

Strategic Plan 2018 - 2021



Voluntary**Action**Islington



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Our Vision

Our vision is of a vibrant civil society that drives local action and positive change for everyone in Islington.

Our Values

- **Equality and diversity**, valuing difference, treating everyone with respect
- **Independence** in our thinking and actions
- **Integrity and professionalism**, maintaining high personal and professional standards
- Working with others to support and develop **collaboration and co-production** across the community
- **Listening and learning** from all our stakeholders including members, staff and volunteers

Our Strategic Aims

We want to address some of the most pressing social issues in the borough. These include:

- **Inequality**
- **Poverty**
- **Community Safety**
- **Health**

Our strategic aims are to enable the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) to address these issues, by supporting organisations to:

- **Be more sustainably funded and resourced**
- **Deliver more effective services**
- **Be more able to influence local policy**

In addition we want to support the people who volunteer for VCS organisations by ensuring:

- **Volunteers gain more social contacts, employability and improved health**

We have developed a Theory of Change to map out how we plan to achieve our strategic aims, and how impact is envisaged at both an organisational level for the VCS, as well as at a local level within the community. This is shown on page 10.



The Local Context



Islington is a diverse and vibrant borough with world-class opportunities at its doorstep. However, it is not without its challenges and inequalities. Having been identified, in 2017, as the worst place in Britain to be a woman due to the gender pay gap, Islington also experiences significant health inequalities, is the fifth most deprived London borough and has the fourth highest level of child poverty in the country.

The outcome of the Brexit vote in 2016 has created significant national uncertainty at a time when we have not fully recovered from a financial crisis, a recession, global economic slowdown and reductions in public spending. We have yet to understand the implications for London and particularly local communities, such as in Islington.

The socio-economic and health inequalities experienced in London are well-known. London has a disproportionately high number of the UK's most deprived neighbourhoods, with over 2 million Londoners living in poverty. Very often the richest and poorest live side-by-side, but often lead parallel lives. Islington is the epitome of this, as illustrated in Cripplegate's report on "Distant Neighbours".

Islington is an Inner London borough and the second smallest by area after Kensington & Chelsea. Despite its reputation for affluence, poverty is a significant problem: Islington has the fourth highest rate of child poverty out of all local authorities in the UK, with around 38% of children living in households on very low incomes. We also have one of the highest levels of older people suffering deprivation, with the fourth highest

level of older people living in poverty. Unemployment rates for UK-born ethnic minorities as a whole are around four times greater than for UK-born white people.

Islington residents are also reported to experience higher levels of mental ill health than residents of other boroughs. An estimated one in six adults had depression, anxiety or both in 2015 and more than half of people with depression also have one or more physical health conditions. In 2015, 1.5% of adults on primary care registers had a serious mental illness recorded, the highest rate in England, including schizophrenia, bipolar disorder and other psychoses. Certain ethnic minority groups, particularly Black Caribbean people, White and Black Caribbean people, and White and Black African people experience serious mental illnesses disproportionately.

Domestic abuse is the most widely reported form of violence against women and girls (VAWG) in Islington. During 2015, Islington police recorded 2,260 Domestic Abuse offences with 2,100 female survivors living in Islington. Rates of domestic abuse have been increasing over time in Islington, as elsewhere, rates were 60% higher in 2015/16 than in 2011/12. Islington also has higher levels of sexual offences than the London average - those aged 16-29 are at highest risk. Although domestic abuse affects all groups of women, younger age, poor health, deprivation and unemployment are associated with higher rates. The impact on children and young people is considerable: over 1,000 (over 50%) assessments are made annually by children's social care in Islington as a result of domestic abuse.

Islington has seen an increase in serious youth violence, up by 28% from 2016/17; this compares to 14% across London. Knife crime offences increased significantly by 50% in the same year, compared to 22% across London. There are six known gangs in Islington and three are seen to be the most active. Islington's Youth Offending tracker shows a disproportion in the number of black young males offending in the borough. An analysis of Islington's most concerning young offenders highlights common themes such as: ADHD and speech and language difficulties; Several school changes; Early childhood trauma particularly DV; Fathers offending/absent/becoming absent; Resident with grandparents; Cannabis use prevalent; Lack of self-care noted; Gaps in statutory services from early childhood to adolescent. They also have a common offending age – starting at 13/14.





Our Approach

We will commit to using our knowledge, expertise and local networks to support Islington's communities who are experiencing disadvantage and inequality. We recognise that voluntary and community organisations play a vital role in challenging and overcoming these inequalities, so it is our role to ensure that they have the right support, tools and information to achieve their aims. Therefore, this strategy presents an opportunity to ensure that Islington is a borough that works for all its residents, so that they experience reduced inequalities and improved life chances.

Our approach will, primarily, be to support organisations that are already focussing their efforts on the issues of inequality, poverty and poor health. We plan to adopt a partnership approach, working alongside the VCS and developing partnerships of like-minded organisations from the voluntary, statutory and corporate sectors in order to maximise resource and impact.

Civil society has a long tradition of advocating for social change, which has led to many significant improvements. We believe it is important to improve skills to influence government, policy-makers and the general public if we are to tackle the root causes of poverty and inequality. Through our

support for VCS organisations, we will develop mechanisms to enhance the voice of individuals and communities that lead to tangible and lasting change for them.

We have a longstanding tradition of supporting small community groups that contribute to improving the lives of people and communities in Islington. They do this by providing support for people to access services, to speak out about issues affecting them or organise activities which help promote a sense of belonging. We will continue our support for these groups to ensure that they have robust systems in place, are well resourced and sustainable, in order to make a valuable impact in the community. Typically, we would consider small groups to have an income under £100,000 per annum.

Social action by volunteers makes a life changing difference to Londoners, with over 3 million volunteers estimated to be active in the capital. We will support local residents to access better information about volunteering and the types of opportunities available in Islington. We will also support local VCS organisations to improve their policies, procedures, systems and skills around the recruitment of volunteers to ensure that all involved can continue to make a difference to their own lives as well as the lives of others.

Strategic Aim 1: Supporting the local VCS to be more sustainably funded and resourced

‘Austerity’ will continue to affect Islington’s communities for years, and Brexit may cause further problems. Further reductions in welfare benefits and the introduction of Universal Credit will adversely affect not only the unemployed and disabled but also the increasing number of working poor in uncertain employment. It is no surprise that demand for services from the most disadvantaged will continue to rise, and not just demand to solve isolated problems. Vulnerable people often experience complex bundles of issues that need to be managed simultaneously.

VCS organisations will also need to nurture our borough to help people avoid debt, maintain good health, overcome isolation, move individuals out of insecure and poorly paid work, help secure the future of our children and young people, help ensure the safety and quality of our local environment and contribute to building a thriving local economy. However further reductions to public sector budgets will almost certainly translate into reductions to financial support for the VCS. But operating costs will continue to rise at a time when demand for support from Islington’s most disadvantaged communities will continue to grow.

It is, therefore, vital that Islington VCS organisations are adequately resourced and sustainably funded to support the most vulnerable people in Islington.

To meet this aim VAI will:

- Produce a booklet about Trust funding for local organisations
- Provide access to live information on a funding website, Open 4 Communities
- Organise briefings about the funding programmes relevant to local organisations
- Develop thematic VCS partnerships to increase access to funding and contracts
- Encourage cross-sector partnership working to unlock resources
- Support Islington’s VCS to strengthen its volunteering practice through platforms for learning and information sharing, such as Volunteer Managers Forum

Strategic Aim 2: Supporting the local VCS to deliver more effective services

Delivering effective services will be challenging with fewer resources, greater costs, greater reporting demands and more legal obligations. The organisations that fund our work require large amounts of paperwork for monitoring, evaluation and other ways of evidencing work we do. The legal frameworks and statutory obligations which charities need to work within and to are constantly being changed or augmented, for example, the recent General Data Protection Regulation, an increasing call on charity resources. Keeping staff and trustees up to date on being compliant will continue to be a demanding task.

In a world of on-demand online services, public expectations of services have changed. Keeping in contact with service users and potential supporters and volunteers through social media is becoming an essential, not an add-on part of many charities' work.

Having effective referral paths for people will be essential to support with people with multiple issues (as outlined in Strategic Aim 1) who need specialist help in a number of areas.

Finding suitable and affordable premises from where to deliver services will become more pressing as more residential developments are built. All other operating costs will continue to rise.

Additionally, as operational issues become more demanding, VCS organisations will find it more difficult to make time for strategy and planning.

To meet this aim VAI will:

- Keep abreast of changing statutory frameworks and how they affect the local VCS, and support groups in adapting to these changes
- Ensure the website has up to date information about Islington, charity regulation, governance, equal opportunities, volunteer management and finance
- Circulate information to members through newsgroups, newsletters and social media
- Offer one-to-one support to VCS organisations through face to face surgeries, telephone and email
- Develop a training programme using staff knowledge and expertise
- Deliver time limited programmes of intervention to small groups
- Offer specialist and Pro Bono advice surgeries and briefing sessions with corporate and VCS partners

Strategic Aim 3: Supporting the local VCS and local communities to influence local policy

Islington's VCS organisations and communities know best what the local issues are and the best ways to solve them.

Working with local communities, whether these are communities of interest or locality, local frontline organisations have vital information about the communities they serve. In particular, they offer unique insights into the realities now faced by the most vulnerable people in society, some of which we outlined under Strategic Aim 1. It is vital that their voice is heard at the highest levels to inform local policy making and ensure precious resources are directed where they are needed most and will make the greatest impact.

There is also considerable potential for greater joined-up operational working across sectors. For example, the Council is using our communication channels to relay volunteering opportunities to VCS organisations and their service users to widen access to a more diverse pool of potential volunteers for parks, sport and other areas.

To meet this aim VAI will:

- Ensure the VCS and public sector are aware of each other's service offer for local people
- Support the development of community based action initiatives
- Organise a programme of events to share and learn from VCS peers
- Promote the voice of Islington's VCS at a strategic level through ICN
- Encourage operational collaboration between the VCS and the public sector
- Maintain learning opportunities for both Chief Executives and Trustees of Islington groups

Strategic Aim 4: Supporting volunteers to gain more skills, social contacts, employability and improved health

Volunteering is the lifeblood of social action. It strengthens society and the ability of VCS organisations to improve the lives of others. Ultimately, on a wider scale, it serves to increase community cohesion.

But volunteering also benefits volunteers themselves. It improves health and wellbeing and reduces isolation; confidence, skills and employability are also increased. Volunteering is a well-known route into, or back into, employment. Furthermore, the opportunities for volunteering are endless, including sport, advice giving, mentoring and magistracy.

In a period of tight financial resources but greater service demands, the role that volunteers play becomes pivotal. More are needed, from the widest range of backgrounds possible, with support, where needed, to help volunteers make the best of their experiences.

To meet this aim VAI will:

- Develop a cross-sector partnership to streamline access to volunteers and volunteering opportunities
- Raise awareness of volunteering through targeted outreach, high profile events and social media
- Champion volunteering through recognition and awards
- Facilitate volunteering for both volunteers and VCS organisations through volunteer database
- Act as a brokering service between potential volunteers and VCS organisations
- A wide range of residents are more connected with local communities through appropriate volunteering opportunities
- Develop capacity of organisations around volunteer recruitment and management through workshops and one to one support
- Develop platforms for sharing good practice



Resources

Local Authority funding for local infrastructure support and the Volunteer Centre runs to March 2020, and it is uncertain whether this will continue beyond this period. Therefore, Voluntary Action Islington will need to focus its efforts on fundraising from a diverse range of sources such as grants, charitable trusts and contracts.

VAI currently generates a significant proportion of its income through the Resource Centre on Pentonville Road, which contributes mainly towards core running costs. We have recently introduced 6 additional desk spaces to hire out and these are expected to contribute an additional £22,000 to our annual income, when at full capacity. The current lease provides us with a further 6 years up to 2024, allowing some stability in terms of time to develop our income.

Partnerships are core to our approach to growth and sustainability. VAI will proactively seek out opportunities to work with local organisations, either as the lead or as the capacity building component to partnerships with smaller more inexperienced groups. Initially, these will be aligned with our strategic priorities of inequality, poverty, community safety and health. We will also further explore the development of special purpose vehicles.

VAI will remain open to opportunities to work cross-borough into neighbouring boroughs, or with likeminded organisations across London, as this will not only allow us to increase our reach and improve our offer, but may also create back-office savings.

We will continue to work with volunteers and student interns. We will work with the BIG Alliance, to received pro-bono help from its members, and other firms to provide training and specialist support to VAI and our membership.

We aim to sustain current and develop new corporate support for the Volunteer of the Year Awards and any other relevant events.

Finally, we will continue to ensure that we run an efficient organisation by reviewing our running costs, finding the best options in terms of utilities, suppliers and contractors, whilst ensuring that we continue to be energy efficient and provide a green workspace for all who use it.

Voluntary Action Islington

Theory of Change

