

### Consultation on the Council's Support to Local Voluntary Organisations (Islington Community Fund)

#### Summary of Responses

A consultation on the council's support to local voluntary organisations, focused on grant programmes in Islington Community Fund, was held from 19 June 2014 to 15 August 2014. During this eight week period we received 41 responses including notes from a workshop facilitated by Voluntary Action Islington which was attended by 30 representatives of local organisations. Around 70% of responses were from organisations currently receiving financial support from the VCS Grants Fund or the Advice Fund programmes. This paper summarises the feedback to the consultation.

#### Consultation Feedback

##### Supporting the Local Voluntary Sector

1. At a time of reduced public funding, how can the council and the voluntary sector work creatively together to meet our priorities for the borough and address the issues that are of most concern to residents?

##### Partnership Working

A strong partnership between the council and the voluntary sector is seen as key to meeting the needs of local residents in the difficult times that lie ahead. There should be regular dialogue with key representative bodies such as Islington Community Network and greater VCS involvement in setting priorities, designing procurements and agreeing outcomes. The voluntary sector election manifesto is an important reference point. Some respondents felt that, over time, the VCS should aim for increased independence with a less dependent relationship and more of a partnership of equals with the council.

Many respondents highlighted the traditional strengths of the voluntary sector in adapting to changing environments, identifying new needs within communities, and developing innovative solutions. It is able to draw on a wider range of external resources than the council, for example by securing grants and donations, and by involving volunteers (individual and corporate). The council could be more supportive by encouraging local procurement, recognising social value and commissioning services in smaller packages. It could also reduce unnecessary bureaucracy and introduce more proportionate monitoring.

##### Collaboration and Consortia

There should be more emphasis on collaboration, for example in sharing information and attracting additional resources to the borough. The council has a leadership role in coordinating funding opportunities and bringing organisations together, a 'catalyst for creativity'. The Advising Islington Together model is helpful: adopting a systems thinking approach to local services; increasing engagement across the voluntary sector so larger organisations support local groups; and addressing historical duplication of services. ESF is well suited to a consortia approach.

Providing support for networking is a cost effective way of enabling a quick response to new initiatives. A few organisations felt that the council should establish a forum of all core funded organisations to share good practice, identify un-met needs, and stimulate new ideas. Better partnerships could be developed with the CCG, schools and businesses.

### **Innovation**

There were a number of specific suggestions and ideas for innovative practice. These included:

- Delivering more activities in the 'real world' community – pubs, cafes, parks, offices, restaurants, schools, leisure centres, etc. Community centres are expensive to run.
- Developing hyper local websites for Islington's neighbourhoods – use social media and online tools to support and join them up.
- Bringing services to communities e.g. 'pop ups' in community hubs, and using buses.

Mixed views were expressed about social enterprises and trading models. Some felt these had a lot of potential to support innovation and generate new income streams. Others were more cautious, perceiving the opportunities for income generation as modest, and in most cases not as a viable replacement for grants and contracts.

## **Islington Community Fund**

2. Given the huge challenges that we face over the coming years, what should be the main priorities of an Islington Community Fund?

### **Support for a Fund**

There was unanimous support for retaining an Islington Community Fund. It is seen as a successful approach which provides longer term funding for organisations delivering strategic priorities as well as smaller grants for groups responding to very local or specific community needs. The focus should continue to be on providing help for Islington's most vulnerable residents to mitigate the impacts of poverty and create a fairer Islington. Grants are viewed as a very effective and flexible way of funding this provision.

### **Fund Priorities**

The council's commitment to addressing the key areas of concern to local residents – jobs, housing and rising cost of living – is strongly endorsed by the voluntary sector. Many other priorities were mentioned including health and wellbeing, community safety and cohesion, and provision for children and young people and for older people. Funding should be flexible enough to allow for emerging local needs (e.g. mental health) and to recognise international events affecting the borough. Discretionary services, such as lunch clubs, were seen as important and save money elsewhere.

### **Grants Programmes**

Feedback indicated very high levels of support for continuing with current grant programmes: core funding to strategically important local organisations (VCS Grants Fund); independent advice provision (Advice Fund); discretionary rate relief; and small grants (Community Chest and Local Initiatives Fund).

Views varied on the focus of a core grants programme – some favouring organisations which bring different communities together under one roof (e.g. hubs), others keen to fund groups representing particular communities (e.g. BME and recent arrivals). Many felt that funding should be directed to front line organisations delivering services and providing community leadership. Infrastructure support and networks were also considered to be important components of an effective local voluntary sector.

### **Other Considerations**

The council should use core grants more strategically as a lever to bring in external funding. It should support organisations that can fundraise successfully.

Work with other boroughs or sub-regionally might be more appropriate for supporting some communities with protected characteristics (e.g. LGBT).

To ensure inclusivity the council should carry out an Equalities Impact Assessment of all Islington Community Fund decisions.

### **Community Hubs**

3. What do you think are the most important services that we should support the voluntary sector to provide in a neighbourhood? Do you think that community hubs are the best way of delivering these?

### **Neighbourhood Services**

The concept of community based provision was widely supported and preferred to services centralised in council buildings. Residents with the greatest needs are considered more likely to access support close to where they live. Voluntary sector providers rooted in neighbourhoods have an important role to play in putting people in touch with a broad range of services as well as enabling them to be engaged in what is going on in their local community.

A wide range of services were suggested for neighbourhood delivery. Those thought to be most valued by residents are:

- Advice and information, especially around the impacts of welfare reform, including family support. Effective signposting and referral to other sources of help.
- Youth and play activities – before and after school, at weekends and in school holidays
- Activities for older people to prevent isolation and tackle health problems
- Employment support services
- Support for vulnerable adults including mental health
- Volunteering opportunities

### **Community Hubs**

Most feedback was positive about community hubs with respondents keen that the council should continue to fund them. Supporting local

community centres providing a range of different activities is seen as an effective way of delivering neighbourhood based services.

The main components of a successful community hub were considered to be:

- A diverse mix of users interacting with each other, somewhere warm and welcoming for people to meet.
- Busy for its size, offering a range of well attended and relevant services, and comfortable just to drop in.
- A one stop shop for information and effective at signposting to other agencies
- Supportive to small groups in the area: providing a home for some, capacity building, fundraising and networking.
- Generates income from external sources and not disproportionately reliant on statutory funding.

Other views were expressed about hubs. Three people didn't know what they did or where they were and felt they should be better promoted. Four respondents wanted them to be more accessible to BME communities and new arrivals and to have better links with organisations acting as 'hubs' for particular communities. A few suggested they should be open for longer hours, ideally 8am - 10 pm every day. Two people argued that hubs try to do too much and that they should specialise more to improve the quality of their offer. Also, there are other organisations providing the same or similar ranges of services that are not funded by the council as community hubs.

### **Geographical Location**

Currently 11 wards have community hubs and these have a role in supporting their local ward partnership. Some respondents felt this was working well and should continue. Others felt that hubs were struggling to provide ward-wide coverage. A couple of people suggested that the location of hubs should be determined by deprivation indices and quality of buildings/services, and that it's more important to know where they are than to have one in every ward. One person proposed a more flexible 'neighbourhood hub' – multiple spaces linked together to share service delivery with a focus on piloting small scale innovation that could be scaled up later if successful.

## **Community Cohesion, Engagement and Advocacy**

4. What activity should we fund to give Islington's diverse communities a voice and enable them to shape and influence services?

### **Open Dialogue and Feedback**

Communities must have opportunities to feedback their views and the council has a role in creating and supporting this - but it should remain flexible on what it funds. What is important is that activities increase inclusion and reduce marginalisation, including for a wider community beyond the protected characteristics such as Irish, white working class residents and people living within the same neighbourhood.

However, Islington's diverse communities face different issues, so a variety of ways to obtain views are necessary. Online platforms, surveys, public meetings, door to door contact and consultations were tools and approaches favoured. The council needs to be aware of the importance of listening to what people are actually saying and not just to the views of a small minority.

### **Involvement and Collaboration**

There should be more opportunities for the voluntary sector and council to collaborate (one respondent preferred the term team work). Workshops and activities delivered in partnership with statutory bodies (including DWP and Police); working together on priorities and on

designing services; jointly developing new policies and commissioning would enable communities to have greater influence. Council timetables and processes often don't allow this and the voluntary sector needs to be supported to help it to engage with statutory bodies effectively.

The council should also play a role in matchmaking and bringing communities together to collaborate. Within neighbourhoods this could be a job for community hubs.

### **Events**

Cultural cohesion events and awareness days were overwhelmingly cited as important and activities that the council should fund. As well as offering platforms to share experiences, they are seen as ways to tackle misunderstandings and overcome parochialism.

### **Forums and Organisations**

The importance of forums and networks (and that the council should core fund them) was stressed, although this shouldn't necessarily extend to funding a separate forum for each of the nine protected characteristics. They should all be community led however. There were also calls for forums to have stronger links with local policy makers. One suggestion included a local strategic board of some type. Only one respondent called for a wider equalities forum - as long as it didn't compromise the other forums. Another highlighted the need for specialist equality organisations since protected characteristics have specific as well as general equalities issues eg disabilities.

A large number of people also highlighted the importance of grass roots organisations in articulating the voice of communities. Community organisations are often the first point of contact for disadvantaged residents. Many 'mainstream' and grass roots VCS organisations have large numbers of members and users from BME communities for example. The council should recognise their role in bringing people together and help them to solicit and articulate the voice of the communities that they serve – an access fund to allow the VCS to pay for support costs such as interpreters for example.

5. How can we encourage groups to collaborate and address wider equalities issues affecting residents from all protected characteristics?

### **Forums, Networks and Partnerships**

These are seen as key to collaboration and, while it may not be necessary to have a forum for each of the protected characteristics, there was a view that the existing forums shouldn't be forced to merge. Instead they should work in partnership to deliver services (training, capacity building etc.). There is also a case for creating and supporting network opportunities for different areas of service such as environment, education, health, jobs, volunteering, training etc. Networks must be welcoming and not single interest talking shops however.

Equally, the importance of creating partnerships between small and larger organisations was highlighted. Some felt that small groups didn't always benefit from the support of forums or council funding.

### **A Stronger Council Role**

The council should hold the ring and play a bigger role in bringing organisations together and creating partnerships. It should also organise

events, seminars and provide information to promote understanding and help groups to focus on the most pressing equalities issues. Brokering relationships and putting organisations in touch with each other for mutual benefit is also important.

### **Joint Working and Funding**

Forcing groups to collaborate is not possible (the VCS is independent), but they could strongly be encouraged. Similarly, good organisations could widen their remit (if in line with their mission) to work with others.

The council needs to involve the VCS at a strategic level, rather than simply inviting it to apply for funding. This would encourage organisations to develop consortia and partnership bids. Joint funding of organisation from larger pots would also help smaller groups to work together (or with larger organisations).

### **Tackling Wider Equalities Issues**

Funding groups representing and working with the most marginalised residents who don't access services is important as they find it easier to approach organisations that they trust. But equalities should also be mainstreamed and all organisations should tackle wider issues across all protected characteristics. Funded organisations should report back on how they collaborate and do this.

At a neighbourhood level, hubs could play a more important role and help to change the mind-sets of local people (particularly those that hold 'soft power' in the area) to challenge negative view of young and BME residents for example.

## **Voluntary Sector Support**

6. What specific support should we fund to sustain a robust local voluntary sector and how should this be delivered?

### **Support Needs of the Sector**

All responses highlighted the importance of continuing to fund support for the sector. The most requested services were fundraising, training, information, premises, marketing and communications, networking, and HR. Many people commented on the difficulties their organisations are facing and the challenges of becoming more resilient. They would like more help with managing finance, 'business' planning, building partnerships and consortia, and developing new income streams. Training in social enterprise, trading and mutual support were also mentioned.

A common theme was that organisations find it difficult to know what support is available and to access it at the right time. Smaller groups in particular are looking for more 1:1 advice and help with filling in fundraising applications, and more opportunities to network and share information with each other. They would like affordable space to be available for groups to share – desk space with meeting space and event space attached – close to where their communities are based.

Examples of gaps in support that need to be filled are support for voluntary sector CEOs, opportunities to develop collaborative work, help to develop new sources of income, and support with collective purchasing initiatives. Several people would like more assistance around employment issues e.g. the introduction of pension schemes in the voluntary sector.

### **Delivery of Support**

Most respondents saw Voluntary Action Islington as a key player in delivering and promoting support at a local level. VAI's training programme and capacity building and information services are valued highly by the sector. Popular resources include the daily news group (VAI News), monthly funding updates and the annual VCS conference. A lot of groups commented favourably on the support they'd received from VAI and the knowledge and commitment of their staff.

Various other providers of support were mentioned including Islington Community Network, Octopus and community hubs, equalities forums/networks (BME, faiths and refugee), Disability Action in Islington and Creative Islington. There were some calls for the council to deliver more help directly but most felt that services supporting the sector should be independent of funders. Council resources should complement support from businesses, local charities and other grant giving schemes such as London Councils. One person argued that there should be a rationalisation of second tier organisations nationally and regionally to cut down on duplication.

A number of other suggestions were put forward for supporting the VCS. More help could be drawn in from the corporate sector, as demonstrated by Businesses for Islington Giving and CoRe Programme initiatives. Recruiting and supporting volunteers should be a priority e.g. more speed dating events at VAI. The resources of housing providers could be marshalled across a ward or a neighbourhood to support TMOs and TRAs with community development. A local arts organisation is working with London Metropolitan University to develop a toolkit to strengthen social capital and (digital) connectivity in communities.

### **Volunteering**

7. Should we fund activity to support volunteering and, if so, what should this be?

#### **The Importance of Volunteering**

Everyone stressed the importance of volunteers to their organisations and that the council should support volunteering in the borough. Some argued that volunteering is the core ethos of the local voluntary sector and that the council should only support groups with a good track record of using volunteers.

#### **Supporting Organisations**

By far the biggest call for support is for good co-ordinators working directly on site with organisations to help them to take on, train and manage volunteers. Working with volunteers is resource intensive and organisations lack the capacity. This is particularly a problem for small groups without staff able to take on the task. Organisations also want help to pay for DBS checks, volunteer expenses and other associated costs.

Council grants should include an element to pay for volunteering costs (training could be shared between organisations). One suggestion was to link funding for expenses according to the volunteering hours that an organisation is able to generate. Another was to sponsor them to take-on volunteers.

Community organisations could also benefit from accredited volunteering and training programmes delivered by specialist organisations. VAI

and community hubs were mentioned as well placed to do this.

### **Supporting Volunteers**

Volunteers – especially the most vulnerable – also need support to take part in volunteering and additional help for people who are volunteering as a route into paid work was highlighted. Specialist mentoring schemes were seen as particularly useful as were programmes that included bespoke training. One respondent called on the council to work with the Jobcentre to provide good volunteering opportunities with local community organisations.

### **Brokerage**

Opinion on the need for a local cross-borough brokerage service to promote and match people with opportunities was more mixed. Some argued that that this was necessary (particularly for small groups) while others thought that organisations were better placed and able to do it themselves. A database of people that want to volunteer would be useful however.

### **Events**

Rewarding and publicly recognising people who had volunteered through regular high profile events and awards was seen as a good way to support volunteering in the borough. These should involve a wider group of people and organisations than at present.

## **Community Engagement and Resident Participation**

### **8. What outcomes should we expect from organisations funded to deliver community engagement and participation?**

#### **Outcomes**

We shouldn't demand and expect the same outcomes across the sector, but Islington's voluntary organisations are mostly already working towards achieving the same outcomes as the council – increasing community cohesion, community safety, work and training, resilience etc. However the council shouldn't be the only funder and match funding organisations was one suggestion.

#### **Quality**

Evidence of high quality services, valued by residents, supporting accesses for the marginalised and delivered by organisations with good knowledge of the communities that they serve should be the primary consideration for the council. Impact should be properly evaluated and organisations should demonstrate that people are engaged and connections made as a result - numbers of clients supported, people taking part in training, consultations, workshops, level of participation etc. should be considered.

#### **Activities**

Various suggested but the emphasis should be on funding delivery Activities should be fun, creative and inclusive. Suggestions included small festivals around themes – arts, older people, Christmas events that bring residents together, showcasing local talents etc.



## **Discretionary Rate Relief**

9. What type of organisations should we support with discretionary rate relief?

### **Continuing Discretionary Rate Relief**

There was overwhelming agreement that the council should continue to give rate relief. Property costs are very high in Islington and organisations value any help. Restricting rate relief would impact on services as groups are forced to shift resources to pay their rates

### **Beneficiaries**

Responses recommended supporting a wide range of local voluntary groups and to keep the scheme broad but that small and medium sized organisations should be prioritised. Other considerations should include the extent to which premises are needed to deliver effective services, that they are well used or shared and how much of the activities delivered from them serve and have an impact on borough priorities.

There were also calls to include other types of organisations such as social enterprises that serve low income residents. One suggestion was to fund micro businesses and another that we include all businesses that paid the London Living Wage.

One respondent argued for including all London-wide organisations based in the borough, but most supported only funding local groups. There was a suggestion that the council should liaise with neighbouring councils to ensure that organisations based outside of Islington but benefitting residents also got rate relief.

## **Premises**

10. What support do local organisations need to meet their accommodation requirements?

### **Affordability and Availability**

Islington is a very expensive borough for the voluntary sector to operate in and the most popular answer by far was support from the council to provide affordable premises and discounted or peppercorn rents. Smaller organisations, particularly those in buildings owned by private landlords, are finding it increasingly difficult to meet their premises costs.

There was strong support for making better use of premises, both the council's own space and that owned by the voluntary sector. Schools and faith properties were cited as examples of buildings with spare capacity outside their normal hours of operation. Many agencies are looking for more flexible space and new community locations to deliver their outreach services.

It was felt that the council could provide better information about the availability of (low cost) buildings and could offer a more imaginative brokerage service. Bringing community groups with complementary activities together in one building would help to bring down costs and provide a better service for residents. Two people mentioned the Camden Collective as an example of a successful cluster of (arts) organisations.

Respondents would like the council to maximise the benefit of Section 106 and Community Infrastructure Levy for the voluntary sector. The

focus should be on improving existing buildings (with accessibility for disabled people as standard) rather than building more community halls and centres. Where there is a strategic need for new community assets, these should be designed to the highest quality standards with ring fenced budgets for room finishes. Developers should offer jobs and training for local people.

### **Other Support**

Smaller organisations in particular commented on the difficulties securing free independent legal advice for premises related issues. This is a specialist area and the impact on an organisation can be catastrophic if it signs up to an occupancy agreement without fully understanding the implications. Could the council establish a premises fund which organisations can apply to for support? One person thought the council should explore the potential for including the voluntary sector in bulk purchasing and maintenance arrangements.

Several responses highlighted the success of the lottery funded Community Buildings Project which was managed by Voluntary Action Islington with a local partnership. Funding came to an end in June 2014 and a new social enterprise is being developed. The council should support this and consider how its services can be made more affordable for smaller organisations. A couple of people suggested that a cross-sector Premises Forum should be set up to steer premises related initiatives.

### **Advice**

11. What role should the voluntary sector play within a 'local support services framework' to assist residents affected by welfare reform?

#### **The Islington Advice Alliance**

We received detailed responses from the borough's three main specialist advice agencies (CAB, Law Centre and Islington People's Rights). The council will consider these as part of discussions to agree how we support independent advice services beyond 2015. This will include talking with the advice agencies concerned.

The comments in this section summarise the views of the wider voluntary sector that we received but also include some of the points raised by the Alliance.

#### **Local Support Services Framework**

Very few had heard of the framework and the council was criticised for not having engaged the sector in discussions about it. The VCS feels that it has an important role to play in assisting residents through welfare reform and wants to be involved in developing and reviewing the framework. The council should invite voluntary organisations to training/workshops and explore ways to collaborate in supporting vulnerable residents.

#### **VCS Role**

The strongly held view was that frontline community organisations were best suited to provide basic advice and information, signpost people to specialist advice and to handhold and help them with basics, such as phone calls, form filling etc. One suggestion was that welfare reform support of this type should be core activity for all groups.

Community groups are in touch with their communities and trusted by their users who may need extra help to access mainstream services, such as language support. Residents need different and multiple ways to access advice as pushing everyone through the same route could alienate the most vulnerable.

There were calls for the council to support the sector to deliver advice. Training, directories and handouts along with strengthening links between frontline organisations and relevant statutory services were suggested.

The VCS could also provide volunteering and training opportunities to encourage people to improve their skills and confidence to re-enter the workplace.

## 12. What advice services should the council deliver in-house and what are voluntary sector agencies best placed to provide?

### **Independence and Impartiality**

This question featured prominently with a concern that residents need to be sure that they are getting advice independently from the council and from a trusted organisation. There would be conflict of interests in certain cases (including where action is against the council; where the council is decision maker or where the council has a duty to implement government policy).

### **Trust**

Residents may be reluctant to share all information with the council (plus are more likely to trust the voluntary organisation's answer) and there was a strong feeling that the council couldn't replicate what the voluntary sector offers.

### **Access**

The VCS is best placed to provide advice to specific communities who aren't or find it difficult to access mainstream services. It can deliver culturally appropriate services and tackle language and trust barriers. It can also provide multiple access points which are valued by residents and which the vulnerable and hard to reach need.

### **Range of Advice**

The voluntary sector can offer advice in broader areas than the council (set out in detail by the advice agencies) and has more expertise e.g. the Law Centre can represent at Upper Tribunals.

### **Council Advice Services**

Some areas of advice are best delivered by the council, such as to residents already receiving a service from social services, but few examples were cited. One suggestion was that council services (IMAX, BEST and MAGPIs) should be moved into the voluntary sector while another argued that the council should only provide advice itself where there was evidence that VCS providers didn't have the capacity to deliver.

Some saw value in having both council and VCS services, suggesting that what appears to be duplication reflects high demand.

### **Further Responses**

As was the case with the previous question on the Local Support Services Framework, we received detailed responses from local specialist advice agencies which we will discuss directly with them.

### **Small Grants**

13. What type of activities should our small grants programmes fund?

#### **Small Grant Programmes**

There was overwhelming agreement that current small grant programmes should continue. Islington Community Chest generated more comment and support than Local Initiatives Fund (LIF). Some respondents argued that LIF should be more transparent, with one suggesting a Dragons Den type approach involving ward partnerships. Opportunities for Islington Giving fundraising to complement small grants programmes should be explored. The two programmes could be better aligned to avoid the risk of duplicating funding awards when resources are scarce.

Community Chest was felt to be running well. A few people made suggestions for reviewing grants criteria: four in favour of allowing awards to 'parent' organisations (e.g. hubs or churches) that house small unconstituted groups; and one for allowing trips and outings. There were also requests for the capacity building service for grant recipients to be reinstated and for more signposting of small groups to hubs for support. One person proposed that community chest be devolved and equally divided between ward partnerships to encourage more joined up working at a local level.

#### **Activities**

Responses recommended supporting worthwhile activity that it would be difficult to attract funding for from other sources. Small groups bringing in a lot of volunteer resource should continue to be prioritised. More emphasis could be placed on using awards to test out small projects and initiatives and to foster collaboration between organisations. Suggestions for the type of activities that should be funded covered a very wide range of community projects including education and employability, volunteering, benefits advice, health and wellbeing, cohesion and integration, gender based work, arts and culture, gardening, and community festivals and events.

### **Funding Mechanism**

14. What evidence should we ask for to ensure that grants are awarded to the most effective organisations?

#### **Funding Landscape**

Respondents understood the financial uncertainty facing the council beyond 2015/16 and felt that introducing 2 + 2 agreements is a fair approach in the circumstances. There should be a clear and transparent process, compliant with the Compact, for the current review of funding and any subsequent reviews from 2017.

Several people highlighted the value in continuing to support organisations that have built up relationships and trust with residents, arguing that

this can't just be transferred from one agency to another. However this shouldn't mean sticking with historical patterns that no longer meet the needs of our communities. One person suggested that new organisations could be introduced to the core grants programme by offering grants in stages subject to satisfactory monitoring.

### **Evidence of Effectiveness**

There was very strong support for gathering evidence of effectiveness and taking an organisation's track record into account when awarding funding. It is important that money is well spent and makes a difference. Minimum standards should be retained as a means of evidencing that groups are reaching a quality threshold in key areas of their operation (currently finance, governance, safeguarding and whistleblowing). Checks should also be made with the Charity Commission website e.g. that accounts have been filed on time.

A large number of responses stressed the importance of assessing levels of community engagement and resident impact. Is activity Islington focused and is it helping to make the borough fairer? Are a range of services on offer and are they meeting the needs of our most vulnerable residents, including those with protected characteristics? Organisations should provide feedback from beneficiaries and evidence of customer satisfaction, both quantitative and qualitative. Visits could be made to groups to view activities on the ground.

Opinions on external accreditation were mixed. The majority thought these were a good way of demonstrating effectiveness and should be taken seriously by funders. Some smaller organisations felt that cost and capacity issues put them beyond their reach.

Other popular suggestions for evidencing effectiveness included: collaboration and joint working; securing external funding; innovation and open to new ideas; and volunteer engagement and satisfaction.

### **Monitoring of Performance**

Various comments were made about how the council monitors performance. Outcomes were preferred to rigid targets – using a key performance framework and allowing flexibility for changing priorities. Monitoring should be proportionate and should celebrate strong performance as well as pointing out weaknesses. Some organisations would like more dialogue about priorities and more face-to-face-meetings with grants officers. The council should keep a central register of forms to avoid different services asking for the same pieces of information.

15 Should we specify minimum core grant awards and, if so, at what level?

### **Minimum Awards**

Of all the responses received, only three were in favour of specifying minimum core grant awards. Most were firmly against with a few 'don't knows'. It was felt that setting minimum levels could exclude small groups or be used as a mechanism to fund fewer organisations overall. Some argued that groups can be very effective with small amounts of money.

### **Other Comments on the Level of Grant Awards**

Although not in favour of setting minimum (or maximum) amounts, some guidance on likely award levels would be useful. One respondent

called for all themes to be treated equally.

Grant awards should be based on individual circumstances and take financial need into account. Awards should be sufficient to cover rent and some core costs. There should be no unrealistically low awards.

### **Further Comments**

16. Have you any other comments to make about the council's support to local voluntary organisations?

#### **Council Support**

Islington Council's commitment and support to the voluntary sector was commended and contrasted favourably to other boroughs. However the voluntary sector seeks reassurances that, despite the massive savings that the council has to make, it won't suffer disproportionately.

The sector can play a role in maintaining valued services. But, funding is not optional and reductions will impact on residents. It is important that long-standing organisations that have built up expertise are not lost.

Organisations will need time and help to readjust and may find it difficult to attract funding without support – particularly BME, migrant and faith groups. If reducing or changing council funding arrangements, there should be proper equality impact analyses and agreements may need to be extended to allow for these. Difficult times lie ahead but there are opportunities in a networked age and we should work together to take advantage of these.

#### **Grants and Core Funding**

There was a strong feeling that the council should continue to give grants and a view that commissioning often focuses on the wrong areas. . Users should be the most important consideration and the council should support effective local grass roots organisations with a good track record in serving residents. Many felt that larger organisations tended to get council funding at the expense of smaller groups. The council should consider top-slicing its large contracts to allow small groups to benefit.

The council should have fair and open funding programmes and should check what organisations actually do when awarding grants.

#### **Administration**

Council systems and monitoring were viewed as unnecessarily bureaucratic involving too much paperwork and onerous reporting requirements, particularly for small grants where administration cost exceed the value of the grant. Monitoring should be proportionate and the council should have clearer, simpler systems - and use plain English.