

BUILDING

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SUCCESS

**KENSINGTON & CHELSEA
VOLUNTARY SECTOR
MANIFESTO 2015**

Introduction

This Manifesto recognises the value and importance of the voluntary and community sector (VCS) in the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea and seeks to safeguard its future for the next five years to come. The VCS contributes considerably to the social and economic development of the borough. The National Council for Voluntary Organisations data (2013) shows the borough has 1172 registered charities. Almost 4000 people volunteer as trustees, and the sector locally provides employment for thousands of people. This is accompanied by an active grassroots social action community, an army of people delivering services on little or no funding, whose contribution should not go unnoticed or be taken for granted.

The VCS exists to provide support to those most in need and for those who, for a number of reasons find it difficult to access public/mainstream services. The sector not only enables people to take charge and improve their lives, it also plays an important preventative role. This Manifesto has been produced by Kensington and Chelsea Social Council with guidance from our voluntary sector members. Each point of the Manifesto sets out the foundations on which we can build an environment in which the VCS is able to flourish in the future.

PROTECTING THE VOLUNTARY AND COMMUNITY SECTOR

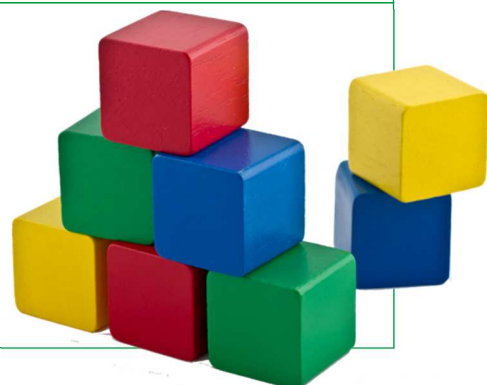
Invest in the voluntary and community sector to save in the long term

The Foundation:

With a growing and ageing population there are now ever increasing demands on public services. Local government funding is forecast to decrease further in the next three years. The Office for Budget Responsibility has projected real cuts in public services of more than 5% in 2016-17 and 2017-18. Reducing spending on public services and passing on those reductions to the voluntary sector is not always the answer. The VCS can be a major driver in delivering innovative services that support communities. However, the sector cannot deal with the fallout caused by reduced public services without continued investment.

The Building Blocks:

Through working with commissioners and residents the voluntary sector can support cost effective change. This will require fresh thinking about the investment that is needed to bring about such change. This way of working is becoming more evident in the field of holistic approaches to health and wellbeing.



Support small organisations to access commissioning opportunities

The Foundation:

The voluntary sector can provide reach into communities and deliver culturally appropriate services. Commissioners can work closely with the sector and communities to understand need and what is required to meet it. Back in 2007 the Government's Audit Commission produced a report, *'Hearts and Minds: Commissioning the Voluntary and Community Sector'*. Strong recommendations were made to 'construct a commissioning process to ensure a variety of delivery organisations have the opportunity and incentive to deliver services...'

The Building Blocks:

Commissioners should recognise the challenges facing smaller organisations to compete for contracts. They should give small organisations an opportunity to come together to bid for contracts, allowing enough time to build consortia. They should also score tenders on the basis of evidence that providers can reach the most disadvantaged communities, or work in partnership with local organisations that can.

Strengthen the 'Social Value Act 2012'

The Foundation:

This Act asks that public authorities consider social value when awarding public service contracts. To date the Act has been welcomed by the VCS and there is evidence of good practice emerging across the country.

The Building Blocks:

Central government should issue clearer statutory guidance for Local Authorities on implementing the Act. It should remove the reference to the EU procurement threshold which means the Act only currently applies to contracts worth over £172,000. For most small and medium sized organisations these contracts are out of reach at local level.

Retain Grants

The Foundation:

The grant system allows the VCS to work nimbly and to respond to emerging needs. Grants also provide a foundation that enables the voluntary sector to retain its independence.

The Building Blocks:

We advocate for the continuation of grant funding to the voluntary and community sector.

Provide affordable voluntary sector premises

The Foundation:

Many voluntary and community organisations in Kensington and Chelsea deliver services out of premises in the borough.

Affordable premises allow organisations to direct most of their funding towards service delivery and staffing.

67%

of the charities that completed our survey told us they struggle to cover the costs of office space.

The Building Blocks:

The Localism Act 2011 recognised 'Assets of Community Value' and right should be extended to premises, and to support the enterprise hub spaces. More power should be devolved to local authorities to implement planning policies in order to meet the specific needs of the borough.

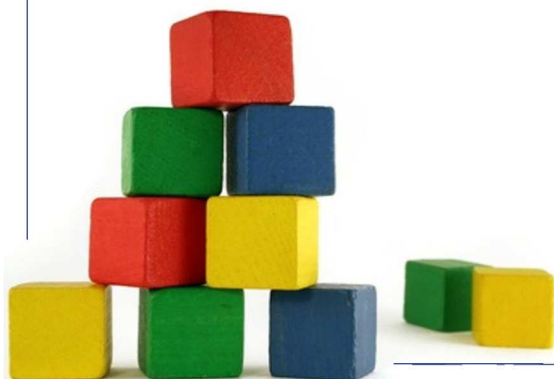
introduced a Community Right to Bid. This guarantee community groups access to affordable development of the voluntary sector and social

HEARING THE VOICE OF THE VOLUNTARY AND COMMUNITY SECTOR

Enable voice

The Foundation:

The VCS plays an important role, enabling individuals to thrive and fulfil aspirations. The sector works across all areas of the community and it is a vital conduit between local people and government. In the Royal Borough the Borough Voluntary Organisations Advisory Group (BVOAG) acts as an important mechanism which brings together both VCS representatives and Councillors.



The Building Blocks:

An incoming government should set up a National Voluntary Sector Advisory Board made up of members who have strong links with local infrastructure organisations and who can adequately represent local issues at a national level.

Revive the Compact

The Foundation:

The Compact was introduced to support the building and maintaining of good working relationships between the voluntary and statutory sector. It has been a helpful tool in understanding how each sector works and allows for discussion on what can be improved.

“I feel that the Compact has not moved with the times and has not adapted well to the relentless cutbacks that have been imposed across the statutory and voluntary sectors.”

The Building Blocks:

The Compact needs to be renewed and reviewed regularly to relate to the reality of the world we are living in today. Matters such as commissioning, premises and social value have opened new challenges for voluntary organisations. Any refreshed Compact must seek a way forward with appropriate solutions which support maintaining good relationships.

Run meaningful local consultations

The Foundation:

Well-designed consultation can engage residents and the VCS in an effective way which informs, asks the right questions and gives and receives feedback.

The Building Blocks:

Consultation needs to be meaningful and not just a tick box exercise. Those that engage must have a realistic chance of influencing outcomes. Processes must always be clear and kept simple to engage the maximum number of residents and voluntary organisations. Outcomes from consultations should be communicated clearly and where positive change has resulted, it should be held up as a good practice and promoted within central and local government.

Amend the Lobbying Act

The Foundation:

The Lobbying Act was introduced to bring about transparency particularly around election time. Still, it has resulted in charities feeling restricted in their right to speak up about their concerns. The VCS has a vital role to play in campaigning and lobbying for social justice and equality. Independence to lobby and campaign is a necessity for the voluntary sector to do its work effectively.

The Building Blocks:

In Kensington and Chelsea the VCS has a rich history of lobbying for social justice. The sector should be encouraged to express its concerns and not be restricted at any time of the year. The next government should amend the Lobbying Act and “gagging clauses” that seek to silence the sector on matters of public interest.

SUPPORTING MIXED COMMUNITIES

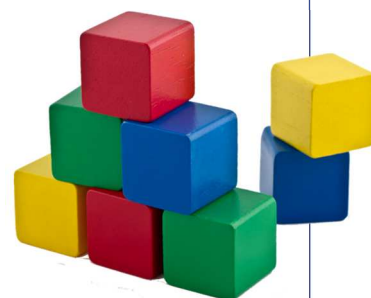
Provide a mixed tenure of housing

The Foundation:

Kensington and Chelsea has a proud tradition of mixed communities. People from all walks of life and from all over the world live in the borough which has made it unique and rich in its culture. But if we are to preserve the character of this borough we need housing tenures that are capable of housing a true mix of residents.

The Building Blocks:

Kensington and Chelsea should make every effort to build more affordable housing to meet its nominated target as defined in the London Plan 2011. Any new developments in the borough should have a mixed tenure of social, affordable and intermediate rent to reflect the needs of the community. The Local Authority should retain its current social housing stock, and refurbish over regenerate.



The recommendations in this Voluntary Sector Manifesto were based upon the input of over 50 local Kensington & Chelsea voluntary and community organisations.
We would like to thank all those who contributed.

Kensington & Chelsea Social Council

Our Commitment

We will continue to collect evidence of how rising rents and housing costs are effecting local individuals and families in the borough. Our work will also address the impact of welfare cuts on struggling families.

We will further advocate for the London Living Wage as a good start to help working families.

We will continue to support the voluntary and community sector in Kensington and Chelsea to deliver services to local residents.

We will collect evidence of the impact of the local voluntary and community sector and share it with decision makers - on what we do, what we can achieve and the difference we make.