



Haringey
**Community
Collaborative**

Our priorities

2026 - 2027



www.haringeycollaborative.org

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Executive Summary

Haringey's voluntary and community sector (VCS) continues to play an important role in supporting local residents and communities. The sector is strong at tackling challenges such as social exclusion, mental health and wellbeing of residents, and the rising cost of living. Grassroots groups, community networks, and larger VCS organisations improve the lives of people across all ages and communities, particularly the young, the old, and those with multiple and more complex needs.

Haringey's VCS is good at understanding real community needs and providing culturally sensitive and trustworthy support to residents. The sector is trusted, connected, and empathetic. These strengths are constrained by ongoing organisational challenges including difficulties recruiting and retaining volunteers, changes to community asset leasing, and increased demand for their services. These challenges are made worse by financial pressures of rising costs, short term grants, and more competition for funding. Despite these pressures the sector remains an vital pillar for community resilience, connection, and wellbeing.

Summary – Priority Challenges 2026-2027

The 2026–2027 Priority Challenge Themes reflect both continuity and evolution in the needs of Haringey’s residents and the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS). Based on this year’s co-production process and borough-wide VCS engagement, six priority areas have been identified.

Priorities 1 – 3 (Cost of Living; Crime & Community Safety; Mental Health & Wellbeing) remain unchanged from last year. Reflected in the co-production process, surveys and workshops, these challenges continue to have the most significant impact on communities and VCS organisations.

Priority 4 (Employability, Skills, Education & Training) has been identified as a higher priority through this year’s co-production (compared with 2024-2025). It reflects a strong and growing consensus that long-term improvement in residents’ wellbeing relies on improving access to good-quality work, inclusive training pathways and skills development, particularly for young people, neurodivergent and disabled residents, and those facing structural barriers to opportunity.

Priorities 5 and 6 (Health & Social Inequalities; Housing) are recognised as highly important to the VCS, with deep connections to every other priority theme. However, these areas require significant systemic change, strategic leadership and investment beyond the direct control of the VCS. While the sector plays a vital role in advocacy, community intelligence and preventative action, meaningful solutions depend on national policy, statutory service reform, infrastructure investment and cross-borough collaboration.

These six priority themes form a picture of the pressures affecting communities in Haringey. This report defines the challenges, desired VCS outcomes, and opportunities for influence and wider systems change.

The Haringey Community Collaborative delivers our mission through three interconnected functions.



1) **Action** focuses on practical support for the voluntary and community sector (VCS), including providing funding through the VCS Challenge Funds and helping organisations build partnerships and develop strong, competitive bids.



2) **Capacity building** strengthens the sector by offering training and learning opportunities, such as online ‘lunch and learn’ sessions, expert-led workshops, and dedicated support from the VCS Capacity Building Lead, to equip organisations to address priority themes.



3) **Influence change** brings the VCS, grassroots communities, and decision-makers together to shape policy and drive systemic change, ensuring the voice and knowledge of the VCS and grassroots communities co-produce the changes we want to see.

About Haringey Community Collaborative

Established in May 2024 and commissioned by Haringey Council, **Haringey Community Collaborative** (delivered by Public Voice and Mind in Haringey) was created to provide strategic leadership and build capacity across the borough's VCS. Our aim is to support VCS organisations – particularly grassroots and underserved groups – to strengthen governance, enhance service delivery, and help to develop the skills resources the sector needs to effectively support the community.

We aim to help and support groups and organisations, and the sector overall, with:

- Sustainability and fundraising
- Governance
- Service delivery and scaling
- Recruiting and working with volunteers
- Measuring, reporting and increasing impact
- Networking, convening and working in partnership
- Being heard and valued by decision makers and key stakeholders in and beyond Haringey

We involve residents and organisations in all levels of decision making, from identifying priorities and themes for the VCS to the allocation of local grant funding in Haringey.



Deciding Our Strategic Priorities

As part of our **2026–2027 VCS Priorities Setting**, we have continued to take a co-production approach to reviewing and agreeing our strategic priorities and the focus of our capacity building efforts. This year, we engaged widely across the sector to ensure that our work continues to be shaped by those closest to the communities we serve.

Between July – October 2025, we gathered insights from **52 Haringey-based VCS organisations through our borough-wide survey**, alongside **42 VCS participants** and **23 representatives from statutory partners** (NHS and Haringey Council) across two VCS Priorities Workshops (online and in person) and a ‘Cabinet in the Community’ event. While the contributions of statutory partners provided valuable context and alignment, the focus of this report is on the priorities identified by and for Haringey’s Voluntary and Community Sector, ensuring that the voices of local organisations remain at the heart of our collective direction.

We sought to learn from and build on what has already been achieved, focusing our efforts specifically on the areas where the VCS has the greatest potential to address a challenge, and where the sector most needed capacity building support.

Summary of our co-production process



Stage 1: Reading and learning

Lots of research has been conducted on both the important issues and challenges in Haringey, as well as on the role and health of local VCS. This stage included analysis of strategies, visions and action plans for or relevant to Haringey, as well as wider regional or national reports, including the status of the voluntary sector. We also spoke with experts on these topics for further background. We worked alongside Haringey's Cabinet Member for Communities to share learning.

From this we identified:

- Already acknowledged issues and priorities in Haringey
- Ways a local VCS can address local challenges
- Areas of strength and of need for Haringey's VCS

Stage 2: Shortlisting themes

We reviewed our a longlist of themes, adding in emerging challenges and gaps raised by VCS organisations through our VCS Forums and feedback channels; additions included, racism and discrimination, and community assets and buildings (e.g. access and leases). We conducted an updated survey across Haringey's VCS, to get views and rankings of priorities for VCS organisations and the communities they serve in Haringey. We also gathered feedback from the VCS on strengths, challenges and capacity building needs for the sector.

Stage 3: VCS strengths

Building on the strengths identified through last year's engagement, we surveyed the sector to reaffirm what the VCS does well, its key strengths, and how the sector delivers successful projects.

Stage 4: Defining priorities

Drawing together what had been shared about both the key issues in Haringey, and the role and capabilities of the borough's VCS, we facilitated workshops and a 'Cabinet in the Community' event for the sector to decide which priorities should be the focus of Haringey Community Collaborative.

From this we identified:

- Priority challenges to be addressed through Challenge Funds and collaborations among Haringey's VCS
- Outcomes to target in response to each priority challenge
- Areas of focus for capacity building efforts, to strengthen and help sustain Haringey's VCS

Haringey Borough Vision – Six ‘Calls to Action’

The Haringey Community Collaborative’s VCS priority themes for 2026-2027 closely align with the six ‘calls to action’ outlined in Haringey Council’s borough vision for 2035¹. The voluntary and community sector is a key partner in Haringey’s future, and if the borough is to achieve its 2035 vision, the sector must be valued and empowered to shape decision-making.

Call to Action 1: Safe and affordable housing is directly supported through the Collaborative’s housing priority, alongside work on cost of living, by strengthening access to high-quality advice, supporting advocacy and enabling VCS organisations to evidence poor housing conditions and challenge unsafe or unaffordable practices.

Call to Action 2: Thriving places is advanced across all six VCS priorities through efforts to strengthen community networks, maximise the use of local assets, share spaces creatively, and create inclusive, welcoming environments that reflect Haringey’s diverse communities.

Call to Action 3: Supporting children and young people’s experiences and skills is strongly aligned with the employability, skills, education and training priority, as well as work on mental health and wellbeing and crime and community safety, supporting families, creating safe and high-quality spaces, bridging skills gaps, and ensuring young people’s voices inform local decision-making.

Call to Action 4: Feeling safe and being safe is directly reflected in the crime and community safety priority, which promotes community-led safety approaches, multi-agency working, improved trust, and targeted responses to violence, antisocial behaviour and hate crime.

Call to Action 5: Tackling inequalities in health and wellbeing is central to the Collaborative’s work on mental health and wellbeing, health and social inequalities, and cost of living, focusing on preventative pathways, reducing barriers to primary care, and addressing the structural drivers of poor health outcomes. Finally, through empowering organisations that promote sustainability, green engagement, and equitable resource access, the Collaborative also contributes to **Call to Action 6: Supporting greener choices**, ensuring grassroots communities are central to the borough’s transition to a greener future.

¹ – Haringey 2035: Our Vision; Haringey Council
<https://haringey.gov.uk/council-elections/council-policies-plans/haringey-2035-our-vision>

Priority Themes

Each of the below were identified as themes that the voluntary sector should prioritise over the coming year. Below, we describe why these were considered most important in Haringey.

1. Cost of Living

Household costs continue to rise across the UK, while real disposable incomes have stagnated, leaving 7.1 million low-income households across the country – around 1 in 4 – unable to afford essentials such as heating or toiletries in the past six months¹. Around 14% of households – 7.3 million adults – reported going hungry in January 2025².

Cost of living pressures are keenly felt in Haringey: almost half of the wards in the borough are within the most deprived wards in England: 20.1% of children live in relative poverty³.

Cost of living pressures continue to shape almost every aspect of life in Haringey. Residents are experiencing escalating food costs, rising fuel bills, insecure work, and rental prices that far outpace wages. Many people, particularly pensioners, disabled people, families living in overcrowded housing and people with no recourse to public funds, are unable to meet even their basic needs. Food poverty, fuel poverty and homelessness are described as widespread, with reports of families having to choose between food and heating. Poor housing conditions such as damp, mould and delayed repairs significantly add to health and financial strain.

The situation is compounded by increasing mental health needs, long waiting lists for support, and the complex social issues that intersect with financial hardship. For children and young people, overcrowded homes, intergenerational unemployment, and lack of safe spaces create additional barriers to wellbeing and opportunity.

VCS organisations themselves face instability due to short-term funding cycles, heavy administrative burdens, and an inconsistent funding landscape. This disrupts service continuity. For example, successful programmes for girls or vulnerable young people have been lost because funding was withdrawn despite clear evidence of need.

1 – Put cost of living at heart of Budget for growth and fairness. Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2025): <https://www.jrf.org.uk/cost-of-living/put-cost-of-living-at-heart-of-budget-for-growth-and-fairness>

2 – Latest food insecurity tracker shows seven million adults going hungry. The Food Foundation (2025): <https://foodfoundation.org.uk/news/latest-food-insecurity-tracker-shows-seven-million-adults-going-hungry>

3 – Haringey population data. Haringey Council (2025): <https://haringey.gov.uk/council-elections/data-finance/haringey-population-data>

2. Crime and Community Safety

Sadly youth involvement in knife crime persists nationwide, with 18% of related convictions involving children ⁴. Meanwhile drug-related crime has grown to nearly 204,000 offences recorded in England and Wales in 2024-25, up from 182,000 for the previous year ⁵. Knife crime offences had decreased slightly (by 2%) in the 12 months to January 2025, but remain a significant concern ⁶. The drug crime rate in Haringey in January 2025 was among the highest in London, however, and drug offences accounted for 6.5% of all recorded crime in the borough ⁷.

Crime and community safety concerns in Haringey span youth violence, knife crime, domestic violence, antisocial behaviour, drug and alcohol misuse, and a general need for safer, cleaner community spaces. Young people in particular are vulnerable to exploitation, gang-related harm and lack of safe opportunities for social engagement.

Some VCS groups highlighted mistrust in policing, particularly regarding racial disproportionality, surveillance, facial recognition technology used in majority-BAME neighbourhoods, and fears of increased data monitoring. These issues undermine community confidence and can exacerbate feelings of exclusion and marginalisation.

Domestic abuse remains a persistent concern, with many residents requiring safer options, more accessible support, and stronger community-based responses. Social isolation, lack of community cohesion and limited youth life-skills provision contribute to the wider safety landscape.

3. Mental Health and Wellbeing Support

One in five adults are living with a common mental health problem in the UK ⁸. Demand for support among children and young people is at record levels. Over 16,500 people were waiting over 18 months for mental health treatment ⁹.

Mental health challenges are widespread and intersect with poverty, crime, exclusion, disability, and housing insecurity. Youth mental health is a major concern, with long waiting times, inconsistent support, and inadequate provision in educational settings. Short-term interventions often discharge people too early, leaving them without sustained care.

4 - Knife Crime: Key Evidence and Insights. Youth Justice Board (2025): <https://yjresourcehub.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/Knife-Crime-Key-Evidence-and-Insights-Aug-2025-1.pdf>

5 - Number of police recorded drug offences in England and Wales from 2002/03 to 2024/25. Statista (2025): <https://www.statista.com/statistics/283103/drugs-in-england-and-wales/>

6 - Crime and Violence Overview. Scrutiny Panel, Haringey Council (2025): <https://www.minutes.haringey.gov.uk/documents/s150222/Haringey%20Crime%20and%20Violence%20Overview%20March%202025.pdf>

7 - Crime Statistics for Haringey. Homenicom (2025): <https://homenicom.co.uk/area/haringey/crime-rate>; Crime and Safety in Haringey. CrimeRate (2025): <https://crimerate.co.uk/london/haringey>

8 - Adult Psychiatric Morbidity Survey: Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing, England, 2023/4. NHS England Digital (2025): <https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/adult-psychiatric-morbidity-survey/survey-of-mental-health-and-wellbeing-england-2023-24/common-mental-health-conditions>

9 - New analysis of NHS data on mental health waiting times. Rethink Mental Illness (2025): <https://www.rethink.org/news-and-stories/media-centre/2025/02/new-analysis-of-nhs-data-on-mental-health-waiting-times/>

Vulnerable individuals, including those facing poverty, additional needs, or social isolation, often rely on VCS organisations for emotional support, signposting, and community connection. There is a growing need for trauma-informed, culturally sensitive mental health services that recognise the social context in which distress emerges.

4. Employability, Skills, Education, and Training

Over 10% of the UK workforce is considered to be in precarious work – with women, younger and working class people more likely to be affected ¹⁰. In Haringey, wages are below London average and unemployment higher than average ¹¹.

Many residents face entrenched barriers to employment, including low local job availability, discrimination, lack of accessible training, and insufficient support for people who are neurodiverse, disabled or experiencing mental health challenges. Young people in particular struggle to secure sustainable, meaningful work that aligns with their interests and potential. Barriers are often social as well as economic: challenges with immigration status, mental health, daily living skills, form-filling, and general confidence-building all hinder access to opportunities. There is strong demand for more inclusive pathways into creative industries, cultural leadership roles, and community-based employment opportunities.

People with learning disabilities face extreme employment inequality, with only a small proportion gaining paid employment. They often experience stigma, limited work experience offers, and a lack of mixed-ability activities where skills can be developed safely and inclusively.



¹⁰ - Assessment of the scale and nature of labour market non-compliance in the UK: interim report. Department for Business and Trade (2024): <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/assessment-of-the-scale-and-nature-of-labour-market-non-compliance-in-the-uk-interim-report>

¹¹ - Haringey at a glance: State of the Borough. Haringey Council (2025): https://haringey.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2024-04/state_of_the_borough_final_master_version.pdf

5. Health and Social Inequalities

Health and social inequalities underpin nearly every other challenge facing residents. Inequities arise from structural racism, discrimination, disability barriers, class disparities, poor housing, food poverty, lack of accessible community venues, and inconsistent healthcare access. Some groups, such as people with learning disabilities, face substantially reduced life expectancy and limited social inclusion.

Residents report difficulties accessing GP appointments, social care, and specialist support – particularly for neurodiversity, SEND needs and early diagnosis. Public health concerns span obesity, substance misuse, gambling, sexual health, dementia prevention and injury prevention. There is also a perception that services and priorities are not universal across the borough and that Haringey's geographical boundaries don't always reflect where residents in Haringey and surrounding boroughs live their lives. Haringey health and social inequalities are experienced significantly differently between neighbourhoods.

Many groups report barriers to affordable community spaces, restricting their capacity to offer inclusive activities, healthy living programmes and social connection.

6. Housing

The UK is facing a housing crisis: waiting lists for family-sized social housing have grown 37% since 2015, and over 131,000 households living in temporary accommodation in England as of March 2025, a year-on-year rise of 12% ¹². Haringey's social housing waiting list stood at over 13,000 in April 2024, significantly above the London average of 10,192. Haringey had over 2,600 households living in temporary accommodation as of September 2025, 29% higher than the London average ¹³.

The housing crisis is one of the most pressing issues for residents. Problems include insecure private rentals, rising rents, homelessness, poor-quality or unsafe social housing, and extremely long delays in accessing housing services. Disabled people, older people and SEND families often have specific housing needs, yet appropriate, adapted or local housing is limited. Rising homelessness and restricted access to hostels or safe temporary accommodation, particularly in winter, place many residents at risk. Overcrowding affects young people's mental health and education, while families in areas like Muswell Hill are being priced out of the communities where their support networks exist. Housing quality, climate resilience and the need for sustainable homes were also highlighted, along with the belief that without stable housing, residents cannot address other issues such as employment or mental health.

¹² – Statutory homelessness in England: financial year 2024-25. Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (2025): <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/statutory-homelessness-in-england-financial-year-2024-25/statutory-homelessness-in-england-financial-year-2024-25>

¹³ – Housing, Planning and Development Scrutiny Panel: Tuesday 23rd September 2025. Haringey Council (2025): <https://www.minutes.haringey.gov.uk/documents/g11288/Public%20reports%20pack%2023rd-Sep-2025%2018.30%20Housing%20Planning%20and%20Development%20Scrutiny%20Panel.pdf?T=10>



How We Will Take Action

To support the VCS with practical, tangible interventions that strengthen delivery and respond to the cross-cutting issues faced by residents, we commit to:

- Provide funding to Haringey VCS to address priority themes through our Challenge Fund model (see box). We will prioritise areas of the borough with highest levels of deprivation and where health and social inequalities are most stark.
- Supporting collaboration and partnership-building, helping organisations to co-design bids, form thematic networks, and develop joint projects.

We will fund and support partnership working to deliver the following the outcomes.

What is a Challenge Fund?

Challenge Funds involve awarding small grants (typically up to £3,000) to VCS grassroots organisations in Haringey, with each Challenge Fund focusing on a different priority theme. These grants provide seed funding to help grassroots organisations test, learn and build evidence for new or existing initiatives addressing the Challenge Fund theme. Grant award decisions will be co-produced by a panel of residents and other stakeholders with knowledge and experience of the Challenge Fund theme.

The selected cohort of grant awardees will get:

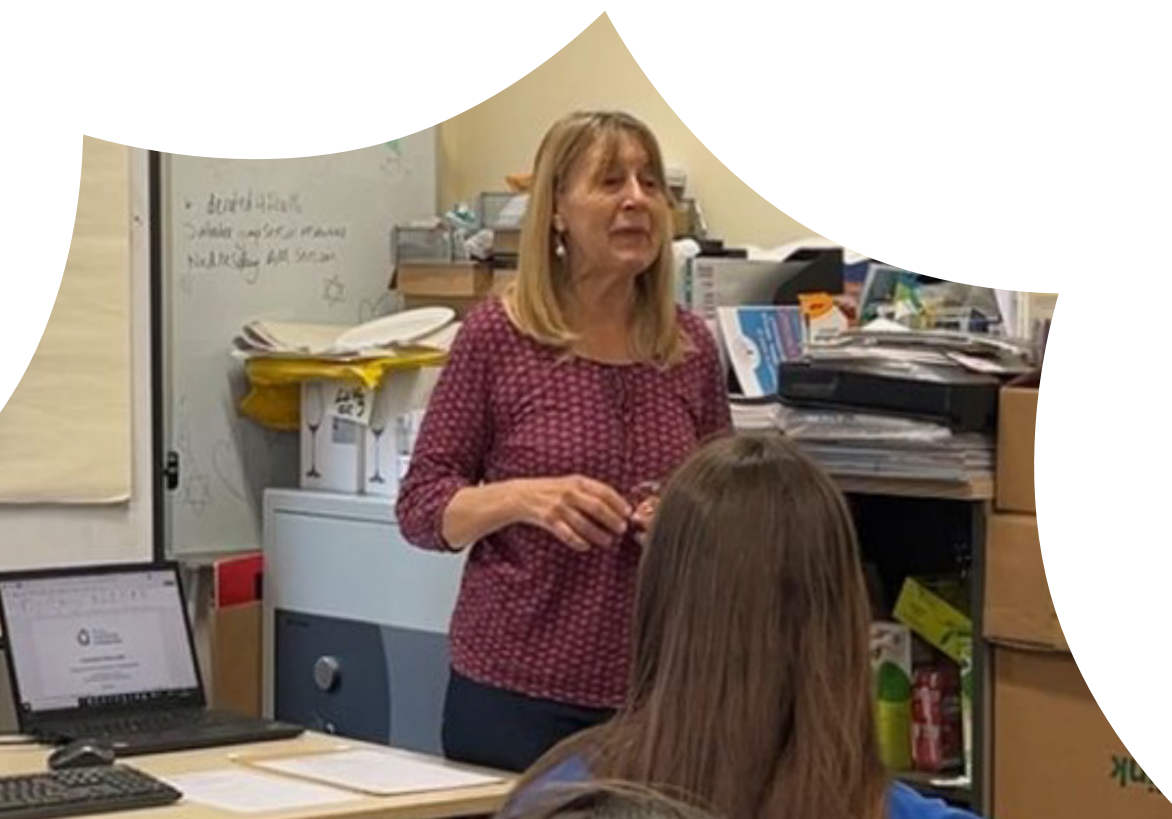
- Funding to support their proposed project or initiative
- Tailored capacity building support
- Advice on measuring and reporting the impact of their project or initiative
- Opportunities to network with the rest of the cohort in a community of practice, sharing learning and ideas to link their work
- Chances to showcase their work and impact to potential funders, partners and other key stakeholders

Our priorities will inform future Challenge Funds.

Information and support for organisations interested in applying, will be shared by the Haringey Community Collaborative – to find out more [join our mailing list](#).

Cost of Living

- Supporting residents to meet their basic needs, including access to amenities for a decent standard of living – such as clothing, hygiene products/facilities, nutritious and quality food, energy/fuel, affordable and suitable housing, and warm/cool and welcoming spaces
- A reduction in food and fuel insecurity through local, culturally appropriate food equity models, high-quality food support, and strengthened community food networks.
- Support that ensures basic needs are met before expecting residents to engage in employment, training or other development opportunities – moving people from “surviving to thriving”.
- Greater stability for VCS organisations through sustainable, long-term funding and simpler reporting processes, enabling consistency of provision.
- Residents have the knowledge, skills and confidence to navigate complex systems (including digital) and enact their rights.
- Financial stability, including access to support and opportunities to develop skills, find decent and adequately paid employment, or for those wanting to start their own business.
- Joined-up, holistic support and information is provided in convenient and welcoming locations
- Young people in Haringey are supported to fulfil their potential
- Dignity is ensured for all residents.



Summary of our first Challenge Fund: Cost of Living

The first Challenge Fund was announced in December 2024 and delivered from January to June 2025. We provided small grants ranging from **£1,950 to £3,000**, totalling **£19,912** to eight grassroots VCS organisations to deliver six-month projects tackling the rising cost of living.

Each unique project, achieve positive outcomes through supporting residents to meet their **basic needs**, improving **access to community support** services, and supporting residents with **financial stability**.

Grant awardees and projects:

- **Pram Depot:** Baby Boxes and Buggies for Vulnerable Mums in Haringey
- **Tender Loving Care Group:** Digital Cost of Living Project
- **The Cheer Up Squad:** Cheerful Meals
- **WAVE Hub (We're All Valued Equally):** Weekly Café and Activities
- **Women at the Well of Living Waters:** WOW Community Hub
- **Haringey Over 50s Forum:** Haringey Older Peoples Alliance, 'Live Cheaper, Warmer, Healthier' Advice Lunches
- **Bounds Green Food Bank:** Independent Community Run Food Bank
- **A Fairer Chance:** Working Black Women Project, Haringey

In July 2025, the Cost of Living Challenge Fund concluded with a showcase event, bringing together grant awardees, beneficiaries, funders, and community members to share the impact and learnings from the projects and celebrate the work of grassroots organisations.

Read more about our Cost of Living Challenge Fund Impact here:

[Spotlight on impact: Cost of Living Challenge Fund](#)

Crime and Community Safety

- All residents feel safe and supported in their communities
- Reduction in youth violence through preventative, trauma-informed and relationship-based support, including accessible mental health care, education, life-skills development and pathways into employment.
- Public spaces and assets are accessible and inclusive
- Community activities welcome the full diversity of Haringey's people. Seldom heard and/or vulnerable groups are engaged and supported in particular.
- Increased support for survivors of domestic violence, ensuring culturally competent and accessible services.
- Greater opportunities for young people and young adults to access safe, inclusive spaces, mentoring and personal development programmes.
- Community-led initiatives that address antisocial behaviour and substance misuse, particularly among young people.

Mental health wellbeing and support

- All young people able to access timely, high-quality mental health and wellbeing support, including those at risk of exclusion or involved in youth crime.
- Stronger consistency of mental health provision, with longer-term support options and reduced early discharge.
- Increased community capacity to support vulnerable individuals, including those with additional needs or disabilities.
- Improved links between mental health, employability, housing and safety services, recognising the interconnected nature of wellbeing.
- More inclusive community spaces that promote belonging, connection and positive identity.

Employability, skills, education and training

- Influence employers to adopt inclusive recruitment practices, disability-friendly workplaces and accessible progression routes.
- Advocate for regionally funded skills programmes that prioritise those facing the greatest barriers, including neurodiverse and disabled young people.
- Partner with schools, SEND services and further education institutions to strengthen transitions from education into employment or training.
- Influence government policy to recognise the long-term cost of excluding disabled and neurodivergent people from fair employment.

Health and social inequalities

- Push for policies combating racism, discrimination and disability inequality across public services, including policing, health and education.
- Campaign for improved public health investment, better GP access, and SEND-specific support pathways.
- Influence borough-wide strategies on environmental health, active travel, green spaces and sustainable community building.
- Highlight and evidence intersectional need, emphasising that cost of living, housing, mental health and disability must be tackled together.

Housing

- Campaign for expanded social housing and stronger regulation of private rented sector affordability and conditions.
- Advocate for a more transparent and responsive repairs and adaptations system.
- Stronger message from the VCS that investment in climate-resilient housing and sustainable community infrastructure is needed for communities.
- Influence national policy on overcrowding, homelessness protections, and support for families with complex needs.





Capacity Building Priorities

To strengthen the resilience, confidence and skills of Haringey's voluntary and community sector, we commit to:

- **Delivering training and learning opportunities**, including 'lunch and learns', expert-led sessions and bespoke support, focusing on themes the sector repeatedly identified as priority: trauma-informed practice, inclusive employability pathways, domestic abuse response, culturally competent mental health support, and navigating complex systems like housing, health, or welfare.
- **Developing skills and knowledge in the VCS** (through training and practical resources), we will deliver targeted training and develop easy-to-use tools that help VCS groups
- **Building organisational resilience**, with support around fundraising, monitoring and evaluation, governance, safeguarding, data and GDPR, digital confidence and long-term planning.
- **Strengthening cross-sector connections**, ensuring the VCS, statutory partners and community leadership groups learn from each other, share intelligence, and understand the inequalities and lived realities facing residents across the borough.

The following were identified as key areas for capacity building support from or via the Haringey Community Collaborative.

Training and Development

- Provide training for staff and volunteers to enhance their skills and knowledge
- Offer training on project delivery, governance, and best practices

Collaboration and Partnerships

- Facilitate collaboration among grassroots organisations to improve efficiency and effectiveness
- Develop a common set of governance documents to streamline processes and promote consistency
- Support joint bidding efforts to increase success rates and leverage collective resources

Bid Writing and Funding

- Assistance with bid writing and funding applications
- Explore the use of AI to improve bid writing and policy development

Volunteer Engagement

- Offer training and support for volunteer development, conditions, policy, and remuneration
- Launch a campaign to recruit volunteers across the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS)

Technology and Data

- Provide training on technology and data collection to support grant applications and community engagement
- Address language barriers to ensure accessibility for all residents

Knowledge Sharing

- Facilitate information sharing and awareness among VCS organisations
- Offer training on changes to benefits and other relevant topics

Policy and Procedures

- Identify gaps in policies and procedures to improve efficiency and effectiveness

Community Engagement

- Create a central platform for information and support
- Promote collaboration among VCS organisations to avoid duplication of services and foster a competitive spirit
- Improve communication of community activities, such as warm and cool spaces
- Support advocacy and community ambassador initiatives





Influence Change

To advocate for a fairer system, we commit to amplifying the voice and expertise of community organisations, ensuring lived experience of grassroots communities directly shapes local strategies on cost of living, housing quality, youth safety, SEND provision and mental health access.

In particular, we will seek to influence change with and for the sector in the following areas:

- **Cost of living:** Work collectively to produce shared evidence and data demonstrating the local impact of cost of living pressures and pushing for cross-sector responses that recognise the intersections between poverty, health, employment and housing.
- **Crime and community safety:** Collaboratively influence regional and national strategies on youth violence, social isolation, crime prevention and digital surveillance policy.
- **Mental wellbeing and support:** Lobby for whole-system approaches that integrate mental health with poverty alleviation, housing quality and employment pathways.
- **Employability, skills, education and training:** Lobby for local job creation, including community wealth-building and investment in social enterprises.
- **Health and social inequalities:** Advocate for co-designed health services with the VCS as equal partners in shaping commissioning, delivery and monitoring.
- **Housing:** Provide evidence on how housing impacts mental health, employability, poverty and community cohesion to influence local strategy.

Other areas of potential VCS influence are shared below. Where practical, the Collaborative will support the efforts of others to influence change in these areas.



Cost of living

- Advocate collectively for long-term, accessible funding models with less bureaucracy and clear strategic priorities shaped by VCS expertise.
- Influence local housing and anti-poverty strategies by providing community intelligence on living conditions, overcrowding and unsafe accommodation.
- Lobby regional and national government for stronger welfare protections, higher pensions, better social housing investment, and policies that keep rent increases in check.
- Campaign for fairer energy policies, winter support schemes, and targeted protection for low-income families and pensioners.
- Work collectively to produce shared evidence and data demonstrating the local impact of cost of living pressures and pushing for cross-sector responses that recognise the intersections between poverty, health, employment and housing.

Crime and community safety

- Champion community-informed policing by bringing lived experience from residents, especially minoritised communities, into local safety partnership planning.
- Advocate for transparent, equitable policing practices that address concerns around surveillance and racial discrimination.
- Lobby for sustainable investment in youth services, domestic abuse provision and early-intervention projects that tackle root causes rather than symptoms.
- Work with the local authority to co-design safer public spaces, improved lighting, and community-led environmental improvements.

Mental wellbeing and support

- Advocate for improved CAMHS and adult mental health funding, reduced waiting times and more accessible criteria.
- Influence education policy to ensure mental health support is embedded within schools, especially for those experiencing behavioural or learning challenges.
- Work with regional and national decision-makers to elevate the message that early intervention, long-term support and culturally competent models are essential.

Employability, skills, education and training

- Influence employers to adopt inclusive recruitment practices, disability-friendly workplaces and accessible progression routes.
- Advocate for regionally funded skills programmes that prioritise those facing the greatest barriers, including neurodiverse and disabled young people.
- Partner with schools, SEND services and further education institutions to strengthen transitions from education into employment or training.
- Influence government policy to recognise the long-term cost of excluding disabled and neurodivergent people from fair employment.

Health and social inequalities

- Push for policies combating racism, discrimination and disability inequality across public services, including policing, health and education.
- Campaign for improved public health investment, better GP access, and SEND-specific support pathways.
- Influence borough-wide strategies on environmental health, active travel, green spaces and sustainable community building.
- Highlight and evidence intersectional need, emphasising that cost of living, housing, mental health and disability must be tackled together.

Housing

- Campaign for expanded social housing and stronger regulation of private rented sector affordability and conditions.
- Advocate for a more transparent and responsive repairs and adaptations system.
- Stronger message from the VCS that investment in climate-resilient housing and sustainable community infrastructure is needed for communities.
- Influence national policy on overcrowding, homelessness protections, and support for families with complex needs.



Strengths of Haringey's Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS)

VCS staff and volunteers perceive a clear and consistent picture of what our sector does well: Haringey's Voluntary and Community Sector is one of the borough's most trusted, connected, and responsive systems of support. The sector's strengths lie in its deep community relationships, its ability to understand and articulate local need, and its flexibility to act quickly. Haringey's VCS is strong when statutory services are stretched, unavailable, or can't meet community needs.

1. Deep Community Knowledge and Trusted Relationships

Across responses, organisations emphasised their proximity to residents, their understanding of communities at neighbourhood, and the trust they build with groups who may feel marginalised or overlooked. This includes refugees and migrant families, people experiencing poverty, isolated older people, and ethnic minority children with additional needs.

VCS organisations often act as the first point of contact and some residents feel more comfortable approaching community groups than large systems. Respondents noted that simply "picking up the phone and speaking to someone" is not always available from statutory services but remains core to the VCS approach.

2. Inclusion, Empathy and Culturally-Sensitive Support

The sector is recognised for creating welcoming, nonjudgemental spaces where residents feel safe and included. Many organisations offer culturally sensitive, holistic and tailored support, enabling people to participate regardless of background, confidence or need. This ability to meet people "where they are" was repeatedly cited as a defining strength.

3. Knowing and Meeting Community Needs

A major theme was the VCS's role in addressing unmet needs, bridging gaps when statutory provision is stretched or unavailable, and supporting those who struggle to access support or digital systems. Respondents described the sector as flexible, responsive and often the only accessible option for residents facing long waits, digital barriers, or financial pressures.

Services include:

- Outreach and mediation
- Bespoke one-to-one support
- Signposting and advocacy
- Wellbeing and social connection opportunities
- Capacity building and training

Several responses stressed that the sector's creativity and speed allow it to trial innovative models and intervene early before problems escalate.

4. Building Community Connection, Belonging and Empowerment

The VCS plays a crucial role in strengthening social networks, building cooperation and empathy, and reducing loneliness. Activities range from events and festivals to small community clubs and peer-led groups.

Organisations emphasised co-production, working with residents to design services that reflect lived experiences and local realities.

5. Collaboration, Information Sharing and Collective Action

Networks such as NAVNET+ and community forums were praised for facilitating information sharing, joint working, and collective problem-solving. Respondents highlighted the value of “contact corridors” between groups and the role of networks in improving outreach, visibility, and coordination across the borough.

Several organisations expressed a desire for more opportunities for collaboration, particularly among more insular groups and communities.

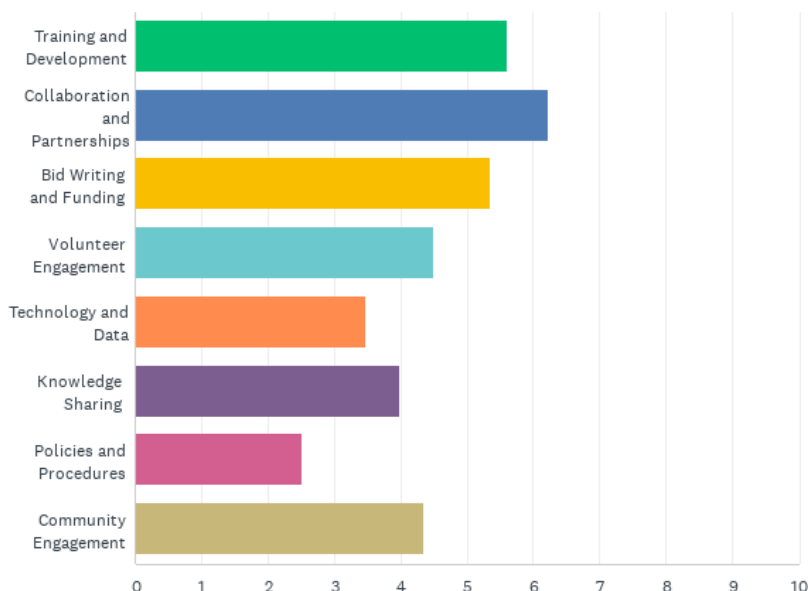
6. A High-Value, Overstretched Sector

A recurring message was that the VCS provides exceptional value for money, often delivering impactful services on minimal budgets. However, contributors also highlighted the pressure of short-term funding, the emotional and practical burden placed on charities, and a perception that VCS strengths are sometimes undervalued. Despite this, respondents emphasised that the sector continues to deliver dedicated, inventive, and community-driven support.



Challenges and Limitations for the VCS in Haringey

Q11 Which capacity building priorities do you think are the most important? Please rank in order of highest importance.



Survey responses from VCS organisations across Haringey highlight a wide range of structural, operational, and financial challenges affecting their ability to meet community needs. These issues reflect both long-term systemic pressures and more recent shifts in policy, funding, and community expectations. These areas will remain a focus for capacity building among the sector.



1. Capacity Constraints and Increasing Demand

Many organisations report being overstretched, with demand for services rising faster than their ability to respond. Limited staff capacity, small volunteer teams, and difficulties recruiting and retaining workers – particularly when roles are low-paid – contribute to a persistent strain on service delivery. Several groups noted that demand is increasingly complex, with individuals requiring more intensive support, often linked to cost-of-living pressures, housing problems, or health-related issues.

2. Volunteer Reliance and Recruitment Challenges

A substantial number of organisations rely heavily on volunteers, yet recruiting and retaining volunteers, especially young people, is becoming increasingly difficult. Non-attendance, irregular commitment, and skill gaps among volunteers further hinder service continuity. This reliance becomes particularly problematic when volunteers are supporting residents with multiple or complex needs.

3. Financial Pressures, Funding Instability, Bid Writing

Funding remains one of the most significant constraints. Rising costs (particularly costs associated with leasing and renting community spaces and buildings) make it increasingly difficult for organisations to deliver activities. Many note inadequate core funding, short-term project funding, and growing competition for grants. Several respondents raised concerns that funders are closing opportunities early due to overwhelming demand. Meanwhile, the reduction of corporate donations and the heightened emphasis on statistical reporting over meaningful outcomes create additional burdens.

4. Strain from Statutory Service Gaps

A recurring theme is the expectation that the VCS will compensate for the shortcomings of local and national government services. Organisations feel they are being relied on to address issues they lack the powers or resources to resolve. This includes supporting people navigating complex systems (such as welfare, housing, and health) without adequate training or information. Some report insufficient communication and trust from statutory partners when escalating issues.

5. Policy Instability and Strategic Barriers

Frequent changes in government and local authority policy create uncertainty and disrupt long-term planning. Organisations struggle to align with shifting priorities and funding criteria. Respondents highlighted the need for more secure, long-term access to community buildings, noting that short or medium-term leases limit the ability of VCS organisations to attract significant investment or restricts their eligibility for certain grant funds.

6. Access to Space and Rising Costs

High rental costs for community venues are a major barrier, with some previously affordable local spaces now priced beyond reach. VCS groups express concerns around the implementation of Haringey's Community Assets Social Value Policy, stressing that this is not financially viable for many VCS groups. This could limit the ability of organisations to run activities, deliver consistent services, or expand provision in response to community demand.

7. Communication, Collaboration, and Information Gaps

Responses expressed that there is often limited awareness of what services exist locally, reducing opportunities for coordinated support. Many highlighted the need for clearer communication, shared purpose, and improved signposting – particularly around systems that are difficult for residents to navigate.

8. Societal and Community Cohesion Challenges

Broader community dynamics also impact the VCS. Issues such as social polarisation, lack of community cohesion, and growing mistrust place additional pressure on organisations attempting to create safe and inclusive spaces. Some groups report that clients sometimes have misinformation or unrealistic expectations, further complicating service delivery.

9. Governance and Skills Limitations

Some smaller grassroots organisations noted gaps in governance, strategic planning, and specialist skills. These limitations can impact their ability to compete for funding, meet regulatory requirements, or engage effectively at strategic levels across Haringey and beyond.



Next steps

We will focus our efforts over the coming year on the co-produced priorities shared in this report. This will involve:

- Launching a Challenge Fund early 2026
- Working with the VCS to develop collaborative projects that respond to the priority themes
- Engaging funders to support additional Challenge Funds addressing our priority themes
- Delivering VCS Forum events and learning/training sessions in response to the VCS capacity building priorities

More details on the Challenge Fund and application process will be announced by the Community Collaborative. [Join our mailing list to keep updated.](#)

Every year we will review these priorities and co-produce again to refresh our strategy.

Thank you to everyone who has participated so far, and who continues to engage with and support the Haringey Community Collaborative.



Appendices

Insights from our co-production

Appendix (a): Narratives / Case Studies from the VCS Priority Challenges survey responses

A. Pioneer Girlz - The Impact of Unstable Funding

Priority Area: Cost of Living / VCS Sustainability

A well-regarded girls' programme providing safety, empowerment and positive development opportunities lost funding after one year, despite clear evidence of continued need. The case exemplifies how short-term funding cycles undermine consistent, preventative work with young people.

B. Wave Hub - A Model of Mixed-Ability Inclusion

Priority Areas: Health & Social Inequalities; Employability & Skills

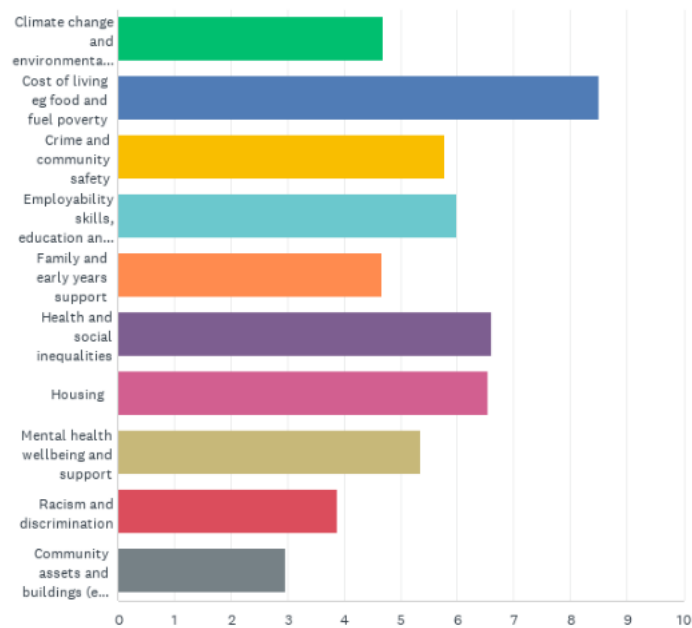
Wave Hub creates inclusive, mixed-ability environments where disabled and non-disabled people participate together. Their donation-based activities reduce isolation for people with learning disabilities, while their mixed-ability café provides work experience, confidence-building and pathways into volunteering or employment.

C. Pedal Power - Tackling Health Inequalities for Disabled People

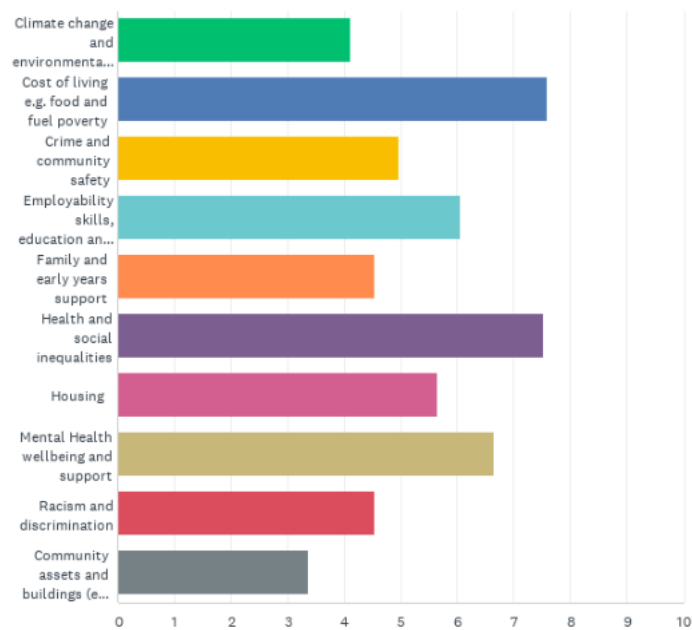
Priority Area: Health and Social Inequalities

Pedal Power highlights stark health inequalities for people with learning disabilities, who face shorter life expectancy, discrimination, isolation and lack of financial independence. Their cycling club offers accessible physical activity and community connection for people of all ages with learning disabilities and their families.

Q4 Now, looking at Haringey as a whole (ie. as opposed to your organisation in particular) which priorities do you think are most important? Please rank in order of highest importance.



Q1 Which priorities in Haringey do you think are the most important for your organisation? Please rank in order of highest importance.



Appendix (b): Selection of Quotes from VCS Strengths Survey Responses

“The voluntary and community sector is uniquely placed to respond quickly and creatively to local needs... creating safe, welcoming spaces where residents feel a genuine sense of belonging.”

“Shines a light on unmet need and provides a conduit for excluded groups to voice their requirements to the council.”

“Sometimes simply picking up the phone and not having to wait in a queue like with DWP makes a big difference.”

“We are hyper-local so we understand what is going on. The Council is not.”

“They do everything that you should be doing... Charities do excellent work but are overburdened.”

“Provides culturally sensitive support – builds trust with the community and acts as a connector between people and services.”

“Offering opportunities for the lonely to connect with others through community groups.”

“Working with, not for, local people.”

“Builds awareness, galvanises communities into action, involvement and connection – offering both practical and emotional support.”

“Most organisations operate on a shoestring budget and still provide amazing value for money.”

Haringey Community Collaborative is delivered by Public Voice in partnership with Mind in Haringey to ensure that the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) in Haringey is stronger, able to attract more funding and deliver better services.

The Community Collaborative works with and is funded by Haringey Council and the local NHS as the official 'Capacity Building Partner' for the VCS in Haringey.

Contact us



020 3794 1168



hello@haringeycollaborative.org



haringeycollaborative.org

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Mind in Haringey
Registered in England 2125188
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