



VCS Strategy Consultation

Consultation Response Report

February 2016



Contents

Introduction	4
Voluntary and Community Sector Strategy	4
Context - Development of the Strategy	4
Executive Summary	5
Consultation Programme	7
Response to the Consultation	9
Events	9
Consultation Questionnaire	10
Email Responses	11
Analysis Methodology	11
Consultation Response Analysis	12
Theme 1 - Promoting Co-production and Sustainability	12
Theme 2 – Maximising the Value from Resources	15
Theme 3 - Creating a Step-change in Volunteering	17
Theme 4 - Bringing Together Businesses and the Sector	20
Business Focus Group	22
Delivering the Strategy	26
Grants Criteria	30
Community Benefit	32
Equalities	33
Other Feedback	34
Appendices	35
1. Questionnaire Results	35
2. Profile of Questionnaire Respondents	46
3. Consultation Questionnaire	48

Introduction

Voluntary and Community Sector Strategy

The council recognises the unique contribution the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) makes in supporting and delivering services that meet the needs of local people in Tower Hamlets and we have been working closely with the VCS in the development of the VCS Strategy.

The vision of the VCS Strategy is to create:

“An independent and sustainable voluntary and community sector, taking a place-based, collaborative approach to working closely with the council and partners to meet the needs of local people wherever they live in the borough”

Our initial phase of consultation (detailed below), ran from September to November 2015 and provided vital feedback from our VCS and council colleagues. Working with the VCS has enabled the council to create the draft VCS Strategy and our combined work with the sector on developing this strategy reflects how we want to work within and across the sector in future.

This report details the findings from a further consultation exercise with VCS, council and business colleagues and the public on the proposed strategy. This phase of engagement concentrated on gathering feedback on the objectives within each of the themes within the strategy, training and support needed to enable delivery of the strategy, criteria around grant giving and community benefit and the impact on equalities.

Context - Development of the Strategy

The VCS Strategy has been developed in close partnership with the Voluntary and Community Sector. The initial phase of consultation on the strategy consisted of an online survey and three workshops completed with the VCS, councillors and officers who engage with the sector, and focused on the issue of roles and responsibilities and how we can improve commissioning practices and encourage closer collaboration with the VCS through co-production.

These workshops were just one of the mechanisms used to consult with the sector and local people. Discussions also took place with the Tower Hamlets Council for Voluntary Service (THCVS) and Third Sector Advisory Board (TSAB). An online survey was also conducted to allow organisations who could not attend the VCS workshop and the wider borough, including residents, to contribute their thoughts and ideas and help shape the draft strategy.

The feedback received during this consultation allowed the council to develop the strategy's key objectives and has been used to inform the action plan to deliver the strategy.

Executive Summary

Overall the feedback received on the draft VCS strategy has been positive. The strategy and associated actions to deliver it have been well received across stakeholder groups. Some themes which ran across feedback include; having clearer language and definition of terms within the strategy - to make it clear and accessible for all, creating a website which can be used to access information and support, there is recognition that a cultural shift within the sector and council is needed to make this a success.

Theme 1 - Promoting co-production and sustainability

A clear definition of terms such as co-production, collaborative commissioning and community leadership is needed. Delivery of the objectives within this theme will need to take place in partnership with the sector. The associated actions to deliver this theme are correct, however there should be consideration of conflicts of interest across the sector and council.

Theme 2 - Maximising the value from resources

There is concern that smaller organisations may suffer when the council moves to an outcome based and commissioned approach. This is due to a lack of resources and skills to enable them to compete with larger organisations. Support should be offered across the sector to mitigate this. Grants remain an important funding stream for certain projects such as pilots and innovation and should be maintained in certain circumstances. Within the council it would be useful to collate information on awarded grants and commissions in a central accessible database.

Theme 3 - Creating a step change in volunteering

There is a need to define what the aim is within this theme – i.e. is it to increase the quality or quantity of volunteers? It should be noted that volunteering levels as a whole have remained fairly stable for many years. It is important to have a range of volunteering opportunities which require both low and high level skills. Brokerage plays an important role in enabling this to happen. Offering awards for volunteering both within the council and businesses is welcomed, to recognise impactful contributions.

Theme 4 - Bringing together businesses and the sector

Businesses remain hard to engage in such activity. Businesses of all sizes – large corporates and SMEs, should be encouraged to contribute. There is a mismatch between local needs and what support businesses are able to offer. There is a need to align expectations across relationships and foster equal partnerships between the sector and businesses. Large corporate CSR programmes are often directed by their head office and can change frequently - therefore these programmes are not necessarily suited to support local needs. Securing endowments is one way of getting around this issue, as these commitments are longer term.

Support to deliver the strategy

With regard to the support the council could offer; an accessible intuitive website where stakeholders can obtain information and be signposted to support, data and contacts would be of high value. The sector would also benefit from access to physical spaces for activities to take place. With regard to support from the sector, the overarching advantage they have is their local intelligence and links across groups within the community.

Grants Criteria

Grants are deemed the most suitable type of funding for certain projects such as pilots, innovations and projects which don't necessarily deliver hard outcomes but do have other *soft* benefits to users. Smaller organisations who struggle to secure funding from other means should also still be considered for grants. Training on other funding streams would be useful both within the sector and for council staff.

Community Benefit

The most commonly mentioned criteria for defining community benefit were local usage and something that has been identified as a need in the local area. The use of community benefit clauses in all council contracts is welcomed. There is recognition that renting of council buildings should take place on a formal basis, and that these agreements need to be transparent. However, there is concern about costs increasing and it is felt that discounts for the use of council community buildings should be limited to smaller VCS organisations.

Equalities

There is not particular concern for any one group when considering the impact of the strategy on the nine protected characteristics but there may be impact on certain groups in certain circumstances. Therefore an assessment must be made as and when a new project is initiated. Training on equalities would be beneficial.

Recommendations

- Update the language within the strategy to make it easier to understand
- Create a glossary of terms within the strategy
- Undertake an impact assessment of the changes proposed to funding arrangement on the VCS and the council
- Create a central website resource for stakeholder to access intelligence
- Facilitate a cultural shift within the council and sector to deliver the strategy
- Embed co-production as a theme throughout the strategy
- Include commitment in the strategy to reviewing the Tower Hamlets Compact
- Create a centralised database within the council of awarded grants and commissions
- Create a Tasking and Finishing Group with representatives from the council, local VCS and businesses of different sizes to enable on-going engagement and involvement
- Offer training on alternative funding streams and equalities (as well as other areas)
- Ensure smaller organisations are supported in accessing funding and provide specialist help where necessary
- Infrastructure funding should be included in the strategy, if the council wishes to achieve the aim of *facilitating a route into employment*
- Create a council employee volunteering strategy that concentrates on hours of time given rather than days to demonstrate a model for business volunteering
- Incentivise volunteering through ways, such as free childcare or discounts at local stores.
- Create case studies of staff members who already volunteer
- Create an annual award for a council volunteer/teams of volunteers and tie this in with existing national activities
- Create an award or have an awards ceremony for businesses
- Research and include examples of best practice across local government
- Map and coordinate current volunteering across the borough, create case studies and raise awareness of this across the council.

Consultation Programme

This final stage of public consultation on the draft Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) Strategy commenced on the 14 January 2016 and lasted for around four weeks until the 10 February 2016.

Information about the draft strategy was available on the council website, as well as the link to the consultation questionnaire.

The consultation programme covered online and face-to-face channels in order to encourage a broad range of responses from different groups including VCS organisations, businesses and residents. There were also face-to-face events with the VCS and business stakeholders, council officers and Members.

Website

A page was created specifically to communicate about the draft VCS Strategy and house the online questionnaire link and all consultation documentation. The documents available on the website included:

1. The draft VCS Strategy document
2. A Frequently Asked Questions document on themes within the strategy
3. Link to the online questionnaire

Social Media

During the consultation period a number of tweets via @TowerHamletsNow were released publicising the consultation. There were also updates on the council's Facebook page. The consultation was also promoted by @THCVS.

Consultation Questionnaire

The consultation questionnaire was accessible online via the council website. The questionnaire covered the themes and areas of focus within the strategy and consisted of a range of closed and open questions. The full consultation questionnaire can be found in appendix three.

Around 1,100 stakeholders from across the VCS, businesses were invited to take part in the online survey. The survey was also advertised on the council intranet to encourage council officers to respond.

The consultation questionnaire asked respondents their views on the themes and areas of focus within the draft VCS strategy as well as asking for feedback on the impact the strategy may have on the nine protected equalities characteristics. This section details the response received to the consultation questionnaire.

Themes and Objectives

The four key themes of the strategy are:

1. Promoting co-production and sustainability
2. Maximising the value from resources
3. Creating a step change in volunteering
4. Bringing together businesses and the sector

Within each of these themes a number of objectives have been developed to ensure delivery of them. Respondents were asked to comment on each set of objectives within each theme in turn.

Email

Those that had questions about the draft strategy, FAQs or consultation questionnaire were offered the opportunity to ask questions about this via email.

Workshops

Four workshops were held during the consultation period:

1. Workshop with VCS Stakeholders (19 January 2016) – around 600 VCS stakeholders were offered the opportunity to attend this event
2. Workshop with council officers (2 February 2016) – all staff were welcomed to attend this event and invites went to 50 specific officers
3. Workshop with the Mayor's Advisory Board (3 February 2016)
4. Workshop with business stakeholders (4 February 2016) – around 700 business contacts were offered the opportunity to attend this group.

During the workshops participants were asked to give their feedback on the various elements of the draft strategy and offer new ideas on how the strategy might be delivered. The full details of feedback received during the workshops are covered later in this report.

Meetings

As well as holding the various workshops, the council has also met with a number of VCS and business stakeholders to discuss the strategy and understand approaches to Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR).

Response to the Consultation

A range of consultation responses were received from residents, workers, council officers and Members, businesses and VCS organisations across a number of activities.

Events

Around 75 people attended the four events held during the consultation period.

Voluntary and Community Sector Workshop

Voluntary and Community Sector colleagues were invited to take part in a workshop to gather their thoughts and feedback on the council's emerging VCS Strategy.

The session was introduced by Melanie Clay, Directors of Resources, Law, Probity and Governance and colleagues also heard from Councillor Saunders, Deputy Mayor and Cabinet Member for Education and Children's Services.

The session was structured around the themes within the strategy and participants were asked for their thoughts and ideas on specific elements within these themes. The group was split in a number of smaller groups to enable in-depth conversations to take place on tables and participants were encouraged to engage to capture their thoughts as they went along.

The main areas that were discussed are listed below.

- Promoting co-production and sustainability
- Maximising the value from resources
- Creating a step change in volunteering
- Bring together businesses and the sector
- Roles and responsibilities in relation to delivery of the strategy
- Assessing Grant funding
- Assessing Community Benefit
- Understating the impact of the strategy on Equalities

41 VCS stakeholders attended the workshop and there were representatives from a range of different VCS organisations.

Council Officer Workshop

Council Officers were invited to a workshop to gather their feedback into the draft action plan to deliver the VCS Strategy. The session was introduced by Emily Fieran-Reed, Service Manager, Community Cohesion, Engagement and Commissioning and closed by Melanie Clay, Directors of Resources, Law and Probity.

The workshop was split into two sessions. During the first session officers were asked for their initial thoughts on the actions within the different theme areas. The second session concentrated on how the action plan will impact on council officers' roles and discussed how teams can be involved in delivery of the action plan.

21 council officers attended the workshop and there were representatives from a range of different council departments.

Mayor's Advisory Board (MAB)

The MAB were invited to a meeting to discuss the strategic objectives within the draft VCS strategy. The session as introduced by Councillor Rachael Saunders, and included a summary of initial findings from the consultation.

Business Focus Group

Business contacts were invited to attend a focus group to discuss their views on the draft strategy with particular focus on theme four – bringing together businesses and the sector. The session was introduced by Emily Fieran-Reed. Four business contacts attended this session.

Meetings

Tower Hamlets Council had a number of meetings with stakeholders from across sectors (including businesses, VCS and broker organisations) These organisations are listed below:

- Barclays
- CCG Governing Board and Officers
- Community Plan Delivery Groups (Tower Hamlets Partnership Group)
- EBP
- ELBA
- Morgan Stanley
- State Street

Consultation Questionnaire

The consultation questionnaire was available online via the council website. In total, 56 people responded to the questionnaire, of which, 15 were responding as individuals and 41 were responding as representatives of organisations.

Those who responded as individuals were a mix of residents and workers. Those responding on behalf of organisations were mainly from VCS organisations (30). Three business representatives responded to the online questionnaire. The VCS and businesses organisations who responded to the questionnaire and gave the name of their organisation are listed below:

Name of organisation	
Ability Bow	Green Candle Dance Company
APASENTH	Magic Me
Asian Women Lone Parent Association(AWLPA)	Malmesbury Community Projects
Bangladesh Youth Movement	Ragged School Museum
Betar Bangla Ltd	SimpleGifts: Unitarian Centre for Social Action
Bethnal Green Mission Church	St Peters Bengali Association
Bethnal Green Weightlifting Club	St. Margaret's House
Black Women's Health & Family Support	Stifford Centre
Chinese Association of Tower Hamlets	Streets of Growth
deafPLUS	The Bow Foodfank
Doctors of the World UK	Tower Hamlets Education Business Partnership
EastendHomes	Tower Hamlets Parents Centre
Globe Community Project	Wapping Bangladesh Association
Golden Moon Youth Project	Weavers Adventure Playground Association

Email Responses

Email responses were received from Tower Hamlets Council for Voluntary Service (THCVS), Volunteer Centre Tower Hamlets (VCTH) and Tower Hamlets Clinical Commissioning Group (THCCG). The feedback from these organisations is reported across sections within this report.

Analysis Methodology

Some of the questions in the consultation questionnaire allowed the respondent to tick multiple answers. Therefore in some of the analysis the sum of the response to a question may be higher than 100%. In other cases, the total response to a single answer question may add up to slightly over 100% due to rounding of decimal points.

All the open ended questions in the consultation questionnaire were coded into themes to allow the responses to be quantified. This encompassed reading every response to these questions and creation of a code frame.

Consultation Response Analysis

The responses to the consultation have been collated where appropriate around the themes and areas of focus within the strategy.

Theme 1 - Promoting Co-production and Sustainability

Objectives

- Review strategies, policies, service specifications and action plans
- Develop Place-Based Community Leadership
- Move to collaborative commissioning
- Develop an evidence base together
- Build VCS and community capacity

There is general consensus across the consultation feedback that the objectives within this theme are correct. Four in five of those who responded to the consultation questionnaire (82%) agree these are right objectives to deliver this theme.

“As small group like us, we need support and training to develop our skills and competencies. We need help to develop our potential funding application. So these broad objectives are really helpful.”

VCS stakeholder

However, during the VCS workshop and across other feedback, a number of considerations have emerged when thinking about delivery of these objectives. There was discussion across a number of the tables at the VCS workshop about the definition of co-production, collaborative commissioning and community leadership and what this looks like in practice. THCCG in their letter to the council mentioned that they would also like a clearer definition of co-production that all stakeholders can clearly understand and work towards. In their experience they feel there are many different interpretations of what coproduction means which can lead to miscommunication and understanding.

Tower Hamlets Council for Voluntary Services (THVCS), in an open letter to the council, commented that co-production needs to be embedded throughout the strategy. For instance, they would like the strategy to specifically say that Tower Hamlets Council will ‘review strategies, policies, services and action plans with the sector’. They also want the action plan to be implemented with the Voluntary and Community Sector.

Participants at the VCS workshop expressed interest in being involved in the review of strategies, policies, specifications and plans as it was deemed having critique from the VCS would be beneficial in this process and the council should ‘critically evaluate for effective outcomes’. There is interest in helping to identify ‘key players and strategy providers’ and those who have specific strategies on things such as arts and mental health etc.

Participants at the VCS workshop are also interested being involved in the development of strategies, policies, specifications and plans. There needs to be consideration of the needs of small organisations when developing policies and there is a need for ‘clear accessible language’. The Mayor and Advisory Board (MAB), in a separate workshop, said that they share similar views emphasising that the council has to make sure the strategy is easily

understood by the community. In particular they feel that the final report should have improved and easily understood definitions of co-production and community leaders.

With regard to place-based community leadership, participants at the VCS workshop thought this needed further explanation and asked how the term '*place*' is being defined. For instance this could mean ward, neighbourhood or wider local area. It was also asked who are the '*community leaders*' - i.e. is this VCS organisations or individuals within the community. There were also questions about why VCS partners would want to advocate place-based community leadership. There was concern about community leaders coming from small and unrepresentative demographic groups, such as older men. Initiatives to build community leaders should be '*geographical and inclusive*'.

Some of those at the VCS workshop felt that '*grant giving is a better relationship than commissioning*' or '*paying by results*'. The term '*collaborative commissioning*' was criticised as being '*bad terminology*' and some feel this approach will not work without proper training and support.

There was agreement that evidence should be developed in partnership, and that this must be good quality data such as '*data at ward level*'. It was also mentioned that the council will need to give VCS partners ample time to respond to requests for data and other documents as '*capacity and resources are limited*'. The MAB felt that the final version of the strategy should include more examples of other local authorities providing open source data and information about the impact this has had.

Additionally, Volunteer Centre Tower Hamlets (VCTH), in an email response to the consultation, said they are '*really keen to lead on*' baseline data for volunteering. If adequately funded they will work with the Institute for Volunteering (IVR), to produce this research.

Officer's Workshop

Officers were asked to discuss the objectives of theme one and associated actions.

From the workshop it was clear that generally officers are supportive of the objectives in the strategy. Officers are interested in collaborative commissioning, commenting that they have had success in the past working with service users to develop briefs for tenders. Officers are also supportive of the objective to share resources and data. Additionally, officers feel positive about providing grants for pilot programmes to allow VCS to develop innovative services, which could benefit residents.

There is general consensus that the actions within this theme are correct but a number of considerations emerged when thinking about delivery of these.

In some ways, officers feel that some of these objectives could be achieved with minimal effort. For instance, many officers commented that their departments have already moved toward commissioning services. Some officers highlight that they already work collaboratively with service users on commissioning and so working collaboratively with service providers is not such a big shift. Finally officers from Adult and Support Services, comment that they hold a quarterly pan-provider forum, which if used more intensively, would allow them to work more collaboratively.

In other ways, officers feel that the new strategy and action plan will lead to significant changes in their roles and the way their departments work. Officers from the Asset Management Team feel that the implementation of the strategy will necessitate a change in the function of the Voluntary and Communications Sector department. Their role will increasingly focus on auditing and monitoring charities which have received council commissions. Furthermore, in order for the council to share resources and data with the VCS, officers feel that there is a need

to review what data they have available and what they are able to share. It was also mentioned that Public Health may have useful data which would allow the council to target resources.

Officers also highlighted areas that the strategy fails to cover. The most significant of which is the omission of how a collaborative commissioning approach will circumvent issues of a conflict of interest working with suppliers. Moreover, many officers feel strongly that the council could invest in projects that could create specialist volunteer, i.e. accounts volunteers which could help businesses prepare for audits.

Theme 2 – Maximising the Value from Resources

Objectives

- Move to an outcome based and commissioned approach
- Take a new approach to grant giving
- Take a strategic approach to council resourcing across the VCS
- Promote transparency and accountability of the VCS
- Build the capacity of the VCS
- Encourage resource sharing within the sector

The stakeholder groups generally felt the objectives to deliver maximum value from resources are correct but some tweaks or further explanation is needed. Around seven in ten of those who responded to the consultation questionnaire (71%) agree these are the right objectives for this this theme.

“Each and every resource must be properly utilised and benefit its respective users”

VCS stakeholder

Participants of the VCS workshop were unclear about where the council was moving ‘from’ in relation to moving to an outcome based and commissioned approach. There is concern that small organisations will suffer if the council takes this approach, as they may not have the resource to compete with larger organisations who know how to ‘tick all the boxes’. There was discussion about the need for support for smaller VCS partners in enabling them to compete in an outcome based/ commissioned approach world. This sentiment is shared by the MAB who feel that the council should build the VCS’s capacity in Tower Hamlets, based on feedback the sector gives and with careful consideration to the needs of small voluntary groups.

Participants of the VCS workshop suggested that some services provided by VCS partners do not always lend themselves to an outcome based approach, for example lunch clubs. It was asked – how should these kinds of benefits be weighed against other services that provide against more specific outcomes. There was a suggestion that some budget could be ring-fenced for these smaller activities.

It was discussed at the VCS workshop that grant giving can support innovation and pilot programmes while commissioning cannot and therefore grants will still be appropriate in some circumstances. There was discussion of having processes that are ‘fit for purpose’ i.e. related to size of grant and that monitoring also needs to be ‘fit for purpose’. It was mentioned that third sector partners need to be involved in the development of frameworks to determine how grant giving might be applied. In relation to this the MAB feel that the council should consider all responses to the allocation of grants and where requests cannot be fulfilled the reasoning should be clearly explained.

With regard to transparency and accountability of the VCS, there was agreement at the VCS workshop that as the money is coming from public coffers, processes must be transparent and recipients of this accountable. There was discussion around quality control and that monitoring of progress must be built into processes. The MAB felt that the social impact of council funded activities should be ‘robustly’ measured but also wanted to acknowledged the differences between ‘soft’ and ‘hard’ impacts.

Part of building capacity within the VCS will rely on fostering organic relationships where partners agree to ‘work together for a bid’ (VCS workshop attendee). At present there is a tendency for organisations to think about their ‘own pot’ and wanting to keep it for themselves. A cultural shift is required.

Another element is related to enabling competition in commissioning processes. There was some discussion at the VCS workshop about who can deliver capacity building. Some were concerned that the sector does not have the time or resource to be able to offer this.

With regard to sharing resources, it was discussed that the council could facilitate this by collating information from VCS partners into one place on the council website or that VCS partners could work together to set up a site where they could post information, or share their needs or offerings .

It was thought by those at the VCS workshop, that larger organisations should help smaller organisations and that this could possibly be part of the bidding requisite.

Opportunities to network are welcomed by VCS stakeholders as it was mentioned that often relationships between organisations are built on strong personal relationships but it is recognised that there is a need to forge more lasting relationships built on more formal ties, as things can break down if individuals move on.

Officer's Workshop

Officers are supportive of the objectives and actions in theme two and only had a few comments on how these changes would impact on their work.

Officers support the movement from grants to commissions, commenting that this is already happening. Officers are supportive of measures that make the allocation of grants and commissions more transparent and welcome more accountability. There is approval for plans that would encourage VCS organisations to work together. Officers feel that there would be mutual benefit for smaller organisations to work with larger organisations to deliver on commissions. These views are shared by the MAB and they believe that the council should encourage partnerships in a number of ways, for example through bidder conferences.

Officers support smaller organisations sharing resources with each other, such as premises and personnel. There is also some support for commissions being conditional on organisations working in co-ordination with one another.

Officers made some suggestions about the implementation of these objectives. Officers have concerns about the '*duplication*' of grants being awarded by different departments, for the same projects, to the same VCS organisations. Officers want the council to address this issue either by forming a central team of commissioners or by having some form of notification process whereby commissioners from other teams could notify all departments of grants they have awarded. Officers were informed that in the medium term there will be software which the council will use to process all commissions. This will prevent duplication of grants and commissions. Officers want this programme to include an '*evidence base*' which would allow them to see how effective these service providers are.

Some officers feel different teams commissioning processes will be affected in different ways as a result of this strategy and therefore feel that either commissioning processes should be standardised across the council, or the action plan should outline how different commissioning teams will be affected by the strategy.

Theme 3 - Creating a Step-change in Volunteering

Objectives

- Audit and capacity building
- Council leading by example
- Developing and promoting new approaches
- Engaging with the business sector
- Co-ordination and brokerage

The objectives in this theme were validated and deemed correct by the majority of VCS stakeholders. Within the consultation questionnaire, nine in ten respondents (87%) agree these are the right objectives.

However, consideration needs to be taken as to whether the aim is to increase the quantity or quality of volunteers - or both. VCTH pointed to research conducted by the IVR which shows that the percentage of people volunteering has only varied between 39% and 44% over the last 13 years. They also feel that the council should refer to the percentage of people who regularly volunteer (29%) as the figure is representative of the experience of VCS organisations.

Participants of the VCS workshop feel auditing and capacity building is necessary, to answer questions such as *'where does volunteering happen? Who organises it across the borough? Where would people want to volunteer?'* It is important to build on volunteering services as many VCS partners rely heavily on volunteers to enable them to deliver services.

"Volunteers are the lifeblood of charities and they can bring in new ideas and energy at difficult times"

VCS stakeholder

It was suggested at the VCS workshop that the council should develop an employee volunteering strategy (Sefton Council was given as an example). However consideration of potential conflicts of interest should be gauged when council staff volunteer. Additionally, in their email to the council, VCTH recommend that the council do not allocate entire days for volunteering but a allocate a total number of hours, this would enable council employees to take up regular positions, such as becoming mentors or trustees. VCTH feels confident that *'this approach is likely to have more buy-in from VCS organisations...and also deliver greater impact'*.

Time banks were mentioned at the VCS workshop and were perceived by some as not having been successful in the past and are not necessarily recognised as volunteering. There was appetite to try new things but not at the expense of what has previously been successful. Pro-bono work was mentioned as an opportunity to get more people engaged in volunteering perhaps by developing links with trades people, those who are retired and *'men in sheds'*.

VCTH also commented that there are issues with providing monetary rewards for volunteers. Monetary incentives will be considered earnings and therefore can *'lead to significant problems for people claiming benefits and partly because they can also inadvertently create contracts and breach minimum wage legislation'*. Instead VCTH recommends that volunteers are incentivised in other ways, such as free childcare or discounts at local stores.

Participants of the VCS workshop and those who responded to the consultation questionnaire feel the business sector should contribute more to the borough in both financial and pro bono ways. SMEs need to be approached as well as large corporates. It was suggested that a networking event would be useful, and increasing resources for brokerage.

Brokerage is highly valued and there was discussion at the VCS workshop that this must be prioritised to enable a step-change to happen. It was suggested that brokers need to be involved in development of the strategy. Further promotion of brokerage services is needed to increase awareness of them. There is high demand for these services but not enough capacity to fulfil this and co-ordination of volunteering is important to avoid duplication of volunteering work. There was discussion that people are more likely to start volunteering with an advisor and online guidance is useful but should not replace face to face guidance. VCTH emphasises that they have limited funding which is soon to run out and *'so any brokerage element of the strategy would also need funding'*. VCTH also feel that for *'optimum inclusion, the brokerage service should take a number of forms, including online via the new online Volunteer Connect platform, face-to-face individual appointments with skilled advisors, and regular Volunteer Fairs'*.

There was concern among those at the VCS workshop that the strategy may focus too much on high level volunteering skills, such as joining committees and running activities in the community, rather than lower entry level volunteering skills. In particular the strategy should ensure that those with disabilities are helped to overcome issues they have, to becoming an active volunteer.

VCTH is supportive of one of the schemes underlying aims of using volunteering as a way of 'facilitating a route into employment'. However, they feel that this element of the strategy is underdeveloped. VCTH provides anecdotal evidence that groups such as those in *'long term unemployment often need lots of extra support'* and *'inevitably require face-to-face 1:1'* time with advisors. As a consequence, VCTH recommends that infrastructure funding is included in the strategy if the council wishes to achieve this aim.

Additionally, VCTH has concerns about the council providing resources for people who were brought up in the borough but do not currently live there. VCTH feel that this gives the impressions that *'you need to move out of the borough to be successful'*.

Officer's Workshop

Officers are particularly supportive of this theme. Officers are keen to support proposals that encourage volunteering within the borough. They are supportive of plans which would allow council staff to volunteer for local VCS organisations. They also welcome proposals for volunteer placements within the council. Additionally officers are positive about proposals to find innovative ways to incentivise volunteers.

There was strong support for incentivising volunteer work with some officers commenting that at the moment this is not happening at some organisations, for instance those that are not paying travel and expenses for volunteers. Some officers commented that the council should ask volunteers what they would like as a reward for volunteer work. Other officers feel that it is important to offer a range of benefits and ask them what they want.

Officers strongly feel that volunteer positions at the council should provide opportunities for people who have faced barriers in finding employment (i.e. people from disadvantaged backgrounds and people with disabilities). One officer pointed to the example of a café in the Stepney Life Centre, where they have paid staff that run the café and have trained volunteers with learning disabilities to do tasks like making sandwiches. Generally officers want the strategy to acknowledge the different levels of volunteering across Tower Hamlets.

Officers also believe that the council should look at organisations which have traditionally been very good at recruiting and managing volunteers such as religious organisations and schools.

When it came to the implementation of this part of the strategy, a number of points were raised. Officers were vocal on proposals for staff volunteering. Some officers feel that it is important to ensure that staff volunteering placements do not cause a conflict of interest with their role within the council.

Officers also recommended a number of ways which the council could promote staff volunteering. One officer suggested that the council create a number of case studies of staff members who already volunteer. Others suggest that there should be an awards ceremony for staff volunteers or this should be included as a category at the annual staff awards. The MAB felt that annual awards should tie in with existing national activities such as volunteer week. Moreover, some officers feel that the council should focus on encouraging staff volunteering for staff members who live within the borough.

Officers suggested a number of ways in which the council could create a '*step-change*' in volunteering. Some suggested that there should be a specific role within the council championing volunteering, a '*Volunteer Tsar*'. Officers from one group commented that they believe different service managers manage volunteers differently. Therefore officers also suggest that this '*Volunteer Tsar*' should also manage volunteer placements within the council and ensure that clear objectives are set and progress is monitored. However, there are concerns that officers may not have capacity to balance work commitments with volunteering commitments.

Some officers want the council to use community benefit clauses to encourage businesses to provide high skilled volunteers to local VCS organisations.

Theme 4 - Bringing Together Businesses and the Sector

Objectives

- Understand the local business environment better
- Encourage businesses to give back to the local area
- Improve the effectiveness of businesses' contribution to the borough

There was general consensus that the objectives to deliver this theme are correct. Nine in ten of those who responded to the consultation questionnaire (91%) agree these are the right objectives. The question is 'how' will this be achieved?

"This is an excellent opportunity for businesses to fund projects and ensure a gateway for talent exchange and sharing"

VCS stakeholder

There was discussion at the VCS workshop around assumptions that are sometimes made when talking about businesses as 'just the Canary Wharf types' and that SMEs and other smaller organisations are not included or thought about.

At the VCS workshop there was agreement that the council and VCS need to better understand business drivers but that businesses also need to better understand the VCS – all parties need to come to the table as 'equal players'. At present there is a 'mismatch between needs' of the VCS and businesses. There needs to be meaningful engagement and dialogue with businesses to understand how needs can be met – for example, employment. It was suggested that improving links between existing groups and stakeholders would aid this, and brokerage is vital.

There are a plethora of ways respondents to the consultation feel businesses can give back to the local area, including commercial mentoring, training and skills on specialist areas – such as finance and business acumen. They can also offer access to private wealth and opportunities to crowd source for VCS projects.

It was agreed at the VCS workshop that all kinds of businesses should be encouraged to give back to the local area but there needs to be more specific details on how this will be delivered, for example via apprenticeships, project involvement etc. There is also work to be done to match needs of businesses with needs of the local area.

VCS workshop participants feel improvements can be made to the effectiveness of businesses' contribution to the borough and that acknowledgement of corporates' who 'really give back' – such as via naming rights, awards or other recognition is important. There should be more focus on corporates having impactful involvement and support more than just 'providing of space' or 'painting a wall'. The feedback from MAB indicates that there is also keenness to encourage businesses away from supplying volunteers for wall painting.

There was discussion that some who work in Canary Wharf perceive Tower Hamlets just as the 'home of Canary Wharf' and not a 'residential borough'. It was suggested that businesses need to be supplied with demographic and social profiling information about Tower Hamlets so they can better understand how they can contribute to the VCS and to their own CSR commitments.

It was mentioned that 'softer measures' of effectiveness such as community benefit, social value and SROI should also be included in evaluation.

Officer's Workshop

Officers are supportive of this theme's objectives. Officers welcome proposals to use community benefit clauses in all council contracts commenting that this is happening already. Officers are also happy to use business rates as a way to incentivise business to give back to the local community.

Officers also want to broaden the range of VCS organisations that big businesses are willing to support. Some officers feel that the council should encourage businesses to fulfil their Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) commitments across the borough, not just simply in the '*shadow of the towers*'. Other officers commented that businesses' CSR activities tend to focus on young people, skills and education, but support is needed for a wider variety of projects.

Officers feel that there are a number of outstanding issues with CSR commitments. Officers feel that many businesses prefer to fulfil their CSR commitments over the course of single day but they would like to see businesses make a more sustained commitment to the borough. It was highlighted that businesses often want to send employees to '*paint a wall or plant a tree*', but back office, board level and strategic support would be more useful.

Officers feel that the strategy should distinguish between businesses of different sizes. Officers support proposals to engage all kinds of businesses commenting that SMEs can bring different kinds of support to the VCS.

Officers also discussed ways in which the council could facilitate dialogue between businesses and the VCS. Others commented that different departments have their own individual contacts for businesses. Officers also supported the use of brokerage organisations and want to work more closely with these organisations to build relationships with businesses. Feedback from MAB indicates that it is important for the council to build a relationship with corporates and SMEs in the borough on issues relating to businesses.

In order to facilitate the dialogue between the VCS, Tower Hamlets Council and businesses, some officers feel there should be a central role in the council to co-ordinate dialogue. Others felt that it is necessary for the council to use a contact.

Some officers feel that the council is not monitoring whether businesses complete their CSR commitments systematically. They feel that the councils should build capacity to ensure that these commitments are met and that action should be taken if they are not.

Business Focus Group

As well as covering the theme of 'bringing together businesses and the sector' within the VCS, Council Officer and MAB workshops (and within the consultation questionnaire), the council also held a focus group with business contacts to discuss the action plan to deliver this theme. This session focussed mainly on the actions relating to theme four, but participants were also invited to give views on the other three themes.

General Observations

It was commented that it is difficult to engage business in conversations about their work in the community.

It was mentioned that it would be useful to see a definition of what the council means by businesses. *"What kinds of businesses is Tower Hamlets Council referring to...there is a huge variety of business within the borough from the very big corporate companies to small local enterprises?"*

It was recommended the council establish a tasking and finishing group on the strategy, with representatives from the council, local VCS and businesses of different sizes to enable on-going engagement and involvement in the delivery of the strategy.

Themes 1, 2 & 3

It was questioned how the actions within the strategy could fit with regeneration opportunities. It was suggested that there was lots of potential to capitalise on regeneration by linking this to VCS activity.

It was also asked how the VCS strategy links with the new strategy towards community centres, and it was noted that community centres are important for residents as they have services embedded in familiar areas.

It was commented that small charities struggle in a number of ways; mainly as a result of governance requirements for funding. Also some organisations may lose out as a result of this strategy because the needs they address do not *'tick all the boxes'*, or as an organisation they don't meet all the criteria the council has set out. It was commented that smaller organisations (grass roots) miss out on social investment money because they don't charge for services or make any money. The MAB shares these views and recommends that smaller organisations should be supported in accessing funding, and be provided specialist help where necessary.

With regard to enabling a step-change in volunteering, there are sometime issues with volunteers being *'whisked away'* on training courses after an organisation has trained them up. The loss of these volunteers has a detrimental impact on organisations and there needs to be consideration of this issue.

There was positive comment about place-based community leadership, with a feeling that this will lead to regeneration, social cohesion and better engagement between the council and residents. However, it was commented that in order for the council to develop place-based community leadership they will have to build the capacity of VCS community organisations. Leaders of local groups will be *'taken away from the frontline'* in order to partner-up to deliver services. The council will have to help these organisations fill the void and may even have to pay these leaders.

In relation the objective of developing a joint evidence base it was commented that East End Community Foundation (EECF) undertake community research, where they use accessible government data and then consult VCS organisations on the results. This research often finds disparity between the data and the views of local VCS organisations for example, the borough could be rated very highly in terms of economic prosperity owing to Canary Wharf, but rated poor by VCS organisations because of their view of local communities and deprivation. This research is useful as businesses are interested in the anecdotal evidence as well as hard data.

Theme Four – Bringing together businesses and the sector

Objective 1: Understand the local business environment better

Proposed Actions:

- A. Build an understanding of what VCS funding or activity companies want to undertake and their funding methods and determine the impact areas that different businesses concentrate on and where there is a local focus. Use this to assist VCS organisations to lever support from the private sector and diversify its funding streams.
- B. Undertake an audit of VCS organisations to get a clear understanding of the range and value of CSR activity in the borough and map it.
- C. Establish pathways of exchange between the VCS and corporate sector to offer long term and meaningful support to the VCS.
- D. Create an online portal or business/VCS directory to facilitate a strategic partnership between businesses and the VCS

With regard to the types of activities companies want to undertake, there is often a huge disparity between what VCS organisations need and what businesses want and are willing to give. It was mentioned that generally businesses like to fulfil their CSR commitments through volunteering and they are very willing to offer time and resources but they want to do volunteer work that matches the skills of their employees. There is also a challenge in being able to offer volunteer opportunities which only last for a few hours at a time – as this is all businesses may be able to offer.

‘Train the Trainer’ was mentioned as a successful model for providing skills based volunteer positions. An example was given of professionals teaching youth workers relevant skills such as accounting and strategic business advice.

It was commented that businesses do not generally base their CSR work on the needs of a given area. Instead their head office (often outside the UK) will give direction to this type of work and it may not necessarily address the needs of the local community. Some large visible businesses are also hesitant about support of ‘controversial’ schemes such as the rehabilitation of drug addicts.

In relation to creating a ‘pathways of exchange’ between the VCS and corporates, it was discussed that businesses want less contact with VCS organisations, as a result of being inundated with requests from charities and that there is a move towards use of brokerage services. Businesses want the organisation of their CSR work to be ‘neater’.

“Rich Mix” (a charity and social enterprise) was given as a good example of an organisation that is successful at securing business support by being flexible to how businesses wish to provide support.

There was considerable discussion about the action to develop an online portal. It was felt that this may be unlikely to work; *“I’ve never seen an online portal that has worked”* as checking such a tool would be low priority for businesses. However, there was a suggestion that an app may be more appropriate, especially for SMEs, and that the council could work with a local start-up tech company to develop this and find innovative ways of making it work. It was felt that there needs to be consideration over the type of information that is given on an online portal and further understanding of what charities need from businesses and what businesses can give.

Objective 2: Encouraging Businesses to give back to the local area

- A. Develop a Business-VCS Agreement which recognises business needs from their social investment, encourages local businesses to adopt a place based approach to providing support to the VCS; articulates a shared vision of what business citizenship will look like; and ways that corporate investment in public services will be used to meet needs in the borough
- B. Utilise community benefit clauses in all Council contracts in order to lever additional support for VCS organisations in the borough and the local community and economy.
- C. Review use of business rates/reductions to incentivise activity to support and develop the capacity of small VCS organisations.

There was discussion that a Business-VCS Agreement would need to be a high level vision style of agreement rather than something more prescriptive due to the nature of needs being very different across businesses and VCS organisations.

All participants supported the use of community benefit clauses and business rates as leverage to encourage businesses to provide support for the local VCS.

One suggestion to encourage businesses to give back to the area was to provide them with a good PR story. It was also suggested that it might be beneficial to provide awards for businesses and hold an awards ceremony, which would provide publicity for medium size businesses.

A pilot programme in Hackney called 'Hackney Giving' was given as a good model for encouraging businesses to give back. This project allows anyone to donate to a fund that is then distributed to small local organisations. Businesses benefit by being allowed to have board members that decide on the allocation of grants. There is a 'Tower Hamlets Giving' planned to launch later in this year.

It was said that larger VCS organisations and larger businesses are moving away from providing support for Tower Hamlets and moving into neighbouring boroughs such as Hackney. Generally, they feel that Tower Hamlets is 'saturated' with volunteers and the VCS sector in Tower Hamlets does not currently have capacity to place the high numbers of volunteers available (especially from large corporates in the borough).

Objective 3: Improve the effectiveness of business contributions

- A. Develop a toolkit to promote CSR in the borough and support mutually beneficial relationships between the business sector and VCS. This includes the development of a comprehensive needs assessment which is updated regularly to identify need in the borough. Promote this to CSR leaders in Canary Wharf and the City Fringe
- B. Engage with businesses and the VCS, to map activity against need, to influence business spend and activity, avoid duplication and ensure as wide a range of groups as possible, benefit from the resources available.

It was felt that these actions apply more to small and medium businesses, as larger businesses have already assessed where the need is and what they want to do. It was thought by one participant that small businesses are best suited to provide local VCS organisations with support because they often made up of local people and therefore see the benefit for themselves.

It was said that the challenge is not about finding where the need for support in the borough is located when it comes to large corporates, but rather finding a common point on the need and what the business is willing to offer. It is difficult to get businesses to change their entire CSR strategy, instead the focus is to try and shift this slightly more in line with the needs in the community.

One participant explained that her organisation concentrates on securing endowment funding, as this is a more sustainable way to improve the effectiveness of business contributions. Corporate CSR change focus regularly, therefore funding for one project can stop if this is no longer deemed suited to the new CSR programme. Endowments commit businesses to providing larger pots of money to a project (or projects) which run over the course of several years providing the VCS greater sustainability.

It was commented that one of the skills businesses do not have which would benefit the local VCS is fundraising. Businesses do not need to fundraise and so they do not have members of staff which can provide this kind of training. It was commented that small VCS organisations need personalised training on fundraising. They need general principles and then advisors who can tailor this advice to their organisations specific situation.

Delivering the Strategy

Support the council can offer

Respondents to the consultation were asked to think about what support the council could offer the VCS to support delivery of the strategy. This related to training, resources and data sources. An overarching theme which ran through the findings was the need for a central website where information can be easily accessed in one place. The MAB also recommend that the council should make sure that the VCS has a central resource online that shows them grants and other funding from all organisations and not just the council.

The consultation questionnaire offered respondents a list of types of support council can offer. The table below lists these in order of priority.

Q25. What kinds of support do you think the VCS will need to help deliver the VCS Strategy?

Support	Percent	Count
Providing support to obtain non-council funding	80%	36
Supporting the sector to retain premises and resources in a difficult financial climate, utilising mechanisms such as the ability to protect Assets of Community Value	69%	31
Encouraging VCS organisations to innovate in how they generate income	67%	30
Providing training in a range of areas	67%	30
“Skilling up” VCS organisations in bidding for and taking on commissioned services	62%	28
Providing governance advice	51%	23
Ensuring VCS organisations are digitally engaged	49%	22
Providing information and advice on mentoring	47%	21
Embedding business planning to ensure that VCS services are resilient and less reliant on funding from the council	44%	20
Other (please write in)	11%	5
Total		45

At the VCS workshop it was suggested the council could support voluntary sector groups by giving support, advice and practical information on relevant data for example, to support fundraising. But at present VCS colleagues are unsure who they could ask for to gain access to relevant data within the council. It was suggested a ‘single point of contact’ needs to be put in place and that the council must be responsive to requests.

The council can also help by creating documents such as FAQs, templates and guides, facilitating networking and enabling connections to be made through channels such as email, Twitter and other social media.

There was considerable discussion about how the council can support the VCS in securing physical space for activities to take place. It was mentioned that VCS colleagues need to be able to access space at schools and on housing estates. It was mentioned that the council ‘needs to work with developers to ensure there is space for the VCS’ in their developments and the council needs to be ‘more rigorous in policing Planning’ to ensure space can be provided for the VCS. It was also mentioned that there needs to be more transparency on how the council works with business to rent out space.

It was felt that the council can support the VCS by keeping ‘*money in the borough*’ by giving commissions to local VCS organisations over outside contractors ‘*as much as possible*’.

The council can support with training and this was felt to be especially important where organisations have been commissioned for specific vulnerable groups such as those with mental health issues. Data about these groups is ‘*invaluable and needs to be accessible to the right people*’.

There was also discussion about how training will be delivered. The VCS have different needs depending on sector, level of current knowledge and skills and so a ‘*one size fits all*’ approach will not work.

With regard to specific data sources, a whole range of information was mentioned as being useful and there was recognition that a lot of this information is probably available somewhere but the difficulty is finding it. Organisations need data to plan where to put their resources. Examples include JSNA, data on older people activities, IMD data, GIS mapping and hot-spotting.

The consultation questionnaire offered respondents a list of types data the council can offer. The table below lists these in order of priority.

Q26. And, what information do you think will be useful for the VCS in delivering the VCS Strategy?

Data	Percent	Count
Health and mental health data	89%	40
Community safety e.g. crime, domestic violence etc	71%	32
Income deprivation data	67%	30
Education data - e.g. attainment, exclusions etc.	62%	28
Employment data	60%	27
Locality of other local services and provision	60%	27
Social work contacts and other	58%	26
Ward based data	58%	26
Housing needs data	47%	21
Other	16%	7
Total		45

Generally comments were made about the need to make data accessible by having statistics and numbers presented in things such as videos, presentations and infographics. Sport England was mentioned as a good example of where this kind of information is available.

THCVS feel that there are many ways in which the council could provide ‘*soft*’ support for the local VCS including safeguarding training, DBS checks and sharing expertise in areas such as insurance.

Support the VCS can offer

Following on from the discussion about support the council can offer, VCS workshop participants were then asked to discuss how the VCS can support delivery of the strategy. A lot of the conversation at the VCS workshop was focussed on the local intelligence and links the VCS has, and how this will be vital in making the strategy a success. Working in 'true partnership' with the council and among VCS where there is 'equality' across is also deemed important.

The consultation questionnaire offered respondents a list of types of support the VCS can offer. The table below lists these in order of priority.

Q27. And, thinking about your organisation or yourself as an individual, what support do you think you can provide to help deliver the VCS Strategy?

Answers	Percent	Count
Offer volunteering opportunities	69%	31
Have meaningful engagement with residents	64%	29
Deliver projects to enhance community cohesion and other challenges that face a changing community	62%	28
Offer word of mouth publicity	53%	24
Deliver services	53%	24
Offer training	49%	22
Offer meeting room/venue spaces	47%	21
Constructively challenge the Council	40%	18
Deliver employability projects	31%	14
Offer employment opportunities	29%	13
Deliver social mobility projects	27%	12
Support and facilitate the setting up of consortiums who can collectively bid against external national organisations for local contracts	27%	12
Donations/fundraising	16%	7
Brokerage services	16%	7
Supply office equipment	11%	5
Other	13%	6
Total		45

Participants of the VCS workshop discussed that the VCS should share knowledge on how to find space, income and resources as well community intelligence. It should also be more open to sharing resources (i.e. office space) and being 'selfless' as opposed to 'selfish'. Peer to peer training among VCS partners was thought to be a good idea but there were questions as to whether this is realistic given resource restrictions. It was asked if larger VCS organisations and businesses could support this. The sector should also be more open in sharing 'lessons learned' where things have been successful as well as unsuccessful.

It was discussed that the VCS can help run community campaigns that will reach groups the council would not otherwise be able to access. It was suggested that a community networking breakfast launch event would be a useful way to bring VCS colleagues and the council together at the start of the strategy.

VCS organisation can help community cohesion and engagement but they require resources and training to enable this. The VCS can also create unique interventions based on their insight on what works with particular

groups and it was mentioned that the council could commission the VCS to carry out pilots, research and gather evidence on their behalf.

The VCS can also offer opportunities for council staff to work/experience the 'coal face' so they better understand service users and VCS partners. It was suggested that this could be part of the council's induction process. The VCS can also offer a lot in terms of constructive criticism to the council, but there is a need for effective communication channels to enable this, which are not currently in place.

Grants Criteria

Respondents to the consultation were asked to consider what criteria that could be used to determine when an organisation should remain grant funded.

The suggestions which were gathered via the consultation questionnaire include:

Criteria	Percent	Count
Support small VCS organisations	29%	9
A track record of success/impact	19%	6
Support local needs	16%	5
Builds capacity	13%	4
Responds to new needs	13%	4
Supports vulnerable ethnic groups	13%	4
Finances pilot projects/innovation	10%	3
Criteria proportionate to the grant	3%	1
Total		31

Participants of the VCS workshop felt any strategy for grant funding should be *'dynamic, not static and not same old'*. Grants were deemed to be the most appropriate way to fund new, innovative and pilot projects where outcomes are not yet known and cannot be predicted. Transport was mentioned across some groups as being a possible service which could remain grant funded. This is a vital service and is often a problem for VCS organisations.

One group at the VCS workshop discussed grant giving as being *'more beneficial for local, informed and knowledgeable groups'*. It was felt that this funding stream is preferable to commissioning when national and bigger organisations may be at an advantage due to capacity. There was also discussion about grant funding being better for *'small things on-going'*. Grant giving as opposed to commissioning was also suggested to be *'better to deliver the community plan and can engage more local people'*.

Grants were deemed appropriate for VCS organisations that struggle to find funding elsewhere (in particular infrastructure charities) and that grant funding could be awarded to sustain existing services such as those related to education and cohesion.

It was suggested that the council could facilitate the creation of a panel of local representatives to enable participatory budgeting for grant funding. There was also some discussion that the awarding of grants could be devolved to the CVS as this is an *'apolitical'* organisation. The Big Lottery model was given as a good example of grant giving which give groups the opportunity/support to build a good business case.

There was a question about whether criteria for grant funding needs to be divided by sector or ward and that there is a need for *'clearer rationale for how funding is divided'*.

There was also a suggestion that VCS organisations who hold *'vast amounts of grant funding in their coffers'* could share this in a co-operative approach. *'Are the sector willing to share resources?'*

There was a general theme across the discussion about improving knowledge across the council and sector about different types of funding. It was suggested that the *'third sector team need strategic knowledge about other funding and local funding'*. Also, different departments within the council need to be clearer on the difference

between grant funding and commissioning. It was felt that sharing good practice around grant making needs to be encouraged and regular network meetings on grants, to share external funding ideas and collaboration, would be useful.

THCVS, in an open letter to the council, expressed concern about a move from grants based funding, arguing that this typified an underlying narrative that the council's financial support for the strategy will be reduced over the course of the strategy. They are concerned about charities struggling to compete with provide sector service providers and are also concerned a drop in funding along with parallel proposal which would see council spaces being rented out to non-profits at market rates. THCVS called for an impact assessment of the changes on the VCS and the council.

THCVS also feel that a move to commissioning will have more of an effect on small organisations. As a consequence, they would like to see more information on proposals which would allow small organisations the opportunity to apply for commissions in consortia.

Community Benefit

Respondents to the consultation were asked to consider what criteria could be used to define 'community benefit'.

The list of suggestions collected within the consultation questionnaire are listed below in order of frequency. Please note the total number of responses is higher than the number of respondents - as several criteria could be suggested by each respondent.

Criteria	Percent	Count
Current/local use	19%	23
Need	17%	20
Vulnerable groups	15%	18
Impact/outcome	9%	11
Health and wellbeing	8%	9
Volunteering/training	5%	6
Younger/children	5%	6
Smaller VCS	4%	5
Older people	0%	0
Total responses		119

There was a suggestion at the VCS workshop that a community benefit should be something that is '*improving the strength of the local community*' and concentrates on strengths not weaknesses. Local providers who have a good understanding of local needs and are providing a good service, should remain in place.

There was discussion about civic pride, and activities which engender this, being used to define community benefit. Examples of this included initiatives that will '*clean up the area such as picking up rubbish and litter, clearing graffiti*' and encouraging others to take pride in local area.

Other community benefit criteria suggested included promotion of 'health and wellbeing of users', the extent to which the service or provision enables volunteering, if it promotes social value and SROI (for example, if you get someone into work, who was previously unemployed, you are saving the state money and helping the individual). There was also suggestion that the council should assess the availability of similar services in the local area and identify gaps which need to be filled. Maslow's Hierarchy of need was also suggested as a useful framework for assessing community benefit.

It was suggested that the council could facilitate the creation of a panel of local representatives - residents/stakeholders/businesses to work with council to make decisions on community benefit.

There was recognition that renting of council buildings should take place on a formal basis, and that these agreements need to be transparent. However, there is concern about costs increasing. There was discussion about the council's Community Buildings Strategy and what the emerging recommendations are within this. Some also felt that discounts for the use of council community buildings should be limited to smaller VCS organisations, as larger national non-profits are better placed to pay market rates for workspaces in comparison to small local third sector organisations.

It was also suggested that the council look at how other local authorities measure this such as Hackney, Haringey, Newham, tri-borough and others outside of London.

Equalities

There wasn't particular concern that any one group within the nine protected characteristics would be negatively impacted by the VCS strategy but at the VCS workshop there were more general conversations about how the approach may or may not work for some groups in certain circumstances.

Within the consultation questionnaire, respondents were asked to choose, from a prompted list, any demographic groups within the nine protected characteristics, whom they felt may be impacted by the strategy.

Group	Percent	Count
None of these	52%	15
Age	34%	10
Disability	34%	10
Religion or belief – this includes lack of belief	31%	9
Race – this includes ethnic or national origins, colour or nationality	28%	8
Gender reassignment	24%	7
Pregnancy and maternity	24%	7
Sexual orientation	24%	7
Sex	21%	6
Marriage and civil partnership (but only in respect of eliminating unlawful discrimination)	17%	5
Total		29

It was discussed at the VCS workshop that a *'payment by results approach'* can exclude some of the most vulnerable groups due to them being *'hard to reach'*. There needs to be a balance between outputs and outcomes, outreach and engagement. It was suggested that having a variety of grants and commissioning would enable the VCS to reach all communities.

There were also questions about how the strategy will impact on groups such as those with mental health problems, dementia, ESOL, the homeless, those in temporary accommodation and transient populations – like immigrants and asylum seekers.

There was some discussion around the definition of *'protected'* characteristics, how this is defined and what the legal requirements are. It was suggested that training and information on equality would be beneficial and that data on issues of inequality could help identify gaps in services.

It was suggested the council conduct a Joint Strategic Needs Assessment and focus grants and commissioned services based on the issues raised within this (it was noted that the current JSNA might be sufficient to do this). The groups also discussed that equalities data needs to be collected and shared within the sector as this kind of information is not always gathered due to lack of understanding of the importance of it

Other Feedback

THCVS made a number of suggestions that did not fit within the broad themes laid out by the strategy. These views are listed below:

- They would like the strategy to address communications and detail specific actions (developed with the sector) to improve communications.
- They want to see a commitment in the strategy to reviewing the Tower Hamlets Compact and implementing or improving structures to ensure that the council and the VCS jointly hold each other to account over the implementation of the Compact.
- They would like the “role of the VCS” section to also describe the role of the VCS as a deliverer of services
- The THCVS would like to change the sentences ‘THCVS has said that it plans to broaden its funding mix in an effort to reduce long-term reliance on funding from the council and thus become more self-sustaining. It has also committed to expanding its membership by offering an attractive range of membership services.’ To ‘THCVS plans to broaden its funding mix in order to ensure that it is sustainable into the future and is committed to increasing its membership.’

Appendices

1. Questionnaire Results

Q1. Are you responding to this consultation...?

Value	Percent	Count
As an individual	27%	15
On behalf of an organisation	73%	41
Total		56

Q2. And in what capacity are you responding as?

Value	Percent	Count
Resident	47%	7
Worker in the area	53%	8
Total		15

Q3. And in what capacity are you responding as? Please tick one box only.

Value	Percent	Count
VCS representative/organisation	73%	30
Business owner/representative	7%	3
Other	20%	8
Total		41

Q4. What is the name of your business?

Value	Percent	Count
Mudchute Park & Farm	33	1
Tower Hamlets Community Transport	33	1
Home care service provider	33	1
Total		3

Q5. How many employees does your business have including yourself? Please tick one box only.

Value	Percent	Count
3 to 5	33%	1
50 to 100	33%	1
Don't know	33%	1
Total		3

Q6. Where does your business operate? Please tick all that apply.

Value	Percent	Count
Tower Hamlets	100%	3
London wide	33%	1
Total		3

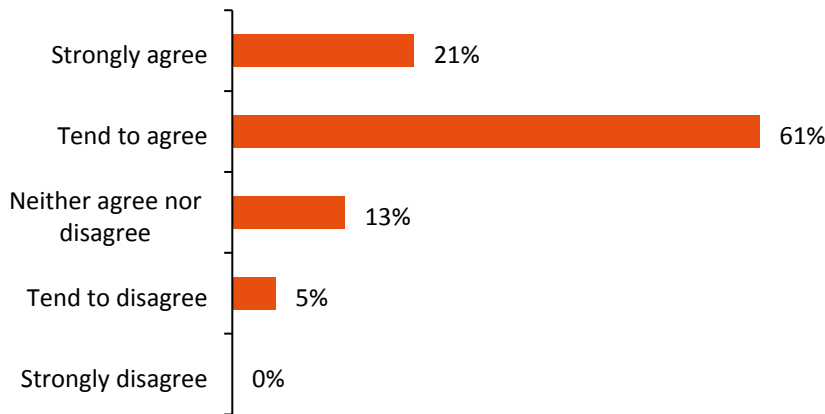
Q8. What type of VCS organisation are you responding as/representing?

Value	Percent	Count
Registered charity	87%	26
Community group	3%	1
Faith organisation	3%	1
Housing Association	3%	1
Other	3%	1
Total		30

Theme 1: Promoting co-production and sustainability

Respondents were asked to validate whether the objectives within this theme are correct to help deliver co-production and sustainability and whether there were changes needed or additional objectives which should be considered.

Q9. To what extent do you agree or disagree that these are the right objectives to help promote co-production and sustainability?



Source: 56 respondents to the online questionnaire for the draft VCS Strategy consultation, 14 January to 10 February 2016

The vast majority of respondents agree that these are the right objectives (82%). The common reasons given for this are detailed in the table below:

Q10. Why do you say that?

Answer	No. of comments	Themes
Agree	46	Endorsing objectives/sensible/good ideas Supportive working collaboration with council/other VCS organisation Supportive of proposals to build VCS capacity
Neither	7	General support but some concerns Concern about the capacity/skill level of VCS currently Need more details
Disagree	3	Concern that VCS organisations have projects that meet council needs Ethnic diversity
Total	56	

Q11. Which objectives do you think will most help support this theme?

Objective	Percent	Count
Build VCS and community capacity	75%	40
Review strategies, policies, service specifications and action plans	53%	28
Move to collaborative commissioning	51%	27
Develop an evidence base together	45%	24
Develop Place-Based Community Leadership	45%	24
Total		53

Source: 53 respondents to the online questionnaire for the draft VCS Strategy consultation, 14 January to 10 February 2016

The most important objectives to deliver this theme are thought to be 'Build VCS and community capacity' and 'Move to collaborative commissioning'. When asked if any objectives are missing eight respondents offered suggestions, these listed in the table below:

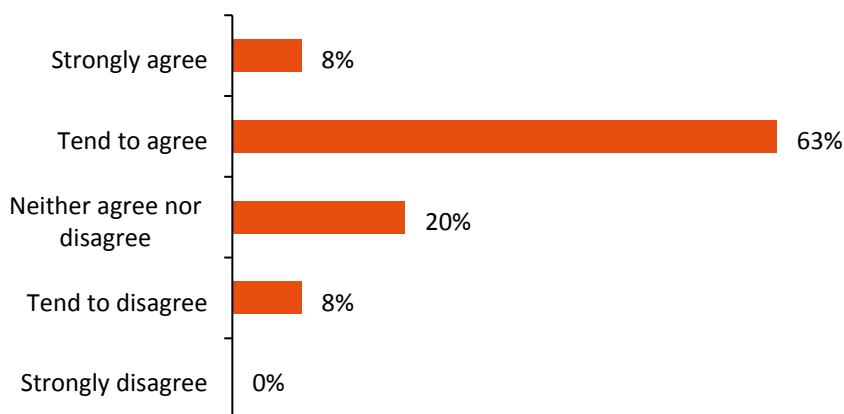
Q12. Are there any other objectives you think are missing?

Answers (15)
Brokerage for corporate giving for small charities
Community of Tower Hamlets has changed during last couple of years and existing strategies, policies, service specifications and action plans required to be reviewed to provide appropriate and adequate services.
Enabling survivors of abuse to access local services in the borough particularly around health and wellbeing
Help build a cohesive and fairer society
I feel there needs to be a more specific objective about identifying joint targets so that core budgets are channelled towards local objectives rather than just commissioned services
I think impact on the environment and outdoor spaces should also be considered. With overcrowding a major issue within Tower Hamlets, this should also be considered.
Joint working is vital. Local people require locally based buildings in which to meet and deliver responses to their needs,
Providing accommodation for VCS Organisations in Council Premises at an affordable/community rent. Supporting VCS Organisations towards core operational costs. Continuing the support to small volunteer led VCS Organisations through grant making, who are not able to bid for commissioning.

Something about dealing with sustainability in the face of the problems of pensions that the majority of VCS organisations will face in the next year or two
Something around innovation and flexibility
The following can be phrased in a better way but here is the gist. Attract external funding to support VCS to continue to deliver service while trying out new models of work. This can go under one of the objectives but we think this should be a separate objective as there are many external funding Opportunities that the council as a lead partner can tap into. Another suggestion for a objective is to 'Adopt and implement a code of conduct/ethics to ensure transparency in allocating funding/commissioning'. In recent times, it has become questionable how or why funding has been allocated to a particular group. It is essential that the council brings back a culture of transparency and integrity in allocating funding.
The old way when you could apply directly to the council for funding was easier because it required less administrative time. It is of course desirable for organisations to work together, but it would be helpful to acknowledge and take into consideration the fact that time spent on administrative work is taken away from actual community work.
To achieve co-production there needs to be the opportunity to scrutinise council run operations to understand, for example, if some services would be better run by the VCS or the independent sector, if there are opportunities for further collaboration or for the council to purchase more from the voluntary organisations and social enterprises.
To inform more funding opportunity for community organisation and help capacity building and sustainability.
To mention young and vulnerable people

Respondents were asked to validate whether the objectives within this theme are correct to help deliver maximum value from resources and whether there were changes needed or additional objectives which should be considered.

Q13. To what extent do you agree or disagree that these are the right objectives to enable maximum value to be gained from resources?



Source: 49 respondents to the online questionnaire for the draft VCS Strategy consultation, 14 January to 10 February 2016

The majority of respondents agree that these are the right objectives (71%). The common reasons given for this are detailed in the table below:

Q14. Why do you think that?

Answer	No. of comments	Themes
Agree	35	Endorsing objectives/sensible/good ideas Support for objectives (i.e. more accountability) but concern the VCS won't have capacity
Neither	10	Will negatively affect small charities Commissions aren't good at responding to emerging needs
Disagree	4	Large charities benefit where as small charities lose out Market rates will negatively affect small organisations
Total	49	

Q15. Which objectives do you think will most help support this theme?

Objective	Percent	Count
Build the capacity of the VCS	66%	31
Encourage resource sharing within the sector	57%	27
Take a strategic approach to council resourcing across the VCS	47%	22
Promote transparency and accountability of the VCS	43%	20
Take a new approach to grant giving	30%	14
Move to an outcome based and commissioned approach	15%	7
Total		47

Source: 47 respondents to the online questionnaire for the draft VCS Strategy consultation, 14 January to 10 February 2016

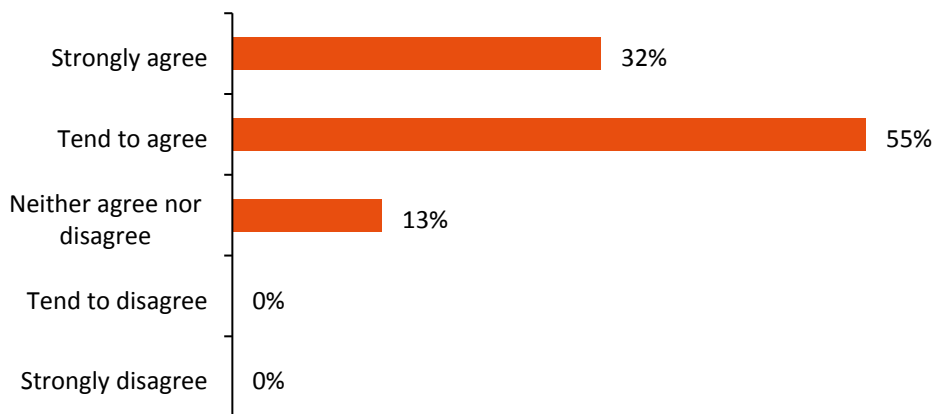
The most important objectives to deliver this theme are thought to be 'Encourage resource sharing within the sector' and 'Build capacity of the VCS'. When asked if any objectives are missing eight respondents offered suggestions, these listed in the table below:

Q16. Are there any other objectives you think are missing?

Possibly including service user involvement, as a means to maximising the resources.
Promote Community Cohesion through support for marginalise ethnic voluntary and community groups.
Sustaining the support to small volunteer led VCS Organisations through grant making.
To make sure that there is a fair representation in the make-up of VCS.
While transparency is needed for VCS, it is also needed from council's side- otherwise the model will not work.

Respondents were asked to validate whether the objectives within this theme are correct to help enable a step change in volunteering and whether there were changes needed or additional objectives which should be considered.

Q17. To what extent do you agree or disagree that these are the right objective to enable a step-change in volunteering?



Source: 47 respondents to the online questionnaire for the draft VCS Strategy consultation, 14 January to 10 February 2016

The vast majority of respondents agree that these are the right objectives (83%). The common reasons given for this are detailed in the table below:

Q18. Why do you say that?

Answer	No. of comments	Themes
Agree	29	Endorsing objectives/sensible/good ideas Importance of volunteering Capacity build the VCS to enable this
Neither	2	Need to be more specific on how this will be achieved Volunteering policy across the council would be useful
Disagree	0	n/a
Total	31	

Q19. Which objectives do you think will most help support this theme?

Objective	Percent	Count
Developing and promoting new approaches	70%	33
Engaging with the business sector	66%	31
Co-ordination and brokerage	57%	27
Council leading by example	55%	26
Audit and capacity building	40%	19
Total		47

Source: 47 respondents to the online questionnaire for the draft VCS Strategy consultation, 14 January to 10 February 2016

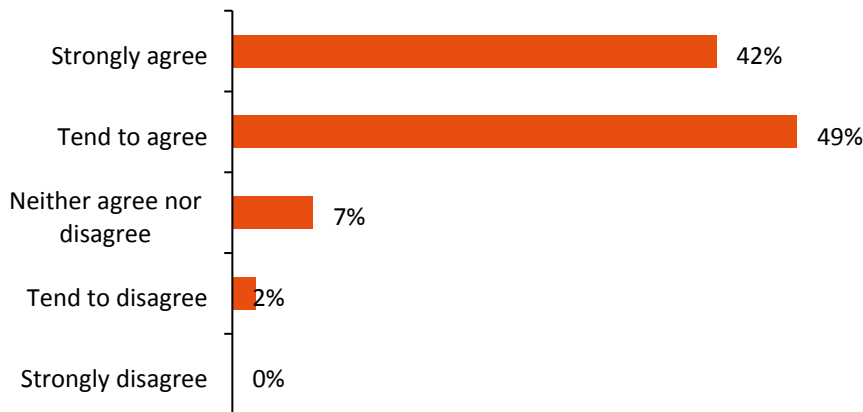
The most important objectives to deliver this theme are thought to be ‘Developing and promoting new approaches’ and ‘Council leading by example’. When asked if any objectives are missing eight respondents offered suggestions, these listed in the table below:

Q20. Are there any other objectives you think are missing?

Answers (8)
Brokerage to lever in funds to support organisations to financial self-sufficiency
Linking up to paid work
Meaningful recognition and acknowledgement
Promote volunteering in schools and colleges.
Replicate best practice models of engaging/supporting volunteers
Supporting VCS Organisations towards core operational costs.
They need to be SMARTER. Due to the high concentration of the BMER specifically Asian community in tower hamlets the need to represent them in volunteer roles should be reflected in the objectives
Volunteering to be promoted and given as much importance as work experience.

Respondents were asked to validate whether the objectives within this theme are correct to help bring businesses and the sector together and whether there were changes needed or additional objectives which should be considered.

Q21. To what extent do you agree or disagree that these are the right objectives to help bring businesses and the sector together?



Source: 45 respondents to the online questionnaire for the draft VCS Strategy consultation, 14 January to 10 February 2016

The vast majority of respondents agree that these are the right objectives (91%). The common reasons given for this are detailed in the table below:

Q22. Why do you say that?

Answer	No. of comments	Themes
Agree	23	Endorsing objectives/sensible/good ideas This should help connect small VCS organisations and businesses Need to bring businesses closer to the local community positive impact of business/what can they deliver Get smaller SMEs involved
Neither	2	Not effective. Unsure how this can be introduced, maintained or enforced.
Disagree	0	n/a
Total	25	

Q23. Which objectives do you think will most help support this theme?

Objective	Percent	Count
Improve the effectiveness of businesses' contribution to the borough	77%	34
Encourage businesses to give back to the local area	66%	29
Understand the local business environment better	41%	18
Total		44

Source: 44 respondents to the online questionnaire for the draft VCS Strategy consultation, 14 January to 10 February 2016

The most important objectives to deliver this theme are thought to be 'Improve the effectiveness of businesses' contribution to the borough' and 'Encourage businesses to give back to the local area'. When asked if any objectives are missing 11 respondents offered suggestions, which are listed in the table below.

Q24. Are there any other objectives you think are missing?

Answers (12)
Broker relationships between business and the community
Business people might be interested in community work
Businesses need to be flexible to support local organisations and not just focuses on thier csr strategy aims.
CSR-ensuring local businesses giving back by signing up to a borough wide CSR strategy with specific targets. This should be embedded
Encourage VCS to develop social enterprise approaches that can be supported by business both in terms of skills, social loan investment and supporting local suppliers (social enterprises and businesses) E.G. could be buying services from a social enterprise, products etc.
Give something back to them as suggestions above!

perhaps adding something about developing local supply chains between businesses and self-employed residents/Social enterprises
Provide skills to businesses so they better understand their local community and the way it works, rather than think up solutions in their offices and then launch them on the local community.
Supporting VCS Organisations to make bids in partnership with other Organisations.
Those businesses that are large cooperation - and bank branches are the ones that need to invest in local schools, projects, youth groups. Opportunities need to be provided to all - mainly those of the younger generation and those trying to enhance upon their skills and learn more.
Yes you can encourage and understand until the cows come home, you have to make the process easy for them. This takes a huge amount of resource and brokerage

Respondents to the survey were asked to pick from a list the kinds of support needed by the VCS. The table below lists these in order of priority.

Q25. What kinds of support do you think the VCS will need to help deliver the VCS Strategy?

Support	Percent	Count
Providing support to obtain non-council funding	80%	36
Supporting the sector to retain premises and resources in a difficult financial climate, utilising mechanisms such as the ability to protect Assets of Community Value	69%	31
Encouraging VCS organisations to innovate in how they generate income	67%	30
Providing training in a range of areas	67%	30
“Skilling up” VCS organisations in bidding for and taking on commissioned services	62%	28
Providing governance advice	51%	23
Ensuring VCS organisations are digitally engaged	49%	22
Providing information and advice on mentoring	47%	21
Embedding business planning to ensure that VCS services are resilient and less reliant on funding from the council	44%	20
Other (please write in)	11%	5
Total		45

As well as being asked about the types of support the VCS needs, respondents were also asked which types of data would be useful for the VCS.

Q26. And, what information do you think will be useful for the VCS in delivering the VCS Strategy?

Data	Percent	Count
Health and mental health data	89%	40
Community safety e.g. crime, domestic violence etc	71%	32
Income deprivation data	67%	30
Education data - e.g. attainment, exclusions etc.	62%	28
Employment data	60%	27
Locality of other local services and provision	60%	27
Social work contacts and other	58%	26
Ward based data	58%	26
Housing needs data	47%	21
Other	16%	7
Total		45

When asked with a prompted list the kinds of support the VCS can offer, the top things mentioned were volunteering opportunities and enabling meaningful engagement with residents.

Q27. And, thinking about your organisation or yourself as an individual, what support do you think you can provide to help deliver the VCS Strategy?

Answers	Percent	Count
Offer volunteering opportunities	69%	31
Have meaningful engagement with residents	64%	29
Deliver projects to enhance community cohesion and other challenges that face a changing community	62%	28
Offer word of mouth publicity	53%	24
Deliver services	53%	24
Offer training	49%	22
Offer meeting room/venue spaces	47%	21
Constructively challenge the Council	40%	18
Deliver employability projects	31%	14
Offer employment opportunities	29%	13
Deliver social mobility projects	27%	12
Support and facilitate the setting up of consortiums who can collectively bid against external national organisations for local contracts	27%	12
Donations/fundraising	16%	7
Brokerage services	16%	7
Supply office equipment	11%	5
Other	13%	6
Total		45

Q28. What, if any, criteria do you think there should be for an organisation to remain Grant funded?

Criteria	Percent	Count
Support small VCS organisations	29%	9
A track record of success/impact	19%	6
Support local needs	16%	5
Builds capacity	13%	4
Responds to new needs	13%	4
Supports vulnerable ethnic groups	13%	4
Finances pilot projects/innovation	10%	3
Criteria proportionate to the grant	3%	1
Total		31

Q29. What criteria do you think there should be for assessing community benefit? Please list key items which you think should be included as criteria. Please list these in order of priority.

Criteria	Percent	Count
Current/local use	19%	23
Need	17%	20
Vulnerable groups	15%	18
Impact/outcome	9%	11
Health and wellbeing	8%	9
Volunteering/training	5%	6
Younger/children	5%	6
Smaller VCS	4%	5
Older people	1%	1
Total responses		119

Q30. In your opinion, are any of the following protected characteristics (as defined by the Equalities Act 2010) going to be impacted by the draft VCS Strategy?

Group	Percent	Count
None of these	52%	15
Age	34%	10
Disability	34%	10
Religion or belief – this includes lack of belief	31%	9
Race – this includes ethnic or national origins, colour or nationality	28%	8
Gender reassignment	24%	7
Pregnancy and maternity	24%	7
Sexual orientation	24%	7
Sex	21%	6
Marriage and civil partnership (but only in respect of eliminating unlawful discrimination)	17%	5
Total		29

Q31. Why do you say that?

Theme	Percent	Count
Impact on all groups should be considered	33%	7
No one will be badly impacted/this promotes equality	24%	5
Children/young people	14%	3
Other	29%	6
Total		21

Q32. And what do you think could be done to address any negative impacts?

	Percent	Value
Consult with protected groups	43%	6
Stronger equality laws	14%	2
Awareness of the needs of individual groups	14%	2
Other	29%	4
Total		14

2. Profile of Questionnaire Respondents

Demographics of respondents

Q33. Which of the following describes how you think of yourself?

Value	Percent	Count
Female	53%	18
Male	44%	15
Prefer not to say	3%	1
Total		34

Q34. Which of the following age bands do you fall into?

Value	Percent	Count
25-34	17%	6
35-44	14%	5
45-54	34%	12
55-64	23%	8
65+	9%	3
Prefer not to say	3%	1
Total		35

Q35. Do you consider yourself to have a disability according to the terms given in the Equality Act 2010?

Value	Percent	Count
No	88%	30
Yes	12%	4
Total		34

Q36. I would describe my ethnic origin as:

	Percent	Count
White: British	53%	18
Asian or Asian British: Bangladeshi	18%	6
White: Other (please write in)	6%	2
White: Irish	3%	1
Black or Black British: African	3%	1
Black/Black British/ Other Black Background (please write in)	3%	1
Asian/Asian British/Other Asian Background	3%	1
Mixed/Dual Heritage: White & Black African	3%	1
Other Ethnic Groups: Vietnamese	3%	1
Prefer not to say	6%	2
Total		34

Q37. What is your religious belief?

	Percent	Count
No Religion	41%	14
Christian	24%	8
Muslim	15%	5
Buddhist	9%	3
Hindu	3%	1
Other Religion (please specify)	3%	1
Prefer not to say	6%	2
Total		34

3. Consultation Questionnaire

About/your organisation

1. Are you responding to this consultation...? Please tick one box only.

- As an individual
- On behalf of an organisation

2. And in what capacity are you responding as? Please tick one box only.

- Resident
- Worker in the area
- A student in the area
- Council Officer
- Councillor/elected member
- Other (please write in): _____

3. And in what capacity are you responding as? Please tick one box only.

- VCS representative/organisation
- Business owner/representative
- Other (please write in): _____

4. What is the name of your business?

5. How many employees does your business have including yourself? Please tick one box only.

- 1 to 2
- 3 to 5
- 6 to 10
- 11 to 49

- 50 to 100
- 101 to 249
- 250+
- Don't know

6. Where does your business operate? Please tick all that apply.

- Tower Hamlets
- London wide
- Rest of UK
- Outside of UK
- Other (please write in): _____

7) What is the name of your organisation?

8. What type of VCS organisation are you responding as/representing? Please tick one box only.

- Registered charity
- Community group
- Community association
- Tenants and residents group
- Green Spaces Friends Group
- Co-operative or social enterprise
- School/parent group
- Faith organisation
- Sports/environmental/ arts and heritage organisation
- Grant making trust
- Housing Association
- Other (please write in): _____

Themes and Objectives

Theme 1: Promoting co-production and sustainability

Co-production means that the council, partners, VCS and service users will identify, assess and define local needs together. Strategies, policies and services will then be developed together to meet these needs.

This method provides an opportunity for all parties to take part in more open, frank and transparent conversations, for example, about the constraints within which they must operate due to the financial climate. It also enables the experience of those receiving and delivering services to be properly reflected in the design of those services.

9) Objectives

- Review strategies, policies, service specifications and action plans - to consider how they can allow greater co-production with the VCS and offer best practice in this area.
- Develop Place-Based Community Leadership – looking at bringing together partners, VCS organisations and service users at a local neighbourhood level to develop more joined up community leadership.
- Move to collaborative commissioning - in order to co-produce effectively, the council will need to review its commissioning and grant funding arrangements, processes and procedures.
- Develop an evidence base together – the council and VCS should share information and feedback, including that of service users and share good practice.
- Build VCS and community capacity - through training and support - identify and develop the skills and competencies of the VCS and the people within it to effectively take part in commissioning processes.

For further explanation of the objectives within this theme, please [click here](#).

To what extent do you agree or disagree that these are the right objectives to help promote co-production and sustainability?

Strongly agree

Tend to agree

Neither agree nor disagree

Tend to disagree

Strongly disagree

10) Why do you say that?

11) Which objectives do you think will most help support this theme? Please tick all that apply.

- Review strategies, policies, service specifications and action plans
- Develop Place-Based Community Leadership
- Move to collaborative commissioning
- Develop an evidence base together
- Build VCS and community capacity

12) Are there any other objectives you think are missing?

Theme 2: Maximising the value from resources

Resources in this context are considered in the broadest sense and include - funding through grants and commissioning; council owned community buildings; the use of commissioning power to generate greater social value; promotion of the sector locally and beyond; making available research, analysis and information; and providing community leadership opportunities.

Objectives

- Move to an outcome based and commissioned approach - all council funding to the VCS will be reviewed to ensure it is contributing to priority outcomes and, with a general preference for commissioning rather than grants. The model will ensure that funding processes are transparent and fair and clarity is provided on how provision is contributing to outcomes.
- Take a new approach to grant giving - with the move to commissioning, grant funding will only remain in a very narrow set of circumstances, for particular purposes, where there is a clear need for funding to be provided by way of a grant rather than commissioning.
- Take a strategic approach to council resourcing across the VCS - the council will review the way it currently resources the VCS, ensuring future resources from any part of the council are clearly linked to identified community need, aligned to council services and demonstrate value for money.
- Promote transparency and accountability of the VCS – by improving control and scrutiny of council funding of the VCS and developing cross-party arrangements for grant decision making and scrutiny.
- Build the capacity of the VCS - the provision of support and training to the VCS to develop their own skills and infrastructure.
- Encourage resource sharing within the sector – including promoting and incentivising joint working between VCS organisations, in particular, bigger and stronger organisations “buddying” smaller organisations and those that need more help.

For further explanation of the objectives within this theme, please [click here](#).

13) To what extent do you agree or disagree that these are the right objectives to enable maximum value to be gained from resources?

- Strongly agree
- Tend to agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Tend to disagree
- Strongly disagree

14) Why do you say that?

15) Which objectives do you think will most help support this theme? Please tick all that apply.

- Move to an outcome based and commissioned approach
- Take a new approach to grant giving
- Take a strategic approach to council resourcing across the VCS
- Promote transparency and accountability of the VCS
- Build the capacity of the VCS
- Encourage resource sharing within the sector

16) Are there any other objectives you think are missing?

Theme 3: Creating a step change in volunteering

The council wishes to increase the quantity and quality of formal and informal volunteers across the sector. Volunteering enables individuals to develop skills, experience and networks and helps decrease social isolation.

Although the benefits of volunteering are recognised, it is important to ensure that it does not undermine paid employment and the quality of volunteering should be managed. The VCS have also stressed that volunteering should focus on giving local people choice over the outcome of their volunteering efforts, and an opportunity to exercise control over how volunteering meets their individual needs, such as personal and professional development.

Objectives

- Audit and capacity building - an audit, undertaken with the community, to assess the potential for volunteering in the council, other public services and within voluntary organisations, is a good first step. The potential number, calibre and experience of volunteers will also need reviewing.
- Council leading by example - the council can do more to lead by example by supporting a volunteering policy across its organisation. This includes building on the knowledge and expertise of its staff and gives council staff time off for volunteering in the local community.
- Developing and promoting new approaches - new volunteering initiatives are to be produced and delivered by the council and VCS together.
- Engaging with the business sector - there are opportunities for the council and the VCS to work more closely with the business sector and develop joint approaches to volunteering. Corporate social responsibility programmes help develop high skilled volunteering in the borough.
- Co-ordination and brokerage - linking volunteers to appropriate opportunities can be difficult. Smarter sharing of information, co-ordinated communications and shared resources for volunteer recruitment are important elements of volunteering management

For further explanation of the objectives within this theme, please [click here](#).

17) To what extent do you agree or disagree that these are the right objective to enable a step-change in volunteering?

- Strongly agree
- Tend to agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Tend to disagree
- Strongly disagree

18) Why do you say that?

19) Which objectives do you think will most help support this theme? Please tick all that apply.

- Audit and capacity building
- Council leading by example
- Developing and promoting new approaches
- Engaging with the business sector
- Co-ordination and brokerage

20) Are there any other objectives you think are missing?

Theme 4: Bringing together businesses and the sector

Businesses can directly support the borough and the VCS as local employers, purchasers of goods and services, funders and through Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) activity.

Objectives

- Understand the local business environment better - as part of developing communication with businesses we will ask what they want from the council and the VCS.
- Encourage businesses to give back to the local area - the council will develop agreements with businesses and business networks to provide support to the VCS and business-based volunteers.
- Improve the effectiveness of businesses' contribution to the borough – by better matching needs of the VCS and value it can offer to what businesses need and what they can offer

For further explanation of the objectives within this theme, please [click here](#).

21) To what extent do you agree or disagree that these are the right objectives to help bring businesses and the sector together?

- Strongly agree
- Tend to agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Tend to disagree
- Strongly disagree

22) Why do you say that?

23) Which objectives do you think will most help support this theme? Please tick all that apply.

- Encourage businesses to give back to the local area
- Improve the effectiveness of businesses' contribution to the borough
- Understand the local business environment better

24) Are there any other objectives you think are missing?

Delivering the VCS Strategy – Action Plan

25) What kinds of support do you think the VCS will need to help deliver the VCS Strategy? Please tick all that apply.

- "Skilling up" VCS organisations in bidding for and taking on commissioned services
- Embedding business planning to ensure that VCS services are resilient and less reliant on funding from the council
- Encouraging VCS organisations to innovate in how they generate income
- Supporting the sector to retain premises and resources in a difficult financial climate, utilising mechanisms such as the ability to protect Assets of Community Value
- Providing training in a range of areas
- Providing support to obtain non-council funding
- Providing governance advice
- Providing information and advice on mentoring
- Ensuring VCS organisations are digitally engaged
- Other (please write in): _____

26) And, what information do you think will be useful for the VCS in delivering the VCS Strategy? Please tick all that apply.

- Housing needs data
- Social work contacts and other
- Employment data
- Health and mental health data
- Income deprivation data
- Education data - e.g. attainment, exclusions etc.
- Community safety e.g. crime, domestic violence etc
- Locality of other local services and provision
- Ward based data
- Other (please write in): _____

27) And, thinking about your organisation, or yourself as an individual, what support do you think you can provide to help deliver the VCS Strategy? Please tick all that apply.

- Offer volunteering opportunities
- Offer employment opportunities
- Offer meeting room/venue spaces
- Supply office equipment
- Offer training
- Donations/fundraising
- Deliver social mobility projects
- Deliver employability projects
- Have meaningful engagement with residents
- Offer word of mouth publicity
- Constructively challenge the Council
- Deliver projects to enhance community cohesion and other challenges that face a changing community
- Support and facilitate the setting up of consortiums who can collectively bid against external national organisations for local contracts

Deliver services

Brokerage services

Other (please write in): _____

Areas of Focus

Grants

28) What, if any, criteria do you think there should be for an organisation to remain Grant funded?

Community Benefit

29) What criteria do you think there should be for assessing community benefit? Please list key items which you think should be included as criteria. Please list these in order of priority.

1: _____

2: _____

3: _____

4: _____

5: _____

6: _____

Equalities

30) In your opinion, are any of the following protected characteristics (as defined by the Equalities Act 2010) going to be impacted by the draft VCS Strategy? Please tick any that apply.

Age

Disability

Gender reassignment

Marriage and civil partnership (but only in respect of eliminating unlawful discrimination)

Pregnancy and maternity

Race – this includes ethnic or national origins, colour or nationality

Religion or belief – this includes lack of belief

Sex

Sexual orientation

None of these

31) Why do you say that?

32) And what do you think could be done to address any negative impacts?

About You

33) Which of the following describes how you think of yourself?

Male

Female

Trans

Intersex

Prefer not to say

34) Which of the following age bands do you fall into?

16-24

25-34

35-44

45-54

55-64

65+

Prefer not to say

35) Do you consider yourself to have a disability according to the terms given in the Equality Act 2010? (Under The Equality Act 2010, a person is disabled if they have a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on their ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities, which would include things like using a telephone, reading a book or using public transport.)

- Yes
- No
- Prefer not to say

36) I would describe my ethnic origin as:

- White: British
- White: Irish
- White: Traveller of Irish Heritage
- White: Gypsy/Roma
- White: Other (please write in): _____
- Black or Black British: African
- Black or Black British: Somali
- Black or Black British: Caribbean
- Black/Black British/ Other Black Background (please write in): _____
- Asian or Asian British: Bangladeshi
- Asian or Asian British: Pakistani
- Asian or Asian British: Indian
- Asian/Asian British/Other Asian Background: _____
- Mixed/Dual Heritage: White & Black Caribbean
- Mixed/Dual Heritage: White & Black African
- Mixed/Dual Heritage: White & Black Asian
- Mixed/Dual Heritage: Any Other Mixed Background (please write in): _____
- Other Ethnic Groups: Vietnamese
- Other Ethnic Groups: Chinese
- Other Ethnic Groups/ Any Other Group (please write in): _____
- Prefer not to say

37) What is your religious belief?

- No Religion
- Agnostic
- Muslim
- Christian
- Jewish
- Buddhist
- Sikh
- Hindu
- Humanist
- Other Religion (please specify): _____
- Prefer not to say

Keeping in Touch

38) Would you like us to keep in touch with you about the results of this consultation?

- Yes
- No

39) Please provide us with your contact details below:

Name: _____

Email address: _____

Role/Job Title (if responding on behalf of the VCS or a business): _____



Westco Trading Ltd
64 Victoria St,
London SW1E 6QP
020 7641 1805
info@westcotrading.co.uk

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