

Committee	Date:
The City Bridge Trust Committee	24 May 2016
Subject: Future of London's Voluntary Sector Infrastructure Support	Public
Report of: Chief Grants Officer	For Information
Report author: Deputy Chief Grants Officer	

Summary

This report updates members on the outcome of the research that you commissioned into the future of infrastructure support for London's voluntary sector and outlines the proposed next steps.

Recommendation

Members are asked to note the report.

Main Report

Background

1. In January 2015, NAVCA (National Association for Voluntary and Community Action) published its report, 'Change for Good', which called for a radical re-think of how infrastructure support for the voluntary sector is provided, in the light of the quickening pace of social, political, economic and technological change. By 'infrastructure support' we mean the provision of capacity building support (usually by second tier agencies) to voluntary organisations providing frontline services. This tends to take three forms:
 - Generalist support (around issues such as governance, finance, fundraising, business planning) typically provided by local councils for voluntary service.
 - Promotion of good practice in volunteer management and involvement, typically provided by local volunteer centres.
 - Finally, specialist support. This might be around a single topic such as property (for example, the Ethical Property Foundation) or around representation and voice (for example, Race on the Agenda or Children England).
2. In response, officers have worked closely with London Funders together with London's two key infrastructure bodies, London Voluntary Services Council (LVSC) and Greater London Volunteering (GLV) in looking at the future infrastructure needs of London's voluntary sector.

3. In September 2015, you approved a grant of £5,000 to enable LVSC, GLV and London Funders to design a detailed project brief for research into London's voluntary sector future infrastructure needs and how this might be resourced. You then approved a further £50,000 to enable London Funders to commission this research.
4. Following a competitive tendering process, Srabani Sen & Associates were appointed to undertake the work which commenced in September 2015.
5. A reference group was set up to direct and inform the work comprising London Funders; LVSC and GLV (representing generalist infrastructure support); Race on the Agenda and Children England (representing specialist infrastructure support); LB Southwark (bringing a local authority perspective); Heart of the City (representing the private sector); Community Links (bringing the perspective of an end-user of infrastructure support); Rocket Science (a think tank with considerable relevant experience); Big Lottery Fund; and City Bridge Trust (represented by the Deputy Chief Grants Officer).
6. Rather than use the term 'infrastructure support' which means little to most people (or conjures images of roads and sewers) it was decided to use 'civil society support' instead¹.

The Research

7. The timetable for the research was tight to coincide with London Councils' review of its four grant-making programmes, including its capacity building programme, all of which are due to end in March 2017. More is said about this review in paragraphs 10 - 12.
8. The research comprised a mix of a literature review and a series of focus groups targeting voluntary front line service providers, civil society support voluntary organisations and local authorities respectively, as well as a series of meetings with the reference group. A conference was then held on 17th December 2015 to test the emerging findings of the research.
9. Further consultation took place during the New Year and the final report, 'The Way Ahead: Civil Society at the Heart of London' was launched at Guildhall on 13th April 2016.

London Councils

10. In December 2015, there was a meeting of the Leaders of London Councils. The findings of London Councils' grants review, as outlined in paragraph 7 were discussed and a motion was passed that agreed it was unlikely there would be continued support for a capacity building programme in the current economic climate. The Deputy Chairman abstained from this motion.

¹ The report defines 'civil society' as people taking action to improve their own lives or the lives of others and as acting where government or the private sector don't.

11. It was then agreed by London Councils that a further period of consultation would take place until mid-January. The Town Clerk wrote to all the borough Chief Executives to explore how the City of London Corporation, City Bridge Trust and local boroughs could work together to protect civil society support. This resulted in several boroughs making useful contact with the Chief Grants Officer in the early part of this year.
12. At the March Grants Committee meeting of London Councils, it was agreed to drop the capacity building programme from April 2017. However, it was also agreed that officers from London Councils would work with City Bridge Trust and London Funders in implementing the findings of 'The Way Ahead' and meetings are underway to discuss how this might play out in practice.

The Findings of 'The Way Ahead'

13. A key tenet of the report is that London's communities and their needs should be at the heart of all civil support organisations and that communities should be encouraged to find their own solutions where possible. It recommends that all sectors – private, public and voluntary - should work together to develop the support that frontline voluntary organisations need.
14. It recommends that civil society support organisations adopt a 'triage and connect' approach to diagnose the issues faced by frontline volunteers, groups and organisations in order to match them to the most appropriate support which would come from a range of sources (be this private, public or voluntary sectors), rather than being confined to civil society support organisations.
15. The report recognises that civil society support provision in London is currently patchy. It proposes a 'hub and spoke' model for civil society support with a London Hub providing support at the pan-London level. The report did not determine the structure of the London Hub which could be a formally constituted organisation or a virtual network of different organisations delivering different functions. The 'spokes' connect the central hub and local communities. What a 'spoke' comprises will vary according to local conditions and could range from an individual community activist through to well-established organisations (such as a council for voluntary service).
16. It recommends that civil society support and independent funders should drive improvements in quality, based on peer support and challenge.
17. In order to address the current patchiness of provision, the report calls on funders to work together to create a regional fund, partly to support the transition from existing civil society support provision to the new model but also to try and ensure that civil society support provision is more evenly distributed across London. The report recommends that the London Hub, working with specialist support, develops standardised resources where possible which can be customised and used locally.

18. It identifies a role for the GLA to collate, analyse and provide data on the needs of London's communities and civil society. Data sharing across sectors is vital in enabling a shared understanding of need and information on policy developments and best practice.
19. Finally, the report recommends that the GLA, elected representatives, London Councils and independent funders ensure that civil society is included in strategic planning and decision making about the future of London.

Next Steps

20. A number of 'actions' were announced at the April launch, the key of which are outlined below.
21. The Reference Group will establish a Change Group to develop an action and implementation plan, together with a communications plan to disseminate the findings of The Way Ahead.
22. Membership of the Change Group will include representatives from:
 - London Funders
 - LVSC
 - GLV
 - Local support organisations
 - Specialist support organisations
 - Independent funders
 - London Councils
 - GLA
 - Commissioners
 - Frontline organisations
23. LVSC and GLV will each convene network meetings of their constituents (local councils for voluntary service and volunteer centres respectively) in order to discuss the report's findings and agree how to move forward.
24. Heart of the City will bring together businesses and business brokerage services to discuss how to take the recommendations of the review forward.
25. London Funders will convene a meeting of independent funders to discuss the report's findings and agree how to move forward.
26. A meeting will be sought with the new Mayor of London to discuss the GLA's engagement with the review and its recommendations.

Conclusion

27. It is clear that the traditional infrastructure model of a council for voluntary service and a volunteer centre in every borough, complemented by specialist provision and regional representation is not sustainable in the current funding climate.
28. The research team and the Reference Group started with the premise that the current funding climate has created an opportunity for a radical re-think of how civil society support is organised and how it can be improved. Nevertheless, the report's recommendations present a number of challenges.
29. Making the transition from the current position to the hub and spoke model, for example, will not be easy and will need to be a gradual process, depending on local conditions. There may be a need to pilot new approaches to deliver civil society support to establish what works and what does not.
30. It is essential that funders work together in taking the recommendations of the report forward although this will not be without its challenges, especially if there is an appetite to establish a regional fund.
31. Two key strengths of the report are that:
 - however civil society support is delivered in the future, it will have the needs of London's communities at its heart
 - it proposes that the private, public and voluntary sectors work together to ensure that frontline voluntary organisations have the support they need.

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