

# Voluntary **Action** Islington

Strategic Business Plan  
2015-18

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Voluntary Action Islington is the membership organisation for the voluntary sector in Islington and the accredited Volunteer Centre for the borough. This Strategic Plan sets out our direction for the next three years, covering the period April 2015 to March 2018. It takes account of the rapidly changing external environment for the sector, with increased levels of need and continuing reductions in public spending. It recognises that Voluntary Action Islington itself has significantly less staff and reduced funding compared with a few years ago.

The priorities for this strategy were determined by trustees following a joint trustee and staff workshop. At this workshop the context facing local organisations, the strengths and weaknesses of Voluntary Action Islington and the opportunities and threats facing the organisation were considered. Trustees and staff have visited local organisations to discuss the main issues they face, to obtain their feedback about services provided by Voluntary Action Islington and to seek their views about our future role and priorities. An online survey of local organisations was undertaken and there have been discussions with significant stakeholders such as the Local Authority.

## 2.0 CONTEXT

### During the next 3 years we anticipate:

- 1) Continuing reductions in public spending - with Local Authorities focussing even more on funding initiatives that will support the delivery of core statutory duties (Islington is anticipating over £90m more cuts over the next 3 years). This will have a significant impact on our members - most will receive less statutory funding although some, whose work is closely aligned to Local Authority statutory duties, may be in a position to grow and take on new work if they can deliver using more cost-effective approaches than statutory agencies.
- 2) Economic growth and increases in employment are currently forecast to continue, but there is significant uncertainty about the long term. Income from employment is not increasing and more people are self-employed and in less secure roles. It is likely that income inequality and the number of people experiencing poverty will rise over the coming years (NCVO: The Road Ahead 2014).
- 3) Nationally, in recent years voluntary sector income has decreased, although recently there has been a reversal of this trend. The decrease is mainly as a result of reduced public spending. Income from government grants and contracts is falling, but the decrease in grant funding is greater than the decrease in contract funding (14.5% and 7.4% respectively). More recently income to charities from individuals is increasing, mainly as a result of payment for service and fundraising (NCVO Civil Society Almanac, 2014). However, smaller locally based organisations are generally not as well positioned as larger national organisations to take advantage of these sources of income from individuals.

4) Locally there will be a Labour administration and no official opposition (there is one Green Councillor) for the next 3 years. The priorities for the Council are jobs, housing and the cost of living. The Islington Employment Commission called for better targeting of employment support services, supporting employers to recruit locally, and improving employment support for young people. It said these should all be underpinned by stronger collaboration between organisations involved in employment.

The ways in which funds from the new Community Infrastructure Levy are used locally may represent opportunities for local voluntary organisations as may the 2014-2020 funding from Europe for employment support initiatives (The Lottery is to become a co-financer of European funded projects). The Local Authority is potentially interested in using s106/Community Infrastructure Levy resources to develop premises for use by the local voluntary sector.

5) Nationally there is likely to be a change of government in 2015, but it is currently very uncertain what the political composition of the new government will be. There may be some changes in priorities, but all parties are committed to continuing reductions in public spending and realistically, it is very unlikely that there will be any substantial new initiatives with a focus on the development of voluntary organisation capacity. However there could be new initiatives of relevance to the sector related to: preventing violent extremism; responding to an ageing population; evidence based interventions that prevent significant later expenditure on more severe social problems and initiatives to support wider use of new technology as a means of delivering public services. It is possible that there will be a referendum on EU membership in the next 3 years with potential long term implications for EU funding.

6) It is likely that there will be increasing pressure on public services as funding reduces necessitating service reorganisation. Welfare reform is also set to continue. There is likely to be public and media reaction to this and potential roles for voluntary organisations in organising responses, commenting on and campaigning about the changes.

7) Continuing advances in technology with more emphasis on mobile technology. Many larger organisations are already working in new ways, but smaller voluntary organisations are often slower to adopt new ways of working. New technologies and social media have implications for fundraising, volunteer brokerage, office organisation, communication and campaigns by charities.

8) Whilst there continues to be no apparent competition for Voluntary Action Islington's core role of representing the sector within Islington, there is competition related to key services that we provide including premises. For example (with regard to premises) from the Angel and Kings Cross hubs, NCVO, the Resource Centre and some community hubs. There are other organisations providing volunteer brokerage (for both employers and residents) and services to local organisations are increasingly provided through pro-bono initiatives and by national and regional charities, and a large number of private/freelance providers. There are some strong local networks that represent part of, but not the entire, sector. A key issue for us is the relationships with these organisations including when, if and how we cooperate, collaborate or merge.

### 3.0 CONCLUSIONS FROM OUR REVIEW

The aim of our on-line survey was to identify the main issues facing local organisations, to obtain views about services currently provided by Voluntary Action Islington, to ascertain interest in future collaboration and to find out how our members want us to support and facilitate volunteering.

The key finding from the survey is that organisations value the role of Voluntary Action Islington, particularly as a source of information and a means of sharing information (especially through the email news group and web site). Our role as an organisation that brings people together face to face is important and our survey found people want to collaborate more, particularly to deliver services, campaign for change and secure funds. There was a strong view that our role, and the services we provide, should be independent from statutory agencies.

The most significant issue facing organisations is the increasing levels of need amongst people they are working with, reflecting the impact of welfare reform and cuts in statutory service provision on Islington's most disadvantaged residents. Organisations were concerned to demonstrate impact and ensure quality. Funding, increased demand for services, and collaboration and partnership were all important issues for local organisations.

In relation to volunteering, most survey respondents said it was very important or important that Voluntary Action Islington assisted with recruitment of volunteers. There was a high level of interest in help with developing policies and procedures for involving volunteers and training in management of volunteers.

Visits by trustees and staff to local organisations reinforce the findings from the survey. There is significant concern about funding and managing short term funding arrangements amongst local organisations. There is interest in more collaboration, including with statutory agencies, to improve services to residents and secure funding. However, lack of time was identified as a significant barrier to achieving this.

During visits feedback about the role of Voluntary Action Islington was very positive. Our role in providing information and building relationships between organisations was particularly emphasised. There were several suggestions that we could play a bigger role in enabling organisations to connect with each other, develop joint bids for resources and promote their work to external stakeholders.

Our capacity building work for smaller organisations is valued and the way in which we have engaged pro bono help to deliver some of this has generally been welcomed. There is a view that we could focus more on the basics involved in running a voluntary organisation and that we could collaborate more with neighbouring CVS to deliver some support services. There was positive feedback about our training.

Several visits highlighted that we should support organisations with volunteer recruitment including help with recruitment to specific roles such as trustees and volunteer drivers. There was also a view that we could provide more help to local organisations with managing volunteers and with deploying volunteer effort in more ways. There was some concern about lack of capacity within the Volunteer Centre team to do this.

During the period of our review a meeting was held with the Leader of the Council and their review of Council support to voluntary organisations was discussed. This is still to be concluded and existing arrangements will continue into 2015-16. During the period of this strategy the Council will be encouraging voluntary organisations that they support to diversify funding, consider how they could use Council support to lever in other sources of funding, reduce costs and develop core competencies. Statutory funding to the sector from grants is likely to continue to decrease.

## 4.0 VISION, MISSION AND VALUES

Our Vision

**A resilient voluntary sector that actively collaborates to support residents and the community**

Our Mission

- To lead and support local voluntary action by individuals and community or not for profit organisations
- To promote strong and mutually beneficial relationships between voluntary, statutory and private sectors
- To develop sustainable voluntary action in our community
- To engage and support the most excluded members of our community
- To empower the community and individuals to take greater control of decisions by public authorities, and others, which impact on their lives and their communities

Our Values

Underpinning our Vision and Mission statements are the values of Voluntary Action Islington and these are at the heart of what we believe as an organisation and how we work both with all our external stakeholders and within the organisation, with our staff and volunteers.

Our values are:

- **equality and diversity**, valuing difference, treating everyone with respect
- **independence**, in our thinking and actions
- **integrity and professionalism**, maintaining high personal and professional standards
- **collaboration**, working with others to support and develop collaboration and co-production across the community
- **listening and learning**, from all our stakeholders including members, staff and volunteers

## 5.0 FUNCTION AND PRIORITIES

At a trustee/staff Away Day we considered our priorities and functions. We consulted our members about priorities during a programme of visits by trustees and staff, and using an online survey. Our two functions are:

- 1. To ensure that our members are well informed about opportunities to sustain and develop their work**

Our priorities are to ensure that local voluntary organisations:

- Can find out about people interested in volunteering with them
- Know about relevant opportunities to apply for funds and tender for contracts
- Have access to information about running a local voluntary organisation including access to services providing good value for money
- Are aware of opportunities for pro bono support
- Are informed about relevant policy developments

## **2. To take a leading role in developing the voluntary sector and volunteering in Islington**

Our priorities are to:

- Encourage increased collaboration to meet local needs including leading and supporting joint bids for funding
- Maximise the potential of volunteer involvement
- Provide a Voluntary Action Resource Centre, that supports collaboration and efficient use of resources
- Promote and champion the role of volunteering and local voluntary organisations
- Determine our role in the development of social enterprise

## **6.0 WORK TO SUPPORT THESE FUNCTIONS OVER THE NEXT 3 YEARS**

***To ensure that our members are well informed about opportunities to sustain and develop their work***

### **Outcomes**

- Membership increases and over 85% of local community organisations that we have contact with are signed up as members of Voluntary Action Islington
- Organisations develop and promote volunteering roles using the accredited Volunteer Centre at Voluntary Action Islington
- Members are regularly informed about opportunities to apply for funds and about relevant opportunities to tender for contracts
- Members can access information and sources of support to assist them to run an effective organisation, through Voluntary Action Islington
- Members are aware of a wide range of sources of pro bono support and can access many of these through Voluntary Action Islington
- Members are well informed about relevant local and national policy developments

### **Services and Activities**

We will continue to increase our membership, which is now free, so most local and community organisations are members. We will offer membership to all relevant organisations that are included in the local Directory of voluntary organisations. We will collaborate with other organisations, such as NCVO, to extend benefits of membership.

We will continue to provide an accredited Volunteer Centre for the borough and support local voluntary organisations to make the best use of relevant online brokerage services including [doit.org.uk](http://doit.org.uk). We will provide other opportunities for organisations to promote volunteering roles, for example by providing a drop-in and volunteer recruitment fairs. When possible we will collaborate with other organisations to promote volunteering - for example with local colleges and universities.

We will continue to provide a local funding booklet and to advertise funding opportunities and relevant tenders using Voluntary Action Islington News. When relevant we will facilitate briefings from significant funders - such as the Big Lottery.

We will review and update the information and resources provided on our website and signpost to other sources of information and support. We will continue to provide one to one surgery sessions to provide organisations with basic information and support about running a voluntary organisation - including developing the role of pro-bono help in delivering these sessions.

We will continue to use briefings, our email news group, website, email newsletter and social media to ensure local organisations are aware of relevant local and national policy developments and about a range of opportunities (including funding and training) that will support their work.

Where there are opportunities to do so we will bid for specialist projects that provide particular parts of the local voluntary sector with support or provide specialist support in areas such as use of ICT. We will collaborate with other organisations to do this (for example Children England or neighbouring CVS).

## **Resources**

We will continue to work with volunteers, including pro-bono help from firms, interns and potentially student placements to support volunteer brokerage and information provision. We will maximise the use of tools such as Voluntary Action Islington News through which members can share relevant information with each other.

During the first year of this plan we anticipate that current Local Authority funding will continue. We intend to apply for further funding from the Local Authority in subsequent years to continue to provide a Volunteer Centre, to provide briefings and information to local organisations to function efficiently and effectively.

We will bid for funding for specialist projects from relevant Trusts and statutory agencies. We will develop our role as a supplier through Big Assist and become a recognised supplier of capacity building support to organisations in receipt of Reaching Communities funding if there is an opportunity to do so.

If necessary we will subsidise the Volunteer Centre and information provision from income generated through the Resource Centre, particularly in the first year of this plan.



## ***To take a leading role in developing the voluntary sector and volunteering in Islington***

### **Outcomes**

- Local voluntary organisations have successfully collaborated with each other and with relevant statutory and private sector partners to improve local services and secure new sources of funding and support
- More voluntary organisations in Islington have the skills to improve their volunteer management and maximise the potential from volunteer involvement
- The Voluntary Action Resource Centre on Pentonville Road generates funds that support development of the local voluntary sector and provides a model of co-location and the efficient use of resources
- Volunteering has a higher profile and is celebrated through events such as the Volunteer of the Year Awards
- Local statutory and private sector organisations are more aware of the role of local voluntary organisations, the issues of concern to organisations and how they can support local voluntary action
- Voluntary Action Islington has determined its role in both leading and supporting social enterprise and has a realistic assessment of the potential role of social enterprise in supporting local voluntary action

### **Services and Activities**

We will continue to provide opportunities for local organisations to meet and network, for example by supporting the Islington Community Network and the Islington voluntary sector conference. We will focus this activity more on building alliances to improve services and secure new funding. Where there are opportunities to do so we will bring together organisations from across sectors to promote new opportunities for local voluntary organisations - for example in relation to premises and European funding.

We will ensure that the Directory of local voluntary organisations is kept up to date and use this to encourage collaboration between organisations and to ensure that organisations are notified about relevant funding, and other, opportunities.

We will help local organisations maximise the potential from volunteer involvement by providing training and consultancy to managers, staff and volunteers and by sustaining improvements using online tools.

We will continue to provide a Resource Centre at Pentonville Road that generates income. This will include renting desks and meeting, conference and training facilities. We will investigate increased opening hours and partnerships with other organisations to provide a varied programme of events and training that support local voluntary action.

We will promote volunteering in the local press, on our website and using social media. We will continue to organise Volunteer of the Year Awards and present these at our AGM.

We will work with the Islington Community Network to ensure the voluntary sector in Islington is represented effectively in relevant forums with the Local Authority, CCG and other statutory and private sector bodies, as relevant.



We will organise a regular meeting with key people from the Local Authority and the local voluntary sector. We will respond to policy consultations as possible within available resources and if opportunities arise will seek resources in order to undertake research into issues of concern to our members.

Voluntary Action Islington Services has recently secured the services of an MBA student to research options for the future of the Voluntary Action Academy and consider its overall viability. Once this research is completed we aim to conduct further research into our role in both leading and supporting social enterprise. We will also review the long term viability and role of the subsidiary company - Voluntary Action Islington Services.

We are supporting a social enterprise initiative providing consultancy, through associates. The long term future, and any further investment in this initiative, will be kept under review in relation to projections for future income.

## **Resources**

The Local Authority will continue to support the Community Network for a further year. For the second and third year of this strategy we will apply for funding that the Local Authority may allocate towards supporting collaboration between local voluntary organisations, and with statutory agencies. If there are opportunities to apply to other statutory agencies to support more collaborative ways of working we will consider these.

If there are opportunities to be involved in developing consortium funding bids then, depending on the role of Voluntary Action Islington in these bids, there may be income arising from these bids.

We have applied to City Bridge for a project to help organisations maximise potential from volunteer involvement.

We aim to continue to increase income from the Resource Centre and will invest any surplus in maintaining the infrastructure of Voluntary Action Islington and investing in the development of the local voluntary sector.

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

If opportunities arise we will seek resources from charitable trusts in order to undertake research into issues of concern to our members.

We will secure MBA student placements and consider the potential of support from Big Assist and Trusts, to enable us to assess our role in leading and supporting social enterprise.

## **Appendices**

Appendix A is our current staffing structure

Appendix B is our staff development strategy

Appendix C is our equalities action plan

Appendix D is our funding plan and budget for 2015-16

Appendix E is the annual operating plan for 2015-16 including targets and planned activities

Appendix F is the register of main risks for the organisation as a whole

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Voluntary Action Islington previously known as  
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**Chief Executive:** Mike Sherriff.  
Company Limited by Guarantee Number 1913555.