

LONDON COMMUNITIES COMMISSION

Commission meeting 3: 17 November 2015

PAPER 3.1 SUMMARY OF WRITTEN EVIDENCE

This paper summarises the evidence submitted for the Commission's third meeting. In line with previous meetings, it is in two sections. Section One focusses on Newham and our first two Terms of Reference (ToRs1 and 2), together with the questions that we asked in relation to them. Section Two focusses on ToR 4 around Funding.

Section 1 Newham (ToRs 1 and 2)

Please bear in mind that the total evidence base for the Commission to consider under Section 1 includes evidence from the previous two meetings. We have not reproduced that here, but if anyone wants an additional copy, please ask.

The extra evidence for this meeting is only from one organisation. It is summarised here.

The Newham Poverty Partnership was formed in April 2013. The partnership has two objectives:

- a) Use their individual and collective knowledge and networks to identify and plan appropriate activities and programmes and to secure resourcing to deliver them
- b) Participate in developing activities, programmes and areas of work which address the effects caused or aggravated by poverty in all its forms

One of the main early concerns was the deficit of advice provision in Newham, in particular a lack of specialised advice. This led us to develop and pilot a Communities Buddies scheme providing intervention to families who are 'on the way down' and are finding it difficult to access advice and support services (see ToR 2).

Individual members have been collating evidence on unmet need in their own organisations. BDCA have noted that there has been a large rise in the number of people seeking crisis support services over the last 18 months, particularly around housing, benefits, debt and homelessness/the vulnerably housed. There also appears to be a growing number of vulnerable people and people with mental health problems attending their community centres, many of these people with multiple and complex needs. While BDCA have set up some short-term initiatives such as a food bank, job and debt advice and a homeless day centre, they urge the need for longer-term, sustainable solutions to these problems.

Our breadth of expertise has been particularly important when applying for funding bids, and gives our partnership credibility with funders.

ToR 2. To identify successful approaches and to examine, within those localities, the specific local skills, intelligence and contributions that citizens and the Voluntary and Community Sector should be required to make in

addressing the identified needs of local people and to recommend accordingly.

Could you provide examples of 'successful' citizen-led approaches in your area?

We have piloted a successful citizen-led approach to addressing poverty in Newham, called Community Buddies.

We knew that many people didn't know how to get help, or perhaps didn't have the confidence to get it by themselves. We all felt that in our experience, what made the difference was relationship - having a friend or someone to get alongside and help them do what they had to do.

We developed a model that would put volunteer 'community buddies' in our existing community centres and projects who would help people deal with a problem (e.g. stopped benefits) before it got worse. They would do this through support and signposting, and in doing so would pass on the skills and confidence to help people cope better with such problems in future. Volunteers would be people who had successfully, recently, moved on themselves and would benefit from the training and volunteer experience. We wanted to test this idea, and discover what factors might be significant in making it work.

How do you know these have been successful?

The Community Buddies pilot was evaluated by Aston-Mansfield and has proven successful. The evaluation report (which is available) shows this, and provides useful lessons for rolling out the project:

- o the model was effective even with complex problems such as housing and immigration status.
- o Outcomes included securing accommodation, accessing recourse to public funds or benefits, avoiding eviction, and finding work.
- o Some clients learnt more effective strategies to manage difficult situations, and become more resilient. Some clients gained the confidence to seek out new opportunities or sources of support for themselves.

Can you identify the key factors that have made for a successful initiative?

- o Training and support was essential. Buddies need to be part of a supportive team with ready access to information and expertise.
- o Establishing trust between buddy and client is vital, as is speed of response, respect, spending time, developing hope about realistic possibilities.

What is the role of partnership in these successful initiatives?

The initiative was developed by meetings of the partnership. It was piloted in one of the partner organisations, with valuable training provided by another, and detailed monitoring and evaluation by a third, with all working together at meetings to review and evaluate during and after the project. Joint funding bids for the pilot and roll-out were/are being made to roll out the project with small teams of buddies based in each of the four partners' community centres/projects and a central co-ordinator.

How are local citizens consulted/involved in local decisions affecting priority planning and implementation?

Community buddies is a relationship-based model supporting people who often have only negative experiences of service provision. The pilot was embedded in one of the partner organisations; the co-ordinator was a former client and the buddies were current clients and often had significant support needs themselves - a potential strength but also a significant challenge. The pilot has learned much about how to manage this. The model seemed to make intuitive sense to both buddies and clients; some clients expressed an interest in becoming a buddy in order to share what they'd learned, or were even doing so informally already. So it is very much a grassroots model, with nobody who is not a local citizen involved at any point.

How transferable is your approach? What do the public sector, private sector and funders need to do to support transfer?

Newham Poverty Partnership is ready to implement this project in all of its centres. It has part-funding for it (from Tudor Trust) but still needs matching funding.

The model would be transferable to other areas. In our partnership, Aston-Mansfield's Community Involvement Unit plays a key role in management, co-ordination and evaluation, while other groups work very much on the frontline with vulnerable people. In other situations a local CVS or other voluntary sector umbrella body might have similar expertise and resources to take the role of co-ordinating a number of grassroots groups. (NPP)

Section 2 Funding

ToR 4. To recommend new ways in which the voluntary and community sector could be funded locally – as well as create a more strategic approach to philanthropic activities – subject of course to quality control and suitable outcome measures.

Perhaps not surprisingly, the evidence submitted under this Term of Reference was not very extensive - although there are outlines of several ideas that the Commission may wish to explore. The contributions included:

Service outputs and outcomes can be very binary and do not often facilitate the delivery of the more creative and citizen led approaches to meeting social need. Where we are able to do this we are increasingly dependent on volunteers being

able to carry out that initial developmental research, needs analysis and relationship building. Our long term financial strategy is focussed on generating significantly increased unrestricted income to enable us to redress this imbalance and to develop both a more pioneering role and to strengthen our citizen led capabilities. The challenge is unless others funding and investing in the sector are willing to commit resources to facilitate such citizen led action, it is unlikely to become a cornerstone of VCS activity again. (GF Toynbee Hall)

It is relatively easy to persuade policy makers and political leaders that there is unmet need which a new piece of research can address by dealing with a small number of proposed delivery agencies; it is far harder to describe the need for long term investment as a requirement for collaborative working across the existing sector. (MS LVSC)

Development trusts such as Westway and Coin Street demonstrate what might be achieved given a strong asset base but these are very much the exception. How can the acquisition of assets best be promoted and funded?

Perhaps the major weakness is the lack of central funding in order to pay for the requisite level of co-ordination, collaboration and strategic delivery of quality services. In current circumstances the availability of core funding for the VCS is almost non-existent. (NB Univ. of Westminster)

Universities and colleges have major, and typically under-used, potential to contribute, in terms of providing research themselves and most importantly, in supporting voluntary and community-based organisations to become more research-minded, using research more effectively and undertaking their own research, including working with funders to develop ways of measuring outcomes rather than focussing upon targets and outputs. (MM Goldsmiths)

We need something equivalent for social infrastructure – with a mandate to building cross-party strategies and investment for common good communities, in London and elsewhere, where the initiatives designed to build community strengths are more rather than less than the sum of their parts, and can be sustained over time. (SW)

The Declaration of Interdependence by Children England and the TUC makes a powerful case for moving away from a model based on competition. Alliance contracting may be one way forward, involving equal decision-making, sharing risk and reward. The voluntary organisation, Revolving Doors, has also published a report on payment by results which suggests pooling, rather than individual contracts.

Grants may be part of the answer. The Health Service is now looking at grants to try to harness the strengths of smaller voluntary groups and their guide on this could be a useful document for the Commission to promote to other public bodies.

Finally, charitable foundations might invest more in London on developing leadership and collaboration within the sector to help it pool resources and ideas, strengthen its voice and articulate the case for greater investment in social infrastructure. (CS Civil

Exchange)

We find that a partnership approach has been particularly advantageous, as organisations with differing approaches are able to collaborate and pool resources in order to maximise impact locally. Having a lead organisation such as Aston-Mansfield, or being able to secure sufficient funding to form an overarching organisation such as Islington Giving, seems to be somewhat integral to the success of a partnership model.

Replicating a model such as Islington Giving across other parts of London may be dependent on the local context. Islington Giving has heavily relied on individual donations for funding, particularly those from board members. The context is very different in Newham, the third most deprived local authority area in the country. The lack of individual wealth of Newham residents may inhibit the high levels of funding an organisation such as Islington Giving needs to function. (NPP)