



COMMUNITY REASSURANCE



THE ROLE OF LONDON'S VOLUNTARY AND COMMUNITY SECTOR

Independent Academic Research
Studies, March 2007

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Government Office for London (GOL), London Voluntary Service Council (LVSC), Race on the Agenda (ROTA) and London Civic Forum (LCF) with Independent Academic Research Studies (IARS) carried out a project to:

- ✚ Provide a forum to raise awareness at all levels of the role of London's voluntary and community sector (VCS) in community reassurance.
- ✚ Allow the VCS to develop its role through the process of identifying needs and devising solutions to co-ordinate and capacity build the sector to fulfil various roles in case of an emergency.
- ✚ Produce an evidence-based report through a consultation event and project, and develop a VCS Community Reassurance action plan.
- ✚ Provide an opportunity for the VCS and public sector to come together to share ideas and experiences towards a safer London for all.

Over 100 individuals and organisations attended the consultation event and submitted their views during the two workshops. In analysing the participants' responses from the event feedback sessions and the evaluation questionnaire responses, the evidence points to gaps and challenges in three main areas:

Area 1: understanding the role of the VCS in an emergency or major incident and devising appropriate strategies to close the existing gaps that are highlighted in this report.

Area 2: recognising that communication channels require greater consideration, both for preventative and emergency situations.

Area 3: planning appropriate training and awareness-raising schemes which deliver 'fitness for purpose' at all levels of the VCS community.

The overarching messages from the consultation were:

- ✚ A requirement for greater involvement of local VCS groups in supporting large-size frontline VCS groups in the event of an emergency or incident.
- ✚ The need to define a formal action plan for their involvement.
- ✚ Better awareness and methods of communication between groups, local authorities and residents.
- ✚ Better coordination between small and large VCS groups working on community reassurance.
- ✚ Training opportunities for local VCS groups.
- ✚ Regular follow-up events at local and regional level.

The conclusions and recommendations for a plan of action are:

- ✚ Greater involvement of VCS in developing and planning community reassurance actions.
- ✚ Large-size, national VCS frontline organisations would benefit from the support which local voluntary and community groups could offer in the event of an emergency or incident.

- ✚ There is work already being carried out by small VCS groups but not enough information about it. Links are yet to be established between these ongoing projects and current structures for community reassurance.
- ✚ The Emergency Planning Officers of local authorities would benefit from the support which local voluntary and community groups could make to their structure.
- ✚ The Civil Contingencies Act and other accompanying regulations provide for a better coordination between the provision of emergency services by public services and VCS organisations. However, these provisions are yet to be fully implemented in all London areas. There are enough case studies in the community to show the way to go about implementing the provisions, but not enough information about them. Therefore, more research is needed into these case studies and how they can be used for future planning.
- ✚ Local voluntary and community groups have many skills which could be of great benefit to their local authorities, frontline, national VCS organisations and emergency services.

An immediate follow-up to this report should entail:

- ✚ Defining the role of the local VCS groups in:
 - Prevention.
 - Community Incidents.
 - Large scale emergencies.
- ✚ Using existing local authority and community website links and communication channels to raise awareness of the VCS, particularly of small local groups.
- ✚ Creating a comprehensive list of local voluntary and community groups with key contact information and set up a distribution system at neighbourhood level.
- ✚ Using the resources of the MPS Communities Together Bulletin to communicate key messages.
- ✚ Using the resources of the 'The Institute of Community Cohesion' to support the development of training programmes in partnership with the VCS national, frontline organisations and other key organisations as appropriate.
- ✚ Recognising the knowledge and skills of local voluntary community groups in devising their role and encourage leadership as appropriate.
- ✚ Requesting Government and/or other stakeholders to provide support for training of local VCS groups in developing their roles.
- ✚ Carrying out additional research and awareness raising programmes on identifying and learning from successful ongoing VCS projects in community reassurance. This should lead to:
 - Better coordination.
 - Greater Awareness.
 - Implementation of the Civil Contingencies Act in all London areas.