

CVS Brent

BUSINESS PLAN

July 2011 – MARCH 2012

Contents

Introduction	3
Context	3
The role of a Council for Voluntary Service in Brent	6
Governance	8
Membership	8
Partners and stakeholders	9
Staff	9
Finance	9
Quality, Monitoring and Evaluation	9
Conclusion	10
Risk Analysis	11-12

1. Introduction

This is the beginning of an entirely new organisation to support, promote and develop voluntary and community action in the London Borough of Brent.

The voluntary and community sector in Brent, as right across the UK, is in a period of transition. The economic outlook and the direction of government policy mean the sector must adapt if it is to survive and thrive. As well as the many challenges ahead, there are opportunities for expansion and growth as communities are asked to re-assess the contribution they make to the area in which they live. A vibrant, confident, diverse, effective civil society in Brent can emerge with the assistance of a strong, independent and inclusive infrastructure support organisation.

The founders of CVS Brent are committed to the development of such an organisation, one that is trusted by its members and partners and whose sole purpose is the support and promotion of voluntary action in Brent.

2. Context

Voluntary, community and social enterprise organisations

Brent has an estimated 700 voluntary and community groups, ranging from local branches of large national charities to small and micro organisations. In common with the national profile, Brent's voluntary and community groups are diverse. Some organisations focus on specific issues; conditions and circumstances; others support communities of identity or place; some organisations work for changes in attitudes and behaviours while others hope to preserve, save and record for the future. Voluntary groups can bring people together for pleasure, for campaigning, to alleviate disadvantage or any other number of other reasons. The common thread that binds all these groups is the voluntary nature of the governing body of these organizations where the Trustees or Management Board give their time as volunteers. Community organisations are distinguishable not from their structure, but by their involvement with particular communities of identity from which they emerge.

In recent years there has been an expansion of organisations that generate profit through trading and business activity but where the surpluses are used for social benefit not private gain. Those involved in such enterprises share with the voluntary and community sector many of the same values and characteristics and as such the three are known collectively as 'civil society'. This is the term that we use in

this document to talk about the voluntary, community and social enterprise sector when it is not necessary to distinguish one from another.

Civil society across the UK has undergone enormous change in the last fifteen years, as successive policy announcements have challenged the sector to reconfigure and ready itself for the delivery of public sector services. The present government wishes the sector to take on further responsibility in this area. However, it is for individual organisations in the sector to decide if that is a role they want to play. Civil Society, as a collective movement must be free to choose its own path, ensuring while some may choose to go down the route of commissioning and contracting, there remains sufficient opportunity, support and resources for those that wish to maintain their traditional activities e.g. as campaigners.

Civil society is critical to social inclusion and strong communities. It is a route for individuals to learn new skills as volunteers or paid staff, provides for people when the state cannot or will not act and adds to the richness of our society. The voluntary, community and social enterprise sector makes a huge contribution to the quality of life for many in the UK and provides the social capital to make communities more resilient in difficult times such as these. Civil society is often embedded in communities in a way that statutory service providers are not and as such has a particular role in assessing and voicing the perspective of local people and helping make services meet their needs.

National political context

In “Building a Stronger Civil Society” (2010) the coalition government set out its strategy “towards helping civil society organisations grasp new opportunities arising from the massive devolution of power to local communities and reform of public services that underpins the Big Society”.

The coalition has made the ‘Big Society’ the central theme of its first term. Reference to it can be found in social policy from the health service to education and welfare. Wherever the public sector has a role, the government is pressing the idea that civil society should be present, supporting, supplementing and take over public sector service delivery. The Government stress they do not have “an ideological presumption that only one sector should run services: high-quality services can be provided by the public sector, the voluntary and community sector, or the private sector”¹ though there is some acknowledgement that they need to address barriers that are particularly problematic for smaller private, voluntary and charitable enterprises². Many civil society organisations remain unconvinced that they will be able to compete against the private sector, particularly on contracts of over £100,000 (as governed by European Competition Law). The introduction of the Big Society bank and the £10m *Investment and Contract Readiness Fund* are positive steps. The recognition by the

¹ Open Public Services White Paper July 2011 pg 9

² Open Public Services White Paper July 2011 pg 39

Treasury of 'social benefit' as well as the traditional bottom-line in the new Annex to the Green Book³ could prove to be a breakthrough if it is implemented at national and local level. The government must move forward on all fronts if voluntary, community and social enterprise organisations are to compete on a level playing field with private sector firms, that have greater access to finance and can price civil society out of the market.

The Localism Bill also creates opportunities for civil society to support their communities to have greater control over their local areas. Though it is extremely unlikely that government will be willing to contribute to the cost of doing this. Regardless of how many contracts to deliver public services are awarded to civil society organisations, there will always be a need for other types of voluntary and community action, those that do not and will never generate income and need to be supported by grants and charitable giving.

It is for civil society to decide how and whether to respond to the government's vision of the 'Big Society' and it is the role of a CVS to inform local groups about the opportunities and risks and to facilitate discussion about that agenda. It is also the role of the CVS to facilitate discussion within the sector and with external partners as to what other agendas should be advanced and to support all groups, regardless of political pressure to favour the existence of some over others.

Local public sector context

Brent Council is supporting the creation of a new council for voluntary service in Brent and is committed to funding some of the core costs of CVS Brent. The Council has stated its desire to continue to support local civil society. However, it is operating in a climate of massive cuts and is undergoing a major restructure in which, the leadership must show due regard to their legal obligations and the delivery of compulsory service provision. Whilst government has urged local authorities to ensure that cuts to voluntary and community organisations are not disproportionate to those being experienced by the statutory agencies⁴ we have yet to see how this will play out in the local arena. The restructuring of Brent Council is still in progress and there has not been any decision as yet on a number of key issues that will impact on the sector: how to use money that will come back to Brent if London Council's plans to reduce centralized funding are finally passed; the future role of the Council's own Voluntary Sector Unit; new commissioning strategies; the roll- out of personalized budgets etc.

The planned NHS reforms will probably result in all local NHS commissioning being devolved to GP practices, many of whom have no track record of working with the voluntary, community and social enterprise sector. Public health responsibility will soon move to the local

³ 'Valuing non- market impacts' annex to the Green Book - the government's handbook on policy appraisal and evaluation Aug 2011

⁴ Best Value Statutory Guidance Department of Communities and Local Government Sept 2011

authority in 2013, bringing further change to how local groups work on key issues such as health inequalities. Further reforms are likely in other public sector domains (Police, Education, Planning) that could have a profound effect on local communities and how they relate to the agencies around them.

A new CVS must be able to respond to this changing environment and provide, encourage and facilitate leadership among local community and voluntary sector organisations to ensure the best outcome for the sector. Strong networking and a shared voice among local groups alongside strategic partnerships and relationships with the public sector will be key to this.

3. The role of a Council for Voluntary Service in Brent

CVS Brent is an entirely new organisation. It has been created to respond to the needs expressed by local voluntary and community organisations. At an Open Forum in May 2011, delegates highlighted their desire for a strong independent voice for civil society in Brent; their wish to increase the quality and opportunity for intra-sector dialogue, joint-working and partnerships; their aim to work at a strategic level with partners from other sectors and to be able to influence the strategy, planning and delivery of the local public sector; their need to access high quality services that enable them to better deliver their own goals.

Using the national framework provided by NAVCA⁵, CVS Brent will work in five key areas:

Support and Services: to help local civil society work effectively, signposting and offering capacity building support, information and advice;

Representation: to ensure the views of local civil society are represented in an equitable and appropriate way;

Liaison: to act as a focal point for Brent's civil society to network; develop partnerships, share learning and agree common ground;

Development Work: to identify gaps and opportunities in services and provision and help civil society grow to fill them; and

Strategic Partnership: to work in partnership with local, regional and national government and the full range of public and statutory agencies on strategy, planning, commissioning and delivery.

⁵ National Association of Voluntary and Community Associations

The Board recognise that CVS Brent will not, at first, be able to deliver against every demand placed on it by local groups. However, it is determined to work with local groups to prioritize its workload and ensure that the interests of local groups are always its first concern.

To this end CVS Brent has consulted on its initial strategic and operational plan and laid down the principles by which it will be managed. These are set out in the Strategic Plan for CVS Brent 2011-2013 and available on request.

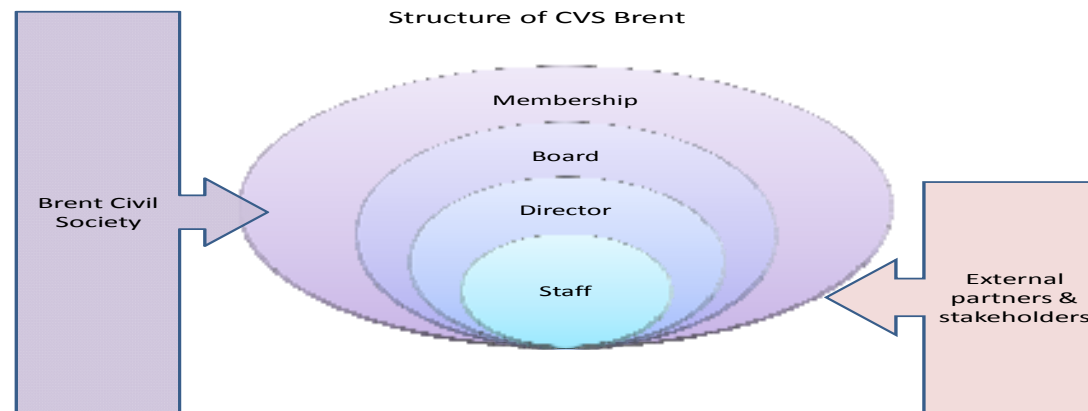
CVS Brent Structure

CVS Brent must respond to the challenge set by the government in the Supporting Stronger Civil Society consultation⁶. Here we see clearly the government's assessment of current infrastructure development provision. In a pre consultation exercise front-line voluntary, community and social enterprise organisations reported that they greatly value infrastructure support but there are too many organisations, duplicating services, many of which are not of sufficiently high quality. In establishing a new infrastructure support organisation, CVS Brent must respond to this challenge and ensure the provision of high quality services that groups really value, in ways that are cost effective and enrich local civil society.

The Board acknowledge that there is an intrinsic value to face-to-face interaction and this model will be used where it adds value and can most effectively be deployed e.g. networking & partnership development. However, in order to ensure that resources are most effectively concentrated on supporting local civil society organisations, the structure of CVS Brent will be based on a service delivery model that provides direct services only where a gap has been proved and where signposting to existing services or an on-line approach will not meet the demand.

The second principle employed by the Board is that 'form should follow function' in regard to its own size and structure. CVS Brent should not expand its own operational size unless there is a compelling and evidence-based reason for doing so. This will ensure that CVS Brent remains on course to deliver against its strategic objectives and does not compete with the groups it supports for resources that do not fit its mission i.e. *"to support individuals and organisations in Brent to have the capacity to respond to the needs and deliver the aspirations of their communities, through voluntary action"*.

⁶ Supporting Stronger Civil Society – A consultation' Oct 2010



4. Governance

CVS Brent has now registered with the Charity Commission and Companies House using a NAVCA approved Memorandum and Articles of Association that enable it to conduct its business under the 2006 Charity and Companies Acts. The Board will meet all the requirements incumbent upon them in relation to these Acts and any that supersede them. The Memorandum and Articles of Association will be available to any member of the organisation, partner or member of the public that wish to inspect them.

The first Board of CVS Brent is made up of those individuals that formed the CVS Brent Planning Steering Group. In line with the Memorandum and Articles of Association they can co-opt others onto the Board, until such time as the Annual General meeting of CVS Brent, when the new Board will be elected by the membership. CVS Brent will operate a recruitment process for those interested in becoming Board members based on a skills and aptitude assessment.

5. Membership

CVS Brent will be a membership organisation. All voluntary, community and social enterprise organisations based or working in Brent will be eligible for membership. Individuals that support the work and values of the organisation will also be eligible for membership. There will be different classes of membership. The rights and rules of membership are set out in the Memorandum and Articles of Association of CVS Brent.

6. Partners and stakeholders

Whilst the criteria and rules of membership will be specific, relationships with external partners and stakeholders will be varied and flexible. CVS Brent will work with any partner or stakeholder that will assist in helping the organisation fulfil its mission and which support its values and principles.

There will be opportunities for partnership working within the local and regional voluntary, community and social enterprise sector and CVS Brent will actively work to support existing partnerships and encourage and promote new ones. CVS Brent will also establish working alliances and partnerships with public and private sector partners and others that consider they have an interest in voluntary action in Brent.

7. Staff

CVS Brent will initially appoint an interim project director to assist in the establishment of the organisation. The Board will then recruit and appoint a permanent director and, resources allowing, up to two additional staff to meet the objectives of the operational plan for the first two years. The Board will pay due regard to its sustainability in the terms and conditions of staffing.

8. Finance

CVS Brent will comply in full with the Charity Statement of Recommended Practice (SORP) for accounting and financial reporting. Further it will be an exemplar organisation in terms of financial management with systems and procedures in place for regular monitoring and examination by the Board. CVS Brent will apply best practice to its relationships with suppliers, in particular social enterprises and local small and medium sized businesses, ensuring payment is made within the required timeframe. The guiding principles of the financial systems for CVS Brent will be transparency and cost effectiveness.

9. Quality, Monitoring and Evaluation

CVS Brent aims to be an exemplar organisation in the Brent voluntary and community sector. CVS Brent will be a learning organisation, it will use information and resources that come from external sources and its own outputs, data and information to improve its service and report to members, stakeholders and partners on its impact.

CVS Brent will put in place systems to evaluate its delivery and impact from the start and will involve all its stakeholder in this.

CVS Brent will carry out an annual review of its work and present the findings to its members and other stakeholders in its annual reports and at the Annual General Meeting.

At the end of the Strategic Plan 2011-2013, CVS Brent will have collected sufficient evidence to apply for the NAVCA accreditation award for best practice in relation to the five core CVS functions.

10. Conclusion

CVS Brent's vision is of a confident and vibrant borough where individuals, groups and communities work together to enrich society.

It will be an inclusive organisation, responding to the needs expressed by its members, providing services and facilitating the coming together of local people to respond to the needs and deliver the aspirations of their communities through voluntary action.

Brent is a vibrant and diverse borough whose citizens benefit from a vibrant and diverse civil society. The role of CVS Brent is to enhance the ability of voluntary, community and social enterprise organisations to make Brent a better place to live, work and learn. Brent's civil society deserves no less.

11. Risk Analysis

Strengths –

- Experienced and skilled board of founding trustees
- Trustees with a reputation for independence, credibility, high quality delivery
- Ability to start with a clean slate and establish best practice across organisation
- Low infrastructure requirements
- Support of expert advice e.g. NAVCA
- Good working relationships among trustees
- Large potential membership base
- A new organisation which will be judged on its own track record
- Support of local council at officer and political level

Weaknesses –

- No track record
- Limited capacity
- No physical base
- High expectation from local VCS
- Conflicting demands of local VCS
- Limited agreed funding
- Limited capacity of trustees to take on additional responsibilities
- Limited resources to start operational delivery

Opportunities –

- Lack of competition from other infrastructure support organisations in Brent
- Evidence of need for a CVS in Brent
- On going changing external environment will result in increased need
- Cost effective delivery available through digital media platforms
- Flexibility to modify approaches
- Joint partnership with other WL CVS's through Transforming Local Infrastructure funding
- Rolling strategic plan that allows future growth to be directed and purposeful

Threats –

- Potential of established VCS infrastructure organisations wanting to expand services into Brent
- Government desire to end direct and indirect (e.g Big Lottery) infrastructure funding
- Inability to fundraise
- Local groups do not support new CVS
- Local groups with limited time and resources to support new CVS
- Local groups with limited time and resources to become involved in networking and partnership working
- CVS Brent will be unable able to appoint a high quality Director
- CVS Brent will be unable able to deliver against its strategic plan

Risk matrix - Risk score based on likelihood of risk multiplied by impact of risk. (1-5 with low likelihood being 1) x (1-5 with minimal impact being 1). CVS = Council for voluntary services; CS = civil society

Risk	Management	Risk score
That CVS Brent is unable to convince partners and stakeholders that it is a credible proposition	<p>Board of trustees to continue to liaise with external partners and provide update reports.</p> <p>Board to continue to build relationships with local CS and act in a transparent and responsive manner.</p> <p>Board maintain oversight of relationships once staff have been appointed.</p>	2x5 = 10
CVS Brent is unable to attract sufficient funding to launch a credible CVS	<p>Board to continue to work with identified start-up funders.</p> <p>Additional funding opportunities are identified.</p>	3x5 = 15
CVS Brent is unable to deliver against the diverse demands from local CS	<p>Extensive dissemination of strategic plan along with dialogue on priorities.</p> <p>Operational plan must consider needs of broad range of CS customers.</p>	2x3 = 6
Local groups do not join or use services of the new CVS	<p>CVS Brent must be an outward facing organisation and take up each opportunity to make local groups aware of its existence and services.</p> <p>Targets should be put in place to increase membership and uptake of delivery and a strategy for these to be developed.</p>	2x4= 8
CVS Brent fails to attract high quality trustees and staff	<p>Board must spend time developing effective recruitment process.</p> <p>Board must not appoint if unconvinced that the new trustee/staff member is suitable.</p>	1x5 = 10