

**Islington Fairness Commission**  
**Submission of evidence by**  
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**St Luke's Community Centre and Trust**

**Tackling inequality in Islington: the role of multi-purpose community organisations such as St Luke's Trust**

Large, independent multi-purpose neighbourhood-based charities such as St Luke's make an essential and unique contribution to life in Islington. Our long-term role in tackling social injustices and dealing with the causes and symptoms of inequality is distinctive and has real impact. We are driven by a mission that individuals, families, groups and communities achieve their full potential. Our multiple income streams mean that we are often more sustainable and long-term than single purpose voluntary sector organisations. Despite this, our sector is often overlooked by policy makers, decision makers and funders.

This submission of evidence to the Fairness Commission will hopefully convince the Commissioners of our distinctiveness and strategic importance, help shift attitudes, and provide a strong basis for the statutory sector's long-term commitment of our type of organisation in the Borough. We have included a broad range of spending policy ideas for consideration and, as requested, some real life experience stories of Islington residents whose lives have been transformed by St Luke's.

**BACKGROUND TO ST LUKE'S TRUST**

St Luke's Community Centre and Trust is a large, independent neighbourhood-based charity serving south Islington residents of Bunhill Ward and surrounding areas. Bunhill is one of the most deprived wards in the borough – The area falls just within the top 20% of deprived areas in London as calculated by the Index of Multiple Deprivation. We have years of experience delivering services, with highly qualified, knowledgeable and skilled staff and Trustees most of whom live in the area, and are responsive to changing local issues.

We own and manage a large busy community centre in the heart of the neighbourhood, and deliver, coordinate and provide a base for people to gather socially, and for local service delivery. Our services work across a holistic range of areas of social justice, are readily provided and effective, and fulfil multiple roles in the community. The building is a true community hub, a hive of community activity that offers wide ranging activities for people of all ages

**Qualities of multi-purpose community organisations**

Organisations such as St Luke's are substantial key players in the community. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation (Thake 2001) study of the sector found that the contribution of this type of organisation:

*“lies at the heart of reintegrating those who are excluded in a society that is increasingly fragmented and an economy that is churning at an accelerating rate. They help renew the networks of civil society by providing social maps and creating mentored pathways for individuals on their journey out of isolation.”*

Organisations such as St Luke’s are recognised both within the local neighbourhood and external agencies such the Council. They provide points of stability in a rapidly changing world, and are often intermediaries between grassroots activity and external agencies. They can react quickly to the constant change in the local needs of the community.

Our relatively large size enables the formation of vertical and horizontal partnerships, accessing larger funding programmes, and we can deliver local services beyond the capacity of smaller organisations. As a result, we can link into the bigger picture better than many smaller community groups. Being locally based we are in contact with local organisations, and play both an ambassadorial role and an active joined up partnership role with others on the community’s behalf, and are therefore in a stronger position to shape policy development and influence decision makers and funders.

### Our Roles

Sampson and Weaver (2010) suggest that there are 5 over-lapping roles performed by multi-purpose organisation of our type. St Luke’s activities appear to match these roles, and later on we will provide examples and positive outcomes:

1. Project-led services – these are often single purpose projects to tackle a particular need. St Luke’s delivers externally funded projects, for example, dementia care, gardening, and business engagement. We are competing for funding with single purpose organisations, and are often at a cost-effectiveness disadvantage, as commissioners and funders do not take into account the other overlapping and beneficial activities:
2. Co-ordinated Service delivery  
Multi-purpose organisations can co-ordinate various service delivery partners to bring effective solutions. St Luke’s was selected to manage the innovative EC1 Neighbourhood Management programme for the entire EC1 area because of its strong background in co-ordinating service delivery. This is resident led programme with the full backing and involvement of the main local service providers. It achieves proper joined up working arrangements, finding efficiencies, and takes the lead in collecting local data and using it to influence and improve public service provision.
3. Different Services, same place  
St Luke’s invites other organisations and groups to use our premises for services and activities. Visitors to our centre, and service providers, come into contact with each other, make introductions, build relationships and trust. Someone dropping off their child at the after-school club, can visit the employment support worker. A family

waiting to see the local MP or their local Councillors, can also sign up to Timebank to utilise skills while a young person who may wish to use the computers beforehand to search for a job or training course , or seek advice on finding grants for youth inspired projects.

#### 4. Local sensitivities and community leadership

Organisations like St Luke's have their finger on the community pulse. External agencies often use St Luke's as a route into the community and tap into our knowledge and trust. We offer and coordinate joined up working, bringing smaller groups into the building to build their capacity. St Luke's helps build a sense of community and reduces social tensions. Our local events such as the Finsbury Arts Festival brings new communities together who previously kept their distance from each other.

#### 5. A voice for the Community

Organisations like St Luke's are in a position to give a voice for the community. Bringing people together under one roof gives a vehicle for community activism and community voices. People wishing to be involved and participate with the community are able to coalesce at St Luke's, find strength, and are no longer lone voices in the community.

### THE DIFFERENCE WE MAKE

Ask many large multi-purpose community organisations what they do, and the answer is inevitably long and complicated. Essentially St Luke's improves people's lives, tackling the causes and symptoms of social injustice and inequality. We can currently count over 65 discrete activities taking place at St Luke's each week (appendix 1); this does not include more imprecise activities such as 'being there for people', 'being a sympathetic ear', or having somewhere warm and safe to rest.

Our community building is a place of support and sanctuary to hundreds of local people, many of them the most vulnerable and isolated in the neighbourhood. Many more people know about St Luke's, they may not come to the centre, or only come a few times a year for a public event, but to them it increases their individual and community well-being if they know they have somewhere to go should they ever need it.

Sampson and Weaver (2010) suggest that the two key determinants of a successful community organisation and centre are attracting people and connecting them, but they agree there is significant difficulties in measuring effectiveness – for example, how can you measure 'flourishing' as in a flourishing community?

St Luke's type of organisation takes a holistic approach to dealing with an individual's needs and problems; we deal with the 'person'. For example, their unemployment issue may be linked to a housing issue, language barriers, benefits take-up problem, family education

issues, or alcohol and drug dependency. An individual may come to St Luke's with an individual issue, but through our connectivity with other agencies, we can help holistically.

St Luke's receives over 700 visitors on an average week using one or more the 65 different activities. St Luke's is a thriving community anchor attracting and connecting people.

### OUR ROLE IN TACKLING INEQUALITY

St Luke's role in tackling inequality is diverse, readily available, reactive to changing needs, and effective. Bunhill ward, like much of Islington, has significant inequalities, with great disparity of wealth and opportunities in the population, yet our role in tackling this is diverse. For example, we provide opportunities and space for people from all backgrounds to gather; we help 're-distribute' wealth of City firms through our business engagement and volunteering programme, we provide job-skills training and mentoring to young people to get them back to work; we provide a base for community activity and services for over 25 different organisations under one roof.

### HOW ISLINGTON COUNCIL COULD SUPPORT OUR WORK

The Islington Labour Party manifesto in 2010 stated that:

"Community centres provide an invaluable service and Labour will press ahead with plans to develop stronger centres into vibrant community hubs, which deliver a range of services to their communities" (Islington Labour, 2010).

This submission of evidence demonstrates what can be achieved by community hubs. We need the Council to press ahead with its plans to develop stronger centres across the borough. We believe this can be achieved in a number of ways which align with the manifesto:

#### De-centralise council decision making powers, and use Community hubs as a resource and conduit into local neighbourhoods

1. St Luke's has been able to demonstrate some of the early benefits of the EC1 Neighbourhood Management programme. This could be strengthened and possibly evolve into a localised decision-making body influencing and controlling core council services in the locality. This might be extended to participatory budgeting at Neighbourhood level. Community Hubs such as St Luke's could take a lead management and administration role in these devolved bodies, bringing their benefits of local knowledge and cost-effectiveness.

### Make more use of the existing community hubs

1. Support Islington Credit Union, Islington People's Rights, and Islington Law Centre with funding to deliver weekly services in key community hubs across the Borough, directly into neighbourhoods such as St Luke's.
2. Re-establish Citizen Advice Bureaux offices and service provision within existing community hubs
3. Support the innovative EC1 Help on your Doorstep service with funding that ensures they make use of the spaces within existing community centres
4. When the Council needs to hold a meeting away from their own premises, they should use Community Hubs to save council costs and as a way of bringing income and vitality to hubs
5. Where Youth Services and facilities are not being efficiently or properly used in a neighbourhood, existing community centres should be given more support and a fair chance in bidding for commissions to take over centres or bring services into their existing buildings.
6. Establish neighbourhood volunteering teams rather than a single borough project. Community hubs could become local volunteer centres where people call upon as a first point of call, rather than having to ring a telephone number or visit non-descript office where no services take place. Existing projects such as the Time Bank networks could take the lead in this.

### Creating better communities

1. Using Neighbourhood Management groups as funders and decision-makers to tackle specific neighbourhood issues e.g. crime. Tackling crime and creating safer neighbourhood has to be tackled by communities acting together.
2. Using S106 from building developments to create a sense of local community rather than only paying for public realm or hard-measured economic outputs. E.g. holding 'welcome to our neighbourhood' events and local knowledge literature provided by local community hubs, rather than central council departments.
3. Supporting the opportunities for large private corporations on Islington's doorstep to become involved in local life and voluntary sector, through providing dedicated Business Link officers working in community hubs (St Luke's has a successful to model to emulate).
4. Maintain and expand community food-growing. St Luke's food growing demonstrates how new communities can establish and come together through the simple task of gardening. This is a classless activity, and provides innumerable well-being benefits. St Luke's has taken a leading role in this activity through dedicated horticulture officers. We feel the Council should fund these posts as a sure way of achieving high social capital.

5. Make discretionary services for older people core funded. Community hubs can take a key role in improving lives of older people, tackling isolation and preventing/delaying the need for social care. Traditional day centres need support in evolving into community centres that attract older people as much as those younger than them.
6. Establish Older Person's activity co-ordinators employed by community hubs. Perhaps even Islington could support the creation of its own jointly branded Council/University of the Third Age based across numerous community hubs.
7. Reconsider the wholesale move towards individual care budgets as this will benefit a few with social care needs, but at the expense of the majority of older people whose community centres will lose their core/block grants.

### CONCLUSION

Large, independent, multi-purpose community organisations like St Luke's are distinctive and effective in helping communities. We provide a wide range of services that tackle the causes and symptoms of social injustice and inequality. Through being hubs of multiple activity, over the long-term we build up a distinct and effective knowledge of local needs, and attract and connect people and organisations serving their needs. We run services, help co-ordinate local service delivery, and act as and foster local voices and neighbourhood ambassadors. Importantly, we know our area and can quickly adapt to changing needs.

The significant contribution our type of organisation adds to Islington communities needs to be better recognised by the statutory sector and funders. Without organisations such as St Luke's the most vulnerable members of society will suffer. Organisations need to be actively involved in policy and decision making, promoted and supported by the local authority. These organisations cannot survive without proper attractive facilities and many need capital improvements funding to attract local people (St Luke's is about to embark on a multi-million pound refurbishment and extension project.)

Finally, the distinctive benefits of multiple activity and services of organisations such as St Luke's might help the commissioners conclude the whole is greater than the sum of our parts. To sustain this, and to avoid even greater inequality in our community, it is therefore critical that revenue funding for existing and new community projects, and core infrastructure funding is maintained during the period of spending cuts.

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## **REAL LIFE EXAMPLES**

### **Lorraine, 43, lives St Luke's Estate EC1.**

Lorraine has recently set up a social enterprise at St Luke's Centre with two other local residents, offering low cost Indian Head Massages to local residents and workers. Lorraine was a volunteer for 4 years for another Islington multi-purpose community group (Holloway Neighbourhood Group) which inspired her to learn a new skill. Lorraine took up a local course in Indian Head Massage and received training from another Bunhill resident who knew about St Luke's Centre and the possibilities of using the centre as a base to deliver services.

An approach to St Luke's led to an offer of free space once a week in a previously poorly used part of the community centre to provide low cost Indian head massages to local people.

Other service providers at St Luke's also connect their clients with Lorraine's service as part of their service package, which makes it well-used and financially sustainable. They can market their low-cost services in a busy public building used by people who benefit the most from this type of service and are normally unable to afford it. Lorraine and her colleagues can also access free business advice and computer facilities all under the same roof.

The new service has given Lorraine a real boost to her confidence, improved her health, and given her a new skill which will help her back into the job market.

### **Chris, 49, lives Whitecross Street Estate EC1**

Chris became involved in his community as a way of improving his area and quality of life. St Luke's community gardening team started outreach work on the Whitecross Street Estate which inspired a number of residents to form a gardening club and tidy up their estate. The club applied for an Edible Islington grant and now have proper community food growing spaces shared by local residents. St Luke's also introduced the club to a large corporate partner (Hogan Lovells – a City law firm) who set up a mini-Apprentice day on Whitecross Street market to sell tomato seedlings with proceeds reinvested back into the allotment project so that more people can join in.

Chris suffers from long term health problems which prevent him from working, but thanks to St Luke's inspiration and introducing him to his neighbours, he now plays a very active part in community life and is very involved in his newly built estate-based community centre.

### **Rose, 80, lives Kings Square Estate EC1**

Rose has been coming to St Luke's Centre for 8 years, having lived in the neighbourhood all her life. She was introduced by another local resident who suggested that Rose got out and about in the community. Rose now comes to St Luke's almost every day, and is heavily involved in volunteer and user-led social activities. She enjoys the daily subsidised lunches, the numerous well-being courses on offer, growing her own food, but most of all meeting her friends and keeping company with local people. Without a community centre like St Luke's, Rose would not have anywhere to meet people, nor come into contact with qualified workers who can deal with any of her needs. Rose says that St Luke's Centre keeps her healthy in body and soul and is a complete lifeline for older people living locally.

**Services Provided at St Luke's Centre (August 2010)**

Target Group Key:

- 1 – activity aimed at whole community
- 2 – activity aimed at older persons
- 3 – activity aimed at children/youngpersons

<b>Services</b>	<b>Service / Facility Provider (St Luke's unless stated)</b>	<b>Target Group</b>
Community Café	Camden Society (40% minimum employment of disabled persons)	1
Social Day Care / Pastoral service		2
Hairdressing	Jarrolds	2
Beauty Therapy	Jarrolds	2
Adult Drama		1
Finsbury Arts Festival		1
Whitecross Street/EC1 Summer Festival		1
Family Fun Days/Community Social Events		1
Community Food Growing		1
Community Gardening Training		1
Yoga classes x 2		1
Time Bank		1
Manicures		2
Free Uk Online Centre (IT & Internet Access)		1
Early Dementia Social Day Care Service		2
Heart & Stroke Club	Manor Gardens Heart & Stroke Club	2
PC Pals training (Community IT Training)	Slaughter & May	2
Older People's Craft Group	Mary Ward Centre	2
Legal Advice	Nabarros	1
Welfare Benefits Advice	Islington People's Rights	1
Debt Advice	Royal Courts of Justice CAB	1
Employment Advice	Islington Law Centre	1
Homelessness Advice	Finsbury Park Homeless Families Unit	1
Careers Advice	EC1 Connect	1
Information Advice & Guidance	Islington Working	1
Over 50s employment advice	Age Concern	1
Capoeira		1
Kung Fu	Fujian White Crane	1
Childrens Ballet & Tap	Clerkenwell School of Ballet	3

Childrens Craft Club		3
Social Care Minibus Transport		2
Table Tennis after school club		3
Indian Head Massage	Social enterprise	1
Street Dancing		3
Sewing Group		2
Art Class		2
Ballet & Movement	Saddler's Wells	2
Line Dancing		2
Tai Chi x 2	Aquaterra / Private	1
Keep Fit	Aquaterra	2
Seated Exercise		2
Barn Dancing	Aquaterra	2
Ballroom Dancing		2
Bike Maintenance	LBI Youth Department	3
MPs Surgery	Emily Thornberry	1
Councillors Surgery	Councillors	1
Car boot sales		1
Spanish conversation classes		2
Corporate Engagement	Hogan Lovells	1
Older Persons outings		2
EC1 Walking Group	LBI	2
EC1 Connect service in building	EC1 Connect	1
Neighbourhood Management		1
Credit Union	Islington & City Credit Union	1
After School Learning Club		3
Function & meeting room hire		1
Bike hire		1
After Adoption advice	After Adoption (tenant)	1
Music Therapy	Key Changes (tenant)	1
Community based mental health services	Islington PCT (tenant)	1
Optician Services (Quarterly)	Hoxton Eye Centre	1
Social Work Placements	City University & London Metropolitan	1
Future Jobs Funders (x3)	LBI/Job Centre Plus	3
Older Persons Outreach Service		2
Beekeeping	Alessia Bolis	1
Financial services	Black Ethnic Minority Financial Services	1
Educational grants	Worrall & Fuller	3