

Summary of Oral Evidence given at the First London Communities Commission Meeting held on 21 October 2015 in Paddington.

The chair, Sir Stephen O'Brien, asked for his thanks to the secretariat (Fabian Sharp and Ines Newman to be recorded. Apologies were given from Sarah Ebanja and David Warner (& Sir Sam Everington who came late). Drew Stevenson, the convener summarised the context of the meeting. The evidence given at this first meeting is summarised in this paper – in the table on the next page and by the main points made by each witness. This paper should be read alongside the summary of written evidence for this meeting available to read and download at the Commission website <https://londoncommunities.wordpress.com/downloads/>

Context:

The Commission Terms of Reference ask it to examine, particularly in this first meeting, how the priority unmet needs of vulnerable communities in London can best be met by working across the three sectors - public, private and voluntary/community.

Key Conclusion

a) **whether a partnership approach is thought to be appropriate and viable**

Partnership and infrastructure organisations were seen as crucial in both the written and oral evidence in order to address the diminishing funding in the statutory sector and co-ordinate and provide a route through to influence. To be viable such a partnership must however address the requirements in column 3 in the table below and tackle the constraints in column 2.

b) **whether it is likely to prove possible for any such partnership to seek agreement about the key unmet needs in the area**

There was agreement about some of the key needs in Paddington (see column 1 in the table below)

c) **whether it is considered possible to begin to map who might do what in order to deliver on those needs over a 5 year period and where the funds may come from.**

Column 5 starts to address this issue but further ideas will be developed at subsequent commission meetings in Tottenham and Newham. Other points that came out of the written evidence include: A central social evidence observatory for London - a coordinated/central way to host and market evidence based service development and standardised monitoring data readily available that provides some baseline outputs of the VCS sector.

Needs	2.Pressures/ Constraints	3.Requirements for partnership	4.Key themes that went across presentations	5.Recommended Actions
<p>1. Housing-enabling people to stay in their communities and have security</p> <p>2. Mental Health, particularly accessible and tailored services for BME communities</p> <p>3. Youth Support working with disaffected youth within the community rather than just having youth activities or working individually with ex-offenders</p> <p>4. Early intervention programmes</p>	<p>1. Commissioning creates competition and is short term, acts against community partnerships</p> <p>2. The burden of providing evidence of impact is too high on small VS providers</p> <p>3. Young people need consistent people and services which can co-ordinate easily and quickly – all services and people changing now has detrimental impact on vulnerable young people, particularly at times of transition</p> <p>4. Losing local knowledge as services/local authority staff are cut</p> <p>5. Capacity issues for small organisations to engage with all stakeholders</p> <p>6. Challenge to improve statutory services through engagement</p> <p>7. Massive dispersal and churn of communities through housing shortage and policies Increase in homelessness/temporary accommodation</p> <p>8. Most people do not believe they can influence decisions locally</p> <p>9. Private sector needs to engage fully and long term and not just ‘paint fences’.</p>	<p>1. Genuinely citizen-led</p> <p>2. Underpinned by community and capacity development that enables the smaller, unheard voices of those in poverty or who are discriminated against to be heard, rather than creating a top down bureaucratic process</p> <p>3. Build a decision-making and consensus =building process to develop shared purpose/aims/model/approach</p> <p>4. Different partnerships: Strategic, neighbourhood, issue-related. Action at different levels. Need linking and each needs a clear purpose and clear geographic area .</p> <p>5. Resources to support coordination</p> <p>6. Clear benefits for all groups participating, especially for smaller organisations</p> <p>7. Need to develop skills for community organisations to be able to call out detail – e.g. buildings handed over with structural issues/costs</p>	<p>1. Democratic process. Way to elect and hear excluded voices</p> <p>2. Trust. To participate, need to know that someone is listening and you have influence. For this need a strong trusted community voice (strong local voluntary and community groups linked through an infrastructure organisation)and statutory service providers and a private sector that are prepared to hear.</p> <p>3. Limited experience of the voluntary sector with the business sector</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CSR does not equal fence painting • Move to skills sharing • CIL/regeneration – how to release monies from private investment to communities <p>4. Lack of urgency. It takes a long time to get everyone round the table</p> <p>5. Shift from centralised power to enabling state</p> <p>6. Role of individuals who make a difference vs organisations and structures</p> <p>7. Role of universities to support evidence base</p>	<p>1. Build on existing partnerships</p> <p>2. Work with organisations which have a track record and are trusted .</p> <p>3. Resource local community anchor organisations</p> <p>4. Enable people to stay in their community: maximise social renting; improve advice services; support private tenants’ rights.</p> <p>5. Define what makes for a successful or unsuccessful area. Release the energy of the many by developing the capacity of those ‘extraordinary’ people who are rooted and have commitment, passion, skills and time.</p> <p>6. Create a Social Infrastructure Commission</p> <p>7. Get statutory providers to see local communities as assets not problems and to change to enable real co-production.</p> <p>8. Change commissioning and impact assessments (this to be discussed on 9 Nov)</p> <p>9. Challenge and engage the private sector</p>

Summary of evidence first commission meeting

Geoff Biggs: Westbourne Park Family Centre

1. To be viable a cross sector partnership must be community-led. Need to work out shared values, purpose, shared evidence base. Need to be representative (elections good) and ensure that representatives report back and engage those usually not listened to; Need the resources to deliver and be seen to deliver something even if setting up structures and processes takes time. Need to be action-focused.
2. Trust and relationships are a key issue. An organisation that is not known and trusted cannot deliver full consultation. May be able to build on Neighbourhood Forum.
3. Churn. Need to develop skills of people new to the country by developing the capacity of people who are rooted and have skills and time.

Stuart Mathers: Avenues Youth Project

1. Trust central to impact: trust of the young people and of the people who live around the youth club. Young people want consistency and someone they can trust. While activities in youth services (football sessions etc.) may be duplicated in different organisations, core youth work is not.
2. Difficult for small organisation to do an analysis of need on their own. Stuart sees most need in groups they are not funded to reach-transition to secondary school and over 19 year olds. In terms of measuring impact- stories are more effective than data. But need support on how stories are told. Conflicting pressures with Mayor's policy on gangs different from local authority's impact assessment
3. Difficulty in getting consistency of working across sectors as a result of the cuts. An incident at the weekend could be resolved if a partnership meeting was held within a couple of days. But local authority keeps changing its policy and personnel and has reduced capacity to support, police have cut community links and fire service stretched.

4. Avenues has a good management committee, considerable support from the Parish Council in Queens Park and gets some support from Time for Paddington, a bespoke corporate community involvement service that supports volunteering from the private sector <http://www.thisispaddington.com/paddington-partnership/community> But the organisation struggles with commissioning and cross sector partnership work. They are wondering about a carrot to get volunteers to attend partnership meetings

Nafsika Thalassis: BME Health Forum

1. Low level mental health the key issue. Partnership in this area mixed. Never had involvement from the private sector as they have not prioritised better mental health outcomes as an area for action. Issue of shared values may be problematic.
2. Project work in partnership is successful (e.g. training volunteers to give low level counselling in their own languages,) but it is harder to get the statutory sector to change its behaviour (e.g. getting NHS to employ interpreters or delivering IAPT services in people's own languages and supporting a longer term relationship between client and therapist).
3. Smaller organisations must not be marginalised through commissioning
4. Citizens want to be involved in co-production where there are resources and they can improve a service, not in consultations about things that have no outcomes.

Andy Watson: WECH Housing Association

1. There is evidence (university research) that community based organisations like WEHC, a resident controlled housing association, have greater resident satisfaction with services and well-being and relatively high degrees of voluntary activity. WEHC helped to deliver 2000 street reps.
2. There needs to be Local Area Renewal Partnership – strategic level partnership body with representatives from voluntary, statutory, community and business sectors - and below this more operational Neighbourhood Partnership boards/Community Forums should be

established at ward level with a similar membership base but drawn from practitioners operating on the ground and with representatives from recipients/beneficiaries of services also attending. These partnerships need to resurrect and resource activities that worked.

3. Infrastructure is seen as a bad word, there is an assumption that projects can deliver in a vacuum. But partnership needs resources- do need someone to give direction, provide organisational support and co-ordinate. Voluntary activity withers without some support.

Steve Hilditch: Housing expert

1. While the maps of deprivation remain unchanged in most areas, in Inner London there has been major change over the last decade driven by the property market with dispersal and decline of social tenants and owner occupiers and the growth of private rented sector and homelessness
2. Most change is required in regional and national policy, but local policy needs to be focussed on how you enable local poorer residents to stay in their communities: advice services; private sector tenants' rights; homelessness and the 100,000 children in temporary accommodation and planning to deliver affordable housing.
3. Unless people have secure housing there is no community.

Ben Lee: National Association of Neighbourhood Management

1. There are still many neighbourhood managers with skills and knowledge working in related fields. And there are possibilities to harness the dynamic of community action to deliver better services
2. However the same discourse is being used to dump underfunded assets and services on communities (e.g. libraries). Those statutory agencies involved in this way should be named and shamed.
3. If community action is to be positively harnessed, it needs: significant long term funding, genuine co-production; support to the VCS so that the detailed implications of co-production or asset transfer and the responsibilities these involve are understood.

Steve Wyler: Consultant and the Common Good (ex Locality)

1. Not starting from scratch: Big Local, Power to change, Locality's work, community organisers, asset transfer- were all reasonable initiatives but fragmented and (except Big Local) not long term- not more than the sum of parts. Civil Exchange community Audit shows that the % of people who feel they can influence decisions has declined.
2. Need to understand what makes some communities productive and others not successful. The latter are often dumping grounds. Common Good: productive communities have high quality common goods provided collectively (schools, hospitals, parks etc.) and self-generated common goods from everyday acts of kindness to community-led local organisations that benefit local citizens. Need to build a network of community enterprise in the poorest areas.
3. How to release the resourcefulness of the many: resourced community anchor organisations (not necessarily representative) that aim to make connections; and very locally based participative democratic organisation- parish councils and building on the 'Our Place' programme which attempts to get neighbourhood level organisations to pool budgets, decide priorities and work together.
4. Need a national social infrastructure organisation.

Jackie Rosenberg: One Westminster

1. Extraordinary things go on at the community level- usually a couple of people with resilience, passion and commitment to the streets where they live. They are found **in** the community. But these people are not supported by the statutory sector which is suffering from cuts and has turned in on itself and become defensive. If local government saw communities as an asset rather than a problem it would make a difference. Things work because they are local, but this is exactly what current funding does not allow.
2. In order to facilitate dialogue you need infrastructure to hold the process together- to ensure the local (that does not have the resources to attend meetings or bid for funds) can be engaged and be heard. Need action at different levels- don't want small, participative, successful organisation to try and do too much.

3. Trying to get the private sector involved is essential but difficult. Time for Paddington has a full time worker and has engaged six companies. But need more from the private sector than volunteers 'who paint fences'. The challenge has to go back to business. How should they relate to community infrastructure?

Marjorie Mayo: Goldsmith College (unable to attend but 2 lots of written evidence)

1. Role of universities in support and evidenced based research. Essential to relate to draw on their particular areas of expertise.
2. Issues vary in relation to the areas and decision-making structures that are most relevant. This suggests the need for intersecting partnerships. Organisations are far more likely to be successful if they explore decision-making processes at the start, agreeing how to approach consensus decision making. Respect and mutual understanding will be key. Community development and outreach work are essential.
3. Whilst there is a case for developing a five year timeframe for planning action programmes, it would also seem important to be flexible, with scope for addressing unanticipated needs, as with the current refugee crisis.

Sean Baine: Chair of Equality Trust (unable to attend)

Suggest that there needs to be some reality about what can be achieved at the area level People working at area level also need to be looking to make alliances beyond area level on these major issues e.g. like London Citizens.

Additional points in discussion.

1. Involving the private sector: Business Connective programme: Long term, clear purpose, objectives, strategy-led. But problem of the reduction of responsibility of managers at the local level in companies. But some companies are reversing it - Boots, Lloyds etc. Some growth in bottom-up activity by graduates in the private sector generating skills development programmes uniquely in the VCS.

2. Impact assessment is becoming an obsession and an industry. It does not make sense for every youth club to have to prove the impact of youth clubs. On things that work, it is a choice- do you want them or don't you want them? Need to just show who is using the service and what is their engagement, policies and procedures in context. There is a risk of the increasing use of payment by pre-determined results. Get perverse effects and focus of quantitative rather than qualitative.. Need to move towards commissioning for purpose.
3. Concern that cuts and the decline in common goods provided collectively will dominate the agenda. However there was agreement that things can still happen and that local organisations had to confront the situation and think 'what am I doing this for, are we able and willing to make changes and to demonstrate that we know how to make things better for our communities?' VCS needs to disrupt itself before it is disrupted.
4. There is no shortage of money except in the statutory sector. Housing associations have plenty of money - as do housing developers. They need to be engaged early. The community must negotiate benefits from private sector development.
5. The Chair wished to have a separate discussion (in February?) about how to get NHS to change and be involved.