Lambeth VCS Futures · Report 02

high trees

THE LAMBETH EVIDENCE BASE

what the sector said, and what it means for a new model of infrastructure support

A report by High Trees for the Lambeth VCS Futures project
lambethvcsfuture.org
October 2026

OVERVIEW

Lambeth has a large, varied and resourceful voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) sector. Mapping has identified 700 active groups, many working on small budgets and many on the same issues as each other, often without knowing it. When the sector was asked what it needs, the answer was clear and consistent. Organisations want infrastructure that is connected and easy to navigate. They want it to be genuinely led by the sector, representative of groups of every size, focused on keeping resources local, and properly resourced, so that it doesn't rely on the goodwill of organisations that are already stretched. They were just as clear about how it must work. Trust will come from shared decision-making and visible delivery, not from further consultation. This report (2 of 3) sets out that evidence and the priorities it points to, which are now being tested with sector leaders, stakeholders and the wider sector between September and December 2026.

KEY FIGURES

700+ active VCSE groups identified through mapping	40+ community meetings attended to find them	63 organisations engaged in the 2026 consultation	33 organisations and representatives completed the survey
17 group and one-to-one conversations across the borough	91% rated a circular economy a high or essential priority	6 previous consultations with the sector since 2017	6 emerging pillars of support, four built on NAVCA functions and two distinctly Lambeth

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01 ABOUT THIS REPORT

Lambeth VCS Futures is a piece of work commissioned by Impact on Urban Health to explore the potential for a new, VCSE-led model of infrastructure support in Lambeth and how it could be achieved. High Trees Community Development Trust, The Brixton Project and Pierre Consulting were brought together to form a project working group, with Pierre Consulting leading consultation with the sector, Brixton Project leading mapping of the sector and High Trees leading the development of the strategy. Over the last 12 months, the project has drawn on national and local good practice, past and present conversations with the sector, and mapping of local assets and challenges.

This is the second of three reports written by High Trees for the Lambeth VCS Futures project, and should be read alongside Report 1, which sets out the existing infrastructure landscape in Lambeth. It draws on the mapping undertaken by Brixton Project, which shows the current size and shape of the sector, and the consultation led by Pierre Consulting, which explored what the sector wants from future infrastructure support. It has also considered previous consultations undertaken about sector support in Lambeth to ensure a comprehensive picture. Together they give a picture of what is working, where the gaps are and what the sector is asking for.

02 MAPPING LAMBETH'S VCSE SECTOR

THE SIZE AND SHAPE OF THE SECTOR

Since October 2025, Brixton Project has been building an up-to-date picture of Lambeth's VCSE "ecosystem". The mapping is jointly funded by Impact on Urban Health, through Lambeth VCS Futures, and by Lambeth Council, through Brixton Project's leadership and advocacy role. To be included, a group needs to be Lambeth-based, mainly serve Lambeth residents, primarily offer free services to the community (alongside any paid-for services), and be a charity or non-profit. Data collection began in earnest in January 2026. Much of the sector isn't visible through official registers alone, so Brixton Project went out to find it, attending more than 40 community meetings, alongside extensive desk research across existing directories, Companies House and the Charity Commission register. Every group found is checked against the inclusion criteria before it is added to the directory, and 109 groups found during the research have been checked and not included. Organisations are then invited to check and complete their own entry through an online form, with regular email reminders, so that as much of the information as possible comes from organisations themselves. So far 86 have done so.

As of 12 October 2026, the mapping has identified 702 organisations currently active in Lambeth. The full directory can be explored on the Brixton Project website, and the Lambeth VCS Ecosystem map shows the same organisations as an interactive network and geographic map, alongside the networks they belong to and the funders that support them. Organisations are grouped into six sectors and 65 more specific themes. 283 organisations work on family and social support, 264 on community and inclusion and 221 on health and wellbeing, and more than a third (37%) work across more than one sector. Those numbers show how vibrant the sector is. They also show how many organisations are working side by side on similar issues, and why better coordination matters if that effort is to add up to more than the sum of its parts.

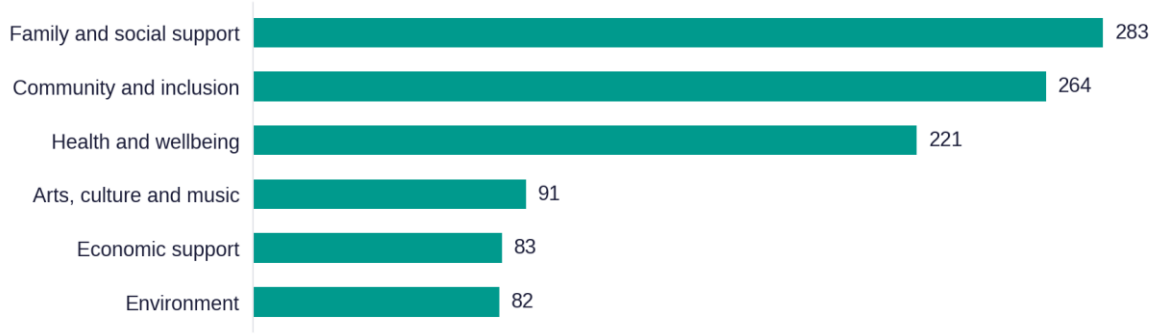

Figure 1: Thematic areas of focus of VCSE groups in Lambeth (Brixton Project mapping). Groups can work across more than one area, so the totals add up to more than 700.

The sector is made up of many kinds of organisation, including 309 registered charities, 138 community interest companies, 124 community organisations, 52 companies limited by guarantee, 45 education institutions and 22 Lambeth Council services that work alongside the sector.

WHERE ORGANISATIONS ARE BASED

Every one of Lambeth's 25 wards has at least one mapped organisation, but the spread is uneven. A third of the 586 organisations with an address in the borough are in just three wards: Brixton Windrush (94), Brixton North (57) and Waterloo & South Bank (43). Clapham Common & Abbeville and Streatham Hill West & Thornton have four each. A further 80 organisations are registered outside Lambeth but mainly serve Lambeth residents. A registered address is not always where an organisation works, so this is an indication rather than a measure of provision, but it points to parts of the borough with far fewer local groups to draw on.

WHAT ORGANISATIONS TOLD US ABOUT THEMSELVES

Organisations that completed the form shared more about themselves. Of the 74 that gave their annual turnover, 31 have an income under £100,000, 27 between £100,000 and £500,000, 5 between £500,000 and £1 million, and 11 over £1 million. 62 of the 82 that described their workforce have paid staff, and 19 are run entirely by volunteers. 74 of the 76 that answered work specifically with communities facing structural barriers and inequality at least some of the time. These figures describe the organisations that responded rather than the whole sector.

RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN ORGANISATIONS

A directory shows who is in the sector, but not how organisations work with each other. Brixton Project has also been testing this through a separate piece of mapping focused on physical activity and wellbeing, in which organisations described their programmes and their working relationships with one another, with the strength of each relationship shown as a network on the Lambeth VCS Ecosystem map. The approach shows how mapping could go further in future, from who exists to how the sector connects and where it is thinly linked.

INCOME AND FUNDING ACROSS THE SECTOR

A second source, the Superhighways London data dashboard launched in July 2025, draws on Charity Commission, Companies House and 360Giving data. It shows 1,794 charities and social enterprises located in Lambeth, with a further 459 working in the borough but based elsewhere. Of these, 831 have a local focus. Together, those locally focused organisations had a total income of £215.42 million and expenditure of £222.71 million. Superhighways has confirmed this reading of the data, which is drawn from public registers and was last refreshed in September 2026.

Behind the headline figures is a sector made up mostly of small organisations. Income band data is only available for registered charities, and is not known for the remaining 555 organisations, most

of which are community interest companies that do not report income in the same way. Of the registered charities with income data, 176 have an annual income under £100,000, and only 20 have an income over £500,000. Taken together, the two mapping exercises describe a sector with significant collective scale but individually small organisations. The level of investment already flowing into Lambeth makes a strong case for collaboration, so that communities get the fullest possible benefit from it.

03 WHAT THE SECTOR SAID

the 2026 consultation

HOW THE CONSULTATION WAS CARRIED OUT

Between April and July 2026, Pierre Consulting undertook consultation with the sector. Thirty-three organisations and other interested parties (the vast majority from the sector itself) completed a survey with one closed question and five open questions. This let respondents set out their priorities and also explain the experiences, expectations and concerns behind them. The survey was followed by group and one-to-one conversations with 17 organisations working across Lambeth, which explored the issues in more depth and picked up perspectives the survey alone might have missed. Pierre Consulting also engaged organisations through open sessions, including Lunch and Learn and Breakfast and Learn events in March and April. These sessions introduced the project and encouraged organisations to take part in the survey and conversations, while the thematic analysis that follows draws on the survey and conversation data. In total, 63 organisations took part across the consultation, with some people taking part in more than one activity.

Pierre Consulting then carried out a thematic analysis of the survey and interview data in August 2026. The findings reflect the views of those who chose to take part and are not statistically representative of the whole sector, and organisation size is a developing profile rather than a complete measure, since turnover is not publicly available for every participant and is not a proxy for reach, impact or community value.

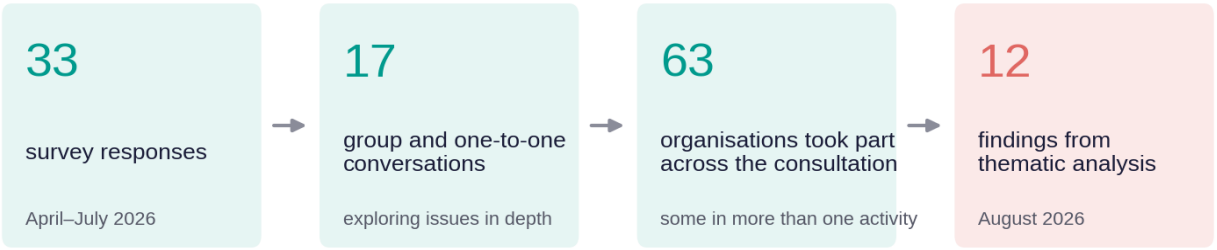

Figure 2: How the 2026 consultation was carried out

What follows is a summary. The full findings, with more detailed breakdowns, are in the accompanying report by Pierre Consulting, Lambeth VCSE Future Engagement Findings and Recommendations (August 2026).

THEME ONE: CONNECTION AND COLLABORATION

Support for a connected, sector-led approach

Support for a genuinely sector-led approach was clear, with respondents describing it as “long overdue” or “urgently needed”. The appetite for more connection was also clear – with some organisations describing a fragmented landscape where groups serving similar communities work in isolation from each other. This is felt to lead to duplicated effort, limited resources being

stretched further than they need to be, and opportunities for collaboration being missed. Smaller organisations in particular described having to find their own way through local systems and build every partnership from scratch. Respondents were equally clear that any new model would only be credible if decision-making genuinely rested with the sector itself, meaning non-profit organisations with direct community and delivery experience, rather than with external organisations or statutory partners.

> “We often work in isolation and have to build every connection ourselves. A more connected, sector-led approach would help smaller and community-led organisations reach the right partners, share knowledge, avoid duplication and ensure underserved communities are not missed.” survey respondent

Collaboration rather than competition

Most organisations want to move away from competing with one another and towards working together. They see this as essential at a time of rising demand, tighter funding and growing pressure to do more with less. Many recognised that current funding arrangements push organisations to work independently rather than share expertise, resources and learning, and they described “working in silos” and “reinventing the wheel”. Respondents also wanted stronger cross-sector working, with better communication, shared objectives and greater recognition of the knowledge and value that community organisations create. Crucially, they stressed that collaboration takes time, capacity and investment. It cannot be built on the unpaid capacity of organisations that are already stretched, and the one-to-one conversations highlighted the substantial informal and unfunded support that organisations already give each other.

> “Supporting the sector to join up is desperately needed to reduce competition and duplication, and increase impact.” survey respondent

Accessible and navigable support

Organisations were clear that support is only useful if it can be found, understood and navigated. Practical suggestions included a single point of contact, one clear central source of information, a maintained directory and simpler routes into support. Pierre Consulting also noted that low uptake of existing support should not be read as low demand when not all organisations know what is available. Accessibility alone is not enough, though: a trusted point of contact should lead into meaningful practical support rather than simply directing organisations elsewhere.

For a future model, connection is the foundation. A new model needs to make the sector visible to itself, make support easy to find, and resource collaboration rather than expecting it to happen for free.

THEME TWO: VOICE, REPRESENTATION AND TRUST

Inclusion and the voice of grassroots organisations

Organisations felt that any future model must reflect the full diversity of Lambeth’s sector, with every type of organisation able to influence decisions. There was some concern that larger, more established organisations often dominate strategic discussions, while smaller community-based organisations, specialist services and organisations representing minority communities find it harder to be heard. Involvement needs to be meaningful, shaping decisions, funding and strategy from the outset rather than being consulted at a late stage. For that to happen, the ways people can take part need to be flexible, accessible and resourced. Time, funding, childcare, language, organisational capacity and day-to-day delivery pressures all shape who is realistically able to be in

the room, and participants cautioned against creating new gatekeepers, stressing that representation should reach beyond the “usual suspects”.

> “My main concern is that smaller community organisations may be overlooked in favour of larger organisations with greater resources. The process should remain transparent, inclusive and accessible, with fair opportunities for grassroots organisations to participate, influence decisions and access funding.” survey respondent

Building trust through transparency and shared decision-making

Trust was seen as a prerequisite for success, and something that will be earned through transparent governance, meaningful participation and consistent delivery rather than assumed at the start. It was repeatedly linked to how decisions are made and where power sits. Participants drew a sharp line between being consulted and having real influence. They also emphasised the need for a collective voice able to engage with the Council, NHS, commissioners and other institutions on equal terms.

> “Trust is when actions meet words.” survey respondent

Resourcing collective leadership and influence

Sector leadership doesn’t happen by itself. Convening organisations, developing shared positions, engaging communities, supporting peers, advocating to decision-makers and co-producing policy all take time and resources. Organisations agreed on the need for a sustained strategic voice across the Council, NHS, commissioners, businesses and funders. Those relationships should be built into how institutions work rather than depending on individual contacts. That would let the sector move from being consulted one organisation at a time to exercising meaningful collective influence.

For a future model, the credibility of a sector-led approach will depend on how it works in practice. How the model is governed, who takes part and how leadership is resourced will matter as much as the services it offers.

THEME THREE: CAPACITY AND SUSTAINABILITY

Capacity, funding and long-term sustainability

Organisations are working in an increasingly challenging environment, with growing demand, limited resources and ongoing competition for funding. They want a new model to invest in the sector’s long-term capability through both organisational development and core funding. That would help organisations build resilience and depend less on chasing one short-term funding opportunity after another. Capacity building was valued, but participants were clear that it cannot substitute for adequate financial resources, and they distinguished between funding frontline projects and funding the organisational infrastructure, teams and systems that make that delivery possible. Limited staffing and reliance on volunteers also make it hard for organisations to take part in networks, partnerships and strategic discussions while keeping frontline services running.

Governance, professional support and shared infrastructure

One of the strongest findings from the one-to-one conversations was the need for practical organisational infrastructure that goes beyond traditional training or funding advice. Participants named as a priority the ability to access shared or centrally accessible expertise across a range of areas including governance and board development, HR and legal advice, finance, fundraising and organisational development.

Workforce development was also a clear theme, linked to retaining staff, supporting progression and succession, and holding on to organisational knowledge. Participants also distinguished between generic information or training and more bespoke organisational development, as some organisations need practical help to identify and work through challenges they may not initially recognise themselves.

Rising need and pressure across the ecosystem

Lambeth's local ecosystem is increasingly under pressure. Community need is rising while statutory and VCSE capacity is under pressure. Organisations described taking on referrals and responsibilities from stretched public services. When one VCSE organisation closes or contracts, the demand moves onto others. When communities can't be supported early, the consequences carry through to health, housing, criminal justice and other systems. The sustainability of individual organisations is therefore a question for the whole system, not just for the sector.

Organisational lifecycle, succession and community assets

Organisations need different kinds of support as they establish, grow and mature. They highlighted succession planning, trustee development and leadership, recognising that organisations, relationships, spaces and institutional knowledge are community assets that can be lost. Protecting physical infrastructure matters as much as organisational infrastructure, as groups face insecure premises, short leases and the threat of displacement.

For a future model, support will need to reflect where organisations are in their development, strengthen the practical foundations that organisations cannot always hold alone, and recognise that a resilient sector underpins the wider public system.

THEME FOUR: FUTURE INVOLVEMENT AND LOCAL ECONOMIC BENEFIT

Appetite for future involvement

Many respondents want to help shape the sector's future by joining working groups, supporting partnership development, and sharing specialist expertise and knowledge from frontline work. Organisations named specific strengths they could bring, including community engagement, disability inclusion, governance, training, research and neighbourhood development. Alongside that willingness came a clear message: involvement must be purposeful, make good use of VCSE knowledge and be properly resourced. Organisations facing immediate pressures can't always contribute to infrastructure development just because they support it.

Views on prioritising a circular economy

Of the 33 survey respondents, 30 (91%) rated a circular economy as a high or essential priority, 3 (9%) rated it a low priority and none said it was not a priority. Two of the respondents who marked it as 'low' were not themselves in the sector, with only one respondent from the sector finding it was not a high or essential priority. The respondents who felt this was important pointed to keeping investment within Lambeth, creating local jobs and skills, sharing resources and building community wealth rather than sector support money sitting with non-Lambeth based organisations or consultants. There was also some uncertainty about the term itself and how it applies to the sector. In the one-to-one conversations, the circular economy did not emerge consistently as a priority in its own right, although its principles came through strongly in discussions of community wealth, local resources, food systems, community assets and resource sharing, including a proposed "Library of Things" and shared pools of expertise.

For a future model, there is expertise and goodwill across the sector that a well-resourced model could draw on. The ambition for local economic benefit is strong, with an appetite for

commissioning and support to be delivered by the sector itself, but clearer language is needed to ensure everyone shares a view on the ambition.

OVERALL FINDINGS

Taken together, the engagement shows consistent support for infrastructure that is genuinely sector-led and representative, strengthens collaboration, provides practical organisational support and gives the sector a credible collective voice, and keeps resources within the sector. It also raises important questions about how that infrastructure is led, how organisations get into it, whose voices shape it, and whether it has the resources and influence to make a real difference. The evidence points to a model that builds on the strengths and expertise already in Lambeth's sector. That means connecting and resourcing existing expertise, making support easier to navigate, strengthening organisations at every stage of development, enabling meaningful grassroots participation, and creating ways for the sector to develop shared positions and influence statutory partners.

RISKS THE SECTOR IDENTIFIED

Respondents were optimistic about the direction of travel but identified four risks to guard against as a new model is developed. The most frequently raised was tokenistic engagement, where "sector-led" becomes symbolic rather than substantive because organisations are consulted without real influence over decisions. The second was the exclusion of smaller organisations, with larger or better-resourced organisations unintentionally dominating governance unless deliberate mechanisms support inclusive participation. The third was capacity, with the risk that the organisations closest to communities have the least capacity to shape future infrastructure unless participation is properly resourced. Fourth was a failure to deliver visible change, reflecting concern that previous consultations have not always led to meaningful action. All of these risks need to be actively considered on an ongoing basis as this work develops.

04 PREVIOUS CONSULTATIONS WITH THE SECTOR

The 2026 consultation builds on almost a decade of conversations with Lambeth's sector about what it needs. That history is a reminder of how much insight the sector has already given. It also shows why respondents now want to see action as well as consultation.

Figure 3: Consultations with Lambeth's VCSE sector since 2017, sized by number engaged

2017 – Equinox Consulting	108 online interviews with community and voluntary organisations on their characteristics, needs and support preferences, plus 18 in-depth interviews with VCSE organisations, 6 with commissioners and funders, and 5 with infrastructure providers in other boroughs. Full report: Beyond Survival: a thriving VCS in Lambeth (July 2017).
2023 – Lambeth Community Hubs Network	Online survey of the resources VCSE organisations most needed, with 18 groups responding.
2024 – High Trees	Engagement activities at a VCSE Networking Event, with 30 organisations represented.
2024 – High Trees	A targeted survey of capacity-building and support needs among Lambeth Local Forum Network members and associated grassroots organisations. 10 responses: Vassall and Coldharbour Forum, Brixton Neighbourhood Forum, Loughborough Junction Action Group, Norwood Forum, South Bank and Waterloo Neighbours, Clapham Park and Herne Hill Forum.
2024 – The Social Innovation Partnership	Lambeth Council commissioned report on the needs of the sector, engaging 34 VCS representatives (79% grassroots, 16% medium-sized, 4.2% large or established) through surveys, focus groups and a community co-analysis session.
2025 – Lambeth Council	Roundtable discussions at a Lambeth VCSE event with more than 100 representatives from the sector, focused on leadership and advocacy and on capacity-building support.

05 WHERE LAMBETH STANDS TODAY

strengths and gaps

WHAT LAMBETH ALREADY HAS

Lambeth starts from a position of real strength:

1. A vibrant sector of more than 700 groups working across a wide range of issues.
2. Peer-led partnerships that have emerged over the last decade, which show Lambeth's "organic resilience" and the sector's ability to organise itself.
3. Significant expertise already within the sector, with considerable potential for peer support, shared resources, referrals, mapping and collective working.
4. Strong willingness among sector leaders to contribute to the sector's future development.

WHAT IS HOLDING THE SECTOR BACK

1. The landscape is fragmented, with many organisations working in isolation despite serving similar communities. This leads to duplicated effort, limited resources being used inefficiently and collaboration opportunities being missed.
2. Some organisations can struggle to understand how existing provision fits together or where to go for support.
3. Smaller organisations can feel isolated and unsupported and have to build partnerships and navigate local systems on their own.
4. Competition for limited funding weakens relationships between organisations and reduces opportunities for collective action. Current funding arrangements encourage organisations to work independently rather than share expertise, resources and learning.

5. Larger, more established organisations can be felt to dominate strategic discussions. Smaller community-based organisations, specialist services and organisations representing minority communities struggle to influence decision-making.
6. Organisations are responding to increasingly complex community needs without enough investment in the infrastructure behind that work. They are absorbing referrals and responsibilities from stretched public services, and when one organisation closes or contracts, the demand shifts onto others.
7. Capacity constraints, including limited staffing and reliance on volunteers, make it hard for groups to take part in networks, partnerships and strategic discussions while keeping frontline services going.

06 WHAT THE SECTOR IS ASKING FOR

the emerging pillars of support

Across the mapping, the 2026 consultation and previous consultations, the sector has been clear that infrastructure in Lambeth needs to be coordinated and easy to access, inclusive, shaped by and representative of the whole sector, including smaller groups, and properly resourced so that it does not depend on organisations giving already stretched capacity for free. It should strengthen collaboration, increase strategic influence, build organisational and community resilience, and help the sector respond more effectively to increasingly complex community needs.

CONDITIONS FOR A THRIVING VCSE ECOSYSTEM

The engagement report concludes that the central challenge for the next phase is what is needed from infrastructure support that will allow Lambeth's VCSE ecosystem to thrive. The engagement points towards:

- genuine sector agency and representative, transparent governance
- sustainable core capacity alongside project funding
- resourced collaboration, peer support and collective leadership
- a 'Lambeth VCS' first model, where funding is kept within the sector rather than non-Lambeth organisations or non-VCS groups
- accessible professional and organisational development support
- a coherent, visible and easy-to-navigate infrastructure offer
- meaningful routes for grassroots and specialist organisations to influence decisions
- a credible collective voice with the Council, NHS, commissioners, funders, businesses and other institutions
- support across organisational lifecycles, including leadership, workforce and succession
- recognition and protection of community assets, spaces, relationships and institutional knowledge
- long-term investment, learning and accountability rather than another short-term intervention

The findings from Reports 1 and 2 in this series have been brought together into an emerging framework of six pillars of support, which is now being tested with the working groups.

The framework began with the four NAVCA functions described in Report 1 as a light-touch starting point, and as the evidence built up, the sector pointed to areas that go beyond them. Four of the pillars build on the tried and tested NAVCA functions, two of them evolving in response to what the sector said: partnerships and collaboration now explicitly recognises Lambeth's networks

and peer support, and volunteering has been extended to include the workforce, recognising the sector as a significant Lambeth employer. Two further pillars are distinctly Lambeth: community wealth and local economy, which brings together funding and commissioning, community spaces and the local economy, and insight, research and evidence, which builds on the borough's strengths in community based research.

NAVCA function	Emerging Lambeth pillar	What has changed
Leadership and advocacy	1. Leadership and advocacy	Retained
Partnerships and collaboration	2. Partnerships, networks and peer support	Evolved to recognise and resource the networks and peer support already in place
Capacity building	3. Practical support and capacity building	Retained, with funding and spaces now sitting in pillar 5
Volunteering	4. Volunteering and workforce	Evolved to include routes from volunteering into work and the sector as an employer
–	5. Community wealth and local economy	New and distinctly Lambeth
–	6. Insight, research and evidence	New and distinctly Lambeth

Table 2: How the emerging pillars relate to the four NAVCA functions

The framework is a starting point for co-design, and the working groups will test whether each pillar belongs in the model, how far it stretches the idea of infrastructure support, and which parts the sector is best placed to lead.

The sections below set out, for each pillar, what the sector asked for, what it would change, what needs to be true for it to work, and what it can build on in Lambeth.

01 LEADERSHIP AND ADVOCACY

Builds on the NAVCA function · making sure the sector is heard and represented

Why this pillar

The consultation drew a sharp line between being consulted and having real influence, and organisations wanted a sustained, collective voice with the Council, NHS, commissioners, businesses and funders. This pillar builds directly on the NAVCA leadership and advocacy function. Ideas emerging through the Pillars of Support framework include VCS assemblies feeding into a strategic group, fair and open selection of representatives for health, community safety, climate and economic boards, and "you said, we did" reporting back.

WHAT THE SECTOR ASKED FOR

- A clear overall vision and plan for the sector, with specific targets
- Clarity on the agendas of key stakeholders such as the Council and health bodies
- Formal representation in decision-making forums, so that influence is ongoing
- Transparency in VCSE funding and resource allocation
- Regular themed meetings to keep momentum and drive change

WHAT IT WOULD CHANGE

- Stronger relationships between the sector, local authorities, wider public services (including health) and businesses
- A stronger, more collective voice for the sector
- Communities better represented

WHAT NEEDS TO BE TRUE

- Decision-making genuinely rests with VCSE organisations, with the Council and other statutory partners playing an enabling rather than a determining role
- Statutory partners recognise the knowledge and value of the sector
- Every Lambeth VCSE organisation has the chance to engage with decision-making, with active involvement of grassroots organisations and those supporting underserved communities
- Sector leadership is resourced, recognising that convening, developing shared positions, advocating and co-producing policy all take time and money
- Governance is transparent
- Opportunities to engage are meaningful, not just consultation

Builds on Brixton Project's VCS Leadership Circle, mentoring programme and VCS Spotlight events; existing seats on the Neighbourhood and Wellbeing Delivery Alliance and the ICB strategic panel.

02 PARTNERSHIPS, NETWORKS AND PEER SUPPORT

Evolved from the NAVCA partnerships and collaboration function · bringing organisations and sectors together

Why this pillar

Organisations described working in silos and competing for the same funding, but the evidence also shows a sector that already provides significant peer support and collective leadership with little or no dedicated resource. This pillar evolves the NAVCA partnerships and collaboration function to recognise that, amplifying rather than replacing it by resourcing network leads and connecting the Lambeth Community Hubs Network, Lambeth Food Partnership, the local forum networks and thematic partnerships into the wider model.

WHAT THE SECTOR ASKED FOR

- A VCS database with contact details for VCS organisations
- Clear contact details for Lambeth Council officers
- A newsletter for VCSE groups to share information and promote opportunities
- Quarterly thematic networking, online and face to face
- Support to share resources and good practice
- Support to build partnerships and consortiums for joint working and joint bids
- Networks for people in similar roles across organisations, such as trustees and volunteer managers

WHAT IT WOULD CHANGE

- Joint funding bids
- Coordinated referral pathways
- Resource sharing between organisations
- Stronger strategic partnerships
- Better use of limited resources
- More joined-up support for residents
- Better visibility of existing organisations and partnerships

WHAT NEEDS TO BE TRUE

- Collaboration is resourced, recognising that attending meetings and developing partnerships takes time and money
- The peer support and collective leadership Lambeth organisations already provide, often with little or no dedicated resource, is recognised and amplified rather than replaced

Builds on Lambeth Community Hubs Network, the local forum networks, the Thriving partnerships, Lambeth Food Partnership and Building Young Brixton.

03 PRACTICAL SUPPORT AND CAPACITY BUILDING

Builds on the NAVCA capacity building function · helping organisations develop, sustain and grow

Why this pillar

Practical organisational support was one of the strongest findings from the one-to-one conversations, covering the governance, HR, legal, finance, safeguarding and fundraising expertise that organisations cannot always hold in-house. The framework adds ideas such as a fixed amount of one-to-one support, incubator support for new groups, and multilingual and accessible formats, building on the Lambeth Community Hubs Network peer-support model.

WHAT THE SECTOR ASKED FOR

- A one-stop shop for all services and support, face to face and online, with a single point of contact and a clear central information source
- A training and one-to-one support offer covering governance, including strategy, business planning, trustee recruitment and legal structures; leadership, safeguarding and financial management; partnership working, workforce development, HR and legal support; communications, including social media; managing buildings, including venue hire, health and safety and fire safety; operational management, including data protection, cyber security, first aid, IT, software and insurance; high-quality service delivery, including inclusive services, community engagement and measuring impact; support in times of crisis
- Fundraising support, including bid writing, funding clinics and workshops, feedback on applications, storytelling and impact evaluation for bids, and support to diversify income

WHAT IT WOULD CHANGE

- VCSE organisations can easily get the support they need, when they need it
- Organisations become more resilient and less reliant on responding to one short-term funding opportunity after another

WHAT NEEDS TO BE TRUE

- Support is tailored to where an organisation is in its development, as it establishes, grows and matures
- Organisations can find, understand and navigate the practical support offer
- Capacity building sits alongside direct support such as funding and workspace, which the framework now places within pillar 5

Builds on Lambeth Community Hubs Network's one-to-one support and resource library; current fundraising surgeries and meet-the-funder events; the Council's free safeguarding training.

04 VOLUNTEERING AND WORKFORCE

Evolved from the NAVCA volunteering function · extended to include the sector's workforce

Why this pillar

The June 2026 workshop asked that volunteering should feed into the workforce and recognised the VCS as an important employer in Lambeth, and the 2020 VCS Strategy estimated at least 22,000 people employed in the sector in the borough. This pillar extends the NAVCA volunteering function so that volunteering, training and paid work connect into clearer pathways, alongside workforce and leadership development, retention and succession planning.

WHAT THE SECTOR ASKED FOR

- Support to recruit and manage volunteers, a central volunteering hub and support to engage corporate volunteers
- Supported volunteering, linking young people to opportunities that develop their skills and supporting volunteers facing financial pressures and other barriers
- Clear pathways from volunteering into the workforce
- Workforce development linked to staff retention, progression, succession and keeping organisational knowledge
- Trustee development, succession planning and intergenerational leadership

WHAT IT WOULD CHANGE

- Organisations can recruit, support and keep volunteers
- Volunteering, training and paid work connect into clearer pathways
- Skills, expertise and organisational knowledge stay within Lambeth's sector

WHAT NEEDS TO BE TRUE

- Volunteering is accessible, recognising the pressures that volunteers themselves face
- The sector is recognised as a significant Lambeth employer, and workforce development is resourced rather than squeezed out by delivery pressures

Builds on the Council's Team Lambeth volunteer database, volunteer fairs and volunteer newsletter; volunteer management support through the Lambeth Community Hubs Network.

05 COMMUNITY WEALTH AND LOCAL ECONOMY

Distinctly Lambeth · bringing together funding, community spaces and the local economy

Why this pillar

Funding was the most consistently dominant theme in the one-to-one conversations, and later conversations raised insecure premises, short leases and threatened displacement. This distinctly Lambeth pillar brings together three connected strands: funding and investment, community spaces and assets, and local economy and social value, with community wealth currently used as the working term. Community buildings are the less glamorous side of infrastructure, but they are where much of the sector's work happens, and the ambition is for Lambeth to have amazing community spaces rather than run-down ones.

WHAT THE SECTOR ASKED FOR

- More core and unrestricted funding, and small funding pots for experimental projects
- Commissioned infrastructure support should prioritise Lambeth-based VCS organisations, rather than money going to for-profit consultants or non-Lambeth-based groups, keeping both the money and the skills in the sector
- A single webpage for all Council grants
- Access to affordable workspace and low-cost, accessible spaces to deliver activities
- Protection for the premises communities rely on, in the face of insecure premises, short leases and threatened displacement
- Retaining investment within Lambeth, creating local employment and skills, sharing resources and building community wealth

WHAT IT WOULD CHANGE

- Organisations are less reliant on short-term funding and better able to plan
- More of the investment flowing into Lambeth stays in Lambeth
- Community spaces are secure, affordable and well run

WHAT NEEDS TO BE TRUE

- Funding is long-term and flexible enough to cover core costs and collective work, not just frontline projects
- Terms such as circular economy or community wealth need to be clearly defined
- The offer covers all spaces being used by the VCS to deliver services, including commercially leased, faith and housing association spaces as well as Council-owned premises

Builds on Council grants and the VCS property leases; the 2021 VCS Assets Strategy; local grant programmes such as those run by Lambeth Community Research Network.

06 INSIGHT, RESEARCH AND EVIDENCE

Distinctly Lambeth · producing and holding the sector's knowledge

Why this pillar

Organisations asked for information that stays up to date and for support to measure impact, which was also the top support need for local forums in 2024, and the one-to-one conversations suggested a shared evidence base to demonstrate the sector's contribution without imposing a single evaluation model. Lambeth already has distinctive strengths here, including the Lambeth Community Research Network, the Community Research Exchange and the Lambeth Peer Action Collective (where young people lead research). This pillar would produce and hold the sector's knowledge, while pillar 1 uses that evidence to influence decisions.

WHAT THE SECTOR ASKED FOR

- A maintained map or directory of who does what, where, so that information does not quickly go out of date
- Support to measure impact
- A shared evidence base that demonstrates the sector's contribution

WHAT IT WOULD CHANGE

- The sector can evidence its value and use that evidence to influence commissioning, funding and policy
- Community insight feeds into decisions that affect Lambeth's communities

WHAT NEEDS TO BE TRUE

- Impact measurement is supported without imposing a single evaluation model
- Low uptake of support is not mistaken for low demand where awareness and visibility are weak

Builds on the Lambeth Community Research Network, Community Research Exchange, Lambeth Peer Action Collective, the Council's Open Data Platform, and the groups mapped by Brixton Project.

SHARED SERVICES ACROSS EVERY PILLAR

Alongside the pillars, a small set of shared services would run across the whole model, responding directly to the finding that support is only useful if organisations can find and navigate it. These are:

- a central platform (website), directory and funding finder as the front door
- a jobs and opportunities board
- one-to-one support
- a trusted supplier directory
- training and learning
- events, networks and a single sector newsletter

07 SUMMARY AND NEXT STEPS

IN SUMMARY

Mapping shows a large and resourceful sector of 700 active groups, many of them working on the same issues side by side. Consultation with the sector shows strong and consistent support for infrastructure that is connected and easy to navigate, genuinely sector-led and sector-delivered, representative of organisations of every size, and properly resourced so that it does not depend on the unpaid capacity of organisations already under pressure. The sector has been equally clear that trust will be built through shared decision-making and visible delivery. Taken together with almost a decade of previous consultation, this gives a clear mandate for change, and the next stage is about how that change should be delivered.

DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS

The engagement report makes ten draft recommendations, which will be tested through the second stage of engagement and taken forward in Report 3:

01 Agree the functions before deciding the structure: define the functions Lambeth needs before deciding what the mechanisms or structures for delivery should be.

02 Move into a genuinely sector-led co-design phase: a representative and appropriately resourced process through which organisations of different sizes, make-up and fields of work shape governance, priorities and delivery.

03 Invest in organisational capacity as infrastructure: governance, finance, HR, legal advice, safeguarding, fundraising, digital capability, leadership and workforce development.

04 Resource collaboration and collective leadership: recognising that convening, peer support, co-production, community engagement and shared positions take time and capacity.

05 Create a coherent route into support: a clear front door, maintained information and mapping, and better coordination between providers.

06 Build equity into governance and participation: deliberate mechanisms so smaller, specialist, grassroots and less visible organisations are not crowded out.

07 Strengthen the sector's collective influence: sustained routes to shape policy, commissioning, funding and strategic decisions.

08 Explore the mechanisms of shared infrastructure, community wealth/circular economy approaches: commissioning and funding within the sector itself, skills building, pooled expertise, resource sharing and community assets that retain capability and value in Lambeth.

09 Protect and develop existing community assets: organisations, leaders, trusted relationships, buildings, spaces and accumulated knowledge.

10 Secure long-term and blended investment: an investment proposition that recognises infrastructure as a long-term enabler of wider funding and public service investment.

NEXT STEPS

The consultation concludes that the engagement provides a strong enough evidence base to move from listening into co-design, with the nature of engagement changing from asking again what organisations need to involving them in designing, testing and governing the response, and with early visible action important in showing that participation has led to change.

The engagement so far has shown a clear mandate for change. The next question is how that change should be delivered. A second stage of engagement is taking place between September and December 2026, with four strands.

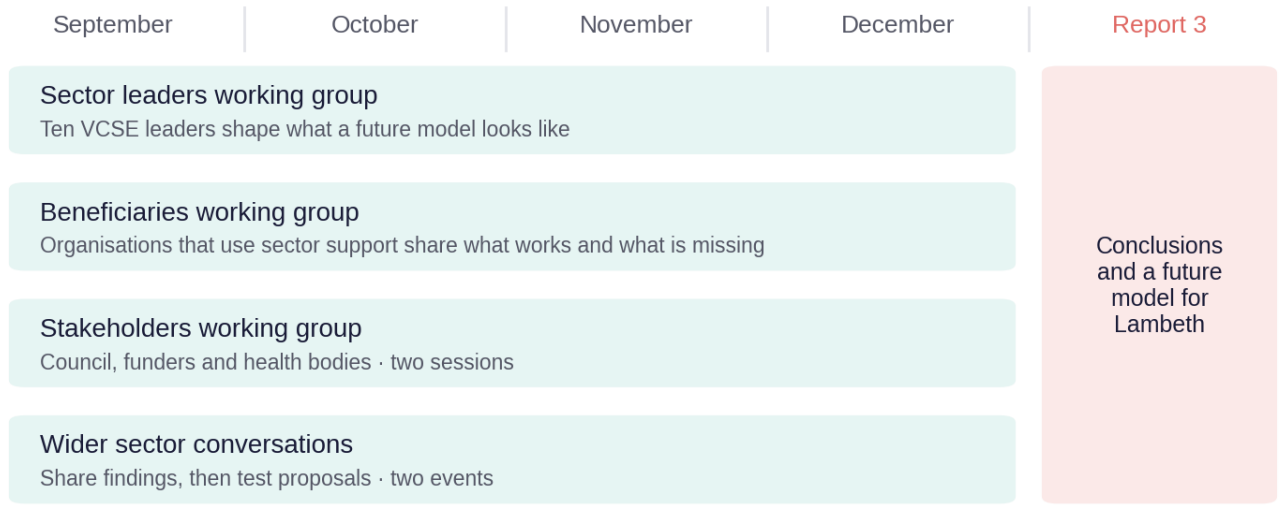

Figure 4: Second stage of engagement, September to December 2026

SECTOR LEADERS WORKING GROUP

Ten VCSE organisations from across Lambeth will take forward discussions on what a future model should look like and how it could meet the needs identified so far.

BENEFICIARIES WORKING GROUP

VCSE organisations that use infrastructure support, starting with a drop-in session on 13 October, will share what support they currently use, what works well and what is missing, so that a future model is shaped by the organisations it is there to serve.

STAKEHOLDERS WORKING GROUP

Lambeth Council, local funders (Impact on Urban Health and Walcot Foundation) and local health bodies, including Lambeth Together, will come together over two sessions. They will reflect on the findings, contribute their views on what a future model needs, and explore how it could be resourced.

WIDER CONVERSATIONS WITH THE SECTOR

Two events will take place. The first will share the findings from mapping and engagement and ask organisations how well they reflect their own experience. The second will give organisations the chance to test and challenge proposals for future infrastructure models in Lambeth.

The third and final report in this series will set out the conclusions from these conversations and how a future model of VCSE infrastructure support could be delivered in Lambeth.

08 SOURCES AND REFERENCES

This report draws on the following sources. Full findings from the 2026 consultation are set out in Pierre Consulting's engagement report.

- Brixton Project (October 2025 – July 2026), mapping of Lambeth's VCSE sector and digital VCS directory. thebrixtonproject.com/vcs
- Brixton Project (2026), Lambeth VCS Ecosystem map, interactive network and geographic map of Lambeth's VCSE sector. lambethvcsecosystem.netlify.app
- Superhighways (July 2025), London VCSE data dashboard, drawing on Charity Commission, Companies House and 360Giving data. datawise.london/london-vcse-dashboard
- Pierre Consulting (August 2026), Lambeth VCSE Future Engagement Findings and Recommendations.
- Pierre Consulting (2026), Lambeth VCSE one-to-one conversation findings and supporting data.
- Equinox Consulting (July 2017), Beyond Survival: a thriving VCS in Lambeth. Full report
- Lambeth Community Hubs Network (2023), survey of VCSE resource needs.
- High Trees (2024), engagement activities at a VCSE Networking Event.
- High Trees (February 2024), Lambeth Local Forum Network support needs survey.
- The Social Innovation Partnership (May 2024), VCS workshop report on the needs of the VCSE sector in Lambeth, commissioned by Lambeth Council.
- Lambeth Council (2025), themes from the leadership and advocacy, and capacity building and fundraising, roundtable discussions at a Lambeth VCSE event.
- NAVCA (March 2026), Local VCSE infrastructure: what does good look like? Full report
- Lambeth VCS Futures (September 2026), Pillars of Support: an emerging framework for Lambeth VCS infrastructure, working draft for the working groups and stakeholders.