

Appendix 2: Response to Issues Raised Through Consultation for Voluntary and Community Sector Strategy

In engaging the sector on the strategy, we have held a number of dedicated events and focus groups prior to the pandemic, which all VCS organisations registered with THCVS were invited to. Consultation to support the development of the VCS strategy has also taken place with a number of existing partnerships and voluntary sector networks. This consultation work has included:

- Co-operate meetings on 24th September 2019, 16th December 2019, 22nd July 2020 and 1st October 2020
- Health and Wellbeing Forum meeting on 27th February 2020
- Premises Forum meeting on 13th August 2019
- Somali Community Working Group meeting on 15th January 2020
- Tower Hamlets Co-production Network meeting on 10th December 2019
- Tower Hamlets Funding Fair on 3rd March 2020
- Tower Hamlets Partnership Executive Group meetings of 14th August 2020 and 16th September 2020
- Tower Hamlets Registered Providers (Housing) Community Involvement Network meeting on 16th September 2020
- Training Enterprise & Employment Forum workshop on 5th December 2019
- VCS Representatives meeting on 11th February 2020
- VCS Strategy Co-design session with VCS organisations on 27th November 2019
- VCS Strategy Development Session – Premises, Volunteering and Infrastructure on 22nd January 2020
- Voluntary Sector Children and Youth Forum meeting on 14th January 2020

The development of the VCS Strategy has also been influenced and supported by:

- a survey of VCS organisations, conducted by the Council and Tower Hamlets Council for Voluntary Services in April 2020, at the start of the pandemic
- regular teleconferences that have been taking place since May 2020, between the Mayor, LBTH officers and representatives of VCS organisations in the borough to identify issues and support joint working in response to the pandemic. There was a presentation on the VCS Strategy at the Teleconference meeting of 28th September 2020.

Key Messages (You Said)	What Will Be Done As A Result (We Will Do)
No Council-led central information system for VCS to advertise their services.	Establishment of a stronger VCS digital presence in the borough, including on statutory sector web sites, with introduction of more interactive web material, VCS case studies and an on-line services directory.
Need to celebrate the value VCS brings to communities	Setting up a high profile VCS showcase event, including presentations of awards for projects, organisations and people
Need for better communication between VCS organisations to understand and strengthen referrals	Development and trialling of digital tools and using them to support better referrals between VCS services
Sometimes things need to be hyperlocal; people feel more comfortable if a service is nearby and walkable	Establishment of the 15 minute Neighbourhoods/ ward-based model to promote and develop localised, targeted and multi-purpose services to meet needs in the community and revive local neighbourhoods
Need to recognise importance of both employee and informal volunteering. Untapped potential for employee volunteering in the borough and possibly lots of unmapped, informal volunteering, e.g. in faith groups.	Development of a borough volunteering plan to put all types of volunteering at heart of borough – employee volunteering, informal volunteering, mutual aid groups, linking volunteering to access to education and employment, trustees.
Need for on-line premises directory for VCS organisations.	Establishment of directory of community buildings on local statutory sector and community web sites to publicise information about available buildings, including their location and how they can be accessed by VCS organisations.

Key Messages (You Said)	What Will Be Done As A Result (We Will Do)
Contracts not reflecting the needs of local organisations – commissioning needs to change.	Local statutory sector organisations should explore how they could possibly prioritise the VCS in their commissioning processes, review how they commission services and consider introducing promotion and support packages to link VCS organisations to their contract opportunities.
Need for cross sector partnership bids, negotiated and agreed via sector forums.	VCS forums, such as the new Community Sector Forum and the Health & Wellbeing Forum, should be supported to identify areas of high level need and broker VCS partnerships to produce sector focused applications for funding
Need to minimise digital exclusion, including access for all groups.	VCS organisations with low level of digital resources will be supported to obtain digital skills, equipment and broadband connections
VCS can provide a voice for residents – online resident surveys and consultations will not reach everyone and might not be understood.	Increase VCS role in consultation and engagement in order to amplify residents' voices, by making use of its strong roots with local communities to ensure the community intelligence that they have is at the heart of consultation and engagement in the borough to support the development of new local policies and strategies.
VCS has the ability to represent different communities, give residents a voice and support collective bargaining.	Set up Tower Hamlets Community Sector Forum to enable a wider range of people and organisations from the VCS, particularly from smaller groups, to fully influence the development of local policies and strategies.

Key Messages (You Said)	What Will Be Done As A Result (We Will Do)
Lack of accurate and up to date information.	Increased joint working between statutory sector data and intelligence teams and VCS organisations – e.g. on Joint Strategic Needs Assessment.
Challenge for the VCS in interacting with private sector.	Set up of VCS organisation-business network meetings and multi-agency business forum.
Reduction in support for equalities groups.	Training and development support for VCS groups run for and led by smaller BAME communities.