

MINUTES OF THE SAFER STRONGER COMMUNITIES SELECT COMMITTEE

Tuesday, 15 July 2014 at 7.00 pm

PRESENT: Councillors Pauline Morrison (Chair), David Michael (Vice-Chair), Andre Bourne, Colin Elliott, Alicia Kennedy, Pat Raven, Luke Sorba, Eva Stamirowski, Paul Upex and James-J Walsh

ALSO PRESENT: Timothy Andrew (Scrutiny Manager), Aileen Buckton (Executive Director for Community Services), Andreas Ghosh (Head of Personnel & Development), Pooja Kulkarni (HR Management Information Officer), Salena Mulhere (Overview and Scrutiny Manager), Barrie Neal (Head of Corporate Policy and Governance) and Geeta Subramaniam-Mooney (Head of Crime Reduction and Supporting People)

1. Confirmation of the Chair and Vice-Chair

Resolved: to confirm Councillor Morrison as Chair and Councillor Michael as Vice Chair of the Committee.

2. Minutes of the meeting held on 25 Feb 2014

Resolved: to agree the minutes of the meeting held on 25 February 2014 as an accurate record.

3. Declarations of interest

Councillor Elliot declared a non-prejudicial interest as a member of the Lewisham Disability Coalition.

Councillor Michael declared a non-prejudicial interest as a patron of the Marsha Phoenix Trust and supporter of the Catford Wanderers Cricket Club.

Councillor Walsh declared a non-prejudicial interest as the Chair of the Lewisham LGBT community group and as a member of Rushey Green Community First.

Councillor Upex declared a non-prejudicial interest as a member of Forest Hill and Sydenham Voluntary Services Association.

Councillor Kennedy declared a non-prejudicial interest as a member of the Marsha Phoenix memorial trust.

4. Select Committee work programme

Timothy Andrew (Scrutiny Manager) introduced the report.

The Committee discussed the work programme for 2014/15; the following suggestions for additions to the Committee's work programme were made:

- A review of work in the borough to combat gang violence, with a specific emphasis on initiatives to support girls and young women. This would focus on assessing the performance of efforts to prevent girls and young women becoming involved in gangs through education and prevention work.

- Scrutiny of the implementation of the borough's volunteering strategy.
- As part of the update on Local Assemblies update – a analysis of the links between Assemblies and community groups.
- A review of the incidences of dog bites as well as measures in place to deal with irresponsible dog owners.
- The delivery of services for people from Lewisham's LGBT community.

Aileen Buckton (Executive Director for Community Services) asked the Committee to note the following in relation to the scrutiny of the borough's volunteering strategy:

- It was likely that the Council would be carrying out a consultation on the main grants programme. It would be difficult to invite individual Lewisham based organisations to address the Committee because of the potential conflict of interest this would represent.

Resolved: to agree the work programme for 2014/15 incorporating the suggestions from members.

5. Council employment profile (2013-14)

Andreas Ghosh (Head of Human Resources) introduced the report and presentation. The following key points were noted:

- The Council aspired to have a workforce that represented Lewisham's community.
- There were some areas where the Council was exceeding its targets for workforce representation and others where it was not doing as well.
- Tracking and monitoring of staff changes through the employee profile was of increased importance because of the redundancies and staff losses caused as a result of cuts to the Council's budget.
- The Council's workforce was broadly representative of the economically active population; however, as a result of reorganisations there had been a reduction in Black staff.
- There were a high number of job applications by people from the BME community, which demonstrated that the Council was perceived as a fair employer.
- The employment and retention of young people into the Council's workforce was recognised as an area for improvement.
- The Council aimed to ensure that there was a representative workforce, but officers were mindful of the potential for target setting to be discriminatory.
- Trends in the Council's employment data demonstrated that the Council's non-schools work force had declined substantially in the past 15 years. This was for a number of reasons, including: the move to provide some services through partner organisations; increases in efficiency and the loss of some professions. This decrease was offset partly by the increase in schools staff, however, it was noted that the increase in schools was largely in non-teaching staff.
- A high number of employees lived in the borough; this demonstrated a significant commitment by residents in the borough to the Council and contributed to employees understanding of, and commitment to, local issues.

- The recent upturn in the economy would have an impact on the Council's ability to attract and retain employees working in care because the Council continued to work with restrained resources, whilst this was not the case in the private sector.
- The majority of agency workers retained by the Council were in the areas of street cleansing and social care.
- Women were overrepresented in caring professions, but the Council also had one of the highest proportions of women in senior management positions in London.
- There were small numbers of self-declared disabled employees at the Council. It had been a struggle to ensure that there was an on-going disabled employee's forum.
- The Council's workforce was a characteristically older, not ageing, workforce. The older age profile of the Council was a result of the general employment of older people.
- Older people were employed at the Council more often for a number of reasons, including: the attractiveness of the Council as an employer for people returning to work (particularly women with caring responsibilities); that the Council was not a 'trendy' employer; the loss of the culture of apprentices, which the Council's apprenticeships programme was attempting to reverse.
- High redundancy costs also made it more likely for the Council to hold on to its older employees.
- Information from exit surveys indicated that there had been a fall in the number of people who were satisfied on leaving the jobs at Lewisham. This was thought to be the result of the Council's programme of reorganisations and redundancies.

In response to questions from the Committee, the following key points were noted:

- There was no official retirement age. People were entitled to take their pensions from the age of 60, with some exceptions.
- Information would be provided about the numbers of people working past the voluntary retirement age.
- The drop in motivation recorded by exit surveys could partly be explained by the programme of staff reorganisations and redundancies. Information from the last staff survey would be shared with the Committee.
- The Council would not discriminate against older people. The ambition was to ensure that the workforce represented the local population.
- Information was kept about disciplines and grievances. Numbers were low – so sharing any details about grievances would be difficult – because of the requirement to ensure staff anonymity.
- Year before last there was an increase in grievances and disciplinarys of staff at the lower grades. However, this was not disproportionate when viewed more widely.
- Information disaggregating the answers to the unknown/prefer not to say category of the equalities monitoring would be provided to the committee.
- Officers would be working with the various staff forums in order to determine how to encourage responses to equalities monitoring. As part of this work, it would be necessary to ensure that there were clear messages about what was being done with the data being collected.

- The Council had been successful in its attempts to reduce the amount of overtime being paid. A substantial proportion of time allocated as 'overtime' payments were in reality for weekend working.
- The number of applications for jobs available was typically 10:1, which was positive for the Council and appeared to show that the Council was an attractive employer.
- Information about the social work recruitment programme would be shared with the Committee. There were still some shortages of social workers, particularly in the area of child protection.
- Ofsted inspections in neighbouring boroughs often had a detrimental impact on the Council's ability to attract social workers, because authorities reacted to shortages by increasing rates of pay.
- There were some areas of under representation for staff from minority ethnic groups. This tended to be where there were low numbers of people from particular minority groups living in the borough- or where there had been a recent change in the local population.
- The internship/graduate programme was a small scale programme designed to give an opportunity to a few local people each year. It was established in order to ensure that there were opportunities at the Council alongside the National Graduate Development Programme.
- There were currently 13 on-going employment tribunals. The cost of bringing a tribunal had increased, which had reduced the numbers of staff coming forward. The number of tribunals taking place was also low in comparison to other organisations.
- Information collected in exit surveys and exit interviews was anonymous.

The Committee also discussed and noted the following key points:

- The perception of unfairness which could be created if the Council appeared to discriminate against older people in favour of young people by creating entry level jobs.
- A query was raised about whether there was sufficient targeting of Council employment programmes- to ensure support focused on people most in need.

Resolved: to note the report.

6. Safer Lewisham Plan (2014-15)

Geeta Subramaniam-Mooney (Head of Crime Reduction and Supporting People) introduced the report; the following key points were noted:

- The statutory crime and disorder partnership for Lewisham was the Safer Lewisham Partnership (SLP).
- The Partnership focused a great deal of effort on prevention work.
- One example of this was the 'responsible retailers' scheme. The scheme encouraged retailers to restrict the availability of knives. Retailers were also encouraged to restrict the sale of high strength alcohol in problem areas.
- Crime figures were highly changeable. Figures altered from day to day and week to week, the Police verification process also had an impact on the final figures.

- The introduction of Policing and Crime Commissioners had brought about a change in the way in which policing priorities were set and monitored.
- The Mayor of London (currently Boris Johnson) was the police and crime commissioner for the city.
- In his Police and Crime plan, the Mayor of London had set targets for the reduction of seven priority neighbourhood crimes.
- Performance in Lewisham would be measured against these targets – but this didn't restrict the Safer Lewisham Partnership from setting local priorities.
- The SLP priorities were: dealing with volume crime; violence against women and girls; serious youth violence and antisocial behaviour.
- Anti-social behaviour was regularly highlighted as an area of concern for residents.
- A six month update on the Plan would be presented at the next meeting.

In response to questions from the Committee, the following key points were noted:

- There was no clear link between levels of recorded crime and the fear of crime; on occasion confidence data and reported levels of crime appeared divergent.
- It was clear that there was distrust in the community about the figures.
- Often wider publicity and communications issues – had an impact on confidence and issues of fear. These were not necessarily to do with local issues.
- There were 62 questions in the public attitudes survey. It was carried out by phone and whilst it was statistically relevant, it was recognised that a number of the questions were open to subjective interpretation.
- Training had taken place to ensure that the officers were alert to the fact that child sexual exploitation was not restricted to women and girls; but that it could also affect men and boys.
- There were initiatives in the borough that worked with the perpetrators of domestic violence. One such project was, 'Tryangle', which worked with perpetrators when they first came to the attention of the police.
- The recently completed Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) Plan would be shared with the Committee. Information about female genital mutilation (FGM) and forced marriage was being distributed to schools. The Council and its partners had developed a single point of contact for FGM and forced marriage, but information about incidences of both issues in the borough remained limited.
- Information about violence against women and girls was collected from the police and from accident and emergency departments.
- Further information would be shared with the Committee about crime 'hot spots' in the borough.
- There were no hotspots for domestic violence, incidences occurred across the borough.
- Further information would be provided to the Committee about ways in which Members could engage with businesses in their wards to support the responsible retailers scheme.
- The Council was working with the Police in Lewisham to ensure that resources and information could be shared, For example, the Police were using local assemblies newsletters in some parts of the borough to share information about local policing issues.

- The Police were being encouraged to use social media – this was more effective in some instances than others – it was important to strike a balance between providing information and making people afraid.
- At one point, Lewisham had the lowest levels of confidence in the police in London. Confidence in Lewisham’s police force had improved, but it was still low.
- Confidence in the police was a wider issue for the criminal justice system. Confidence in the Crown Prosecution Service and the Courts System were also vital to ensuring that people felt able to come forward with information after an incidence of serious violence.
- The Council had a statutory responsibility to tackle anti-social behaviour. The Council’s community safety teams were responsible for delivering initiatives in partnership with the police.
- Police contact points were not being well used; a review was being carried out by the Mayor’s Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC).
- Further information about contact points would be shared with the Committee.

Resolved: to note the plan.

7. Main grants programme consultation

Aileen Buckton (Executive Director for Community Services) introduced the report. The following key points were noted:

- The Council had a strong relationship with the community and voluntary sector (CVS).
- The Council was facing a major challenge to redesign its services and reduce its budget. For the first time in ten years, a reduction was being proposed to the main grants budget.
- It was no longer feasible to put forward a programme to protect the sector. A 25% reduction (£1.5m) was being proposed – which was at the lower end of the cuts being planned for Council services.
- The grants budget was £5.9m and a further £20m was spent across the Council on the commissioning and delivery of services from the community and voluntary sector.
- £330k of the budget was allocated to the London borough grants scheme, which supported organisations providing services across the city. There was no proposal to reduce this.
- It was important that there continued to be a vibrant and independent community and voluntary sector, which provided advice to residents and acted as a critical friend to the Council.
- Lewisham had a three year programme of grant funding, which enabled the core costs of organisations to be covered, enabling them to draw in other funding and resources.
- There would be funding available for infrastructure organisations.
- The new programme would encourage community and voluntary sector organisations to work in partnership with the Council to deliver services.
- Lewisham was the first London Borough to develop a community and voluntary sector compact. This long-term commitment to the community and voluntary sector made it important to ensure the consultation on the main grants programme was well run.

- Organisations would be expected to work collaboratively to deliver sector wide delivery of the Council's equalities objectives.
- Consultation events would be held across the borough. The consultation process would allow for flexibility in responses.
- The consultation would close on 30 October. A report would be available for the Committee's meeting on 3rd November, but much of the information would need to be provided at the meeting.

The Committee resolved to suspended standing orders at 21:30 in order to enable the completion of committee business.

In response to questions from the Committee, the following key points were noted:

- The programme of small grants would continue. There was currently £100k allocated to this programme.
- The community and voluntary sector were not major employers in the borough, so it was unlikely that the reduction in funding would substantially impact on employment in the borough. However, it was recognised that CVS organisations were important local organisations, employing local people. The impact assessment being carried out on the proposals would identify where there would be an adverse impact on any particular group.
- The Council had, in the past provided 'investment in kind' through reduced rents or the use of shared facilities.
- Due to the programme of cuts the Council was required to obtain commercial rents for its assets. Even if the Council was in a position to provide buildings for the use of the sector, these would need to be on the basis of full repairing and maintenance leases, which many CVS organisations would be unwilling to take on and manage.
- Different funding amounts being allocated to the different grant themes would be made available once the results of the consultation were available.
- The community and voluntary sector was adaptable, and would be in a position to adjust to the requirement to deliver new services.
- One of the changes in the new programme was to allow organisations to bid to be a community development partner – which would draw together partners to coordinate the needs of a defined neighbourhood, working with local assemblies and other local groups.
- Officers would work to reduce duplication in the programme, in partnership with the sector, to ensure there was minimal duplication of effort.
- There would be a covering letter with the consultation document, setting out the context for the changes. This would most likely be from Councillor Millbank (Cabinet Member for the Third Sector)
- If there was to be a named person to deal with queries about the consultation, this would probably be an officer because typically queries about consultations focused on administrative issues.

Resolved: to note the report.

8. Items to be referred to Mayor and Cabinet

None

The meeting ended at 9.45 pm

Chair:

Date:
