

LONDON COMMUNITIES COMMISSION



Draft Recommendations for Action with LONDON BOROUGHES

Paper 2, Mar 2016

Foreword

This is the second in a series of short papers and draft recommendations from the London Communities Commission. This independent Commission was set up in September 2015, with eleven Commissioners from the private, public and voluntary sectors, convened by the Paddington Development Trust and supported by London Funders and City Bridge.

Its task is to look into how citizens and communities in London's most deprived areas might be strengthened and supported in these times of austerity.

This is in response to growing concerns that, without such support and the active engagement of local people, the quality of life there may continue to deteriorate to levels that not only destroy the well-being of tens of thousands of citizens, but pose a threat to the social and economic sustainability of the whole capital.

We have amassed a wealth of evidence and are in a position to make recommendations to various bodies and institutions to tackle priority unmet needs and disadvantage in London's most stressed neighbourhoods.

I am extremely grateful to all those who gave their time by submitting evidence and sharing such impressive ideas with us.

The proposed actions in this paper focus on what might be achieved by close working on agreed priorities with the London Boroughs. We are publishing it now as a draft paper for discussion with the boroughs in order to develop a commonly-owned strategy about the way ahead. This paper should be read alongside the paper on Commissioning which is addressed to all statutory providers, not just local authorities.

I look forward to the discussions - and thereafter to work with the boroughs and other partners to implement the final recommendations fully over the challenging years ahead.

Sir Stephen O'Brien
Chair of the London Communities Commission

Introduction

The Commission realises that the London boroughs and other statutory services are facing huge, and growing, service demands whilst simultaneously facing continuing loss of resources.

The Commission wanted to examine what fresh initiatives might be taken to complement existing work and wanted to assess what the basis of such initiatives might be and whether additional resources could be brought to bear. Our particular concern was the continuing scale of unmet need and deterioration in the quality of life in London's most stressed areas, together with implications for the social and economic sustainability of the capital.

We understand that the boroughs have an enormous amount of experience in dealing with these issues themselves and that there are other examples of successful practice by others. This is why the Commission called for evidence, from local authorities and others, looking at solutions that work. We found that many of these solutions were driven by imaginative leadership and direct input from the communities, working alongside the local authorities, statutory services, foundations and trusts and the private sector. In today's climate of reduced public sector resources, we believe that these examples need building upon.

Proposing that we tackle the most acute problems in this way is an attempt by the Commission both to meet individual needs and to reduce the current inequalities in London. In doing this we are building on the previous work of communities themselves, the Boroughs and their partners.

In summary, we believe that:

- the boroughs (in co-operation with the Mayor) should identify the neighbourhoods that, strategically, have the greatest unmet needs across London,
- led by local communities, the Boroughs and their partners within each of these areas should agree on the key unmet priority needs that are specific to their area; and then agree on the outcomes designed to resolve them - over five years,
- there needs to be a positive cross-sector delivery model to enable effective, successful and focused action,
- and, critically, additional resources are needed in these stressed areas - both to initiate new projects as well as to complement or develop local programmes by the many agencies involved, particularly the boroughs. The Commission has some proposals as to where those resources may come from.

We understand that this approach will not solve all of the difficult problems facing communities and individuals across London. But we also understand, based on experience elsewhere, that such a focused approach will, if properly managed, bring real and demonstrable improvements to countless individuals in these stressed areas, and will build resilience within the communities themselves - so that they are better enabled to secure their own future. It is a framework that could enable a host of other initiatives to take place. It is conceived as an enabling strategy, not an exclusive one.

The Commission's Approach

We were very conscious of the wealth of data already available and the huge number of initiatives already under way to tackle disadvantage in London. We wanted to ensure that our work was complementary to other exemplary initiatives, but we also wanted a fresh and focussed approach - one that brought together the private, public, funders and voluntary and community sectors genuinely working with common aims to an agreed, shared programme and one which started from the citizen rather than institutions.

Our immediate task was to decide on the areas and issues which we thought were the most critical, which would have the greatest impact and which would be manageable in terms of creating tangible improvements through targeted changes across the sectors.

With this approach in mind, we sent out a call for evidence in September 2015 and subsequently held a series of Hearings in October and November, publishing our Report of Evidence in February. This can be found at <https://londoncommunities.wordpress.com>.

Based on the evidence, we found that an area-based approach had demonstrably worked well and there were many pointers to what created success. These included new ways of working which allowed residents to define the outcomes, a genuine cross-sector approach, individual and organisational leadership from a core voluntary sector body, a local focus, the inclusion of smaller groups who had the ear of the local community, and clear accountability.

We then developed these conclusions into a set of specific proposals for a way forward in the difficult current climate. We believe that significant impacts can only be made over the short to medium term if there is a genuine spirit of co-operation and if a geographic focus is called into play. That is why we have presented a set of draft actions for the incoming Mayor of London as he/she will have a clear role to play alongside others, not least the boroughs, in protecting the social and economic sustainability of London.

Draft recommendations for Action by the London Boroughs

Commissioning. The third Term of Reference of the Commission was to look at the current system of commissioning. In response, we have developed a further set of recommendations for local authorities and other statutory providers which can be accessed in the parallel paper on Commissioning and should be read alongside the recommendations below. This paper deals with local authority support in the priority areas where success will depend on the Boroughs commitment to the approach the Commission has set out.

A. Our first, and arguably most important, draft recommendation to all partners is to see and to cast the role of communities and their representative organisations as the core of the solution, not the problem. Communities need to be a real part of defining issues, specifying solutions, delivering them wherever possible and thereby bringing their unique experience and expertise that so often currently goes to waste. We cannot afford to continue such waste, nor to make enemies of allies.

B. Our specific draft recommended actions for the boroughs, within the field covered by the London Communities Commission, are complementary to those that we have set out for the

Mayor and for commissioners and reflect the prime issues that we have set out above. We believe that the boroughs should:

1. Join with the Mayor in setting out a clear vision, a sense of direction and ambition for the future of London which shows how they will work with partners to tackle poverty, deprivation, poor health and the increasing polarisation that threatens London's sustainability.
2. Work together with the Mayor and others in identifying a number of priority areas on the basis of need (which we have called Community Action Neighbourhoods).
3. Help set up a Joint Action Board (JAB) in the CAN with a lead community anchor organisation, other partners from the statutory services, private sector, academia, funders and trusts. This Board, based on local knowledge, would agree the actions and outcomes to be achieved over a 5-7 year programme in a way that ensured the involvement of smaller voluntary organisations. The whole Board could meet once a year to agree the overall programme (and subsequently monitor and adjust it as necessary and agree its annual outcome report). Operational matters could be dealt with through task groups reporting back to the full Board annually. Thus, whilst the areas themselves would be set strategically, the programmes, actions and outcomes would be determined locally and would lever in independent money and the knowledge, time and skills of local communities.
4. Help in the identification of a lead community anchor organisation for the CAN in their area and assist that organisation so that it can become the accountable body for the implementation of the local programme.
5. Reflect the priorities agreed by the JAB in the allocation of borough resources in the areas, in as much as they represent agreed local priorities.
6. Work closely with local community organisations to help them to develop and deliver local services, drawing on community knowledge, resources, expertise and skills in order to improve relevant delivery. See also our separate report on commissioning.
7. Look at providing appropriate and secure low cost accommodation for the voluntary and community sector. Where appropriate also look at the possibility of transferring viable assets to encourage the longer term financial security of community organisations and to help secure their role in building better local futures.
8. Help in establishing new and imaginative funding mechanisms at a borough level (such as Islington Giving) to support this approach, alongside other resources, including from other statutory providers and their programmes. See the separate paper from the Commission on possible new sources of funding.
9. Join with London Councils and other partners in encouraging central government to back the initiative and to provide match funding in the interests of London and communities in the areas concerned.