

## Way Ahead: Thematic Groups

The Way Ahead report makes 12 recommendations for action. The Systems Change Group has gathered these under five key themes. Each theme will be explored by a Task and Finish Group, running from the 30th November event to the end of March 2017. These groups will be led by organisations with experience and knowledge of the field. Their task is to review existing knowledge and learning, seeking out data, research, best practice, effective models and expertise. They will propose practical plans for moving to a new system, identifying barriers to new ways of working and opportunities to overcome them.

- **Pragmatic Co-production** – Hackney Council for Voluntary Service
- **Triage and Connect** – Volunteer Centre Croydon
- **Data Sharing** – Superhighways and Networked Planet
- **Voice and Campaigning** – Sutton Council for Voluntary Service
- **Consistent Commissioning and Funding** – Locality

As a starting point for the Theme Groups and for discussion at the 30<sup>th</sup> November event, this paper summarises the text on each theme from the Way Ahead report.

### **PRAGMATIC CO-PRODUCTION**

Co-production is where Londoners work with those in power, and each other, in a way in which all voices are heard equally in developing a shared understanding of need and in crafting solutions to make London a better place. To be clear, effective co-production goes well beyond consultation. Pragmatic co-production should cover a continuum of activity as set out in the diagram below.



By “pragmatic” co-production we mean honest conversations should be held between communities, funders and civil society about the constraints on what is possible and the tensions between differing viewpoints. The effectiveness of this approach has already been proven in sectors such as children’s disability, where co-production has become central to how services are shaped within the overall context of finite resources.

### **TRIAGE AND CONNECT**

Empowerment should be at the heart of how local, regional and specialist support work with volunteers, community groups and formally constituted frontline organisations. In order to deliver this, this Way Ahead proposes a “triage and connect” approach.

By “triage” we mean:

- Diagnosing the issues and problems with which frontline volunteers, groups and organisations “present”, to enable a holistic understanding of and prioritisation of these needs
- Identifying the strengths and ambitions of volunteers, groups and organisations which can be built upon

By “connect” we mean:

- Providing access to sources of support, whether these sources be from the civil society sector, business sector, consultants, peers or specialist volunteers
- Providing opportunities and ideas to enable frontline volunteers, groups and organisations to develop and flourish

- Brokering connections with or signposting frontline volunteers, groups and organisations to the right form of support for them, so that they can devise their own solutions

This triage and connect approach has the potential more closely to deliver the bespoke service that many frontline volunteers, groups and organisations crave. It also makes a virtue of the multiple sources of support that are available within and beyond the civil society sector itself.

### **DATA SHARING**

The proposed system involves a dynamic flow of information to enable all players to work in the most effective way. If pragmatic co-production increasingly becomes the means by which an understanding of needs is developed, the picture of need will constantly evolve. This picture will need to be understood by all those involved with a particular community; hence the importance of sharing data on needs regularly and consistently. The role of specialist support will be crucial, not just in relation to understanding the needs of particular communities of interest, but also in spreading awareness of policy and best practice.

The GLA currently plays an important role for other sectors in collating data, analysing it and making it accessible. Civil society is a large and important contributor to London, and as such the GLA should extend its data role to encompass civil society. As co-produced needs data is developed, it could be pulled together by the GLA. Over time, this data would provide a clearer and shared understanding of need as it evolves across London, which is accepted by funders, civil society and communities themselves, and could be incorporated into strategic planning at all levels. Data about the sector itself is also important for planning, for example on the size, location and nature of civil society in different areas of London as it correlates to communities needs; the nature of volunteers, including where they volunteer, and to what issues they contribute.

### **VOICE AND CAMPAIGNING**

Civil society makes an enormous contribution to London, and therefore the Way Ahead proposes that it should be brought into wider, strategic planning and decision making for the capital. Its close connection to London's communities coupled with its flair for developing creative solutions to challenging issues makes it an invaluable ally in taking London forward.

One of the most crucial roles that civil society plays is that of speaking truth to power. How civil society enables community voices, including those that are rarely heard, to come to the fore will be crucial to its future success in influencing and campaigning. Basing influencing and campaigning work on the voices of communities will reinforce the legitimacy of civil society in influencing those in power. As a sector, civil society needs to be much better at coming together to agree core messages and provide a united front. If the sector is rooted in and driven by what communities say, this will be far easier to achieve.

If civil society can consistently adopt a more open style which recognises the challenges faced by those in power, and step up beside decision makers, bringing communities with them, it can have substantial influence by working collaboratively to solve London's problems.

### **CONSISTENT COMMISSIONING AND FUNDING**

Funders and commissioners are a vital part of the civil society "ecosystem". Some ways in which funders could work more effectively are: work with civil society, fellow funders and communities to develop a shared understanding of need; rethink *how* funding is provided so there is greater flexibility in how funds can be applied; and be more transparent about what they have achieved with the funding they have invested.

Civil society support is inconsistently funded and structured across London, which compounds the variability of what is offered and the quality of services. For local support to provide a consistent offer across London, consistent local commissioning is required. The Way Ahead recommends that London Councils work with local authorities to establish this consistency.

Pressure on funding is constraining support organisations' ability to adapt. The Way Ahead sets out clear functions for local, regional and specialist support, which will need to be funded. This provides a clear focus for how funding could be used and the benefits of that funding. The proposed system also ensures less duplication and more consistency of what is funded and delivered locally and regionally.