

# Supporting Central London's local third sector

An exploration of  
the impact of services  
offered by Central  
London Councils for  
Voluntary Service

## Summary of Key Findings

This is a summary of the key findings of *Supporting Central London's Local Third Sector: An exploration of the impact of services offered by Central London Councils for Voluntary Service*. The study was commissioned by the Central London Council for Voluntary Service network (CLCVS).

Using documentary analysis and a survey of a cross-section of service users from six of the seven Central London CVS we sought to identify and understand some of the ways in which CVS services make a difference and to whom; and what contributes to their success.

CVS in Central London, like their counterparts around the country, support, promote and develop voluntary and community action in two ways – through work on capacity, and work on 'voice':

1. Providing organisations with capacity-building support so that they can identify and meet local needs and deliver high quality services.
2. Acting as a voice for third sector groups within local decision-making structures so that they can not only respond to the context within which they work but also influence and shape it.

The study focuses only on one aspect of CVS' work – their organisational capacity-building. Our aim was not to conduct a formal evaluation or impact assessment of capacity-building services, but to offer more simply an initial exploration of the work, identifying the kinds of differences being seen, and suggesting some of the strengths of the CVS approach from the perspective of their service users – third sector organisations, their staff, volunteers and trustees.

## CVS Making a Difference

National research suggests that on average each year a CVS might be in contact with as many as 350 local groups, and that demand for CVS services is growing. The six Central London CVS involved in this study record a significantly higher than average contact network of closer to 900 organisations in each borough. All six report a growth in demand for their services in recent years from both new and existing groups, and changes in the type of demand reflecting the changing context in which the sector operates.

### Services and Support

Last year the six CVS between them offered capacity-building support to more than 1,200 voluntary and community groups and trained 1,980 individuals from approximately 970 organisations.

The largest proportion of organisations receiving capacity-building support (30%) worked with children, young people, parents or families, and 29% were recorded as Black and Minority Ethnic or Refugee (BMER) organisations, with an even spread across other client groups.

The dataset on training recipients reflects a very similar profile, though we found slightly more medium-sized organisations accessing training – with a lower percentage (approximately 64%) recorded as small organisations.

### Development work and liaison

The six Central London CVS regularly disseminate information and news to nearly 6,000 voluntary and community groups. They currently facilitate and/or support over 25 local networks and forums, and organise meetings and events that offer information and learning and networking opportunities to hundreds of local groups.

## How do Organisations Benefit?

When considering the difference made by CVS services, we recognised from the outset that the terms 'impact' and 'outcomes' remain contested; even across our sample of CVS different terms are used to describe results and differences made. We found it useful, however, to distinguish between impact and outcomes using the broad definitions adopted by Charities Evaluation Services

### Improved quality of services

87% of survey respondents said that CVS capacity-building support had helped them improve the quality of their services.

A key goal of CVS capacity-building activity is to support organisations to deliver high quality services that meet local needs.

## More efficient organisations

82% of survey respondents reported that CVS support had contributed to improved organisational effectiveness.

The majority of groups approach their CVS because they want to become more effective or efficient in some aspect of their service delivery or organisation's management. Our survey reflected this, with 93% of respondents (117 organisations) reporting this as a reason for seeking support. 82% of these respondents felt CVS interventions had improved their effectiveness.

## More responsive and adaptable organisations

78% of survey respondents felt their CVS helped them be better informed about important policy and legal issues. 72% said their organisation had been helped to improve their planning and problem-solving skills, and 73% said their CVS had helped them work better in partnership with others.

A key aspect of CVS capacity-building work is helping groups build their capacity to respond to change, plan for the future, and extend and improve their services where necessary. A majority of survey respondents reported that support, information and advice from their CVS plays a vital role in helping them be more responsive and adaptable, with more than two-thirds saying they felt better informed about the wider context for their work and better at forward planning as a result of support received.

## Better resourced organisations

68% of survey respondents felt that CVS support had contributed to their organisation's sustainability, with 67% reporting that CVS support had directly helped them bring in additional funding.

Support with fundraising is one of the most popular services provided across the six CVS and reflects groups' main, and arguably growing, concern to improve their access to funding. We found evidence that CVS capacity-building support is helping many groups not only achieve greater success in their fundraising efforts but also build a stronger base from which to offer services more generally – for instance, supporting them to attract other non-monetary resources such as premises, equipment and volunteers.

## Better managed, more accountable organisations

64% of survey respondents reported that CVS interventions had enhanced their organisation's governance by improving the skills and knowledge of their trustees. 83% reported that their CVS had enabled them to put in place necessary policies and procedures to support good governance.

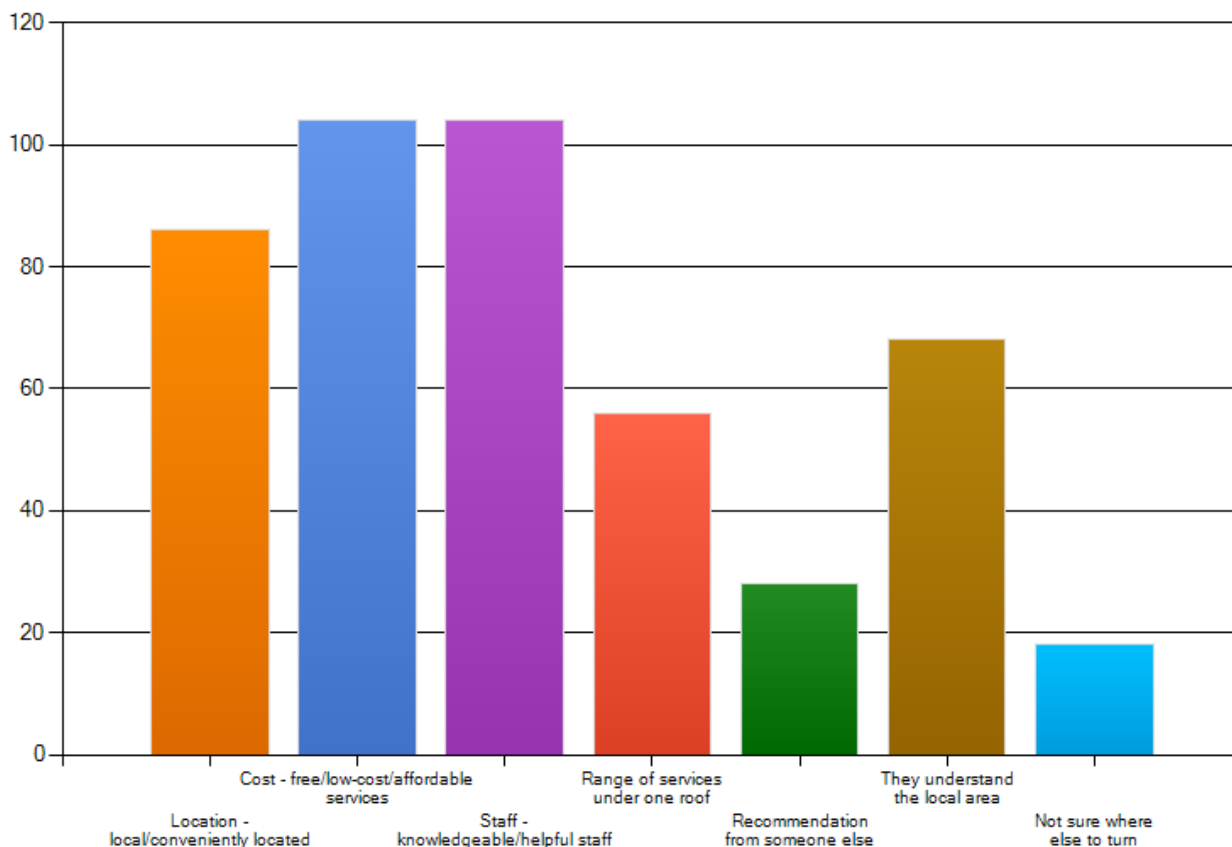
A majority of service users within our survey felt CVS support, information and advice plays a vital role in helping them be more responsive and adaptable, with more than two-thirds saying they felt better informed about the wider context for their work and better at forward planning as a result of CVS support.

## Critical Success Factors

It became clear that groups see a number of clear advantages to using their CVS, sometimes over and above other infrastructure providers available to them, and that word of mouth and positive recommendation from others is a factor for many in their initial approach - with some 20% of respondents citing this as a factor in their decision.

The following aspects of CVS activities and approach to capacity-building emerged as important contributors to their ability to make a difference:

### Breakdown of survey respondent's reasons for accessing their local CVS



## Further Information

To access a free copy of the full report, you can either download the PDF from [www.clcvs.net](http://www.clcvs.net) or order a printed copy from Katie Hall, on 020 7832 5808 or [Katie.Hall@vai.org.uk](mailto:Katie.Hall@vai.org.uk).

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