

***Supporting Voluntary Action in the
London Borough of Bromley***



**Strategic Development Plan
2025-28**

Introduction

As Community Links Bromley marks its 60th year, the Board has prepared a new Strategic Development Plan for the period 2025 – 2028.

We have consulted colleagues and representatives of the community from various sectors, all in the context of the evolving environment. The voluntary and community sector continues to face new challenges from digital transformation, emerging inequalities and shifting income sources alongside increasing service demand.

We aim to future-proof all operations and ensure the right and effective level of support and engagement over the next three years. Our mission remains to strengthen and champion a thriving and influential voluntary and community sector, through high quality local support.

We will ensure that we:

- are community/user led. Our service is informed by and delivered for Bromley's voluntary, community, and social enterprise (VCSE) sector.
- continue to demonstrate our impact and value to funders and the community.
- embrace diversity and inclusion by widening reach, enabling access and participation across all groups.
- empower people and communities at the heart of everything we do, building trust through integrity and accountability.

In producing this plan, we have listened to a wide range of sectors, organisations, and community members. We have:

- shared our initial thoughts, enabling the VCSE sector to help shape our vision, engaging with users of VCSE services, commissioners, funders and delivery partners.
- been guided by the findings from the State of the Sector Report (2024).

We will review our current staff/volunteer structure as our plans and service develops, identifying funding for new posts and volunteer roles to achieve these objectives.

Thank you all for your contributions and working with us to shape the future of Community Links Bromley.

Janet Tibbalds
Chair, Community Links Bromley

The Vision

An inclusive, community led organisation, committed to creating a culture of opportunity that empowers individuals, groups, and communities to thrive.

We will create a culture of opportunity for ALL.


Mission and purpose

Community Links Bromley's purpose is to support, promote and facilitate the development of a strong, diverse, confident and effective voluntary and community sector in the London Borough of Bromley, to enable the sector to improve the quality of life for all communities.

Our values

Our values drive everything we do:

- We are open.
- We learn and adapt continuously.
- We are ambitious.
- We are passionate.
- We are informed.
- We are here to listen.
- We are committed to inclusion.

LEADERSHIP AND ADVOCACY	PARTNERSHIPS AND COLLABORATIONS	CAPACITY BUILDING	VOLUNTEERING
			
Mobilising and encouraging community action, strengthening our sector's voice and influence on key decision-makers and funders.	Creating opportunities and driving effective joint working by building networks of local organisations and strategic partners.	Providing practical support and opportunities for people to develop skills in their local community, so that they can achieve their goals and aspirations.	Building an environment in which volunteers and their communities thrive, by encouraging and nurturing volunteering opportunities.

Our Strategic Priorities

CLB will continue to enhance and develop its work and role in the community, as a second-tier organisation, as the critical function of VCSE organisations locally is recognised and develops. We have engaged widely with stakeholders to identify their aspirations in preparation of this plan. The plan looks ahead over the next three years, with built in opportunities for review as the external environment evolves.

Over the next few pages, we have set out the priorities which will shape our work within the context of this strategy.



1. Voice of the Sector

CLB will lead and advocate effectively for the VCSE sector in Bromley.

We aim to bring VCSE organisations together to lead, inspire and build confidence and mutual respect. We will use local VCSE intelligence and knowledge to influence statutory sector decision making, policy and practice.

We aim to ensure that the CLB is seen as a network where small charities and larger ones can belong, contribute, share knowledge and support one another.

Outcomes:

- The sector has a stronger voice and influence on key decisions and relevant policy development locally and regionally.
- The sector is informed about and supported to actively participate in local policy development and decision-making structures via the Voluntary Sector Strategic Network (VSSN).
- Local partners, statutory, educational, business and charitable, are better informed about the sector and communities.
- CLB is recognised for its credible leadership role and ability to create links within the sector and across sectors.

To progress this, we will take the following actions:

- Recruit a small groups worker to engage with and support the small and under-represented groups.
- Host an annual sector/stakeholder themed conference (the Assembly) to share knowledge and facilitate peer support and use to inform local statutory partners.
- Establish a Small Charities Advisory Panel to strengthen the voice of small charities locally and within our organisation.
- Develop thematic and geographically based forums and networks of VCSEs, increasing sector engagement and connectivity.

2. Collaboration and Cooperation

CLB will facilitate partnership building and support collaboration.

We will develop the voluntary sector role in strategic partnerships throughout the borough. We will act as a broker for social and community action, encourage and mobilise cross-organisational communication and identify opportunities to grow partnerships both inside and outside the sector e.g. with local business, with and between VCSE organisations and with public bodies. This will include supporting other organisations to reach groups in the community.

Outcomes:

- There is effective, systematic communication, collaboration and partnerships among VCSE organisations, between different sectors and with communities and people.
- VCSE organisations are able to influence and deliver services more effectively by working collaboratively through networks, formal partnerships and consortia and with excellent local service knowledge.

To progress this, we will take the following actions:

- Develop the network of VCSE organisations of all interests and sizes across the Borough.
- Work with partners across the sector and sub region to support, develop and sustain the VCSE Health and Well Being Alliance
- Develop ties with the private sector to assist with the development of Social Value programmes, and pro-bono support for the sector.
- Work with partners from the Integrated Care System VCSE Alliance to undertake further work locally to increase understanding of the Integrated Care System and the potential opportunities resulting from system changes.
- Map the sector every two years in the State of the Sector report and highlight areas of best practice as well as identifying areas of weakness. We will analyse the findings and make recommendations for action to increase the sustainability of the sector.

3. Capacity Building

CLB will provide the necessary training and guidance to enable VCSE organisations to deliver services to their communities as effectively as possible.

We aim to provide the sector with relevant and timely information, advice and guidance to build its capacity and support its role within the community. We will share support and best practice on a range of topics and provide training and resources.

We are committed to ensuring that this work is user-led and provides opportunities for organisations to gain from the experience and expertise of other larger or more highly developed organisations in the sector.

In summary, CLB will aim to support local charities run their organisations effectively – so that they can focus on their cause successfully.

Outcomes:

- Gaps in provision are identified alongside the challenges faced and potential solutions identified.
- Local organisations have access to high quality support, advice and facilitation to help them develop.
- Local VCSE organisations, including those from seldom heard and under-represented communities, are better placed to adapt their activities in response to local needs and changing circumstances.



To progress this, we will take the following actions:

- Develop systems to enable more experienced organisations to share their expertise with developing groups, including exploring the possibility of setting up a mentor programme in association with appropriate partners to support developing groups.
- Continue to develop support, training and skills programmes, particularly for smaller and newly formed groups, including programmes on building good governance, financial planning and financial management for developing organisations.
- Develop a 'business support resource or toolkit' with model policies and procedures such as HR, finance, information, governance and legal matters. We will convene a working group of small charities to inform decisions on the toolkit, its format and consider ways in which it can be maintained and kept up to date.
- Undertake further work to understand the needs of charitable organisations of all types and sizes especially micro charities and under-the-radar groups/organisations in the borough. This work will include outreach to enable direct engagement with small/micro VCSEs to complement the survey data.
- Continue to host regular bid writing training and meet the funder style events to give local groups the best chance of success.
- Convene a Funder Round Table to initiate a conversation on inward investment into Bromley and explore issues regarding Bromley as a "Cold Spot."
- Lead on developing an action plan to consider skills gaps across the sector in relation to governance and develop proposals for addressing them.



4. Volunteering

CLB will work to inspire and promote inclusive volunteering across the sector.

We believe that volunteering strengthens communities. It connects people, builds trust, and enables action on the things that matter most locally. But for volunteering to truly thrive, it must be open to everyone, both the volunteers themselves and recipients of the volunteer support.

CLB is central to this. We connect volunteers with opportunities, support the groups who host them, and help create the conditions where everyone feels welcome.

Volunteering should reflect the make-up of local communities, yet many organisations still find it difficult to attract volunteers from certain communities including disabled people, and young people. We plan to tackle this by building partnerships, reviewing how roles are presented, and co-designing with underrepresented groups.

Outcomes:

- The satisfaction and reward experienced by volunteers through their work is widely recognised.
- A positive environment in which the value of volunteering is widely recognised and volunteer activity is flourishing.
- Partners and stakeholders have a good understanding and knowledge of volunteering, best practice and the impact of changes in policy and practice.
- Barriers to volunteering are reduced.

To progress this, we will take the following actions:

- Hold an Annual Awards Ceremony that recognises the contributions from volunteers and also highlights the benefits they experience.
- Share good practice emerging from the Volunteering for Health programme.
- Develop, in collaboration with the Volunteer Managers Forum, a sector wide action plan for working with younger volunteers, FE Colleges and Universities locally.
- Engage with FE Colleges and Universities locally to position volunteering as part of student pathways into employment.
- Work with local business networks and employers to develop a structured programme of staff team volunteering.
- Explore best practice regionally and nationally to help identify innovative and effective systems for enabling volunteering to prosper.
- Work closely with the other organisations in Bromley that have volunteer teams to work together to share opportunities and best practice for mutual benefit.
- Host a quarterly Volunteer Managers' Forum for networking opportunities and to share experience and expertise.
- Work with partners to explore the development of a local Volunteer Passport.
- Continue to support the recruitment of volunteers by operating a Volunteer Centre for the borough which will:
 - Provide practical advice and guidance on all aspects of volunteering.
 - Raise awareness of the benefits of volunteering in the borough to the community and for the volunteers themselves.
 - Maintain a database of current volunteering opportunities and operate a volunteer online portal/phone line for people looking to volunteer.
 - Monitor the progress of the volunteers and use feedback on their experiences to inform future work, including the length of time they are active in the community, their experiences and the overall quality of the volunteering experience in the sector.
 - Support those organisations and businesses working with volunteers, by providing best practice advice and guidance.

5. Cross-cutting theme: Inclusion

CLB will work to create a fairer Bromley and London where everyone can thrive.

Community Links Bromley is proud of our Borough and our capital city. We recognise that despite its diversity, prejudice and discrimination exists in many forms.

Outcomes:

- CLB is actively ensuring inclusive language and communication throughout its work.
- CLB is working to deliver all information and contact details for the service in accessible formats.
- CLB is routinely challenging discrimination whenever it is seen.
- CLB is working to develop services to enable digital inclusion.
- The principles of equality are fully supported and deployed throughout the local VCSE and leading to more equitable outcomes.

To progress this, we will take the following actions.

We recognise that this is an ongoing journey and we will prioritise further development. This will include:

- Constantly review recruitment practices for staff, trustees and volunteers. Review job descriptions, advertisements, how/where recruitment is targeted and the recruitment processes.
- Increase flexibility and promote a healthy work/life balance.
- Ensure good practice at events to give accessibility to the widest range of groups.
- Sign up to NAVCA's anti-racist statement and principles for VCS infrastructure, pledging to 'identify and oppose racism; working together to actively change policies, behaviours, and beliefs that perpetuate racist ideas, actions and structural racism.'
- Ensure that our commitment to promote equity, diversity and inclusion is meaningful and is understood throughout CLB.
- The development and training role of CLB is reviewed to ensure promotion of diversity is offered routinely.

6. Cross-cutting theme: Creating a financially sustainable organisation

CLB will work to ensure it is a sustainable, financially secure organisation.

The survival of CLB and hence the quality support and development it offers to local VCSEs is dependent on its long term sustainability.

Outcomes:

- CLB remains a viable and flourishing second tier organisation for the three year life of this plan and well beyond.

To progress this, we will take the following actions:

- Have a current Strategic Development Plan in place at all times, with regular planned reviews to ensure it is up to date.
- Engage in scenario planning and horizon scanning to maximise the opportunities for delivering CLB objectives and mitigate risks to delivery and financial sustainability.
- Adopt a medium term Financial Management Plan accompanied by a robust resource plan to enable delivery of the Strategic Development Plan.
- Ensure Board approval for all new projects and commitments is informed by consideration of full cost, resource and risk implications.
- Meet the requirements of good governance, ensuring appropriate oversight and assurance of CLB activities.

