

Camden Council response to Healthwatch Camden and Camden Disability Action Joint project – How accessible are Camden’s Community Centres?

Healthwatch Camden and Camden Disability Actions’ (CDA) joint report has highlighted the importance of accessibility and inclusion in Camden’s Community Centres. Camden Council recognises in a time of diminishing resources that addressing access issues is challenging for Community Centres and we want to look at how we can enable Centres in Camden to maximise opportunities and resources.

It is encouraging that in the majority of cases people felt welcome at community centres and were able to access activities and services. We do however recognise that there is more that can be done by centres to improve access- both physical and sentimental.

Please see below for our response to the recommendations for Camden Council as set out in the report.

- **Has a clear policy on the role and value of community centres in the borough and on the purpose of its support for community centres**

Camden Council has long recognised the important role that Camden’s community spaces and centres play in creating a support hub for local residents. The work of our Strategic Partners demonstrates the positive role that community centres and organisations play in supporting people with disabilities to access activities and opportunities:

In 2017, Hampstead Community Centre ran IT sessions for 23 people to improve their knowledge of technology, 83% of whom had a disability. The Calthorpe Project delivered 1,575 hours of supported gardening sessions for people with learning disabilities and mental health issues to 17 Camden residents. They also offered volunteer opportunities, work placements and paid work in their Community Café to 7 students from Westminster Kingsway College, Learning Difficulties and Disabilities department. The Catering Entry Level Vocational Access Course students completed work placements and all passed their course.

Community centres’ knowledge of their local community, awareness of local issues and new and emerging needs has been recognised by the Council as being a valuable resource. The Community Centres Fund, which ran for a number of years up to the launch of the Strategic Partnership Fund (SPF), was a commitment by the council to support these important organisations to thrive, develop their role and become increasingly resilient. This led to the development of the SPF Neighbourhoods which seeks to:

- Maximise the use of existing strengths, assets and resources
- Increase opportunities for residents from different backgrounds to be more connected and more involved in local social action, to help themselves and each other
- Improve life chances and opportunities for residents, to ensure that they are not held back because of background, circumstance or identified community.

In addition to SPF Neighbourhoods, the Council also works with Equalities Partners and projects across the borough to ensure mainstream services deliver for all by:

- Identifying and tackling barriers
- Identifying ways to increase access
- Increase levels of participation, social action and influence in civic society by those communities currently underrepresented
- Improve life chances and opportunities for residents to ensure they are not held back because of background, circumstance or identified community

These aims are closely aligned to those in the Council's Supporting People Connecting Communities strategy, which acknowledges the role that community spaces and centres can play in using a strengths based approach in supporting people with health, and social care needs; the approach builds on their strengths and supports them to overcome the barriers that prevent them from reaching their full potential. The Council also recognises the important role they play in encouraging interaction and engagement between neighbours and people with different experiences and backgrounds, which supports one of the Camden 2025 calls to action: **In 2025, Camden should be safe, strong and open, and everyone should be able to contribute to their community.**

Calthorpe Project Case Study

Brian [a young man with Autism] found it difficult to settle into a nearby College, which is known for its tough inner city environment. Staff here engaged with him and discovered a love for football and invited him to take part in Tuesday Drop In sessions. To begin with, he struggled to fit in with the crowd sometimes even getting emotionally upset at how the other students would treat him. Slowly his skills as a goal keeper and staff actively making sure he integrated with all the students, helped him settle and make friends. 5 months on Brian is a different man, showing a lot more confidence and self-esteem. He has a much greater social life. He now even gives back to the Calthorpe and volunteers as a gardener.

Camden Council is committed to engaging with community centres to explore how we can work effectively together to achieve both the aims of the Supporting People Connecting Communities plan and the aims of the SPF Neighbourhoods and Equalities whilst respecting and supporting community centres' independence and self-determination. The community partnership team (CPT) will work with community centres to agree how the council can best support them in order to enhance their role in supporting residents.

- **Works to support centres to maintain and improve access, including supporting the installation of induction loops; checking that lifts installed are fit for purpose and assisting with upgrading them where necessary; and checking that doors are safe and easy to use, and that lighting is adequate**

The Centre for Accessible Environments (CAE), funded by City Bridge Trust, offers a free service for voluntary and community groups on accessibility. CAE also supports charities to bid for up to £5,000 for access consultancy and up to £100,000 for access improvements. The council is recommending our Strategic Partners and C4 investigate whether this support and funds can be accessed jointly as a borough wide alliance or partnership. The

responsibility for maintenance and improvements is that of the lease holder however the council can signpost centres to information and advice and the CPT can work with them to access support and identify funding opportunities.

As a commissioner of services at community centres

- **Checks the centre's compliance with the Equality Act and offers support and guidance where there is non-compliance**

All service provision that is paid for by the Council requires provider's premises to be accessible in line with the Equality Act 2010.

When services are commissioned, an Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA) is completed during the initial phase of scoping a service. This ensures that the service is compliant with equality legislation and every opportunity is taken to foster advancements for the protected characteristics under equalities legislation.

As a commissioner of social care and health services

- **Collects information on the range of access requirements for disabled people in the borough, uses that information to shape commissioning plans, works to fill access gaps where they are identified and makes sure that up to date information on the accessibility of local community services is available to disabled people and to its own staff**

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Camden Adult Social Care are currently conducting a review of their information and advice provision and are working on an action plan to improve provision of information and advice. The action plan will include the recommendation to detail accessibility of local services in the information that is provided, which it is hoped will improved access to services.

Camden have provided four years of funding (October 2017 until September 2021) to develop a Centre for Independent Living (CIL). CIL is a hub for information, guidance and support, and signposts people to local services. Through this partnership and the Adult Social Care action plan, the Council and partners will be able to work together to ensure that up to date information on accessibility of services is available.

- **Encourages and supports community centres to find resources for access improvements and staff training on disability equality and awareness of the needs of specific groups, e.g. deaf people, people with learning disabilities**

Local services, including community centres, are able to access the Camden Training and Development Service (TDS). The training available through TDS includes staff training on disability awareness. For example, Camden provide a course on Autistic Spectrum condition awareness which provides delegates with an understanding of what it means to have an Autistic Spectrum condition and provides support on communication strategies. This course is available to third sector organisations, including community centres.

Through the CPT, VCS organisations have access to Grant Finder which has details of funding opportunities. The team provides advice and support to partners, which includes many community centres across the borough, in response to specific needs.

The shared vision for CIL is that it will play a vital role in connecting voluntary and commercial sector providers to their target market as well as promoting the interests of disabled adults through community engagement. This will involve supporting local organisations, including community centres, to find resources for access requirements and staff training. Information on how this support will develop will be rolled out to the sector as the plan evolves.

In all its work as a commissioner and a planning authority

- **Seeks to maintain and improve access, including increasing the availability of Blue Badge parking spaces and the availability of outdoor space suitable for assistance dog 'spending'.**

Applications for Blue Badge parking spaces are considered on a case by case basis and should there be specific needs of centres they should contact the Council to request additional provision. The responsibility for maintenance and improvements sits with the leaseholder. The Council adopted the Local Plan in 2017 which sets out its commitment to improving air quality. Policy T2 sets out its aim of having car free developments in the future, whilst recognising the needs of disabled people and ensuring there is appropriate provision: Policy T2 Parking and car-free development

The Council will limit the availability of parking and require all new developments in the borough to be car-free.

We will:

- a. not issue on-street or on-site parking permits in connection with new developments and use legal agreements to ensure that future occupants are aware that they are not entitled to on-street parking permits;
- b. limit on-site parking to:
 - i. spaces designated for disabled people where necessary

In terms of new community provision- either stand alone or an extension to existing facility- the Council looks at accessibility issues in line with planning guidance. We would expect to be actively engaged in terms of specification, fit-out and how the facility would function. Depending on the scale of the proposal, there is a screening process to establish if the development is going to give rise to equalities impacts and where appropriate (particularly for larger schemes) an EIA will be undertaken by the Council's control case officer. We also

work closely with public health colleagues and applicants may be required to prepare for a health impact assessment demonstrating how the proposal addresses health and wellbeing issues, which is then scrutinised by public health colleagues.

With regards to the 'dog-spending areas' we welcome further discussion as to the requirements.

- **Engages community centres in developing local assets (services, places, self-help groups, local leaders) to create supportive environments for disabled people.**

The Council's Supporting People, Connecting Communities plan sets out the Council's commitment to introducing a strengths based approach across all of its services. This approach focuses on understanding peoples' strengths and the strengths and assets of their informal networks and local communities. It is based on building relationships with people to understand what is important to them, and working with them to achieve their identified outcomes. All services will work in a co-ordinated way to achieve outcomes for an individual service user, eliminating duplication of provision and maximising the assets of individuals and local communities. Officers working on the plan will engage with community centres on the role they are able to play in achieving outcomes for users and the support they need to do this.

Services to be commissioned and procured are subject to service user engagement to help inform the development of the service specification. This ensures that service user outcomes are at the centre of service delivery. In addition, all evaluation panels have service user representation and involvement in the selection of the provider who is finally awarded the contract.

Depending on the type of service, providers are also required to ensure that service users can access wider support networks within the community. Providers should promote partnership working with local community and voluntary sector organisations to ensure that service user's care and support needs are met.

For Camden Clinical Commissioning Group working in collaboration with Camden Council we recommend that the CCG and the Council:

- **Make sure that plans for supporting self-care and 'social prescribing' take account of access needs so that disabled residents referred to local community services have their access needs met. This may providing funding for specific activities for some disabled people.**

Camden CCG and Camden Council make sure that plans for supporting self-care and 'social prescribing' take account of access needs so that disabled residents, referred to local community services, have these needs met. Providers are required to comply with Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) and are asked to outline, within any relevant tender responses, their approach to accessing premises which meet any basic standards with regards to accessibility. The standard NHS Contract asks for detailed confirmation about compliance

with DDA and evidence of how it is being complied with. Providers are held accountable through appropriate contract management mechanisms.