

Islington's Voluntary and Community Sector Partnership Grants Programme 2021-2024

Disability Provision Review Final Report

The Voluntary and Community Sector Partnership Grants Programme 2021-2024 Equality and Cohesion Networks strand is for organisations who are strategic leaders working across a range of protected characteristics. An organisation funded within this strand should help transform attitudes and behaviours towards residents with protected characteristics and contribute to addressing inequalities faced by residents with protected characteristics.

The estimated number of Islington residents with a disability in 2019 was 33,822, or 14% of the population (State of Equalities report 2019) and the need for voluntary sector provision for residents with a disability is evidenced by the high level of need amongst the population, due to the structural disadvantage faced by many because of their disability.

At the time of awarding funding for the grant programme 2021-2024 there was no application which met the criteria within this strand for disability provision. In September 2020, the Voluntary and Community Sector Committee approved the recommendation to ring-fence funding of £30,000 per annum while a review was undertaken to understand the priorities and needs of disabled residents in the borough and organisations working with residents.

The aim of this review was to support the allocation of this funding by identifying the needs and gaps in provision for both residents with a disability and for voluntary and community sector organisations working with residents with a disability to shape the requirements for this funding.

1. Methodology

A mixed methods approach was taken to gather data and insight for this review. This involved two workshops and a survey. The survey asked eight open questions for organisations to share their experiences in their own words.

In total the research drew on insights from 25 voluntary and community organisations in Islington.

1.1. Workshop with VCS organisations

The Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) Development Team facilitated an online workshop (17th February 2021) with local voluntary and community sector organisations and local funders.

The workshop discussion focused on:

- The priority areas of support for disabled residents and voluntary sector organisations working with residents with disabilities in Islington.
- The current picture of organisations working with residents with disabilities and how they are supported within the wider voluntary sector.
- What was likely to be needed from the Islington disability support offer for organisations to achieve their priorities.

The workshop was hosted on Zoom. Overall there were 7 participants.

1.2. Workshop with current provider

On 5th March 2021 The VCS Development Team conducted a focussed discussion with staff and trustees from the currently funded organisation for disability within the Borough-wide strand of the grants programme 2016-2020. The attendees were in two discussion groups; staff and trustees. The workshop discussions focused on:

- The impact of Covid-19 and current status of the organisation.
- The organisations' experience of delivering services to support disabled residents in Islington since 2016.
- The likely future work and development of services and support.
- The challenges and priority areas for disabled residents and the sector.

1.3. Survey of voluntary and community sector organisations

Voluntary and community sector organisations and local funders were invited to contribute to an online survey. Questions focused on:

- What support and services are working well for residents with disabilities in Islington?
- Gaps in provision for a) residents with disabilities in the borough and b) voluntary and community sector organisations.
- What organisations would expect to see from a strategic leader supporting the sector to ensure needs are being met for residents with disabilities.
- The picture in terms of services and support currently offered to residents with disabilities
- The priority areas of support needed for residents with disabilities.

The survey was live from the 8th February 2021 until the 5th March 2021 and there were a total of 15 responses.

1.4. Synthesis and reporting

The VCS Development Team combined insight from the different research methods to produce this report, highlighting key findings, considerations and recommendations.

2. Findings

2.1. The current picture – what works well

In the workshops and survey, organisations were asked about what is currently working well for both residents with disabilities in Islington and for voluntary organisations working with residents with disabilities.

Responses were as follows:

- Grassroots disability organisations in Islington and services specific to particular disability needs currently work well. There was consensus that in Islington there are a wide variety of voluntary groups or services as well as day centres and residential centres for people with disabilities to access. Services such as lunch clubs, befriending, activities and play schemes were specifically mentioned.
- Advice support for welfare benefits, including help with benefit reviews.
- Advocacy groups for residents with learning disabilities.
- Co-production with family carers.
- Direct payments support.
- The Islington Directory as a tool for sign-posting residents and organisations.
- Covid related support; assisting people with practicalities such as prescriptions, food and benefits advice.

2.2. The current picture – where are the gaps

Responses to questions in the workshops and survey about where organisations feel there are gaps in the current provision for residents with disabilities and for organisations working with residents with disabilities were as follows:

For residents:

- A lack of awareness from residents and organisations about what help and support is available for residents with disabilities.
- Exclusion of those without digital access: IT literacy; cost of broadband.

- Fewer services for older people with disabilities.
- Access to support for residents from BAME communities with a disability.
- A gap around physical disability and sensory impairment.
- A gap for residents with mental health needs who are stepped down from specialist services.
- Preventative services are less common, particularly for mental health and emotional resilience building.
- Accessibility of activities in languages other than English.
- Lack of awareness of intersectionality.
- In some communities disability is taboo or not recognised.

For the voluntary and community sector:

- There is a lack of awareness and skills on how to best support people with a learning disability or autism, often leading to poor coordination.

2.3. What are the needs of the sector

In the survey and workshop with the voluntary sector, organisations were asked what they would expect to see from an organisation supporting the wider sector around disabilities and what they as organisations would benefit from. The responses were as follows:

- Sharing of information about what services and support are available for residents.
- Effective communication with the sector.
- Advice on how to make buildings and space accessible; also on how to ensure websites and marketing materials are accessible.
- Training on disability awareness, to be able to support organisations to develop a better understanding of working with people with disabilities, including training on the law and local context.
- Co-production training
- Be able to work in partnership with other local organisations.
- A critical friend/ auditor
- Best practice guides
- Support in terms of employing people with disabilities – training pack for HR
- Strategic leadership
- Smaller organisations would benefit from a strongly positioned disability advocacy organisation to whom they could all refer for specialist guidance.

2.4. What are the needs for residents with disabilities

In the workshops organisations were asked to identify the priority areas of support for residents with disabilities. These were identified as:

- Advice support (welfare benefits, debt, PIP). One organisation specialising in legal advice noted that 90% of people accessing welfare benefits advice had a disability; 60% of people accessing housing advice had a disability; and 81% of people accessing debt advice had a disability.
- Housing and supported living
- Addressing isolation
- Health (physical and mental health)
- IT and broadband access
- Better freedom of movement by more accessible spaces
- Greater access to social care services, occupational therapy and aids for independent living
- Employment and income maximisation

Following on from this, organisations were asked what they would expect to see from an organisation working with residents with disabilities as a strategic leader to support residents in addressing these priority areas. These were:

- Supporting residents with disabilities with IT and digital exclusion.
- Advice support for welfare benefits, housing advice, debt advice.
- Campaigning on behalf of disabled residents; advocating for an approach that enables people with disabilities to have the same freedoms, choices and quality of life as the wider society.
- Peer support – residents have a voice and are part of decision making.

2.5. Outside the scope of this funding

There were a number of findings from the review that are outside the scope of this funding. The VCS Development Team will share these findings with the relevant council services and with any organisation who is funded under this strand to ensure better outcomes for residents with disabilities. These were:

- A need for more flexibility when dealing with the council; easier routes of access to particular teams in Adult Social Care for example; support for those who may be unable to use IT to contact via email.
- Clarity on where to go for support in the council for specific services (e.g. blue badges)
- The negative impact of the People Friendly Streets programme on residents with disabilities.
- Lack of communication and coordination between health, social care and education services.

3. Moving forward – Recommendations for the prospectus

Based on the findings from the review, recommendations have been made which cut across all the feedback received. These have been included in the Equalities and Cohesion Networks strand prospectus in the section 'The difference we want you to make'. This section of the prospectus details the specific ask for Disability Provision. The recommendations below are the priority areas we want organisations applying to focus on:

3.1. Act as a strategic leader

- Support the voluntary and community sector in Islington to ensure that the voice of people with disabilities cuts across all work.
- Embed best practice models for employing people with disabilities in your own services, as model for the wider sector.

3.2. Deliver, co-produce or provide sign-posting to services that improve wellbeing and quality of life for people with protected characteristics

- Share information about services and support residents with disabilities can access.
- Work with public sector bodies such as the council and NHS to ensure people with disabilities can navigate the system.
- Delivery, or ensure people are able to access advocacy services.

3.3. Transform attitudes and behaviours towards people with protected characteristics

- Deliver disability awareness training
- Act as a critical friend for organisations to ensure the voice of people with a disability is present across services

3.4. Work collaboratively across the wider equalities agenda to ensure residents facing multiple discrimination are recognised and supported

- Work with Black and Minority Ethnic community groups to ensure there is equal access to support for those facing multiple discrimination because of race and disability.
- Address barriers for accessing support, such as language, by collaborating with community groups and other organisations.

4. Revised Prospectus

Below is the revised '*The difference we want you to make*' section of the application form and prospectus which will be included in the final prospectus.

1) Act as a strategic leader:

We see the voice and challenge of Islington's voluntary and community sector as critical to ensuring that we achieve greater equality and cohesion within Islington. We want to work with organisations that can help to shape and influence public discourse, policy and decision-making in order to improve outcomes for people with protected characteristics. For example, we want to partner with an organisation that can:

- Act as an umbrella organisation, developing and running an Islington-wide network of equality focussed organisations working across disabilities.
- Strengthen the voice of key stakeholders working to improve outcomes for residents with disabilities, including through effective campaigns and policy dialogue.
- Act as an independent champion for people with disabilities in Islington.
- Work with residents and networks of VCS organisations to establish a knowledge and evidence-base (research, reports, or data) detailing the realities faced by people with disabilities.
- Identify the key issues affecting people with disabilities in Islington.
- Identify, evaluate and develop effective responses to the local, regional and national policy that impacts on people with disabilities.
- Support the voluntary and community sector in Islington to ensure that the voice of people with disabilities cuts across all work.
- Embed best practice models for employing people with disabilities in your own services, as a model for the wider sector.

2) Deliver, co-produce or provide sign-posting to services that improve wellbeing and quality of life for people with protected characteristics.

Improving people's quality of life is key to our vision of a Fairer Islington. We want a partner that can:

- Deliver, or ensure people are able to access an appropriate offer of services that increase participation in employment, volunteering, education and training.
- Deliver, or ensure people are able to access an offer of services that increase participation in Islington's leisure, cultural and community offer.
- Deliver, or ensure people are able to access appropriate advice services, including PIP.

- Deliver, or ensure people are able to access a wide range health and wellbeing services.
- Share information about services and support residents with disabilities can access.
- Work with public sector bodies such as the council and NHS to ensure people with disabilities can navigate the system.
- Deliver, or ensure people are able to access advocacy services.

3) Transform attitudes and behaviours towards people with protected characteristics

We want to ensure that people with protected characteristics are able to live lives free of discrimination, prejudice and inequality, and are fully valued, listened to and included. For example, we want to work with a borough-wide organisation that can:

- Promote a positive image of people with disabilities and celebrate their contribution, achievements and abilities through communications, events and campaigns.
- Understand trends in bullying, hostility and hate crime against people with protected characteristics, and ensure that key stakeholders develop appropriate responses to address incidents and the underlying causes of hate crime.
- Develop a disability awareness training and advice offer to local organisation regarding issues and challenges facing the groups that you work with.
- Act as a critical friend for organisations to ensure the voice of people with a disability is present across services.

4) Work collaboratively across the wider equalities agenda to ensure residents facing multiple discrimination are recognised and supported

Many residents would identify as having more than one protected characteristic and we are therefore keen for equalities organisations to work collaboratively to acknowledge, celebrate and support residents. This could include:

- Linking with and working in partnership with other equalities organisations on delivering equalities events.
- Providing activities and services that work across, between and within different communities, promoting intersectionality and encouraging a common sense of belonging.
- Fostering strong and positive relationships within and between people of different identities and characteristics, which can include age, disability, ethnicity/race, gender, religion, sexual orientation and socio-economic status. Including between people with multiple identities.
- Work with BAMER community groups to ensure there is equal access to support for those facing multiple discrimination because of race and disability.

- Address barriers for accessing support, such as language, by collaborating with community groups and other organisations.

5. Next Steps

Following on from the review the recommendations will be incorporated into a revised prospectus for Disability Provision in the Equalities and Cohesion Networks strand of the VCS Partnership Grants Programme 2021-2024.

The fund will launch for applications on Monday 19th April 2021 and close on Friday 7th May 2021.

Organisations interested in applying will be asked to contact partnerships@islington.gov.uk to request a prospectus and application form.

Final recommendations for funding will be taken to the Voluntary and Community Sector Committee on Tuesday 6th July 2021.