

Annual Report of the Voluntary and Community Sector Committee

Policy and Performance Scrutiny Committee, 24 February 2015

Background

- The Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) Committee is responsible for overseeing the Council's engagement with the Islington community and voluntary sector and ensuring value for money and fairness in the allocation of council resources to the sector.
- In 2014/15 the Council will spend just over £41m on services delivered by the voluntary sector. Around half of this goes to Islington based organisations. However, as the Council faces the biggest reductions in government funding since the Second World War, it is becoming increasingly difficult to sustain resources at this level.
- Despite government cuts, the Council is determined to continue making a real difference in the areas that matter most to local people. The voluntary sector is a key partner in this endeavour but it will also need to adapt to a harsher financial climate. The Council and the VCS will have to work more closely with less money in new and creative ways to meet the challenges that lie ahead.
- The VCS Committee meets six times a year and, under its [Terms of Reference](#), is required to make an annual report to the Policy and Performance Scrutiny Committee on its activities. This year's report covers the period from March 2014 to February 2015.

During 2014/15 the VCS Committee:

- Agreed £2.3m of funding to support local organisations working with some of Islington's most vulnerable residents by extending current grant awards from the **VCS Grants Fund** and **Advice Fund** for 12 months to 31 March 2016. This will provide time for the Council and the VCS to work together to develop the resiliency of the voluntary sector and consider how best to support local organisations beyond 2016. Discussions will be informed by the feedback from a consultation with the VCS in summer 2014 and by recommendations from the Annual VCS Conference held in the Assembly Hall in November.
- Awarded **Discretionary Rate Relief** (DRR) to 173 local organisations at a cost to the Council of approximately £275,000 per year. Awards are for five years until 31 March 2020. DRR is a cost effective way to support organisations providing local benefit as councils only have to pay 30% of the cost of giving it. The rest is funded by central government and the Greater London Authority. New applications for DRR will now be considered by the VCS Committee twice a year.

- Agreed around 200 proposals submitted by ward councillors for awards from the **Local Initiatives Fund**. These awards enable councillors to respond directly to priorities in their ward and fund small projects sitting outside of mainstream funding programmes that might not otherwise receive resources. Each ward has £20,000 per year to allocate (proposing to reduce to £15,000 per year from April 2015).
- Ratified around 50 grant awards from **Islington Community Chest**. This is a very popular scheme providing small grants to local community organisations with a turnover (in most cases) of less than £50,000 a year. The programme is administered by the Cripplegate Foundation which tops up the Community Chest with its own resources and offers a capacity building service to all groups that receive a grant. The Council's contribution is £200,000 per year.
- Awarded small grants totalling £16,000 per year from the **Community Festivals Fund**. For 2015/16 the VCS Committee has agreed to adopt a more strategic approach and will fund a smaller number of key festivals – between £1,500 and £4,000 per event – providing borough-wide benefit.
- Offered 10 Islington-based community organisations and charities **free hire of Islington Assembly Hall** for an event. These have included a world health day for older people (Islington Mental Health Forum), annual school sports awards (Sport Islington) and a spring ball (Cubitt Artists).
- Approved Islington Council's contribution of £231,000 to the **London Boroughs Grants Committee** for 2015-16. This scheme funds organisations providing services across London, many of which meet local priorities such as tackling poverty, reducing crime and providing decent and affordable housing. The net benefit for Islington residents is estimated to be £400,000 per year.

Signed by:



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