Executive Summary

A summary of our full State of the Sector Report

The London Borough of Camden has a diverse voluntary and community sector which plays a vital role in building relationships of trust with communities and supporting some of the most vulnerable residents. In 2023, we were home to 2400 voluntary and community based organisations, including faith groups and social enterprises. The diversity of the sector and its responsiveness to the pandemic and cost of living crisis has widened recognition and highlighted its importance to local society.

The sector plays an important role in mobilizing community action, tackling the causes and effects of poverty, inequality, and social and economic exclusion. A strong and vibrant sector is at the heart of a fairer Camden.

This research, commissioned by Camden Infrastructure Partners, aimed to help local stakeholders understand the strengths, challenges, and support needs of Camden's civil society in today's complex environment. By analysing primary and secondary data, along with stakeholder interviews, the study identified contributory factors to a challenging ten years.

The research also highlighted the diverse and complex needs of organisations in Camden. Given how varied the challenges and organisational needs are, a bespoke response is required to support the sector to grow stronger and more resilient. The report sets out the sectors support requirements against some of the greatest challenges the research identified. Insights are intended to inform discussion and action from all organisations interested in supporting a thriving, independent voluntary and community sector.

See sector support requirements overleaf...

Conclusion

Camden's VCS is a vital component of the borough's social fabric and economy, playing an essential role in addressing inequality and fostering community action. However, the sector faces significant challenges that threaten its sustainability. By focusing on strategic infrastructure support, sustainability, workforce development, and enhancing sector strengths, Camden can ensure a thriving, resilient VCS that continues to support the borough's diverse communities effectively.

Grassroots Civil Society and Small Groups

To nurture local developments in civil society and small groups we identified the following support requirement:

- **An incubator hub accessible in-person and digitally providing a range of information, guidance and access to support services and mentoring**

Sustainability

To ensure the strength and resilience of the local sector is maintained, we have identified the following priorities where some organisations will require support:

- **Support with strategic, financial and operational planning**
- **A programme to build fundraising skills and capacity**
- **Investment in Customer Relationship Management (CRM) systems**
- **Brokerage of strong sector partnerships for bidding**
- **Targeted fundraising support for groups most in need**

Demonstrating Impact and Understanding Need

Organisations of all sizes in Camden strategically benefit from robust evidence of need and the ability to demonstrate their value. To effectively achieve this, we identified the following support requirements:

- **Support to measure and communicate impact and social value**
- **More Community Action Research (CAR) to better understand need**
- **Creation of a multi-agency data repository increasing data access**

People - Paid and Voluntary Workforce

Of all the themes in this report, workforce presented the most challenges and complexity. Organisational support requirements are therefore greater and may require longer term investment:

- **Support to reimagine volunteering**
- **Collaborative investment in local workforce**
- **Workforce development hubs for training**
- **Promotion of employee volunteering**
- **Sector wide Employee Assistance Programme (EAP)**
- **Access to affordable HR support**
- **Salary benchmarking survey for the sector in Camden**

Proactively Responding to Change

Camden's VCS needs support to effectively respond to and manage change in several areas. We have identified:

- **Accessible information, training and resources skilling leaders in change management**
- **Cultural Advocacy Programmes**
- **Consultation with equity-led organisations on their specific infrastructure support needs**
- **Build capacity of sector to engage with and address environmental and climate change priorities**
- **Programmes to improve use of technology and AI**
- **In light of rapid changes in technology, a growing and changing voluntary and community sector and the changing needs of our diverse communities the sector needs to effectively respond to change.**