



ISLINGTON

# Annual Report of the Executive Member for Community Development Communities Team - Covid Response

Cllr Una O'Halloran  
Policy & Performance Scrutiny Committee  
April 2021

# Islington Covid-19 – Service Offer & WeAreIslington

- At the outset of the Covid-19 outbreak, the Communities team worked with VCS partners, providing [guidance](#) on closing, changing or maintain services directly related to the community response.
- The team proactively called and engaged network organisations and individual organisations to ensure lock-down compliance in faith sites, community centres and community organisations across the borough.
- The team established a [Covid-19 Service Directory](#) as part of the council's WeAreIslington helpline, ensuring residents could access support in relation to food, medicine, counselling, legal advice, physical and mental well-being.



**WE ARE ISLINGTON**

**Are you struggling because of Coronavirus (COVID-19)?**  
**We are Islington is here to help you**

**Get in touch**  
If you or someone you know needs support, then help is available. Islington Council, voluntary sector and mutual aid groups are working together to provide support. This could include help with getting food or medicine, online group activities, legal advice or a friendly conversation.

**You can contact organisations directly or call the We are Islington helpline on 020 7527 8222.**

You can also email [weareislington@islington.gov.uk](mailto:weareislington@islington.gov.uk)  
Minicom: **020 7527 1900**

We will be open **every day** from **9am to 5pm**.

Remember you can keep up with local news, link to public health advice and sign up to our ebulletins at [www.islington.gov.uk/coronavirus](http://www.islington.gov.uk/coronavirus)

A big thank you to all the residents, volunteers and charities across Islington who are rallying round to support their community. We are Islington.

**Can you help someone who is struggling?**

There are lots of ways to help, including volunteering with local community groups. Charities in the borough also need assistance. If you/your business want to help please approach a local group or check out [www.islington.gov.uk/findvolunteering](http://www.islington.gov.uk/findvolunteering). You can also email [volunteer@vai.org.uk](mailto:volunteer@vai.org.uk)

Please ensure that any organisation that you help gives you advice on how to keep yourself and others safe.

**Can you donate to help someone who is struggling?**

Please give to the Islington Giving Crisis Fund. Every penny you give to this fund will go to people who are isolated, anxious and in most need of financial support through this crisis. [www.islingtongiving.org.uk](http://www.islingtongiving.org.uk)



- In late 2020 particular community conversations were undertaken with the Somali, Bangladeshi and Arabic Speaking community leaders on testing and public health messaging.
- These had a short public health update and then a shared discussion about how to support community leaders in supporting their communities and sharing health messaging. This led to the community video programme of scripts being shared and developed.
- In the New Year with another lockdown, the wider Community Conversations programme was established to provide direct access to public health information with the Director for Public Health, providing community groups with an opportunity to ask questions and have a community discussion about concerns, issues, and ideas relating to supporting residents during the pandemic.
- The invitations are sent to VCS partners, Mutual Aid Groups, Community Leaders, TRAs Councillors and anyone who would like to register. The mailing list currently stands at 340 (excluding councillors) with new people being added daily.
- To date, 14 weekly sessions have been held with an average attendance of 50 people. These are now moving to fortnightly as lockdown eases.

- The Communities team continues to work with Islington's twelve mutual aid groups, providing flexible support informed by ongoing dialogue with groups, recognising their autonomy
- Each ward-level group has a designated link officer who is available to pick up emerging issues, discuss complex cases and support onward referral, provide practical help such as printing, and link groups with other organisations and services
- Regular newsletters provide key updates to mutual aid groups in areas such as safeguarding and safer volunteering, local processes such as We Are Islington, and testing and vaccinations
- A series of online 'Where Next?' Conversations commenced in July 2020, with sessions exploring the involvement of mutual aid groups in community food initiatives, and support around formalising organisational structures for groups interested in doing this
- In autumn 2020, there was a shift towards running learning and reflection sessions for mutual aid groups on a less formal drop-in basis, with sessions jointly planned and facilitated by a mutual aid coordinator and council link officer
- Researchers from the universities of Sheffield, Hull and Leeds, who are investigating volunteering during the pandemic, are using Islington as one of their case studies of the mutual aid movement, and have interviewed link officers and people active in their local mutual aid group
- Learning from work with mutual aid groups will be used to shape ongoing thinking about the infrastructure needed to support resident-led action, and what the role of council might be here

# Volunteering

- Voluntary Action Islington (VAI) delivers the volunteering programme for the borough. During the height of the pandemic 1600 new people registered to volunteer via VAI. There are now 2528 residents registered on the Simply Connect volunteering portal.
- Voluntary Action Islington with the VCS team secured an Islington Council redeployee to act as a Volunteer Coordinator whose role is to identify volunteer roles within the voluntary and community sector in Islington and match volunteers to the roles. The Volunteer Coordinator has reached out to the hundreds of organisations who are part of VAI's network and supports them in advertising the role and in providing an induction offer for organisations who do not have the capacity to do this themselves.
- A targeted approach was taken e.g., specific roles needed were not only advertised on the portal, but direct emailing was also used, VAI sector mailing list.
- The VCS Team supported VAI with the Volunteer Steward work, putting together JD's, advertising and recruiting volunteers & DBS checks. They worked in partnership with MGWT, Age UK and HOYD who would then induct the volunteers ready to support at vaccinations centres.
- The VCS team funded and worked closely with the Safeguarding team to access DBS checks for VCS volunteers
- An additional 20 volunteer roles specifically relating to support during Covid-19 have been identified and advertised on VAI's volunteer portal.
- The VCS team worked in partnership with the BIG Alliance to identify corporate volunteers, particularly around befriending.

# VCS Funding & Support



- Islington Council signed up to the [Covid19 Funders Statement](#) (We Stand with the Sector) to reassure the VCS by offering flexible and supportive funding arrangements throughout the pandemic.
- **Islington Giving Crisis Fund** – Working with Cripplegate Foundation to launch an urgent appeal for donations with funding being used to support community organisations responding to the emergency and the Council's Resident Support Scheme. The fund raised over £400k to support the sector in responding to the crisis.
- **Reviewing funding practices** (LIF, Partnership Grants Programme, Food Connection Grants) to ensure that temporary revised measures were put in place to prevent delays to funding and support the sector in its response to the crisis.
- Undertaking regular, **well-being calls** with VCS grant funded organisations.
- Development of **VCS newsletters** to share important guidance, information on funding and support available.
- **London Community Response Fund (LCRF)** – Working with partners to align the Crisis Fund to the LCRF in order to tap into the pooled funds being made available across London from a range of funders. Including distributing grants to key organisations working with residents through wave 4 of the fund.
- **National Lottery Coronavirus Community Fund** – Working with the National Lottery and funding partners to provide additional support and promote the launch of this fund, which distributed Govt funding to the charity sector.
- **Advice sessions** have been delivered working with partners and key funders (incl. National Lottery), to ensure that organisations are supported in writing funding bids, developing alternative incomes/individual giving models and financial planning during this challenging time.
- Working to support organisations in applying for **additional Govt grants** available for the sector during the pandemic.

# Community Food Response

- Working with staff across the council including Public Health, Environment and Regeneration, Homes and Communities.
- The Communities Team has led work around the Covid-19 Food Response including:
  - **Supporting 23 Community Food Projects** surplus food provision, funding, access to volunteers, parking, key worker letters, guidance, food safety visits - overview of support [here](#).
  - Over £210,000 of grant funding provided by the council
  - Supporting projects to access over £300,000 of funding through the London Community Response Fund
  - Directly running a **surplus food project at Andover Community Centre**, with 1047 food parcels delivered to or collected by residents in the first 12 weeks of the crisis – [Vanessa to update figures here](#)
  - Securing food supplies for the Food Distribution Hub, including from:
    - **Arsenal**
    - **Felix Project**
    - **Additional Purchases for nutritional balance**
- Food deliveries will now be made directly to community food projects in Islington, instead of through the Food Distribution Hub, and the hub will be gradually wound down, and returned to a community centre at the end of April 2021.
- The council will continue to run the food parcel delivery service that has been in operation throughout the crisis, for residents with a crisis need. This service is accessed through the We Are Islington Helpline.
- During the recovery stage of the crisis, we will be working with community food projects, surplus food providers and Islington's Food Poverty Alliance to maintain community food provision across the borough.



# Andover Community Centre Food Project

- At the start of the pandemic, the Andover Surplus Food Project was scaled up to meet the increasing needs of Finsbury Park residents. It now supports 130 households each week, with over 5,400 food bags distributed to local people during the pandemic.
- Currently we have a pool of 24 volunteers supporting the project, who have come mainly through Finsbury Park Mutual Aid Group. The food project has become a joint endeavour and the volunteers are actively involved in shaping it. The contribution of volunteers has been recognised by a Mayor's Civic award.
- The Andover Community Centre has provided holistic support to residents accessing the project, referring them to other agencies according to their particular needs. This includes referrals for mental health and well-being support, Income Maximisation and the Resident Support Scheme, adult learning and employability support.
- In October 2020, partnership with Help on Your Doorstep enabled the successful trial of an outdoor, pop-up advice stall which ran alongside the food project.





# Social Connectedness

- Working with staff across the council including Public Health and Communications. The Communities Team has led work around Social Connectedness during Covid-19. This has included:
  - Devising and embedding a script pathways for loneliness, bereavement and suicide for WAI and developing and delivering staff training
  - Creating a signposting resource for staff and VCS partners: structured into 9 themes of social connectedness offer e.g. activities, young people & families, identity (faith, culture, gender, sexuality).
  - Developing a Social Connectedness Resident Leaflet, that was translated into community languages.
  - Establishing a Social Connectedness Network with mailing list of 70 organisations for partners across the Council, VCS, mutual aid groups and NHS who are interested in or working on social connectedness to share good practice, build professional relationships, create partnership opportunities, and identify and tackle challenges collectively

September 2020

## Briefing on Social Connectedness for Partners Working and Volunteering in Islington

Introduction from Councillors Janet Burgess and Una O'Halloran

We are so pleased to introduce this Social Connectedness briefing for our fantastic partners working and volunteering in Islington's mutual aid groups, voluntary and community sector (VCS), health services and other organisations. It outlines what we are all doing, together, to ensure that **everyone in Islington feels socially connected** and can access the support they need.

Many more of us have felt socially disconnected as our lives have been unprecedentedly disrupted by the Covid-19 pandemic - **daily interactions with friends, family, colleagues, and acquaintances declined or stopped entirely**, with millions of us missing the simple joys of hugging or holding hands. Everyone has felt anxious and uncertain about the future.

**Social connections are so important for our wellbeing and quality of life** - and even more so during this challenging time. Being socially connected brings us joy, purpose, helps foster our sense of belonging, and improves our health and productivity.

