

Winter Learning

Support for low-income households in winter 2022/23
Key findings

AUGUST 2023



MAYOR OF LONDON



About this report

This report brings together the findings of a research project commissioned by the GLA and London Councils that was undertaken in the months of June to July of 2023. The research examined the lessons learned from different interventions to support low- income households in winter 2022-23.

More about this research is on our website, http://www.social-life.co/project/learning_from_londons_winter_programmes/

We would like to thank the stakeholders who shared their knowledge and experiences with us. We appreciate their expertise and the time they put into this work and hope the report will provide useful insight.

The report was written by Olimpia Mosteanu and Yasmin Jiang, with contributions from Nicola Bacon.

Research team: Mena Ali, Nicola Bacon, Yasmin Jiang, Lavanya Kumaran, Olimpia Mosteanu and Simeon Shtebunaev.

Social Life was created by the Young Foundation in 2012, to become a specialist centre of research and innovation about the social life of communities. All our work is about the relationship between people and the places they live and understanding how change, through regeneration, new development or small improvements to public spaces, affects the social fabric, opportunities and wellbeing of local areas. We work in the UK and internationally.

www.social-life.co @SL_Cities

Table of contents

1.	Executive summary	2
2.	Research methods	6
3.	Specific interventions	8
4.	Outcomes of winter interventions	14
5.	What worked well: enablers	18
6.	What did not work as well: barriers	20
7.	Lessons learnt	23
8.	Recommendations	27

1. Executive summary

Social Life was commissioned by the GLA and London Councils to gather information about the lessons learned from different interventions implemented across London to support low-income households in winter 2022-23.

The research is based on a mix of methods, combining in-depth interviews, focus groups, an evidence review and online survey. It brought together the experiences and views of a wide range of stakeholders, including London boroughs, London-wide government, voluntary and community sector (VCS) organisations, funders, and businesses. Four interventions that were implemented at the local level were central to this evaluation: warm and welcoming spaces, holiday food aid provision, energy advice and support, and welfare and hardship support.

1. What worked well

Collaboration and coordination

- Partnership working between different stakeholders - particularly boroughs, VCS organisations and community spaces - was effective both in broadening outreach and engagement and ensuring effective delivery of winter provision.
- VCS infrastructure organisations played a vital role in supporting and convening grassroots organisations.
- Putting aside time in the early stages to strategise and co-design interventions with delivery partners enabled more effective delivery down the line.
- Finding the right balance between ‘one size fits all’ and targeted provisions enabled better outreach and delivery. For instance, the increase in demand for energy advice and support last winter led to new collaborations and formats in which advice and support was provided. This included a variety of direct and targeted provision and drop-ins.
- Building on the lessons from the rapid response and partnership working that developed during COVID proved to be helpful, allowing boroughs to build on established and trusting relationships with their local VCS organisations.

Capacity and outreach

- Building capacity of frontline workers was an important enabler to delivering winter provisions, especially equipping them with the knowledge and skills to signpost and refer to other services effectively.
- Warm spaces worked best when there was a range of activities and services on offer. Warm spaces can act as ‘hooks,’ attracting people for warmth and offering an opportunity to help access other services and socialise. VCS organisations hosting warm spaces are trusted by the community, enabling services to reach people that might otherwise be missed out or who agencies may find difficult to engage.
- Welfare advice and hardship support was commonly targeted at residents based on boroughs’ existing data. There is increasing awareness of the limitations of this, risking missing out on

residents who have not previously accessed council support. Working in partnership with VCS organisations, that can identify households that may be missing from databases, was identified as a potential solution.

- Access to flexible and sustainable funding enabled boroughs to inject funding into more innovative approaches and to fund capital works. This is particularly important given the limited scope of the Household Support Fund last winter.
- Political buy-in and general support from cabinet members streamlined the delivery process and facilitated partnership working across departments.

2. What worked less well

Coordination and resourcing

- The timescales of the Household Support Fund (HSF) from central government requires quick turnaround and hampers long-term planning, which places additional pressures on boroughs.
- Short timescales for commissioning and delivering interventions limited the success of working in partnership with VCS organisations as delivery partners, particularly in boroughs where the council did not have existing structures for joint working or relationships with their local VCS.
- Working continuously in crisis mode, responding to pressures from COVID-19 to Homes for Ukraine and the cost-of-living crisis, has exacerbated existing problems around capacity and resourcing.
- Inflexible funding can make it difficult for delivery partners to respond quickly to the changing needs of the vulnerable households. Winter 2023-24 will be different to last winter, but flexible funding and guidelines can ensure that delivery partners work as effectively as possible in the new context.

Capacity and outreach

- Targeted delivery of welfare advice and hardship support was effective, but boroughs would have benefited from increased data sharing across agencies.
- A more comprehensive cross-agency database would help identify compounding vulnerabilities such as health risks or residents affected by the benefits cap.
- Better awareness and integration of welfare advice and hardship support with other agencies and service providers would enhance effectiveness and reach, including work on income maximisation and targeted social welfare advice.
- The concept of a 'warm space' can be stigmatising; terms such as 'welcoming space' or 'community living room' were found to be more accessible.
- Tracking the impact of interventions such as warm spaces, food aid, or energy advice was more difficult than monitoring benefits uptake, advice sessions attendance (including on debt and financial skills), and vouchers and cash-based support distribution.
- VCS staff are demoralised because they feel that they are unable to adequately meet the needs of service-users.

- There was a lack of recognition in the funding available to boroughs and VCS organisations of their increased costs in delivering services. This limited the impact and effectiveness of their work.
- Boroughs and VCS organisations had little capacity to work preventatively. This can exacerbate the complexity of the issues that people experienced, and the resources required to resolve them.

3. Recommendations

Short-term recommendation for winter 2023-24

Recommendations for strategic and delivery partners to increase collaboration and coordination

- Prioritise approaches that strengthen coordination of winter provisions within boroughs, including setting up joint approaches across departmental silos and sectors.
- Strategic agencies should prioritise co-production of light touch monitoring tools with delivery partners, that are fit for purpose when working with vulnerable people. This can create opportunities for a more consistent flow of information and data sharing across sectors.

Recommendations for boroughs to increase capacity and outreach

- Allow flexibility in spend so partners have enough time and capacity to integrate learning from past experience into next phases.
- Prioritise provision of training for front-line staff to ensure systematic signposting across winter interventions, so that individuals who present will receive clear and consistent advice about their options.
- Allow flexibility in the way that funding for warm spaces is used by VCS organisations to ensure they can respond quickly to the changing needs of the vulnerable households.
- Ensure that funding for VCS organisations allocates appropriate resources to monitoring and evaluation to help relieve pressures around data collection; also ensure that the monitoring demands are proportional to the funding allocated.
- Use a variety of outreach and engagement channels to maximise accessibility across user groups. Carefully consider the format, language, and style of communication, as well as location and timing of outreach.
- Use clear, friendly, and simple messaging about winter provisions in a variety of community languages and formats. Whenever possible, use iterative design approaches and incorporate ongoing feedback from users.

Recommendations for the GLA, London Councils and the London Partnership Board to facilitate dissemination of good practice

- Leverage the GLA and London Councils' existing networks and partnerships to create London-wide opportunities for VCS organisations to share good practices and resources about dealing capacity issues, complex cases, safeguarding, and resolving incidents with users.

- Leverage existing forums and networks across boroughs and within the VCS to gather examples of good practice for winter provisions, targeting specific winter provisions as well as holistic approaches that incorporate cost-of-living interventions.
- Leverage the London Partnership Board's expertise to systematise the examples of good practice in a Winter Learning Framework that can be easily picked up and used by boroughs and VCS across London.
- The Winter Learning Framework should be guided by the specific recommendations that came out of this evaluation regarding how strategic and delivery partners can increase collaboration and coordination, and capacity and outreach (listed in the first two sections of this recommendation section).
- Work collectively to identify existing partnerships and networks, and - where needed - to establish new platforms that could act as dissemination pathways for the Winter Learning Framework and the specific examples of good practice for winter provisions.

Medium and longer-term recommendations

For boroughs

- Ensure that effective models and ways of working that emerged through the cost-of-living crisis are embedded in longer-term ways of working, to build organisational memory to prepare for future crises.
- Build enough time into commissioning and funding cycles to allow stakeholders to invest in relationship building with strategic and delivery partners.
- Respond to learning over the previous winter to work towards a preventative approach, intervening upstream to minimise the impact of future crises and build long term resilience. This includes recognising the systemic and root causes of crises for individuals and for London.

For the GLA, London Councils and the London Partnership Board

- Create London-wide opportunities for cross-agency data sharing to increase access to information about vulnerable individuals and households.
- Leverage existing networks and forums to streamline boroughs' approaches to income maximisation and targeted social welfare advice.
- Use London-wide networks and partnerships to clarify opportunities and roles for private and business sector organisations in resourcing and supporting the delivery of cost-of-living interventions.
- Continue to advocate on a strategic level to ensure that the needs of low-income residents are adequately addressed within local and central government policy and legislation.

2. Research methods

The evaluation focused on the impact of the range of initiatives designed to support low-income Londoners through winter 2022-23. The cost-of-living crisis has presented a substantial challenge for all Londoners, but it has fallen harder on London's low-income households.

The need for agencies to address profound poverty at this scale is new: although specific programmes and projects have supported low-income households in the past, provision to help people avoid destitution at this general scale is new. Until recently, initiatives to address destitution has focused on smaller groups and needs, including people with no recourse to public funds, rather than reaching out to all low-income Londoners. As a result, the public, private and voluntary sectors worked together to co-ordinate support for London's low-income households over the 2022-23 winter period.

Our approaches to methods and selection of participants acknowledged that commissioning arrangements and relationships between different services varied between boroughs. The evaluation research used a mix of primary and secondary research methods, combining in-depth interviews, focus groups, an online survey and evidence review.

The data provides a detailed account of stakeholders' views on the winter provisions, highlighting common issues, gaps, barriers and how different groups and communities' experiences differed. The research evaluation had **three interrelated goals**:

1. to understand what has enabled successful initiatives and to investigate any barriers that hindered local work
2. to capture perceptions of experiences to date, then to distil what has been learnt and what participants see as relevant for their work in winter 2023-24, and over the longer term
3. to provide insight into the perspectives of different sectors, particularly boroughs and the VCS, as well as other key stakeholders including businesses and charitable trusts/philanthropists.

The research team carried out **26 in-depth interviews** with London boroughs, London government (LGA and GLA), local VCS organisations, national VCS organisations, businesses, and funders/philanthropic organisations.

We ran **five focus groups**, two with London-wide and local government, two with local VCS organisations and one with other stakeholders, including funders, businesses and national VCS organisations. The focus groups were an opportunity to build on findings from the interviews and to explore how different factors influenced the effectiveness and impact of each intervention. The selection of participants for interviews and focus groups aimed to maximise the range of experiences, taking into account different geographies (inner, outer London) and political control. We also carried out **an online survey** targeting the London Partnership Board members. A wide range of **reports and grey literature materials were reviewed**, including evaluations and internal reporting. This review allowed us to cross-check the evidence against our key findings from in-depth interviews, focus groups and online survey.



In-Depth Interviews
(26 completed)

London boroughs (x8)
London-wide government, LGA and GLA (x4)
Local VCS organisations (x7)
National VCS organisations (x3)
Businesses (x2)
Other funders/philanthropic organisations (x2)



Focus Groups
(5 completed)

London-wide and local government (x2)
Local VCS organisations (x2)
Other stakeholders, including funders,
businesses and national VCS organisations (x1)



Online Survey
(9 completed)

Online survey of The London Partnership
Board members



Evidence Review
(51 documents)

Reports and grey literature
materials

While the evaluation used a mix of primary and secondary research methods to capture a wide range of experiences and lessons learned from different interventions, the findings described in this report are indicative rather than representative of London's winter provisions delivered last winter. The findings included in this report focus on **the themes that cut across individual experiences and in-depth accounts of those who took part in the research**. A cross-method thematic analysis was used to identify **the patterns emerging from what has been learnt** and what participants saw as relevant for their work in winter 2023-24, and over the longer term.

The quotes we included in this report have been edited for clarity and, when necessary, they have been amended to ensure anonymity.

Section 3 focuses on the four key interventions designed to support low-income Londoners through winter 2022-23. **Section 4** sets out broad outcomes that cost-of-living interventions delivered over the past winter. These are not intended to be comprehensive but rather distil the overall impacts that were most important to the stakeholders who took part in the evaluation. **Section 5** and **Section 6** provide an overview of the main enablers and barriers. **Section 7** examines the lesson learnt by different groups of stakeholders who took part in the winter evaluation. The findings included in this section focus on transferable lessons and changes for more effective delivery of interventions for low-income households in the next winter and beyond. While the views of all stakeholder groups are captured, the section focuses on learnings most relevant to boroughs and London-wide government. **Section 8** outlines our recommendations, starting with a list of short-term recommendation for winter 2023-24, followed by a series of medium and longer-term recommendations for strategic partners.

3. Specific interventions designed to support low-income Londoners in winter 2022-23

1. Warm and welcoming spaces

Key findings

- Warm spaces can act as ‘hooks’, attracting people for warmth and offering an opportunity to help access other services and socialise. VCS organisations hosting warm spaces are trusted by the community, enabling services to reach people that might otherwise be missed out or who agencies may find difficult to engage.
- Warm spaces work best when there is a range of activities and services on offer. Presenting them as community hubs reduces stigma and attracts a wider range of visitors.
- Moving forward, stakeholders aspire to coordinate services to ensure a more consistent offer and provide targeted statutory support (including housing and financial support and employment advice).
- There is value in helping warm spaces work together. In boroughs where an agency (such as a CVS) or a dedicated person carried out a convening role, warm spaces were enabled to share learning and build networks.
- Some boroughs are drawing on learning from warm spaces to establish year-round ‘community living rooms’, working in partnership with VCS organisations and targeting areas lacking in existing social infrastructure.

Design

Over the winter of 2022/23, warm and welcoming spaces became widespread across London, many being signposted on the GLA and borough websites. A broad aim of these spaces was to offer residents a warm place to stay at a time of increasing energy bills. In many cases, warm and welcoming spaces offered additional provision, varying from advice services to hot food and drink; other spaces provided an extensive programme of activities and programming.

Based on the evidence review and primary data collection, warm and welcoming spaces are typically council-operated venues (such as libraries and youth hubs) and venues operated by VCS organisations. In some boroughs, warm spaces were also hosted by faith organisations and local businesses, although this appeared to be less common.

Boroughs differed in the way that warm and welcoming spaces were funded. In some boroughs warm and welcoming spaces have been funded beyond the winter period to continue as ‘community living rooms’ or repurposed as ‘cool-spaces’ for the summer months.

The concept of ‘warm spaces’ was identified by some stakeholders as potentially stigmatising. In several places across London those were rebranded as ‘community living rooms’, emphasising the social aspect of the spaces rather than the economic situation of the users.

Delivery

Stakeholders who took part in the evaluation generally agreed that spaces with established users who were already visiting and using the space tended to work more effectively than spaces which were offering this service for the first time.

Across stakeholder groups, participants noted that providing a wide offer and integrating services from different agencies was the most effective use of the provision. This may include debt and welfare advice, income maximisation and food provision, delivered through the council or VCS partners. Some boroughs (for example Harrow and Havering) also partnered with the NHS to deliver services such as health assessments and check-ups. Some interviewees recognised the potential of warm spaces as a model for delivering services through a place-based and community-centred approach at a larger scale.

Some of the commonly identified user groups were single parents with children, people living alone, and older people. Users benefited from social activities to meet other people and reduce isolation. However, warm spaces were typically open during the daytime, during working hours, and other user groups may have benefitted from them had they been open during the evening or on weekends. A stakeholder with particular expertise working with faith communities commented that people living in large, multi-generational families were less likely to use and benefit from warm spaces as they had more incentive to heat their homes. It was noted that these larger families are more likely to be a part of minority ethnic or faith communities.

A few interviewees across stakeholder groups raised the logistical concerns around using warm and welcoming spaces in adverse weather conditions. When weather conditions are difficult, people may not want to leave their homes to go to warm spaces, particularly people who are vulnerable to the risks of being outside in poor weather.

Our overall evaluation indicates that there was an increase in demand for VCS organisations' existing services as a result of additional winter pressures; this added to the pressure faced those VCS organisations who also hosted warm spaces. Some VCS representatives who took part in the research added that warm spaces may not be the right offer for some VCS organisations because of the additional staffing and resourcing required. Running costs for VCS organisations hosting warm spaces increased over the winter, as they were also impacted by price increases, including cost of heating and supplies.

The evaluation shows that warm spaces were not always monitored beyond counting the number of attendees. In some cases, service providers felt that impact evaluations could be perceived as intrusive and reinforce feelings of shame or stigma. Some organisations took a more qualitative approach to assessing their impact but overall, it remains quite difficult to determine the effectiveness of warm spaces across London because of the lack of comparable data.

2. Holiday food aid and seasonal provisions

Key findings

- Some boroughs expanded the eligibility of holiday food aid using the Household Support Fund.
- Provision around food provides effective contact points for referring and signposting residents to other forms of advice and support.
- Working with other service providers and agencies such as VCS organisations, schools, and youth hubs was key for delivering holiday food aid.

Design

Holiday and seasonal provisions focused on winter-specific support such as food aid during the holidays and school holiday schemes offering activities and meals to children.

Boroughs in receipt of the Holiday Activities and Food programme funding from central government provided holiday clubs for children in receipt of free school meals. Some boroughs supplemented this with internal funding or the Household Support Fund, for example offering additional vouchers for families during holiday periods and expanding the eligibility of free school meals.

Some boroughs worked with VCS organisations to boost food provision over the holiday period, funding food hubs and food networks. In several cases, boroughs tried to develop holistic services, integrating advice services, or signposting to other forms of support. In a few cases, hot meals were offered at warm hubs.

Delivery

Several boroughs we interviewed pointed out the importance of working with schools to disseminate information around eligibility for holiday provisions to parents. VCS organisations and youth hubs often played a key role as delivery partners for holiday interventions.

Interviewees also noted that provisions around food were effective opportunities to provide other forms of support and signposting. One borough mentioned that they delivered these services at a community food shop, using food as a “hook” to bring people in; a number of VCS organisations echoed this and commented that food is an “enabler” for connecting people with other forms of support.

Across the research, the information about food aid and seasonal provisions was slightly shorter compared to what was shared about other types of winter interventions. This could be a reflection of the roles and work portfolios of the people who took part in the evaluation, as well as the amount of information that could be shared during in-depth interviews (lasting about an hour) and focus groups (on average 1.5 hours).

3. Energy advice and support

Key findings

- The increase in demand for energy advice and support last winter led to new collaborations and formats in which advice and support was provided. This included a variety of direct and targeted provision and drop-ins.
- Support took a variety of forms, including grants and vouchers to help with energy costs, DIY advice, direct installation of energy saving measures, and advice around reducing energy bills.
- Some stakeholders discussed ways for energy advice and support to be delivered more strategically, such as targeting support directly to vulnerable households and exploring the role that energy companies may play in addressing the impact of energy costs.

Design

In response to the sharp rise in energy costs over the winter of 2022-23, London boroughs provided support households to minimise the impact of higher energy bills. Interventions included energy efficiency advice, door-to-door energy efficiency assessments, DIY workshops, and direct relief such as fuel vouchers.

In our in-depth interviews, some boroughs described how they had commissioned VCS organisations specialising in energy efficiency advice and support, such as The HEET Project in Redbridge, or the South West London Energy Advice Partnership in Wandsworth and Richmond. These provided drop-in advice services as well as home visits to make changes to improve heating efficiency. Havering Council, as another example, used their Community Infrastructure Levy fund to commission contractors to carry out small works in residents' homes. In some cases, this support was targeted and residents who could benefit from the service were contacted directly; in other cases, these were open drop-in sessions, open to all residents. In Southwark, the council partnered with Citizens Advice Southwark to create more capacity and expand energy advice services already offered. To respond to the increase in demand for energy advice, additional council funding allowed Citizens Advice Southwark to pay for two additional full-time advisors. The Southwark Energy Savers service opened in December 2022 and will continue until at least the end of March 2025.

Other boroughs took a different approach, for example distributing fuel vouchers to offset the cost of energy bills. Yet other boroughs offered energy advice through community outreach events, including Cost of Living Roadshows.

Delivery

Some boroughs found that their energy advice session had lower engagement than was expected - these tended to be open drop-in sessions. This prompted some to reflect that if they were to offer this provision again, they would target it better, for example integrating this support with other council services that low-income households may access.

Other boroughs experienced good uptake - including when advice and support were integrated through an existing advice service, or when support was directly provided to households, including fuel vouchers and direct installations of energy saving measures. A number of stakeholders remarked that the cost-of-living roadshows, which included energy advice, were well attended.

Beyond the borough level, a national VCS organisation specialising in the energy sector noted that the wider pressures in the energy sector meant that there were fewer tools available to households struggling with energy bills - for example transferring to a fixed tariff can be an 'easy fix' for households on standard variable tariffs (which tend to be more costly), however there were no fixed tariff deals over the winter of 2022/23. It was also noted that it has been difficult to get in contact with energy suppliers, as their call centres experienced high demand and limited capacity.

Stakeholders working strategically at a London-wide and national level were interested in thinking about the role of energy companies in supporting households with energy costs, such as funding advice and support through philanthropic giving.

4. Welfare advice and hardship support

Key findings

- Welfare advice and hardship support was commonly targeted at residents based on boroughs' existing data. There is increasing awareness of the limitations of this, risking missing out on residents who have not previously accessed council support. Working in partnership with VCS organisations, that can identify households that may be missing from databases, was identified as a potential solution.
- Barriers to delivering welfare advice and hardship support include stigma and a lack of awareness of the support available, particularly for residents who became financially precarious for the first time.
- Targeted delivery of support was effective, but boroughs would have benefited from increased data sharing across agencies.
- Better awareness and integration of hardship advice and support with other agencies and service providers would enhance the effectiveness and reach of the service.

Design

Welfare advice and hardship support includes the provision of advice (such as income maximisation, debt, housing and employment) as well as direct grants and vouchers provided to reduce the impact of the cost-of-living crisis.

Advice and support were provided both through funded VCS advice organisations as well as through boroughs themselves. Many boroughs prioritised advice supporting residents to access unclaimed benefit and debt.

Boroughs generally used a portion of the Household Support Fund to target and directly pay eligible low-income households, based on their set criteria. However, this meant that the support would only reach residents who had previously engaged with the council. Some local councils offered additional funding, either through the Household Support Fund or through their own budgets, which residents could apply for directly, or allocated funding to VCS organisations to distribute on a discretionary basis.

Some boroughs set up events to broaden engagement with welfare advice and support. This included 'one-stop shops' or 'roadshows', where the council, VCS organisations, and occasionally health services, gathered in a public space to outreach and provide information and support. Some borough

representatives interviewed mentioned the Debt Free Advice Bus as another example of provision - the bus was funded by the GLA and operated drop-ins across London.

Across stakeholder groups, interviewees reflected that there had been a sharp increase in demand for advice services, while the advice sector as a whole experienced a skill shortage, limiting the ability of the sector to meet needs.

Delivery

Direct hardship payments and support was targeted through boroughs' existing data, and many acknowledged that some residents would have missed out on the support. This includes people who are experiencing financial hardship for the first time, disabled people, people who are experiencing homelessness, people who have no recourse to public funds, or people who are ineligible for statutory entitlements but are struggling financially. As well as not knowing about the services available, it was suggested that some groups, such as people who are in employment, experienced a greater sense of stigma when accessing support, making it more difficult to engage this group. The people most at risk of missing out on support were people facing multiple vulnerabilities.

Boroughs agreed that direct and targeted hardship support was effective for reaching low-income households. However, many commented that they would benefit from more data and data sharing across agencies, such as with the NHS, so they can take into account health vulnerabilities and other considerations.

Improved referral pathways between VCS organisations and boroughs was suggested to improve the effectiveness of hardship advice and support in both interviews and the evidence review. This includes establishing ways for trusted VCS organisations to gain smoother access to council services, and identifying residents who would not traditionally engage with the council. As an example, Southwark Council, through their Cost of Living Fund, implemented a Community Referral Pathway to work with the voluntary and community sector to identify and refer vulnerable households known to them or that they came into contact with.

Outreach efforts such as setting up roadshows and one-stop shops were found to be effective and popular with delivery partners. These ensured that every visit led to engagement with a large number of residents, minimising the need for promotion and marketing.

Across methods, this evaluation research found a recognition for the value of integrating hardship advice and support, as well as signposting systematically across agencies. This would enable VCS organisations, council officers and caseworkers, and other frontline workers such as health providers, to be aware of the advice and support provision available.

4. Outcomes of winter interventions

This section sets out broad outcomes that cost-of-living interventions delivered over the past winter. These are not intended to be comprehensive, but rather capture a general sense of the impacts that were most important to stakeholders who took part in the evaluation.

1. Impact of winter interventions on London's low-income households

Participants in the in-depth interviews and online survey were asked whether interventions over the past winter met the needs of low-income households. Generally, there was consensus that, where residents were able to access winter provisions, their immediate needs were met, allowing service providers to reduce or “cushion” the impact of the cost-of-living crisis.

“[Winter interventions] may have pushed into a few things [...] but I do think we can't say that it was effective, but just because of looking at things like poverty levels and things like insecurity.”

A London-wide government representative

“Our interventions were effective in easing the burden of cost-of-living pressures for the residents they reached [...] Despite this, we know that our interventions were not enough to help every resident facing financial hardship. The financial resilience of many residents was already limited going into the winter [...] although we offer as much support as we can, this is not an issue we can tackle on our own.”

A London Partnership Board member

Through the evidence review and in interviews, some boroughs provided monitoring data on increases in benefits uptake; attendance on advice sessions or workshops (including on debt and financial skills); and the number of vouchers and cash-based support distributed over the past winter.

It was more difficult to track the use and impact of interventions such as warm spaces, food aid, or energy advice. Stakeholders spoke about the importance of minimising the stigma of using these services and their concern that impact monitoring activities could increase this; both boroughs and VCS representatives discussed the already stretched capacity of VCS organisations as a factor that limited monitoring. Some also commented on a lack of clear expectations or guidelines around impact monitoring.

In several instances, VCS and borough representatives described their cost-of-living interventions as “fire-fighting” or “sticky plaster”, reflecting a short-term and reactive approach, explaining how they were not able to fulfil the long-term needs of low-income households.

“If you are a low-income household, in our borough, you could look at a website, you could apply for a small amount of money through the Household Support Fund. You could go to a food bank. I don’t see it being any more low-level. I would say at the moment, it’s a sticking plaster and pretty small one.”

A borough representative

“We’re looking at why we were getting an increased number of people using the food bank, and it went from 30 to 50 up to 70 people [last winter], we also saw repeat people who were using the food bank over four times a month....So we did a benefit check for everyone who was visiting the food bank, we wanted to look at what the emergencies issues were, why they came to the foodbank and through that we began to target the underlying issue.”

A local VCS organisation

Additionally, stakeholders who took part in in-depth interviews and survey respondents pointed out that while they were able to support the residents who they engaged with, there are still groups of residents who have been missed out on winter provisions. This could be because of a sense of stigma around asking for help, lacking knowledge of the support available, or support being inaccessible or culturally inappropriate.

Finally, stakeholders felt that while cost of living interventions were able to address the immediate needs of low-income Londoners, individual organisations can only do so much when faced with the depth of the cost-of-living crisis.

“We feel fairly confident that we’ve been able to target what we’ve got at those who need it most. We are aware that there are probably some people who have slipped through the net – we try and design things so that there are options for them as well. And this is work that is making things less bad, not making things better.”

A borough representative

2. Impact of delivering winter interventions on stakeholders

Improved partnership working and delivery models

In some boroughs where there had not historically been a strong relationship between the VCS sector and the council, delivering cost of living interventions has motivated closer working and co-delivering services; other boroughs explored new models of working with partners. Some examples of changes include putting a greater emphasis on co-designing interventions with VCS partners and residents; taking a cash-first approach and minimising means-testing; creating a new role for liaising between VCS and the boroughs; developing joint strategies with other service providers.

Some borough representatives also commented on internal working practices that affected their cost-of-living response. These included a greater willingness to work across departments and break down silos;

reducing the bureaucracy involved in decision-making; taking a targeted and direct approach to supporting residents; and taking an integrated approach to delivering services across different departments.

“Learning from our previous pilot, I think we want better integration with things like working with primary care [...]. There were a lot of things happening during the cost-of-living crisis [...] but I think there was a sort of lack of being joined up. So I think, learning from that, [...] being more aware of everything that's happening, so frontline officers, whoever's working, are able to give the right information and guidance.”

A borough representative

“There is much better infrastructure [now] at the officer level to be able to support developing shared approaches [...] that sort of infrastructure should continue to be supported.”

A London-wide government representative

Shifting priorities

Some boroughs involved in the evaluation had already started to incorporate their learning into a long-term anti-poverty strategy or framework. Other boroughs reported greater political will to take action on poverty as a result of the cost-of-living crisis. The evidence review shows that some boroughs are using learning from the past winter to strengthen their case for greater investment in community infrastructure and the VCS.

“Some of those sorts of things are beginning to shift: how we see our role, how we can promote the fact that it's [everybody's]... responsibility to think about how we can tackle poverty and work in an anti-poverty kind of framework.”

A borough representative

VCS staff wellbeing and morale

VCS organisations were increasingly concerned about staff welfare in their work over the past winter. Some interviewees pointed out that staff were demoralised because they felt that they were unable to adequately meet the needs of service-users. Particularly in lived experience-led organisations, there was also concern that staff may see their personal experiences and struggles reflected in the experiences of the clients that they are supporting, which can impact their wellbeing. It was also reported that VCS staff were working with increasingly complex cases over the winter, which can have an emotional toll.

Additionally, many stakeholders who took part in the evaluation reported that salaries in VCS organisations are low, and that staff were more likely to be directly impacted by the cost-of-living crisis themselves. Short term funding can create an additional sense of precarity for staff. All of these factors can contribute to high turnover of frontline workers, particularly in the advice sector.

"We feel helpless. When you have vulnerable people who are at risk, that's not reassuring. So that has a huge impact on us."

A London-wide VCS organisation

"We have a challenge as employers to be able to support staff to look after them financially, as it's really difficult to fundraise and offer high salaries in the charity sector. It's also very difficult for us to deal with the stress that staff are exposed to..."

A local VCS organisation

5. What worked well: enablers

1. Capacity and resources

A key enabler cited by all stakeholder groups relates to planning and resource allocation. **Putting aside time in the early stages to strategise and co-design interventions** with delivery partners enabled more effective delivery down the line.

Co-designing or co-producing interventions was cited as an important facilitator especially by boroughs and VCS organisations. Many of those who took part in the research reported that joined up work focused on maximising benefits for low-income households was key last winter.

The increase in demand for energy and welfare advice and support last winter led to new collaborations and formats in which it was provided (including a variety of direct and targeted provision and open events or drop-ins). **Finding the right balance** between ‘one size fits all’ and targeted provisions enabled better outreach and delivery.

Given the increase in demand and complexity of advice cases, there was consensus across stakeholder groups that **building capacity of frontline workers** was an important enabler to delivering winter provisions, especially equipping them with the knowledge and skills to signpost and refer to other services effectively.

Access to flexible and sustainable funding was cited as an important enabler by a wide range of stakeholders. Some of the borough stakeholders said that being able to inject some funding into more innovative approaches and funding capital works made a difference, especially given how limited the HSF was at the time in its scope. Both VCS representatives and funders noted that uplifts to existing grants, flexible budgets and simplified application processes for winter grants enabled grass-roots organisations to better respond to the cost-of-living crisis last winter.

Political buy-in and general support from cabinet members streamlined the delivery process and facilitated partnership working across departments. A number of stakeholders remarked that having a person on the team who was embedded in the council and could work across different departments allowed for interventions to be designed and delivered quickly. Overall, the evaluation shows that more joined-up work within boroughs is also seen as an important enabler.

2. Coordination and partnership working

There was consensus across the stakeholders who took part in the research that **partnership working across different stakeholder groups** (critically boroughs, VCS organisations and community spaces) was effective in broadening outreach and engagement and ensuring effective delivery of winter provisions.

Access to information and data about vulnerable individuals and households emerged as an important enabler of winter provisions. While outreach through VCS, schools and at public events enabled engagement with people that the council otherwise would not be able to reach, most stakeholders felt that coordination across sectors and agencies could improve access to data in order to target communications to people who would have benefited from these services.

Working through local partners and relying on key networks increased credibility and trust in outreach. Local VCS and funders also highlighted that place-based networks enabled support to be better coordinated, adapting rather than duplicating winter provisions and sharing information. However, there

was also recognition that joint-up work takes time, and developing partnership working can be resource-intensive.

The ability to coordinate with a wide range of service providers was also reported as a key enabler across stakeholder groups. In-depth interviews and focus groups discussed how VCS infrastructure organisations played a vital role in supporting and convening grassroots organisations last winter. Coordination cross-borough was also cited as an enabler by boroughs representatives and VCS organisations. Where such coordination was missing, stakeholders noted that cross-borough work would be an enabler for their work.

Building on the lessons from the rapid response and partnership working that developed during COVID contributed to better coordination across sectors. The research shows it allowed some boroughs to build on established and trusting relationships with the VCS.

Stakeholders from all groups pointed out that **sharing good practice** was an enabler for their work. They cited the importance of collating information, good practice case studies and user-friendly data toolkits to facilitate replication. However, stakeholders also flagged that there is a need for better approaches to streamlining and disseminating information and resources.

A number of stakeholders noted that **the role of the GLA in leveraging relationships** at different levels to engage with boroughs had positive outcomes. Some also pointed out that the GLA worked fast to try to solve things iteratively and outside the box.

3. Other enablers

Stakeholders from various groups pointed out that last winter some funders took more supportive, lighter **approaches to monitoring and reporting**, in an attempt to relieve some of the existing pressures on VCS organisations. Relatedly, proportionality of impact monitoring and reporting against delivering services was seen as an enabler. Thinking ahead, stakeholders noted that easy monitoring tools that are fit for purpose are key enablers.

Local VCS organisations and some of the boroughs reported that **cash first approaches** were an enabler, minimising administration and ensuring that residents can access support in a timelier way.

Other enablers mentioned by stakeholders included the **willingness to try something new or to be innovative**, and **clear and friendly-looking messaging and communication with service users**. For example, two stakeholders mentioned that the ordinary “brown letters” should be replaced by colourful leaflets or friendly-designed newsletters.

6. What did not work as well: barriers and challenges

1. Barriers experienced by boroughs

Engagement and outreach

In general, borough representatives taking part in the evaluation used targeted outreach to deliver support alongside wider communication and marketing to inform residents of cost-of-living interventions that were open to all.

With targeted outreach, boroughs used internal data to identify residents who were eligible for and would benefit from additional support, such as grants and benefits maximisation advice. However, **residents who were not already on the council's databases, but who had been made vulnerable by the cost-of-living crisis**, such as first-time benefit claimants or residents who fall just outside of benefits eligibility, **may have been missed out by targeted interventions**. Similarly, people who have historically not engaged with local authorities, such as people with no recourse to public funds and people experiencing homelessness, would have been likely to miss out on targeted outreach for support, even if they were eligible for it.

Interviewees consistently noted that they would benefit from a **more comprehensive database**, including additional data from other agencies such as the NHS and the DWP, to identify compounding vulnerabilities such as health risks or residents affected by the benefits cap.

Some interviewees reflected that **borough communication and marketing channels only reach a specific group of people**; some people have greater capacity to take up the offers being advertised, whilst others would require more support to access them.

Some London-wide government interviewees also cautioned that outreach and engagement along borough boundaries risks missing out **residents who do not have a strong sense of connection to their borough**.

Capacity and resources

In many cases, the cost-of-living crisis response was added to existing workloads, **putting pressure on staff who are already overburdened**. Interviewees mentioned that the cost-of-living crisis has arrived on the back of a series of crises which borough staff had had to work on, from COVID-19 to Homes for Ukraine. This has exacerbated existing issues around capacity and resourcing, particularly in boroughs where there is a **lack of existing infrastructure and relationships with VCS organisations** and other delivery partners. At the same time, **the cost of delivering interventions has increased**, which is not necessarily reflected in central government funding or council budgets.

Borough representatives who took part in the research also reflected that the strain on their capacity has **prevented councils from upskilling and building the capacity of frontline staff and delivery partners** to integrate provisions and provide holistic support. This could include equipping staff with the knowledge to effectively signpost and refer service users to other services.

Some interviewees would have also benefited from **additional time and capacity to integrate learning into the next funding cycle**, taking a more strategic approach.

Coordination and partnership working

Boroughs consistently worked with VCS organisations and other agencies to implement cost of living interventions over the past winter. However, **short timescales for commissioning and delivering interventions limited the success** of working in partnership with VCS organisations as delivery partners, particularly in boroughs where the council did not have existing structures or relationships with relevant VCS organisations.

Borough interviewees also recognised that VCS organisations were facing additional challenges as a result of **increased running costs** and **high competition for funding**, which compounds the difficulty of delivering interventions within the short timeframes that councils are working toward.

Some interviewees also experienced barriers in **internal coordination**, referring to “fragmentation” or “siloed working”, while the cost-of-living crisis had cross-cutting implications which benefited from joint approaches.

Wider policy context

Many borough representatives who took part in the research noted that the wider policy context constrained their ability to respond effectively to the cost-of-living crisis. In particular, **the Household Support Fund in winter 2022-23 was seen as restrictive**, - although the new round of HSF gives boroughs a wider scope for spending the fund. Additionally, some stakeholders felt that the **quick turnarounds demanded by the HSF did not enable long-term planning**, putting boroughs under additional pressure.

Stakeholders wished for a greater recognition from the central government that **effective distribution of the HSF is dependent on local contexts** and would benefit from greater flexibility. For example, some of the boroughs interviewed pointed out that without buy-in from local leadership and existing structures (including links with the VCS), it can be more difficult to implement cost of living interventions.

Boroughs also reflected on **limited resources** as a barrier. This was compounded by cuts in central government support over recent years, including ending funding for free school meals in the holidays. Benefits that residents receive do not always meet living costs, so **boroughs are using their own funding** to implement secondary interventions to support residents financially.

2. Barriers experienced by local VCS organisations

Engagement and outreach

Similar to boroughs, VCS organisations experienced barriers around engagement and outreach. Particular concerns are around low-income residents who experience language barriers, disabilities, people struggling with mental health issues; those who are from minority ethnic backgrounds; and those who are first-time benefits claimants. In particular, people who are in employment as well as people who have newly become eligible for benefits may feel **stigma** around accessing cost of living support.

VCS organisations also need to **respond flexibly to service-users**, which requires additional resourcing. For example, people who have childcare responsibilities or who face challenging employment conditions may not be able to access services during traditional opening hours.

Where outreach was successful and demand was very high, spaces where services are delivered can get crowded; a heightened sense of scarcity and need may lead to tense interactions with staff and other service users. Stakeholders commented on the **safety and welfare concerns** around managing the number of people who present at services.

Capacity and funding

There was consensus across the VCS stakeholders who took part in the research that while demand has

increased, so has the cost of delivering interventions, from running costs to the cost of goods and salaries. This is not reflected in the funding that boroughs are able to offer to VCS organisations.

At the same time, as a result of the compounding impacts of the cost-of-living crisis, service-users are experiencing **situations that are more complex and which require more time and resources to resolve**. Without the capacity to work preventatively, at both a local government and a VCS level, the complexity of cases that are presented to VCS frontline workers are exacerbated.

It was common for VCS organisations to identify that **the funding landscape has become increasingly competitive**. The available funding also tends to be short term. More resourcing is needed for VCS organisations to cope with increased demand.

Working with public sector organisations

VCS organisations identified that barriers exist in their relationship with boroughs. For example, some VCS stakeholders would have benefited from **a more direct flow of communication and information** - when signposting or referring public sector services information can become outdated quickly. Where VCS organisations work across borough boundaries, the inconsistency in advice and interventions can pose a further barrier.

Another barrier was around the **reliance of public sector organisations on the VCS to deliver interventions**. VCS organisations have become a first port of call for delivering cost of living winter interventions, but they cannot work effectively if they are not provided with adequate resources and information, and if boroughs are not adequately supporting the service-users referred into council services which results in them returning to the VCS organisation.

Finally, across research methods, VCS organisations reported that the **existing policies and mechanisms that are meant to support vulnerable residents are not sufficient** and overly bureaucratic, which complicates the work that VCS organisations are doing and increases the capacity required to support each resident.

3. Barriers experienced by other stakeholders: national VCS organisations, businesses and funders

As with other stakeholder groups, **the challenging economic and funding landscape** and limited organisational capacity was a common barrier across all methods. Funders and infrastructure VCS organisations faced **increased running costs**, which then translates into **less capacity to support frontline VCS organisations**. There was also recognition that funding has become more competitive, and that it tends to be short term.

In the in-depth interviews, national VCS organisations commented on the fact that all sectors were overwhelmed over the past winter, which makes it more **difficult to work in partnership and to take a joint-up, integrated approach** to delivering interventions. This was echoed in the survey, with partner organisations struggling to find the capacity to deliver cost of living interventions.

Stakeholders in this group were likely to be working at a more strategic level and were therefore attuned to the policy environment and the impact of this on their work. For example, in the online survey of London Partnership Board members, a common identified barrier was around the **constraints posed by national policies relevant to the cost-of-living crisis**. This was echoed in interviews and focus groups, adding that the limited level of support from the central government on a range of issues (fuel, food, health and housing) resulted in a high level of demand on stakeholders in this group.

Another reflection was around the **initial lack of clarity in the policy environment** in response to the cost-of-living crisis, which meant that interventions were reactive, rather than preventative.

7. Lessons learnt

The findings included in this section focus on **transferable lessons and changes for more effective delivery of interventions for low-income households** in the next winter and beyond. While the views of all stakeholder groups are captured, the section focuses on **learnings most relevant to boroughs and London-wide government**.

1. A coordinated and joint-up approach

Stakeholders emphasised the importance of building services that are coordinated and integrated. One-stop-shops and roadshows were found to be effective because they enabled residents to engage with multiple services. When thinking about improvements for the next winter, a recurring theme was around equipping frontline workers across different agencies - boroughs, health and the VCS - with knowledge to signpost and refer residents. This means that when a resident presents at any service, they will be provided with consistent advice about what to do next. Many stakeholders saw these joined-up interventions as opportunities to develop more holistic and strategic approaches to supporting low-income households.

“We made it [Household Support Fund] work because we had other funding streams, but [...] with that funding being so restricted to food and energy, [the implication] was that food and energy exists in a vacuum to everything else. And it's not, it's intrinsically linked to employment, mental health, a whole heap of other things. I was pleased that this new round of Household Support Funds [...] opens up to the provision of training and support, rather than just being restricted to direct support with energy and food.”

A borough representative

In cases where stakeholders were able to develop joint strategies and approaches to implementing winter interventions with partners, they found that the delivery process to be smoother - whether this was with other statutory agencies such as the NHS, or with VCS partners. However, stakeholders acknowledged that this requires additional lead-in time and capacity, often needing a dedicated staff member or team to liaise and build relationships. It was also suggested that a coordinated approach worked well when stakeholders engaged with different levels of a partner organisation - for example, local branches of a national organisation or front-line staff can often be more accommodating and flexible in implementing the rapid changes required in crisis.

There is widespread recognition amongst stakeholders that VCS organisations are well-placed to provide access to communities and groups of residents who are more difficult for boroughs to engage. Both borough and VCS representatives expressed that it would be beneficial for boroughs to play a greater role in providing networking and capacity-building support. Additionally, there was a wish to involve VCS organisations not just in the delivery, but also the design of interventions. This also includes exploring alternative, more direct referral pathways between frontline VCS organisations and statutory services so that residents are able to access support more efficiently.

“Support has to be joined up... for example, someone might apply for an emergency grant or work for assistance scheme, that is making sure that when they do, they actually then get referred on to our welfare rights service, or our

money advice team, so they can get that longer term kind of [support] ... that means that eventually, they don't need to keep on falling back on this kind of hardship fund that we offer."

A borough representative

"[What could be done differently is] ensuring that there's a more joined up approach between different partners and strategic partners...and actually seeing these as an opportunity for furthering our aims and objectives in a more cost-effective way."

A local VCS representative

Another reflection from stakeholders working at strategic levels was consider the role that private sector organisations should play in supporting cost of living interventions, and how their resources can be better leveraged in the next winter.

2. Sharing learning

There was consensus across the stakeholders who took part in the research that learning can be captured more effectively and embedded into provisions targeting low-income households this coming winter.

Participants from all stakeholder groups felt that they would benefit from opportunities to share good practices across their sectors, to learn what works well and how to avoid repeating mistakes. Many remarked that VCS infrastructure organisations and London-wide government are particularly well-placed to facilitate this role. For instance, London Plus has been compiling examples of good practice, insights and innovative ideas across London aimed at mitigating the impacts of the rising cost of living. They have also been working with partners to develop a list of organisations, particularly those that are London-based, for signposting and matching support for those affected by the rising cost of living.

"I think it'd be helpful to just have examples of good practice, almost like a resource bank [...] so that we can all learn from each other [...] further details and how they dealt with challenges, what kinds of interventions worked out, which communities they serve?"

A borough representative

"[How] much easier will it be for local authorities and voluntary sector to step up and implement certain initiatives they might have done similar last year, just learning from the past...it might be worth getting London councils to hold an event where they talk through those things. So that actually over this winter, and for next winter, there is a bit of a good practice guide. [...] The other boroughs can learn from not just their successes and failures last year, but as more of a collective."

A London-wide VCS representative

There were mixed experiences of impact monitoring and evaluation. Both borough and VCS representatives commented on the difficulty of capturing impact data, highlighting constraints in capacity; concerns around creating stigma; and a lack of guidance for delivery partners around monitoring and data collection. For the next winter, participants expressed a wish to see more fit for purpose monitoring guidelines and clearer expectations set around how learning should be captured.

“[Any] funding that the GLA is going to provide for cost of living related responses [needs to demonstrate] the impact of that, but a monitoring system would benefit from being co-produced [...] with organisations of the type that would actually be delivering the service, because then I think you would come up with something that was proportionate and reasonable.”

A borough representative

3. Recognise differences across London boroughs

VCS delivery partners working across London would have benefitted from more consistency in the commissioning process across boroughs. Similarly, frontline organisations would have also benefited from more consistent information and signposting across different localities. Conversely, boroughs and London-wide government stakeholders reflected on the importance of recognising differences across boroughs, and that one approach does not fit all local contexts.

“[Recognising] there needs to be a locally tailored approach...identifying areas where more consistency can be taken to mean that it's not kind of a postcode lottery for residents, that you're not just dependent on where you live as to the level of support you receive.”

A London-wide government representative

4. Long-term planning

Planning ahead and taking a long-term view of supporting low-income Londoners was a key lesson across research methods. When asked to think about the next winter, there is a strong focus on building the resilience of Londoners; some borough representatives also discussed an increased focus on anti-poverty as a strategic priority.

There is a broad understanding across stakeholder groups that the next winter will be as difficult low-income households as the winter of 2022-23, and that organisations need to be prepared for the same levels of demand.

Targeting winter interventions at the household level was agreed to be an effective delivery model in ensuring that the most vulnerable households received support. Some borough representatives are now using this model to target advice and support, such as around debt and income maximisation, with the aim of ensuring that residents receive a steady income and are less susceptible to financial crises. VCS representatives voiced that taking a longer-term approach in resourcing and funding the VCS would ensure that their work can become preventative rather than focused on responding to crises.

Thinking more immediately about the next winter, stakeholders across all groups would have benefited from a longer lead-in time for designing and implementing winter interventions. This planning time would,

according to those who took part in the evaluation, allow for stronger partnerships and coordination, co-designing interventions with partners and service-users and broader outreach and engagement.

“Our intervention was too slow and too late to ensure fully effective roll out...plans should be made much earlier in the year to allow better collaboration with partners and ensure that interventions have the best opportunity to support those most at need.”

A member of the London Partnership Board

“I want us to make sure that we’re hanging on to those medium- and longer-term issues, that we’re thinking about community resilience generally.”

A London-wide government representative

5. Advocate for strategic change

When thinking about the next round of winter interventions, there was a recognition across all stakeholder groups that individual organisations and sectors can only do so much without the root causes of the cost-of-living crises being addressed.

Boroughs, VCS and London-wide government representatives highlighted the role they each have in advocating on behalf of low-income Londoners for a more functional welfare system, alongside a long-term approach to tackling poverty and inequality that is reflected in the resources made available to boroughs and VCS organisations.

“The structures and systems that have caused this in the first place, are still there [...] How are we as a wider system, not just one local authority here or there [...] how are we in a kind of coordinated way able to start to lobby for change [...]?”

A borough representative

8. Recommendations

Short-term recommendation for winter 2023-24

Recommendations for strategic and delivery partners to increase collaboration and coordination

- Prioritise approaches that strengthen coordination of winter provisions within boroughs, including setting up joint approaches across departmental silos and sectors.
- Strategic agencies should prioritise co-production of light touch monitoring tools with delivery partners, that are fit for purpose when working with vulnerable people. This can create opportunities for a more consistent flow of information and data sharing across sectors.

Recommendations for boroughs to increase capacity and outreach

- Allow flexibility in spend so partners have enough time and capacity to integrate learning from past experience into next phases.
- Prioritise provision of training for front-line staff to ensure systematic signposting across winter interventions, so that individuals who present will receive clear and consistent advice about their options.
- Allow flexibility in the way that funding for warm spaces is used by VCS organisations to ensure they can respond quickly to the changing needs of the vulnerable households.
- Ensure that funding for VCS organisations allocates appropriate resources to monitoring and evaluation to help relieve pressures around data collection; also ensure that the monitoring demands are proportional to the funding allocated.
- Use a variety of outreach and engagement channels to maximise accessibility across user groups. Carefully consider the format, language, and style of communication, as well as location and timing of outreach.
- Use clear, friendly, and simple messaging about winter provisions in a variety of community languages and formats. Whenever possible, use iterative design approaches and incorporate ongoing feedback from users.

Recommendations for the GLA, London Councils and the London Partnership Board to facilitate dissemination of good practice

- Leverage the GLA and London Councils' existing networks and partnerships to create London-wide opportunities for VCS organisations to share good practices and resources about dealing capacity issues, complex cases, safeguarding, and resolving incidents with users.
- Leverage existing forums and networks across boroughs and within the VCS to gather examples of good practice for winter provisions, targeting specific winter provisions as well as holistic approaches that incorporate cost-of-living interventions.
- Leverage the London Partnership Board's expertise to systematise the examples of good practice in a Winter Learning Framework that can be easily picked up and used by boroughs and VCS across London.

- The Winter Learning Framework should be guided by the specific recommendations that came out of this evaluation regarding how strategic and delivery partners can increase collaboration and coordination, and capacity and outreach (listed in the first two sections of this recommendation section).
- Work collectively to identify existing partnerships and networks, and - where needed - to establish new platforms that could act as dissemination pathways for the Winter Learning Framework and the specific examples of good practice for winter provisions.

Medium and longer-term recommendations

For boroughs

- Ensure that effective models and ways of working that emerged through the cost-of-living crisis are embedded in longer-term ways of working, to build organisational memory to prepare for future crises.
- Build enough time into commissioning and funding cycles to allow stakeholders to invest in relationship building with strategic and delivery partners.
- Respond to learning over the previous winter to work towards a preventative approach, intervening upstream to minimise the impact of future crises and build long term resilience. This includes recognising the systemic and root causes of crises for individuals and for London.

For the GLA, London Councils and the London Partnership Board

- Create London-wide opportunities for cross-agency data sharing to increase access to information about vulnerable individuals and households.
- Leverage existing networks and forums to streamline boroughs' approaches to income maximisation and targeted social welfare advice.
- Use London-wide networks and partnerships to clarify opportunities and roles for private and business sector organisations in resourcing and supporting the delivery of cost-of-living interventions.
- Continue to advocate on a strategic level to ensure that the needs of low-income residents are adequately addressed within local and central government policy and legislation.

Social Life was created by the Young Foundation in 2012, to become a specialist centre of research and innovation about the social life of communities. All our work is about the relationship between people and the places they live and understanding how change, through regeneration, new development or small improvements to public spaces, affects the social fabric, opportunities and wellbeing of local areas. We work in the UK and internationally.

www.social-life.co @SL_Cities

Report commissioned by the GLA and London Councils

