

Annual Report of the Executive Member for Homes and Communities

Cllr Una O'Halloran
Policy & Performance Scrutiny Committee
November 2023

Framing of work this year

- The Community Partnerships Team adopted a locality Working model from July 2022, driven by a desire to improve outcomes for the residents and communities of Islington. The fundamental principles are as follows:
 - This approach enables the multi-agency workforce to collaborate, share knowledge and work together, focusing on the localised needs within the communities they serve.
 - Locality Working is a journey evolving from good practice across the borough.
 - The three geographies of North, Central, and South are aligned with the Council's other locality-based services, such as Bright Starts and Bright Futures as Adult Social Care.
- Areas of Responsibility: Our work focuses on building strong, cohesive and resilient communities – supporting local organisations and residents to engage in their community and help each other. Specific areas of responsibility are:
 - Voluntary and community sector – including VCS Grants, Advice, Islington Community Chest
 - Community development and resident engagement
 - Ward Partnerships and Local Initiatives Funding
 - Equalities and community cohesion
- In order to make Islington fairer we have set out an overriding approach.... “Our overriding approach is to help people to build resilience through prevention and early intervention, but we know we can’t do this in isolation – and nor do we want to. Islington is a vibrant and cohesive community, with strong partnership working across the public sector and a valued and dynamic voluntary sector.
- Collectively Islington’s voluntary and community sector contributes to all Council priority objectives. As a Council we are committed to using our role to support an independent, vibrant and dynamic VCS and recognise that the sector has reach beyond our services and that can respond in ways that we cannot.

Framing of work this year

- **CORE PRINCIPLES:** Guided by the principle of inclusivity, we aim to foster meaningful relationships with all stakeholders, this includes residents and community partners, health providers, and faith groups. We understand that each one contributes to our rich community fabric. Our approach is dynamic, rooted in learning, and accessible, ensuring responsiveness to evolving community needs. This aligns with the locality model (place-based approach), which harnesses the potential of local assets and resources.
- **COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT:** We work to engage under-represented groups actively, addressing any participation barriers. This aligns with the principles of The Deal 2030, which is based on mutual respect and trust. Work with partners to shape a locality based funding opportunity for residents and local communities.
- **COMMUNITY SPACES:** A strategic review of all community assets including community centres, community rooms and other community spaces. This will include an assessment on the condition and use of these spaces.
- **INTELLIGENCE AND COMMUNICATION:** To ensure adequate data use, we will enhance our digital inclusion initiatives, equipping residents with the necessary digital skills and resources to access information and services and participate fully in community life. This aligns with The Deal 2030's focus on digital innovation.
- **DELIVERY AND IMPLEMENTATION:** Our delivery approach will focus on strengthening the voluntary and community sector, involving a grants program to fuel community-led projects. A robust approach to participatory budgeting will ensure that funding decisions reflect the diverse community's priorities. This is in line with the place-based approach, which sees economic, social, political and environmental rationales.

Voluntary Sector: VCS Grants Programme 2024-2028

- The VCS Partnership Grants Programme provides core funding to voluntary and community organisations working with Islington residents who are often disadvantaged and facing hardship.
- The Council made a commitment to **protect ‘levels of Council grant-giving to the local voluntary and community sector’** during this current programme with the current budget per annum at approximately £2.696m.
- The programme has been designed around the **Council’s Corporate Plan 2018-22, Corporate Objectives and Values** which recognises the importance of collaboration and partnership. The programme aims to promote community resilience and early intervention and prevention.
- The council has committed to funding the VCS grants program in 2024/28.
- These grants provide a foundation for a strong working partnership with organisations who support the council to shape and enable a strong, independent VCS that delivers against our corporate priorities, and provides a basis for partnership working, dialogue and flexible responses to emerging need and changing context.

Voluntary Sector: Independent Legal Advice

So far.....

- 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.
- The funded advice providers form the **Islington Strategic Advice Partnership**, working together and with other funders to support residents. In November 2022 the partnership delivered free training to the sector on Welfare Benefits, Housing Needs & Allocation and Debt. 70 participants benefited from this training
- Between 1 April 2022 and 30 September 2022, **11,196 unique residents were supported with advice**, e.g. around housing, benefits, debt, immigration and employment.
- In this period **4235 clients were supported around welfare benefits (including Universal Credit)** and **2162 clients were supported around debt, 1856 housing enquiries and 864 immigration cases.**

Voluntary Sector: Small Grants Programmes

Community Chest

- Islington Community Chest is a partnership between Cripplegate Foundation and Islington Council funding organisations in Islington with grants of up to £5,000 across 3 rounds per year.
- **£200k pa in small grants** is made available by the Council to community organisations delivering projects that improve quality of life for Islington residents and tackle inequality across the borough.
- From **April 2022-March 2023 56 organisations were funded totalling £235,255**. Funding was awarded to organisations delivering 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 2022-23, local ward councillors have been allocated £14,000 Local Initiatives Fund per ward to provide small grants for a variety of activities that benefit residents living in their ward.
- 151 projects were awarded funding from Islington Council's Local Initiatives Fund totalling to £253,018 in this period. This has seen local ward benefits and community engagement events.

Voluntary Sector: Small Grants Programmes

Discretionary Rate Relief Programme (DRR) 2020-2023 - To date DRR has been awarded to 130 organisations occupying 170 hereditaments. The total in relief awarded is £1,126,627 with £337,988 being the cost to Islington Council in foregone income. The programme has now closed for applications as the agreed limit has been reached. A new policy and programme was launched on 1 February 2023 for the next round of DRR which commences from 1 April 2023 – 31 March 2026.

Cost of Living Grants – Our Cost of Living Grants were launched in late 2022 which complimented our Local Initiative Fund and provided extra support to community groups to support residents during the Winter months. This fund has enabled 5 organisations to receive funding totalling £5,433.37. This fund remains open for groups in the next financial year.

Queen's Jubilee Grants In June 2022 we granted 61 applications funding to bring communities together to celebrate the Queen's Jubilee, the total funding which was distributed to community groups amounted to £33,045.

Warm Spaces Initiative – Our Warm Spaces initiative launched in October 2022 to support with the Cost of Living challenges, our key partner Octopus worked with 15 Community Centres to provide wrap around support for vulnerable residents in the Borough. A total of 355 residents accessed the centres on a weekly basis and were given access to the communal offer which included *Community Kitchens*: free give-aways of eat in or take-away cooked meals; *Community Food Hubs*: providing a combination of co-op and 'food bank' models; *Social and Welfare*: providing wide-ranging prevention and early intervention activities, along with signposting, community organising, and community outreach. We also reached to our community settings to see where residents could gain access to Warm Spaces and a total of 42 community spaces were identified for our vulnerable residents.

Community Voice and Resident Groups

In 2022-23 the team facilitated a number of opportunities for residents and other stakeholders to **have a say and contribute to solutions to shared issues**, including:

- **Ward Partnerships:** Ward Partnerships 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. They provide an opportunity for residents to interact with councillors and local stakeholders, holding the council to account.
- **Locality Wellbeing Networks:** Funding awarded to VAI and Octopus Community Network to set up, run and develop Locality Wellbeing Networks in each area of the borough. The networks will enable connection, co-delivery and community voice, with a programme of training with Community Organisers UK and The Social Change Agency providing a framework for those taking part.
- **Drops In Sessions:** The team have attended and engaged at these sessions held for Council Housing Tenants, informing them of volunteering opportunities, TRA's and estate gardening, and service and activities available in the borough such as Arts on Estates and Active Spaces programmes.
- The Communities team provides support for groups of residents who want to come together to **act on things that are important to them and improve where they live**. This includes:
 - **Tenants and Residents Associations:** The focus has been on reengaging with TRAs post pandemic, supporting with live issues and beginning conversations around TRA Biennial General Meetings. Throughout the year, the team have sent fortnightly email bulletins to TRAs with opportunities to share with their communities. Through our locality-based teams we aim to work with residents to form new TRAs, provide the necessary training and support for them to flourish and have a community voice.
 - **Estate Gardening Groups:** There are more than 40 gardening groups on estates in Islington. The new Housing gardening team supports estate-based gardening groups with operational issues, with the team engaging groups and supporting them to identify funding.

Place-based Work: We are Cally

- The [We are Cally Community Plan](#) was approved by the Executive in May 2021. The plan lays out shared ambitions for Cally by 2024 and the actions that will be taken to get there, across five thematic areas: a **strong community**; better opportunities for **children, young people and families**; attractive, well-used **public spaces**; improved **health and wellbeing**; a thriving, connected **local economy**.
- **Community governance arrangements** were established to oversee the delivery of the plan and addressing emerging issues. The We are Cally group convenes quarterly and brings residents, VCS partners and council colleagues together to foster collaboration and engage stakeholders in the evolution of the plan and actions.
- **Capital works** projects including the creation of a youth employment hub at West library and the refurbishment and extension of Jean Stokes community centre have completed and are now in regular use. Forthcoming improvements to Bingfield and Barnard Parks will create new family-friendly play and active space. Affordable workspace plans for garages adjacent to Bingfield will support grassroots businesses and activate the public areas surrounding the park.



Public Opening at Jean Stokes



Arts workshops with London Met and Autism Hub

Place-based Work: We are Cally

- **Partnership working in Cally** has been fundamental to the delivery of the plan and has continued to grow in 2022/23. Cross sector collaboration has been enriched by the community development officer and has led to transformative music workshops with London Symphony Orchestra and Help on your Doorstep, resident arts sessions with London Met University, and working with Local Economies colleagues to develop a Food Surplus Café within a community centre.
- **Encouraging greater resident participation and engagement** through a number of programmes that will be delivered in partnership with colleagues across the council. We will work with the Participation and Engagement team to pilot participatory budgeting on Nailour estate, inviting residents to develop funding proposals for new project on the estate. On Delhi Outram Estate, the community development officer and special projects teams are working with Global Generation and residents to co-design a new garden revitalising a disused area. This approach hopes to foster genuine partnership between LBI and residents and looks to build self-sustaining projects with legacy and impact.



Children learning to dance with paint



Residents joined us to plant the beds around the extension to Jean Stokes Community Centre

Estate Based Activity Programmes



- The **Active Spaces** programme supports residents' health and wellbeing, through a wide-ranging programme that this year has included dancing, pilates, soca aerobics, women's fitness, mindfulness, capoeira, and family sports and cooking sessions.
- Over 2022/23, following participant feedback, **Active Spaces** activities have continued to be delivered as a hybrid offer with the majority of sessions held in person, but a number of popular activities being hosted online. This offer enables a vital support network for people to access activities, a support network and regular social interaction from their home where they are either unable to leave the house, or simply prefer the comfort of their own space.
- The **Arts on Estates** programme begins with the premise that everyone is creative and is aimed at engaging Islington Council Estate residents in a range of high-quality arts and cultural activities where access may be limited due to financial, confidence or social restrictions. Targeting the elderly, young people, families and vulnerable communities, residents have access to and participate in a variety of short- and long-range activities designed to meet the following key objectives : -
 - Increase participatory arts in underserved communities
 - Promote community cohesion bringing together a range of residents to engage in a range of creative activities
 - Enhance health and wellbeing
 - Reduce social isolation



Estate Based Activity Programmes – Active Spaces

- **515 Active Spaces sessions** were held from April 2022 – March 2023, with **combined attendance of 3604**.
- **Survey feedback tells us:**
- 98% of participants said they enjoyed the activity they had taken part in
- 96% had taken part in the activity more than twice and considered themselves a regular participant
- Participants reported that they felt happy, healthy, relaxed, fit, empowered and part of the community after taking part in the sessions
- More than 75% of participants felt that their mental and physical health had improved

Participant Feedback...

Alfie is a fantastic fitness trainer. I always leave her sessions feeling motivated & happy. I've made lots of friends too.

The soca aerobics class encourages me to get moving , it is very entertaining and I feel very good after the session

Amazing group and community help me get out of my house to overcome my depression

Participant Feedback...

"Excellent class, the teacher is engaging, encouraging and it is a lot of fun to move the body. This class was a lifeline during the pandemic. It lifted my spirits and I felt alive. I still do the class consistently and it's the only class I have even attended consistently for more than 2 yrs. There is something additive about it!"

"I enjoy being able to do the classes on-line. I feel tired after the class but also alive and stronger."

• Active Spaces with Families for Life

- Across 2022/23 we delivered 4 Active Spaces Family Kitchen programmes at community spaces across the borough.
- Each session includes 45 minutes of fun sports games delivered by Arsenal in the Community, followed by cooking a nutritious meal and sitting down to eat together. Parents / Carers and children take part in all activities together.
- The collaboration has proved very popular and each programme has reached full subscription of 6 families.

Estate Based Activity Programmes - Arts on Estates

- 106 Arts on Estates sessions were held from April 2022 – March 2023, with a combined attendance of 1171 at a mixture of short- and long-term activities.

- The range of courses includes the Singing Well Community Choir, Girdlestone Arts , Pottery, Family creative courses delivered by the Crafts Council and new for this year Creative Writing.

- Of note and in recognition of the impact of the pandemic the Choir continues to delivered a hybrid offer which has been welcomed by residents and further our data suggests that Arts on Estates is reaching further into Islington's diverse communities with for example

- 69% of participants self-identified being of global majority ethnicities
- 14% of families had at least one person in their group who identified as being deaf, disabled or living with a long-term health condition.
- 24% of families had at least one person in their group who identified as neurodivergent.
- Survey outcomes from Arts on Estates have been overwhelmingly positive with the range of activities making a key difference to residents' lives.



Participant feedback

Creative writing has made a difference especially the free writing - it's a great addition to everyday life also learned more about other people in the community, and the community overall

Participant feedback :- the course made me feel more confident in speaking within groups and less anxious. Sharing feelings and ideas in a safe environment has been really useful and good for my mental health.

Creative writing participant

Estate Based Activity Programmes – Arts on Estates - Impact

The Crafts Council

Four artists and makers were commissioned to develop and deliver high-quality craft workshops for local families

Activities include soap casting, printmaking, fabric upcycling, and making denim tote bags.

Participant feedback

My son loves the workshop, he can be creative and he enjoys mixing with the other kids



Pottery



Participant Feedback

- I feel fab
- I feel empowered having learnt a new skill
- Feel like I've been very lucky to have attended this pottery course in full
- Connected with my community and less anxious and isolated
- Feel much happier. Want to meet new people and do something else now.



Girdlestone third age art class Feedback

This art class made my life better in the past years”
Lorraine

This is a lovely class with a nice atmosphere, I feel welcome here”

One participant has now developed the confidence to start her own furniture upcycling course.

Estate Based Youth Programmes

Arsenal COMMUNITY

Islington WEEKLY TIMETABLE
(January)

FREE FOOTBALL SESSIONS!

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
ELTHORPE PARK, NY 9:30am - 10:30am School years 3 - 7	ANDOVER, NT 10411 0411 9am - 10:30am School years 3 - 8	ELTHORPE PARK, NY 9:30am - 10:30am School years 3 - 8	ANDOVER ESTATE, NT 9am - 10am School years 3 - 8	Paradise Park, NT 9:30am - 10:30am School years 3 - 7
ROSEMARY GARDENS, NI 1pm - 1:30pm School years 3 - 8	HARVEST ESTATE, NT 9:30am - 10:30am School years 3 - 8	KING'S SQUARE, ECV 9:30am - 10:30am School years 3 - 8		ROSEMARY GARDENS, NI 9pm - 10:30pm School years 3 - 8
	ST LUKES ESTATE, ECV 9am - 10am School years 3 - 8	WEDBOURNE ESTATE, NT 9:30am - 10:30am School years 3 - 8		

Estate Based activity programmes for young people are run through partnership with Arsenal in the Community and Access to Sports, aimed at young people between 8-19 years.

The programmes are delivered on Westbourne, Crouch Hall Court, St. Lukes, King's Square, Andover and Harvist estates.

During 2022-23, there were:

- more than 1800 weekly term time sessions delivered
- more than 250 school holiday sessions delivered (Easter, Half terms and Summer Holidays)
- 3550 lunches provided to young people during school holidays
- 98 young people gained coaching badges/ sport accreditations
- 16 young people gained employment in the community sports sector, with a further 17 being supported into other employment
- King Square pitch was upgraded during 2022-23 with support from Arsenal in the Community, Adidas and Thriving Neighbourhoods

For more information contact: Access Programme ap@arsenal.co.uk

the ACCESS to SPORTS project

Arsenal COMMUNITY

Islington WEEKLY TIMETABLE
(January)

FREE FOOTBALL SESSIONS!

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
WOLVERHAMPTON, NI 9:30am - 10:30am School years 3 - 8	ANDOVER ESTATE, NT 9:30 - 10:30am School years 3 - 8	ELTHORPE PARK, NY 9pm - 10:30pm School years 3 - 8	HARVEST ESTATE, NT 9:30am - 10:30am School years 3 - 8	Paradise Park, NT 9:30am - 10:30am School years 3 - 8
ROSEMARY GARDENS, NI 9:30am - 10:30am School years 3 - 8	ST LUKES ESTATE, ECV 9pm - 10pm School years 3 - 8	KING'S SQUARE, ECV 9:30am - 10:30am School years 3 - 8	CROUCH HALL COURT, NY 9:30am - 10:30am School years 3 - 8	ROSEMARY GARDENS, NI 9:30am - 10:30am School years 3 - 8

For more information contact: Access Programme ap@arsenal.co.uk

Kicks ISLINGTON

Directly-Managed Community Centres:

- The team continues to provide the Friday **Andover Surplus Food Project** and supply food to an average of 110 households a week.
- The **Food Cycle community meal** delivers a table service food offer to about 65 individuals a week
- Tenant organisations **Help on Your Doorstep, One True Voice, MEWSO and Islington Turkish and Kurdish Women's Welfare Group** provide essential services and activities to people who may have complex health issues and protected characteristics, helping them be resilient and not reach crisis point.
- **Bright Start** deliver activities for local families from the centre, reaching families not previously engaged.
- **Adult and Community Learning** provide learners with sewing courses on a one-to-one and group basis and attendees have also been successful in completing associated qualifications.
- The new **Youth Space** for youth activities is at capacity, with Manor Gardens Welfare Trust delivering a youth club 3 times per week.
- The Andover team also support **resident volunteering**, the Andover Community Centre **garden project** and a Monday **coffee club**.
- The **Andover Team** directly delivered successful celebrations (such as Eid Party for community centre week) and residents trips (such as Brighton Coach Trip) for the locality. The **Community Laundrette** supports the cost of living crisis and is steadily growing with an average of 10 users per week
- **Friends of Andover Community Centre** group aims to bring all partners working in the area together with the common aim of helping the surrounding community and informing what takes place in the centre.

A Flavour of Activities at the Vibast Community Centre



Directly-Managed Community Centres: Jean Stokes Community Centre

- Following a two-year refurbishment project to create a brighter, more accessible space the Jean Stokes Community Center opened in December 2022. The refurbishment was part of the £1.6million plan to transform the Cally area which was produced by residents as part of the Council's **We Are Cally** Community Plan.
- The community center has four charities who are based in the purpose-built office space: **Help on Your Doorstep (HoYD)**, **Age UK**, **The Stuart Low Trust (SLT)** and **Autism Hub Islington**. All four charities facilitate programmes and activities within the center and are accessed by residents and the local community.
- Early 2023 the community centre commenced its programme of activities and courses which included **Adult and Community Learning's** ESOL, Maths and English classes, keep fit classes run by the **Fit Women's Group** and **HoYD's Children's Street Dance**. The **Jean Stokes hall** is regularly booked by the local community for celebrations and family events. The centre regularly hosts and collaborates on programmes and events that challenge inequality and look to widen participation within the Cally community.

