



VOLUNTARY

ACTION

ISLINGTON

STRATEGY

2024-27

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Foreword by Emma Hutchins

The staff and trustees are proud to share our strategy for 2024-2027.

The challenges facing the VCFSE sector in Islington are not insignificant. High levels of poverty and inequality in the borough sit against a backdrop of national and global crises that manifest in the lives of our communities, creating a difficult environment for the VCFSE to meet increasing need.

But they are not insurmountable. The last few years have shown the strength of our communities. The VCFSE sector has collaborated, innovated, and worked tirelessly to adapt and respond to emerging issues with its characteristic passion, knowledge and agility.

VAI is no exception. **Our new strategy brings together everything we've learned about what works and how to overcome challenges.** It puts the voices and needs of the VCSFE sector at the heart of an ambitious programme. We will deliver what we know works, build what we know is



needed, and set our sights high to reach the full potential of our brilliant groups and residents.

We are uniquely placed to do this. We are in a privileged position to amplify the voices of our communities, give them the tools and platforms they need to thrive, and ensure they are at the heart of local policy and decision-making.

We are excited to grow on this journey and we look forward to working side by side with our partners along the way.

Emma Hutchins, Chair of Trustees

Introducing VAI

Voluntary Action Islington (VAI) is the umbrella body for Islington’s diverse Voluntary, Community, Faith, and Social Enterprise (VCFSE) sector and has been providing infrastructure support services in the borough for over 50 years.

Islington has over 1500+ registered charities, community interest companies (CICs) and community groups that are passionate about giving everyone living in Islington the opportunities to succeed in life. We support and work alongside the local VCFSE sector as well as regional and national organisations putting equity, equality, and social justice at the heart of all our work.

We recognise that the VCFSE sector is key to tackling inequality and driving social change in Islington, so our role is to ensure that the sector has the right support to achieve their aims.

With a membership of over 800+ local

organisations, VAI empowers Islington’s diverse, most marginalised, and underserved communities by working closely with local VCFSE organisations and providing support where needed.



One of our most important functions is to champion the role, expertise and impact of the local VCFSE sector – and we do this in Islington as well as across North Central London (NCL) through the NCL Voluntary, Community Social Enterprise (VCSE) Alliance, and London wide through the London Plus Council for Voluntary Service (CVS), Volunteer Centre Networks and nationally through NAVCA.

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Islington is made up of diverse and vibrant communities, with so much to be proud of. Our communities are served by a passionate and committed VCFSE sector that plays a vital role in providing services from early intervention to more intensive long-term support.

Navinder Kaur, VAI’s CEO

Our history

A little over 50 years ago, a group of local people committed to improving the lives of people in Islington came together to create a new body, which became known as the **Islington Council of Social Service (ICSS)** – later renamed **Islington Voluntary Action Council (IVAC)** in 1977, then **Voluntary Action Islington (VAI)** from 2009.



The idea of the Islington Council of Social Services emerged from the political and social awareness of 1960s London. In this setting in Islington, a group of local people representing voluntary, community and faith organisations, public services and local councillors formed the backbone of those who created ICSS.

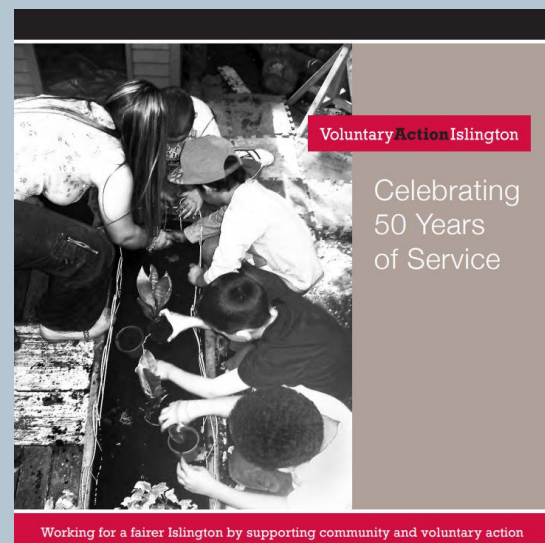
On the chilly winter evening of 10th February 1971, Islington Council of Social Services (ICSS) was born at a

meeting with 120 representatives filling the prestigious location of the Council Chamber of Islington Town Hall.

Over the years the membership grew and became more diverse, and the organisation rode the waves of successive governments, economic recession, local government spending cuts, the 'Big Society' initiatives and more recently COVID-19.

Despite these cycles of change and crisis, the VCFSE sector continued to grow and today Islington's local VCFSE is one of the most thriving in London, if not nationwide.

You can read more about our history in [VAI's 50th Anniversary Publication](#).



Our mission, vision & values

We have refreshed our vision and mission for greater focus over the next 3 years.

Mission

To strengthen Islington's Voluntary, Community, Faith, and Social Enterprise Sector (VCFSE) to develop and deliver services effectively and sustainably and promote social justice.

Vision

A thriving Voluntary, Community, Faith, and Social Enterprise Sector (VCFSE) in Islington enriching people's lives and building stronger communities.

VAI's values



ISLINGTON

Poverty & inequality: the local context

The socio-economic and health inequalities experienced in London are well-known. London has a disproportionately high number of the UK's most deprived neighbourhoods, with over 2.3 million Londoners living in poverty.¹

Islington is an Inner London borough with an estimated population of 216,573². Despite its perception of wealth and affluence, **Islington has high levels of poverty with extreme inequalities**, with the richest and

poorest living side-by-side, but often leading parallel lives.



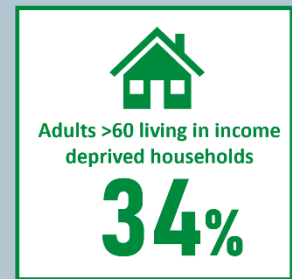
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Alongside deepening poverty, inequality is stark in Islington. Islington is fast becoming a place where middle-income families can no longer afford to live. It is instead characterised by wealthy families living in owner-occupied properties and low-income families living in social housing. Though they live close by, often on the same street, higher and lower income residents live different and separate lives. They are distant neighbours.

Cripplegate Foundation/Nef: Distant Neighbours: Poverty and Inequality in Islington³

Inequality is a defining feature of life in Islington and has very real impact on the health, wellbeing and prosperity of residents and our borough. Islington is the sixth most deprived borough in London and deprivation varies across wards. There are currently about 27,100 low-income households in the

borough, with 9,200 households living below the poverty line (34%) including about 8,000 children.⁴ 3,500 low-income households are at risk of financial crisis (not enough money to pay rent/council tax or any savings), of which 10% are lone parent households.⁵

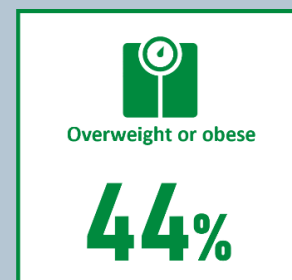
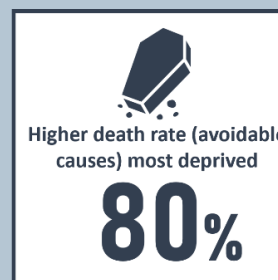
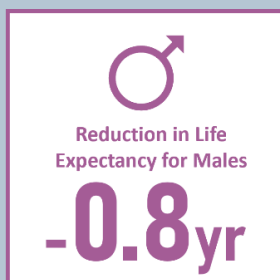


Racial and ethnic inequalities persist too and unfortunately COVID-19 and the cost-of-living crisis has further highlighted and exacerbated structural inequalities. National research, by the Runnymede Trust has shown that the cost-of-living crisis is likely to drive deepening levels of inequality. They revealed that 1 in 2 Global Ethnic Majority (GEM) people live below the poverty line compared to only 1 in 4 of their White counterparts.⁶

In a borough where 31.8%⁷ of the population is from the Global Ethnic Majority (compared to 18%⁸ in

England and Wales), this inequality is reflected in GEM groups facing difficulties finding employment and health inequalities.

Islington residents face significant **physical and mental health inequalities** influenced by various socio-economic factors and environmental conditions. The borough has the highest proportion of the working age population claiming sickness and disability benefits (approx. 9,800 people) in London – the main reason being mental ill health.



Children and young people in Islington are more likely to live in deprivation than the rest of the population. 28% of children under sixteen live in income deprived families – the highest in London. In 2021/22, 41% of pupils received free school meals compared to 25% in London.

Islington is one of the most densely populated boroughs in London with 16,699 people per m², more than 38 times the national average. However, only 13% of the borough is green space and 71% of residents live in flats often without **access to green space**.

The unique role of Islington's VCFSE

Islington has a thriving VCFSE sector consisting of a **broad and diverse range of organisations with an incredible breadth of focus**. Our VCFSE sector in Islington is made up of a combination of small grassroots organisations and social enterprises alongside some larger national charities that have their bases in the borough.



Islington is a thriving hotspot of VCFSE organisations making up approximately **11% of all organisations** operating within the borough and is a vital part of the local economy.

VCFSE organisations deliver **early intervention and prevention and intensive ongoing and crisis support services** providing the necessary backbone to Islington's communities, particularly those facing the greatest challenges and difficulties.

There is a great deal of trust between communities and our local VCFSE sector, and many turn to the VCFSE first to meet their needs. Islington's VCFSE organisations have **unique skills and lived experience** - they are the experts in understanding local people and the issues they face.

The VCFSE sector is **an important part of the eco-system** - a provider of services bringing knowledge, experience, and insight about the needs within our communities as well as being well placed to highlight issues around access, quality of services and identifying gaps.

The VCFSE sector therefore has a vital role to play in co-designing solutions to the challenges that our communities are facing as it is already integral to the design and provision of a wide range of community services as well as being connected to statutory services.





Small and medium sized charities are embedded in local communities and have an intimate knowledge and understanding of local people's assets and needs. They build and nurture social networks that enable relationships between people and the wider community, and between those communities and local and national government. They engage directly with groups that other agencies fail to reach and listen to, and work in holistic and person-centred ways that are responsive to individual and local contexts. Staff, trustees, and volunteers take on multiple roles, which provides greater flexibility and responsiveness to the needs of service users.

Sheffield Hallam University: The Value of Small⁹

The sector creates a great deal of **social value** which includes providing volunteering and training opportunities, so that local residents can develop the necessary experience and skills to help them on their journey into employment, career development as well as improving their health and wellbeing.

The sector also provides opportunities for people to take part in **community and social action** – playing to the strengths within communities by facilitating connections between people and networks to tackle issues and make improvements within their local area.



Current challenges facing the VCFSE

The sector has told us that they are experiencing a **rise in demand for their services at unprecedented levels**, with individuals and families presenting **increasingly complex issues**, and many are already in crisis. More and more residents are turning to the local VCFSE sector for support with debt advice, food and basic household provisions, housing, mental health services, legal advice, and immigration.

Based on the latest forecasts by the Institute for Government, it will take a long time for household incomes to recover to their previous level in real terms. Real Household Disposable Income (RHDI), a measure of living standards will not return to its 2021/22 level until 2027/28¹⁰. And in that year living standards will still be below pre-pandemic levels in real terms, meaning that the effects of the cost-of-living crisis are likely to be felt for a long time.

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The cost-of-living crisis has intensified the challenges faced by the voluntary sector in Islington with increased demand for services and financial strain on households, but it has also led to increased collaboration and innovative solutions to support the community.

Navinder Kaur, VAI's CEO



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The pandemic and cost-of-living crisis both tested charities' abilities to respond to challenges in a rapid and agile way. While charities rose to those occasions, they have also cost the sector some of its own resilience.

Now as the economy gradually returns to growth, albeit a sluggish growth, the VCFSE sector has in turn emerged from existential crisis. It has now reached a new status quo, but that new status quo is neither healthy nor stable for the people who rely on, volunteer with and work for charities.

The perennial financial challenges that plague the charity sector continue with a third (32%) of charities expecting their finances to deteriorate while a further 35% expect their finances to stagnate.

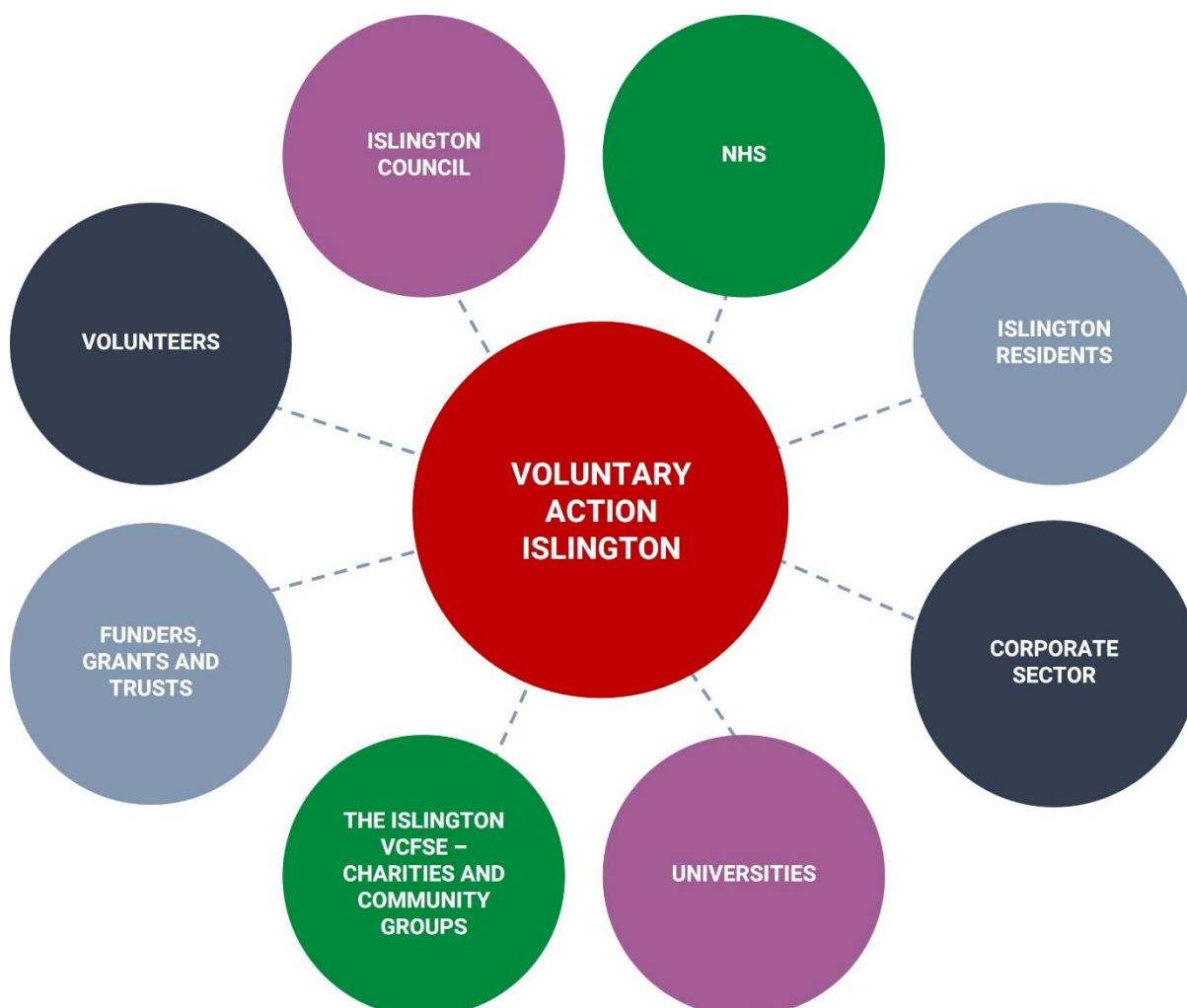
Financial challenges are compounded by those stifling the workforce. While charities, particularly the largest ones, have continued to recruit at pace, recruiting the right people has been challenging (57% of vacancies in the sector are now defined as hard to fill).

With both financial and workforce constraints, the ability of charities to meet ever rising demand is held back. 70% of charities expect demand for their services to increase over the next three months and while the majority will just be able to meet it, over one third of charities (35%) do not expect to be able to meet demand through the Autumn.

These triple tidal forces of restricted income, workforce challenges and ever-rising demand mean many organisations are in a constant state of adaptation and flux. This means that many charities cannot play their fullest possible role in building resilient communities. But they have the potential to. Charities have the infrastructure, organisation and knowledge to make a real difference to efforts to strengthen the UK's communities – and could do so all the more effectively if they were strengthened in turn.

Pro Bono Economics: Treatment for the charity sector's unhealthy status quo¹¹

VAI – a unique role at the heart of Islington’s VCFSE



VAI plays a vital role as a connector between the various sectors in Islington, serving as a central hub for support, coordination, and capacity building within the VCFSE. We work with a range of partners including both corporate and statutory, in addition to the VCFSE.

Our unique role includes encouraging collaboration across the borough, amplifying the voices of the underserved, important advocacy work and championing the role of the VCFSE sector.

Our approach

The national research that we have drawn upon corresponds with what our local VCFSE organisations have told us. Over the last 3 years we have gathered and collated insights from: -

- VAI's annual conferences
- Advisory group members and their networks of organisations
- Community Conversations - partnership events with the VCFSE sector and statutory sector partners
- Small groups summits
- Local Wellbeing Network meetings and events which include the voice of residents
- Member surveys
- Feedback from 1-2-1 capacity building and organisational development advice sessions and training
- Direct feedback from our volunteers (local residents) and Volunteer Involving Organisations Volunteer Manager Forums
- State of the sector reports including NCVO, Pro Bono Economics and Sheffield Hallam University.

Our approach will be primarily to continue to support micro, small, and medium sized¹² organisations that are already focussing their efforts on tackling issues of inequality, poverty, and poor health. We also recognise that providing opportunities for residents to play a greater role in their communities through volunteering and community action is key to achieving better outcomes.

We believe that our members and the Islington communities we serve play a critical role in informing our work and the insights we have gathered form the basis of this strategic plan.



Our strategic aims

VAI's Strategy for April 2024 to March 2027 is an ambitious programme which sets out how we will work with the local VCFSE sector to deliver

positive and lasting benefits for many communities across the borough. To achieve our vision, we will focus on four strategic priorities:

1

TO SUPPORT THE DEVELOPMENT, EFFECTIVENESS AND SUSTAINABILITY OF ISLINGTON'S VCFSE



2

TO ENABLE AND STRENGTHEN VOLUNTEERING, SOCIAL ACTION AND COMMUNITY RESILIENCE



3

TO FACILITATE STRONGER PARTNERSHIP WORKING ACROSS THE VCFSE TO INFLUENCE POLICY, DECISION MAKING & SYSTEM GROWTH



4

TO RUN VAI RESPONSIBLY, EFFECTIVELY AND EFFICIENTLY AS A MODEL OF GOOD PRACTICE



1. To support the development, effectiveness, and sustainability of Islington's VCFSE

We want Islington's VCFSE sector to feel valued for the work they do and their impact and social value to be fully understood and appreciated.

The VCFSE sector need the support to flourish so they can continue to help the residents they serve, as well as unlocking their potential to meet the increasing demands from Islington's communities. Our activities over the next three years will build the resilience of these organisations by giving them access to resources and training.



What research and local VCFSE sector feedback is telling us

Public sector commissioning and grant funding landscape

- The crisis in Local Government funding with budgets being squeezed plus the current financial situation is having a huge impact on the VCFSE sector.
- Statutory contracts still favour larger charities.
- The sector is not receiving the full value to deliver public sector contracts and are heavily subsidising them due to full cost recovery rarely being applied and the lack of (inflationary) uplift on statutory contracts.
- The fundraising landscape is particularly challenging with competition for grants, more pressure to secure core grant funding and meet more niche funding criteria.
- Small charities are wary of collaboration in case knowledge and skills are appropriated by larger charities, however more networking opportunities and resources for partnership working are required.

Increasing demands being placed on the VCFSE sector

- Larger numbers of Islington residents are presenting with increasing complexities, leading to huge pressures on the VCFSE sector.
- Wider understanding amongst partners of the increasing demand for VCFSE services, the challenges the sector are facing, and continued need for support.

Sharing resources and more joined up working

- The VCFSE sector requires better access to / understanding of local data and intelligence that is being generated by the statutory sector to shape services, plan for the future and for evidencing funding applications.

What research and local VCFSE sector feedback is telling us

Capacity building and organisational development

- The VCFSE sector needs capacity building, organisational and workforce development support including training and resources that are affordable, accessible, and bespoke.
- Artificial Intelligence (AI) explosion will continue and there will be increased cyber security risk and misinformation.
- Fundraising, charity structures, financial planning, measuring/demonstrating impact and digital transformation constitute the biggest operational challenges for the local VCFSE sector.

What we continue to do

- 1-2-1 advice sessions with new start-ups, micro / small grassroots groups, and larger organisations.
- Bespoke organisational development support and training in priority areas.
- Provide access to a wide range of good practice resources and funding opportunities.
- Provide access to the wider capacity building offer delivered by external local partners.
- Work with the voluntary sector to enhance collaborations – partnerships and joint working amongst the VCFSE organisations and across sectors.

New initiatives for 2024-27

2024-25

- Phase 1 CRM (Salesforce) system implementation to collate and centralise information we hold on our membership (800+), analyse how we work with them, the services they offer and develop ways to enhance our support offer.
- Development of new communication channels including a revamped website.

2025-27

- Phase 2 CRM (Salesforce) system implementation to measure and evaluate VAI and the wider VCFSE sector's impact.
- A new directory of VAI's membership, with an improved membership offer.
- Further fundraising training, with monitoring, evaluation, and impact frameworks.
- Achieve NAVCA's Local Infrastructure Quality Accreditation.
- Develop an AI strategy and share learnings across the sector (and internally).

New initiatives for 2024-27, if funding permits

2024-25

- Bespoke training including charity structures, fundraising, financial management and budgeting.
- Implement an outreach plan to engage VCFSE organisations not currently connected to or supported by VAI.
- Thematic events / forums / networks of VCFSE organisations to support collaboration, sharing of expertise, and identifying gaps / trends as well as raising awareness of local services available to residents.

2025-27

- A wider offer of organisational and workforce development support e.g., Equality, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EEDI) training to meet the needs of organisations.
- A Training Hub offering an enhanced, accredited, and non-accredited programme of bespoke 1-2-1 and group training developed in partnership with other local providers as well as providing a space to raise awareness of training offered by local partners including Islington Council.
- Seek Quality Standards Accreditation for community groups and charities.

So that by 2027...

- We will ensure that the VCFSE sector has improved access to resources and high-quality support and greater skills for organisational resilience and sustainability.
- VCFSE organisations will be run more responsibly and effectively with stronger governance and leadership skills.
- We will strive for sustainably funded and future-proofed local organisations with more opportunities for collaboration and the sharing of skills and expertise.



Capacity building with the Somali Speakers' Women's Group

The Somali Speakers Women's Group have been running activities for the Somalian community since 2000. Based in Islington, they provide regular 'Stay and Play' groups every Saturday serving lunch as well as teaching languages and Maths.

Over the years they've faced challenges with their charity status, fundraising and IT but have received help at different times from VAI VCFSE Development Managers, Maria, Yvette and Tsigereda.

In 2024, with the help of Tsigereda, they successfully applied for CIO charity status. She assisted them by helping them write their charity's objectives, checking their governing documents and liaising with the Charity Commission. The new CIO status has opened many grant fundraising opportunities for the charity to further develop their activities. VAI is now assisting the charity with new funding applications so they can continue to offer their invaluable services to the Somalian community.



Mana Al Sharif, a trustee at the charity says:

“I advise every Islington charity to work with Voluntary Action Islington. Over the years they have helped us with numerous issues that all small charities face. Thank you so much.”

2. To enable and strengthen volunteering, social action & community resilience

We want to ensure that Islington residents have a wide range of opportunities to make a difference in the area where they live, study or work through volunteering or social action.

Hundreds of volunteers give up their time each year to work in their local communities and spearhead social action. These volunteers should be celebrated and recognised for the important roles they play in their communities.



What research and VCFSE Sector feedback is telling us

- Levels of formal volunteering (unpaid work organised by a group, club, or organisation) are well below pre-pandemic levels.
- The cost-of-living crisis is impacting levels of interest in volunteering with concerns about costs e.g. young people including university and college students are reluctant to commit to ongoing volunteering and need to prioritise paid work.
- The VCFSE sector need the added value of volunteering and need to offer flexible roles e.g. both short and long term opportunities.
- Volunteers need rewarding and meaningful volunteering experiences.
- Organisations need support demonstrating the wider social value and impact of volunteering e.g., volunteering is not valued enough as a stepping-stone to employment.
- Volunteering does not always reflect the diversity of the local community including people seeking sanctuary, young people, and disabled people.
- VCFSE organisations have less capacity to recruit and train volunteers, and retention and management of volunteers is underfunded.
- The sector needs to be supported to advocate more effectively through collective voice.
- There is a need to amplify young people's voices and represent their views.

What we will continue to do

- Community outreach with drop-in sessions provided by a team of Community Volunteering Advisors to increase the number of potential volunteers registered with the Volunteer Centre.
- Volunteering fairs delivered with Volunteer Centre Camden (VCC) and the London Borough of Islington (LBI).
- Provide access to best practice resources for Volunteer Involving Organisations via the Volunteer Managers Forum.
- Events to recognise and promote volunteering e.g., Volunteer of the Year Awards.
- Provide access to clear and accessible information on volunteering opportunities.
- Promote and deliver local community development initiatives such as the Local Wellbeing Networks - supporting community resilience and bringing together partners to tackle the cost-of-living crisis as well as the causes of long-term inequality and poverty.
- Provide a platform to share information about gaps, quality of service, and how to improve the eco-system of support for residents, share funding and training opportunities, best practice, and emerging themes via the Local Wellbeing Networks across the three localities – North, Central and South.

New initiatives for 2024-27

2024-25

- A new Volunteer Brokerage Platform and website to improve the volunteering experience for residents and Volunteer Involving Organisations (VIOs).
- A viability study to establish how we develop our volunteering, social action and community resilience in line with the needs of the VCFSE sector.
- Seek reaccreditation of the Volunteer Centre through NAVCA's Volunteer Centre Quality Accreditation.

2025-27

- Develop and implement a borough-wide volunteering strategy in partnership with Islington Council, The Big Alliance, Islington Giving and VCFSE partners.
- Provide access to a wide range of volunteer training opportunities delivered by local partners including Islington Council.
- A new CRM (Salesforce) system for improved insights and collective impact measurement.
- Further development of website with more good practice resources for volunteers and VIOs.





My desire to establish more meaningful connections in the community motivated me to become a community organiser as I recognised the potential for positive change. Before I completed the community organiser training, I recognised the importance of networking, but I didn't utilise it properly. The training helped me to understand networking to get the best of projects.
Participant in Community Organising Programme

New initiatives for 2024-27, if funding permits

2024-25

- Support the development of community led research and community resilience (emergency planning / response) initiatives.
- Development of volunteering resources on the new website highlighting the presence and profile of volunteering.
- Continue to promote community development initiatives through the Local Wellbeing Networks.
- Develop the Local Wellbeing Networks website showcasing the impact of community organisers & change makers.
- As part of the cost-of-living programme:
 - Recruit residents relying on food aid provision to volunteer to improve their wellbeing.
 - Increase awareness of wrap around services available to residents relying on food aid provision.

2025-27

- Increase the capacity and resources of VAI's Volunteer Centre Services Team to develop and deliver a wider offer to the VCFSE sector.
- Development and implementation of a monitoring and evaluation framework to analyse the impact of volunteering.
- Development of a Volunteer Charter with light touch quality marks for Volunteer Involving Organisations (VIO).
- A Training Hub of volunteering related resources and accredited and non-accredited training.
- Supported volunteering programmes to make volunteering accessible to all Islington residents including young people and students.
- Increase the numbers of disabled people, asylum seekers, refugees, and vulnerable migrants through more inclusive volunteering programmes.

So that by 2027...

- The volunteering infrastructure, access, inclusivity and practice will be strengthened across the VCSFSE so that more and better volunteer matches are made.
- We will celebrate the impact of volunteering through recognition and awards, inspiring and motivating the sector and individuals.
- We will strengthen partnerships and collaboration via the Local Wellbeing Networks for the sector to co-create, with statutory partners, solutions to local challenges.

How volunteering helped asylum seeker Faryad Mohammednezhad

Faryad Mohammadnezhad is a former asylum seeker from Iran who lived in one of the contingency hotels in Islington from 2023 until June 2024 while he waited for his status to be reviewed.

VAI was working in partnership with the Union Chapel Asylum Project when Faryad heard about volunteering at the beginning of May 2023. After an initial conversation he mentioned that he was feeling depressed and lonely and later on, we also realised he was suffering high levels of anxiety because of his traumatic past in Iran.

Faryad came for a volunteering appointment at VAI. He wanted to help and keep active and also learn more about the local community while waiting for his case to be reviewed. VAI

encouraged him to volunteer, and he applied to a few organisations with VAI supporting him during the whole process.



He was successfully recruited by The Stuart Low Trust (SLT), an organisation that supports local people experiencing social isolation or mental distress. Faryad volunteers at their Friday events, cooking and looking after the participants. After a few sessions volunteering there, Faryad seemed happier, and he came back to us for more volunteering opportunities!

Faryad then helped us at the VAI Volunteer Centre, championing volunteering through talking to other residents at the contingency hotels and assisting us at drop-in sessions, sometimes acting as an interpreter. He has helped other hotel residents with volunteering interviews and applications, volunteers at the Union Chapel Asylum Seeker project and also at different organisations in Islington with one-off volunteering opportunities.

We've witnessed how volunteering in Islington has had a positive impact on his mental health and his confidence. He was part of the team that won the Volunteering Team of the Year at the Islington Volunteer of the Year Awards in 2023 because of their work at the Union Chapel Asylum Project. VAI and the other organisations where the volunteers have assisted him with his asylum seeker application and finally Faryad has received his refugee status. Three months later he is now living independently, working as a health carer in a West London hospital and aiming to start working as a nurse – his passion and profession until he had to flee Iran.

3. To facilitate stronger partnership working across the VCFSE to influence policy, decision making and system growth

We will continue to build collaborations and encourage and promote cross-sector partnerships.

Partnerships are core to our approach to growth and sustainability. VAI will proactively seek out opportunities to work with local organisations, either as the lead or as the capacity building component to partnerships with smaller groups.



What research and VCFSE sector feedback is telling us

- With benefits and public services squeezed and the cost-of-living crisis, there is increased and more complex demands from residents for VCFSE services.
- Increasing poverty across Islington's communities as well as greater need are exacerbating existing systemic inequalities.
- The sector has requested support with partnership working including networking and collaboration to be facilitated by VAI e.g., thematic events and forums.
- VAI needs to facilitate and support organisational responses to advocate more effectively for the sector.
- The sector needs to be supported more effectively to represent the needs of residents that they are close to – this in turn will improve the outcomes for residents through the eco-system of support through the VCFSE sector, the council and other partners.

“

The conference was excellent. Thank you to VAI for organising this. Working together makes us stronger as communities and enables us to help others more.

Feedback from VAI VCFSE Sector March 2024 Conference

What we will continue to do

- VAI annual conference for strategic dialogue.
- VAI representation across Islington Council and North Central London (NCL) strategic partnerships.
- Thematic events bringing together VCFSE sector and statutory partners to strengthen collaboration and codesign.
- Facilitation of an Advisory Group made up of VCFSE organisations and networks.

New initiatives for 2024-27

2024-25

- Establish and set direction of travel for 'Islington Charity and Community Leaders Network'.
- Refresh the Islington Compact and commissioning guides and toolkits in partnership with VCFSE sector and Islington Council.
- Develop borough wide VCFSE strategy and implementation plan.
- Widen VCFSE representation across Islington Council strategic partnerships.

2025-27

- Continue to set direction of 'Islington Charity and Community Leaders Network', identifying priority areas for focus and setting up working groups to take these priorities forward.
- Embed the Islington Compact across the VCFSE sector and Islington Council.
- Implement borough wide VCFSE strategy and implementation plan.
- Work with universities to support policy and research work.

New initiatives for 2024-27, if funding permits

2024-25

- Forums and networks (including Local Wellbeing Networks) for VCFSE organisations to strengthen their collective voice and shared learning.
- Improved communication channels and sharing of information and insights.
- Supporting more effective dialogue amongst the VCFSE sector and between sectors.
- Engage the wider VCFSE sector in key policy developments and service transformations – such as health and social care.

2025-27

- Produce local state of the sector reports including qualitative and quantitative data of the organisations and residents supported (via our Salesforce CRM) to make more visible the impact and social value of the VCFSE sector.
- Provide access to an improved hub of resources for evidencing – share data, insights and learnings generated by Islington Council and VCFSE sector and partners such as London Metropolitan University.

So that by 2027...

- The VCFSE sector will be better connected and work more collaboratively.
- We will represent the interests of the VCFSE organisations more effectively, ensuring that their collective voice is heard, so they are more engaged in policy making and can co-create with statutory partners, solutions to local challenges.
- We will support the VCFSE sector to engage more effectively in contract, commissioning and grant funding arrangements.

“

A very well organised event, really well put together, lots of representation, time to network, and make important connections.

Feedback from VAI VCFSE Sector March 2024 Conference



4. To run VAI responsibly, effectively, and efficiently as a model of good practice

We want to become an efficient, inclusive, and environmentally sustainable organisation as a leading example to the sector.

We will continue to develop VAI's Resource Centre (co-working space) into a collaborative and affordable co working space, ensuring that VAI is a great place to work.



What research and VAI feedback is telling us

- Changing workspace requirements, with more hybrid working as a consequence of the pandemic, is forcing us to adapt and develop a new business model as well as having an impact on community and collaboration.
- Inflation remains high and is impacting core operating costs of the Resource Centre.
- Our current IT systems / processes are inefficient and limit our ability to measure impact and evaluate our support.
- The impact of climate changes is already apparent in Islington, and we need to ensure that VAI adheres to responsible and environmentally resourcing.
- The Resource Centre needs to be as inclusive as possible so that the co-working space is accessible to all.

“

The City Year UK team are users of the meeting rooms at VAI. We appreciate the professionalism, facilities, and flexibility that the VAI team shows us. The provision of the meeting rooms is a terrific resource for charitable organisations such as ours to be able to access.

City Year (Charity)

What we will continue to do

- Comprehensive training opportunities for VAI's staff and volunteers.
- Offer a thriving Resource Centre with collaboration opportunities for hosted organisations.
- A solid Governance Structure with a range of trustees with diverse experience and skills.
- Ensure that our staff are remunerated competitively as per our London Living Wage Accreditation.

New initiatives for 2024-27

2024-25

- A new Salesforce CRM to streamline processes, centralise membership information and improve communication including HR and Office Management modules.
- A revamped website with improved accessibility to news and resources.
- Improvement of the Resource Centre facilities and a banded price structure to offer affordability.
- Room hire booking functionality.
- Review of all VAI's organisational policies and procedures.

2025-27

- A two-yearly trustee skills and diversity audit and recruitment for any gaps.
- Apply for NAVCA infrastructure accreditation to demonstrate the quality of infrastructure services.
- A training programme for VAI staff and volunteers including Equity, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EEDI).
- Improved HR / performance management processes.
- Publishing annual VAI Impact Reports.
- Develop a sustainable VAI business model.
- More joined up back-office processes for hosted Resource Centre organisations.

New initiatives for 2024-27, if funding permits

2024-25

- Improved office and room hire facilities including new meeting rooms, revamped bathrooms/kitchen and redecoration.
- Increase in core costs contribution from charitable trusts / foundation and statutory funders.

2025-27

- Continued improvement of office facilities.
- An Eco Audit to reduce VAI's environmental impact.
- An Accessibility Audit to improve the office facilities and accessibility.

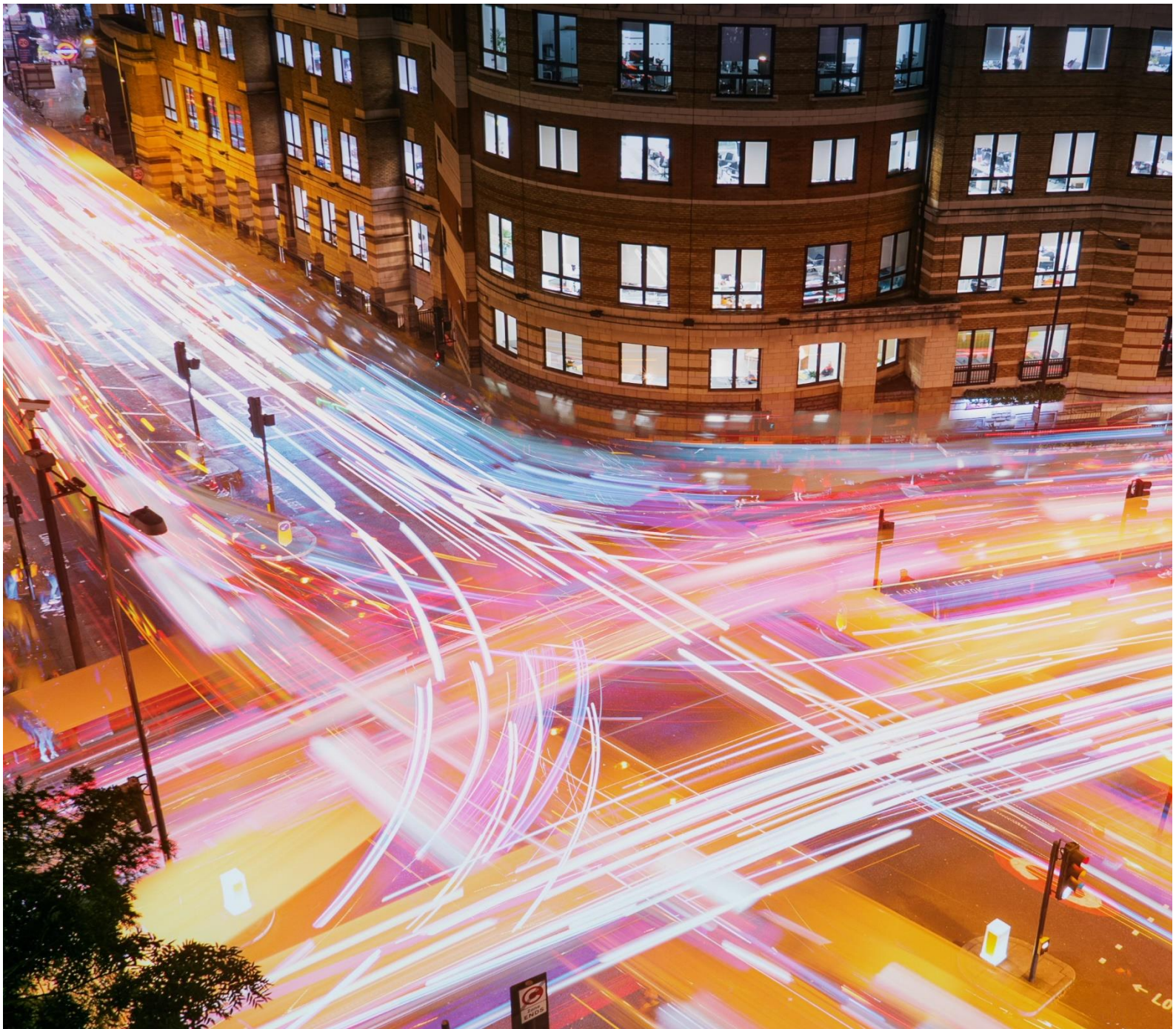
So that by 2027...

- We will nurture our team - staff, trustees and volunteers - recruiting, training and retaining talent and ability that reflects the diversity of our community.
- We will develop a robust internal infrastructure with a sustainable business model, clear policies and procedures and a supporting IT infrastructure.
- We will provide a welcoming and value for money Resource Centre, sharing skills across the Centre.

“

We love being at VAI's Resource Centre, the price is great, people are lovely, great location and wonderful community feel.

Respect (Charity) who work in VAI's coworking space



References

- ¹ [BBC: Quarter of Londoners Living in Poverty](#)
- ² [Wikipedia: London Borough of Islington](#)
- ³ [Cripplegate Foundation/Nef, 2017: Distant Neighbours Poverty and Inequality in Islington](#)
- ⁴ [LBI: Children and Young People Islington](#)
- ⁵ [LBI: Children and Young People Islington](#)
- ⁶ [Runnymede: Unequal Impact](#)
- ⁷ [City Population: Islington](#)
- ⁸ [Gov UK: Population of England and Wales](#)
- ⁹ [Cripplegate Foundation, 2017, Distant Neighbours](#)
- ¹⁰ [Office for Budget Responsibility: The Outlook for Household Income and Consumption](#)
- ¹¹ [Pro Bono Economics: Treatment for the charity sector's unhealthy status quo](#)
- ¹² [NCVO: How many voluntary organisations are there?](#)

Charity Size by Income Band

<i>Income Band</i>	<i>Name</i>
<i>Less than £10,000</i>	Micro
<i>£10,000 to £100,000</i>	Small
<i>£100,000 to £1m</i>	Medium
<i>£1m to £10m</i>	Large
<i>£10m to £100m</i>	Major
<i>More than £100m</i>	Super-Major

NCVO: In 2020-21 just over 80% of charities in the UK were micro and small.

Contact information

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