

LONDON BOROUGH OF CAMDEN	WARDS: All
REPORT TITLE Annual Report of the Cabinet Member for Voluntary Sector, Equalities, and Cohesion – 2023/24	
REPORT OF Cabinet Member for Voluntary Sector, Equalities, and Cohesion	
FOR SUBMISSION TO Culture and Environment Scrutiny Committee	DATE 9 December 2024
SUMMARY OF REPORT <p>The Cabinet Member for Voluntary Sector, Equalities, and Cohesion will provide 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:</p> <p>Muhammed Ravat Cabinet Officer Corporate Services London Borough of Camden 5 Pancras Square London N1C 4AG muhammed.ravat@camden.gov.uk</p>	
RECOMMENDATIONS <p>The Committee is asked to note and comment on the contents of the report.</p>	

Signed: *N. Shah*

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

Date: 27 November 2024

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Camden stands as a beacon of diversity, resilience, and inclusivity. As Cabinet Member for Voluntary Sector, Equalities, and Cohesion, I am honoured to help guide Camden's work to ensure that every resident has opportunities to thrive. Our borough's richness in cultures, beliefs, and experiences is a profound source of strength, uniting us as we respond to both local and global challenges that impact our community. Camden's diversity inspires a shared resilience, fostering an environment where mutual support and understanding are at the core of our community.
- 1.2 In 2024, *We Make Camden* continues to shape our ambitions, serving as a guiding vision to create a borough where "everyone has a chance to succeed and no one is left behind." This year, Camden has focused on amplifying residents' voices, particularly those from communities that have often been 'easier to ignore.' Through initiatives like the *We Make Camden VCS* Investment Programme, we are empowering neighbourhoods, promoting social action, and addressing inequalities head-on to build a more inclusive Camden.
- 1.3 Camden's strength lies in both its diversity and its resilience in the face of global events that resonate within our communities. As an interconnected borough, we recognise that social, political, and economic developments around the world impact lives here at home. This year, our work with the Camden Interfaith Network exemplified this commitment. Through initiatives such as interfaith dialogue workshops and the *Borough of Sanctuary* programme, Camden has fostered crucial spaces for understanding and allyship. The *Borough of Sanctuary* accreditation, awarded in 2024, recognises Camden's efforts in creating a compassionate and welcoming environment for all, including refugees and asylum seekers. Events like the Interfaith Forum and the Camden Faith and Belief Awards have further highlighted the borough's commitment to fostering cohesion and celebrating the contributions of its diverse communities.
- 1.4 Our voluntary and community sector (VCS) remains an essential support network, particularly in challenging times. Camden has continued to increase its investment in this sector, with initiatives like the Resilience Fund ensuring that organisations can remain adaptive and responsive to our residents' needs. These organisations play a crucial role in providing essential services, from food and mental health support to community advice, reinforcing the safety net that Camden's communities rely on. We are proud to invest in leadership, capacity, and volunteer development through the Infrastructure Fund, enhancing the sector's ability to serve our communities effectively.

- 1.5 Camden's mission to ensure that our borough's leadership, public spaces, and services reflect the breadth of our community has guided much of our work this year. Initiatives like the Camden Equity Network and the Inclusion Calendar continue to advance representation and inclusion across protected characteristics, including race, gender, disability, sexual orientation, age, and religion or belief, as well as all other protected characteristics. These efforts celebrate Camden's shared values, reinforcing its identity as a place where diversity is embraced and championed.
- 1.6 Promoting health and wellbeing is integral to Camden's vision of equity. In 2024, we expanded community health initiatives to ensure accessible mental health support, wellness programmes, and vital services across the borough. This year, we prioritised prevention by building community strength, creating spaces where residents can connect, share, and feel supported. Camden is nurturing a healthier, more cohesive community where wellbeing is a priority for all.
- 1.7 Camden's commitment to neighbourhood empowerment remains evident in our approach to community development. Initiatives like the Warm Spaces Campaign and the *We Make Camden Kit*, administered by Camden Giving, empower residents to shape their own futures and strengthen community bonds. By investing in grassroots projects, we encourage social action, civic pride, and local ownership across our neighbourhoods, grounded in Camden's belief in the power of resident leadership and community resilience.
- 1.8 As we look toward 2025, Camden remains dedicated to building a borough that is inclusive, equitable, and resilient. We will continue to engage with diverse communities, expand our support for the VCS, and work in partnership with residents to drive meaningful change. Together, we are making Camden a place where no one is left behind, and all communities play a vital role in our shared journey toward a fairer and more inclusive future.

2. Camden's Voluntary Sector

2.1 Overview of the VCS

- 2.1.1 Camden benefits from a strong and dynamic Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS), comprising over 2,400 organisations ranging from grassroots community groups to large, established charities. This sector plays a pivotal role in tackling some of the most pressing issues in the borough, providing essential services, creating innovative solutions, and amplifying community voices to support and empower residents across Camden.
- 2.1.2 Beyond delivering critical services, the VCS fosters cohesion and resilience, embodying Camden's values and the goals outlined in the *We Make Camden*

vision. Camden Council remains committed to building community strength by supporting this sector through funding initiatives, capacity-building programmes, and collaborative partnerships aimed at addressing inequalities and fostering social change.

2.2 VCS Funding & Support Initiatives

2.2.1 Strategic Partners Fund (SPF)

From 2017 to 2024, the Strategic Partners Fund provided multi-year core funding to organisations working in areas of community empowerment, health, and equality. This vital funding stream strengthened Camden's VCS by enabling organisations to address urgent community needs while planning for the long term. The projects supported by the SPF have positively impacted thousands of residents by amplifying community voices, enhancing services, and advancing equity. Camden has applied learning from the SPF to design and develop its new *We Make Camden VCS Investment Programme 2024–2031*.

2.2.2 We Make Camden VCS Investment Programme

In 2024, Camden launched the *We Make Camden VCS Investment Programme*, a transformative 7-year commitment providing £4 million annually to the VCS. This grant ecosystem focuses on preventative measures, fostering collaboration, and driving social action to tackle inequalities. Key funding initiatives include:

- **Community Partner Fund:** This £1.9 million annual fund supports 38 partner organisations embedded in Camden's communities. By providing unrestricted, long-term funding, the Council empowers organisations to adapt flexibly to changing needs while leveraging additional external funding. This innovative approach has earned national recognition from the Institute for Voluntary Action Research (IVAR) for its open and trusting model of grant-making.
- **Infrastructure Fund:** Committing £180,000 annually over seven years, this fund supports three key partners in capacity building, volunteering, and leadership development for the VCS. This long-term funding ensures smaller organisations have access to critical support and resources.
- **We Make Camden Project Fund:** Launching in November 2024, this fund will complement micro-grants by supporting social action initiatives and creative responses to Camden's missions. With an emphasis on collaboration and shared learning, the fund will help address structural and immediate needs.

2.3 Key Initiatives Addressing the Cost-of-Living Crisis

2.3.1 Warm Spaces Campaign

Amid the cost-of-living crisis, Camden mobilised a network of libraries, community centres, and faith organisations to create *Warm Spaces*—welcoming hubs where residents could connect, seek support, and stay warm. These spaces have become vital community resources, reflecting Camden’s commitment to wellbeing and resilience.

2.3.2 Cost-of-Living Fund

The Council allocated £2 million to support essential needs like food and energy for Camden’s most vulnerable residents. In early 2024, £450,000 was distributed to over 30 organisations, bolstering community services and expanding the reach of warm spaces.

2.3.3 Cost-of-Living Community Response

From December 2023 to January 2024, eight borough-wide meetings brought together 145 organisations, including VCS groups, schools, faith organisations, and community activists, to map needs and coordinate responses. Through collaborative mapping and needs assessments, £456,000 in grants were awarded to 36 organisations to provide services responding directly to the impact of rising living costs.

- Key initiatives funded included community laundries, healthy cooking classes, financial wellbeing training, youth and family programmes, and social activities that empower residents to build resilience while addressing immediate needs.
- Key areas of focus included community action, coordination and collaboration, and impactful communication. Organisations were encouraged to follow principles such as prioritising prevention, empowering communities, and tackling inequalities.
- Examples of community-led provisions include financial wellbeing training, community cookery sessions, breakfast clubs, repair and restart workshops, and food-growing initiatives.

The success of these initiatives has led to increased citizen action, with residents mobilising to support one another. To sustain this momentum, the Council has committed to fund Camden Giving to run the *We Make Camden Kit* for an additional two years.

2.4 Resilience Fund

- 2.4.1 Launched in 2021, the Resilience Fund has delivered over £2 million to support Camden’s VCS in adapting to financial pressures and increasing service demands. The VCS Resilience Fund has been designed to support

Camden's VCS to be sustainable and resilient in a rapidly changing and increasingly challenging economic and social context. This ensures we can collectively deliver our shared ambitions for the borough. Grants are aimed at addressing key organisational risks, putting organisations on a more sustainable footing, and fostering a strong, sustainable, and independent VCS that effectively responds to residents' needs.

- 2.4.2 In 2024, 42 organisations benefited from Resilience Fund grants, enabling them to address financial liabilities, stabilise operations, and build leadership capacity. Insights from this programme have fed into the *Camden State of the Sector* report, highlighting challenges like increasing service demands, rising costs, and funding pressures. This learning will inform the design of a new organisational foundations fund in 2025.

2.5 Camden Advice Network - Debt and Financial Hardship Support

- 2.5.1 The Camden Advice Network (CAN) has been pivotal in supporting residents facing financial hardship. Over its five years, CAN has enabled VCS partners to secure an average of £2 million annually in match funding. The network has raised £40 million in benefits and reduced £1.5 million in debt from 2021–2024.
- 2.5.2 Supported by a £1 million annual investment, CAN facilitates quarterly forums with community providers like Citizens Advice Camden, Age UK Camden, and Mary Ward Legal Centre. These sessions assess community needs, share best practices, and promote collaboration. The *We Make Camden Food Mission* further enhances CAN's efforts, embedding financial literacy and tailored support for residents.

2.6 Voluntary Community Sector's Partnership Initiatives

- 2.6.1 **Collaborative Efforts with Key Stakeholders**
Camden co-convenes key statutory and voluntary community sector (VCS) providers, including those offering advice, food support, social prescribing, employment, and mental health services, to address identified gaps and improve service delivery.
- 2.6.2 **Improving Consistency of Awareness, Signposting, and Referrals**
The Council has enhanced processes around signposting and referrals across various support systems, ensuring residents receive timely and accurate information and services.

2.6.3 Enhancing Equity, Access, and Support

Targeted interventions provide comprehensive 'wraparound support' for residents on low incomes, ensuring equitable access to services, particularly for digitally excluded residents, older adults, and those with English as a second language.

2.6.4 Training and Best Practice Sharing

Training programmes and best practice sharing initiatives are cascaded among service providers, enhancing their capacity and effectiveness in addressing poverty-related issues.

2.6.5 Developing Peer Support Networks

Camden promotes peer support spaces where residents and service providers can share experiences, offer mutual support, and collaborate on solutions.

2.6.6 Data Collection and Campaigning

The Council gathers data and case studies to inform campaigns aimed at tackling poverty, influencing policy, and securing resources.

2.6.7 Fostering Collaboration and Shared Information

By developing a shared view of information, advice, and support services, Camden ensures seamless collaboration and communication among all stakeholders, strengthening the VCS ecosystem.

2.7 Summary of Achievements and Future Direction

2.7.1 The Camden VCS sector continues to make remarkable strides, driven by collaborative partnerships, strategic funding, and a shared commitment to social equity. The successes of 2024 demonstrate Camden Council's dedication to fostering a resilient, inclusive, and impactful VCS sector capable of addressing the borough's most urgent challenges. The Council looks forward to further developing these initiatives in 2025, deepening support for marginalised communities, enhancing partnerships, and advancing Camden's vision of a connected, inclusive, and empowered borough.

3. COHESION AND COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT

3.1 Interfaith Network and Faith-Based Collaboration

3.1.1 Camden's Interfaith Network remains a cornerstone of our community cohesion efforts, fostering unity, understanding, and collaboration across diverse faith groups in the borough. The Interfaith Network provides a platform for faith communities to engage in meaningful dialogue, share resources, and work together on shared community challenges.

- 3.1.2 Delivered in partnership with the Faith & Belief Forum, this year marked the inaugural Camden Faith & Belief Awards, celebrating organisations and individuals who contribute tirelessly to Camden's social fabric. Recognised projects include the Faiths Forum for London, awarded in the "Building Connected Communities and Neighbourhoods" category for hosting interfaith iftars that united over 500 attendees. Lifeafterhummus, a community benefit society, won the "Tackling Poverty" award for its vital support services, including food distribution, cooking classes, and waste prevention activities. Hopscotch Women's Centre was honoured in the "Welcoming and Supporting Refugees" category for helping over 1,500 Afghan refugees resettle in Camden. The "Inspiring Children and Young People" award went to King's Cross Brunswick Neighbourhood Association for its Youth and Sports Programme, which engages over 200 young people.
- 3.1.3 Winners of the Faith & Belief Awards were also invited to lunch with the Mayor, where their contributions were celebrated further. Profiles of these organisations and individuals are being featured as case studies on the We Make Camden website to inspire and engage the wider community.
- 3.1.4 Individual contributions were also celebrated, including Stuart Diamond of Mitzvah Day, whose initiative brings people of all faiths together for volunteer work; Matt Mahmood-Ogston of the Naz and Matt Foundation, which provides trauma-informed support for LGBTQ+ individuals from conservative cultural backgrounds; and Sharley Newitt of the NW5 Project, which supports children and families from over 20 nationalities in Kentish Town. These recognitions highlight Camden's commitment to nurturing community cohesion through faith-inspired action and inclusive initiatives.
- 3.1.5 The Interfaith Network delivered a robust programme of events throughout the year, with a particular focus on Interfaith Week in November. Highlights included a tree-planting ceremony in Kilburn Grange Park last year and a series of events this year to bring communities together in celebration of their shared values. These activities reflect Camden's commitment to fostering dialogue and collaboration across faiths.

3.2 No Place for Hate Campaign

- 3.2.1 Camden's "No Place for Hate" campaign remains integral to our mission of creating a safe, inclusive borough. Following high-profile riots in the UK that led to unrest, I collaborated closely with Council Leader Richard Olszewski, community safety teams, and the Police to provide reassurance across Camden's communities. This involved conducting community visits to places of worship and community centres, where we met with residents, offered support, and shared guidance on reporting hate crimes.

- 3.2.2 Camden's Community Safety Team and local Police increased patrols, focusing on areas near places of worship and other community spaces. This proactive approach demonstrates Camden's unwavering commitment to community safety and to ensuring residents feel secure and supported. The campaign includes educational resources, public outreach, and partnerships with community leaders, all aimed at fostering a culture of respect and mutual understanding.
- 3.2.3 Through the "No Place for Hate" initiative, Camden emphasises that hate and intolerance have no place here. The campaign empowers residents to report hate crimes and provides essential support to those affected, reinforcing Camden's identity as a borough that celebrates diversity and actively combats prejudice.

3.3 Camden's Refugee Response

3.3.1 Borough of Sanctuary

- 3.3.1 In 2024, Camden was officially recognised as a Borough of Sanctuary, celebrating its rich history of welcoming and supporting refugees and asylum seekers. This prestigious accreditation also marks Camden's integration into the City of Sanctuary Network, aligning the borough with other UK local authorities dedicated to creating a culture of welcome and compassion for displaced people.
- 3.3.1 As a Borough of Sanctuary, Camden has been proactive in resettling over 250 Afghan refugees and helping them integrate into the local community. Since March 2022, Camden residents have hosted around 1,000 Ukrainian refugees, supported by dedicated council services that facilitate the transition into independent housing. Camden's commitment to a welcoming environment has fostered a community spirit that uplifts those fleeing conflict and persecution.
- 3.3.1 To celebrate our refugee communities and their contributions, Camden hosted a week of activities from 22–28 July 2024. Events included art exhibitions, children's yoga sessions, and storytelling workshops, each highlighting the unique journeys and resilience of refugees in Camden. This celebration underscores Camden's dedication to inclusivity and community cohesion, recognising the vital contributions refugees make to the borough.

3.4 Empowering Neighbourhoods through Social Action

3.4.1 Warm Welcome Spaces Campaign

- 3.4.1 In response to the ongoing cost-of-living crisis, Camden's Warm Welcome Spaces campaign provided essential support to residents facing financial hardship. Over 50 sites across the borough—including libraries, community centres, and voluntary sector locations—have served as crucial hubs offering warmth, resources, and support.
- 3.4.1 Approximately 40% of Warm Welcome sites are managed by VCS organisations, many of which were beneficiaries of the Cost-of-Living Community Response Fund. These spaces offer a variety of services tailored to residents' needs, such as community meals, homework clubs, laundry facilities, and health advice. Notable examples include the London Irish Centre, which provides advice, social meals, and pantry access, and the Gospel Oak Living Room, which offers after-school support and food cooperative services.
- 3.4.1 Cross-portfolio initiatives further enhanced Camden's Warm Welcome Spaces campaign. For example, coffee mornings hosted at Kentish Town Leisure Centre provided vital support for seniors, offering social activities, light refreshments, and opportunities to engage with health and wellbeing programmes tailored for older residents. Libraries and children's centres also played a pivotal role in the campaign, offering warm, welcoming environments where residents could access information, participate in activities, and connect with community services. These efforts reflect Camden's holistic approach to addressing the cost-of-living crisis and fostering community resilience.
- 3.4.1 This campaign is central to Camden's approach to building resilient, empowered communities. By meeting residents' needs and fostering a sense of solidarity, Warm Welcome Spaces embody the borough's commitment to supporting vulnerable residents and enhancing overall community wellbeing.

3.4.2 We Make Camden Kit

- 3.4.2 Launched in partnership with Camden Giving, the We Make Camden Kit enables residents to start community projects addressing local challenges. Since its inception in 2021, the initiative has funded over 325 projects, empowering residents to make meaningful contributions to Camden's missions, including youth engagement, social cohesion, and community health.
- 3.4.2 The Kit provides resources and support to residents who have firsthand experience with Camden's challenges, helping them implement solutions that resonate deeply with the community. Each project funded by the We Make

Camden Kit reinforces the borough's commitment to community-driven change, fostering an empowered and inclusive Camden.

- 3.4.2 Through initiatives like the We Make Camden Kit, Camden continues to encourage active citizenship and local leadership, ensuring that residents from all backgrounds have the opportunity to shape the future of their borough.

3.4.3 Youth Engagement Projects and Community Champions

- 3.4.3 Camden's Community Partner Fund has supported numerous organisations focused on youth engagement and social action, including The Winch, Fitzrovia Youth in Action, and St Mary's. These organisations create opportunities for young people to lead projects, build skills, and contribute positively to their communities, advancing Camden's mission of empowering the next generation.
- 3.4.3 Additionally, Camden's Community Champions programme is now in its fifth year, operating in three council estate clusters—Kentish Town, Kilburn, and Regents Park. This initiative supports residents in identifying and delivering social action projects that address local health and wellbeing priorities. By fostering a sense of ownership and civic responsibility, Community Champions continue to enhance community resilience and cohesion across Camden.

4. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IN THE BOROUGH

4.1 Camden's Diversity Mission

- 4.1.1 Camden remains fully committed to our Diversity Mission, a key pillar of our ambition to ensure that, by 2030, the borough's leadership roles are as diverse as our communities. This long-term goal is part of the *We Make Camden* vision, guiding our work to create a borough where "everyone has a chance to succeed, and no one is left behind." In 2024, we continued to make substantial strides toward diversifying leadership by supporting representation from a broad spectrum of ethnic, gender, and marginalised groups across the borough.
- 4.1.2 To advance our Diversity Mission, Camden has prioritised strategic pathways to leadership that directly empower residents from historically underrepresented communities. This year, we focused on diversifying roles in school governance, business boards, charity trusteeships, and tenant and resident groups. By increasing access to leadership positions and providing

resources for individuals stepping into these roles, Camden continues to build a community where leadership reflects the population it serves.

- 4.1.3 Our focus has also included collaborating with partners and commissioned organisations, encouraging them to adopt the same inclusive values that Camden upholds. Through this, we are fostering an environment where transformational change in representation and inclusion is championed throughout the borough. These partnerships reinforce our commitment to a leadership structure that truly represents all of Camden.

4.2 Inclusion Initiatives and Key Campaigns

- 4.2.1 **Camden Equity Network:** Established as a community of practice, the Camden Equity Network has become a vital forum for equity and inclusion. It brings together stakeholders, community leaders, and organisations to share best practices on tackling inequalities and promoting diversity. With themed meetings aligned to Camden's *Inclusion Calendar*, the Equity Network fosters a collaborative approach to advancing Camden's equality and diversity agenda. This year, the network has been instrumental in uniting diverse voices across the borough, encouraging active participation in creating a fairer Camden.
- 4.2.2 **Camden Inclusion Calendar:** Now in its second year, Camden's Inclusion Calendar has been a resounding success, drawing attention to critical dates and themes around diversity and inclusion. The 2024 calendar includes over 200 important dates—holy days, special events, and festivals—with a special monthly focus on various aspects of equity, from neurodiversity to community strength. Accessibility has been a priority; the calendar is available in formats compatible with assistive technology, ensuring universal access. Each month's theme, from Pride Month to Community Strength in November, reflects Camden's commitment to an inclusive and cohesive borough that celebrates the contributions of all residents.
- 4.2.3 **Brave Cafés Initiative:** In 2024, Camden launched the "Brave Cafés" initiative together with Leeds City Council as part of an innovate project funding provided by the Intercultural Cities Network part of the Council of Europe. These were based on Camden developed Brave Space guidelines in partnership with Leeds and Camden's community partners. The aim of the sessions was to test out the use of the guidelines as an effective tool in better community engagement particularly on difficult or emotive conversations. Camden held four sessions encouraging, an open dialogue on sensitive topics, fostering greater understanding and resilience within the community. With attendance ranging from 40 to 70 participants per session, the initiative will now begin to write up findings and produce a joint report by the two respective councils on the outcomes of this exciting project. Camden's partnership with Leeds on this project marks a significant milestone, reflecting

a shared commitment to tackling similar social challenges through collaborative, impactful action.

4.2.4 Key Campaigns and Events: Camden has continued to champion key initiatives promoting inclusivity, such as Black History Season, the No Place for Hate Campaign, and other equality-driven events. By celebrating these themes and addressing the unique challenges faced by different groups, Camden demonstrates our commitment to fostering unity and mutual respect. Our campaigns are designed to empower communities and strengthen the connections among residents, reinforcing Camden's identity as a borough of diversity and inclusion.

4.3 Supporting the LGBTQ+ Community

4.3.1 Camden's support for the LGBTQ+ community has been unwavering, and in 2024 we continued to expand services and initiatives aimed at promoting visibility, inclusion, and wellbeing. Through our partnership with Forum+, Camden offers a range of services supporting LGBTQ+ residents, including events such as LGBTQ+ History Month and Pride. The Forum+ Employment Readiness Programme is a particular highlight, equipping LGBTQ+ individuals with skills and guidance to enter the workforce with confidence. This programme has been pivotal in breaking down barriers to employment and fostering a more inclusive local economy.

4.3.2 Mental health and crisis support remains a critical focus, especially for LGBTQ+ residents facing homelessness, discrimination, or mental health challenges. Camden is committed to ensuring that all residents have access to essential support services, creating safe spaces and opportunities for connection. By addressing the specific needs of LGBTQ+ residents, Camden strengthens its vision of inclusivity and equity.

4.4 Progress on Disability Inclusion

4.4.2 This year, the Disability Oversight Panel (DOP) also focused on the implementation of Camden's Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Strategy, assessing the progress made and identifying areas for further improvement to better support residents with disabilities. The panel's insights are invaluable, fostering a collaborative environment where policies and services reflect the needs of disabled individuals. Camden's commitment to accessibility was also underscored in our Inclusion Calendar, with December dedicated to Disability Awareness, featuring events and discussions that promote understanding and empathy.

4.4.3 The Council's offer on sport and physical activity opportunities for disabled citizens in Camden underscores our commitment to ensuring that leisure and sports facilities are inclusive and accessible to all. In September, Talacre Community Leisure Centre hosted its annual "Active for All Day," an event

dedicated to disabled children and young people. This event provided opportunities for physical activity, social engagement, and community-building, aligning with Camden's ethos of inclusivity and empowerment.

- 4.4.4 Camden Council has also developed a comprehensive guide for disability access to leisure facilities, highlighting the variety of activities available for disabled residents. This guide includes resources for adaptive sports, inclusive fitness classes, and social activities that cater to a wide range of needs, ensuring that all residents can engage with leisure services in a meaningful way. These efforts reflect Camden's unwavering commitment to fostering an environment where everyone, regardless of ability, has the opportunity to participate and thrive.

4.5 Recognising Care Experience as a Protected Characteristic

- 4.5.1 In 2024, Camden took a historic step by officially recognising "care experience" as a locally protected characteristic, underscoring our commitment to supporting residents who have been in care. This initiative aligns with our broader goals to tackle social inequality and foster real change.
- 4.5.2 The decision to recognise care experience followed a comprehensive debate and review, where Camden assessed the unique needs of care-experienced residents and the challenges they face. As a result, we now join a progressive group of councils working to improve life outcomes for care-experienced individuals. This includes support in education, employment, and social mobility, as well as enhanced access to mentorship and council services.
- 4.5.3 New initiatives have since been introduced, ranging from community support networks to expanded access to council resources. This milestone reflects Camden's leadership in promoting equality and demonstrates our commitment to ensuring that all residents, regardless of their background, are valued and supported. By embedding this recognition into local policies, Camden strives to create a more inclusive environment where care-experienced individuals can thrive and access the same opportunities as others in the borough.

4.6 Strategy for Diversity in the Public Realm

- 4.6.1 Camden's Strategy for Diversity in the Public Realm (SDPR) continues to deliver on its mission of making Camden's public spaces more reflective of its communities. The five-year action plan, launched in 2023, has already seen the implementation of projects that celebrate Camden's diverse heritage. Public spaces have been transformed through commissioned art, renaming

initiatives, and events that honour individuals and groups from historically underrepresented backgrounds.

4.6.2 SDPR's focus on inclusivity extends to high streets, planning, and community regeneration, ensuring that residents feel connected to the spaces they inhabit. Key initiatives this year included partnerships with Camden Black Creatives and the ongoing Camden People's Museum project. Each of these projects helps bring Camden's rich history to life while fostering a shared sense of identity and pride in our public spaces.

4.6.3 Camden's approach aligns with the Mayor of London's Commission for Diversity in the Public Realm, making Camden a leader in creating public spaces that are safe, welcoming, and reflective of London's diverse population. Through our ongoing efforts, Camden's public realm strategy will continue to honour the stories and contributions of its residents, ensuring that everyone feels represented and celebrated.

4.7 Building on Equalities and Disproportionality Strategy

4.7.1 Camden's Equalities and Disproportionality Strategy, currently under development, aims to provide a long-term framework for addressing inequality across all council services. This strategy, created in close collaboration with Camden's communities, will incorporate ambitious goals for equity, inclusion, and social justice. Areas of focus will include social mobility, refugee support, and community cohesion, setting a comprehensive agenda for tackling systemic inequalities.

4.7.2 The Camden Equalities service, established in 2020, will oversee the development and implementation of this strategy, monitoring progress and adapting initiatives to ensure that equality remains a central focus of Camden's service delivery. The strategy represents Camden's unwavering dedication to social justice and a fairer future for all.

4.8 Diversity in Camden's Workforce

4.8.1 One of the things we are most proud of at Camden is our strong sense of values and passion for social justice. We are one of the most diverse places in the country and as an employer we continue to be sector leading in our work to be fair and inclusive and representative of the community we serve.

4.8.2 We were one of the first organisations to adopt the London Living Wage. Further to this, £1million has been invested in the period from 2023 to 2025 in the bottom of our pay scales to ensure a minimum earnings guarantee that is set above the London Living Wage (£16.41 per hour compared to London Living Wage of £13.85 per hour). This is an investment to help our lowest paid staff in the cost of living crisis. We know from our work that the cost-of-living crisis disproportionately affected women and people from Black Asian and

other ethnic communities. This was exacerbated by inflexible work and high childcare costs (a full-time nursery place in Camden is £1,200 per month). By providing a minimum earnings guarantee and focusing on flexibility (we also offer childcare deposit loans to help with upfront costs) we can help to put right the historical barriers that have led to women and diverse communities having less access to good quality work.

- 4.8.3 Being open and transparent with data has underpinned Camden's work on inclusion. We publish our pay gaps by gender, ethnicity and disability (an extension to the statutory requirement).
- 4.8.4 Building on publishing our gender pay gap we have worked hard to ensure we support women at work. In 2024, Camden was accredited by Bloody Good Employers as being an organisation that is inclusive of those who menstruate. This includes awareness sessions for managers and the provision of free period products in all our staff workplaces. In parallel we've launched a menopause commitment, which seeks to challenge stereotypes as well as offer practical support with workplace adjustments (for example flexible working, better uniforms and USB fans). We've also focused on violence against women and girls. Everyone at Camden now receives basic training on how to recognise the signs of domestic abuse and support someone in making a disclosure. We are building a culture where there is no longer stigma and secrecy that can often further isolate survivors from their families, friends and society.
- 4.8.5 In 2020 after hearing from a wide variety of staff groups across the organisation we launched Camden's Race Equality Action Plan. This saw us revisit our end-to-end recruitment processes to ensure they were fair and unbiased. Part of this work has included the launch of our inclusive recruitment volunteer pool, which has recruited staff from across the organisation, particularly Black, Asian and other ethnic staff to take part in the recruitment process. This ensures we open up the transparency of our processes and are always able to ensure diverse representation on our panels.
- 4.8.6 We also operate no all-white shortlists at level 5 and above and anonymised recruitment. There are now 253 Black, Asian or Other ethnicity staff within grades Level 5 to Level 7 accounting for 29.5% of all staff in these grades. Looking specifically at Chief Officers (Level 7) where 38.46% of staff are Black, Asian or Other ethnicity, this group is representative of the Camden Residential population (40.48%) and almost representative of the workforce (43.58%). We've made good progress improving representation at all levels with our top 30 leaders now representing the community that we serve for the first time.

- 4.8.7 More recently we have supported staff who were impacted by the war in the Middle East. We set up dedicated wellbeing pages on our staff intranet and extended the trauma support in place. Alongside the responsive work, we are tackling the systemic causes of discrimination. This includes the launch of a reporting discrimination hub (designed in partnership with staff groups), underpinned by the principles of restorative justice and healing.
- 4.8.8 All of this sets the tone for who we are as an organisation and what we value. We want our employees to feel seen and safe and able to do their best work.

5. HEALTH AND WELLBEING THROUGH LEISURE

5.1 Camden's Commitment to Accessible and Inclusive Leisure and Wellbeing

- 5.1.1 Camden's Leisure service exemplifies the Council's commitment to accessible health and wellbeing initiatives tailored for all ages and backgrounds. The team collaborates with community partners to offer an inclusive range of physical activities, promoting mental well-being and resilience across diverse demographic groups. Whether through youth engagement or services for older adults and individuals with disabilities, the service actively supports Camden's mission to build a healthier, more connected borough.

5.2 Talacre Community Sports Centre Redevelopment

- 5.2.1 The Talacre Community Sports Centre redevelopment project, partly funded by the UK Government's Levelling Up Fund, is one of Camden's flagship projects, aiming to enhance leisure offerings and meet increased demand. With a £7.7 million investment, of which £3.26 million is directed toward Talacre, the redevelopment will result in new flexible spaces and an expanded gymnastics facility. Anticipated to drive over 1,900 additional weekly visits when fully operational, Talacre's updates will include improved accessibility, upgraded reception and café areas, energy-efficient systems, and enhanced park access.
- 5.2.2 Community engagement throughout the redevelopment planning has been robust, incorporating feedback from local councillors, disability forums, and Friends of Talacre Park. The reimagined facility will offer spaces conducive to a wide range of activities, from rebound therapy and yoga to advanced gymnastics training, underscoring Camden's commitment to inclusivity in physical activity.

5.3 Active for Life Campaign

- 5.3.1 Launched in March 2024, the "Active for Life" campaign seeks to address inactivity among Camden's residents over 60. The campaign integrates

behavioural science insights to motivate seniors to engage in regular physical activity by overcoming common barriers, such as limited mobility, low motivation, and access constraints. Key resources include a 9,000-copy booklet distributed to older residents, outlining practical activity suggestions, free local opportunities, and success stories of residents who found new ways to stay active.

- 5.3.2 The campaign also includes partnerships with community organisations like Castlehaven Community Association and Holborn Community Association, which host outreach and taster events. These events promote social connection as well as physical activity, meeting Camden's goal of fostering holistic well-being for its senior population.

5.4 Special Programmes for Children and Young People

- 5.4.1 Camden's focus on youth engagement is reflected in its comprehensive youth sports programming. For example, the Sports Education and Training Programme at Talacre, now expanded by 54%, offers qualifications in sports leadership, providing a structured pathway for youth who may face barriers in traditional education. This programme is pivotal for many participants, equipping them with skills and experience that enhance employability and foster personal growth.

- 5.4.2 The Holiday Activity Fund (HAF) is another key initiative, enabling children from low-income backgrounds to participate in free sports camps during school breaks. This year, Talacre hosted a five-week summer programme attended by over 150 children, including a girls-only week. Activities ranged from multisport sessions to coding workshops, combining physical and cognitive development opportunities in a supportive environment.

- 5.4.3 Additionally, initiatives like the Friday Night Project at Talacre engage young people from diverse backgrounds, offering a free monthly event with activities such as trampolining, boxing, and laser tag. These programmes help build a strong sense of community among Camden's youth, promoting both health and social well-being.

5.5 Get Active Programme for Residents with Health Conditions

- 5.5.1 The Get Active Programme (GAP) supports inactive residents with long-term medical health conditions by providing personalised, one-on-one guidance to incorporate physical activity into their daily routines. The programme is working with those completing at 12 months achieving well over the UK physical activity guidelines of 150 mins a week. Feedback has been overwhelmingly positive, with participants reporting enhanced physical mobility, reduced anxiety, and greater confidence. For example, several participants noted improved balance and energy levels, critical outcomes that empower them to lead more independent lives.

5.5.2 GAP's success has led to high referral rates, with over 100 patients accepted in the recent quarter. The programme's focus on continuity and small, achievable goals ensures that each participant progresses at a comfortable pace, supported by check-in reviews that enable continuous improvement and adaptation.

5.6 Diversity and Inclusion Initiatives

5.6.1 Addressing the underrepresentation of South Asian residents in leisure services, Camden is implementing the South Asian Physical Activity Action Plan. This plan targets specific barriers identified through community engagement, such as the need for women-only sessions and financial support. Camden's approach includes recruitment efforts to diversify leisure centre staff, improving accessibility for South Asian residents and fostering a welcoming atmosphere.

5.6.2 The Council's leisure contractor also provides a wide range of sessions targeted and broadening use for communities who are under-represented , such as women only gym and swimming sessions and Amplify a free family fun day celebrating inclusive arts and sport in the build up to the Paralympics.

5.7 Community-Led Outdoor Initiatives

5.7.1 Camden's outdoor gyms and disability cycling programmes exemplify the borough's dedication to accessible, community-driven physical activities. Three outdoor gyms were upgraded this year, each featuring accessible equipment and QR-coded signage for activity guidance. This initiative aims to empower residents to engage in independent exercise within local green spaces.

5.7.2 The disability cycling programme, held in Regent's Park, offers an inclusive environment where individuals with disabilities and their carers can participate in recreational cycling. This programme's continuation has been secured through partnerships, ensuring that disabled residents have access to enjoyable and supportive outdoor activities.

5.8 Collaborations with Health and Mental Wellbeing Organisations

5.8.1 Camden's leisure centres actively collaborate with health and mental well-being organisations to support residents facing health challenges. Through partnerships with MIND, Camden provides free swimming sessions for residents experiencing mental health issues, fostering physical and emotional wellness. During World Mental Health Day, Camden's centres hosted events to raise awareness, connecting residents with mental health resources.

5.8.2 Additional partnerships have expanded leisure access for Camden's carers and individuals with diabetes. For instance, Camden's leisure centres collaborated with Diabetes UK to raise awareness through targeted swim

sessions, and GLL offered bespoke, discounted memberships for local carers. These initiatives illustrate Camden's commitment to providing a supportive network of health resources for all residents.

5.9 Future Directions for Leisure and Wellbeing in Camden

- 5.9.1 Looking ahead, Camden's Leisure service is dedicated to expanding and refining its programmes to meet the evolving needs of residents. Planned improvements to leisure spaces and community engagement will ensure that services remain relevant and responsive, particularly for underrepresented groups.
- 5.9.2 Camden's vision of a cohesive, healthy community continues to drive its approach to leisure services, with a focus on inclusivity and accessibility for all residents. Through ongoing partnerships, innovative campaigns, and robust community input, Camden is set to build upon its success, creating an environment where everyone has the opportunity to lead an active, fulfilling life.

6. CONCLUSION

- 6.1 This year has reinforced Camden's role as a leader in promoting equality, cohesion, and community empowerment, with every effort firmly rooted in our vision of We Make Camden. Despite ongoing challenges, including the cost-of-living crisis, Camden has shown remarkable resilience and unity, addressing the needs of our residents and creating tangible pathways toward a fairer and more inclusive borough. As Cabinet Member for Voluntary Sector, Equalities, and Cohesion, I am proud of Camden's continued dedication to these values, prioritising the wellbeing of every resident.
- 6.2 Camden's Voluntary and Community Sector has once again proven to be a cornerstone of our community, supported by our ongoing investment and a shared commitment to social action and collaboration. The launch of the We Make Camden VCS Investment Programme has bolstered this vital sector, enabling it to adapt and thrive in the face of growing pressures. From social action initiatives to critical support services, our VCS partners remain at the forefront of community-led change, making Camden a stronger, more cohesive borough.
- 6.3 The designation of Camden as a Borough of Sanctuary is a proud testament to our community's compassion and inclusivity. Our long-standing commitment to welcoming refugees, exemplified through our support for Afghan and Ukrainian families, reflects the values that make Camden a truly special place. The week of activities celebrating our refugee communities this

year stands as a testament to the contributions they bring and the solidarity that defines Camden.

- 6.4 This year, Camden's interfaith efforts have brought together diverse communities, fostering mutual understanding and unity through initiatives like the Camden Interfaith Network and the Faith & Belief Awards. Camden's commitment to combating hate remains strong, with our No Place for Hate Campaign reaffirming our dedication to creating a safe and inclusive environment for all. Together with community leaders and safety teams, Camden has prioritised reassurance and engagement, ensuring that our borough remains a welcoming and resilient place.
- 6.5 Our efforts to empower neighbourhoods and encourage resident-led social action reflect Camden's belief in the strength and potential of local communities. Through initiatives like the Warm Welcome Spaces and the We Make Camden Kit, we have created spaces where residents can connect, lead projects, and access essential resources. Camden's neighbourhoods are becoming stronger and more connected, and the impact of these efforts is seen in the empowerment and resilience of our residents.
- 6.6 As we look to the future, Camden's commitment to equality, inclusion, and community strength remains steadfast. I am grateful for the dedication of our partners, council staff, and residents who have worked tirelessly to make Camden a place of opportunity and safety for all. Serving as Cabinet Member has been a privilege, and I remain committed to working alongside our community to build a borough where everyone feels valued, safe, and empowered to thrive.
- 6.7 Camden's journey is one of resilience, unity, and progress. We will continue to champion diversity, foster collaboration, and ensure that no one is left behind. Together, we are building a Camden that not only celebrates its diversity but actively works to improve the lives of all who call this borough home.

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.