

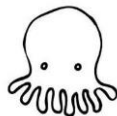
Working together for a strong, stable and dynamic VCS in Islington

Report on Progress following the Open
Dialogue event in November 2016

Cripplegate Foundation



ISLINGTON



**Voluntary
Action
Islington**

APRIL 2018

Cripplegate Foundation | Islington Council
Octopus Community Network
Voluntary Action Islington



Introduction

Working Together

In November 2016 Cripplegate Foundation, Islington Council, the Octopus Community Network and Voluntary Action Islington (VAI) brought 30 local voluntary and community sector (VCS) groups and networks together to discuss whole-community action for sustaining Islington's strong and vibrant voluntary sector.

There has been good progress on most key ideas in 2017/18 but there is more to do and develop. We are keen to maintain dialogue and embed actions as we learn what proves to be helpful and effective for Islington's VCS.

The event was a first step in starting a conversation about how greater collaboration can unlock the wealth of skills and assets among peers across the voluntary sector and enhance the dedicated infrastructure support provided by second-tier organisations.

This report provides a first update on progress to date led by the convening partners on the priority issues identified by participants. In future, we propose issuing an annual update to keep groups and stakeholders informed about what is available, and to encourage sharing of knowledge and ideas from everyone with an interest in ensuring we maintain a resilient and dynamic VCS in Islington.

To allow us to build up and share as complete a picture as possible of the range of infrastructure support and peer-to-peer methods of sharing and learning in the borough, we are keen to hear about developments taking place across VCS organisations and networks around, for example, formal or informal ally schemes. In addition, if you would like to ask more about any of the actions or initiatives described in this report please feel free to contact the relevant partner:

- The BIG Alliance, Max Rowe, max.rowe@thebigalliance.org.uk
- Cripplegate Foundation, Helen Kersley, helen.kersley@cripplegate.org.uk
- Islington Council, Pamela Aristokle, pamela.aristokle@islington.gov.uk
- Octopus Communities, Julie Parish, julie@octopuscommunities.org.uk
- Voluntary Action Islington, Guljabeen Rahman, guljabeen.rahman@vai.org.uk

All information will be collated by Islington Council's VCS team. Please contact Pamela Aristokle, Pamela.Aristokle@islington.gov.uk, with any updates you can provide.

Summary of Action

The summary table below shows action taken or started on the ideas voted for by participants of the Open Dialogue event. Three key priority areas were identified: **Knowledge Exchange**; **Leadership Development**; **Resources**. The idea of developing communities of practice received by far the highest number of votes from event participants.

Some have been one-off actions (the property workshop hosted by **Cripplegate Foundation**), others are being piloted (the CMI Leadership and Management Diploma). With ongoing collaboration across VCS and support organisations we aim to develop all areas, including those where action is yet to be taken.

Idea for action voted for by Open Dialogue participants	Action to date
Priority Area One	Knowledge Exchange & Developing Communities of Practice
Action Learning Sets – spaces for reflection (see progress update p. 5)	Yes – a series of Octopus Community Network Action Learning Sets
Network Events (see progress update p. 5)	Yes – CEO networking events have started, organised by VAI
Ally Schemes	To be developed
Ways to Connect Evidence	To be developed
Priority Area Two	Leadership Development
Trustee Development, Support and Networking (see progress update p. 6)	Yes – Trustee Appreciation event was held in Nov 2017. A Trustee Mentoring Programme is being developed by VAI and LBI for Autumn 2018 launch.
VCS Leadership Development (see progress update p. 6)	Yes – VAI and LBI have secured free CMI Level 5 Leadership & Management Diploma for Islington VCS
Business Mentoring (see progress update p. 6)	Yes – The BIG Alliance has launched an Executive Partnership Programme with VAI
Priority Area Three	Resources: Operational Support
Shared Services	To be developed
Joint Purchasing	To be developed
Access to Specialist Services Including HR	Yes – Cripplegate Foundation hosted a property workshop and clinic run by the Ethical Property Foundation in March 2017
Other/ capacity building (see progress update p. 7)	Yes – With the VCS Work Placement Scheme LBI is working with London Metropolitan University to enable VCS groups to maximise the use of students.
Priority Area Three	Resources: Funding Support
Information sharing and facilitating access to funding opportunities (e.g. Government & corporate funding) (see progress update p. 7)	Yes – LBI and VAI have jointly purchased a funding tool: ‘Open for Communities’ that is hosted on VAI’s website. LBI’s VCS team has also purchased ‘Local Insight’ (more information on p. 7).

Priority Area One: Knowledge Exchange

Progress Update

Action Learning Sets – Thematic Groups

Since October 2017 Octopus Community Network has been pilot testing Action Learning Sets in collaboration with the Social Change Agency with great success. Each Action Learning Set comprises four people and a facilitator. Currently, twelve members of the Octopus Network are involved in nine Action Learning Sets, meeting three times in a structured format to encourage the exploration of issues or challenges in a trust-based environment.

“It’s been important to have the Action Learning Sets take place outside of the usual day-to-day work environment so as to enable full and uninterrupted participation.”

Each Action Learning Set participant is coached in asking clarifying questions and methods to help their peers arrive at conclusions and form a set of actions.

“Having participated, I see Action Learning Sets as a proactive way to problem-solve. This approach can support individual and peer-to-peer development (something we are keen to support within the network) and organisation and leadership development, too.”

An evaluation undertaken at the end of the Action Learning Sets demonstrates how beneficial they have been for those taking part. [Feedback results can be viewed here.](#)

Network Events

To support the leadership of VCS organisations, VAI hosted a CEO networking event on 3rd July 2017, themed “Making Partnership Work”. CEOs and Directors of charities and social enterprises operating in Islington shared experiences of partnering and collaborating and strengthened their connections with those in a similar role. Mary Mason, from Solace Women’s Aid, and a member of London Violence Against Women and Girls Consortium, gave a very inspiring presentation, talking about her experiences of collaboration. A discussion followed about the merits of different partnerships, from informal agreement to full merger. As a follow-up to the first meeting, VAI set up “Islington VCS CEO & Director Virtual Network”, an e-network for CEOs to share ideas, information and learning.

A second CEO networking event took place on 24th April 2018. Max Rowe from the BIG Alliance gave a presentation about their offer to Islington organisations, and Sophie Mathias from the Big Lottery shared information about changes to the Reaching Communities funding programme. Going forward, two are planned for each year.

Priority Area Two: Leadership Development

Progress Update

Trustee Development

A Trustee Appreciation Event (a joint initiative between **Islington Council** and **VAI**) was held during Trustee Week in November 2017. The event was open to trustee chairs plus one other trustee from organisations across the sector. The event was well attended, offering trustees the opportunity to network with each other, with officers from the **Council** and with **VAI**. Many attendees have kept in contact since the event. Another Trustee Networking event took place on 26th April 2018 at **VAI**. Jenny Potkins from Pilotlight presented their different executive support programmes for charities.

A Trustee Mentoring Programme is currently being scoped. **VAI** aims to support a group of new trustees who would benefit from the support of more experienced peers.

VCS Leadership

Ensuring that leaders and managers of VCS organisation have the appropriate training and support is essential. **VAI** and the **Council** recognise the importance of investing in the leadership of the sector and have secured free accredited training in the CMI Level 5 Leadership and Management Diploma. The first course began in September 2017 and will run until December 2018. Thirty participants from twenty-four local organisations enrolled on this course with the cohort purposely designed to ensure a mix of public sector and VCS staff. Free for participants, the total value of the provided training is £210,000.

Business Mentoring

The BIG Alliance has launched an Executive Partnership Programme in partnership with **VAI**. This nine-month pilot project will connect senior managers and directors of **BIG Alliance** corporate members as employee volunteers with leaders from some of Islington's voluntary and community organisations enrolled on **VAI's** 2017/18 Essentials Programme. To complement the Essentials Programme, which builds the effectiveness and sustainability of these organisations through training and workshops, employee volunteers will provide monthly one-to-one coaching for leaders for the duration of the project.

Priority Area Three: Resources

Progress Update

Operational Support

The VCS Development Team has been working with London Metropolitan University to build community cohesion and strengthen the links between students and the local VCS. There are opportunities for VCS organisations to utilise student skills through the VCS Work Placement Scheme. The Scheme gives organisations access to students with a range of specialisms, including consultancy and research.

In addition, **The BIG Alliance** is always available to facilitate business skills volunteering and to help local voluntary sector organisations work on operational capacity challenges. For further information, please contact Tom Browne – tom.browne@thebigalliance.org.uk

Funding Support

The **Council** and **VAI** set up free access subscription for all Islington based organisations to a funding tool called Open for Communities. The tool is hosted by **VAI** to enable organisations to search for funding opportunities available in the borough.

The **Voluntary and Community Sector Team** has purchased Local Insight, providing data to help with the design of services, to understand need and develop stronger funding applications. This that enables you to investigate and scrutinise public data, including the latest data and analysis for your communities and services, with up-to-date open data matched to the areas you work in. If you are interested in using this tool, please do email Partnerships@islington.gov.uk requesting a password.

Islington's Volunteer Offer

It is well recognised that residents, employees and students all have a wealth of skills and expertise that VCS organisations could benefit from. Over the last six months the **Council**, **VAI** and the **Big Alliance** have co-produced a borough wide volunteering plan which aims to raise the profile of volunteering across the borough, reduce duplication and streamline the recruitment process.

Organisations are encouraged to register with VC Connect, **VAI's** new online volunteering brokerage platform, and directly advertise vacancies to people seeking opportunities. This development will reduce the burden of VCS organisations having to complete multiple forms and increase the potential reach to interested people. **The Big Alliance** will continue to seek to place business volunteers with local organisations, using VC Connect to find the needs of VCS organisations and match volunteers accordingly.