


LONDON BOROUGH OF CAMDEN	WARDS: All
REPORT TITLE Annual Report of the Cabinet Member for Voluntary Sector, Equalities, and Cohesion – 2022/23	
REPORT OF Cabinet Member for Voluntary Sector, Equalities, and Cohesion	
FOR SUBMISSION TO Culture and Environment Scrutiny Committee	DATE 14 December 2023
SUMMARY OF REPORT <p>The Cabinet Member for Voluntary Sector, Equalities, and Cohesion is providing the Culture and Environment Scrutiny Committee with her annual report for discussion.</p> <p>Local Government Act 1972 – Access to Information</p> <p>No documents that require listing have been used in the preparation of this report.</p> <p>Contact Officer: Clarissa Frias, Cabinet Officer, Corporate Services London Borough of Camden 5 Pancras Square, London N1C 4AG 02079744132 / clarissa.frias@camden.gov.uk</p>	
RECOMMENDATIONS <p>The Committee is asked to note and comment on the contents of the report.</p>	

Signed: 

CLlr Nadia Shah - Cabinet Member for Voluntary Sector, Equalities, and Cohesion

Date: 4 December 2023

Cabinet Member for Voluntary Sector, Equalities, and Cohesion Annual Report 2022-23

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 In my capacity as the Cabinet Member for Voluntary Sector, Equalities, and Cohesion, I am tasked with guiding initiatives related to volunteering, empowering neighbourhoods, advocating for health and wellbeing through sports and leisure, and holding a distinct responsibility for support for and the flourishing of Camden's Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS). I am proud that my portfolio includes the opportunity to engage deeply with Camden communities, to work with organisations at the forefront of tackling inequalities in Camden, and to lead the Council's work to make a more just and equal future for Camden.
- 1.2 Camden stands as one of the most diverse places in the country, with a rich history of advocating for equality and progress. Our vision for the future, encapsulated in [We Make Camden](#), articulates our aspiration to transform Camden into a place where every individual has the opportunity to thrive, leaving no one marginalised. I hold with great pride my responsibility in working with community organisations to deliver outcomes-orientated community projects, and I am dedicated to crafting an inclusive environment that caters to all. Overall, my focus is on fostering a cohesive community and ensuring that the Council's powers and resources are focused on addressing issues of inequality.
- 1.3 In our Borough and as a Council, we continue to confront the persistent challenges stemming from the lasting effects of the pandemic, compounded by the ongoing cost-of-living crisis, which have magnified existing inequalities within Camden. While a significant portion of our population enjoys affluence and robust health, it is essential to acknowledge that Camden is also home to communities facing lower incomes, diminished health, and sometimes a limited voice in shaping the decisions that affect their lives. The increase in the cost of living has further exacerbated these disparities, disproportionately affecting the most vulnerable among us. This cumulative impact has resulted in pronounced inequalities between the wealthiest and the lowest income residents of Camden. In light of these challenges, our *We Make Camden* commitment is steadfast in fostering community cohesion, promoting equality, and embracing diversity to ensure a more inclusive and equitable future for all.
- 1.4 I am proud to showcase through my Annual Report that, despite the numerous challenges we face, we remain resilient in the face of mounting pressures. Our commitment to transformation and innovation persists, aligning firmly with the ambitious goals outlined in *We Make Camden*. Within this framework, my report will focus on transformative initiatives achieved through collaboration with our partners in the voluntary sector and with our citizens and communities. The primary objectives include strengthening the sector's resilience and independence, supporting social action, and fostering the development of a borough where diverse communities can come together to achieve real change. The emphasis is on creating opportunities

that celebrate diversity and shared values, contributing to a more inclusive and cohesive borough.

2. CAMDEN'S VOLUNTARY SECTOR

- 2.1 Camden benefits from a strong and vibrant Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS). The VCS have long played a critical role in Camden with a long history of tackling some of the most pressing issues facing the borough. Camden is home to more than 2,000 VCS organisations ranging in size from informal groups of neighbours coming together, through to multi-million-pound charities, working across our diverse communities and tackling multiple social challenges. These organisations play a hugely valued role in Camden in delivering much needed services; in creating innovative solutions to some of our most intractable social challenges; and in working with our diverse communities to amplify their voices and facilitate proactive measures.
- 2.2 A robust and adaptable Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) plays a pivotal role in realising the goals outlined in *We Make Camden*. This sector is instrumental in enhancing the borough by fostering resilient communities, tackling poverty and inequality, and enhancing residents' overall quality of life. *We Make Camden* reaffirms the council's dedication to bolstering a resilient VCS.
- 2.3 In our work in supporting the VCS, we aim to establish a collaborative atmosphere that empowers Camden's communities to flourish. This involves offering diverse funding opportunities, ensuring access to reasonably priced workspaces, providing support for capacity building, and fostering a climate of partnership and cooperation.
- 2.4 Our Community Partnerships Team works directly with a portfolio of organisations and assists in areas such as fundraising, governance, organisational strategy and development, business planning, monitoring, and evaluation. The team are available to offer advice and support to all Camden-based VCS organisations, irrespective of whether they receive Council funding or not.

VCS Grants Programme 2024-2031

- 2.5 In February 2023, the Full Council approved a new seven-year, annual £4 million grants initiative for Camden's Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS). This allows for the creation of various grant programmes to address the requirements of both the sector and the communities in Camden.
- 2.6 Camden is also leading the way as a local authority in providing long term unrestricted funding to Camden's VCS through our Strategic Partners Fund since 2017. 'Unrestricted funding', in the context of charity funding, does not mean no strings attached. This funding enables us to commit and invest in the whole organisation. We therefore look for partners who can demonstrate a strong community impact.

- 2.7 The Council remains dedicated to supporting the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) in Camden, particularly due to the sector's crucial role in realising the objectives outlined in *We Make Camden* and its leadership in community responses to the challenges posed by the pandemic, refugee situations, and the cost-of-living crisis.
- 2.8 The development of the grants programme has been closely aligned with the missions and challenges of *We Make Camden*. The VCS funding programme is instrumental in realising the goals of *We Make Camden*, particularly in addressing injustice and inequality to create inclusive, secure, and vibrant communities. Additionally, it aims to provide support for overall well-being, fostering good health, and promoting connections to enable individuals to start well, live well, and age well.
- 2.9 This initiative is fundamentally rooted in creating an equitable approach, ensuring that the available funding is directed towards areas where it can generate the most significant impact. The overarching goal is to lay a solid foundation that not only supports the individual entities within the sector but also facilitates a fair and efficient distribution of funding to maximise its positive effects.

Community Partner Fund

- 2.10 The Community Partner Fund forms a key part of the overall VCS grants programme. It was launched in July 2023 and it will provide £1.7 million per annum in unrestricted core grants of between £10,000 to £100,000 over a seven-year period until March 2031 to VCS partners who are delivering social change in their communities.
- 2.11 It is designed to provide support to VCS organisations in Camden, aiming to enhance their ability to serve the local communities throughout the borough effectively. To qualify for the fund, organisations must be based in Camden and demonstrate their pivotal role in addressing and responding to community needs. Eligibility criteria include being deeply ingrained in a Camden neighbourhood, representing a Camden equalities group to advocate for their needs, or actively leading efforts to address significant social challenges in the community. The fund seeks organisations that can play a lead role in aligning with Camden's missions and challenges outlined in the *We Make Camden* initiative.
- 2.12 It was widely promoted through a variety of media including our web pages; the Community Partnerships newsletter; and via other communications channels such as Voluntary Action Camden and Young Camden Foundation newsletters, LinkedIn, and Twitter.
- 2.13 To support smaller organisations with less experience in bid-writing, we worked with Voluntary Action Camden (VAC) and the All Ways Network (AWN) who offered 'Writing a Successful Bid' workshops to VAC members throughout July to September. These interactive workshops took place online and were accompanied by one-to-one surgeries.

- 2.14 Between July and September, the Community Partnerships Team also hosted three online Community Partner Fund information sessions which were attended by 103 people. In addition, the team attended sector-wide events such as the Young Camden Foundation members meeting; Voluntary Action Camden's annual general meeting; and a C4 network meeting to promote the fund.
- 2.15 All organisations currently in receipt of a Strategic Partner Fund Grant submitted an application for the Community Partner Fund 2024-2031. The outcome will be announced in February 2024.

Camden Infrastructure Fund

- 2.16 The Infrastructure Fund has been launched in September 2023. It is a crucial component of our comprehensive annual £4 million VCS grants initiative. We have established this fund with the understanding that robust infrastructure support is essential for the flourishing of VCS organisations and their leaders.
- 2.17 A strong, sustainable, and well-run VCS that responds to people's need is central to our ambitions for Camden. VCS infrastructure organisations are a much-valued part of this landscape – helping VCS organisations to grow by providing supporting information and advice on VCS strategy and management; building the skills of VCS leaders, staff, and volunteers; and providing leadership and coordination on some of our most intractable social challenges.
- 2.18 We align infrastructure funding with our comprehensive funding strategy by providing financial support in the form of grants, thus committing to long-term investments in infrastructure organisations. The overall amount of funding for infrastructure support remains the same at £150,000 a year in total.

Community Impact Resilience Fund

- 2.19 The second round of the Community Impact Resilience Fund, introduced in December 2022, has been established to assist VCS organisations in navigating the ongoing cost-of-living crisis, fostering adaptability and sustainability. In these persistently challenging times for residents, our Voluntary and Community Sector partners in the borough play a crucial role in collaborating with us to provide vital support for those most affected by the cost-of-living crisis.
- 2.20 We are supporting these organisations to overcome the cost-of-living financial pressures they may be facing and ensure they are on the best possible footing to be financially resilient and independent in the future. For some, this may mean an initial investment to examine their business model, put new technology in place, or recruit a specialist to help with their operations. This will enable organisations to address immediate risks in the short-term and make changes that will increase their sustainability and resilience through planning for the longer term.

- 2.21 Camden's VCS organisations were able to apply for grants of up to £30,000 from the Council's £1 million resilience fund. 34 organisations have been allocated grants and the Council worked with a further nine organisations to support their plans for organisational resilience.
- 2.22 The resilience fund is in addition to the already committed £4 million per year in grant programmes from April 2024 to March 2031.
- 2.23 The promotion of Round 2 of the Resilience Fund has been extensive, utilising various media platforms such as our website, the Community Partnerships newsletter, and other communication channels, including the VAC newsletter. In addition to online and email outreach, the fund's information was effectively disseminated during borough-wide community meetings and ward-level discussions as part of the Cost-of-Living Response initiative. Face-to-face meetings at the ward level engaged a diverse range of small and medium-sized VCS organisations across 17 wards from November 2022 to January 2023. Furthermore, three online Resilience Fund information sessions were conducted in January 2023, drawing participation from 41 individuals.

Cost of Living Equity Fund

- 2.24 An additional £60,000 in Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) funding has been secured to establish the Cost-of-Living Equity Fund. The fund was specifically targeted at organisations working with people who are disproportionately impacted such as older people; Black, Asian, and other ethnic residents; disabled people; carers; and women.
- 2.25 Key objectives of the fund include:
- Proactive outreach - reach one or more of the target groups to promote the offer and help residents access support, especially in areas where there's a gap.
 - Face to face activities - projects which include events and activities that contribute to quality of life for residents.
 - Communications and publicity - incorporating details in the proposal on how residents will be informed about the available support. Various methods such as door knocking, distribution, and signposting are suggested to ensure effective dissemination of information and outreach to the community.
- 2.26 The maximum grant size is £10,000, although organisations applying as individuals are unlikely to be awarded more than £5,000. 31 organisations who work with the target groups were invited to apply. 16 applications were received – 12 are partnership applications and 3 are from faith-based organisations.
- 2.27 An in-person workshop was held on 10th May to provide information about the fund, discuss proposals, and support collaboration. This was attended by 12 organisations.

- 2.28 There was an underspend of £5,762 from the Belsize Ward Community Response Fund, which councillors approved for reallocation to the Equity Fund. As a result, the overall budget for the Equity Fund now stands at £65,762.

Other Cost-of-Living Support

- 2.29 We acknowledge the numerous challenges facing the Voluntary and Community Sector in Camden, as well as the heightened needs of the residents they support. Consequently, we have increased our investment in the Cost-of-Living support, including:
- investing £1.3 million in a family support fund focused on secondary school hunger, help with school uniforms, and free healthy school breakfasts to prevent children from low-income families starting the school day hungry;
 - investing another £2 million in our cost-of-living crisis fund to help residents who cannot afford essentials like food or energy bills; and
 - investing more than £29 million in our Council Tax Support Scheme, which reduces council tax bills, putting money back into the pockets of residents on low incomes – 16,000 residents won't pay anything at all.

Camden has committed to invest in universal primary free school meals should the current Mayor of London scheme end.

Camden Community Wealth Fund

- 2.30 The Camden Community Wealth Fund is an investment fund that provides repayable loans, equity finance, and business support to people, businesses, and organisations across Camden. It will focus on making longer-term, 'patient capital' investments (i.e., 10 years+); and will support people who face barriers in accessing finance via more traditional investment routes. As the Lead Cabinet Member for the Diversity Mission, I have been involved in the development of the Community Wealth Fund and look forward to the work it will do to bring partners together across the borough with the Council to tackle entrenched inequalities and injustice in Camden.
- 2.33 It is intended that the Community Wealth Fund will focus investments on opportunities which clearly support two of the Council's *We Make Camden* missions. These are:
- Diversity Mission: By 2030, those holding positions of power in Camden are as diverse as our community – and the next generation is ready to follow
 - Young People Mission: By 2025, every young person has access to economic opportunity that enables them to be safe and secure
- 2.34 The Fund's proposed mission is to therefore extend greater equality for young people in Camden and promote diversity in positions of power across the borough. Its purpose is to provide investment and support for people,

businesses, and organisations in Camden that are delivering on our missions; to empower them to develop their ideas, grow their businesses, and maximise their impact for the local area.

- 2.35 The core purpose of the Fund is to:
- Focus additional investment in delivery of the *We Make Camden* missions, tackling inequality in Camden.
 - Provide investment that is inclusive and diverse in the types of people, businesses, and organisations it invests in.
 - Make investments based on local knowledge of need, actively involving local people in decision-making.
 - Create opportunities for investment in areas that the traditional finance market may overlook, particularly in people and ideas requiring a more extended payback period. This initiative aims to positively influence and shape the investment market.
- 2.36 The decision to establish the Fund was made by Cabinet in July 2023. It is proposed that Camden will serve as the initial financial source for the Fund, and the ultimate goal is for the Council to commit an investment of up to £30 million in capital to the fund over the long term. Initially, the Fund will commence with a smaller amount that will gradually build over time, subject to regular reviews that assess both financial and social impact. The Fund will be participatory - with co-production and community leadership at the heart of how the Fund makes decisions. I look forward to how the Fund continues to develop and progress over the coming year.

Community Spaces: Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) Rents and Leases Policy

- 2.37 The [Community Spaces: VCS Rents and Leases Policy](#) has been developed to create a fairer, more consistent, and more sustainable framework for letting property to VCS organisations. The policy will replace inconsistent and ad-hoc arrangements that have created a situation widely perceived as unfair.
- 2.38 Offering cost-effective workspaces and delivery locations is an essential element of the Council's assistance to the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS). By providing affordable spaces, the Council contributes to the financial resilience of Camden's VCS. This affordable premises initiative aligns with the Council's annual commissioning relationships, amounting to £51 million, and its grant funding relationship, totalling £3.9 million per annum, with the VCS.
- 2.39 This policy sets out a new framework for managing rents and leases in premises let to the VCS. The principal driver of the policy is fairness; to introduce a comprehensive and consistent framework for charitable tenants giving greater clarity and improved terms to the sector. The aim of the policy is to introduce a fair, consistent, and transparent approach to the way in which properties are valued and rents are set; how discounts are applied to VCS organisations; the occupational terms offered to the VCS; and the way in which premises are allocated to VCS organisations.

- 2.40 This will be achieved through the framework set out in this policy, through a fair, consistent, and transparent approach to:
- Head of Terms - The terms of occupation offered to VCS tenants
 - Valuation and Rent Negotiation - Setting rents for properties occupied by VCS tenants
 - Social Value Rent Discount - The application of rent discounts for all VCS tenants that meet the eligibility and criteria of the Social Value Rent Discount Framework
 - Premises Allocation - The allocation of premises to VCS organisations
- 2.41 On 18th January 2023, the Cabinet adopted the introduction of this single framework to manage commercial property leased to charities and community groups in Camden Council's premises. We hope this will provide clarity and confidence for community groups in our Council buildings and transparency on how we use this important resource to support our community ambitions.
- 2.42 The Council as a whole will be jointly responsible for implementing Camden's Community Spaces: VCS Rents and Leases policy, and will oversee interpretation of this policy and, if necessary, minor operational revisions elements of this policy including the valuation process, Social Value Rent Discount process, and Heads of Terms.

3. COMMUNITY COHESION

Camden Interfaith Network

- 3.1 Faith communities are an important partner to the Council in reaching out to our residents, in providing important care, support, and advice to those in need; and providing a framework for community cohesion. The Camden Interfaith Network is the revitalised version of the Faith Leaders Forum (FLF), following the end of the previous strategy plan at the height of the pandemic. This revitalisation involved re-energising and strengthening relationships and collaboration among members and creating a new strategy and yearly activity plan. The Community Partnerships Team conducted a consultation and evaluation project, with assistance from interfaith groups and Faith & Belief Forum, to actively gather insights and ideas from forum members and the broader community. The team also sought to investigate ways to support and encourage members to be more actively involved and identify gaps in representation, along with strategies to address these gaps.
- 3.2 The Council maintains a dynamic and productive partnership with members of the Interfaith Network with a focus on community engagement. The members are key partners in connecting with the community to identify concerns and tensions; sharing information and reassurance messages in response to hate crimes and other incidents; and for other community outreach. I am proud to Co-Chair the Faith Forum and to co-lead this group committed to dialogue and collaboration across faiths in Camden.

- 3.3 The Interfaith Network is dedicated to uniting religious faith groups in Camden, with the goal of celebrating the role of faith communities. It identifies areas of common interest in civic life where faith communities may work together to the benefit of the wider community. Additionally, it works towards enhancing communication between faith communities, the Council, and other public, voluntary, and community sector organisations. The network serves as a platform for interfaith dialogue, facilitating the sharing of knowledge, resources, and best practices. Moreover, it promotes a shared understanding of important public issues affecting local communities.
- 3.4 The significance of faith groups coming together around important public issues has been particularly notable amidst the ongoing conflict in the Middle East. Regular reassurance meetings are underway where members discuss the repercussions of the conflict on their communities, emphasising the ongoing importance of fostering spaces for interfaith dialogue. There is a clear dedication to dialogue and a shared commitment to ensuring Camden's communities remain cohesive and tolerant, and the commitment to preserving and strengthening interfaith relationships remains evident. The meetings also provide a space to hear from community safety officers and the police about our ongoing work to reassure communities and their response to incidents of hate crime.
- 3.6 In past meetings, several attendees highlighted the importance of engaging with schools, addressing the needs of children and young people, and ensuring that schools can adequately support their students. Camden schools have been provided with a range of information and support to address this. The feedback from these meetings has also directly influenced the actions taken by Council departments and the police.
- 3.7 On 2nd November 2023, over 20 people gathered in the Mayor's Parlour for an interfaith reception and celebration. The purpose of the event was to highlight the importance of interfaith work and dialogue, as well as help build new relationships across different faiths and communities. Together with the Mayor and my Co-chair of the Faith Forum, we welcomed guests and recognised the key role interfaith work plays in supporting and promoting community cohesion. The evening was an opportunity to emphasise our commitment to ongoing interfaith relations and supporting faith communities.
- 3.8 We are deeply concerned and aware about the increasing occurrences in hate crime incidents both in Camden and across the country. Our top priority is keeping our communities safe. Our Community Safety Team collaborates closely with the Police to maintain a visible presence in the borough and offer support to our faith communities.
- 3.9 Various interfaith initiatives, including visits to faith sites, regular calls, and the introduction of "No Place for Hate" surgeries, are currently underway. The ongoing "No Place for Hate" surgeries are a personal commitment, as I actively engage with organisations to provide a platform for communities and residents to communicate with me directly so I can provide support and reassurance. This effort is crucial as hate crime rates have significantly increased both nationally and in the borough. We also recognise that there

may be underreporting from communities affected by the recent and ongoing conflict in the Middle East.

Becoming a Borough of Sanctuary for Refugees

- 3.10 The Council is dedicated to ensuring that Camden is an inclusive place where no one is left behind. *We Make Camden* outlines how we unite communities to address social inequality and instigate meaningful social change. Camden has always been a place where individuals seek to improve their lives, support their families, and make a positive impact - forming the basis of our community spirit and resilience. Over the years, Camden has welcomed and assisted refugees and displaced individuals from various parts of the world, such as Syria, Afghanistan, Ukraine, and Hong Kong. The community has consistently stepped up, with many households offering support, including providing homes for those displaced from Ukraine since March 2022.
- 3.11 We aim to continue the tradition of community activism by seeking recognition as a 'Borough of Sanctuary' for refugees, following the national City of Sanctuary framework. This aspiration aligns with the goals of *We Make Camden*, reflecting our commitment to making Camden a welcoming home for everyone. Achieving the status of a Borough of Sanctuary will showcase our dedication and enhance our efforts as we collaborate with other local authorities, residents, the voluntary sector, and public services. The Council continues to support refugees and asylum seekers in the borough. In August, the Leader of the Council agreed the continuation of grant funding for the Hopscotch Family Advocacy Programme until 31 March 2026.
- 3.12 As part of our work to become a Borough of Sanctuary, Camden's libraries, along with librarians, library staff, community groups, and book enthusiasts, are actively raising awareness about the challenges faced by individuals in the asylum system. They provide support, opportunities for participation, and contribute to creating a welcoming culture in the broader community.
- 3.13 To achieve the Library of Sanctuary Award for Refugee Week last June, Camden libraries undertook a programme to expand their current offerings with a focus on refugees. Achieving this Award acknowledges and celebrates libraries that go beyond expectations to demonstrate solidarity and hospitality. Given that libraries serve as warm spaces and neighbourhood hubs where people can access information and support, the initiative to become Libraries of Sanctuary aligns seamlessly with their role.

Neighbourhoods Work

- 3.15 In Camden, we have a clear vision for the future as set out through the ambitions, missions, and challenges in *We Make Camden*. However, achieving our vision will require individuals, communities, and local services to work together closer than ever to support our neighbourhoods to thrive. As Cabinet Member, an approach to bringing services closer to communities and community groups is important to me and I am keen to

support a strategy that ensures closer collaboration between services and our voluntary and community partners.

- 3.16 As such, we have embarked on an ambitious programme of work across the Council and with our partners seeking to ensure our services are connected, relational, and work in the local context for the people they serve.
- 3.17 The work has started this year with a pilot project in Kentish Town; which has brought together a multidisciplinary team of council staff including housing, repairs, community safety, adult social care, and mental health professionals. The pilot has been testing out new approaches to help local residents to get the help they need swiftly and effectively.
- 3.18 Over the coming months, we shall be introducing further services and stakeholders into the Kentish Town pilot including a newly formed Kentish Town multi-disciplinary health and care team, the Council's local family hub services, and our network of local VCS anchor organisations. I look forward to updating the Committee about this important work to make the most of our neighbourhood-based services and deepen our collaboration with community partners.

4. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IN THE BOROUGH

Diversity Mission

- 4.1 Camden Missions are the long-term goals for the future of our borough that were developed in collaboration with people across Camden. The Missions evolved from the work of Camden's Renewal Commission. While the Renewal Commission came to an end in 2021, we embraced its recommendations to progress these Missions, so they remain at the heart of our work as we look to the future. They are long-term goals which help to break down and tackle big, complex issues across Camden – with a focus on bringing the shared resources of our community together to make the most impact.
- 4.2 I am the Cabinet Member lead for the Diversity Mission, which is one of the four Camden Missions alongside Food, Young People, and Estates and Neighbourhoods. It states that *by 2030, those holding positions of power in Camden are as diverse as our community, and the next generation is ready to follow*. There is a growing movement of people in Camden leading transformational change in representation, inclusion, and equality. We want to imagine, design, and create a future where people from all ethnic backgrounds in Camden are represented in leadership roles and positions of power across the borough.
- 4.3 The Diversity Mission focuses on influencing:
- a) Access to leadership opportunities within our communities that the Council has direct control over, such as school governors and tenant and resident representative groups.

- b) Training and support for individuals stepping into leadership roles for the first time and building capacity for future leadership.
- c) Our partners and commissioned organisations to adopt the same values and priorities as us in diversifying their leadership and power structures.
- d) Challenging and campaigning for diversity and equity as integral aspects of healthy, flourishing, and innovative organisational and community leadership.

4.4 As Cabinet Member sponsor, I lead on the regular leadership sessions to prioritise activity and help develop, maintain, and adapt relevant governance around delivery and evaluation. The primary purpose of these sessions is to bring officers and Council members together to discuss and consider activities across the Council, the borough, and the work of national partners. We celebrate success and share challenges through these Mission sessions.

4.5 Moreover, the Mission sessions provide a valuable opportunity for fostering a culture of continuous improvement. By engaging in constructive dialogue, we can identify areas for improvement, explore innovative solutions, and ensure that the Council's activities remain responsive to the evolving needs of the community and aligned with broader national objectives.

Strategy for Diversity in the Public Realm

4.6 Camden is committed to addressing inequalities, building community strength, and increasing diversity and inclusion. Over the past two years there has been an increased drive for change, and the Council has worked together with communities to deliver ambitious and exciting projects. Our work to diversify the public realm in Camden is a key part of this change, and one part of the Council's wider equalities and disproportionality work.

4.7 In the last two years, we have delivered projects to increase diversity, inclusion, and representation in public spaces in Camden. We have worked with and supported diverse creative organisations, businesses, and voluntary and community sector organisations. We have also commemorated pioneering individuals from communities that have historically been underrepresented in the public realm. All of which has formed part of a wider effort across London to make our public spaces reflect the diversity of the capital's communities.

4.8 The [Strategy for Diversity in the Public Realm \(SDPR\) 2023-2028](#) has been developed, outlining an ambitious action plan to increase equality, diversity, and inclusion in Camden's public realm. The strategy and action plan have been co-designed with our community and stakeholders, through extensive resident engagement. The action plan will be owned and delivered by services across the Council, and we have worked with many services to develop the strategy. The strategy was adopted by Cabinet in February and is the first strategy of its kind to be developed by a UK Council.

4.9 SDPR aligns with the aims of *We Make Camden*, which states that we want to create and develop healthy and sustainable places and communities in

which people can take forward their ideas and ambitions – be it the public spaces we inhabit, or the connections that we build with them. Overall, the Strategy aims to build:

- A public realm that reflects and celebrates the diversity of Camden’s communities.
- A public realm that ensures our residents feel connected to, and part of their borough.
- A Camden that is a better place to live, visit, and work, with people benefitting from improved wellbeing and sense of place.

4.10 The strategy also outlines actions and programmes that support the goals of *We Make Camden*, emphasising a strong, sustainable, and inclusive local economy, along with active efforts to address injustice and inequality for safe and open communities where everyone can contribute. Aligned with the mission of the [Mayor of London’s Commission for Diversity in the Public Realm](#), Camden’s strategy expands the concept of the public realm, encompassing plans for high streets, borough planning, and economic regeneration programmes.

4.11 The SDPR action plan includes a wide range of projects including:

- Commissioning artists and producers to work with communities to animate high streets and open spaces, to make them culturally diverse and inclusive through festivals, performances, music, film, and visual art;
- Developing partnership with Camden Tour Guides;
- Developing a virtual Camden People’s Museum;
- Developing a programme of naming opportunities for the public realm;
- Work on blue plaques across Camden commemorating individuals from underrepresented groups;
- Supporting the growth of diverse businesses on the high street;
- Reviewing and adapting the CIL application form to ensure new projects promote diversity and equality; and
- Increasing diversity in the Camden Archives Centre.

Camden Equity Network

4.12 The Council launched the Camden Equity Network in 2023, an initiative to build a community of practice approach to the equity agenda in Camden across our partners, organisations, and community groups. Our aim is to adopt a collaborative approach, fostering the exchange of best practices and insights among Camden organisations and community groups as we collectively pursue our goals for equity and inclusion in the borough.

4.13 The Camden Equity Network is developing its rhythms for meetings based on feedback. Each meeting will revolve around a specific theme in line with Camden’s Inclusion Calendar. We want the membership of the Camden Equity Network to evolve and change, and we welcome suggestions.

Camden’s Inclusion Calendar 2023

4.15 We recognise the importance of public events and public days of celebration of remembrance that give people the opportunity to come together and to

learn. That is the reason the Equalities service created the first ever [Inclusion Calendar](#) in Camden. It not only prevents oversight but also contributes to education, celebration, and the ongoing commitment to creating a workplace or community where everyone feels valued and included.

- 4.16 Every year, this Inclusion Calendar will highlight important themes around diversity and inclusion with a special themed focus each month. This popular calendar contains over 200 important dates including holy days, special events, and festivals. Each month, Camden concentrates on a specific theme of equity and inclusion such as faith and belief, disability, ageism, racial equality, and community strength; and focuses resources on events and activities to highlight experience and ambitions. Additionally, the calendar provides a platform for our partners, citizens, and communities to actively contribute and shape its content throughout the year with their activities.
- 4.18 This year, the calendar has been designed and produced in a format which allows universal access so that content can be used by as many people as possible including people with disabilities or vision impairment. It makes it easier for people with disabilities to access the calendar with the aid of assistive technology software and devices like screen magnifiers, screen readers, speech-recognition software, text-to-speech software, alternative input devices, and refreshable Braille displays.

Disabilities Work: Disability Oversight Panel

- 4.19 The Disability Oversight Panel (DOP) is a body constituted by the Leader of the Council focused on hearing the voices of disabled residents on issues of policy, strategy, and Council services. It is an important forum to highlight the priorities and ambitions of disabled people in Camden and focus on specific services and policy programmes.
- 4.20 The Disability Oversight Panel is supported by the entire Council, allowing the Panel to request documents pertaining to any aspect of the Council's work relevant to the priorities and needs of disabled individuals. Nevertheless, specific support for the Panel is provided by several key teams such as Equalities and Community Strength, Participation and Partnerships, Committee Services, and Supporting People Commissioning and Care Services. This year the Panel has received updates on Accessible Streets and an update on the Council's approach to improving the accessibility of our website.

The Addition of a Local Protected Characteristic for Camden

- 4.21 The [Equality Act 2010](#) protects people against discrimination for protected characteristics, such as race and ethnicity, pregnancy and maternity, age, disability, sexual orientation, gender reassignment, gender, religion or belief, marriage or civil partnership, but not care experience. More than 30 councils in England and Scotland, including five in London (Ealing, Haringey,

Lambeth, Sutton, and Waltham Forest), have changed their policy to make "care experienced" a locally protected characteristic.

- 4.22 The Equalities service have proposed that the London Borough of Camden recognise "care experienced" as a locally protected characteristic. This will be explored further in the new year.

Developing an Equalities Strategy

- 4.23 The Equalities service, which the Council created in Autumn 2020, oversees, monitors, and steers work across council services to ensure Equalities are embedded in service thinking, design, and delivery. The service is in the process of developing an Equalities Strategy for Camden. This comprehensive strategy will incorporate our ambitions alongside measures for success around the Equalities agenda. The areas of focus encompass social mobility, our refugee response, and our work on community cohesion. We will provide information and updates on further developments as we work to shape this impactful strategy.

Cabinet Response to the Report of the Cabinet Adviser for the Diversity Mission

- 4.25 The Leader of the Council each year establishes four Cabinet Adviser roles to offer evidence-based recommendations and policy-making support to the Council's Cabinet. Councillor Nanouche Umeadi served as the Cabinet Adviser for the Diversity Mission in the previous municipal year (2022/23), with a specific focus on creating opportunities for young people from diverse backgrounds. The Cabinet Adviser's report, "[Using Careers Education to Build the Next Generation of Diverse Leaders](#)", demonstrates a strong connection to both the Youth and Diversity Missions, and its ongoing implementation will be integrated into these missions, collaborating with schools, businesses, and the broader Camden community.
- 4.26 Through a [report](#) presented to the Cabinet, I was tasked to review and respond to a number of recommendations made by the Cabinet Adviser for the Diversity Mission, as well as the considerations of the scrutiny committees that her report has been presented to. The report provides an initial response and commentary on these recommendations, welcoming the valuable insight and research of the Cabinet Adviser, as well as examining the ongoing work being done by the Council to address them.
- 4.27 In addressing a question on additional support the Council could undertake to promote greater diversity in leadership, Councillor Umeadi emphasised the significance of continuous mentoring, even after an apprenticeship or STEAM programme placement had ended. She added that the Council needed to provide its own work experience opportunities in a more systematic and well-organised way. She also encouraged leveraging existing relationships with external organisations in the borough to facilitate placements and finding ways to streamline the administrative process.

- 4.28 At the Cabinet meeting held on 7th June 2023, consideration was given both to the report of the Cabinet Adviser for the Diversity Mission, which was introduced by Councillor Umeadi; and my response, which I personally introduced. The recommendations have been endorsed and activity is underway to deliver against them – a key theme of the work of the Diversity Mission is to address a number of the issues raised by Councillor Umeadi in her report.

5. HEALTH AND WELLBEING THROUGH LEISURE

- 5.1 A key element of my portfolio is responsibility for services rooted in our communities including leisure services. I see these services as critical to providing social networks for our citizens, services to keep people healthy and well, and spaces and places for children and young people.

Leisure Centre Social Value

- 5.2 Whilst leisure centres have a specific focus on physical activity, we recognise the role they can play in providing wider social value to our communities. Over the past year we have introduced a number of initiatives to enhance community engagement and inclusivity:
- a) The Accessible Activity Guide, launched in July, provides a comprehensive overview of accessible weekly activities with easy-to-understand symbols across Camden's leisure centres.
 - b) The Work Experience Programme, successfully re-launched over the summer after a Covid-19-induced suspension, offers valuable opportunities in Camden.
 - c) Chalcots residents now enjoy 12 months of free swimming, courtesy of a Council-funded campaign.
 - d) The "Give it A Go" event on Hampstead Heath saw active participation from Camden residents, with the Community Sports team engaging over 200 attendees and promoting the Schools Out summer holiday programme.
 - e) The introduction of a Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) class at Kentish Town Sports Centre, marking Camden's first of its kind, reinforced the commitment to inclusivity within leisure centre offerings.

We will continue to look for opportunities to ensure our leisure services are meeting the wider social, community and wellbeing needs of our residents.

Remodelling of Talacre Sports Centre (TSC)

- 5.3 Talacre Sports Centre is an important leisure centre in the Borough providing a range of services. Capital funding of £7.7 million has been secured from the Government's Levelling Up project, for a holistic package of interventions to create a healthy and connected neighbourhood across Gospel Oak, Haverstock, and Kentish Town South. The remodelling of Talacre Sports Centre is a key element of the plan, of which £3.2 million of the grant is ring-fenced. This will significantly increase the quality and capacity of the centre

and increase opportunities for more children and young people to be physically active.

- 5.4 The funding will be used to (amongst other things):
- Create a more attractive, accessible, and safer building
 - Increase capacity – 80 to 100 sqm of new flexible higher quality activity and learning spaces
 - Providing more high-quality and modern classroom space for Not in Education, Employment, or Training (NEET) young people on education programmes
 - Greener building services, refurbished changing rooms, and toilet facilities (including Changing Places provision), community café, and social space
 - New play provision on Talacre Town Green and improvements to public realm between this area and Talacre Sports Centre

5.5 Alongside the capital investment, the Council is also investing in services that support and give opportunities to young people in our leisure centres. The Sports Education and Training Programme at Talacre has also increased student numbers by 54% this September. There are now sixty 16-19-year-olds, attending everyday studying Level 2 and 3 NVQ and Btech qualifications in Sports Leadership, Development, and Coaching. This vocational offer is an important offer for many young people who have previously struggled in mainstream education.

5.6 Talacre Sports Centre also hosted our children's sports camps this summer, and with the Holiday Activity Fund enabling families on Free School Meals to book free places, the centre was full of active 8- to 12-year-olds. There were four weeks of multisport on offer for boys and girls where more than 130 participants joined in the fun, followed by a fifth girls-only week with a further 25 participants. Activities also included Lego coding sessions provided through our Library service which were really popular with staff and students.

Opening of Kings Cross Fitness (KCF)

5.7 We opened Kings Cross Fitness this year, a brand-new sports centre facility near Granary Square. Phase One was opened in September and offers advanced fitness classes that deliver tailored, personalised, interactive workout experiences at a competitive price; in an environment usually only available in expensive private studios and complementing our existing offer at Pancras Square. This type of provision is the first of its kind to be located within a local authority leisure contract and is covering new ground.

5.8 Phase Two, which is due to open in late Autumn 2024, will see the addition of a four-court sports hall and functional gym to complement activities at the nearby Pancras Square Leisure. The sports hall will provide much needed indoor activity space in the borough, increasing capacity and allowing for more targeted sport programming. The gym will then also include accessible equipment for inclusive programmes for disabled residents.

- 5.9 KCF will increase participation in sport and physical activity by residents in areas of comparatively high physical inactivity of Kings Cross, St Pancras and Somers Town, and wider borough wards of Camden. This facility will also make a significant contribution to addressing health inequality and improve the physical and mental wellbeing of its users. It is anticipated to be recognised as a flagship venue within the borough.

Green Spaces – Outdoor Multi-use Games Areas

- 5.10 The Sport and Physical Activity Service and Green Spaces are developing an application to the Football Foundation's Playzones fund. 'Playzones' are safe, inclusive, and accessible outdoor facilities designed to unite communities through recreational activities such as football and other sports. These facilities aim to engage and inspire the least active residents by providing small-sided local setups, coupled with community ownership and activation initiatives.
- 5.11 In Camden, this is likely to take the form of improvements/adaptations to existing ball courts to diversify their use and benefit. The funding is specifically targeted at addressing inequality by creating opportunities for underrepresented and inactive citizens, including women and girls, people with disabilities, diverse ethnic communities, and those from lower socio-economic groups. Currently, we are actively engaging with the community to refine the focus, and we anticipate full submission by November 2023.

The Regent's Park - The Royal Parks

- 5.12 The Royal Parks who operate Regents Park, have submitted a funding application to the Football Foundation to build a second 'hybrid' football pitch, alongside the existing pitch. Whilst 'hybrid' pitches are not usually funded by the Football Foundation, they recognise the unique position of Regents Park in reducing a deficit of facilities in Central London. The priority user groups for the new pitch, if successful, will be women and girls, disabled citizens, lower socio-economic groups, and diverse ethnic communities. Camden provided formal support for the application and hope to work closely with Royal Parks to engage Camden citizens in the future opportunities this provides. If successful, build will commence later his year.

Under-representation of Ethnic Groups / Race Equality Plan

- 5.13 We recognise that there is disproportionality in who and how people use our leisure facilities. We want to ensure that our services are welcoming, engaging, and accessible to everyone. Our data shows that there is an under-representation of members of Camden's South Asian community in our leisure services. The Council is conducting a comprehensive research programme, incorporating community engagement, is in progress to understand more about this under-representation including speaking with adults and children and young people, and understanding what they want from sport and physical activity services and facilities. The study will also seek to understand and identify what barriers currently exist in preventing participation. The completion of the programme is expected soon, and the

findings along with corresponding recommendations will be presented in due course.

Disability Activity Offer

- 5.14 We are also about to start a review of the adult and children and young people disability physical activity offer, recognising that there is scope for improvement for services to be accessible and engaging for everyone in Camden. Once a review has been undertaken, a plan will be developed to make changes required. The Disability Oversight Panel will be consulted on the development of the investigation and help to shape recommendations that may emerge.

Library Service

- 5.15 One of the four strands of the Service's new Universal Library Offer includes delivering health and well-being outcomes. We are undertaking research and engagement on the services and support that people want from their local libraries, including market testing and pilot schemes. This is an area of development for London Sport (Regional development agency for physical activity provision) who are keen to test and learn from delivery in 'non-traditional' spaces including libraries and we will work with them on this programme.

6. CONCLUSION

- 6.1 I am proud of the work that the Council has led over the last year to tackle inequalities and injustice – and as the Cabinet Member, I am proud to be able to work across the combined capacity of our community services including leisure services, libraries, and our voluntary and community sector partners to make the lives of our residents better.
- 6.2 The various challenges and the ongoing Cost of Living crisis have reaffirmed the caring nature of Camden's community. Even in the face of these challenging circumstances, our community has come together, demonstrating resilience and solidarity. Despite the difficulties, we have persevered in providing essential services to the people of Camden. My unwavering commitment to collaboration and progress remains steadfast, driven by the shared goal of enhancing the wellbeing of everyone in our community.
- 6.3 I express my sincerest gratitude to all colleagues, partners, and staff who have dedicated themselves tirelessly throughout this challenging year in pursuit of the common goals outlined in *We Make Camden*. Their commitment and generosity have been instrumental in our ability to support the most vulnerable in our community. Serving as the Cabinet Member for Voluntary Sector, Equalities, and Cohesion representing our residents has been a privilege, and I am committed to working collaboratively to strengthen Camden's resilience and strive for true equality in Camden.

7. FINANCE COMMENTS OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR CORPORATE SERVICES

The Executive Director Corporate Services has been consulted and their comments are included within the report.

8. LEGAL COMMENTS OF THE BOROUGH SOLICITOR

Legal Services have been consulted and their comments are incorporated within the report.

9. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

All the programmes and work outlined in this report have positive environmental implications for Camden and are built from, or strongly aligned with, the Camden Climate Action Plan, Biodiversity Strategy, and Clean Air Action Plan.

REPORT ENDS.