felt to be ineffective.

Civil society support organisations themselves recognised that the success of their campaigning work was very varied. When asked to rate on a scale of 0 - 10 the level to which they feel “heard” by those they seek to influence, where 0 meant “no impact” and 10 meant “exceptional impact”, the responses of attendees of the local civil society support organisations focus groups ranged between 1 and 8, showing a wide disparity between organisations in their own assessment of their campaigning impact. Specialist civil society support organisations responses to this question ranged between 5 and 7.

Borough grants officers were asked to rate on a scale of 0 – 10 where 0 meant “no impact” and 10 meant “exceptional impact”, how effective organisations were at influencing them, campaigning and representing the voice of frontline organisations and communities. Regional civil society support organisations were rated by borough grants officers between 1 and 2; specialist civil society support organisations were rated between 2 and 7; both local civil society support organisations and frontline organisations were rated between 4 and 8. The variability in scores echoes the variability in effect reported by civil society support organisations themselves. It could be that there is a direct connection between the localness of an organisation and the effectiveness of their influencing, and that organisations that can represent a place are seen as more valuable by borough grants officers. This could have implications for the voice, influencing and campaigning role of civil society support organisations, particularly specialist bodies. Or it could be that civil society support organisations vary in how they campaign and represent communities, leading to variable results.

7.4 Legitimacy

The literature highlights issues around civil society support organisations' representational role, including:

- conflicts of interest with frontline organisations with which some civil society support organisations are competing for funding
- questions about how civil society support organisations are hearing from frontline organisations and gathering needs data
- challenges for civil society support organisations around reaching the full breadth of the communities they serve

A clear message from borough grants officers was that local civil society organisations should provide a voice for, and articulate the issues and needs of local residents. However, they reported a difference between needs as described by local civil society support organisations and those described by the frontline organisations with whom they have a direct funding relationship. At one level this is understandable as it reflects the diversity of frontline organisations that can work across a borough, however the different perspectives can result in confusion and questions about how representative or accountable local civil society support organisations are. This is an issue that should be faced and addressed. Borough grants officers also felt that it is inappropriate for local civil society support organisations to compete with frontline organisations for contracts.

The issue of how civil society support organisations are hearing from frontline organisations and gathering needs data was explored in more depth in the online survey of frontline organisations carried out as part of this Review. Frontline organisations were asked how frequently they were asked by civil society support organisations for information about needs or other issues that would enable them to be effectively represented to decision makers. The results were startling in that the majority of respondents reported only occasionally (less than yearly) or never being

asked for such information. Whether this is because respondents didn't recall being asked for such information or whether it is because they were indeed rarely or never asked is not clear.

Whatever the accuracy of the responses to this question, what comes through is that frontline organisations do not feel sufficiently listened to by civil society support organisations that are there to represent them. No strata of civil society support fared well in response to this question.

Table 7.5.1: How frequently do infrastructure bodies ask you for information about need or other information that would enable them to represent your voice to decision makers? (Note: the term “infrastructure” was used in the research and hence used to report the results)

Between 87 and 93 out of 94 people responded to each element of this question

	Local CVS or Volunteer Centre	Regional Infrastructure Organisations e.g. LVSC, GLV	Specialist Infrastructure Organisations	National Infrastructure Organisations e.g. NCVO, NAVCA, ACEVO
	Numbers (percentage)	Numbers (percentage)	Numbers (percentage)	Numbers (percentage)
Once a month	3 (3%)	1 (1%)	7 (8%)	2 (2%)
Once a quarter	11 (12%)	6 (7%)	12 (14%)	4 (5%)
Once every six months	8 (9%)	5 (6%)	2 (2%)	1 (1%)
Once a year	7 (8%)	5 (6%)	4 (5%)	5 (6%)
Occasionally	37 (40%)	30 (34%)	36 (42%)	33 (38%)
Never	27 (29%)	41 (47%)	24 (28%)	42 (48%)

The literature states that campaigning and influencing those in power are crucial for the sector as a whole and for civil society support bodies in particular. Civil society speaks a lot about the importance of “speaking truth to power”; of holding decision makers, particularly politicians, to account for the choices they make and the impact of these choices on local communities. For the civil society organisations and support bodies to be able to do this well, do they not need to hold themselves to account too? Do they not need actively to reach out to the communities they serve; to campaign on the issues that communities tell them matter; to ensure that their own decisions and choices are the right ones; to make transparent how they campaign and how they choose the issues on which to focus?

Legitimacy also links back to frontline and civil society support organisations being able to prove the difference they make, and then feed back to their stakeholders about it. This is a crucial way in which civil society organisations can and should hold themselves to account.

The political environment in which the civil society sector now operates is certainly more combative. The sector’s best weapon is to prove its worth, be transparent and to reach out directly and regularly to its stakeholders so that communities actively



choose to stand by the sector's side. To do that, the sector needs to stop talking in ways that only makes sense to itself and start talking in a way that Londoners can understand.

7.5 Skills

What appears absent from the debate in the literature about campaigning is whether civil society support bodies have the right skills to provide an effective voice for vulnerable Londoners and the frontline organisations that serve them, or to influence decision makers. The nature of campaigning and influencing has changed substantially in recent years. Campaigning is a professional skill that has to be learned in the same way as any other professional skill. If frontline organisations are relying on civil society support organisations to learn how to develop this evolving skill who is training the support bodies in this?

That skills development is needed is apparent from the way many from civil society support bodies talk about campaigning. The expression “seek first to understand, then to be understood” does not seem to figure in many people's thinking on campaigning. Yet without this understanding, all the sector can hope to do is to talk at those it seeks to influence, achieving little real change in the minds and actions of decision makers.

This observation also applies to many of the reports reviewed as part of this project. Many of the recommendations aimed at bodies outside the civil society sector demonstrate a lack of understanding of how these bodies work, the challenges they face and where the needs of the civil society sector sit within these bodies' priorities.

8 Funding and the role of funders

8.1 Who do we mean by funders and what do we mean by funding?

Funding is provided to the civil society sector by a variety of sources including statutory funders, independent grant makers, businesses, philanthropists and smaller scale donors. Funding is provided in a range of ways from grants to run the core functions, project grants, commissioning of contracts, social investment and donations.

London Funders list 104 members, all of whom fund civil society in London either as their main role or as part of their work. This includes London boroughs, independent funders and businesses.

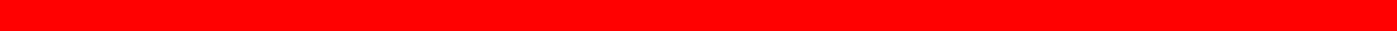
8.2 The fundraising landscape

A key aspect of the context for the Review of the Future of Civil Society Support is London Council's review of its civil society sector funding priorities. This, in turn, within a context of continuing cuts to public sector funding, some of which were announced in the 2015 Budget, with further substantial cuts announced in the Comprehensive Spending Review on 25 November 2015. This was covered briefly in Section 1: Introduction and context.

The literature provides no evidence of a strategic, pan-London approach or response to the public sector funding cuts, either from public funders or from the independent funders that form a key part of the "funding ecology". Regional civil society organisations such as GLV and LVSC, with their "helicopter view" could play an instrumental part in helping to bring order to this borough driven approach which lacks strategic, pan-London coherence, but ultimately London's leaders need to take responsibility to make this happen.

With greater emphasis on civil society organisations, not just as service deliverers, but as rejuvenators of communities and drivers of societal "self-reliance", none of the literature is naming the elephant in the room: that none of this can happen without resource. Whilst the literature acknowledges the tensions resulting from growing demand coupled with reduced resources, there is no mention of the need to make choices. Hard choices. Choices whereby funders work with civil society organisations in London to decide what needs matter most and therefore where resources are concentrated. Civil society should be at the heart of any such debate.

From the literature review it can be seen that trends in funding go beyond the narrative of cuts. Few funders are willing to fund core costs and are more interested in funding projects particularly those classed as "innovative", with innovation often taking priority over tried and tested ways of working. There continues to be an emphasis from funders on demonstrating impact, though some of the research shows that civil society organisations struggle to fully understand or adopt such methodology. There have been many changes in commissioning, one aspect of



which is a move from grants to contracts and the management challenges this brings for civil society organisations.

Frontline organisations are turning to other forms of income generation such as individual giving and are being encouraged to explore social investment and social enterprise models. The backdrop to this is one of increased scrutiny of civil society sector fundraising, stemming from recent high profile negative publicity, coupled with government commitments to address actual and perceived weaknesses within the sector. There is also a lack of understanding of the resources needed by civil society organisations to generate income and the opportunity costs of unsuccessful bids for funding.

8.3 How funders could work differently

Several reports have called on funders to take a more strategic approach to their funding programmes and decisions. The reports say this approach should include:

- working collaboratively with other funders to target resources more effectively
- working collaboratively with those they fund, for example to “problem solve”
- provide longer term funding including resources to support civil society organisations to step back and take a strategic approach to their own development and sustainability
- sharing knowledge and intelligence across funders

There is a clear call in the literature for funders to resource civil society support. There is also a call for funders to understand and address the implications of the way they provide funding. For example, the move away from core grants to greater use of restricted project grants is eroding civil society organisations' sustainability and resilience.

Borough grants officers were asked what would enable funders to work more strategically and what the barriers are. The main issues raised were:

- lack of time to find out what's happening beyond their own area
- need for open dialogue about what's needed, where, what should be pan-London and what should be local
- need for agreement across geographical areas about how we achieve the right mix of civil society support

There were a wide range of views expressed from civil society support organisations in the focus groups about how funders could work differently. The key themes that emerged from these discussions were that funders should:

- Simplify evaluation requirements

- Develop a shared approach to funding and evaluation across funders, including better cross borough working by local authority funders
- Develop a better understanding of outcomes and impact evaluation, and what it involves
- Share knowledge that they have gleaned from the evaluation data they have collected, and use this knowledge to inform the sector
- Fund evaluation
- Take risks

Borough grants officers felt that funding should be maintained for civil society support and that they themselves could develop a more flexible relationship with the sector that took account of change. However they also felt that they should be more prescriptive about outcomes reporting and think more carefully about what sort of civil society support they fund. Both of these points speak to the struggles within a reduced public spending envelope of funding civil society support.

8.4 Difficulties with the literature to date

Much of the literature describes funders as if they are a homogenous group. None of the literature acknowledges the political realities surrounding public funding such as the local focus of many politicians and officers in local authorities which act as a barrier to working strategically with other funders. There is no recognition in the literature of the difficult choices the public sector is having to make on what they fund with diminishing resources, and of the fact that civil society is only part of what has to be funded from public resources. In other words, the reports fail to take account of the bigger picture related to public funding.

In relation to independent funders, there are again a wealth of recommendations about how they could improve the way they work. As with public funders, there is no understanding demonstrated within the reports that independent funders have their own priorities and lines of accountability which might act as barriers to them working in the way that the reports' authors think they should. Also the dates of these reports stretch across nearly ten years, yet there is no sense in the later reports that the recommendations of earlier reports have been acted on or even followed up.

Whilst the literature as a whole talks extensively about the civil society sector's need to get better at demonstrating impact, there is little acknowledgment of the fact that many organisations are relying on multiple sources of grants and contracts, with each funder having a different take on outcomes and reporting requirements. How should funders align their outcomes frameworks? And to what extent do funders themselves have a clear understanding of outcomes, let alone what is involved in delivering and measuring them? The literature shows no evidence of how funders are taking account of the increased administrative burden of reporting against outcomes by, for example, providing funding for evaluation.

Across a series of reports, funders are exhorted to work more strategically, whether individually or working collaboratively with others. There is little evidence of these reports exploring:

- the barriers to working collaboratively (some of which were highlighted by borough grants officers – see above)
- the governance needs of independent charitable funders so that their Boards are able to provide the requisite leadership to the organisations they govern
- how funders should acquire the knowledge they need to inform a more strategic approach to their funding (note the points made earlier in this report about the lack of consistent or accessible data)

8.5 Funding civil society support

Many of the funding issues facing frontline organisations are also facing civil society support organisations, which are having to rethink their funding model. Civil society support organisations have been criticised for competing with frontline organisations for funding, but in an era where funding alternatives are slim, without a renewed commitment from funders to value and fund civil society support, organisations' decisions to compete for funding are understandable, even though the flaws in this approach are evident.

With little "public appeal or profile" for the work of civil society support organisations, grant and contract funding and traded income seem the only obvious routes. Charging for services, as the literature points out, risks civil society support organisations excluding the very small organisations that might need them the most, unless as one report suggests, frontline organisations are given the funding to buy in the support they need. At the heart of all of this is a key question: how can civil society support organisations organise their offer in a way that is affordable and so utterly compelling that funders have to take note and fund them?

NCVO evidence, produced for this Review shows a complex picture in terms of the funding of local civil society organisations. Some civil society support organisations have succeeded in maintaining funding levels and some have faced reduced income, and the landscape is changing in terms of who is providing civil society support.

The turnover and therefore the size of local civil society support organisations varies a great deal, borough by borough. Data from regional civil society support organisations shows significant variations in local authority funding. This data shows the importance of independent funders in the funding mix civil society support organisations rely on. Many civil society support organisations are relying on multiple funders and therefore presumably having to report to several different funding bodies in several different ways.

What appears to be driving the difference in local authority funding for civil society support is the perceived importance of civil society support relative to other local funding priorities. It does not seem to be based on frontline organisations' need. This



is likely to have ramifications for local areas' ability to meet the needs of its citizens, and indeed, local economies, given the importance of civil society as employers in London. It also doesn't take into account the fact that volunteering will need effective support if it is to reach the potential for London that policy makers desire.

8.6 Supporting frontline organisations to fundraise

The context of increased scrutiny of fundraising and attempts by frontline organisations to diversify their income have significant implications for the sophistication of the offer that civil society support organisations will have to provide into the future to help frontline organisations navigate the complexities. As was seen above, the evidence from the online survey carried out with frontline organisations as part of this Review identified support with raising income as their greatest need.

Some of the advice frontline organisations will require will be around funding strategy and risk management, and with the resources of civil society support organisations shrinking, how can they afford to employ staff at a senior enough level of expertise to advise and support frontline organisations in the way they need?

9 What's missing from the debate?

This Review expected to find more on the following areas:

- Governance and leadership, including the role of trustees
- Risk "transference" and how to manage risk
- How (changing) service user needs links with/ should drive reshaping of civil society support and frontline organisations
- Data on how frontline organisations map against London communities' needs
- Planning for and impact of further devolution in London
- Insight about those who don't use civil society support organisations and why

9.1 Governance and leadership

Whilst there is passing reference in the literature to the need to address governance in relation to frontline organisations, there is little discussion about:

- the specific challenges facing Boards and how these could be addressed
- what should be expected of Boards in leading and ensuring the sustainability and resilience of their organisations
- what should be expected of Boards in ensuring that their organisations are delivering against needs
- trustees' role in ensuring the organisations define, measure and deliver impact
- where Boards' strengths and weaknesses currently lie
- training and support for, and quality assurance of, Boards

Given the crucial role of governance and the common perception of variability in civil society Board performance, this is an area that it might be helpful to examine in future. Strong leadership will be crucial in ensuring the future of the sector given the volatility of the environment in which we find ourselves. This is something the Review will return to in its Final Report.

There is a complete absence in the literature of consideration of the governance needs of civil society support organisations themselves, which is surprising given the range of strategic demands many reviews assign to these organisations. Some of the questions that arise include:

- How are civil society support organisations' Boards appointed, including questions around how frontline organisations and local communities are reflected in board membership?
- How fully do trustees understand their roles and responsibilities?
- What skills, knowledge and expertise do they have now? Are these right for addressing the challenges that civil society support organisations face?
- What skills will they need into the future to ensure their organisations' sustainability and resilience and to ensure the organisations they govern are making a demonstrable difference to the frontline organisations and communities they serve?
- How do trustees drive strategy? To what extent are they engaged in the wider debate and issues affecting the civil society sector?
- How do trustees manage and what is their attitude to risk?

There is very little discussion of the need for systematic development of leadership and management skills for the sector and associated succession planning.

Governance and executive level leadership were rarely raised in the focus groups run as part of this Review.

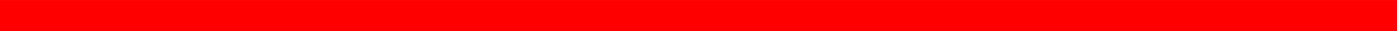
9.2 Risk “transference” and how to manage risk

There is some discussion in more recent literature about issues around risk transference given new forms of funding that frontline organisations are grappling with, particularly related to contracting and taking on what were previously statutory services. However what needs further detailed examination is the practical support that frontline organisations require to manage this in terms of how they can protect their organisations, negotiate to ensure that they take on an appropriate level of risk and influence decision makers to ensure that the system is fairer in apportioning risk.

Given some of the feedback from frontline organisations that the level of expertise of those providing them with support is not always at the right level of seniority and complexity that they require, how do we ensure that civil society support bodies have the right level of expertise available on this, a most crucial issue?

9.3 How (changing) service user needs links with/ should drive reshaping of civil society support and frontline organisations

The appearance of service users and beneficiaries is as thin as a ghost within the debate about what should drive the reshaping of the sector in light of environmental changes. Whilst covered above, this point bears repeating here.



The needs of service users and beneficiaries appear mostly in the reviews only in relation to the pressures they are placing on frontline organisations through increasing demand. The focus of the reviews and reports to date is on how to enable organisational survival and adaptability, not on “what is the best thing to do with and for beneficiaries.”

There is an assumption in the literature that frontline organisations are delivering for beneficiaries and service users, (and that therefore they need to be sustained in order to continue to do so), but nowhere is this assumption tested. Given the regular reference to the fact that frontline organisations need to get better at evaluating and demonstrating impact, this all pervading assumption is a curious one. What role should civil society support organisations have in identifying those frontline organisations that are not delivering for their communities and service users, supporting them to get better or helping them to collaborate, merge or close?

The literature is silent on how the needs of service users and beneficiaries should inform the role and services of civil society support organisations, whether local or specialist. If they are not effectively connected to the full range of needs and views of service users, on what basis can they support frontline organisations to deliver better for Londoners? And indeed, on what basis can they represent the views of their local communities? When considered against the backdrop of increasingly scarce resource, how can civil society support organisations effectively hear from the full breadth of the communities they serve and represent, whether local, regional or “special interest”? How can they reshape their own offer and role without this knowledge?

9.4 Planning for devolution

Further devolution in London is being actively debated, yet there is no reference to this in the literature available. This could be because the debate is too “current” and that the literature has not yet caught up.

9.5 Insight about those who don't use civil society and why

Understandably there is little consideration in the literature of which frontline organisations do not use civil society support organisations and why.

At the frontline organisations' focus groups conducted as part of this Review we did ask attendees, if they had not accessed traditional civil society support, why not. The themes from these discussions were:

- Small/ neighbourhood organisations don't know where to go
- Civil society support “doesn't fit our needs”
- Cost (including membership fees)
- Doubts about relevance: “Is the advice practical and relevant to the ‘real world’ of my organisation?”

- Doubts about value for money: “How good is the impact of the pound spent on infrastructure?”

9.6 Bringing sectors together

In cash strapped times, it is crucial moving forward that each of the sectors that make up the fabric of London - public, private and civil society – come together to work in the best interests of Londoners. This issue is rarely discussed in the literature or in the wider debate. Each sector has its own strengths, yet each works in very different ways. Nowhere in the literature or in the wider debate is there a recognition that these differences have to be explored to identify and address the barriers to working together if the sectors are to have any kind of a chance of joining together in the best interests of Londoners. Generating mutual understanding will not happen organically. It needs active planning, with the different benefits that the public, private and civil society sectors will glean being defined, and the changes required of each sector to work effectively together to be actively negotiated.

9.7 Digital and new technology

Given the current policy emphasis on finding digital solutions to providing services and connecting with service users, and given the findings of the literature which highlighted the importance of IT and digital media to civil society organisations, it was surprising that these issues did not surface more in the primary research. These issues will be considered further in developing recommendations from this Review.

10 Conclusions and next steps

There is much to be celebrated in the work of civil society support organisations. Despite changes in the environment and cuts to funding, civil society support organisations have continued to play an important role in supporting frontline organisations to deliver for Londoners. Individual civil society organisations have successfully navigated some of the challenges in their environment to reshape themselves for the future. However, this Review has highlighted fundamental weaknesses in the sector as a whole, weaknesses that have to be addressed to ensure sustainability and success. If ignored, the future for civil society support appears uncertain.

The one thing that is certain is that change is necessary. Substantial change, that stretches across the whole system. Tinkering around the edges with small changes will not be enough.

Civil society support organisations do not bear all of the responsibility for change. There is a power differential between civil society and the players around it, which require those players to review how they relate to civil society. Funders have to learn to think and work differently, as public funding shrinks and state provision continues to be retrenched. London's leaders also have to play a role in working with civil society to bring it into mainstream thinking about solutions for London.

In the next stage of this Review, recommendations will be presented outlining what this change could look like. These recommendations will be published early in 2016.

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