Community Resource Strategy

ROYAL *borough of* GREENWICH

Contents

Foreword

> Community organisations, including voluntary and community groups and faith-based organisations, play a vital role in Greenwich's civil society. They bring residents together and provide essential services to the most vulnerable individuals in the Borough, often reaching those who the Council struggles to connect with. The diverse range of community organisations in Greenwich reflects the rich diversity of our Borough.

The Council is dedicated to strengthening the third sector and ensuring its vibrancy in Greenwich. Mission 14 of Our Greenwich plan focuses on empowering the voluntary, community, and socially motivated sectors to provide increased support to those in need. Additionally, the services offered by community organisations contribute to various other missions within the plan.

To better encompass the scope of community organisations, the Community Resource Strategy replaces the previous Voluntary and Community Sector Strategy. The change in name reflects a broader focus that goes beyond the traditional boundaries of the sector. The term "Resource" emphasises our intention to utilise this strategy to guide the Council's use of both financial and non-financial resources, including tangible assets like property and intangible assets like expertise and purchasing power.

We acknowledge the challenges in the Council's collaboration with VCS groups and have put forward ideas to address these challenges. We also aim to improve our understanding of community "need" to ensure that future commissioning and service provision are better aligned with the actual needs of the community, rather than perceived needs. Furthermore, we strive to break down barriers and foster a more collaborative relationship with community organisations of all sizes.

The development of this Strategy involved extensive engagement with community organisations of all sizes and residents from across the Borough. We particularly sought to include the perspectives of minoritised communities and groups led by individuals from Black and Global Majority backgrounds. It is our commitment that this Strategy reflects the aspirations and concerns of all residents and communities in the Royal Borough of Greenwich.

The Royal Borough of Greenwich, like many other local authorities, is facing unprecedented financial challenges. It is imperative that we optimise the use of our limited resources. This Strategy outlines actions that will enable us to develop effective approaches with community organisations, leveraging the Council's assets, and exploring non-financial support options in addition to funding and premises.

This Strategy represents a significant shift in the Council's approach to community organisations, encompassing both the general community and the Voluntary and Community Sector. It provides a clear roadmap of actions to be implemented throughout the life of the Strategy. We will continue to work closely with communities and community organisations to deliver these actions and bring about positive changes for all stakeholders. Together, we can build a stronger and more resilient community in the Royal Borough of Greenwich.

Cllr Adel Khaireh
Labour Councillor for Plumstead & Glyndon Ward Cabinet Member for Culture Communities and Equalities

Executive Summary

Residents of the Royal Borough of Greenwich benefit from the diversity and dedication of its Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS). Made up of small and national charities, faith groups, social enterprises, non-constituted organisations as well as their beneficiaries, funders and commissioning bodies, the success of the sector requires local government, philanthropy and civil society to come together to safeguard the wellbeing of individuals and communities.

To achieve this, it is vital that we maximise the assets and resources which are available to the community, including those owned and managed by the Council. This strategy sets out a plan for how the Royal Borough of Greenwich can better use its community assets as well as various forms of funding and commissioning to support and empower the sector.

The strategy is built upon a needs analysis of the sector, providing a data-driven understanding of the needs of residents, including the most marginalised communities, but also identifying the existing strengths and initiatives within the Council and its VCS groups. This helps the Council understand how all communities could be well-served by the VCS sector and Council, and improve the wider targeting of resources. Through our needs analysis, four priority wards were identified which are currently underserved in terms of community assets and provision of VCS activity, but have comparatively high levels of deprivation:

- Middle Park & Horn Park
- Plumstead & Glyndon
- Thamesmead Moorings
- Abbey Wood

Alongside this needs-based analysis, RBG's Community Resource Strategy recognises not only the material needs that are necessary to pull people out of poverty, but also the powerful forces of belonging, aspiration and community that Greenwich VCS groups provide. The strategy includes a series of principles that should shape all the work done with the VCS sector and community assets, enabling both more meaningful participation and a more efficient approach to service provision. These principles are:

1. **Embracing value creation in the VCS ecosystem:** seeing the wider social value than an asset can bring to a community, and how the VCS can work together to maximise that.

2. **Moving from paternalism to participation:** continuously emphasising co-production, learning from previous iterations within the Council, and improving going forward.

3. **Moving beyond the basic material needs:** seeing where prioritising crisis response in certain areas of the ward could lead to an underfunding of crucial ecosystem work elsewhere that would create more sustainable outcomes in the longer-term.

The strategy also highlights three priority areas of focus that will enable the Council to provide better support to the VCS with limited resources:

Continuing to build trusted relationships

The Council and VCS working together to make decisions that impact the Greenwich community through participatory processes where communities have their voices heard, ensuring equitable power distribution and strong relationships between the Council and community.

Achieving catalytic resourcing for the common good

Building structures for Council and VCS organisations to work together to resource the VCS ecosystem fairly and effectively for the long term: developing an equitable, transparent framework that guides how Council resources, including funding and Council-owned community assets, are used and accessed by VCS groups.

Making great assets available to the community

Community assets and data managed in a more transparent way, with involvement from more stakeholders, to provide quality shared public spaces for the VCS and wider community: ensuring that appropriate, safe spaces are made available, maintained and affordable for VCS and the wider community to use.

Enabling alternative sources of funding, more efficient collaboration, and sustainable business models for VCS organisations where appropriate will help the Council to empower the VCS in an environment of shrinking budgets and fast-rising costs.

All actions and decisions made on the back of this strategy should take into account and build on existing initiatives where possible. Moreover, the Council needs to recognise both the existing localised expertise within the VCS (deep knowledge of community need, and strong relationships between smaller and larger infrastructure organisations), and combine that with its own ability to see the bigger picture of need and provision across the borough.

1. Introduction

The Royal Borough of Greenwich features great cultural diversity, a strong voluntary and community sector and a host of community assets and resources. Greenwich is also a borough that has seen significant changes in the last 10 years, including a population increase of 13.6% between 2011 and 2021, the 5th largest increase in population of any London borough.[1] This trend is set to continue, with the most significant increases in population likely to be seen in Peninsula and Woolwich Riverside wards.[2]

The broader macroeconomic context is characterised by a distinct uncertainty and instability. The Council is grappling with the twin challenges of public spending cuts and increased demand for public services, alongside societal challenges including climate change and migration, resulting in the need for greater efficiencies, collaboration and innovation.

Given the strengths and challenges that characterise the borough, there is an opportunity to better understand the needs of residents and the wider sector, so that they can support and enable its development in an appropriate and responsible way. Part of this comes through the "Our Greenwich" 5-year corporate plan. The plan focuses attention on the Council's direct and indirect interactions with residents and communities, and sets out some key goals that aim to support a thriving life for all Greenwich residents in a challenging context. These goals are:

1 In 2030 residents will have a **different relationship** with the Council.

2 The Council is focused on **building services that build resilience** and independence.

3 When an interaction is needed with the Council people are able to get the right information or service in the most **efficient and accessible** way possible.

4 Our communities have a stronger voice and feel heard. This has been achieved through a change in the way that community engagement is carried out, with a focus on **going to communities and really listening**.

5 This regular engagement gives us a **constant understanding** of the challenges, hopes and fears of our communities to make sure we're addressing the right things.

6 Our shared understanding of our challenges, missions and growth of community networks has led to **greater levels of partnership** to address challenges.

Many of these goals rely not only on the Council and residents, but other relevant public, private and third sector stakeholders to achieve. In particular, the network of voluntary and community sector (VCS) organisations, who provide varied services to the community, from mental health support to youth club services, create a foundational bedrock for building all the trusting relationships, mutualism and community interactions that are so important for community cohesion and resilience. Greater trust within communities, both between residents and towards public institutions, is itself vital to fighting prejudice and crime, and increasing wellbeing for all.

However, these VCS organisations can only support residents if the organisations themselves have the funding and resources they need to deliver their services and activities. The Royal Borough of Greenwich manages a large commercial and operational Property portfolio from community centres to libraries and leisure centres. These shared public spaces are a vital source of support, warmth and facilities for residents to come together as a community, share with one another and build relationships. They are also an important resource to enable VCS organisations to be formed, to grow and to carry out their activities for and with the community.

This is why the Royal Borough of Greenwich has commissioned a new Community Resource Strategy to reimagine its relationship with VCS organisations and the community assets it holds. Our work seeks to provide an overarching strategy for how to manage these valuable resources, as well as mapping and identifying areas and types of need, ensuring that the future planning and allocation of resources better aligns with the needs of residents in our local communities.

Based on interviews and needs analysis, the priority areas proposed in this strategy feel most vital to building sustained collaboration between the VCS, Council and other local actors, leading to better outcomes for the borough through this "VCS ecosystem". However, many of the next steps and proposed ideas are based on existing examples of best practice or previous initiatives that the Council and VCS have worked on over the years. Understanding what's out there already, and building on existing initiatives, must be an underlying principle of community resourcing going forward to achieve the best outcomes for residents across Greenwich.

2. Our Approach

In developing this strategy, we sought to embody missions 15, 16, 17 of the "Our Greenwich" Plan by actively listening to communities, developing networks, and designing services around the needs of residents.

We took a strengths-based approach, recognising that the Council's community assets form part of a wider network of both physical and intangible assets and strengths within the VCS. For example, we asked every VCS we interviewed for a recommendation of someone else to speak to, to try to tap into the rich networks out there and avoid bias.

As we did our analysis, we also challenged ourselves to think of this strategy from the perspective of the VCS, rather than "only" the Council's levers. All stakeholders in the ecosystem have a role to play in making this strategy successful, and we know that VCS groups have a lot to contribute.

The work was split into three phases over the course of 9 months as summarised in Figure 1.

Overall, we engaged with:

- **54 VCS organisations** via in-depth interviews, focus groups, and online feedback (see Figure 2).
  Of these, 40% (17 organisations) are led by people from marginalised communities.
- **75 Council staff and elected members** via in-depth interviews and focus groups
- **100 residents** via focus groups and street engagement
- **19 external experts** from other local authorities, social finance, community wealth building and other areas of expertise

1 Scoping & Strategy Review
Set out where we are now and what we want to achieve together

2 Needs Analysis
Explore the diverse needs and strengths with our local community

3 Strategy Development
Build a vision for the future and shared actions we can take today

4 Delivery
Consolidate insights to share wiith collaborators & wider community

5 Outputs
Robust community-led strategy Insights & recommendations report

Figure 1: Process for developing the Community Resource Strategy

Our analysis of VCS provision in Greenwich was based on data sourced from MetroGAVS online directory, the LiveWell database, and a VCS list provided by RBG Communities team in late 2023. We also worked with a list of community assets provided by the RBG Property team in summer 2023.
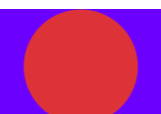
VCS Engagement List

Table 1: List of VCS organisations engaged with

Name of organisation	Interviewed (video or phone call)	Attended a workshop	Provided feedback by email
MetroGAVS	✓		✓
Metro GAD		✓	
GCDA	✓		
Greenwich Inclusion Project (GrIP)	✓		
Young Greenwich Youth Services	✓		
Tramshed	✓		
Abbey Wood Community Group	✓		
Clockhouse Community Centre Association Greenwich	✓		
Eritrean Diaspora Community Network (EDCN)			
Glyndon Community Centre			
Irish Community Services in Greenwich, Bexley and Lewisham (formerly Irish in Greenwich)	✓		
Middle Park Community Centre	✓		
Woolwich Common Community Centre	✓		
The Big Red Kick			✓
Black Major	✓		
ARC and You			
Intercultural Youth Development Association	✓		
Abbey Wood Library	✓		
Better Gym (GLL)	✓		
Black Female Entrepreneurs Greenwich		✓	
Woolwich Works	✓		

	Col 1	Col 2	Col 3
Gurdwara Sahib Woolwich	✓		
Ramgarhia Sikh Association	✓		
Catford and Bromley Synagogue	✓		
Charlton Church			✓
Woolwich Garrison Trust			✓
Peabody	✓		✓
Weekend User Drug Project (WSUP)		✓	
Judy Smith			✓
Soul Purpose 360		✓	
Community Reconnection		✓	
Congolese Support Group	✓		
Nepalese Veterans Gurkha Club	✓		
Charlton Athletic Community Trust	✓		
Volunteer Centre Greenwich	✓		✓
Greenwich Citizens Advice Bureau Ltd	✓		
Greenwich Mencap	✓		
HER Centre	✓	✓	
AnaHuna		✓	
Mama2Mama			✓
First Step Trust		✓	
Plumstead Community Law Centre			✓
CraftA Community			✓
World of Hope		✓	
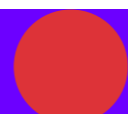
Organisation	Col 1	Col 2	Col 3
More2 Nurseries		✓	✓
Mum's Aid	✓	✓	
Food for Purpose	✓		
Dyslexia Care Foundation	✓	✓	
Ajoda Community Alliance	✓		
Javan Coker Foundation	✓		
Parent Power	✓	✓	
Somali Teaching Group		✓	
Charlton Toy Library	✓	✓	
Little Fish Theatre Company	✓		
Samuel Montagu Youth Centre			✓
Artfix			✓
TACO			✓
Emergency Exit Arts	✓		
Friends of Barnfield Residents Committee (Part of Barnfield Care Home)	✓		
Charlton Central Residents Association	✓		

It should be noted that while 54 of the 535 VCS organisations we contacted as part of this strategy provided valuable input, the remaining 90% did not respond or engage with it. This may be due to many reasons including not seeing our emails or other forms of engagement, not having the time to respond, or choosing not to for various reasons. These unheard voices are vital to listen to, and highlights a real need for further intentional engagement (in-person, in-community) going forward.
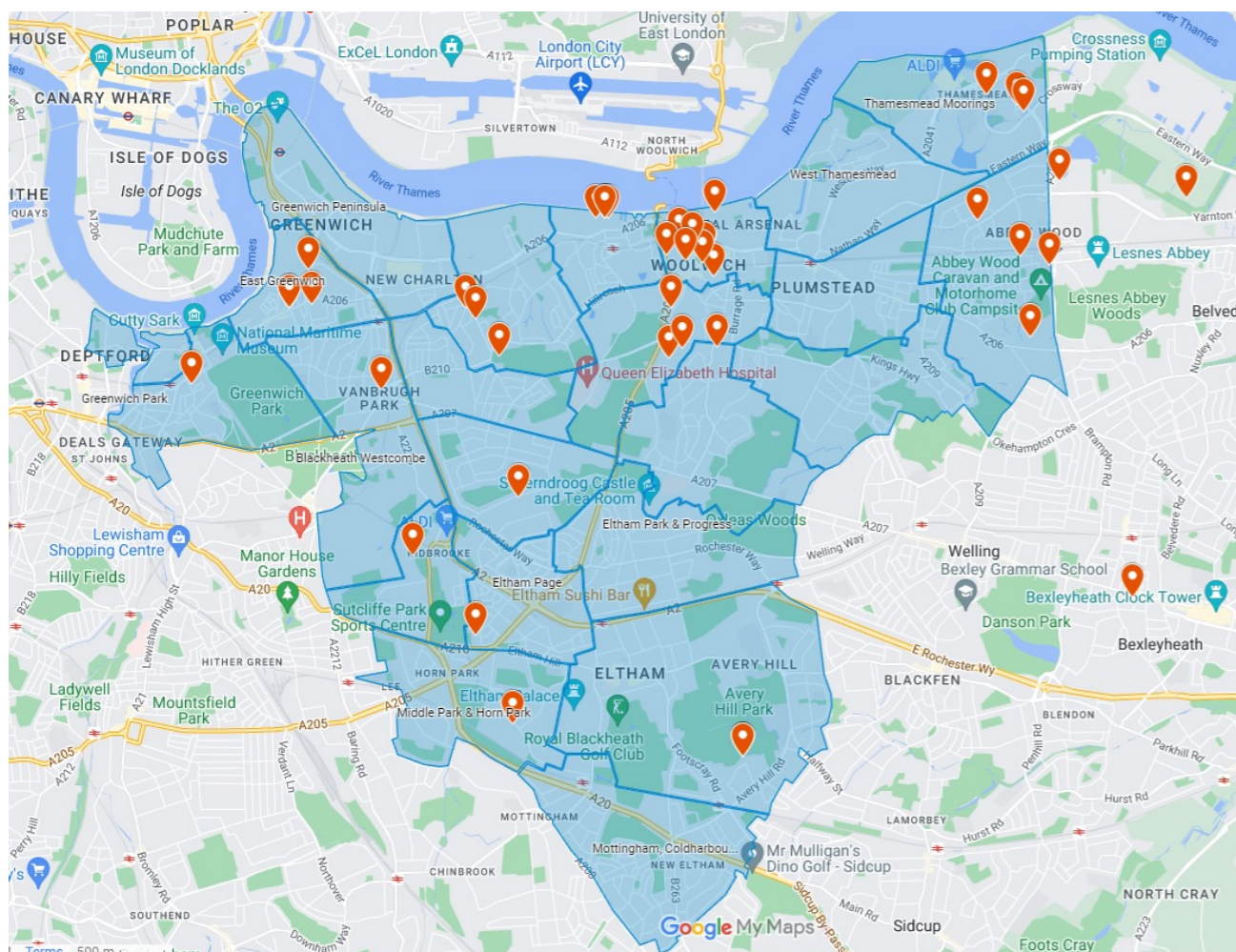
Figure 2: VCS organisations engaged with via in-depth interviews, focus groups, and online feedback

Alongside this qualitative analysis, we conducted an in-depth review of existing Council documents and strategies,[3] and existing data on Greenwich demographics,[4] measures of deprivation,[5] location of community assets and extent of VCS activity[6]. The analysis of this data is included in the following section.

[3] Our Greenwich Corporate Plan, VCS Strategy 2017-2022, Greenwich Race Equality Scorecard, Social Mobility Delivery Plan 2019

[4] Royal Greenwich Data Observatory

[5] Pharmaceutical Needs Assessment 2023-26 and Greenwich household data from the Low Income Family Tracker

[6] Our analysis combined data from the MetroGAVS online directory, the LiveWell database, a VCS list provided by Greenwich Communities team in late 2023, and a VCS list provided by MetroGAVS in Jan 2024. The analysis did not include this final VCS list.

Key definitions

Voluntary and community sector (VCS)	The term "voluntary and community sector" (VCS) refers to organisations whose primary purpose is to create social impact rather than profit. It is often called the third sector, civil society or the not-for-profit sector. The largest single category of VCS organisations nationally is registered charities, but there are many different governance structures and sizes within the sector.

This strategy takes into consideration the full range of organisations that exist in the borough, but recognises that many organisations that help make the Greenwich a vibrant place to live and work receive no direct financial support from the Council and indeed may not be officially recognised in the VCS databases currently being used.

By voluntary and community organisations, we are referring to the following types:

- Small businesses with a social impact purpose
- Co-operatives and social enterprises
- Educational establishments
- Faith groups
- Green spaces friends groups
- Healthcare providers
- Housing associations
- Military support organisations
- Non-constituted groups of residents working together to make a difference in their local communities
- Non-profit organisations
- Public service providers
- Registered charities
- Sports, environmental, arts and heritage organisations
- Tenants and residents' groups |
| Building, facilities, and spaces owned and managed by the Council "Community assets" | Non-commercial facilities used for the wellbeing or social interest of communities and which are owned by the Council or where the Council plays a central role in the planning or delivery of the services provided.

This includes: community centres, leisure centres, libraries, cultural assets, parks and other open spaces, playing fields, children's centres and cultural spaces. Some facilities, such as doctors' surgeries or schools fall outside of this definition but may form part of the overall consideration of these spaces due to the overlapping need arising from how spaces are used.

The following are excluded from this definition: hospitals and healthcare; transport infrastructure; police, fire and other emergency services; schools and higher/further education; Council-owned commercial buildings; Council offices/depots; and housing.

Note:

This group of facilities is referred to by the Council as "community assets". However, the co-design process undertaken for this strategy has highlighted that the value of community "assets" is much broader than many of the Council commissioning services allow for. Through our asset-based community development approach, we have tried to ensure we are appreciating these intangible community strengths alongside the physical assets. This will allow us to better understand the collective participation that makes community assets contribute a value that is more than the sum of their physical parts. |

|	The term "co-design" has many interpretations, definitions, and preconceptions attached to it. Within this project, we take this term to mean the involvement of residents, communities, and organisations in building the strategy, and putting their voice on a level playing field with the voices of those in power. This includes:
Co-design	• Seeking their input in the research phase
	• Gathering their ideas and suggestions in the ideation phase
	• Bringing together Council representatives and local groups/organisations in the planning phase
	• Seeking their feedback before the strategy is finalised and launched

3. Needs Analysis

3.1 Resident challenges

This needs analysis aims to provide a data-driven understanding of the needs of residents in Greenwich in order to help understand how all communities could be better-served by the VCS and Council, and to improve the wider targeting of resources. Our resident data was gathered from datasets held by the Royal Borough of Greenwich alongside in-person street engagement with residents, while our VCS data was gathered from focus groups, workshops, and 1:1 interviews with more than 47 VCS organisations.

Please note that our analysis is not exhaustive - we spoke with over 100 residents in more than 8 wards, but were unable to complete full in-person engagement across all wards. It would be helpful to undertake more research within specific wards, particularly the priority wards highlighted below, since our research indicated strongly that there is high variation of need and outcomes within wards themselves.

3.1.1 Key demographics of Greenwich

The Royal Borough of Greenwich has a population of 289,254 (14% increase from 2011, the 5th largest increase in population of any London borough).

Figure 3: Population density (per hectare) by ward (Census 2021 data)
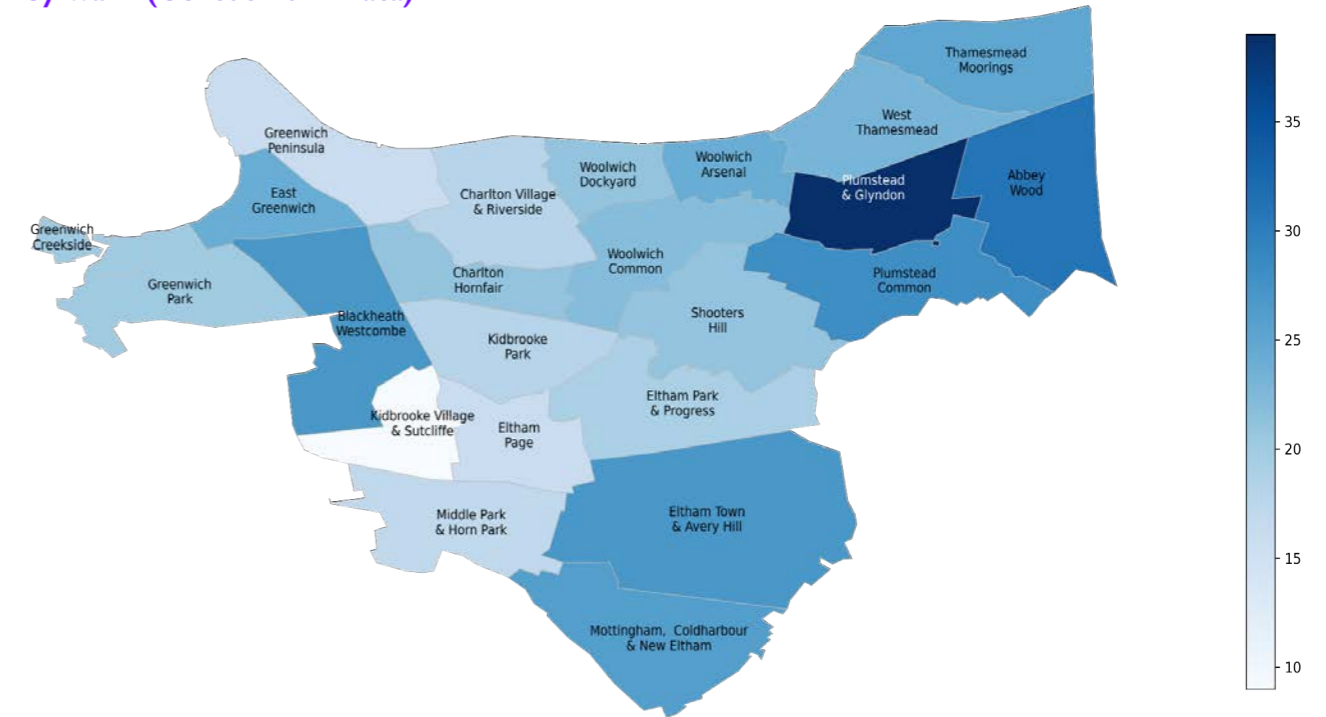
Plumstead & Glyndon has by far the highest population density, at 39 persons per hectare, with a significant proportion of housing estates and limited green space. The next closest is Plumstead Common at 28 persons per ha. On the other end of the spectrum, wards with significant areas of green space including Kidbrooke Village & Sutcliffe have much lower population density with just 9 persons per ha, with Eltham Page and Greenwich Peninsula the next closest on 16 persons per ha.

Areas with higher population density may, depending on indicators of deprivation, require more allocation of assets and community resources to support the larger population. However, it is worth remembering that lower population density could also lead to a higher likelihood of isolation or lower community cohesion, which may justify more community resources.
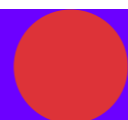
Figure 4: Population age groups by ward (Census 2021 data)
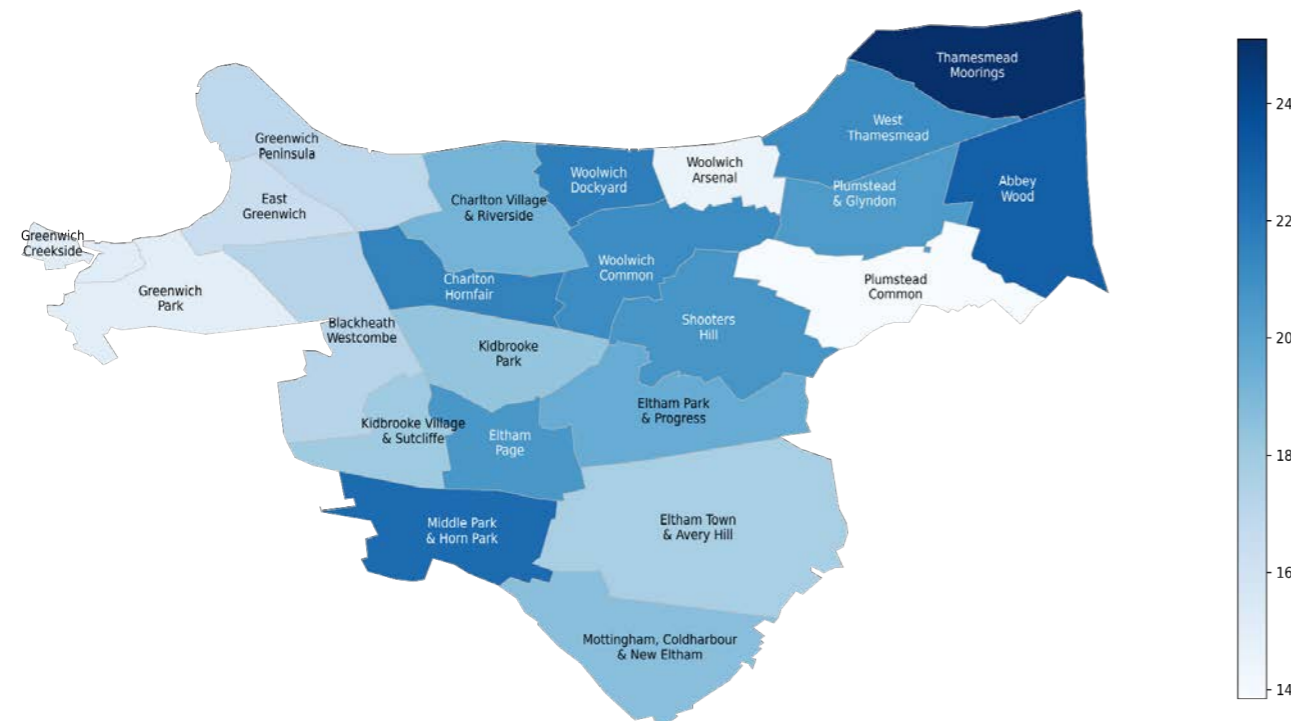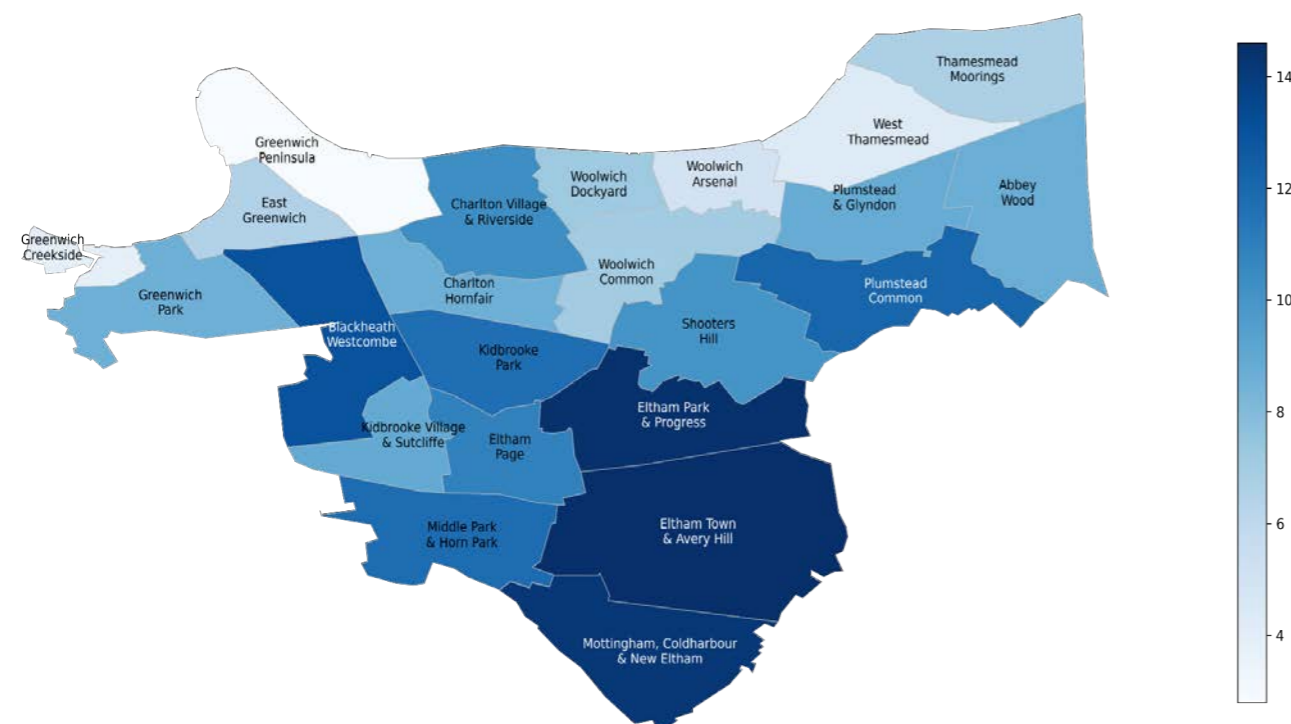
% Younger Residents (15 and under)

The number of residents in the borough aged over 65 has risen by 16% since 2011. This is 10% of residents, compared with 18% of the population in England. 70% of the population are aged between 15-64, compared with a national average of 64%. 20% of the population is under the age of 15. This means that compared to the rest of the country, Greenwich has fewer older people, a larger working age population, and higher numbers of young people. Thamesmead Moorings (25%) and Middle Park & Horn Park (23%) have the greatest representation of those aged 0-15 while Eltham Town & Avery Hill has the highest proportion of older adults over 65 (15%).

The age profile of a ward can indicate the kind of VCS activity that may be needed by the population. For example, Eltham Town & Avery Hill is more likely to need specific services for the elderly (either older people's community activities, and/or health & wellbeing associated with an ageing population), while the youth/children's services in Thamesmead Moorings could be an important area of focus. Please note these assumptions should be tested in more depth in each specific area.

Figure 6: Non-white ethnicity population by ward (Census 2021 data)

Figure 5: Population age groups by ward (Census data 2021)

% Older Residents (65 and over)
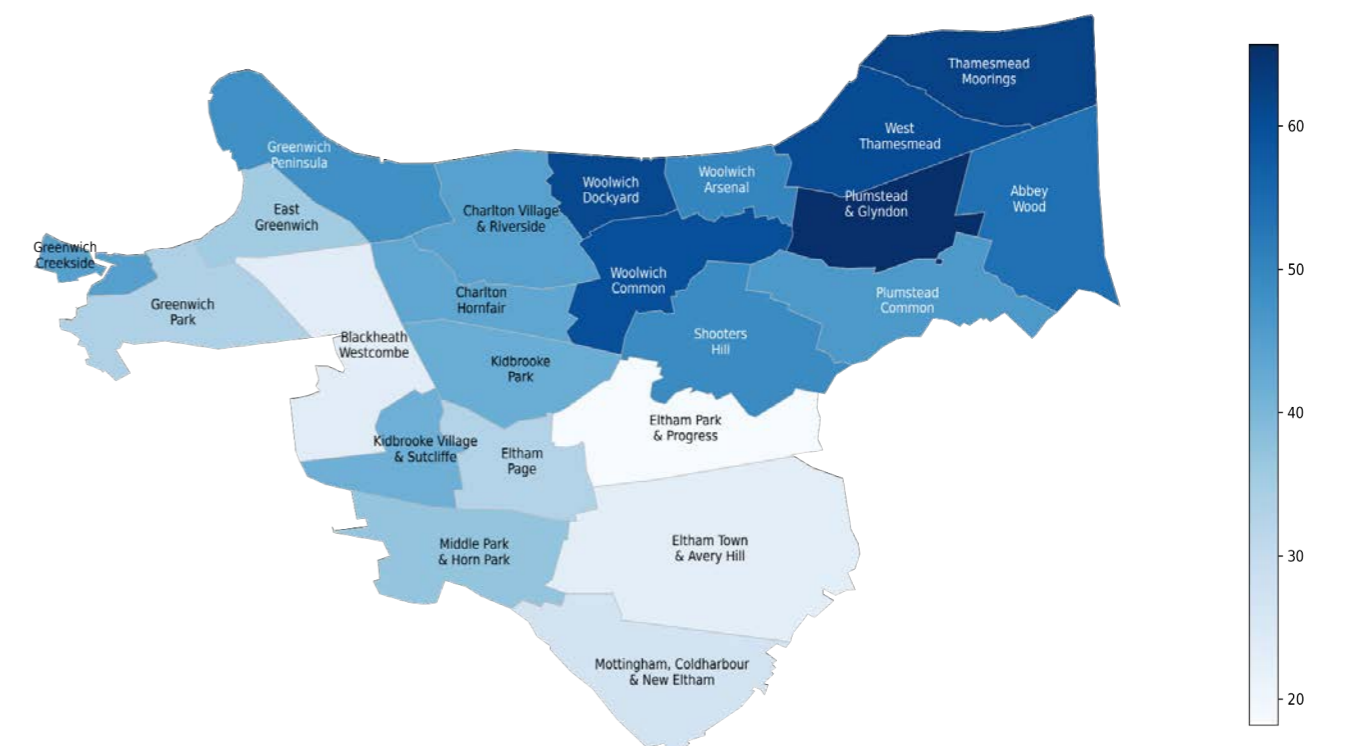
Nearly 45% of the population of the borough are from non-white backgrounds. However, there are proportionally more people from Black backgrounds in Greenwich than the average in London (19.1% vs 13.3%) and fewer people from Asian backgrounds vs London (12% vs 19%) (Race Equality Scorecard 2019). The highest representation of non-white ethnicities is in the North-east of the borough, which correlates broadly with the map of deprivation (as discussed in the following section). Wards with the highest representation of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic populations are Plumstead & Glyndon (66%), Thamesmead Moorings (62%), and Woolwich Dockyard (61%). Eltham Park & Progress has the lowest representation (18%).

Ethnicity can in some cases correlate with deprivation, particularly for Black African Londoners and Asian British Londoners. Therefore the ethnicity map of Greenwich may be a useful indicator of deprivation, and could be viewed alongside specific metrics of deprivation to identify services needed in different areas as discussed in the following section. The needs of different ethnic minority communities can also be explored further to help in targeting support and resources.
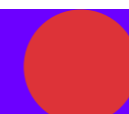
3.1.2 Deprivation in Greenwich

By analysing need through the lens of deprivation, we sought to identify where there is a lack of resources, opportunities and services, which are considered essential to individual and community wellbeing. We chose six metrics of deprivation, which are available within Greenwich's Local Authority dataset.[7] These metrics are:

1. Pension credit eligibility - combining the number of "households claiming pension credit" and the number of "households eligible for but not claiming pension credit"

2. Poverty - the number of "households in relative poverty"

3. Unemployment - the number of "households not in work"

4. Child poverty - the number of "households with a child eligible for Free School Meals"

5. Disability - the number of "households with a disability"

6. Caring responsibilities - the number of "households with a carer"

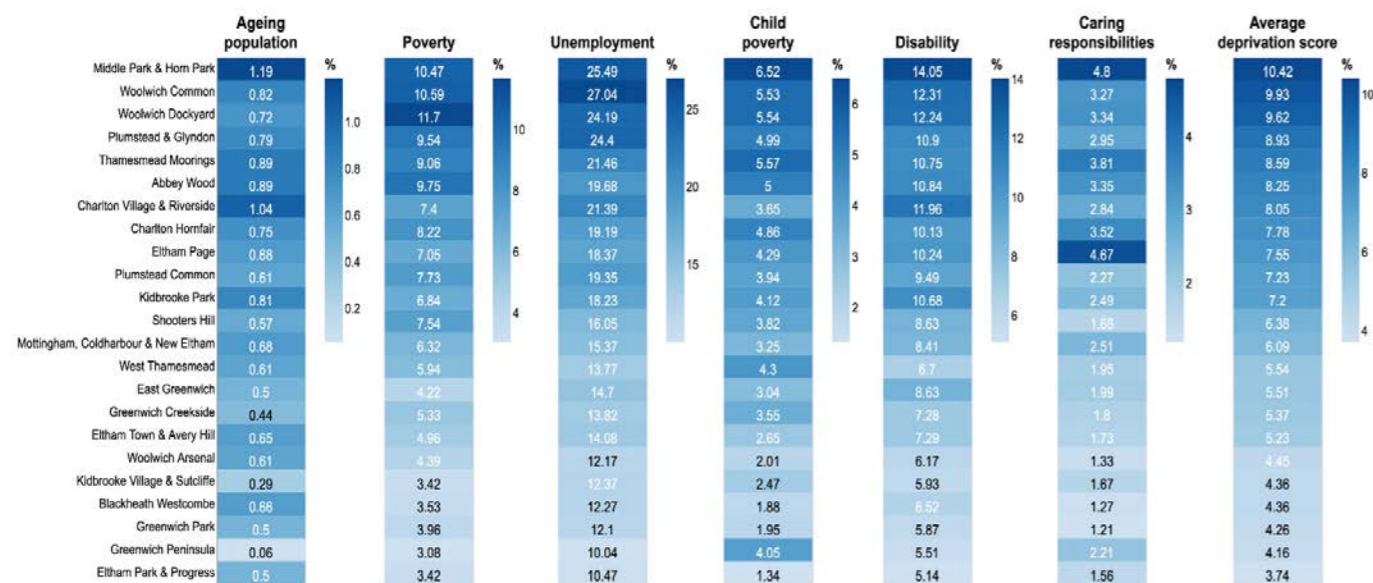We determined the relative level of need in each ward by calculating the percentage of households that were affected by this type of deprivation. We applied equal weighting to each deprivation metric to build an average "deprivation score" and then rank the wards from most to least deprived.

Figure 7: Deprivation metrics across all wards

[7] We used the Low Income Family Tracker (LIFT) platform to access and analyse current local authority data at a ward and household level. This data is more up to date than the most recent census (2021) and the Index of Multiple Deprivation analysis (2019). The full set of data can be found here.

Figure 8: Map of total deprivation score by ward
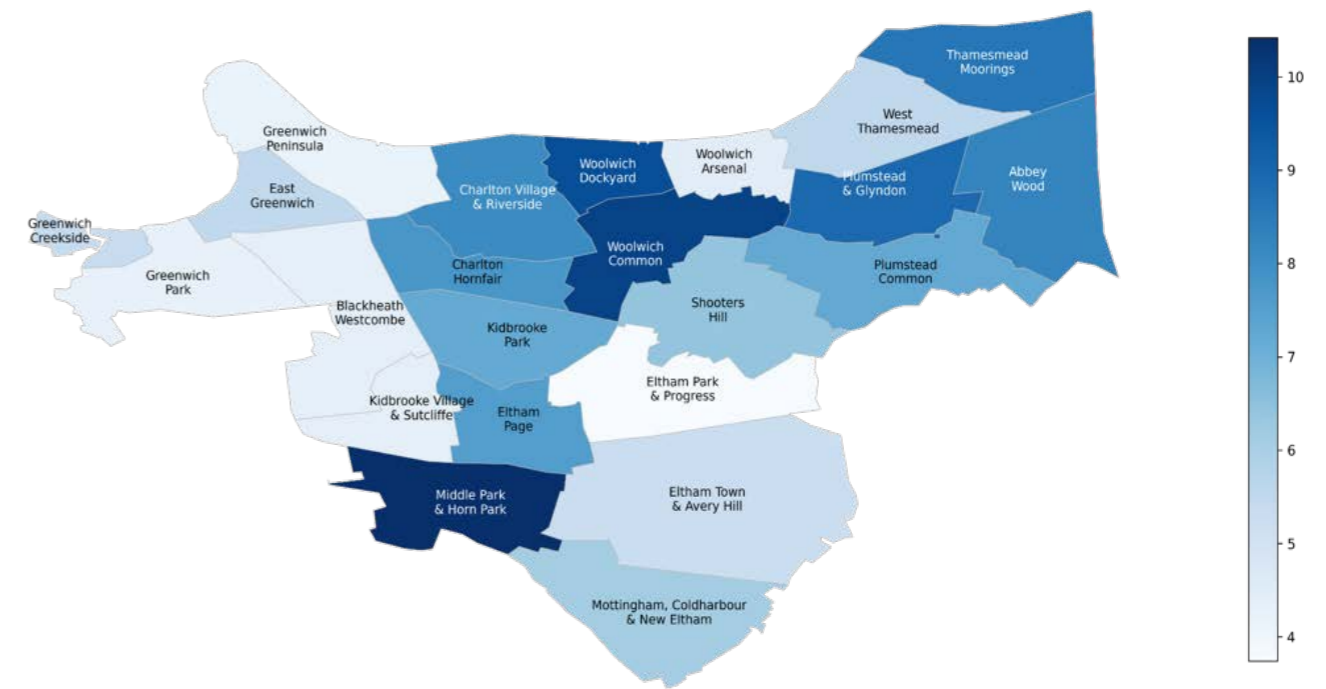
3.2 Current provision for resident challenges

3.2.1 VCS in Greenwich

Greenwich benefits from a thriving voluntary & community sector, spanning a diversity of activities, sizes and types of organisation. In the interviews, focus groups and other qualitative research carried out as part of this Needs Analysis, both the Council and VCS groups reported many positive experiences and perceptions of each other.

> **Greenwich has a really nice feel. Despite the politics, the politicians do their best to look after residents. It's frustrating and effective in equal measure, but the borough is somewhere you get out of bed to be in. When I speak to councillors 1:1, they're deeply dedicated to the borough and residents.**
>
> **RBG employee**

> **[Most teams] are good communicators, they have been supportive. If you want to run an idea past them, they are open to that. The Councillors have also been really good.**
>
> **VCS organisation**

To assess the spread of VCS organisations in Greenwich, we analysed a list of over 400 VCS organisations operating across the ward,[8] and categorised them by type (based on the above definition of the VCS) and main activity, as illustrated in Figures 9 and 10.

Figure 9: Types of VCS organisation in Greenwich based on the categories of VCS outlined in Definitions[9]

Tenants and residents group **1.6%**
Housing association **2.3%**
Public service **6.7%**
Education **2.6%**
Faith group **17.7%**
Sport/art/environment/heritage **26.0%**
Co-op/social enterprise **4.0%**
Community assoc group **14.2%**
Non-profit **0.7%**
Registered charity **18.8%**
School/university **2.1%**
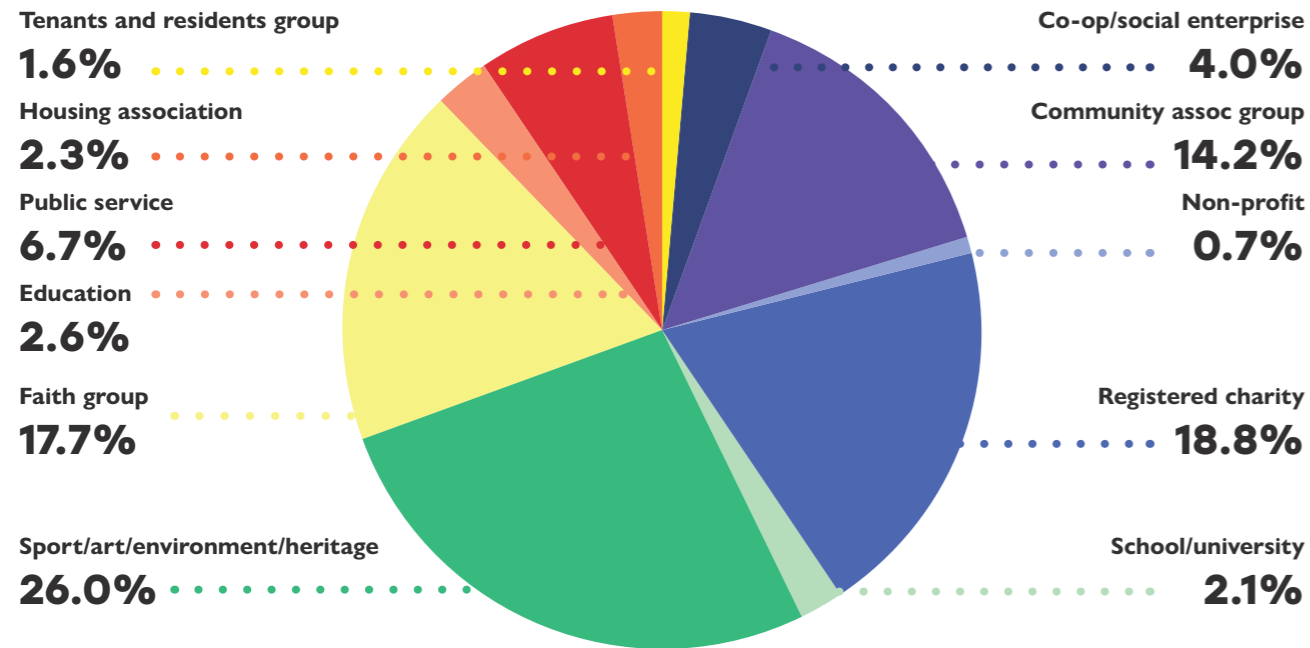
Figure 10: Types of VCS activity provided by the VCS sector in Greenwich
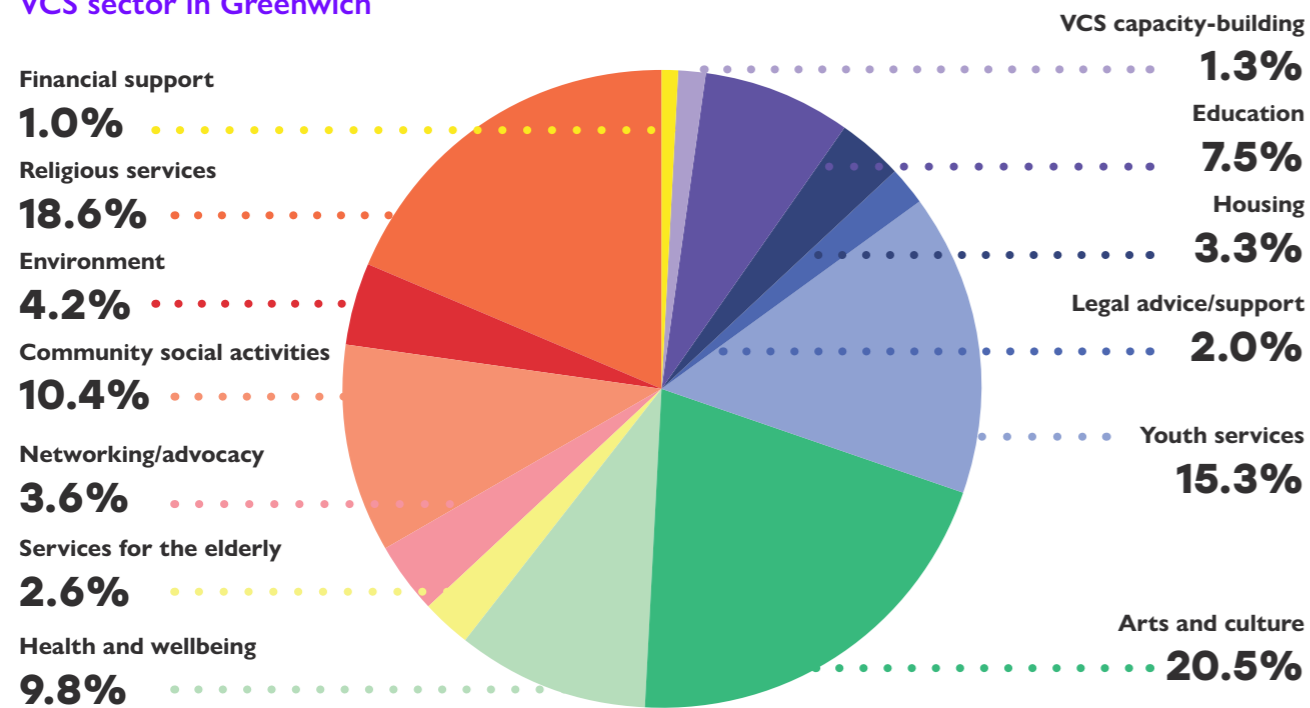
Financial support **1.0%**
Religious services **18.6%**
Environment **4.2%**
Community social activities **10.4%**
Networking/advocacy **3.6%**
Services for the elderly **2.6%**
Health and wellbeing **9.8%**
VCS capacity-building **1.3%**
Education **7.5%**
Housing **3.3%**
Legal advice/support **2.0%**
Youth services **15.3%**
Arts and culture **20.5%**

There are 950+ VCS organisations in Greenwich, the majority of which are not on the main VCS list that was used for the above analysis.[10] Of these VCS organisations, at least 30% work in some way with marginalised communities (e.g. women and children, Black communities, or people with disabilities). However, the number of small VCSs led by marginalised groups is low compared to the overall demographics of the borough. Though some faith groups also represent marginalised communities, it is striking that only 6% of other organisations are explicitly representing these groups.

The three most common types of VCS (63% in total) are sports, arts, environmental & heritage organisations, registered charities, and faith groups, which are themselves broad categories describing many different types of VCS groups. Arts and culture is a large proportion of this activity, which is likely a legacy of previous team structure: the VCS and Culture teams were previously merged and more proactive engagement was done with culture groups than other VCS at the time. Additionally, part of the VCS funding for arts and culture goes to the Community Arts Fund, which awards small grants on a rolling basis, encouraging smaller arts and culture organisations to engage with the Council. Higher engagement with arts and culture organisations could be an example of best practice for engagement with other types of organisations. Arts organisations also play a vital role in weaving communities together - creating safe spaces for marginalised identities, developing shared culture through expression and community, and improving mental and physical wellbeing. However, existing Council funding structures are less able to evaluate these holistic "social value" outcomes (see more in Section 4), possibly leading to underfunding of the arts and culture sector.

Community associations and groups make up the fourth largest category of VCS. Our analysis indicated that these groups often provide a large proportion of the social and support activities that hold communities together.

Figure 11: Map of VCS organisations in Greenwich

3.2.2 Community assets

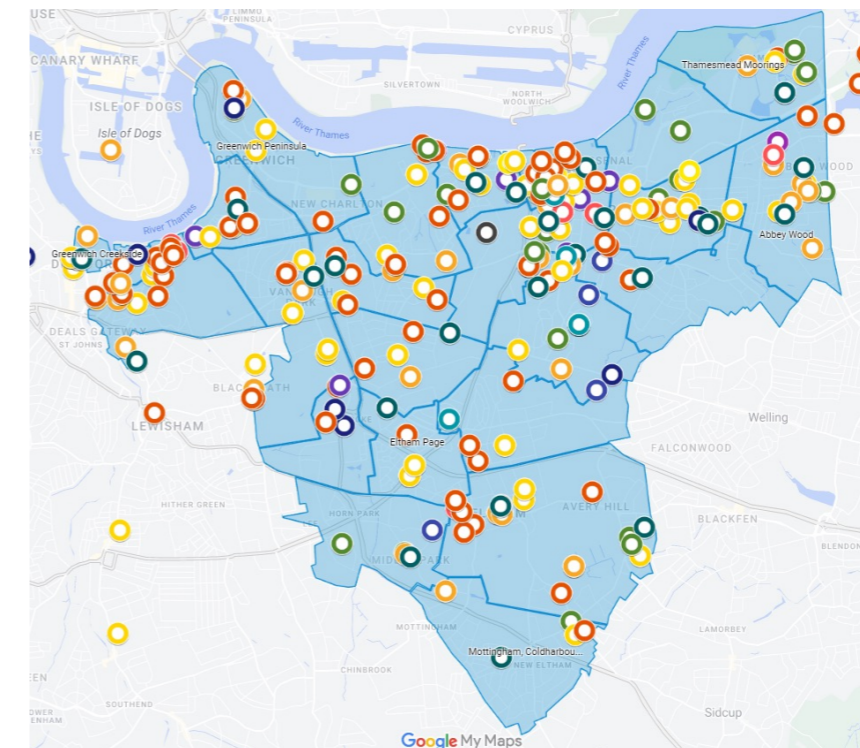The Royal Borough of Greenwich manages a large commercial and operational Property portfolio which includes community centres. This number varies greatly depending on which sites are recorded and/or included in the definition of "community assets", as discussed in Key Definitions. Funding for lifecycle repairs has always been limited, if not non-existent, so property management has instead been run in a reactive way. The Council, when considering its budget, ensures that statutory building compliance requirements are prioritised.

Of these sites, a significant proportion are occupied by VCS organisations, the majority of which have long-term peppercorn rent agreements with the Council. These organisations are recognised as "very useful": the Council recognises the opportunity cost in providing a building to a VCS organisation who can provide services which the Council would otherwise have to finance and run themselves.
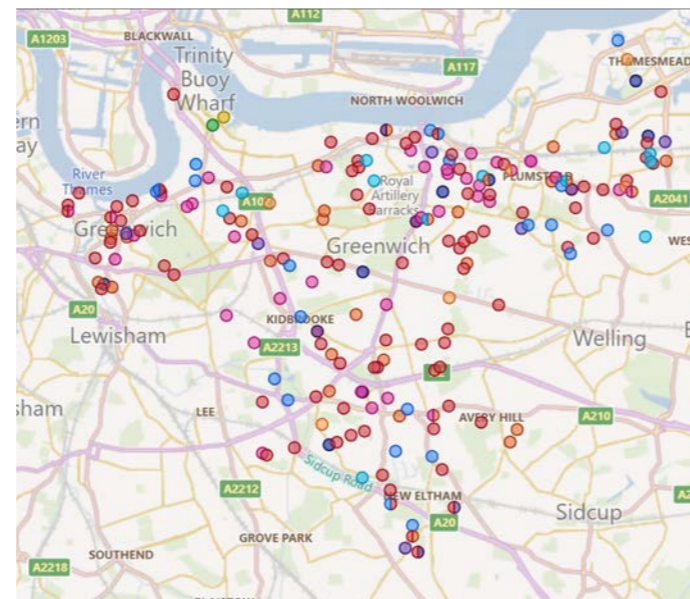
Figure 13: Map of Council-owned community assets in Greenwich

Figure 12: Type of Council-owned community assets in Greenwich

Youth Service **2.1%**
Sports Centres and Pools **5.8%**
Social Services **3.7%**
Parks and Gardens **27.7%**
Other **7.6%**
Libraries **2.4%**

Arts and Museums **0.9%**
Community Centre/Letting **14.2%**
HRA meeting room **0.7%**
Day Centres **2.1%**
General **23.8%**
Historic Bdgs - 3rd Party Use **0.9%**
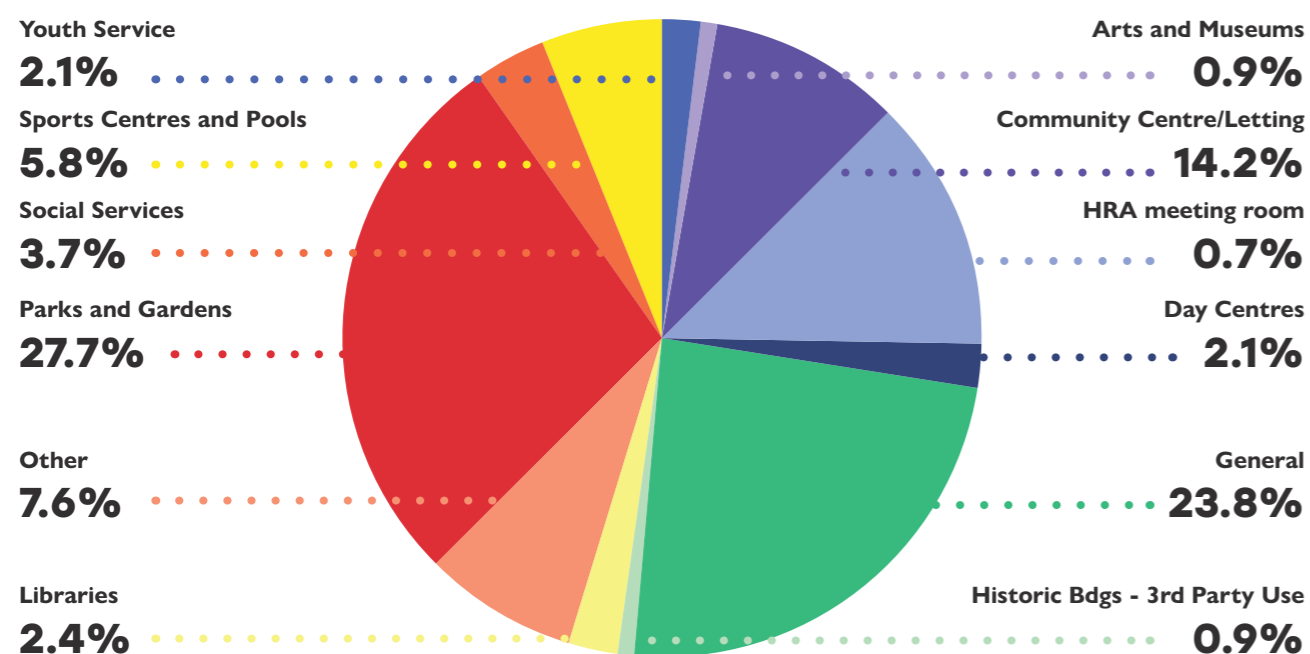
3.2.3 Priority wards

Based on the above analysis of community needs and provision in terms of VCS activity and community assets, we sought to understand the specific need across the borough. Deeper research into specific wards will be necessary to better understand variation within each ward. Though all wards have variation, with wealthy and poor neighbourhoods in close proximity, some wards are more effective than others in achieving subsidisation and cross-fertilisation (e.g. Mycenae House in Blackheath). We identified four priority wards where the need is high relative to current provision of assets and VCS activity (Table 2).

Table 2: Priority wards based on analysis of community needs and provision

Ward	Deprivation challenges / opportunities
Middle Park & Horn Park	Particularly high incidence of disability and carers, and performs worst on almost every deprivation metric. Also has very few council-owned community assets and known community groups, with weak civil society presence. Tenant/resident participation is low and health services are highlighted as a key area of concern.
Plumstead & Glyndon	Largest ward with a high number of community assets. The main challenges relate to maintaining these assets and ensuring broad accessibility, especially given rapid population growth and diversification of need (children, young people, faith groups). For example, Glyndon Community Centre has the potential to be a vibrant, inclusive community space, but struggles with maintenance and universal appeal.
Thamesmead Moorings	Low number of council-owned community assets and community groups for its size and deprivation ranking. Peabody owns a large number of community assets. The ward faces challenges related to the health and wellbeing of young people, with high incidence of childhood obesity and insufficient active spaces within the borough, requiring people to travel to Woolwich Common. The neighbourhood has a large, growing ethnic minority population, high transience and strong but often sidelined ethnic minority VCS groups. There is an opportunity to empower these VCS groups to take a larger role in the neighbourhood's regeneration, with infrastructure development enabled by CIL contribution and better collaboration with Peabody (maximising Peabody assets while ensuring community voices are heard).
Abbey Wood	High levels of poverty, with a lack of basic support services e.g. financial advice or debt support. There is a high number of Council assets and the community centres in Abbey Wood are a hugely positive resource, but residents feel that "the Council has neglected this ward". There is an opportunity to promote Abbey Wood library and support better community forums to share local concerns.

3.2.4 Ongoing needs analysis

The above data provides a snapshot of resident need and VCS provision as at the end of 2023. In order to continue allocating resources and assets appropriately, the Council will need to regularly update their understanding of needs and provision across the borough.

We have created the Greenwich Needs Analysis Tool to help Council teams, particularly the Communities team, more easily assess need and provision. This is a spreadsheet designed to allow high-level analysis of the deprivation in each ward of the borough, and comparison to the provision of VCS services. This can inform decision-making around funding decisions, asset allocation, and priority focus areas.

The tool combines the following datasets:

- List of community assets owned by the Council
- List of VCS organisations in Greenwich (including their location and their primary activity)
- Key household deprivation indicators based on the Low Income Family Tracker platform
- Demographics of each ward (population, # households, population density, age, ethnicity)

These data, when taken together, allow Council staff to compare the levels of need in different wards with the number of VCS organisations and Council assets present in that ward. It is also possible to see which activities are provided in that ward by the VCS sector and whether those match up to the need. Through this, staff can identify wards with high levels of need compared to a lower level of provision, as well as identifying specific gaps in activity (e.g. a lack of youth services in an area with high numbers of children on Free School Meals).

3.3 VCS challenges

The above needs analysis showed high and varied levels of need across the borough, based on traditional metrics that show certain types of deprivation and variation in demographics within and between wards.

However, the needs of populations and communities are complex - need does not adhere to ward boundaries, nor only to specific demographic groups. While resident demographic data tells about individual or household needs at a population level, it does not tell us about the needs of the wider ecosystem around them, composed of the public, private and community sectors (see Figure 14).

Figure 14: I / We / It approach for understanding need across an ecosystem
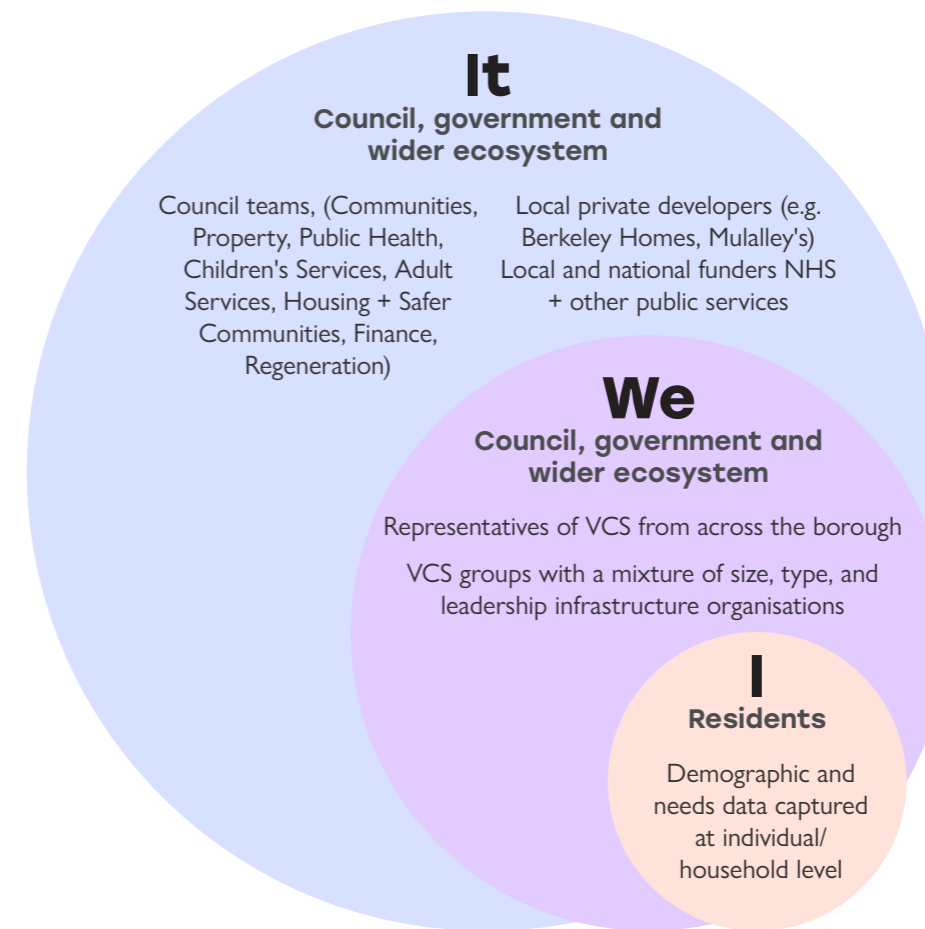
There is deep and important expertise among the VCS organisations and groups that exist in Greenwich, both in terms of understanding the needs of their communities, and the best ways in which to serve them. In some cases, these groups represent communities with whom the Council has little to no contact. In others, they provide a wide array of hugely valuable services to people from multiple wards, sometimes filling in the gaps where the public sector can no longer provide for communities. In other cases, they may work alongside existing public services to help improve resident outcomes and give people a sense of belonging, creating community cohesion. Often, the VCS organisations who feel they have been marginalised in Council or other asset allocation processes also represent the resident communities who are most marginalised. Working on the frontline of local service provision and at the heart of their communities, VCS groups are a rich source of qualitative insights on what's needed - and when properly supported, they can share the responsibility for community outcomes with the Council in a mutually beneficial way.

Therefore we sought to understand the barriers that stand in the way of VCS organisations as they seek to support the wellbeing of individuals and communities. To analyse need through the lens of VCS groups we looked at the different categories of organisation and explored their challenges using interviews, focus groups, and workshops. In selecting a sample of groups to engage, we chose those that would enable us to learn from best practice as well as lived experience of marginalisation as detailed in Table 4.

Best Practice Criteria	
VCS groups demonstrating Best Practice	• Have been able to engage with Council strategy development processes • Are well known for their exemplary work in their communities • Have received adequate funding and/or support from the Council

Marginalisation Criteria	
Marginalised and excluded VCS groups	• Marginalised by factors like race, wealth, immigration status, and sexual orientation, though the degree of disadvantage will vary with economic or geographic deprivation. • Face economic or geographic exclusion that is impacting their access to community assets • Face cultural, language and access barriers that cause them to feel unheard or not understood by the Council • Have not been adequately engaged with in regards to their needs and experiences of accessing community services, spaces and support in the borough • Have not been traditionally involved in the Council's strategy development

3.3.1 VCS categories

As we interviewed different VCS organisations about the challenges they face, we gathered a series of key challenges, which are outlined thematically in Section 3.4. We also identified 10 VCS categories that go beyond their organisational structure or primary activity. The organisations that fit into these categories share common challenges, so this categorisation which can help to identify trends and target support for these groups.

Fledgling groups	Small, newly formed (<2 years) groups, often led by a dedicated founder, based on a single issue campaign or serving a specific group	e.g. Dyslexia Care Foundation, Mama2Mama, Speak Out Woolwich, LACES
Challenges	Funding, Visibility, Competition • Need funding to get established but lack track record, accounts history, relationship and trust with Council to secure resources • Less likely to be visible to or aware of other organisations resulting in lack of information, opportunities, disconnection from the ecosystem and the sector they are working in • Compete for small pots of funding with medium/larger sized organisations who are more familiar with the language, form, tactics of bidding and grants processes	

"The more I learn about [funding applications], the more I understand it is a whole world of its own, things you should and shouldn't write. It's become a tactical game."

VCS Groups led by Marginalised Communities	Groups created for the benefit of marginalised communities, led by individuals from that marginalised group. Structures mainly include small charities, non-constituted groups and faith groups, though some are more formalised.	e.g. Congolese Support Group, Nepalese Veterans Gurkha Club, Queer Circle, Food for Purpose, CraftA, Ajoda Community Alliance

"We need larger funding to be controlled by community groups who are minoritised. Micro funds are okay but they do not push toward building or developing groups who need support to grow."

Challenges

Trust, Collaboration, Growth Opportunities, Funding, Representation, Access

- Distinct lack of trust in the Council, with groups feeling that it does not understand the barriers faced by marginalised groups, has put little effort towards reducing these barriers, and in some cases restricts information about funding opportunities for these groups
- Prevented from building direct relationships with the Council as their work is often subcontracted through larger community groups in unequal power relationships
- Lack of time and capacity to form proactive partnerships, particularly with mainstream organisations which receive a larger share of funding
- Short-term funding constraints, with more access to microfunds than larger longer-term funding which requires financial forecasting skills and business planning
- Poor representation by infrastructure organisations due to barriers in understanding, language and recognition

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Medium-resourced Organisations	A broad category of organisations with more baseline of resources than the smaller organisations above, but not as established as the lead players and feel caught in the middle.	e.g. Mums Aid, Irish Community Services, HER Centre, Plumstead Community Law Centre

"If we build partnerships we can leverage funding and build resilience, sustainability and make more impact. Currently I don't feel this is facilitated enough by the Council."

"[The funding applications] shouldn't be this extensive. It is a tough and demanding application, based on what they need and how many questions there are."

Challenges

Engagement, Collaboration, Premises, Funding, Assessment / Evaluation

- Interested in partnering with smaller organisations but sufficient incentive structures and support are not provided by the Council
- Some are charged disproportionately high rental costs for the income they make, and still face uncertainty about the longer-term of their premises (e.g. being dependent on children's centres rather than owning their own space)
- Difficulties in applying for VCS grants - a lengthy and complex process relative to the amount of funding available and competition for that funding
- Unable to demonstrate the full extent of the holistic social value they create - tools like CBAT require significant input and have had little follow-through from the Council, and there are few other "social value" measurement tools that the Council recognises

National Charities	Local branches of larger national/regional charities with headquarters elsewhere. Well resourced with sophisticated fundraising strategies, often commissioned for Council services, with strong "brand recognition" within the Council and the community.	e.g. Mencap, Greenwich Mind, Age UK, Citizens Advice

Challenges

Funding, Premises, Collaboration

- Many of these organisations are delivering services through commissioning, and are often receiving support from the Council via service users (e.g. pip), rather than direct funding.
- Difficult to maintain properties with the Council as the main leaseholder, since the property team is experiencing major delays and financial shortfalls for building upkeep
- Varying ability to provide a localised approach - and a lack of opportunities to network effectively with smaller, local organisations and benefit from their expertise, especially those working with more marginalised communities.
- Suffered from previous poorly-structured joint contracts, which lacked appropriate cross-referrals and and had very poor monitoring of whether the partnership was working.

"It's very run down, we have funding to get a new kitchen but the Council is very slow to get things fixed."

"[Last time], we were working as individuals, not in a partnership. This funding round, they said they welcomed partnerships but it was not stipulated. They never monitored it properly - they should have said the money will stop unless you work together."

Faith and Special Interest Groups	Includes faith groups, special interest groups like allotments, sports clubs and "Friends of" groups - powerful mobilisers of residents, working on a set of shared beliefs, high mutualism and a strong volunteer base. Faith groups often offer not only religious but also services available to both their own faith community and others.	e.g. Gurdwara Sahib, Trinity Vineyard Church, Ramgharia Sikh association, Friends of Oxleas Woodlands, Friends of Plumstead Common

Challenges

Funding, Connections

- Faith groups feel excluded from many Council funding structures due to their religious nature, despite running many activities that could qualify as "community social activities".
- Difficult for "Friends of" groups, which typically exist more in wealthier areas, to connect with more deprived areas of their ward (e.g. West Thamesmead, Plumstead Common)

"There are disparities in how funding opportunities are disseminated, processed and awarded. We feel there is a sense of bias in how funding is allocated by identifying as a faith group. Our work also serves communities in the borough."

"We have not been updated about the use of a community space that was taken over to be refurbished. That space was essential for us to be able to run events and provide support for our community."

Tenants & Residents Groups / Associations (TRAs)	Typically linked to the estates with a central community hub (e.g. Woolwich Common), but few in number compared to other London boroughs. More common in the more affluent neighbourhoods	e.g. Charlton Residents Association, East Greenwich Residents Association
Challenges	Engagement, Relationship with Council, Premises	
	• Increasingly difficult to recruit volunteers and/or members, possibly because of a generational shift in the willingness to volunteer. Poorer neighbourhoods are also less likely to have self-organised TRAs. • Increasing mistrust towards the Council because reported issues have taken a long time to resolve, or objections felt like they were ignored • Not all of the tenant groups have meeting rooms, and the Council does not have a system of managing and tracking the use of those they do have	

"In Horn Park, there is currently nothing on the estate as a way to engage with residents on issues."

"It feels like developers have more say than local residents that will be impacted by these new builds.

"I'm quite relieved when we get rid of the meeting rooms [on the estates] because we [the Council] don't know how to manage them."

Community Hubs	Generally well-funded and often based out of well-known Council-owned community centres with a long lease, although most community centres are on tenancies at will. Typically have a handful of paid staff which enables more effective fundraising and good ongoing relationship with the Council. They act as important hubs, delivering a number of different services and supporting many smaller VCS organisations through low/no cost space.	e.g. Clockhouse, Woolwich Common, Woolwich Front Room, Tramshed, Charlton Athletic Community Trust
Challenges	Capacity, Premises, Funding / Costs	
	• Struggle to serve a large and increasing need with a small employee / volunteer base. A high number of organisations relying on them, and increasing numbers of referrals, impacts on wider activities like impact measurement • Difficult to maintain properties with the Council as the main leaseholder, since the property team is experiencing major delays and financial shortfalls for building upkeep - but many hubs are used 7 days a week, so physical upkeep is vital for health & safety • Compete for a small number of core funding grants, which increasingly do not cover the rising costs of energy, salaries, etc. • In some cases, they lack the funding structures which can have universal appeal (e.g. funding to allow varying capacity to pay, which then enables bigger/more established groups or private activity to subsidise others) Note: Middle Park Community Centre and Glyndon Community Centre have the potential to be "hubs" but do not currently fit into this category due to lack of funding for property maintenance and lack of broad community engagement	

"It can get a lot and it feels like we are the main service providing this type of support. That means that either we need to be better funded, in order for us to increase our capacity or there needs to be expectations put in place in terms of the amount we can deliver".

"We are squeezing everything we can out of this asset and more, even though they have an asset that can be used better. That's up to Greenwich to better manage those resources".

"Our ethos is about creating a safe space, and by the nature of the work we have done we have attracted organisations who want a safe environment with acceptance and openness. The costs of the building are greater than anticipated, some organisations are using the building for free, others are paying market rent."

Arts & Culture Organisations	Very varied category of VCS, from small special interest teams to large arts venues and world-famous museums. Activities often cut across multiple social groups including marginalised communities. Groups often provide safe spaces, shared culture & community, and improved mental & physical wellbeing	e.g. Tramshed, Little Fish Theatre, Emergency Exit Arts, Queer Circle, ArtFix, Royal Museums Greenwich, Woolwich Works
Challenges	Funding, Assessment / Evaluation, Audience	
	• Strong feeling that arts & culture organisations are less well-supported than other (larger) community organisations in Greenwich • Funding feels particularly stretched now that alternative funding e.g. Arts Council is also highly competitive and less available in London as part of Levelling Up • Difficult to demonstrate the value of holistic community-based activities that contribute to social cohesion and overall longer-term benefits, because Council funding is based on a service model, measuring specific activities not social outcomes • Poor visibility and accessibility of some of the cheaper studio space available for local artists (e.g. Woolwich Works)	

"There is a huge amount of social value wrapped up in what we do. Measuring and demonstrating the value of that is difficult."

"We need to have a central revenue stream, not spread it across all of the organisations who could use the space".

Network / Infrastructure Organisations	Larger organisations funded directly by the Council to provide support to small organisations with funding applications, networking opportunities, and/or other support including impact assessments	e.g. MetroGAVS, GCDA, GrIP, Volunteer Centre Greenwich
Challenges	Data, Relationship with VCS, Funding / Costs	
	• Mixed levels of data management - lack of data on the VCS sector that is accurate, high-quality, and up-to-date data, and poor systems for managing data on an ongoing basis (this is partly due to a lack of transparent databases from the Council) • Strained relationships with smaller VCS organisations, especially those led by marginalised groups, who feel the infrastructure orgs cannot represent their needs well • Compete for funding with all VCS groups, despite providing a "network" service which is distinct from community-level VCS activity • Also compete for a small number of core funding grants, which increasingly do not cover the rising costs of energy, salaries etc.	

"Organisations don't have the capacity to apply for that funding. That's our role [to support them], but our funding has been cut 50% in recent years so we only have one person to do that role."

"The energy costs have skyrocketed for us and it has meant that we have had to take decisions on activities that can be prioritised within the set budget we have for the year. There are no opportunities for us to be able to apply for core funding from the council which would be so helpful to have."

Local / Public Services	Well-resourced buildings and services that are often commissioned by the Council and sometimes (though not always) occupy Council buildings on long-term leases	E.g. Greenwich Leisure Limited (includes e.g. Woolwich Library, Abbey Wood Library, Waterways Children's Centre, Storkway Children's Centre etc) Also schools, though they fall outside the scope of this strategy
Challenges	Engagement, Premises, Collaboration	
	• Limited knowledge of how to improve engagement with local communities • Poor state of building maintenance, with long wait times when requesting support from the Council • Lack of easy way to share their premises, even though many have plentiful space available outside of core "school hours"	

"We acknowledge that more needs to be done to make local residents aware of our services, use the space for other social activities and to embed our work as an important part of the community."

"Requesting refurbishment to the building has been a long process and there has not been much effort in efficiently addressing the key areas of concern we have in the way that the building is designed, furnished and maintained."

"Our centres usually operate from 9am to 3pm and then don't really get used much after that - the spaces could be used better to help support other groups/sustainability of our services".

3.4 System challenges

This section describes the system challenges that are preventing Greenwich's VCS ecosystem from achieving resilience, sustainability and a more generative approach to resourcing.

Challenge 1: Poor collaboration across Council and VCS ecosystem

The lack of internal dialogue across departments within the Council was a clear challenge raised by RBG teams, but also evident in the way that projects in this area are commissioned. The importance of collaboration has long been recognised, but not well implemented. For example, at present, there are multiple different Council initiatives running simultaneously, all supposedly encouraging VCS sector collaboration but with the risk of duplicating efforts.

Organisational changes, restructures and staff turnover within the Council were also noted in the 2017 VCS strategy as a key barrier to collaboration - clearly this issue has not been fully resolved since then. This was seen in recent commissioning rounds where 3 out of 4 in the team had left within 12 months, including everyone involved in the previous grants cycle, contributing to a loss of vital institutional knowledge.

Poor collaboration is also a barrier for the VCS network itself. Many VCS groups reported limited opportunities to interact, network or bid together for joint funding rather than competing for the same grants and contracts. More bid writing and other skills-based learning opportunities are needed to support smaller and more marginalised groups, which could in many cases be provided through the shared expertise and experience of other VCS organisations.

There have been several attempts to improve interaction between the Council and the VCS, including co-production projects for previous commissioning rounds. However, these were often done in a rushed manner, without sufficient time or attention paid to who participated, and with limited evaluation and learnings afterwards.

> " A few years ago there used to be regular meetings held for VCS organisations, leaders, - that does not happen anymore which has been so disappointing to see "

VCS organisation

Challenge 2: Fractured VCS database management and digital infrastructure

Maintaining centralised databases on VCS activity, community assets and resident need is one of the most vital steps in delivering a needs based approach to VCS resourcing, but there are several operational and data governance challenges to overcome in delivering this.

Currently MetroGAVS holds the most up to date database on VCS activity in the borough, although the Council and other VCS organisations also hold separate databases with similar functions, including the Community Directory. However, these mostly rely on VCS organisations being aware of these databases, and then reaching out with updates to their details and/or to add themselves to the database, which creates gaps and inaccuracies as well as being labour intensive.

Similarly, there is no centralised database on
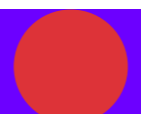
community Council assets that are available for community use. While most of these are listed in the Concerto site list, it also includes many non-operational and commercial properties which are not relevant, and does not include tenant meeting rooms on estates, which are held separately by the Tenancy Support team.

Data on resident needs is likewise split across different teams in Housing, Public Health and elsewhere, with no shared approach to assessing need. While some of this work is outsourced to offer useful tools like LIFT, there is currently no way of integrating useful public health and other datasets, which contributes to some part of the borough not receiving the proportional support they require.

Challenge 3: Measuring and assessing cross-cutting social value

As with many public sector services, the attribution of costs in providing VCS support is not centralised across the Council, with different teams not linked up in order to better understand the cross-sectoral value being generated. VCS organisations know that they are "delivering bucketloads of social value," but struggle to measure and demonstrate that value in a way that they can receive the funding and support they need.

> " Our Mental Health Programme takes £30k per year to run that programme, but it costs £45k every time an ambulance is called for a young person who has tried to commit suicide. It is difficult to equate and value our work. "
>
> **VCS organisation**

The Property team at RBG has been exploring new ways to evaluate social value in terms of how community assets are assigned to VCS groups, with the aim of moving away from the legacy peppercorn rent model that is currently in place. The Community Benefit Assessment Tool (CBAT) being trialled by the Council is designed to help make consistent decisions on what, if any, rental concessions are to be granted to organisations in exchange for the services they intend to provide from a particular building. However, the VCS groups trialling this have reported lengthy documentation and evaluation processes with little visibility of next steps, while the Council teams have expressed uncertainty about whether the tool is effective for several reasons:

- As a proprietary tool owned by Simetrica, there is no transparency in terms of how values are calculated.

- It offers an average value for community benefit, which means it doesn't capture the variation in people who benefit significantly from a service, nor those who benefit very little.

- There is concern about double counting of some individuals, if one organisation were to carry out multiple activities.

- It is difficult to extract benefits to the Council specifically (e.g. targeting RBG outcomes), as the benefit is measured across the broader community and public services.

Challenge 4: Difficulty accessing funding & contracts for commissioned services

While VCS funding is not directly within the scope of this Strategy, funding includes or assumes low cost spaces, without which existing funding amounts would be insufficient to conduct activities. Indeed, the challenge of

accessing funding was the main topic raised by community organisations who report "struggling to make ends meet" at this time. Many groups struggle with what they see as complex application processes for RBG funding, including the VCS grants programme, despite Council efforts to make this accessible. Major issues highlighted were:

- The length of applications compared to the amount of funding (not proportional)

- Multiple questions in one application that seemed to require the same content, just in a different format

- Not enough time given for the application window

> " The voluntary sector grant was tough to apply for and a really long process. It shouldn't be this extensive. It is a tough and demanding application, with what they need and how many questions there are. The work doesn't align with the funding we get. "
>
> **VCS organisation**

VCS groups also report that it is difficult to get funding for core costs because most funding is for specific projects rather than day-to-day running. While some organisations did mention improvement in the flexibility of funding awarded in more recent VCS rounds, this clearly remains a challenge.

> " There just isn't enough time to complete applications to the standard required, AND do my actual job. Then we cannot find funding that would even help take the workload off me or expand our projects that are already struggling due to capacity because it's hard to find core cost funding. "
>
> **VCS organisation**

Challenge 5: Accessing appropriate spaces and facilities

While some VCS organisations have leases on the properties they occupy, most community assets occupied by VCS groups (85% approximately, according to the Property team) are occupied on a legacy peppercorn rent basis. From a Council perspective, this can be an issue since as soon as the agreement is made on property, it transfers from contractual to property law.

> " It's very difficult to manage difficult tenants on peppercorn, because there's no "unpaid rent" to claim so there's no way to claim back the property. "
>
> **RBG employee**

There are significant differences in perspective here between what the Council and community sector think should be provided as a given, whilst acknowledging the need to move away from a paternalistic approach. This is central to some of the challenges facing the management of RBG community assets and its VCS relationships. In particular, the Council teams have expressed some reluctance to support profit-making activities being carried out in Council-owned community buildings. However, for many small VCS organisations, devoting part of their time to profit-making activities (e.g. running a small bar on a Saturday night, or providing space for corporate events) is the best way to sustainably fund their social value activities.

Another significant part of this challenge is maintenance of the buildings which often remains the responsibility of the Council under their ownership, either in part or in full. In the context of budgetary pressures, this is a real cost burden for the Council, as well as being an issue for many of the VCS organisations using the space, limiting the services and provision they are able to offer, including their ability to make spaces more accessible and inclusive e.g. to those with disabilities.

> "The issue is that people get Council buildings for free, don't maintain the building, and then make profit from their activities. And the Council then has to step in and spend lots of money repairing the building.

RBG employee

> "Our building is Council owned, we lease it. It's very run down, we have funding to get a new kitchen but the Council is very slow to get things fixed.

VCS organisation

As with funding and other Council resources, the lack of visibility and transparency in how properties are shared is a significant barrier to building trust with VCS organisations, for whom these decisions sometimes appear arbitrary or unfair.

> "There needs to be more openness about what properties they own and which ones can be used by the community/VCS sector - as they have spaces that they don't manage well or simply turn into housing than for wider community use.

VCS organisation

> "Buildings and property are assets, but it's about whether they are assets that are being shared and with a more equal agenda. We are squeezing everything we can out of this asset and more, even though they [the Council] have an asset that can be used better. That's up to Greenwich to better manage those resources.

VCS organisation

Challenge 6: Weak relationships between Council and VCS

The lack of transparency and visibility, combined with inequities (perceived or otherwise) in the way that funding and assets are shared with the community, have contributed to a strong sense of mistrust in the Council that has clearly built up over many years.

> "For me personally, I know a few people [at the Council] and it's okay, but for the community I support, there are huge levels of mistrust, disappointment and apathy towards [the Council] due to them feeling that they don't understand their community, the support they require and to be made to feel part of the community in the borough.

VCS organisation

With significant budgetary constraints, the Council often doesn't have capacity to send team members out into the community on a regular basis to engage with VCS. However, many VCS groups talked of their desire to see more Council presence on the ground, and would like the opportunity to show RBG staff first-hand the impact of the work they are doing in the community.

> "I feel that [the Council] does not have a strong understanding of community needs, as I have not seen them at many community meetings/forums, have not been able to speak to them much and there is a lack of visibility from Council members on the ground to understand this sector and its challenges or needs.

VCS organisation

4. Community Resource Strategy

4.1 Principles of a new approach

We have heard from our interviews, workshops and research that both the Royal Borough of Greenwich and the VCS feel that a new approach to community resources is required. To achieve this, there are three key principles that need to be applied as part of the new strategy.

Many of the commitments in the recent Voice and Influence Charter are closely aligned with these principles and we see these two documents working together to shift the mindset and approach around the VCS in Greenwich.

1. Embracing value creation in the VCS ecosystem

We know that the most resilient communities are connected and cohesive. While VCS organisations play a vital role in building these cohesive communities, it is also the shared public spaces of community assets which create the physical environment for residents to come together, form relationships and support one another - building social value. The combination of these assets with VCS organisations and other socially-oriented initiatives and/or stakeholders makes up the "VCS ecosystem".

From this perspective, understanding how value creation works in the VCS ecosystem is essential to understand the complex and multi-faceted social value that an asset can bring to the community. This social value includes both the individual impacts on resident lives that lead to better long-term outcomes and higher wellbeing, as well as the broader systems level contributions to community cohesion and resilience.

The cyclic process of value creation in the VCS ecosystem involves combining resources under scarcity constraints - in this case Council-owned community assets, grant funding and commissioning opportunities, with unpriced or underpriced contributions from the community. These contributions are often intangible and include volunteer time, local knowledge, lived experience, social networks, and entrepreneurial spirit, and they can generate a whole range of offerings, which are desirable, accessible and appropriate for residents and communities. This process of contribution and transformation creates common social value strengthening the ecosystem, building resilience and permeating society at scale.

VCS organisations are often experts at doing what they can with what they have to improve social outcomes for their local communities, although they may lack the wider perspective that local government has around how needs vary across the borough. They also often play a redistributive role, directing resources to where there is a lack in a personal, human-centric way based on what they see in their community, which can complement the data-driven approaches of central and local government. Both the Council and the VCS have a lot to gain from sharing information, pooling resources, and allowing joint ownership with residents and community organisations. In order to share information in a truly open and transparent way, better structures of participation, whether they be cultural norms or embedded ways of working, need to be intentionally created and maintained.

2. Moving from paternalism to participation

To create meaningful value, rebuild stronger relationships, and ensure the best outcomes for the Greenwich community, the Council needs to move away from an approach embedded in a paternalistic legacy, towards a participatory approach that strives to 'empower' over 'inform' in the hierarchy of participation. Moving to this new paradigm involves the following shifts:

Table 3: Examples of the shifts involved in moving from a paternalistic to a participatory approach/mindset

Paternal Approach	Participatory Approach
Council-centric view of VCS activity	**Ecosystem view of VCS activity**
Resourcing methods are hierarchical and non-transparent leading to distrust and poor flow of resources between VCS	Resourcing methods emphasise collaboration, transparency and mutualism leading to strong flow of resources between VCS
Focuses on activity supported by the Council without recognising work funded by other funders/civil society	Recognises non-Council forms of contribution and value creation including non-financial, volunteering, private subsidy or philanthropy
Prioritises short-term solutions based on outcomes defined by the Council based on its priorities	Works with VCS to define and measure more long-term and indirect outcomes for the community
Traditional funding and resource allocation processes	**Collaborative and inclusive resourcing**
Grant processes and property allocation designed by the Council with support directed towards enabling VCS groups to comply with formal requirements	Fair resourcing processes developed in collaboration with VCS groups, with support directed towards social outcomes
Repeat funding of larger VCS compounding the marginalisation of small, diverse, excluded groups.	Equitable distribution and decentralisation of opportunities, promoting inclusion and empowerment for excluded groups.
Centralised information control and access	**Open, collaborative information sharing**
Information held and managed by the Council and umbrella organisations creates inequities	Information shared and built openly by all actors within the ecosystem to empower all actors

3. Moving beyond the basic material needs

The Council is operating with constrained resources, so prioritisation is required to ensure these are targeted at the areas of most need. This can be assessed both geographically (i.e. people who live in a specific area, like a ward) and non-geographically (i.e. people who are members of the same cultural group). To do this effectively within a dynamic environment of changing needs and provision, the Council must continuously and consistently gather and analyse data on resident needs, as well as data on VCS activity and resource provision.

Our needs analysis showed that some areas of the borough are identified as being more deprived on both a quantitative and qualitative basis (see "Priority Wards"). This analysis of need helps with initial prioritisation when it comes to resource allocation, and can be used by the Council alongside more localised knowledge from VCS groups, who have a much deeper understanding of what is needed in their specific communities.

However, a needs analysis at the household level is a blunt instrument for assessing how best to support an ecosystem of VCS activity. It is important to recognise that there are many types of need beyond the most basic material requirements for food and shelter, and it is a mistake to assume that we can move up this hierarchy of needs only once these are fulfilled. Indeed, our more complex social needs for love and belonging, fulfilment and aspiration are all essential for us to not just survive but thrive, as individuals both and communities. Tackling these social needs can also support in meeting the more basic ones, due to the contribution that community cohesion can make to many other factors from health to loneliness, housing and knife crime.

This is important to acknowledge when it comes to a needs based approach to resource allocation, as it requires a more nuanced approach to balancing and comparing the needs of a community or area. For example, funding a food bank that provides emergency support to families might rightly seem more urgent and important than the local Scouts group which promotes health, wellbeing, and happier young people. But the food bank is a short term, crisis response strategy, and focusing only on crisis response can become a repeating cycle. In comparing these activities, the Council should consider how it can use its limited resources and influence to meet the multiple levels of need, through an ecosystem approach. For example, the food bank may be tied into a larger programme to promote the sharing of food and other household goods locally, or the Scouts group can be funded on the condition that it welcomes a wider group of children who can then benefit from the skills-building and relationships. Both types of service are important and need to be accessible, inclusive, and working alongside other VCS and statutory services.

Recognising this nuance informs the type of data that must be collected and assessed as part of an ongoing needs analysis. The Council needs to have an up-to-date picture of needs across a variety of deprivation metrics, but also a more comprehensive understanding of how the various VCS and Council services all currently connect (or don't) in service of these deprived areas, especially with respect to the more complex social needs outlined above. This may require more qualitative ways to assess need among communities, which can be carried out in collaboration with the VCS to inform what additional metrics and datasets need to be collected to deliver this strategy on an ongoing basis.
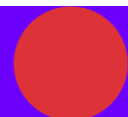
4.2 Strategic priorities

Figure 15 below details the proposed theory of change for the strategy, to be implemented over the next 3-5 years. The overall aim of this Community Resource Strategy is:

The Greenwich community sector is strengthened and empowered to generate positive outcomes for residents, including the most marginalised communities.

These 'positive outcomes' all relate to increased health and wellbeing, as defined in the Our Greenwich Plan. These include:

- Health and financial wellness
- Safe and secure home and borough
- No discrimination
- Council is better connected with communities
- Communities feel heard
- Council is adaptive to VCS and resident need

Figure 15: Theory of Change for the new Community Resource Strategy

Aim
What is the intended impact of this work?

Greenwich community sector is strengthened and empowered to generate positive outcomes for residents, including the most marginalised communities

Key stakeholders
- Council staff: Communities, Property, Public Health, Children's Services, Adults' Services, Housing and Safer Communities, Finance, Regeneration
- VCS Sector: Representatives from VCS groups across the borough in the 'steering group' or committee, a mixture of size, type and leadership of VCS group, Infrastructure organisations (e.g. GCDA, GAVS)
- Others: Local private developers (Berkeley, Mullalley), Local and national funders, NHS/other public services including police

Assumptions
- A thriving VCS sector will conribute in the long run to wellbeing in the borough, via less measurable and more intangible benefits than the immediate service provision on the ground.
- Greenwich VCS organisations have the right capabilities and knowledge to improve outcomes for marginalised communities, if properly resourced

Outcomes
What is the immediate and measurable effect of this activity?

Trusted relationships

A cohesive, participatory approach where communities have their voices heard in the VCS ecosystem, building resilience for all

Catalytic resourcing for the common good

Council and VCS organisations work together to resource the VCS ecosystem fairly and effectively for the long term

Great assets available to the community

Transparent information is available to VCS and other stakeholders, allowing community assets to be made available, maintained and affordable for VCS, particularly marginalised groups

Outputs
What are the initial outputs from these activities, which lead to the outputs above?

- More trust and stronger relationships between the Council and VCS groups
- Participatory decision-making processes and enhanced community involvement in local government
- Better collaborative relationships between VCS and organisations across the borough
- Long-term power sharing mechanisms that combat marginalisation of smaller and less-heard VCS voices

- Jointly-made decsions that create long-term social value at a micro and macro level, embedded into Council systems
- Social value framework that helps the Council and VCS respond to local needs, identify opportunities, and inform policy decisions across the whole of the Council (including grants, contracts, and rent agreements)

- Centralised and up to date database of resident needs & VCS activity
- Appropriate, safe spaces are made available and maintained, including non-Council assets
- Better access to information and opportunities to use community assets especially for marginalised or seldom heard groups
- Strategic Asset Review to inform what to do with individual assets
- More actors brought into the ecosystem with respect to physical spaces and potential for community ownership or partnership with private actors

Activities
What does the Council need to do to meet these objectives?

Priority area 1: Council and VCS working together to make decisions that impact the Greenwich community

- Communities and Property teams arrange regular site visits to community assets (during operating hours) to build a presence on the ground and solidify relationships with VCS.
- Review existng participatory structures within the Council and wider community sector (e.g. GHive, GAVS steering group, Community Champions) to establish what's working well and can be built on.
- Centralise commissioning and grant work currently sitting across the departments involved in (or adjacent to) VCS activity
- Building on existing structures and/or setting up new initiative where necessary, establish a diverse and representatiive co-design committee including residents and VCS for shared decision making.
- Establish a 'Community Connector' role in the Council to support capacity building, act as a point of contact and facilitate communications cross-Council and with the VCS
- Attend and support existing networking events for the VCS (e.g. GHIVE) to encourage partnerships, joint funding bids, signposting and sharing of resources between VCS groups

Priority area 2: Build structures for Council and VCS organisations to work together to resource the VCS ecosystem fairly and effectively for the long term

- Review existing social value measurement initiatives within the Council and wider community sector (e.g. previous VCS commissioning round) to establish what's working well and can be built on
- Select a social value measurement tool that the VCS and the Council can both agree on, with a combination of short-term and long-term outcomes
- Enable VCS and their beneficiaries to communicate their social value on their own terms and in a simple way
- Create a co-design process for catalytic resourcng between the Property team, VCS commitee and Communities team

Priority area 3: Community assets and data managed in a more transparent and participatory way to provide quality shared public spaces for the VCS and wider community

- Council teams centralise key data on community needs and provision (VCS activity, assets) and make this available to VCS, particularly infrastructure organisations
- Host regular meetings with key stakeholders in the borough for property, funding and assets to identify opportunities to make non-Council spaces and resources available
- Use this combined data to support and fund the development of multi-use 'community hubs' that provide more flexible co-location for VCS orgs
- Develop (or utilise existing) user-friendly digital platform which allows information about community groups and spaces to be accessed by anyone. It could also include a centralised online system where community spaces can be listed and booked.
- Keep community spaces warm, safe, and well-lit - by maximising relationships with local stakeholders (esp. developers) and leveraging social value / CSR initiatives where possible for lower-cost maintenance
- Convene a conversation with Property team and VCS representatives to discuss different forms of community ownership/asset transfer etc

This strategy recommends three strategic priority areas where the Council should test and prototype various activities to shift the needle further towards a participatory approach over the next 3-5 years. These recommendations are designed to highlight the key ways in which the Council and VCS can work differently together towards better outcomes. In many cases, there are already existing initiatives or working groups in Greenwich that are exploring some of these ideas. We would highly recommend undertaking a review process of what's already out there before building any new groups, databases, or projects. Consolidating and improving upon existing work is the most effective way to reach better outcomes quicker, and with buy-in from the whole sector.

> **We need a shared understanding of what exists - if we achieve that then we can look at a longer-term vision... it's a quick win: we need to look at what already exists and be clear about it**

VCS organisation

Strategic priority area 1

Trusted relationships: Council and VCS working together to make decisions that impact the Greenwich community

Objective: To embed a participatory approach where communities have their voices heard, ensuring equitable power distribution and strong relationships between the Council and community to support a cohesive and resilient VCS ecosystem

Outputs:

- More trust and stronger relationships between the Council and VCS groups
- Participatory decision-making processes and enhanced community involvement in local government
- Better collaborative relationships between VCS organisations across the borough
- Long-term power sharing mechanisms that combat marginalisation of smaller and less-heard VCS voices

Rationale: To thrive, the Greenwich VCS must include a variety of types of organisation (by size, purpose, structure and governance) that are supported to work together effectively. The importance of collaboration has long been recognised, but not well implemented.

Defining problems beyond a single sector, and incorporating stronger participation and community voice in an ongoing way, brings value to all parties, in the form of both community social outcomes and cost savings to the Council.

In the current system, inertia tends to keep individuals and departments working as they have always done, with collaboration a "nice to have". For example, disjointed commissioning processes make it more likely that one VCS organisation will be funded from separate departments, resulting in higher costs to support that relationship, for example with performance monitoring. Instead, participation and collaboration should become a crucial way of advancing the projects: no department can achieve what it needs to achieve on its own, and requires the support and efforts of others.

The Greenwich Corporate plan clearly states: "We know that we need to work in new ways if we are to make change. This will mean working in closer partnership and sharing power with communities." The Communities team can play a convening and supporting role in the VCS ecosystem through the principles of participation outlined above. They should also give power to infrastructure organisations who have long been embedded in the sector - ensuring those organisations are representative of the VCS community. This participation creates more spaces for sharing power with the VCS, and holding both sides accountable to next steps.

Activities

Priority next steps:

1. Communities & Property teams arrange regular site visits to community assets (during operating hours) to build a presence on the ground and solidify relationships with VCS.

2. Review existing participatory structures within the Council and wider community sector (e.g. GHive, Disabled People's Parliament, GAVS steering group, Community Champions) to establish what's working well and can be built on.

3. Where possible, centralise commissioning and grant work currently sitting across the departments involved in, or adjacent to, VCS activity (Health + Adult Services; Housing + Safer Communities; Children's Services; Finance + Legal Services; Regeneration, Enterprise + Skills; Communities, Environment + Central).

4. Building on existing structures and/or setting up a new structure where necessary, establish a diverse and representative co-design committee including residents and VCS for shared decision making.

5. Establish a "Community Connector" role in the Council to maintain relationships with this committee, support capacity building, act as a point of contact and facilitate communication cross-Council and with the VCS.

6. Attend and support existing networking events for the VCS (e.g. GHIVE) to encourage partnerships, joint funding bids, signposting and sharing of resources between VCS groups. Fund these events where possible / appropriate and leverage relationships with external funders to improve visibility and increase alternative revenue streams.

"Connecting business and organisations to each other - coffee mornings, events, bringing people together who can bring benefit to each other in some way. Start that conversation, you never know where it will go."

Key principles for this project

Principles the Council needs to prioritise	Principles the VCS needs to prioritise
• The Communities team must take a strengths-based approach to build on existing expertise in the community, trusting residents and VCS groups with resources and decisions.	• Any participating resident or VCS representatives must represent the common interest rather than represent their own political interests.
• Existing co-design and consultation activities must be streamlined and built upon to reduce costs and administration on both Council and VCS sides.	• Participating members must act as liaisons between VCS groups and the Council, taking responsibility for communicating information and connecting the relevant people via e.g. regular gatherings or meetings. They may also take on further tasks such as maintaining information on VCS group activity across a specific ward or set of wards (see Project 3).
• Leveraging existing expertise within Council and VCS, facilitating skills sharing where possible and supporting organisations to work together.	• Participating members can invite VCS groups to express their views to the committee / assembly and the Council rather than seek to represent their interests without providing a share of voice.

Future vision

We want to create the habits and mechanisms for an ongoing participatory approach across the VCS ecosystem. As the Council and VCS groups build more trust, other more participatory ideas could be developed:

• Running Citizens Assemblies discussing e.g. the allocation of community resources or funding.

• Creating a Community of Practice - creating opportunities to share information and develop knowledge together.

• Making joint bids easier, transparent, and better monitored (this will require adjusting funding structures e.g. reducing the time it takes to apply for joint bids between small organisations).

Examples

• Camden Think and Do: A non-profit bringing together local residents and schools, businesses and the council, to create a resilient community ecosystem that addresses environmental and social justice issues at a local level.

• Let's Talk Islington: Ran a series of events and participatory projects to engage the local community and discuss inequality, and residents' priorities and hopes for the borough. This knowledge was collated and used to inform a new Local Plan. Currently developing a new participation and engagement offer to continue building on connections within the community.

• Star of Greenwich: A community hub and social venue that has become a meeting place for a wide range of charity and community groups. Initially reopened using a community ownership model, supported by a crowdfunding campaign. Future plans include using a community ownership share model to ensure the business is sustainable and meets the needs of local people (read the interview).

• Frome Model of Primary Care: A federated partnership between local health care providers, offering connections to the voluntary sector and local groups to improve social prescribing. Information on the services available in the community was gathered through research and engagement, and collated on a community website.

• Berkeley Homes Community Management Body: A participatory committee including Council, residents, Berkeley representatives, and GCDA as lead, to manage the community centre at Kidbrooke Village. This is part of the obligations of the development agreement and provides a local example of sustainable participatory work.

Strategic priority area 2

Catalytic resourcing for the common good: Building structures for Council and VCS organisations to work together to resource the VCS ecosystem fairly and effectively for the long term

Objective: To develop a fair, transparent framework that guides how Council resources, including funding and Council-owned community assets, are used and accessed by VCS groups. This framework would ensure that the most marginalised communities are priorities based on an ongoing assessment of resident and VCS needs, and that the Council moves away from managing need and fire-fighting crisis towards identifying opportunities and focusing on long-term outcomes.

Outputs:

- Jointly-made decisions that create long-term social value at a micro (single actor) and macro (multi-actor/ecosystem) level, embedded into Council systems
- Social value framework that helps the Council and VCS respond to local needs, identify opportunities, and inform policy decisions across the whole of the Council (including grants, contracts, and rent agreements) - see below for more information on social value
- Guidelines or support for the VCS to help them access alternative (non-Council) sources of funding and adapt self-sustaining/social enterprise models if desired

Rationale: In an environment of ever-shrinking budgets, the most effective way to build long-term positive outcomes is for social benefit and financial sustainability to be closely intertwined. This means that VCS activity and the use of Council assets need to be assessed both on "value for money" in the traditional sense, while also recognizing that wider social value over the long term also provides "value for money". It also means that social enterprise, co-operative, and funding models based on external sources need to be more common and encouraged by the Council. Different types of VCS organisations need to be able to access different types of funding and assets to do their work. Those who are able to self-organise and self-fund should be allowed to do so (e.g. making money out of a Council asset if that helps to sustain them without grant funding) while those who need more help (based on needs analysis, and prioritising smaller organisations) should have more resources allocated to them.

Meanwhile, the current system of hiring and leasing Council spaces is a complex mix of historic tenancy agreements, peppercorn rents, and conditions for social outcomes tied into property agreements. Creating more consistency in the property allocation decisions is crucial to make property management easier and to avoid accusations of bias or inequity.

Key Activities

Priority next steps:

1. Review existing social value measurement initiatives within the Council and wider community sector (e.g. previous VCS commissioning round) to establish what's working well and can be built on
2. Select a social value measurement tool that the VCS and the Council can both agree on, with a combination of short-term and long-term outcomes
3. Enable VCS and their beneficiaries to communicate their social value on their own terms and in a simple way (e.g. making grant applications and monitoring proportionate to the size of the grant)
4. Create a co-design process for catalytic resourcing between the Property team, VCS committee and Communities team

"When requesting data, we need to be proportionate about it - we can't be asking for lots of performance data when the organisation is not getting much funding to deliver services. There has to be an understanding that performance management needs to be proportional to what's going in."

Key principles for this project

Principles the Council needs to prioritise	Principles the VCS needs to prioritise
- The Communities team must, where possible, reduce duplication of grant funding and commissioning - Where possible, try to reduce formal requirements around grant funding and commissioning opportunities - streamline application forms, reduce the number of questions asking for similar content - Council resources should be directed towards ecosystem support and value creation processes, supporting new income, hybrid business structures and strong philanthropic relationships - alongside (or ideally instead of) outputs and activity measurement	- Recognise the Council's stretched resources and capacity, and contribute meaningfully to this shared work - Any participating resident or VCS representatives must represent the common interest rather than represent their own political interests

Future vision

Over time, the fair resourcing framework may evolve to incorporate more radical and innovative funding models, aligning with best practices in philanthropy and local government. The ongoing participation and feedback from Community Groups will be crucial in shaping the framework's development. Similarly to Priority Area 1, this work can build towards a more participatory and collective approach overall, moving away from the top-down approach where the Council is relied upon to "give" support in a unidirectional manner.

There also could be other features developed, such as:

- Creating guidelines to ensure fairness across the sector such as implementing a cap on the percentage of funding any VCS group can receive to prevent resource monopolisation and the concentration of power and voice by organisations and communities

- Creating guidelines for sufficient lead time and distribution/comms actions for advertising grant or commissioning opportunities to enable VCS groups to respond in a prepared manner

- Incorporating tiered funding structures, acknowledging the varied sizes, need and capabilities of VCS groups e.g.

- 1. Large-scale commissioning = the key services that require significant capital input or technical expertise e.g. physical health provision, sports facilities. Collaboration with smaller organisations encouraged and well-monitored for better localised approach.

- 2. Small but growing = grant funding, and smaller commissions, for organisations who have the potential and desire to scale. Particularly focusing on Black and Global Majority led groups who have buy-in from a large community.

- 3. Grassroots = grant funding, in smaller sizes, for the "one-man-band" or small volunteer-led style organisations who provide a valuable local service but have no desire / reason to scale up across wards."

- Integrating a tiered asset allocation approach. Although the current state of the assets and leases is hugely complex, a more consistent model is essential going forward, and it may be that some pre-existing rent or lease arrangements may need to be adjusted to fit the new model. e.g.

- 1. Gold = understanding market value of a property. Charge a market value, have a lease with the occupier. If the occupier is a VCS that can't afford the rent, but delivers the outcomes the Council wants, the Council should then fund the organisation to help it cover the rent. Be very transparent around this. Also put in place a service level agreement with the sponsoring department at the Council where we lay out the details of the agreement. These details, especially on social value requirements, should not be articulated through the property contract.

- 2. Silver = involving a tool to measure those social, economic, environmental outcomes (e.g. CBAT or other). The tool allows value to be applied to outcomes on a consistent basis. Rent will be discounted according to the value of the outcomes.

- 3. Bronze = in some cases, tenants are not on a lease, or they are on a tenancy at will, and there are examples where that isn't going to change. But the Council needs to at least do compliance for the building maintenance and reporting from those tenants.

Examples

- Newham Council - asset review flowchart: This flowchart provides a framework for managing council properties, outlining a process that may take buildings into community ownership.

- Islington Council - social value matrix: Matrix through the Social Value Portal used that turns social value into financial proxies for allocating peppercorn rent, but which is complemented by qualitative measures and in-person visits/interviews with VCS to capture the more nuanced value not included in SROI measures.

- Social Value UK: A professional body that provides training for organisations wishing to measure social value and use data to inform their decision making processes. They encourage collaboration between organisations and network members, promoting the idea of using social value over more traditional, financial methods of assessing the value of a contract or project.

Social Value Fact Sheet

What is Social Value?

Social Value is the term used to describe and measure improvements in economic, social and environmental wellbeing. Though the term was originally a legal term, based on the Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012, it is now much more commonly used to guide socially-oriented decisions and activities across a wide range of sectors from public services to private businesses and community organisations.

The most comprehensive and community-led understanding of social value puts great emphasis on lived experience. According to Social Value UK: "Social Value is a broader understanding of value. It moves beyond using money as the main indicator of value, instead putting the emphasis on engaging people to understand the impact of decisions on their lives. The people's perspective is critical."

Why does Social Value matter?

Social Value reshapes how success is defined and measured, prioritising the wellbeing of communities alongside economic growth. In theory and practice, Social Value combines both qualitative and quantitative understanding of how social change happens. It seeks to bridge the gap between improvements for individuals and improvements to the system, showing how impacts are felt in people's lives and also distributed locally, regionally, nationally and beyond.

What are the fundamental principles of Social Value?

Although there are many frameworks for describing and measuring Social Value, there are 8 fundamental principles which underpin how it gets put into action. These principles are:

- Involve stakeholders (including beneficiaries) directly to understand their perspectives and what they value

- Understand how change happens and evaluate this through evidence of positive and negative changes whether they were intended or unintended

- Value what matters, which involves recognising and connecting what real humans care about, and how those values take quantifiable dimensions

- Only measure and report what is true and fair, in the eyes of stakeholders

- Ensure honesty, don't overclaim or take credit that isn't due
- Verify the results independently, to help stakeholders understand whether the impact happened
- Be responsive to societal goals in a strategic, tactical and operational way

How can Councils and VCS groups work together to create Social Value?

Collaboration between Councils and VCS groups is crucial for creating Social Value, as it combines their resources and knowledge to effectively meet local needs and enhance community well-being. This collaboration can be achieved through participatory design and decision-making processes, where Councils facilitate and guide a fair distribution of resources. In this process, the Council can act as an enabler of community contribution and potential. This is especially important if Councils want to move beyond managing the critical survival needs of communities in crisis to unlocking opportunities, which will enable those communities to thrive.

What potential does Social Value hold for longer-term sustainable monetisation and investment strategies?

Using Social Value as a way of describing and measuring social impact opens new avenues for impact investing and social finance. By qualifying and quantifying the economic, social, and environmental benefits of projects or initiatives, funders can identify opportunities that offer positive improvements to people's lives alongside financial returns to the system. This thinking can support innovative financing models like social impact bonds, where returns to funders are directly tied to the achievement of desired social outcomes, over the long-term. Other tools, such as Social Return on Investment (SROI) or the Community Benefit Assessment Tool (CBAT), can be helpful guidelines for measuring social value, and the overall desired outcomes should be co-designed with the communities and VCS who will be most impacted.

Strategic priority area 3

Making great assets available to the community: Community assets and data managed in a more transparent way, with involvement from more stakeholders, to provide quality shared public spaces for the VCS and wider community

Objective: To ensure that appropriate, safe spaces are made available, maintained and affordable for VCS and the wider community to use. This relies on ensuring better access to data and digital infrastructure that can enable VCS to make better use of existing Council and non-Council assets, and including a wider group of local stakeholders in the conversation around asset management.

Outputs:
- Centralised and up to date database of resident needs & VCS activity
- Appropriate, safe spaces are made available and maintained, including non-Council assets
- Better access to information and opportunities to use community assets especially for marginalised or seldom heard groups
- Strategic Asset Review to inform what to do with individual assets
- More actors are brought into the activities around building a VCS ecosystem, particularly when it comes to physical spaces, with potential for community ownership or partnership with private actors

Rationale: Creating a community is partly about having a space where people feel comfortable to gather and connect. Over the years, evidence has shown connections between a lack of community space and increased crime, dirty neighbourhoods, and youth exclusion. It may seem obvious, but keeping the Council spaces well-maintained, clean, well-lit and warm should be a low-hanging fruit to increase engagement and build more community wellbeing - however, budgets are limited for this work.

Alongside this, much of the work that goes on in Greenwich's thriving VCS ecosystem is flexible and adaptable, scaling up or scaling down in response to need and often providing services outside of typical "working hours". This agility is not reflected in the current distribution of community properties. There is also quite limited visibility on how other properties are used and where there is potential for better use e.g. schools are often empty after the school day, but the space is not used by local organisations simply because there are few opportunities to connect and collaborate.

Tackling this requires a more collective approach to property and data management. The Council, as well as the VCS, both need to have a better ongoing understanding of what assets there are, and what activity is going on in the VCS, through a centralised information database. And there is an opportunity to bring in a broader group of stakeholders who manage property in the borough (including private actors), giving everyone access to (and responsibility for) a centralised set of information. This group should meet regularly to discuss ways that they can collaborate, share responsibility, and ultimately move more power towards the community. Transparency in this will be absolutely central in order for both VCS and residents to get the most out of their areas.

Key Activities

Priority next steps:

1. Council teams work together to centralise key data on community needs and provision (VCS activity, assets) and make this available to VCS, particularly infrastructure organisations.
2. Host regular meetings with key stakeholders in the borough for property, funding and assets to identify opportunities to make non-Council spaces and resources available (including Berkeley, Peabody, Greenwich Military Trust, NHS, major funders like Lottery, Heritage, City Bridge Trust).
3. Use this combined data to support and fund the development of multi-use "community hubs" that provide more flexible co-location for VCS organisations.
4. Keep community spaces warm, safe, and well-lit - by maximising relationships with local stakeholders (esp. developers), and leveraging social value / CSR initiatives where possible for lower-cost maintenance.
5. Develop (or utilise an existing) user-friendly digital platform which allows information about community groups and spaces to be accessed by anyone from the borough. It could also include a centralised online system where community spaces can be listed and booked.
6. Convene a conversation with Property team and VCS representatives to discuss different forms of community ownership e.g. community asset transfer.

Key principles for this project

Principles the Council needs to prioritise	Principles the VCS needs to prioritise
• The Communities team must co-produce any digital infrastructure with VCS groups so that it responds to their needs and helps them achieve their goals • Many platforms / CRMs / data management tools exist already so the Council should not build their own tool as a first step, but rather purchase or whitelabel an existing tool • If the existing asset list has to be rationalised and reduced, the Council should try to identify properties that could be more easily made available by agreement - this may produce less immediate cash, but will lead to better outcomes and cost-savings for the Council in the longer-term	• Think outside the box - aim to be imaginative and adaptable about ways that existing spaces could be used, working in partnership with other VCS groups where possible • Be prepared to use a hybrid mixture of digital and non-digital tools - a platform will allow scale while the Council's contacts can help those who are less able to interact with digital tools

"Everyone across the system has a responsibility to access this directory and keep it updated. If everyone does a bit of updating (which is very easy to do), it makes it much more useful for everyone as well."

Future vision

More digital solutions could be integrated into this project, but at its heart it is about enabling more effective and distributed community asset management and ownership.

The insight and experience gained through all three of these strategic priorities, which enable more participation, should feed into the development of other more complex structures of community ownership and stewardship of community resources such as community chests and land trusts, shifting ownership of resources towards community bodies over time.

Deeper exploration into the skills, resources and enablers is needed to support VCS groups undertake more stewardship and ownership of community assets and resources. This can include a review of community wealth building approaches taken by other local authorities to establish what approaches are suitable in which contexts.

Examples

• Ealing Council: Built a community asset and research consortium through the Living Roots Project, to address health equity. This partnership came about in response to the pandemic, and creates partnerships between health and social care organisations, local authorities, and the VCS sector, with the intention of building on an existing programme of assets.

• Resilience Web: Place-based interactive digital maps highlighting the organisations within the area working in the environment and social justice, designed to bring together those interested in forming partnerships or volunteering.

• Lewisham Local / Community Exchange (please note this platform is still under development): An online marketplace that brings together local businesses and community organisations in order to share resources, with the goal of improving the borough.

• Helsinki Booking Portal: A portal run by the City of Helsinki, which allows local residents and groups to hire municipal buildings and spaces for private events, meetings and social activities, linked to the broader city strategy and sustainability. Offers information on grants and funding, city administration and opportunities for collaboration for local residents.

5. Conclusion

The Council and VCS organisations in Greenwich are made up of an incredibly well-respected, experienced group of people all working towards similar outcomes - better wellbeing for residents of the borough. Like many UK boroughs, there are areas where communities are thriving and others, often just round the corner, where people are just about surviving - and it is vital to take the differing needs into consideration when allocating resources.

At the same time, there is huge potential to build on existing initiatives, bring together the ecosystem, and better leverage all the resources available. Fair and transparent asset and funding allocation is a big part of this, not least because of the trust it can build between Council and VCS organisations. And this must sit alongside more meaningful, sustained, and regularly reviewed methods of participation. There are many different ways of doing co-design which are not difficult, overly lengthy, or costly.

> **Greenwich is one of the most progressive Councils when it comes to giving people... a voice.**

But co-design and participation does need to become a reflexive habit, one that the Council builds into its processes in an intentional way.

Our Strategic Priority areas aim to give the Royal Borough of Greenwich some signposts towards next steps and a longer-term implementation plan that will allow the Council to better assess need, recognize areas of strength and opportunity, and allocate resources accordingly. We hope that in collaboration with many local VCS organisations, the Council can create the conditions for all VCS organisations, and the communities they serve, to thrive in a challenging and changing environment, and make people proud to be a resident of Greenwich.