

23.09.2015

London Communities Commission
c/o Paddington Development Trust
Unit 122 Great Western Studios
65 Alfred Road
London W2 5EU

Dear Friend,

London Communities Commission

I am writing to you on behalf of the London Communities Commission to invite you to submit evidence to one of the Commission's hearings.

The London Communities Commission is currently sponsored by London Funders and Paddington Development Trust (PDT). It emerged from a Summit held on the 18 June 2015, attended by 75 community organisations, policy makers, businesses, funders, thinkers and place shapers, which sought to clarify how the community sector should start to define shared aims and goals and develop ownership of the way forward across all sectors. One way of taking forward some of the conclusions of this Summit was widely thought to be a high level Commission which PDT has facilitated and is being chaired by Sir Stephen O'Brien CBE. There are 11 further Commissioners:

- Sir Sam Everington Public Sector
- Christine Mead Public Sector
- Lucy de Groot Public Sector
- Eithne Rynne Voluntary Sector
- David Adair Business Sector
- Paul Buchanan Business Sector
- Guy Insull Business Sector
- Sarah Ebanja Community Sector
- Geraldine Blake Community Sector
- Neil Johnston Community Sector
- David Warner Funder

The full weight of austerity is falling onto the shoulders of the most disadvantaged and poorest members of communities all over London. In spite of this austerity, there is evidence of successful community and citizen's action in hidden pockets all over London and the London Community Commission will shine a light on their recent achievements. In this context, the Commission will also focus on the real needs of poor Londoners rather than the existing provisions to support them. It will examine further opportunities for local third sector partnerships to develop collaborative and trusted relationships with like-minded civic, public and private sector organisations as well as Foundations and philanthropists to eliminate inequalities in London.

The terms of reference of the Commission are set out below:

Terms of Reference (ToR) of the Commission.

1. *To review the current approach to communities' policies and the role of the citizen/voluntary/community/private sectors in London in order to recommend how the extent and nature of current needs in disadvantaged communities can better be met, concentrating on the priority unmet needs. This task may best be met by focussing on a few defined localities.*
2. *To identify successful approaches and to examine, within those localities, the specific local skills, intelligence and contributions citizens and the Voluntary and Community Sector should be required to make in addressing the identified needs of local people and to recommend accordingly.*
3. *To explore future community-based funding design and make recommendations for a more coherent system of local support that addresses the current trend for increasingly large scale procurement that edges out smaller community-based organisations (who often have the track record and local knowledge to deliver more meaningful and targeted programmes and outcomes); to contribute to ongoing work being undertaken by London Funders and others, and recommend improvements, or alternatives, to current arrangements.*
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*

The Commission plans to hold three evidence gathering sessions. Each session will be in two parts and be hosted by a community organisation. The first part of the meeting will gather evidence from local community organisations in the areas where the meeting is being hosted: Paddington 21st October, Tottenham 10th November and Newham 17th November, starting at 6pm for 3 hours each.

The second part of the meeting will hear from witnesses from across London.

There will be a severe time constraint on the amount of oral evidence that the Commission can hear. However, **there is no restraint on written evidence and we invite and encourage you to respond to some or all of the questions raised below.** It would be helpful to have written evidence that focuses on the first and second term of reference by the 15 October and responses to the other two terms of reference or all wider issues by the end of October. If your evidence relates to one of the three localities, please ensure we have it at least a week before the meeting in that locality.

The evidence should particularly address the following although we do not wish to constrain what people believe are key points by suggesting the questions below:

ToR 1. *To review the current approach to communities' policies and the role of the citizen/voluntary/community/private sectors in London in order to recommend how the extent and nature of current needs in disadvantaged communities can better be met, concentrating on the priority unmet needs. This task may best be met by focussing on a few defined localities.*

- * Do you have an evidence-based analysis of the unmet community needs in London/your area? If so what are they in general terms?

- * Do you have an evidence base on the current contribution of the VCS to meeting these needs? If so what is that contribution?
- * Do you have an evidence base on the impact and long term costs of successful community based responses to priority need not receiving funding in the future? If so what have those impacts been?
- * Do the community organisations in your area share a set of values, aims and objectives? Is this formally or informally expressed?
- * Is there a cross-sector community partnership approach that can facilitate responses to funding bids and contracts? If such a partnership exists: (1) does this partnership assist in giving the community a voice? (2) How could it be improved? If no such partnership exists (1) what are the barriers to its formation? (2) what successful methods or organisational relationships have been used to give the community a voice and the capacity to respond together to needs?
- * How could the priority needs of local citizens be better met and what steps exist in order to capture their views?

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?
- * How do you know these have been successful?
- * What is the role of partnership in these successful initiatives?
- * Can you identify the key factors that have made for a successful initiative?
- * How are local citizens consulted/involved in local decisions affecting priority planning and implementation?
- * How transferable is your approach? What do the public sector, private sector and funders need to do to support transfer?

ToR 3. *To make recommendations about the current system of commissioning, including a localities approach, with a view to addressing the tendency for larger and larger contracts that edge out smaller community-based organisations (who often have the track record and local knowledge to deliver more meaningful and targeted programmes and outcomes). To recommend improvements, or alternatives, to the current system.*

- * What is the scope for focussing efforts much more on local solutions whereby local people, communities and businesses as the core of the solution, not the problem?
- * How can commissioning be improved to maximise the voice of those to whom services are being delivered?
- * How can commissioning maximise the value of untapped local resources and build local capacity?

- * Is the model of a local community framework company feasible, whereby a given programme of agreed priority work is jointly funded and delivered by local partnerships over say a three year period? If not, what are other best practice localities approach?
- * What benefits can other localities' approach deliver?
- * What is required of public agencies and the GLA to make such commissioning successful?
- * What safeguards are required to ensure such partnerships are genuinely community based and trusted by the local community?

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.*

- * What new models of philanthropic and private sector giving should be developed across London? We are exploring the possibility of transferring the Islington Giving model <http://www.islingtongiving.org.uk/website/> to other localities. What are the advantages or difficulties with this model?
- * What is the business case for such models?
- * How can such models ensure money is distributed fairly across London?
- * Is there a place for local and London-wide precept powers being used at local levels?
- * How can community capacity be built to respond to such models?
- * What accountability frameworks are required (a) to funders (b) to local communities?
- * What is the role of the GLA and the London boroughs in such models?

We do not expect those responding to the call for evidence to address all these questions but would very much appreciate your contribution.

Contributions should be sent to fabian@pdt.org.uk. All evidence submitted will be put on our website www.londoncommunities.wordpress.com. We will be publishing summaries of each of the Commission's hearings and you would be very welcome to attend any of the sessions as part of the audience Paddington 21st Oct 6pm, Tottenham 10th Nov 6pm, Newham 17th Nov 6pm.

If you would like to give oral evidence please email us by the end of September, indicating in a short paragraph (max 300 words) the reason you wish to give oral evidence and the key themes you are addressing or points you will be making. We will need to select those who give oral evidence and it would therefore be helpful to have, in a couple of sentences, why you feel you should be selected. We will inform you as soon as possible if we would like you to give oral evidence to a session.

The Interim Report will be published early in 2016 and we will send this back to everyone who submits evidence for final comment. The final report will be published in March 2016.

We look forward to hearing from you and hope you can participate in this important initiative.

Yours sincerely,

Fabian Sharp, Commission Coordinator
on behalf of Sir Stephen O'Brien, Chair.