

H A R I N G E Y

Fairness Commission

What We've Heard

A summary of the VCS Forum focusing on Fairness

15th October 2018

Alexandra Palace, Haringey

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On 15th October 2018 Fairness Commissioners and Officers ran a Voluntary Community Sector (VCS) Forum event dedicated to the topic of fairness, which was put on by Bridge Renewal Trust. Attendees took part in round-table discussions, discussing their perspectives on fairness and inequality.

The session was divided into a number of tables, each of which discussed one of the following topics:

- Children & Education;
- Communities & Neighbourhoods;
- Finance;
- Health & Wellbeing;
- Housing;
- Debt.

Volunteers from the sector moderated on the day, and were asked to submit their notes from the discussions at the end. A summary of the moderators' notes that were submitted is below.

CHILDREN & EDUCATION



- **Families find it difficult to access services that are there to help them.** For example:
 - Many feel they have to go private to get the support they need;
 - There is a 2-year waiting list for CAMHS in Haringey, the list is not this long in other places e.g. Islington;
 - Access to Occupational Health and Speech and Language is particularly poor.
- **There is too much focus on youth crime.** Participants say we need to focus more on mental health etc.
- **Participants say there is a need to be more child-focused** and listen to what *their* goals and aspirations are.
- **Participants felt that support teachers in schools no longer know how to deal with children with special needs.** It was suggested that the Council could work with VCS to develop a price plan for training professionals on SEN.
- **Some services / training for parents with children with SEN needs to be done in their native language.** Having interpreters doesn't work in a wider group.

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- **SEN children often have multiple professionals involved in their support, which can be very difficult for the family to manage.**
- **The rate of school exclusions is a problem, and exclusions seem to be resorted to more quickly than they used to.** This is a particular concern for children with SEN and black boys.
- **There is low level take-up of Apprenticeships in Haringey.** More broadly, participants think there needs to be a better link between employers and schools.
- **There was a suggestion that good and outstanding schools maintain their position by not employing NQTs, which is bad for the sector.**
- **Funding for the VCS sector has reduced significantly, affecting the services they can provide.** For example, there is no funding anymore for VCS to do 1-1 behavioural support.
- **Participants want more expenditure to be kept in-borough, with local service providers.** Schools, GPs etc. are paying out of borough companies for training that could be provided by Haringey's VCS, at a lower cost and by people with lived experience.
- **Participants want to see a more collaborative approach to sharing examples of good practice across the borough.** It happens in patches, but it's disjointed. They say there is a lack of collaboration around economic development in particular.
- **Participants say it is particularly difficult to collaborate with doctors,** even when the VCS are offering a free service to their patients.
- **Participants say it is difficult to get an appointment with Councillors.**

COMMUNITIES & NEIGHBOURHOODS



- **The length of the housing list has not changed over the years, and high rents are a problem.**
- **Participants on this table thought that residents should be given more control over their community.** For example, they wanted help to scale community land trusts, which they see as a fairer alternative to other forms of regeneration.
- **Participants say community land trust members have been pushing for housing specifically allocated to health and social care staff.** They say it's disappointing that the GLA or Council were not also pushing for it.
- **On the whole, they thought that community activism should be seen as more of an asset.** A cultural change is required to change mind-sets.

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- **The community wants more help to secure affordable meeting venues.**
- **People want libraries to be made more accessible, with rooms that the community can use for meetings, in the evenings as well as daytimes.**
- **One participant said that young people are online and we need to engage with them online as well.** Actual youth centres are expensive, but virtual meeting places are cheap.
- **Due to accessibility issues and isolation there is a lack of fairness in how different groups access information and resources.**
- **There is a significant digital divide, and an issue of accessibility more widely.** This affects those with visual impairments, hearing difficulties, colour blindness etc.
- **The group thought the Commission should be looking into how different groups can be helped to access the internet.** There was a suggestion that the Council could use volunteers for information sharing.
- **There is a problem for those who speak English as a second language – information is often only available in 2-3 other languages etc.** Children often end up interpreting for their parents, but this isn't always appropriate or even allowed.
- **Participants said that the borough is very split, and it's difficult to travel between different parts.** Some participants said that transport links across the borough should be reviewed, and bus routes negotiated with TfL.
- **North-Middlesex Hospital cannot pay London weighting, and it therefore struggles to recruit and retain good staff.** Haringey also misses out on a lot of grants as it's seen as outside 'central' London.
- **The Council says prevention is important, but this doesn't come through.** Often all that is needed is to be able to speak to one person at the beginning of a problem, and this doesn't happen so the problem deteriorates.
- **People seem to have to take legal action – against the Council and other statutory services – before they are able to get the support they need.**
- **Participants wanted services to be better signposted, and suggested the creation of a directory of services and support, for health and social care in particular.** They'd like a system where you enter your postcode and get the information you need. They thought this could be backed up by a team of people who can also answer telephone enquiries.
- **There may be clear boundaries between how different agencies work, but people's lives aren't structured like this.** Participants want this to be accounted for.

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FINANCE



- **Residents could use more support in terms of financial management - it is unfair that some people fall into arrears because they don't have the support or knowledge.** Organisations such as LEAP should go to residents and look at how they could make savings and manage their debt.
- **Residents should be better informed about the availability of free or subsidised courses, and who is eligible.** E.g. training for sole traders, workshops for older people, etc. They also wanted to know what the threshold is for access to adult education.
- **Participants perceived an inequality in residents' access to advice, information and guidance.** They want officers to be proactive about getting information to residents and making sure it is accessible for them.
- **Participants thought that HALS could be run more effectively.** They thought that the VCS could be used more effectively to provide courses for people that 'fall through the cracks', such as asylum seekers.
- **Not-for-profits struggle with financial sustainability, due to grant dependency.** Funding is also not always linked to capacity building, meaning investment in this area is more difficult and many have to operate hand to mouth.
- **The way that services are commissioned can lead to new set ups that start from scratch rather than building on what's there.** This also creates short-termism and an unnecessary amount of competitiveness.
- **Participants suggested the Council introducing a Council Tax Protocol, with a system for reviewing cases of those who are in arrears with their Council Tax bills.** In such cases the Council appears more likely to move to court proceedings than to identify how the relevant households could be supported. One participant had been threatened with eviction before help from Councillors and their MP helped prove that they were eligible to have their bills frozen for a period of time. They raised the point that it costs more to pay for court proceedings, to pay out housing benefit etc. than it does to reduce Council Tax for a fixed period of time. One participant was particularly concerned that Council officers are not consistent in who they target for arrears, and think due process is not always followed.
- **The Council should be doing more to support social and small enterprises with skills, competencies, leadership, governance and entrepreneurial skills.**

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- **Participants wanted a ‘Haringey Directory’, with signposting to local care networks.**
- **In terms of referrals for social worker support, participants wanted to see greater clarity around why a request may be rejected, and around what restrictions and rates exist.**

HEALTH & WELLBEING



- **The table wanted to see better access to care for all, including those who are housebound or socially isolated.** Lots of services are perceived to expect people to visit them, rather than getting out to those that are isolated or unwell. People need help on their doorstep.
- **Three table discussions on this topic said they wanted to see drop-in centres, lunch clubs or neighbourhood hubs** – welcoming places for local people, with community navigators available to signpost residents to services.
- **There are lots of vulnerable and isolated people who don’t know what help they need, don’t know how to ask for it, and are not told.** Families with disabled children can wait over a year with no help before there is a diagnosis. Then they are often left on their own once they are diagnosed. This can lead to mental health problems or family breakdown. Carers should get respite, and diagnoses should not just be clinical – they should assess whether e.g. there is enough food in the house, the TV is broken, if other resources are lacking. As a solution to this, participants through local groups should more actively publicise their services.
- **Smaller local community groups often struggle to get commissioned for work** – they should be empowered to do this kind of work, otherwise what are we learning from the services we commission. Bigger groups then get commissioned and paid, and use volunteers to keep costs down.
- **We could use our population more effectively** – lots of older people are unsupported to give back to their community and learn new skills.
- **IT skills courses are needed for much of the population.**
- **Participants perceive a lack of connectivity between clinical and community care, particularly when it comes to discharging.** Participants would like to see more social prescribing, e.g. with GPs signposting patients to VCS organisations.
- **GPs should be given better training around dementia, as people get diagnosed too late.**

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- **High rates of mortality among young carers and families.**
- **Can something be done about the number of fast food outlets?**
- **Lots of people want to do voluntary work but there is not enough support or opportunities.**
- **IAPT – participants questioned whether there was information available on how effective this was, and whether it has really improved the employment figures among those involved.**
- **Getting in touch with the Council is particularly hard**, with no telephone numbers advertised and the need to have an email address if one wants a response. The reliance on online to access information serves as a barrier.

HOUSING

- **Participants raised a number of concerns around the level of support needed to help residents navigate the housing system, in terms of accessing housing benefits as well as applying for social housing. They wanted more support for residents in the following areas:**
 - **When making applications for housing benefits;**
 - **In learning how to navigate the system to find housing;**
 - **How to use My Account, for those with lesser IT skills.**
- **Many people spend a number of years in temporary accommodation before being housed. This has a lasting impact on them.**
- **People get stuck on licenses and are not given support to move forwards.**
- **The use of license agreements creates insecurity for those living in supported housing.**
- **Staff in supported housing don't have the skills to help residents apply for private rentals** – supported housing officers should be trained on how to help vulnerable people maintain their tenancy.
- **Provide vulnerable tenants support from within the community.**
- **There is currently poor transition planning for vulnerable care leavers. This needs to be improved.**
- **Care home contracts should include move to independent accommodation.**
- **Quality of accommodation was commented on as a problem**, though it was not specified whether this was in relation to social housing or the private rental sector.
- **Participants want the Council to do more to prevent developers from getting out of providing social housing.** They think that developers should be supported to help them deliver this element.

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- **Homeless people find that they are not eligible for housing because they are stuck in the process of being categorised as homeless.** Eligibility is delayed, meanwhile their situation deteriorates.
- **Homelessness needs to be addressed much earlier** – Citizens Advice, Homes for Haringey, etc. have long waiting lists.
- **Improve community integration through community support.** Safeguarding and people with vulnerabilities need better coordination.
- **One migrant family had to continue living in a house that had abuse graffitied on the wall outside.**
- **You often have to have proof of abuse for police to believe that it's happening, or three incidents of ASB for them to do something.**
- **Promoting home ownership is discriminatory because certain groups are less likely to be financially able to pay the deposit.** Even the shared ownership fee requires an income of £60k-90k.
- **Socio-economic status should be a protected characteristic.**
- **Access to housing is extremely important for disenfranchised young men and those coming out of prison.** They have to prove their lives are at risk in order to be housed elsewhere. If they go back to the initial vulnerable environment it's more difficult to prevent reoffending. The system needs to change and be set up to believe and support people better.
- **For young offenders there is also a lack of continuity after discharge.** Once they are transferred their support drops off.
- **80% of people on the Gangs Matrix were on it because they were victims of crime, yet they face the threat of eviction for being on there.**
- **There is a lack of awareness around the system and support available around ASB.** Participants want a system for dealing with nuisance neighbours, and access to mediation for such situations.
- There was concern around housing stock going down, as homes are knocked down and flats put up.
- **Rents are going up considerably in the east, and there's an epidemic of lone parent families being pushed out of the borough because they can't afford to stay.**
- **The 3,000 Haringey households in TA affects more than 5,000 children.**
- **There needs to be greater clarity over what the process is when council-rented property hands over between generations.** Families lose their homes because they didn't know what process to follow.

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- **Housing need is going to get worse with universal credit.** There is likely to be more support required from the Council – it should be planning for this.
- **Private landlords don't rent to those on benefits.** The Council should be doing more to stop this type of discrimination.

The Fairness Commission would like to thank those who attended the VCS Forum and shared their experiences with us.

If you attended but feel that your comments are not reflected here, please contact us by email or telephone (fairness@haringey.gov.uk / 020 8489 5336).