

NEEDS ASSESSMENT HEADLINES

WALTHAM FOREST GIVING

INTRODUCTION & BACKGROUND

Groundwork London secured funding from the City Bridge Foundation to set up a place based giving scheme in Waltham Forest- the first of its kind in the borough. It employs a tailored approach to support the borough's diverse communities. Waltham Forest Giving is part of a wider network of 18 other giving schemes across London.

The key focus of the needs assessment was to explore how community groups in Waltham Forest can be best supported by funding, resources and/or time. In recent years, there have been attempts to set up a CVS in the borough which were ultimately unsuccessful- leading to disconnect, distrust and unmet support needs amongst the sector.

At present, the local authority, along with representatives from the voluntary and community sector, have commissioned 'Locality' to support the co-design of a new coordinating body for the voluntary and community sector - 'Community Voice'. Groundwork London have been responsive to this and are working with the local authority to avoid duplication, and ensure Waltham Forest Giving complements existing and emerging initiatives.

The needs assessment upholds an authentic spirit of co-design. The ideas, frameworks and plans for Waltham Forest Giving come directly from those living and working across the borough. Their contributions will help us to shape the scheme, in order to make it both a successful and equitable initiative that has longevity and forms an integral part of the community infrastructure in the borough. Waltham Forest Giving will be guided and overseen by a steering group made up of local residents, representative of local groups and businesses.

METHODOLOGY

➤ This needs assessment was carried out by Public Voice CIC, the research methods utilised were as follows:

- A review of current literature on place-based giving.
- Desk research on Waltham Forest and the people who live and work there
- Semi-structured interviews with key individuals from a range of community organisations in Waltham Forest.
- Surveys on place-based giving and the hopes for the Waltham Forest Giving Scheme with Waltham Forest residents.
- A survey as above but with community organisations in the borough.

➤ Public voice engaged:

- 13 community groups through surveys
- 51 residents through surveys
- 15 interviewees (11 with people from community groups, 3 with current LBWF staff members, and 1 interview with a place-based giving scheme in London)

Following the completion of the needs assessment, based on the relatively small sample size, further interviews with residents and community group representatives were conducted by WF Giving Manager, Charlie to further validate the findings. She has consulted over 200 residents, and held interviews with 32 community groups and 6 other giving schemes. We have been actively seeking voices from under-represented groups and those seldom heard. This work was carried out between August 2023 - May 2024.



FINDINGS AND KEY THEMES

INEQUALITIES AND COST OF LIVING

“The most pressing needs here in the borough are really about, just peoples lack of financial ability to keep a roof over their head, to keep their fridge full of healthy food, to make sure that their bills stretch to cover their needs for the month. They’re the most pressing needs. So if any funding was going towards that, it would be great. But at the same time, that’s just like band aid stuff, the problem is like structural! The problem is much bigger, so I don’t think that small pots of funds can go to addressing those bigger structural stuff. But it can go to helping people’s immediate needs on the ground, for sure.”



“The biggest problem which is facing Waltham Forest is...inequality. Access to adequate housing, energy bills and the fact that Waltham Forest has had the biggest increase in housing costs, both rental accommodation and actual housing stock, that’s really driving inequality here.”

- Cost of living is biggest issue coming up again and again with residents and community groups alike
- Disparities in wealth make it feel that there are pockets of both affluence and deprivation in the borough. It’s felt that the borough is becoming increasingly unequal.
- Chingford and Leytonstone come up a lot as underserved areas. Many people felt that Walthamstow seems to get more resources and have more events than other parts of the borough
- Rising rents and poor housing access came up in the vast majority of engagement with residents and community groups
- Multiple people felt that older housing estates are ‘left behind’ and there haven’t been enough resources for them:
 - Priory Court Beaumont
 - Cathall
 - Chingford Hall
 - Aldrich way
 - Stadium Place - feelings that development has worsened crime in this area
 - Antagonistic feelings around the ‘gentrification of the borough’

CRIME/ SAFER STREETS/ YOUNG PEOPLE

“Crime has gone up, petty crime, bike thefts, phone thefts, shoplifting, you see a lot of drug use around parks and parents feel concerned taking their children to parks...where certainly you find drug needles and people openly injecting drugs. I feel people are not comfortable going into certain areas or accessing certain roads at certain times.”



“Youth services and services for people who struggle with homelessness and addiction. I think that these are the two things that really should be top priority before anything else. Looking at how we can support this, not just coming up with a random scheme but looking in-depth at what we can really do to actually improve those people’s lives for good, and not just a time-limited scheme where they just fall off at the end. There needs to be more consistency and it needs to have positive outcomes for the service-users. Schemes are time-limited and then at the end people just fall off it because there is nowhere to go and that needs to change. It needs to have a long-lasting impact.”

> In our focus groups with young people, they told us:

- Money is a huge barrier to accessing activities
- Young people struggling with access to meaningful jobs and they feel disheartened when rejected. They want to see better advertisement of jobs at local organisations
- They value volunteering as a chance to build up their experience and make a difference
- More youth clubs needed – when funding runs out, youth clubs & projects close
- Free sports sessions – usually aimed at certain groups E.G those on free school meals
- More on offer for young kids than teenagers

> Groups deemed as needing more support from surveys:

- People living with mental health problems, disabilities and long term health conditions
- Older people
- Low income families
- Young People
- Refugees and asylum seekers

> Minority ethnic groups repeatedly coming up as unsupported:

- South Asian
- African & Caribbean

THEME 1

VALUED, RECOGNISED AND SUPPORTED

“I think that’s really crucial because VCS organisations are absolutely key in supporting our residents and have done absolutely amazing work for ages, particularly since COVID and if you think about all of the work that was done during COVID, they are key partners, they know what our residents need sometimes, to an extent, more than the council does because there is good section of numbers of our communities that might be reluctant to come to statutory service for a range of reasons including, you know, a lack of trust for example.”

“The council has come up with some good schemes in getting the voluntary sector to come together, but you’ll often find that there’s funding for a bit and then they move onto a new idea. And I’ve seen that happen quite a lot.”



Key Takeaways:

- ✓ VCS are key partners in supporting residents
- ✓ Importance of this sector receiving support from the local authority, local initiatives and businesses.
- ✓ People want to feel their expertise and track record are valued
- ✓ The sector want to be trusted to make decisions about money

THEME 2

FUNDING AND CAPACITY

“I think it’s core funding which is harder to get from any grant funders... most of my time is spent chasing what are often short-term pots of money... If we had that investment to be more long-term and more strategic...I could grow what we’re doing and grow the number of people I employ in the borough, create more jobs, and bring money back into the borough. And it’s hard to get that”



> TOP 3 BARRIERS TO FUNDING AND SUPPORT:

1

Competitive funding environment

2

Lack of capacity and resources

3

Complex application process

- Relying on funding creates financial insecurity which puts services at risk and stops organisations from being able to plan ahead.
- Frustrations around losing statutory funding and services being outsourced to groups outside of the borough
- Core/unrestricted multi- year funding for existing solutions rather than creating new projects
- Lack capacity to do funding applications and have to overcome apathy when turned down.
- Often don’t get feedback on unsuccessful applications
- Funding needs to be for individuals too – sometimes people don’t want the additional stress and responsibility of registering as a charity/constituted group
- Clear guidance for funding applications and a good support structure for grant management
- Funders to be flexible with things changing in terms of budget and timeline
- Monitoring and evaluation to be straight forward
- Funders must ensure reasonable deadlines for funding apps
- Long contracts and agreements are off-putting
- Organisations want to feel trusted with money, not just pro bono support
- Constantly ‘firefighting’ in the organization so can’t focus on strategic development

THEME 3

DISJOINTED SECTOR

“We haven’t had a CVS in Waltham Forest for a number of years....there is definitely a big gap, I think a few years ago, and this precedes me, there was an attempt at having Southwark as a CVS for Waltham Forest and Southwark but that did not work for a range of reasons. Geography being one of the obvious ones and some other logistics.”



> Key Takeaways:

- Need networking, partnerships and collaborations with a coordinated approach
- Groups want one to one bespoke wrap around support
- Contact database for community groups
- Regular opportunities needed for grassroots groups to come together
- Seen lots of umbrella organisations come and go
- Sector is exhausted – “We keep pushing ourselves because we know the need is there”

THEME 4

VOLUNTEERS AND VENUES

- Issues around relying on volunteers (particularly when managing physical spaces)
- Many struggling to recruit volunteers – suggested that it could be linked to people taking up more paid work due to the cost of living
- Some have had success with volunteers by keeping the sign up process simple and covering travel costs
- People want to volunteer but don’t know where to go
- Difficult to cover building maintenance and repairs
- Accessing venues is hard – affordability, suitability and privacy
- Uncertainty with leases

THEME 5

MIXED EXPERIENCES WITH LOCAL AUTHORITY

Public Voice:



“Waltham Forest Council have in the period post the COVID-19 pandemic, employed a new cohort of staff who have had a background in working in the VCS and with community groups at the grassroots level. Equipped with greater cultural humility, this cohort have been well-placed to begin engaging with community organisations in Waltham Forest and be more sensitive to the issues which impact the communities which these organisations serve”

“The council does not always support us financially, but generally I think Waltham Forest [council] with the in-kind support we have is definitely much better than many other councils.”

> Some community group members still doubt council intentions for relationships and feel a sense of distrust. One mentioned that the council are “making great strides” in the right direction to rebuild the trust.

- Funding process with local authority has been too rigid – power imbalance
- Local authority deadline – often short turnaround for applications. Feeling of “wrap it up, spend the money, demonstrate outcomes” when it comes to funded projects
- Felt that there is a high turnover of council staff, which means that new relationships must be formed again with community organisations.



THEME 6

CHANGES TO BUSINESSES

- The sector would like more meaningful collaborations with corporates and small businesses but aren't sure how to go about it.
- Businesses would love attention and having their profile raised locally
- Some community groups have already had small successes getting support from local business. People really value this
- Small businesses often want to support community initiatives but don't have staff/money to invest even when they want to support the work
- Borough requires novel approaches to harness local business support – need a really robust business engagement strategy
- Long term relationships with corporates, not just a one off
- New FSQ principles state that at least 70% of procurement needs to be from local businesses



In terms of finding local donors or benefactors, a community group member said:



“I would not even know how to go about finding that, and there are a lot of wealthy people in Walthamstow now especially in the last few years, house prices are just ridiculous and there are lots of people with money moving in, there are lots of people I know that work in media for example, but I don't know how to tap into those people...”

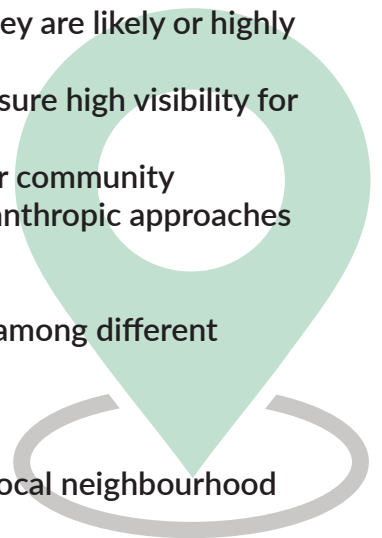
In terms of garnering support from local businesses in Waltham Forest, one community group member said:

“It is something that we've really wanted to do, and have kind of looked at but it's been our experience so far that when we've looked at corporate partnerships for example...it just feels that they aren't that many big organisations in the borough that have staff size or their own money to invest. Its all micro businesses that love what we do and are supportive in terms of sharing stuff on social media or things like free coffee every month, people will donate a fridge to us and things, but in terms of something that actually feels like it's gonna help take us up a notch in terms of presence, we've always looked outside of the borough. Which is a shame really...”



PLACE BASED GIVING

- 90% of residents did not know about place based giving but 40% said they are likely or highly likely to get involved
- Essential to raise the profile of place based giving in the borough and ensure high visibility for WFG.
- People are interested in the scheme and how it will affect them and their community
- Pandemic, cost of living and decreased funding mean we need new philanthropic approaches
- WF Giving has to compliment other initiatives well and add value
- PBG can utilize more equitable and accessible approaches for funding
- WFG can facilitate shared learning across the borough, communication among different organisations and networks
- Enable robust partnerships
- Share successes and goods stories
- Some people suggested that residents get more passionate about their local neighbourhood than the whole borough



“There is an important role which the Waltham Forest Giving Scheme can play to facilitate shared learning across the borough, communication among the different organisations and networking. Hence, the scheme will be well-placed to enable robust partnerships between sectors and organisations in the borough and then share successes and good news stories.”

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“We don’t need time-limiting schemes lead to nothing”

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR: WALTHAM FOREST GIVING

These recommendations will form basis for shaping WFG, to ensure it effectively meets needs of WF diverse communities.

We intend to use these to co-create our strategy and Year 1 action plan with the steering group.

1. INCREASED NETWORKING AND SHARED LEARNING

- Connecting groups working in the same locations or supporting the same groups
- Creating better solutions through working together
- Involving a broad range of partners with local knowledge and expertise
- Bringing new resources and approaches into the borough and using existing resources more effectively.
- Having a clear, evidence-based focus and approach.
- Invest in multi sectorial relationships
- Shared training opportunities for networks
- Bring groups together who rely on volunteers to share best practice and recruitment ideas

2. EQUITABLE FUNDING FOR COMMUNITY GROUPS

- Core funding for existing services and projects as well as new initiatives
- Non-restricted, multi- year funding
- Simple, transparent grant schemes
- Funding for individuals as well as groups

3. LOCAL BUSINESS RELATIONSHIPS

- Playing to strengths, as money is not the only asset people can offer
- Show businesses exactly how their input makes a difference locally
- Offer and ask must be clear
- Shop local schemes
- Small business Mapping
- Align with the values of a corporate partner.

4. LOCAL PHILANTHROPISTS RELATIONSHIPS

- Identify local high net worth individuals and build relationships with them
- Invest in relationships with local philanthropists

5. WORK COLLABORATIVELY WITH OTHER GIVING SCHEMES

- Joint funding bids based on geography or shared themes
- Raise profile of place based giving
- Share resources and learnings

6. RAISE AWARENESS OF LOCAL GROUPS AND THEIR GREAT WORK

- Share good news, and success stories
- Spread joy
- Increase visibility

7. CONTINUOUSLY LISTEN TO THE COMMUNITY IN WALTHAM FOREST & BUILD TRUSTING, AUTHENTIC RELATIONSHIPS

- Respond quickly to local events and conditions
- Takes time to gain local involvement and build trust

