

VCSE Engagement in developing a neighbourhood health service in Southwark

The ambition of a neighbourhood health service is to bring people, services, and communities together to help everyone live healthier, more active, and independent lives. The focus is on joining up care and support, especially for those who need extra help. Neighbourhood working goes beyond treating illness. It supports people to stay well throughout their lives by addressing the wider factors that affect health, such as housing, employment, education, and social support, and by actively tackling health inequalities. Local councils and voluntary and community organisations play a vital role alongside health services to provide support that fits people's daily lives.

Integrated Neighbourhood Teams (INTs) are a cornerstone of neighbourhood care, bringing together health, care, and community partners to deliver proactive, personalised support close to where people live. The Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) plays a vital role in this ecosystem, offering trusted relationships, local knowledge, and culturally sensitive services that statutory partners often cannot.

Involving the VCS meaningfully in the development and delivery of INTs will:

- Strengthen community engagement and trust.
- Ensure services reflect local needs and assets.
- Promote equity and inclusion in service access and delivery.
- Reduce health inequalities and focus on wider determinants of health
- Enable co-design and co-delivery of care and support.
- Build on existing infrastructure, projects, learning across the borough and develop sustainable partnerships across sectors.

The VCS in Southwark is very diverse with over 1,300 registered charities and a further estimated 3,000-4,500 unregistered community groups. The income ranges from less than £10,000 per year in some groups/organisation to over £1 million in others.¹

We have received feedback from the VCS that:

- they attend meetings and events organised by the statutory sector which often do not feel relevant to them, and where it's unclear how their voice can be effectively heard
- due to the diverse nature of the VCS in Southwark it is very difficult for one or two people (or organisations) to effectively represent the whole sector
- effective engagement requires time, energy and commitment and for smaller organisations, this is often at the expense of delivering core business and that funding is required in order to be able to attend these meetings and events.

The Neighbourhood Health Service in Southwark is at an important stage of development with Integrated Neighbourhood Teams currently being formed in each of Southwark's five neighbourhoods for three priority cohorts:

- 1) people living with frailty

¹ State of the Southwark Voluntary and Community Sector, 2022-2023

- 2) people living with multiple long term conditions
- 3) children and young people with complex needs.

Last year, Southwark appointed an “Integrator” to host the identified integration functions required to enable primary, community, mental health, acute specialist, local authority, VCS and other partners to work together effectively at neighbourhood level. The Southwark Integrator is a partnership between Guy’s and St Thomas’ NHS Foundation Trust and the two GP Federations, Quay Health Solutions (QHS) and Improving Health Limited (IHL).

The aim of this project

The ICB has identified £160k (non-recurrent) to provide funding to the VCS to support the development of a Neighbourhood Health Service in Southwark during 2026. The aim of this funding is to create capacity for the VCS to:

- Facilitate discussions, workshops, meetings etc to define the role of the VCS in delivering neighbourhood health services including (but not limited to) their contribution to Integrated Neighbourhood Teams, and with a particular focus on the three priority cohorts described above.
- Propose how the VCS could work with, and as part of, INT in a sustainable way, and what is needed to make this happen (e.g. testing this on small scale). This may include things like accepting referrals, taking part in multi-disciplinary team discussions, informing service improvements etc.
- Help health and care services that are part of Integrated Neighbourhood Teams connect with local communities and local community assets and organisations more effectively and systematically, to help address health inequalities and facilitate more preventative and pro-active care.

In addition, the Integrator has recently appointed a VCSE Strategic Lead for one and a half days per week to provide VCSE leadership in shaping INT design and development in Lambeth and Southwark. It is anticipated that the VCSE Strategic Lead will be a key stakeholder in the delivery of this project.

NB it is also recognised that there may be an increased potential for the VCS to **deliver** health and care services in the Borough, either as single organisations, or in partnership – with other VCS organisations or statutory sector organisations. The purpose of this funding is **not to fund this type of service delivery**, although it is anticipated that ideas and proposals for different ways of providing health and care services may be generated through this engagement. Any service developments of this nature will need to be commissioned via usual processes.

Requirements

It is anticipated that there is one lead organisation in each neighbourhood which will:

- Act as the main point of contact for the INT leadership team and the Integrator
- Ensure appropriate representation from the VCS at meetings and events arranged by the INT leadership team and/or Integrator
- Lead and facilitate activities within neighbourhoods that actively support development of strong relationships between local communities and community assets, VCS,

health and care services staff, and support the development of an ongoing way of working that will help these connections be sustainable.

- Organise activities (events, focus groups, surveys etc) for the VCS to contribute to the development of INTs, inviting contributions from the statutory sector representatives as appropriate
- Ensure that there is participation from a wide range of VCS organisation and community organisations, some of which may not have connected with the statutory sector before.
- Reimburse other VCS organisations for taking part in these activities as appropriate
- Active participation in 'community of practice' across five neighbourhoods which facilitates timely learning and sharing of best practice
- Ensure leverage of existing assets in the system, e.g. social prescribers, community health ambassadors, VCS Clinical and Care Professional Leads (CCPLs), and the Creative Health programme
- Liaise with relevant networks in the borough, such as the BAME Community Leaders and the Consortium of Older People's Services in Southwark (COPSINS).

It is also anticipated that one of the lead organisations provides a coordinating function across all neighbourhoods. This will involve:

- Facilitating opportunities for all lead organisations to share ideas and learning, for example, through a community of practice
- Lead role in liaising with the Integrator and ICB
- Coordinate a final report with learning and insights from all five neighbourhoods

Expected deliverables:

- Work plan to be developed with the INT leadership team and Integrator representatives within the first three months
- Light touch feedback reports – with recommendations, at agreed intervals and forms (e.g. written/verbal etc) throughout the year
- At least one bespoke event in each neighbourhood, led and coordinated by the lead organisations which is attended by a variety of VCS organisations and staff from health and care services
- Final report with insights and learning from all five neighbourhoods and a proposal for a sustainable 'engagement approach' with the VCS so there is an agreed way of working with the sector so that the VCS are active partners in the ongoing development and delivery of a neighbourhood health and care service.

Funding

£28k per neighbourhood – to be held by the lead organisation and distributed to other VCS organisations in their neighbourhood as appropriate (and as determined by the lead organisation)

An additional £20k for the lead organisation which provides the coordinating function for all five neighbourhoods.

Anticipated outcomes

- Greater understanding by INTs of the community assets in their neighbourhoods, which includes people, organisations and buildings, and how they can support delivery of the ambition of a neighbourhood health service.

- An agreed, sustainable longer-term approach for working with the VCS on the delivery of Integrated Neighbourhood Teams.