



ISLINGTON

Annual Report of the Executive Member for Community Development

Cllr Una O'Halloran

Policy & Performance Scrutiny Committee

April 2021

Towards a Fairer Islington

- Working to the council's [VCS Strategy 2016-20](#), the Communities Team has contributed and informed a range of corporate strategies including Fairer Together. Working primarily at a preventative level, the team aims to enable a 'Strong, Independent Voluntary and Community Sector' that can support people to:
 - **Thrive:** Residents will live happy, healthy, and independent lives, working where appropriate, responding positively to challenging life events.
 - **Connect:** Community cohesion and community relationships will be strong, social isolation will be tackled, and our diversity will be a strength.
 - **Give:** People will give their time, talent and energy to actively participate and engage in the local community.
- The Communities Team's work focusses on 'building communities and strengthening the voluntary and community sector' by:
 - **Strategy:** Supporting the Development of Corporate Strategy – e.g. Fairer Together
 - **Community Networks:** Establishing and maintaining key local, borough-wide, thematic and demographic community networks (e.g. advice, volunteering, place-based, equalities, funding, capacity-building)
 - **Places and Spaces:** Managing community facilities, establishing independent management models, securing access to premises so that council assets are utilised to their full potential for local communities, community development programmes
 - **Funding and Investment:** Managing grant programmes, funding support and working with funders to maximise income to VCS
 - **Capacity Building and Volunteering:** VCS support and interventions, training and development, trustee and committee support, volunteering infrastructure.
 - **Communications and Digital Development:** Communicating 'sense of community', ensuring access and visibility of community/VCS offer.

Voluntary Sector: VCS Grants Programme 2021-2024

- The previous VCS Partnership Grants programme was extended for 3 months by Executive on 30 April 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic. This ended on 31 December 2020 with the new programme starting on the 1 January 2021 and running until 31 March 2024.
- The Council made a commitment to protect 'levels of Council grant-giving to the local voluntary and community sector'. The current budget per annum is £2.7m.
- The [VCS Partnership Grants Programme 2021-24](#) has been designed around the Council's Corporate Plan 2018-22, and the Council's Corporate Objectives and Values as well as the emerging Fairer Together Programme which recognises the importance of collaboration and partnership. The programme aims to promote community resilience and early intervention and prevention.
- As a corporate initiative, the grants programme has been co-produced, co-designed, co-delivered and co-managed with Executive Members, directorates, and Islington CCG, and this has led to the development of 6 strands:
 - Advice & Navigation – Strategic Partners Programme
 - Community Hubs – Strategic Partners Programme
 - Capacity Building – Strategic Partners Programme
 - Equalities and Cohesion Networks – Strategic Partners Programme
 - Volunteering – Strategic Partners Programme
 - Delivery Partners Programme

Voluntary Sector: VCS Grants Programme 2021-24

- This multi-year core funding provides a critical foundation for organisations and has a multiplier effect, enabling organisations to bring additional resource into the borough.
- All organisations are monitored under a Funder+ model, with support around governance, finance and fundraising, safeguarding, communications.
- In January 2020 the new grant funding round was launched. Final recommendations for grants were taken to the September 2020 VCS committee. This resulted in 48 organisations receiving core grant funding. Of the 48 organisations, 40 are currently funded organisations and 8 are new to the core grant programme.
- The Resident Impact Assessment identified three key positive outcomes of the new grant programme:
 - There is a 19% increase in the funding of BAME organisations compared to previous grants programme
 - This includes funding through the new Equality and Cohesion Network Strand, which aims to bring together strategic leaders working across a range of protected characteristics, so that the voice and challenge of organisations who represent or work with residents with protected characteristics is elevated.
 - In order to enable residents with protected characteristics to access independent legal advice, the council established a 'community advice' strand of the VCS grants programme, awarding £126K pa. to organisations working in grass roots community-based settings.

Voluntary Sector: VCS Grants Programme 2020-24 –Reviews



- Reviews are being carried out under three strands, with the aim of allocating £135K of retained funding in the following areas:
- **Capacity Building & volunteering:** This review will consider the capacity building and volunteering support needs of the voluntary sector and look at how best to meet the needs in light of the community mobilisation that took place in the last 12 months. A prospectus will be launched in April framed around the views and needs of voluntary sector organisations.
- **Equalities and Cohesion Networks:** The Equalities Impact Assessment of the grant recommendations highlighted gaps in two equalities networks including, a borough-wide network focussed on race and a borough-wide network organisation for disabled residents and organisations working with disabled people. A key aspect of this work is to enable communities to advocate, lobby and influence policy.
 - Based on an assessment of the grant support awarded to VCS organisations this review took a specific focus on the needs of the **Black-Caribbean community**, a prospectus informed by this dialogue will be launched in April with the aim of supporting a strong community organisation for Islington's Black Caribbean community, potentially linked with access to premises.
 - A review has been undertaken to inform the allocation of a grant to support organisations working with residents with a **disability**. This review has looked at the role of a lead organisation to act as a strategic leader; deliver, co-produce or provide sign-posting to services that improve wellbeing and quality of life for disabled people. A prospectus will be launched in April framed around the views and needs of voluntary sector organisations.

Voluntary Sector: Independent Legal Advice



- Our advice funding ensures that residents can access independent and impartial advice on welfare benefits, debt, housing and immigration issues which help improve household income, tackle indebtedness, sustain tenancies and secure residency.
- £1.41m pa core grants for independent advice and support to Citizens Advice Islington, Islington Law Centre, Islington People's Rights, Help on Your Doorstep, Arachne Greek Cypriot Women's Group and the Islington BAMER Advice Alliance.
- These advice providers form the Islington Strategic Advice Partnership (ISAP) and work together to support residents. Between January 2020 and December 2020, **18,149 residents were supported** e.g. around housing, benefits, debt, immigration and employment.
- In the same period advice partners supported residents to **reduce/prevent debt totalling £4.7m** and **secure benefit entitlements totalling £4.8m**
- A community advice strand has been created to support community organisations deliver advice in community languages.
- During the covid pandemic advice partners have continued to provide a full service remotely, adapting their services to support residents through telephone and online case work.
- ISAP have dealt with a big increase in new claims to Universal Credit and more advice on employment support.

Voluntary Sector: Strategic Priorities

- **Discretionary Rate Relief** - A new policy and programme was launched on 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2023 providing business rates relief to not-for-profit and charity organisations in the borough. To date for this financial year (20/21) DRR has been awarded to 140 organisations occupying 174 hereditaments. The total in relief awarded is £1,147,265.25 as at end of January 2021, with £344,179.58 being the cost to Islington Council in foregone income.
- **Food Connection Grants** - From 1 April 2020 the VCS Development Team took over management of the Food Connection Grants which comprise 6 providers delivering lunch clubs and day services for older people. A review of the current agreements has been undertaken and monitoring and partnership working with these organisations will now align with the new VCS Partnership Grants Programme.
- **London Living Wage** – Working with VAI, Islington Giving, the Refugee & Migrant Forum and Employment Services to deliver advice and support to the sector addressing challenges and barriers to becoming a living wage employer, thus developing the Council's Living Wage ambitions.
- **Grant Funding Programmes** - Advising and supporting other departments to continue to deliver grant funding programmes (e.g. Supported Families Fund, Small Grant Programmes)

Community Chest

- Islington Community Chest (ICCC) is a partnership between **Cripplegate Foundation and Islington Council** funding organisations in Islington across 3 rounds per year.
- **£200k pa in small grants** is made available to community organisations delivering projects that improve quality of life for Islington residents and tackle inequality across the borough.
- In 2020-21, **39 organisations received grants totalling £182,480** to deliver community-based projects in key thematic areas such as: advice and support, education, skills and employability, the local environment, community safety, improving health, reducing isolation and increasing community involvement.

Local Initiatives Fund

- In 2020-21, local ward councillors have been allocated **£14,000 Local Initiatives Fund per ward** to provide small grants for a variety of activities that benefit the residents living in their ward.
- Activities funded include Covid response projects (e.g. food response, making premises Covid safe, mutual aid groups), environmental improvements, gardening projects and a variety of livestreamed and online projects.
- **82 projects** were awarded funding from Islington Council's Local Initiatives Fund in 2020-21, compared to 141 in 2019-20. 10 groups were funded for more than one project in 2020-21. Awards in 2020-21 ranged from £55 to £7,758.
- 17 (25%) of the 67 funded groups were new to Islington Council's Local Initiatives Fund

Ward Partnerships

- Ward Partnerships (WP) are a forum for community engagement – bringing together ward councillors, service providers, and local communities to identify and address issues and priorities relevant to the ward.
- All wards have held WP meetings throughout 2020/21, with some wards holding more than one
- WP meetings, have provided an opportunity for residents to interact with councillors and stakeholders. Real time information and the community response during the pandemic has been shared. Holding them online, has led to an increase in the number of residents attending and participating.
- They are an essential arena for the resident's voice and views to be heard, and an important arena for civic participation, where local issues are raised.
- WPs are the engagement link into/for Fairer Together work.
- The formation of Mutual Aid groups, means working and thinking at a ward level has never been so prominent, and presents opportunities for the WP, the MAG's will be key of how any engagement might happen
- We can use learning around the role, purpose and function of WPs from recent work in Calley & other area-based work, such as Tollington Locality work. Working with members to evolve the WP, by engaging residents and stakeholders around thematic priorities, working together to solve issues, concerns and achieving aspirations. Setting this out in a community plan which has leverage to influence delivery in the area.

Estate Based Community Centres

We aim to ensure that community centres are safe, welcoming spaces that meet the needs and aspirations of our residents and be the 'Heart' of the community:

- During 2020/21 some centres undertook improvements including new kitchens, new WC facilities, health and safety works, redecorations and increased storage facilities.
- Centre repair and improvements plans for 2021/22 include upgrades of facilities to kitchens and WC facilities, halls, boilers and roofs.
- Covid regulations have meant that community centres have only been allowed to open for exempt activities and some therefore been closed for all or the majority of 2020/21.
- Some centres have worked with Partners to help with the Covid response providing community food projects and also one opening as a rapid flow testing centre.
- In preparation of centre reopening all health and safety checks and deep cleans have been carried out to community spaces
- It is proposed to deliver a three-year Community Centre Strategy that sets the purpose of community centres, deliver a vision for existing centres and new centres and places them as a key Partner in supporting the Islington Council vision.
- Centre committees have received support and regular communications in relation to the covid, Islington and public health updates and when allowed will work towards phased return. Full support to enable return will be given by the community development team.

Estate Based Active Spaces Programme

The Active Spaces programme seeks to address the Council's vision of Be Islington, by connecting the community through a diverse, creative and engaging programme of support, activities and projects.

The Active Spaces Portfolios includes:

- **Arts on Estate** - Residents engaged in inclusive, vibrant and enriching creative activities
 - **Estate Environment** – Creating, innovating, engaging, and being healthy through growing.
 - **Active Spaces** – Increasing the use of community facilities by offering a free, consistent and accessible programme to support the health and wellbeing of residents.
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- These activities are free and are advertised specifically through estate based and Islington media.
 - Each portfolio works within associated estate facilities and with Islington teams, partners and VCS organisations.
 - During 2020/21 activities have moved online.
 - Plans are now in place to move activities back to estate facilities whilst keeping an element of online provision.

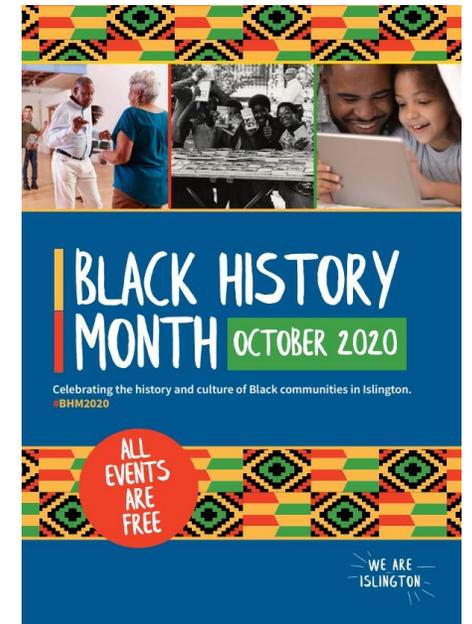
Community Development and Partnerships: Finsbury Park

- In common with other community centres, Durham Road and Andover Community Centres have been closed for most of this year other than services responding to the Covid-19 crisis
- The team have stepped up the **Andover Surplus Food Project** and supply additional basic foodstuffs to over 130 households a week, working with Finsbury Park Mutual Aid Group
- The **FoodCycle community meal** smoothly changed its operational mode to a take-away service – catering for about 65 individuals a week
- Tenant organisations **Help on Your Doorstep, One True Voice and Islington Turkish and Kurdish Women's Welfare Group** provided some individual face-to-face counselling when government rules allowed, but have largely provided assistance online and by telephone
- When possible, **Adult and Community Learning** worked with learners on their sewing course on a one-to-one basis to enable them to complete their qualifications, and supported them virtually when it was not
- **Catch22** have continued to offer virtual support to local people looking for work
- After the onsite nursery moved out in November 2020, this part of the building was used by **Brightstart** to run support groups for families with younger children when restrictions permitted
- The Andover Community Centre took the opportunity afforded by compulsory closure to the public to carry out some much-needed **refurbishment** to the lavatories

- The team continues to play a key role in the **Good Growth Fund Project** in Cally. The project involves co-design of physical spaces in the neighbourhood with residents and local stakeholders and will see the basement of **Jean Stokes Community Centre** brought back into use as part of a vibrant community hub, to open in early 2022.
- The **We Are Cally Community Plan** has been developed with input from 150 local stakeholders. The plan will be published in May 2021. The plan lays out the hopes and ambitions of people who live and work in the area, and practical action that will be taken to help realise these shared aspirations. The plan is focussed on five key areas:
 - Better opportunities for children, young people and families
 - A thriving, connected local economy that benefits everyone
 - Attractive, well-used public spaces
 - Improved health and wellbeing
 - A strong community with a sense of belonging
- **Partnership working in Cally** has been a key focus of 2020-21, with the further development of the Jean Stokes Community Centre Users' Group and Cally Youth Providers Forum, the building of a new 'Greening Cally' group, and support to residents involved in local Mutual Aid Groups.
- Residents and practitioners have had the opportunity to build capabilities to support resident-led change through **Asset-Based Community Development courses**.

Equality Events

- The communities team coordinates and works with an extensive range of community partners to deliver a number of equalities events for the council, including [Refugee Week](#), [Black History Month](#), [Interfaith Week](#), Transgender Day of Remembrance, World AIDS Day, [International Day of Disabled People](#), Windrush Day, [Holocaust Memorial Day](#), [LGBT History Month](#), International Women's Day and International Day Against Homophobia, Biphobia and Transphobia.
- 2020/21 has seen a continued approach to working in partnership with Library and Heritage Services, Communications and the newly formed Race Equality Network as well as Community Partners including Forum+, Islington Faiths Forum and Disability Action in Islington in order to establish a 'whole community' approach to the way we celebrate our diversity and coordinated communications.
- The Covid pandemic has meant a new approach to delivering events has been established, moving to virtual platforms such as Zoom to deliver talks and putting out more online content including videos, interviews and articles.
- This approach resulted in an in-house Black History Month for residents and staff including 18 live events, daily historical information on social media, reading materials, an online exhibition and the development of a Black History archive. International Women's day was marked with an event celebrating that amazing achievements of women in the voluntary sector. LGBT History month continued to be one of the largest in the UK with a wide array of online events including film clubs and poetry.
- From 2021/22 Equality Events will be coordinated by the Council's Fairness and Equalities Team



Supporting EU Nationals

- In the last year there have been several advice sessions on the EU Settlement Scheme, for EU nationals and for organisations working with EU nationals on immigration advice. These included:
 - Islington in Europe's ninth free advice session - an online evening session for residents delivered pro bono by solicitors in partnership with Islington in Europe and two local immigration law firms – Wilson Solicitors LLP and Wesley Gryk Solicitors LLP.
 - An online advice session for 30 voluntary sector partners and social services on supporting vulnerable EU nationals, delivered by Settled.
 - Targeted work to support vulnerable EU residents through clear communications and advice was delivered in partnership with Communications, Voluntary Sector Partners and client facing council services. Signposting to advice in other languages by Settled and to other voluntary sector partners including Islington Law Centre and Arachne Greek Cypriot Women's Group.

