

The Impact of London's Voluntary Sector Infrastructure

London Plus – September 2026

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Foreword from the London CVS Network Co-Chairs

London's communities face a combination of crises exacerbated by its inequalities – the cost of living, particularly housing and childcare; mental health and social isolation; and this summer the very real impact of the climate emergency. And yet throughout all these pressures, the Voluntary, Community and Faith Sector (VCFS) responds with agility, creativity, and compassion.

Sitting behind the dedication of London's charities and community groups are Local Infrastructure Organisations – the umbrella organisations which support, strengthen, connect and champion this work done in communities to support residents from food to friendship to hope.

This final report in the series highlights great practical successes, alongside challenges and opportunities to do more. It demonstrates the vital role infrastructure organisations play in helping the sector remain resilient in the face of financial uncertainty and growing community need. We hope that readers will consider how they can support their own borough's care and coordination for the VCFS – so that more communities can thrive, and so that our city's stark inequalities can be tackled.

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The London Councils for Voluntary Services (CVS) Network brings together borough-based local infrastructure organisations to strengthen voluntary action across the capital.

[For more information, visit the London CVS Network webpage](#)

Foreword from the London Volunteer Centre Network Co-Chairs

We are pleased to endorse *The Impact of London's Voluntary Sector Infrastructure*. This report highlights the essential role that infrastructure organisations play in strengthening London's communities and helping organisations deliver meaningful support locally.

The evidence demonstrates how infrastructure bodies provide invaluable expertise, capacity building, training, advocacy, and opportunities for collaboration. Their work enables charities, community groups, and volunteers to operate effectively, respond to emerging challenges, and maximise their impact.

The report makes a compelling case for continued investment in the organisations that support and connect the wider voluntary sector. Strong local infrastructure creates stronger communities, helping to ensure that services remain resilient, responsive, and accessible to those who need them most.

We commend everyone who contributed to this report and the organisations whose experiences have informed its findings. The insights and recommendations offered provide an important foundation for future decision-making by funders, policymakers, and sector leaders.

We wholeheartedly support the report's conclusions and recommendations, and encourage all stakeholders to recognise the critical value of voluntary sector infrastructure in sustaining a thriving and effective civil society across London.

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The London Volunteer Centre Network brings together Volunteer Centres across the capital to strengthen volunteering infrastructure at both local and regional levels.

[For more information, visit the London Volunteer Centre Network webpage](#)

Background

This report is the final instalment in a three-part series exploring London's voluntary sector infrastructure. Across the series so far, we have set out why local infrastructure is essential to thriving communities, examined the increasing pressures it faces, and highlighted the risks posed by long-term underinvestment.

Building on the **Impact of London's Local Infrastructure 2022/23** and **Impact of London's Volunteering Infrastructure 2022/23**, this report focuses on the collective role, value, and impact of London's Local Infrastructure Organisations (LIOs). It brings together the contributions of Councils for Voluntary Services (CVSs), Volunteer Centres, and equivalent organisations, demonstrating how they work individually and collectively to support a stronger, fairer London.

The findings are based on research with 35 LIOs across London, drawing on data, case studies, and impact reporting from 2024/25. The report is structured around the four recognised functions of infrastructure, as defined by the National Association for Voluntary and Community Action (NAVCA): leadership and advocacy; partnerships and collaboration; capacity building; and volunteering, alongside an additional function of facilitating funding identified by the Department for Culture, Media & Sport (DCMS).

In doing so, this report aims to show not only what LIOs do, but how their collective impact strengthens London's voluntary, community, and faith sector (VCFS), and why they must be recognised and supported as essential partners in delivering change across the systems that underpin thriving communities.

Methodology

This report draws on primary survey data collected from voluntary sector infrastructure organisations across London between December 2025 and March 2026. The timing of the survey was designed to align with organisational reporting cycles and to maximise capacity for engagement. The analysis in this report focuses on the collective role, value, and impact of London's voluntary sector infrastructure during the 2024/25 financial year.

Responses were received from 35 Local Infrastructure Organisations (LIOs) covering 88% of London boroughs, providing strong representation across the capital. Responses include those from Councils for Voluntary Services, Volunteer Centres, and integrated infrastructure organisations delivering combined support functions.

The insights throughout this report reflect recurring themes and shared experience rather than a statistically representative view of the sector. All responses have been anonymised, with identifying information in quotations and case studies only included with explicit permission.

What are Local Infrastructure Organisations?

London is home to nearly **44,000** registered charities, **18,719** of which work at a local level within communities.¹ Yet many operate with limited resources, with nearly half of all charities in London reporting an annual income of **under £100k**.¹

Alongside them, thousands of non-registered community groups and grassroots organisations play an equally important role in supporting local communities across the capital.

Together, these organisations make up a rich and diverse civil society landscape. Sustaining that landscape, however, requires more than individual organisations acting alone. Similar to physical infrastructure, Local Infrastructure Organisations (LIOs), also known as Local Civil Society Infrastructure (LCSI) or Local Voluntary Sector Infrastructure, provide the underlying systems that allow the sector to function.

Just as roads or bridges connect people and places, LIOs connect voluntary, community, and faith sector (VCFS) organisations with each other, and with statutory and private sector partners, creating the conditions for collaboration, skills development, and stronger partnerships. Like physical infrastructure, they require ongoing maintenance and investment.

There is no one model of infrastructure organisation, however the National Association for Voluntary and Community Action (NAVCA) have identified four distinct functions of local infrastructure.²

Leadership and advocacy: Mobilising and encouraging community action, strengthening the voice of the VCFS, and increasing its influence with key decision-makers and funders.

Partnerships and collaboration: Creating opportunities and driving effective joint working by building networks of local organisations and strategic partners.

Capacity building: Providing practical support and development for local people and organisations, to nurture skills and build community resilience.

Volunteering: Building an environment in which volunteers and their communities thrive, by encouraging and nurturing volunteering opportunities.

Recent research by the Department for Culture, Media & Sport (DCMS) adds a fifth category of **facilitating funding**, where local infrastructure provide “...*information about opportunities, influencing the design and targeting of grants or other forms of funding and co-ordinating local bids*”.³

These functions are interconnected – each one strengthening and enabling the others, creating a virtuous cycle where stronger organisations lead to stronger communities.

Beyond their core functions, LIOs also deliver a diverse range of specialist services, from emergency planning, preparedness and response to health and wellbeing services (including advice, guidance and signposting), community champions programmes, and community accountancy.

Every infrastructure organisation is different, but they share one goal: helping the VCFS and local communities thrive.

Councils for Voluntary Services (CVSs) are one type of LIO. They support, connect, represent and champion local charities and community groups, bringing organisations together to address local issues and drive social action. Through this work, they contribute to building stronger, fairer communities, and many also provide volunteering support as part of their wider offer.

Another key type of LIO is **Volunteer Centres**. These organisations act as the primary access point for volunteering at a local level. In London, they are typically borough-based and work closely with both residents and organisations to develop and promote volunteering opportunities.

At London Plus, we host the **London CVS Network** and the **London Volunteer Centre Network**, both playing a central role in convening, supporting, representing, and advocating for LIOs across the capital.

What is the reach of London's Local Infrastructure?

Each distinct function of local infrastructure depends on the same thing: their ability to connect with the people and organisations that make up and support London's civil society. The map below shows just how widely London's Local Infrastructure Organisations (LIOs) are spread across the capital, but geographic coverage is only part of the picture.

For a borough-by-borough view of infrastructure organisations across London, visit the screen reader compatible **[Map of London's Voluntary Sector Infrastructure \(2024/25\)](#)**.

London's LIOs reach a vast and diverse range of voluntary, community, and faith sector (VCFS) organisations from across the capital. In 2024/25 alone, they reached over 30,500 VCFS and grassroots organisations - and their reach extends well beyond the VCFS itself.

They also engaged with over 13,000 statutory, public, and private sector bodies, including local authorities, NHS trusts, commissioners, educational institutions, emergency services, funders, businesses, and national and regional government.

Digital channels play a role in this reach too, with information shared to over 79,500 newsletter subscribers in 2024/25, and more than 147,500 social media followers.¹

¹ Where current year data was unavailable, including for non-responding organisations, figures have been supplemented with 2022/23 data to ensure the reach of all local voluntary sector infrastructure organisations in London are included.

What difference do London's local infrastructure organisations make?

London's Local Infrastructure Organisations (LIOs) do more than support individual organisations. They shape the conditions in which the whole voluntary, community, and faith sector (VCFS) operates. As strategic partners, they advocate for the sector, strengthen organisational capacity, and ensure that the voices and needs of communities are reflected in decision-making at all levels.

Leadership and advocacy

Effective leadership and advocacy are rooted in strong, trusted relationships. By gathering insight from local charities and community groups, London's LIOs champion and represent the VCFS across decision-making spaces at every level, working to shift systems so that they better serve local communities.

This work is best understood as a driver of systems change: not a single intervention, but a sustained process of shifting the underlying structures and conditions that shape how systems operate.⁴

In 2024/25, London's LIOs delivered a wide range of leadership and advocacy activities, including:

- Representing the sector at a strategic level through boards, steering groups, and forums, bringing sector priorities directly to statutory and public sector partners
- Providing evidence and insight to influence local systems and decision-making
- Coordinating sector responses to consultations, strategies, and policy changes
- Producing reports, briefings, and position papers on behalf of the sector

What changed as a result?

Two themes emerge clearly from the evidence: LIOs' leadership and advocacy activities are strengthening the sector's influence in decision-making spaces, and are helping to secure fairer, more equitable funding outcomes.

1. Strengthened sector voice and strategic influence

Through the leadership of London's LIOs, the VCFS is now better represented and has greater influence within the systems and partnerships that share local decision-making.

LIOs across the city have secured representation on key boards and partnerships, enabling the sector to shape decisions earlier and more directly. This breadth of presence has contributed to tangible changes in how systems operate, including the influencing of commissioning models, shaping compacts with local authorities and Integrated Care Boards (ICBs), and ensuring that VCFS priorities are reflected in policy and strategy.

As a result, relationships with public sector partners have also deepened, leading to more consistent and meaningful opportunities for the VCFS to influence decisions at a structural level, rather than being consulted late in the process. One LIO in outer London noted:

“We’re seeing a shift in how the local authority and health colleagues engage with us, providing more opportunities to have the sector voice in designing new programmes.”

At the same time, a growing body of evidence built through State of the Sector reports and targeted briefings has strengthened the sector’s credibility, enabling local organisations to make a stronger case for investment and hold cross-sector partners to account.

2. Greater funding and fairer processes

Through their advocacy and influencing work, London's LIOs helped the VCFS secure significant additional investment in 2024/25. In turn, this funding helped frontline organisations sustain their services, supporting communities facing increasing need and stabilising provision in a challenging environment. We examine the role of LIOs in facilitating funding later in this report.

Beyond securing investment, LIOs across London have contributed to meaningful improvements in how funding processes are designed. Greater recognition of full cost recovery is helping to reduce longstanding structural barriers, making funding more accessible and sustainable, particularly for smaller and grassroots organisations. This is particularly important in the current financial landscape for the sector, where every pound needs to work harder.

Leadership and advocacy in action

Community Southwark: Unlocking space for the voluntary sector

Access to affordable, suitable space is one of the most persistent challenges facing VCFS organisations, and one that's often hardest to solve alone. Community Southwark, which supports the local sector through advice, training, and networking, has taken a leading role in tackling this through its Premises Project, working to secure both immediate access to space and longer-term change in how space is planned and allocated across the borough.

What they did

The project began by building a robust evidence base. Since 2024, Community Southwark has gathered data on the demand and supply of VCFS space across Southwark, showing that BAME-led and low-income organisations are disproportionately affected, and that the core problem is affordability, not availability.

Armed with this evidence, Community Southwark has worked to bring the right people to the table, building relationships with the council, NHS partners,

universities, cultural institutions, developers, and faith groups to raise awareness of the issue and coordinate action to unlock space.

The difference it made

This work has translated directly into policy change. In July 2025, the borough's council published its updated Affordable Workspace Strategy, securing much greater recognition of the VCFS and confirming VCFS involvement in a new model for Affordable Workspace Hubs, which are shared sites intended to give local groups better access to affordable space. Community Southwark has also been working with council staff and external consultants on Southwark's Social Purpose of Land Framework, giving communities and the VCFS more say in how council buildings are used. They are now exploring how potential VCFS hub sites could fit within both policies together.

Crucially, this has translated into real space for real organisations: 36 local groups have been matched with suitable premises so far, with new pipelines for accessing venues across public, private, and community assets.

What's next

Looking ahead, Community Southwark's next focus is developing a dedicated VCS Premises Policy alongside key council colleagues, building on the recommendations of its 12-month Learning and Recommendations report. It is meeting regularly with a designated council officer and working with the council to access and understand data on VCFS leaseholders, ahead of developing policy proposals in consultation with its members in 2026.

For more information, visit [Community Southwark's Premises Project webpage](#)

Enabling resident-led action

Leadership and advocacy activity delivered by Local Infrastructure Organisations (LIO) also helps unlock the assets, energy, and ideas of local residents, enabling communities to lead change themselves and take direct action to shape the places where they live. This delivers improvements on specific issues of importance to the local community, while also bringing wider benefits – building agency, increasing resident satisfaction, and developing the skills and confidence communities need to take action.

The following case studies illustrate what this looks like in action.

Community Action Redbridge: Small Sparks

Learning from its Healthy Communities Programme, Community Action Redbridge identified Loxford as facing persistent health and wellbeing inequalities, including the rising cost of living, mental health pressures, difficulties accessing healthcare, concerns about the local environment, and growing social isolation.

At the same time, it was clear that residents had ideas for improving things locally, but lacked the resources, support, or confidence to put those ideas into action. Small Sparks was created in response - offering microgrants and light-touch support to empower residents to lead the change they wanted to see in their own communities.

What they did

Community Action Redbridge prioritised relationship-building and simple processes, placing collaboration and trust above bureaucracy. Most importantly, they recognised that local people are best placed to understand what their communities need and trusted them to take the lead.

Over the pilot period, eight resident-led projects were supported by Small Sparks Grants. Each project reflected the creativity, care, and insight of local people, and addressed a range of community priorities:

- **Fitness and health:** Outdoor yoga sessions in the park; chair yoga designed for older adults with limited mobility; and a football and mentoring group supporting local boys' physical and emotional wellbeing.
- **Peer support:** Community-led spaces for women to talk about grief and mental health; and a peer support group for people living with diabetes to share experiences and manage their condition together.
- **Skills-building and connection:** Sewing classes that brought people together to learn new skills in a supportive space; and a wellbeing day trip that helped build confidence and reduce isolation among older women.

Community Action Redbridge also offered tailored support to project leads, signposting them to other Community Action Redbridge projects, and providing fundraising support to help them explore how their ideas could grow or continue.

The difference it made

Though modest in scale, Small Sparks had significant impact. Across the eight projects supported, Community Action Redbridge saw clear outcomes:

- **Strengthened community ties:** Participants reported feeling more connected, supported, and able to share their experiences with others. One woman described the grief group as “a safe space” to connect with others for the first time since losing her husband.
- **Personal development:** Leads built new confidence and skills. For some, this was their first experience of applying for funding and first experience of leading a community initiative. One participant called it “life-changing,” while another described it as their “first successful funding application” - a moment that built pride and ambition.
- **Improved wellbeing:** From reducing isolation to promoting physical activity, the projects supported holistic health. One woman shared how attending sewing sessions had helped her overcome agoraphobia. In another case, a participant offered to accompany someone to a GP appointment, demonstrating the value of informal, peer-based systems of care.

What they learnt

The Small Sparks pilot reinforced the value of trusting local people and removing unnecessary barriers. Community Action Redbridge also learnt that:

- **Timing matters:** Overlapping with Ramadan and a short delivery window meant some projects felt rushed. Future delivery should allow more lead-in time.
- **Tech barriers exist:** Some leads needed paper forms or one-to-one support to manage banking and reporting.
- **Integrated support:** Several Small Sparks leads were connected with other Community Action Redbridge projects to help them sustain or grow their ideas. By linking up their projects more intentionally, Community Action Redbridge can offer more joined-up, person-centred support that nurtures early-stage ideas and increases their potential for long-term impact.
- **Sustainability is possible:** Several projects are continuing independently or exploring further funding opportunities, showing the model’s potential for lasting impact.
- **A simple model can create deep change:** Through small investments and relationship-based support, Small Sparks unlocked the leadership and creativity that already existed in the community.

For more information visit the [Small Sparks Community Fund information pack](#)

BD Collective: Building Neighbourhood Networks

Since 2022, BD Collective has been testing a different approach to neighbourhood health.

Rather than starting with services, structures, or organisational priorities, they have been creating the conditions for residents, community organisations, and public services to learn together, build trust, and act together around the things that matter most in their neighbourhoods.

What they did

This work has focused on establishing three connected elements:

- **Integrated Neighbourhood Teams (INTs):** Cross-sector teams bringing together residents, health services, the council, community organisations and other partners around neighbourhood-specific challenges.
- **Health Connectors:** VCFS leaders who act as bridges between Neighbourhood Networks, the wider voluntary and community sector and Integrated Neighbourhood Teams.
- **Neighbourhood Networks:** Asset-based resident-led spaces focused on building connection, trust, belonging and local action (Asset Based Community Development, ABCD).

Together, these create a neighbourhood infrastructure capable of moving beyond consultation towards genuine co-design and collective action.

Of these three elements, it's Neighbourhood Networks that sit closest to residents themselves, and it's here that this case study looks in more detail.

The purpose of Neighbourhood Networks is to build connection, grow trust, increase belonging, and support resident-led action around local priorities defined by people who live in a neighbourhood. Rather than seeing communities primarily through their needs, the Networks focus on local assets, relationships and strengths, helping residents take action on issues they care about, with light-touch support from local VCFS organisations.

The difference it made ⁵

The Neighbourhood Networks are still in the early stages of delivering with less than a year of operation completed. However the value they are creating can be seen across a number of key areas:

- **Connection and belonging:** Networks are creating opportunities for residents to build relationships with others they might not have previously interacted with. This helps reduce isolation and strengthen community connections through activities such as parent groups, cooking classes, and neighbourhood events
- **A changing relationship with place:** Residents are developing a stronger sense of ownership for their local area, with community activities helping people see local spaces as “theirs”.
- **Civic confidence and skills:** Residents are gaining confidence, leadership skills, and practical experience through their participation in pitching ideas, leading

activities, organising events, and taking greater responsibility for neighbourhood initiatives. Networks are already seeing more community agency with residents taking the initiative in small but significant ways.

- **More shared knowledge and inspiration:** Networks are helping VCFS organisations learn from one another, adapt successful approaches, share ideas, and strengthen collaboration, creating greater collective impact across neighbourhoods.

What's next

BD Collective is in the final stages of completing their strategy, which has grown from two years of VCFS and resident feedback. Their strategy focuses on three principles: Connect, building positive relationships between local VCFS, residents, and statutory organisations; Collaborate, developing meaningful collaborations between all stakeholders; and Change, which aims to unite local VCFS through shared aims, developing it into a cohesive sector that can work with the Council as an equal partner, attract funding and achieve systemic change.

For more information visit the [Neighbourhood Networks webpage](#)

Supporting and empowering marginalised communities

Local Infrastructure Organisations play an important role in amplifying the voice of marginalised and underrepresented communities to shape the systems, services, and decisions that affect their lives. Through leadership and advocacy, LIOs use their trusted relationships with statutory partners to influence change, while their practical capacity-building support enables lived-experience and equity-led organisations to strengthen their voice, access resources with the result that local responses are more equitable and inclusive and informed by those closest to the issues.

In 2024/25, this included:

- Supporting grassroots and community-led organisations to share their knowledge and experiences
- Facilitating leadership development and capacity-building for underrepresented groups
- Helping organisations involve people with lived experience in their work
- Amplifying community voices through campaigns, communications, and media
- Advocating directly on behalf of marginalised groups
- Bringing lived experience into local consultations, boards, and strategic partnerships
- Ensuring the needs of marginalised communities are reflected in emergency response and resilience planning

What changed as a result?

Together, these activities have strengthened how marginalised communities across London engage with and influence local systems, with impact evident across three key areas:

1. Marginalised communities have more opportunities to influence decision-making

Marginalised communities that were previously absent in local decision-making are now more consistently present and influential. Their lived experience is shaping service design, informing local policy, and changing how public sector partners understand and respond to community need.

For example, in one borough, an LIO worked with their local authority's Community Planner to increase resident involvement in the review of the Local Plan - the document which sets out the borough's vision for future development. Through facilitated meetings and masterclasses, residents (including those whose voices are often underrepresented) were supported to share their housing-related experiences and contribute to the review. This resulted in more than 30 submissions and established an ongoing dialogue between local communities and decision-makers. The LIO helped ensure community perspectives were heard within the planning process, contributing to the adoption of trauma-informed planning in the Local Plan.

Community-led housing and Traveller policies were also adopted, demonstrating how LIOs can support lived experience to effect policy change, ensuring local systems are shaped by the people most affected by them.

Similarly, Volunteer Centre Tower Hamlets (VCTH) has worked to increase representation of global majority communities at governance level through its Minoritised Ethnic Trustees (METs) programme. The programme recruits and trains Tower Hamlets residents from global majority communities in the basics of charity governance, then matches them with local registered charities seeking to strengthen and diversify their trustee boards. By increasing the involvement of underrepresented residents at governance level, the programme helps charities benefit from a wider range of skills and perspectives, strengthens local legitimacy and voice, and takes direct action on structural under-representation within the sector's leadership.

2. The VCFS has the capacity to represent communities

Grassroots and community-led organisations are better equipped to advocate for the people they serve. With stronger leadership, clearer governance, and greater confidence in involving their communities, they are playing a more sustained role in shaping local services over the long term.

Across London, LIOs provided dedicated capacity building support to hundreds of grassroots organisations and developed dedicated networks to strengthen representation of communities that have historically been underrepresented in local systems. Crucially, LIOs also help translate this growing capability into influence. Through their strategic relationships with key stakeholders, they connect grassroots and community-led organisations with decision-makers, amplify the issues they raise, and ensure marginalised voices are represented in the spaces where decisions are made.

One community group supported by Kensington and Chelsea Social Council (KCSC) described how this plays out in practice:

"KCSC...bring organisations together, introduce us to people we may never otherwise meet and give us a place at the table.

Those meetings at the Town Hall matter. Older residents sitting around those tables, sharing their views on policy and services, sometimes holding decision-makers to account when needed because older people can easily be sidelined. But our members are not wallflowers. They have experience, knowledge and insight to offer.

I can honestly say this level of support for the voluntary sector doesn't exist everywhere."

Quote attribution: Stars of Our Story: Kensington and Chelsea over 50's Forum

3. More equitable access to resources and system responses

Effective leadership and advocacy activities from LIOs result in a more equitable system, both in how support is allocated and how services respond to need. For example, funding and resources are reaching organisations that may previously have been excluded, and emergency planning is increasingly reflecting the needs of communities most at risk.

Targeted support from LIOs across London has helped smaller grassroots organisations successfully apply for and receive funding. For example, in one borough, dedicated one-to-one advice sessions for BAME-led groups supported them in accessing health inequalities funding and delivering more genuine co-production.

Emergency planning has also become more inclusive, with LIOs leading community resilience projects specifically focused on the needs of people and communities who face structural inequalities and are disproportionately impacted by emergencies. One LIO in inner London described:

“The work of the [Community Resilience] Project has resulted in much better relationships between VCS and statutory partners...It also led to statutory partners having increased access to data as well as insights from the VCS sector, particularly around the needs of people with protected characteristics.”

Supporting and empowering marginalised communities in action

Compost London: Building community power in research

Marginalised communities are often underrepresented in research and decision-making, despite being disproportionately affected by the issues being studied. Barriers such as limited trust, lack of access, and few opportunities to influence research findings can mean that community knowledge and lived experience are excluded from the evidence used to shape services and policy.

What they did

Compost London has worked to change this, helping marginalised communities across Newham and the wider North East London Integrated Care Board (ICB) area shape research, build new skills, and connect directly with statutory and academic partners.

In 2024/25, Compost London partnered with UCL's Institute for Global Prosperity and Newham Council to secure £1 million from UKRI and The Young Foundation, establishing the Newham Community Research Network (CRN). The Newham CRN is made up of three subnetworks, each focused on a community often excluded from research: migrants and refugees, marginalised women, and young adults with SEND. Supported by the UCL Citizen Science Academy, residents in each subnetwork were trained as "citizen social scientists," learning research methods,

ethics, and project planning before carrying out research on issues that matter to their own communities.

Alongside the Newham CRN, the North East London Research Engagement Network (NEL REN) has extended this approach further, bringing together community groups, researchers, and health and social care organisations to address health inequalities and improve participation in research.

The difference it made

Across both networks, marginalised residents are playing a more active role in shaping research priorities, with barriers such as confidence, digital access, caring responsibilities, and time actively addressed to sustain their involvement. This has strengthened relationships between communities, research institutions, and public sector partners, replacing one-off consultation with ongoing collaboration.

What they learnt

This work shows how communities can move from being the subjects of research to active partners in producing it with the support of LIOs - helping ensure that evidence, policy, and services are shaped by the people they are meant to serve.

For more information:

- **Newham Community Research Networks (CRN) – Compost London**
- **NEL Research Engagement Network (NEL REN)**

The **Newham Community Research Network** is funded by the UKRI and The Young Foundation and led by Compost London, UCL's Institute for Global Prosperity, and Newham Council

The **North East London Research Engagement Network** is delivered with a range of partners including Compost London.

Tower Hamlets CVS: Flourishing Communities Project

Global Majority women face significant barriers to accessing sexual and reproductive healthcare in Tower Hamlets, resulting in poorer outcomes and unmet need. Too often, the experiences of women from Bangladeshi, Somali, migrant, and asylum-seeking communities are underrepresented in the design and delivery of health services, limiting opportunities for services to respond effectively to their needs.

What they did

Tower Hamlets CVS (THCVS) has played a key advocacy role through the Flourishing Communities project, a partnership tackling health inequalities experienced by Global Majority women in accessing sexual and reproductive healthcare.

At the heart of the project was a commitment to co-production. Each of the three delivery partners supported a steering group of women from Bangladeshi, migrant/asylum-seeking, and Somali communities respectively, ensuring lived experience directly shapes health priorities and solutions.

THCVS has acted as the bridge between these communities and the health system, advocating for the partnership, representing the VCFS in strategic spaces, and facilitating collaboration with stakeholders including Primary Care Networks (PCNs) and commissioners.

The difference it made

This work has translated lived experience into practical change. Nine women have trained as Cervical Screening Champions, working with THCVS and a cervical screening nurse to design and deliver culturally appropriate awareness sessions in community languages, and in partnership with other voluntary sector organisations, on cervical screening, breast awareness, and contraception, helping bring trusted health information into community settings.

Furthermore, the project has delivered a range of outcomes, including:

- **PCNs advertised their services to VCFS organisations**, enabling women to access websites and opportunities they previously did not know how to navigate
- **5 women gained employment**
- **Closer working relationships between PCNs and the VCFS**, supporting improved patient outcomes
- **Steering groups continuing to meet**, sustaining oversight of the programme
- **Women sharing their lived experience of maternity services with the place-based partnership**, with partners also attending the borough scrutiny committee to profile the project's work and share lived experience of maternity services

What they learnt

THCVS shows how LIOs can drive meaningful systems change through trust-building and co-production, helping women often excluded from decision-making shape the services they use. Their work demonstrates that improving health equity takes more than consultation: it requires LIOs to build strong community relationships, sustain engagement, and act as effective bridges between communities and the systems that serve them.

For more information, visit the Flourishing Communities project page

The **Flourishing Communities** project is a partnership funded by The National Lottery Community Fund and delivered alongside Limehouse Project, Praxis, and Women's Inclusive Team.

Partnerships and collaboration

No organisation thrives in isolation. London's Local Infrastructure Organisations (LIOs) play a critical role in building the relationships and shared infrastructure that enable the voluntary, community and faith sector (VCFS) to work more effectively. By connecting organisations across the sector and with statutory, public, and private sector partners, they help align priorities, share knowledge, and drive coordinated and impactful action.

In 2024/25, London's LIOs delivered 680 network and forum events, engaging over 9,000 VCFS organisations and connecting them with a wide range of statutory, public, and private sector partners including:

- Local authorities, including borough councils and elected members
- Health and care bodies, including NHS Trusts, Integrated Care Boards, GP practices, and social care providers
- Funders and grant-makers, including trusts and foundations
- Commissioners and public funders, including local authority and NHS commissioners
- Emergency services, including police, fire, and ambulance services

LIOs also coordinated collaborative projects and joint fundraising applications in 2024/25, worked with the sector to identify shared strategic priorities, supported collective impact and evaluation work, and enabled coordinated responses to crises and emergencies.

What changed as a result?

Taken together, these activities have strengthened the connections and coordination needed for the VCFS to operate effectively, both within the sector and across wider systems, enabling more joined-up responses to local priorities and challenges. The evidence points to impact across three areas.

1. A more connected and collaborative sector

London's LIOs have created the conditions for relationships and partnerships that would not otherwise exist, bringing together organisations and building the trust needed for genuine collaboration. Smaller organisations are gaining access to knowledge and networks, and the sector as a whole is developing a stronger, more unified voice.

"Bringing organisations together who ordinarily would not know each other let alone work collaboratively - opening up opportunities and breaking down barriers."

Local Infrastructure Organisation in Outer London

This connective work is happening at scale. Across London, LIOs convened hundreds of network and forum events in 2024/25, creating what one LIO in inner London described as "a safe space for voluntary and community organisations to explore solutions to common challenges together". By consistently convening the sector at this scale, LIOs are building a shared infrastructure of relationships, grounded in knowledge and trust that the sector can draw on over the long term.

2. More effective cross-sector collaboration leading to better outcomes

Where LIOs have facilitated genuine cross-sector partnerships, the results are tangible. Joint working between VCFS organisations and statutory and public sector bodies has unlocked significant resources, with collaborative funding applications securing substantial financial investment for the sector in 2024/25. Co-produced projects have also addressed complex community challenges such as health inequalities in ways that no single organisation could achieve alone.

"These activities strengthened collaboration across the VCFS and statutory health systems, helped communities shape learning agendas, and improved cross-sector understanding of how to work effectively with grassroots organisations."

Local Infrastructure Organisation in Inner London

3. A sector better prepared to respond to emergencies

LIOs have played an increasingly important role in ensuring the VCFS is embedded in emergency planning and resilience work, rather than an afterthought. New resilience networks and local emergency plans have been established with support from local Borough Resilience Forums, and community exercises are increasingly designed around the needs and knowledge of the VCFS, with LIOs playing a central convening role.

For example, in Enfield, this has taken shape through Enfield Voluntary Action (EVA), which has produced three community resilience plans, each designed to strengthen the role of the VCFS in emergencies and complement statutory planning rather than duplicate it.

EVA has also partnered with Enfield Council and the Enfield Borough Resilience Forum (EBRF), with support from the GLA and the London Communities Emergencies Partnership Community Resilience Fund, to embed VCFS capacity, relationships, and learning into borough-wide emergency preparedness. A formal data-sharing agreement was also established between EVA and Enfield Council, enabling rapid, joined-up action across the VCFS and statutory partners when a crisis hits.

Through their sustained partnerships and collaboration, EVA has become a critical bridge between statutory emergency planning and community-level action,

embedding VCFS insight and capability into Enfield's resilience arrangements on an ongoing, rather than one-off, basis.

"Developing emergency response plans and exercises with the VCFSE in mind
- enabling their input and bringing their communities and needs to the table."

Local Infrastructure Organisation in Outer London

LIOs also enable voluntary and community organisations to mobilise quickly and work in a coordinated way during times of crisis, strengthening local capacity to respond to emergencies and ensuring support reaches communities most in need.

One charity described how they continue to benefit from relationships built with support from Kensington and Chelsea Social Council (KCSC) which enabled them to support their local community during COVID-19:

"During that time, it was our connection with an active KCSC network that enabled us to respond quickly to community need. We were able to establish food distribution across the borough at pace, adapting spaces and mobilising support in real time. The voluntary sector's ability to come together in moments of crisis should never be underestimated. We can do this because we are trusted."

Quote attribution: Stars of our Story: The Venture Centre

However, this work is not without challenge. Sporadic funding means some LIOs are starting and stopping resilience activity rather than building sustained capability. But where investment has been sustained, the results are clear, with statutory partners gaining improved access to community insight, and the sector better placed to support the most vulnerable residents when crises emerge.

Partnerships and collaboration in action

One Newham: Growing collaboration across the borough

Community gardens are vital spaces for wellbeing, food growing, and community connection. Many community gardens in Newham operate with limited funding and rely heavily on volunteer labour, facing a lack of access to consistent funding, difficulty sourcing gardening materials and equipment, and limited capacity to apply for grants or coordinate borough-wide efforts. Collaborative funding models can help unlock access for exactly this kind of smaller, under-resourced group, who would otherwise struggle to compete for individual funding.

What they did

Sustainable Newham, a One Newham network of voluntary, community and faith sector organisations working to strengthen the sector across Newham, coordinated a collaborative funding model to support community gardens across the borough, with a particular focus on ensuring diverse and faith-based groups had access to

resources and support. Supported by ReSpace, the model brought together strategic partnerships and funding from the LCY Community Fund, Cory Group, and The National Lottery's Awards for All.

The difference it made

With this funding, One Newham distributed essential gardening resources including soil and compost, trees, plants and seeds, and equipment and tools, as well as contributing towards forest school facilitators and refreshments at community events. Resources were shared across the 23 gardens with a focus on inclusion and equity, with a flexible and responsive approach allowing each garden to receive what it needed most. The model also encouraged peer support and knowledge sharing between garden groups.

The initiative had a wide-reaching impact. Access to green space was improved for hundreds of residents, and nine diverse-led and faith-based groups were directly empowered. Gardens reported increased participation and community engagement, while shared resources reduced costs and improved efficiency, and the initiative fostered stronger relationships between community groups. As one garden leader said:

"We've never had this kind of support before. It's made a huge difference to what we can grow and how we involve the community."

The project also laid the groundwork for future collaboration, with many gardens now exploring joint events, seed swaps, and shared learning sessions.

What they learnt

One Newham reflected on what the funding has enabled:

"We are in the early stages of developing our resourcing hub, which will act as a central resource for the residents of Newham to borrow gardening tools, learn skills, recycle and learn about how to process their waste in an efficient and creative manner - changing behaviours and acting as the catalyst. This funding has helped to kick start our project as well as connect us with other green spaces across Newham"

By pooling resources and coordinating funding through One Newham, the model allowed smaller, often overlooked groups to benefit from larger funding streams and build capacity for long-term sustainability, demonstrating how equitable, coordinated support across sectors can extend impact well beyond the initial funding itself.

Capacity building

As well as strong relationships and influence, a thriving voluntary, community, and faith sector (VCFS) also depends on the practical skills, tools, and confidence that organisations need to grow, adapt, and sustain their work.

London's Local Infrastructure Organisations (LIOs) play a central role in building this capacity so that communities benefit from stronger, more resilient organisations, who are better equipped to meet local needs and unlock further support.

In 2024/25, London's LIOs delivered capacity building support to over 5,900 VCFS organisations across the capital, covering a range of areas including:

- Governance, such as safeguarding, compliance, and risk management
- Setting up new organisations and organisational structures
- Strategic planning, including business planning, sustainability, and growth
- Impact, such as monitoring and evaluation, and demonstrating value to key stakeholders
- Marketing and communications
- Human Resources (HR)

London's LIOs also supported the sector's financial resilience in 2024/25 by providing fundraising advice, feedback on funding applications, and wider financial management support, helping organisations to manage their resources more effectively and strengthen their preparedness for funding opportunities.

Training and development represent a core strand of capacity building support. In 2024/25, London's LIOs delivered 841 training sessions, attended by over 12,000 people, equipping staff, trustees, and volunteers across the VCFS with the skills required to support their communities effectively.

Underpinning all of this is the sharing of knowledge across the sector. No single organisation holds all the answers, and LIOs play a vital role in helping organisations learn from others, sharing information, intelligence, and good practice so that knowledge gained in one corner of the sector can benefit organisations everywhere.

Capacity building in action

The following case study illustrates how this support is delivered in practice, drawing on the experience of one infrastructure organisation working closely with the sector it supports.

Kensington and Chelsea Social Council: Organisational development for the local sector

A strong local sector depends on organisations having the basics right - clear governance, sound evaluation systems, and the confidence to navigate funding systems that can otherwise feel inaccessible. Kensington and Chelsea Social

Council (KCSC)'s Organisational Development team works to build and sustain an effective, resilient, and representative local voluntary and community sector, sharing best practice and helping organisations access funding and ensure their long-term sustainability. This support is shaped directly by what local organisations say they need.

What they did

In 2024/25, KCSC expanded its outreach offer to include surgeries on topics such as fundraising and finance in both the north and south of the borough, alongside a flexible mix of 1:1 sessions, including site visits and meetings held online or at their office. Their training programme, developed in response to ongoing feedback, covered topics including staff management, volunteer management, fundraising, capturing impact, conflict management, and preparing accounts. Online “Meet the Funder” sessions gave organisations direct access to current information from funders about grant programmes, while a regularly updated funding page signposted local and national sources of funding to support organisations' sustainability.

The difference it made

This responsive and tailored approach is reflected in strong satisfaction levels, all of which exceeded their targets. KCSC's information, advice, and guidance for organisations achieved a 93% satisfaction rate in 2024/25, its funding surgeries achieved a 90% satisfaction rate, and 85% of VCFS organisations engaging with KCSC said they were satisfied that KCSC had acted on their behalf or enabled them to respond to priorities affecting the sector.

The impact of this support is most clearly demonstrated through the experiences of individual organisations that KCSC has supported. For example, one organisation, providing film-related courses alongside emotional support and employability training to young people from low-income families, was supported by KCSC to source funding to continue its work. KCSC provided feedback on funding applications, advised on involving participants in service design and how to capture and describe this, and supported the organisation with budgeting for projects. The organisation went on to secure £23,000 in funding, enabling it to continue its work with young people, and they continue to engage with KCSC's training and networking opportunities.

A second organisation, dedicated to improving wellbeing through accessible trauma-informed bodywork and providing weekly 1:1 complementary therapies for individuals in the community who would otherwise be unable to access this kind of care, had a strong track record of community impact but was struggling with capacity and confidence in navigating complex funding applications. KCSC completed a grant search with the organisation, discussed options for funding to sustain and expand its existing offer, and provided guidance to ensure its application aligned with funders' priorities. As a result, the organisation was awarded £24,000 in funding.

What they learnt

Reflecting on this work, KCSC noted that guided support is critical in helping organisations access funding opportunities and build the confidence needed to apply. This, in turn, supports a more resilient sector, enabling organisations to navigate funding challenges more effectively and build greater long-term sustainability.

Facilitating funding

Nationally, the voluntary, community, and faith sector (VCFS) continues to face significant financial pressures, driven by a “perfect storm” of declining funding, rising costs, and increasing demand⁶. These pressures are also being felt across London, making access to funding and other resources increasingly important for organisations seeking to sustain their services.

In this context, London’s Local Infrastructure Organisations (LIOs) play a vital role in helping organisations navigate an increasingly challenging funding environment, connecting them to funding opportunities and resources they might not otherwise access.

Facilitating funding is rarely a standalone activity. It runs through much of the work explored elsewhere in this report: from advocacy and evidence that helps LIOs make the case for fairer funding processes, to the networks and partnerships that bring the VCFS together with funders, and the fundraising advice and financial management support that form part of LIOs’ wider capacity building offer. This work represents a significant, and often less visible, contribution to the financial sustainability of London’s VCFS.

In 2024/25, London’s LIOs leveraged in excess of **£22.9 million** into the VCFS - funding that supports frontline services, reaching local communities facing the greatest need.

This figure demonstrates the tangible return on investment in local infrastructure itself. It reflects the relationships, expertise, and convening power that LIOs bring when they advocate for the sector, broker partnerships, and support organisations to access resources they could not reach alone. When the cost of funding LIOs is considered alongside the funding they help unlock, the case for investment in infrastructure becomes clear.

London’s LIOs deliver a wide range of activities to facilitate funding to the VCFS, reflecting those identified in DCMS’s national research into this function.⁷ Most LIOs in London manage or distribute grants and community funds, lead or support place-based giving schemes, and a smaller number distribute emergency or crisis funding.

However, the ability to facilitate funding is not evenly distributed across the sector’s infrastructure. Research by DCMS shows that while larger LIOs (with an annual expenditure of £500,000 or more) undertook at least one funding facilitation activity between 2024 and 2025, this fell to 86% among smaller LIOs.⁷ This suggests that although facilitating funding is a valuable service, it is also one of the most difficult to sustain without adequate resourcing. It requires more staff time than any other activity, even where it is not the most frequently delivered.⁷ This disparity underlines a wider point: investment in local infrastructure itself is what enables them to draw down external investment for the local sector. Where LIOs are well-resourced, they are better placed to secure funding that benefits frontline organisations; where they

are not, that capacity and the funding it unlocks is put at risk. Against this backdrop, the £22.9 million leveraged into London's VCFS in 2024/25 should not be seen as guaranteed, but as the result of sustained effort.

Facilitating funding in action

Haringey Community Collaborative: VCS Challenge Fund

Haringey Community Collaborative demonstrates how facilitating funding can work in practice when local infrastructure organisations combine community insight, connections across sectors, and coordination between partners. Through its VCS Challenge Fund, Haringey Community Collaborative has supported grassroots organisations to address locally identified priorities, directing funding towards the communities and issues where it is most needed.

What they did

The Challenge Fund was co-designed with the sector, engaging more than 70 voluntary and community sector organisations to identify key priorities for the borough. This process identified the rising cost of living as the most urgent issue, shaping the focus of the first funding round.

Haringey Community Collaborative designed a simple and accessible application process to ensure that smaller grassroots organisations were able to apply. Funding decisions were made by a community panel made up of local residents, experts, and stakeholders, strengthening transparency and local ownership of the process.

Beyond distributing grants, Haringey Community Collaborative provided tailored capacity building support to the awarded cohort. This included helping groups develop evidence of outcomes and impact for their work, alongside opportunities to build connections with potential partners and funders. Funded organisations delivered their projects over a six month period, culminating in a showcase event to share learning and demonstrate impact to local stakeholders and funders.

The difference it made

As a result, participating organisations were better able to evidence the outcomes and impact of their work. The programme also strengthened relationships between grassroots organisations and potential funders, including local authorities, health commissioners, and trusts and foundations, creating new opportunities for future collaboration and investment.

What they learnt

Haringey Community Collaborative highlights several key lessons: keeping application processes simple and focused is critical to ensuring accessibility for a diverse range of organisations. At the same time, capacity building support must be flexible and responsive, recognising that organisations have different levels of experience and support needs.

Community Links Bromley: Strengthening local access to funding

What they did

Community Links Bromley plays a key role in improving access to funding for the borough's voluntary sector. This includes horizon-scanning and signposting funding opportunities, providing bid-writing advice and reference support, and leading collaborative bids to attract inward investment. Funding opportunities are promoted through e-bulletins and outreach, with applications managed via the Award Force platform. This support has helped improve access to funding across the borough, supporting efforts to "*shed its 'cold spot' status*".

The difference it made

A number of events in 2024/25 have strengthened connections between organisations and funders, including a Funding Conference in June 2024 attended by more than 90 people and 17 funders, and a Funding Fair in November 2024 featuring funders such as The National Lottery Community Fund. Workshops, 1:1 surgeries, and "Meet the Funder" sessions have further supported organisations to develop strong funding applications.

Support for collaborative bids has also brought new investment into the sector locally. This includes a Volunteering for Health bid involving King's College Hospital NHS Foundation Trust and nine partners, and a joint proposal to extend the Thinking Works contract, supporting vulnerable residents with energy advice.

Targeted initiatives have also been used to address gaps in funding. For example, a partnership with London Youth delivered a Cold Spots grants programme for small charities, offering grants of up to £5,000. In addition, Community Links Bromley continues to manage Bromley's Innovation Fund, which received 39 applications in 2024/25, reflecting the success of their outreach and training efforts.

What they learnt

Through these activities, it is clear that coordinated funding support and advice, partnerships, and grant management, can help bring new resources into the local sector and improve access to funding for local organisations.

Volunteering

Every successful volunteering opportunity requires a substantial investment of time and resource: from raising awareness of the role, matching it to the right person, preparing them for it, and recognising their contribution. London's Local Infrastructure Organisations (LIOs) provide this support at scale with local expertise: promoting volunteering, reducing the barriers that prevent people from getting involved, and ensuring volunteers are connected to opportunities that are accessible, well-managed, and meaningful to them.

In 2024/25, 24 LIOs across London provided volunteering support and brokerage services to **over 19,500** volunteers.

London's LIOs delivered a wide range of volunteering support and brokerage activities in 2024/25, including:

- Advertising volunteer and trustee opportunities, and brokering matches between volunteers and opportunities
- Promoting volunteering and running campaigns
- Delivering volunteer and trustee training and development programmes
- Supporting health and wellbeing-related volunteering initiatives and opportunities
- Advising and training organisations on volunteer management and best practice
- Recognising and celebrating volunteer contributions
- Supporting and developing employee volunteering programmes
- Leading systems change work to strengthen volunteering infrastructure

Alongside this core offer, over half of LIOs delivered specialist volunteering programmes in 2024/25, supporting groups who may otherwise face barriers to participation. This included migrants and displaced people, young people, disabled people, people with learning disabilities and mental health conditions, alongside a range of other marginalised communities.

What changed as a result?

Two themes emerge clearly from the evidence: London's LIOs are enabling volunteering at scale, while also working to widen opportunities to access volunteering for communities who might otherwise face barriers to participation.

1. Enabling volunteering at scale

London's volunteers play a vital role in delivery of key services across the city including in the health and care sector where over 14,000 volunteers support the NHS across the capital⁸ and the value of volunteering in London is estimated to be £35.9 billion annually.⁹

National research consistently shows that people who volunteer are more likely to report improved wellbeing, stronger social connections, increased confidence, and

opportunities to develop skills and experience. The role that LIOs play in enabling and supporting volunteering can therefore be understood not only in terms of the opportunities they create, but also in the wider social, economic, and community benefits that volunteering generates. However, research at a national level shows that rates of formal volunteering are declining across the UK, including London.¹⁰

By supporting volunteer-involving organisations to adapt, innovate, and share good practice, London's LIOs help ensure these organisations can continue to attract and engage the volunteers they need. For example, in one LIO-run peer network, 60% of organisations reported strengthened skills in recruiting and managing volunteers, and 100% found network meetings valuable for information and resources.

2. Widening opportunities to access volunteering

There are also inequalities in terms of which communities are able to access volunteering opportunities - often mirroring the structural inequalities in wider society. LIOs can play an important role in providing insights, support, and skills that mean a wider range of communities and individuals can access the benefits which come from volunteering.

For some volunteers in London, volunteering became a pathway into employment: one LIO reported that 54 of the 154 volunteers it placed went on to progress into paid work. Others saw volunteering reach communities who might otherwise face barriers to participation: one LIO reported that 50% of registered volunteers came from marginalised communities, while another noted that more than 300 people volunteered for the first time through its brokerage platform.

Volunteer Centre Hackney's Step Up programme illustrates this in practice, supporting people who struggle with their mental health, helping them to find volunteering roles and employment. Stacey was referred to the programme after a traumatic accident forced her to give up her career as a fitness instructor, leaving her isolated and struggling with addiction. With support from a progression coach, she began attending peer groups before moving into regular volunteering at Hackney Night Shelter. Volunteering helped Stacey rebuild her confidence and routine, ultimately supporting her return to paid work as a community fitness instructor (the field she'd had to leave) and she is now training as a peer mentor to support others facing similar challenges.

Challenges of capturing the long-term impact of volunteering support

Measuring the impact of volunteering support and brokerage services presents a particular challenge for LIOs. While it is relatively straightforward to record outputs such as the number of opportunities promoted or volunteers registered, understanding longer-term outcomes for volunteers and volunteer-involving organisations is much more difficult. Many of the benefits associated with volunteering, such as increased confidence, improved wellbeing, stronger social

connections, progression into paid employment, and sustained civic participation, emerge over time and require ongoing follow-up to track.

Given the scale of volunteering brokerage activity and the limited resources available to support impact measurement, collecting this data consistently is often challenging. As a result, much of the evidence available reflects the scale of activity delivered across London rather than its longer-term outcomes.

This is a challenge being recognised at a national level: in 2025, NAVCA received funding to develop a national impact assessment framework to help LIOs better understand, measure, and demonstrate the difference they make in their communities. Once complete, this framework could offer LIOs a shared, consistent way to capture longer-term outcomes - helping to address some of the gaps identified above and strengthening the sector's ability to make the case for continued investment.

Volunteering support in action

The following case study shows what this support can look like in practice - not just helping organisations find volunteers, but helping them connect with their communities, build the basic tools they need to recruit and sustain themselves, and continue the work that matters to the people they serve.

Volunteer Centre Greenwich: Supporting the Greenwich Pensioners Forum

What they did

The Greenwich Pensioners Forum was referred to Volunteer Centre Greenwich by a councillor from the Royal Borough of Greenwich. When Volunteer Centre Greenwich met with Forum members, it became clear that the group had been struggling to access support and was at risk of closing. There were not enough volunteers available to attend meetings, organise events, and carry out administrative tasks, and many members also faced digital barriers, making it difficult to promote volunteering opportunities and recruit new volunteers online.

To address these challenges, Volunteer Centre Greenwich organised and hosted a volunteer recruitment coffee morning for the Forum. They provided the venue, promoted the event, and supported the group on the day to ensure it ran smoothly.

As part of this support, Volunteer Centre Greenwich also identified gaps in the Forum's volunteer recruitment infrastructure. They provided practical resources, including volunteer recruitment templates and application forms, and their Social Media Volunteer designed a new logo for the group, which the Forum continues to use.

The difference it made

The coffee morning generated significant interest from 22 potential volunteers, helping the Forum connect with people interested in supporting its work and reducing the risk that the group would close.

The support also left the Forum better equipped to recruit and manage volunteers in the future. With a new logo, recruitment materials, and application processes in place, the group now has stronger foundations for attracting and welcoming volunteers, while improving its visibility within the local community.

What they learnt

Reflecting on this work, Volunteer Centre Greenwich found that face-to-face recruitment events can be particularly effective for engaging potential volunteers. The coffee morning format gave people an opportunity to meet Forum members, ask questions, and gain a better understanding of both the organisation and available volunteering roles.

They also learned that many prospective volunteers prefer personal interaction over receiving information solely by email. As a result, Volunteer Centre Greenwich continues to promote coffee mornings and similar in-person engagement opportunities as an effective way of generating interest in volunteering roles and supporting community groups to recruit volunteers.

Challenges and opportunities facing London's infrastructure

As demand for their support continues to grow, many Local Infrastructure Organisations (LIOs) across London are operating with increasing funding uncertainty, rising costs, and growing competition for diminishing resources. Without sustained investment in infrastructure itself, the risk is not simply that individual organisations struggle, it is that the wider sector fragments, community voices go unheard, and the capacity to respond collectively to local need is lost precisely when it is needed most.

New data explored in our second paper, *The Systemic Funding Crisis Facing London's Voluntary Sector Infrastructure*, finds that financial insecurity among London's LIOs is no longer an isolated issue, but a structural one. Nearly one third of organisations are now operating with six months or less of core funding, a proportion that has nearly doubled since 2024, while fewer organisations have core funding secured beyond one year. Almost a quarter reported that their core funding was lower than before in real terms, and a further 60% said funding levels were unchanged but worth less due to inflation.

The consequences of this insecurity extend well beyond individual organisations. Over two thirds of London's voluntary sector infrastructure reported chronic underfunding, and the same proportion said they are repeatedly at risk. While most organisations reported that absent infrastructure is not currently an issue in their local area, the prevalence of chronic underfunding and repeated risk points to a growing likelihood that this could change, and over a third reported being at risk of closure within the next two years if no further funding is committed. As our second paper sets out, these pressures rarely exist in isolation. Shifting public sector support, a changing landscape for trusts and foundations, increasingly competitive funding environments, rising expectations to do more with less, and a workforce under severe strain are all compounding an already fragile situation.

Where funders have recognised the value of sustained, long-term investment, and where infrastructure organisations have been able to secure it, the benefits are clear and the difference is tangible - as the evidence throughout this report demonstrates.

Despite the scale of these pressures, 2024/25 also saw a number of achievements and opportunities worth celebrating. For many LIOs, simply continuing to deliver was itself a significant achievement. As one LIO in outer London reflected:

"Still being here, still doing what we are doing and still engaging thousands of volunteers, achieving everything we have with very limited resources."

Others made tangible progress towards greater financial stability, securing new multi-year funding or recovering from in-year deficits through careful financial management. One LIO, having started the year with a significant deficit, described

ending it close to breaking even as "an achievement in this current climate", a reflection of the resourcefulness many LIOs have shown in the face of sustained pressure.

2024/25 also saw LIOs strengthen relationships with statutory, health, and business partners, securing new contracts and funding streams, and in some cases helping shape strategy at a system level for the first time. Many celebrated volunteering-specific achievements, such as attracting a more diverse range of volunteers and growing volunteer numbers despite resourcing challenges. New models of support also emerged this year, from place-based giving schemes to digital tools connecting volunteers and organisations more effectively, demonstrating the continued capacity of London's LIOs to innovate.

Looking ahead

Ultimately, the measure of local infrastructure is not the number of networks convened or volunteers brokered, but what changes for people and communities as a result. Infrastructure works largely behind the scenes, yet it shapes what is possible on the ground: who is heard, what services are sustained, what a local community feels like for those who live there, and how effectively local communities can respond to both everyday challenges and moments of crisis.

This is particularly true in London, where the scale, diversity, and complexity of need require strong, connected, and resilient voluntary and community action. Local Infrastructure Organisations (LIOs) play a critical role in holding this system together. They enable collaboration where there might otherwise be fragmentation, strengthen organisations that might otherwise struggle to survive, and ensure that community knowledge and experience inform the design and delivery of services. In doing so, they help create the conditions in which the wider sector and the communities it serves can thrive.

London's LIOs are often most visible in what they make possible for others. But it is worth considering what would be lost without them. Smaller and grassroots organisations would have fewer routes to funding, less access to peer learning, and less support to navigate complex statutory systems. Community voices, particularly those of marginalised and underrepresented groups, would be less consistently present in the decision-making spaces that shape local services. The £22.9 million leveraged into the sector in 2024/25 would be unlikely to reach organisations at a local and grassroots level. Emergency planning and response would proceed with less community knowledge and fewer cross-sector relationships to draw on. And the fragmentation that LIOs work daily to prevent would, over time, quietly erode the sector's collective capacity to respond to the needs of London's communities. Infrastructure is not visible in the way that frontline services are, but its absence would be.

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