

MINUTES OF THE SAFER STRONGER COMMUNITIES SELECT COMMITTEE

Monday, 20 April 2015 at 7.00 pm

PRESENT: Councillors Pauline Morrison (Chair), Pat Raven (Vice-Chair), Andre Bourne, Brenda Dacres, Colin Elliott, David Michael, Luke Sorba and James-J Walsh

APOLOGIES: Councillors Alicia Kennedy and Paul Upex

ALSO PRESENT: Councillor Joan Millbank (Cabinet Member Third Sector & Community), Paul Aladenika (Policy and Partnership Manager), Timothy Andrew (Scrutiny Manager), Aileen Buckton (Executive Director for Community Services), Charlotte Dale (Interim Overview and Scrutiny Manager), Matthew Henaughan (Community Resources Manager), James Lee (Service Manager, Inclusion and Prevention and Head of Cultural and Community Development) and Geeta Subramaniam-Mooney (Head of Crime Reduction and Supporting People)

1. Confirmation of the Chair and Vice-Chair

- 1.1 Timothy Andrew (Scrutiny Manager) opened the meeting and invited Members to confirm the result of the Council's Annual General Meeting, appointing Councillor Morrison as Chair and Councillor Raven as Vice-Chair of the Committee.

Resolved: to agree Councillor Morrison as Chair and Councillor Raven as Vice-Chair of the Select Committee.

2. Minutes of the meeting held on 10 March 2015

Resolved: to agree the minutes of the meeting on 10 March as an accurate record.

3. Declarations of interest

Councillor Morrison – non-prejudicial – Trustee and Chair Ackroyd Community Association

Councillor Elliot – non-prejudicial – Council Appointee to the Lewisham Disability Coalition; Member of the Grove Park Community Group

Councillor Raven – non-prejudicial – Member of the Lewisham Disability Coalition

Councillor Michael – non-prejudicial – Member of the Catford Wanderers Cricket Club; Patron of the Friends of Marsha Phoenix Memorial Trust

Councillor Dacres – non-prejudicial – Trustee of the New Cross Gate Trust

Councillor Sorba – non-prejudicial – supporter of Telegraph Hill play club

4. Select Committee work programme 2015/16

- 4.1 Timothy Andrew (Scrutiny Manager) introduced the report. The process for devising, prioritising and agreeing the Committee's 2015-16 work programme was highlighted.

- 4.2 The Committee then discussed its 2015-16 work programme with officers; the following key points were noted:

- The Committee wanted a full response to the matters raised during the consideration of the Council's employment profile in 2014-15.
- The implementation of the volunteering strategy was led by partners in the community and voluntary sector (CVS), with support from officers in the Council.
- An invitation would be made to CVS partners to update the Committee on progress to implement the strategy.
- The Committee wanted to receive information from a range of sources for the upcoming agenda item about provision for the LGBT community. Invitations would be made to the Metro Centre and to representatives of LGBT Camden.
- Officers offered to present a review of information about the approach to equalities provision through the main grants programme; officers also offered to bring the review of data for the preparation of the new Comprehensive Equalities Scheme to the Committee in the Autumn.
- The Committee noted the suggestion by the Sustainable Development Select Committee to carry out a review of the Council's enforcement activity towards the end of the municipal year. It was also noted that changes to the service were currently being implemented.
- The Committee would consider carrying out an in-depth review of issues related to poverty, which might include: in-work poverty; food poverty; the impact of poverty on lone parent families and the effects of benefit changes. The Committee also discussed the possibility of reviewing information from the indices of multiple deprivation on a street by street level. The Committee was informed that new data was due to be published in the summer.

Resolved: to amend the Committee's work programme based on the discussions and to put forward the draft programme to the Business Panel.

5. Voluntary sector accommodation

5.1 Matthew Henaughan (Community Resources Manager) introduced the report; the following key points were noted:

- Officers were seeking a decision from Mayor and Cabinet about the Council's approach to letting community premises.
- The existing approach to the provision of space for community and voluntary sector organisations was inconsistent.
- A new policy on accommodation for the voluntary sector was required to remove past discrepancies and to ensure that the Council was making the most effective use of Council premises.
- There was currently a 30% occupancy rate of the Council's hireable spaces, which was contrasted with the high level of demand for office spaces.
- It was recognised that there were a number of different options for the rationalisation and allocation of premises.
- Three options were considered for the future usage of space (continuing existing arrangements; full cost recovery; rationalisation with a transparent allocations system).
- Two of the options (retaining existing arrangements and full cost recovery) were discounted before the consultation with the CVS started.
- Officers preferred a tiered approach to allocations which emphasised collaboration.
- There were 12 written responses to the consultation.

- Whilst some respondents had specific concerns about their future usage of space, it was recognised that there was a need for a change.
- There was a concern from some respondents to the consultation that changes were taking place in isolation; this was not the case.
- Any future implementation of a new process would include a sufficient period of notice for affected organisations. There would also be sufficient time for the possibility of community asset transfer to be explored.
- The appeal of community asset transfers for organisations was limited because of the potential long term maintenance and upkeep costs involved.
- There would be a process of dispute resolution to resolve issues with existing and proposed usage.
- Further discussions and consultation would take place as plans developed.
- The current set up of community centres was not fit for the needs of a modern community.

5.2 Matthew Henaughan (Community Resources Manager) and Aileen Buckton (Executive Director for Community Services) responded to questions from the Committee; the following key points were noted:

- If a new approach to voluntary sector accommodation was agreed by Mayor and Cabinet, it would result in a distinct change from existing practice.
- The concept of ‘peppercorn’ rent was no longer an appropriate way to think about the usage of Council assets.
- The Council could not maintain a system of hidden subsidies for organisations by offering them discounted space.
- There had to be a formal agreement for the funding of services.
- Officers would work through each situation to bring existing agreements up to date, assessing the legal position of each asset the Council owned.
- The Council already supported the usage of libraries by community and voluntary sector organisations.
- Proposals for the future use of day centres were being consulted on – and it was intended that any future approach to the use of day centres would incorporate the Council’s strategic priorities for its assets.
- Community groups were being asked to make use of currently underutilised space.
- The consultation on voluntary sector accommodation was an opportunity for the Council to talk to the community and voluntary sector about its accommodation needs and to encourage it to use space efficiently, in a period of reduced resources – as had been the case with the Council and other public sector organisations.
- The Council wanted to ensure that there were community centres suitable for the needs of modern communities.
- In some cases, organisations were using funding just to pay staff to open and close buildings, which was not an effective use of resources.
- The Council intended to use in house capacity to reduce any costs associated with moves.
- Officers would look further at the costs of transitional arrangements.
- Each building would have its own agreement – there would be no blanket policy.
- The designation of space for different uses in new developments was decided by planning policy.
- Few organisations wanted retail sized spaces. In some cases organisations wanted new developments to set up trusts to fund future initiatives, rather than creating spaces in large developments.

5.3 Councillor Millbank (Cabinet Member for the Third Sector) addressed the Committee; the following key points were noted:

- There were some difficulties in determining the commercial value of certain assets. She gave the example of a play centre in a park – which might be important to the local community – but the value of which was difficult to determine.
- There was an important process to be worked through with the Council's Corporate Assets team.
- The Council sought to act as a critical friend to the community and voluntary sector in order to develop more dynamic ways of working.
- It was intended that Voluntary Action Lewisham would support organisations to collaborate and to share resources.
- It was incumbent on organisations to use resources (whether they be money, buildings or volunteer time) to best effect.
- There had been a long standing issue with the accommodation of the community and voluntary sector and many organisations in the sector were keen to see a change.

5.4 The Committee resolved to share its views with Mayor and Cabinet, as follows:

5.5 The Committee recommends that officers give specific consideration to any future proposals that might threaten the viability of affected organisations.

5.6 The Committee also recommends that detailed consideration be given to transitional arrangements, in order to minimise the impact of any changes on organisations.

5.7 The Committee recommends that the Mayor reviews the use of the Council's arm's length commercial vehicles in order to support community and voluntary sector usage of Council assets (including, but not limited, to interim and meanwhile use of commercial units); which should include the non-financial benefits of this type of approach.

Resolved: to share the Committee's views with Mayor and Cabinet

6. Main grant programme funding

6.1 James Lee (Head of Cultural and Community Development) introduced the report; the following key points were noted:

- The development of the main grants programme had previously been considered by the Committee.
- The existing programme ran from 2011-2015. The new programme would run from 2015 to 2018.
- In line with the Council's requirement to make substantial savings from its budget, the programme had been reduced by 25%, from £5,889,000 to £4,389,000.
- Taking into account adjustments for the 2015/16 year, London wide funding arrangements and agreements with the Clinical Commissioning Group £3,880,248 was available for the programme.
- There had been 117 applications requesting funds of £8,940,0896.
- The previous consultation on the programme had identified a preference for a reduction in the number of organisations funded, rather than the level of funding to be cut for all organisations.

- 62 organisations had been recommended for funding 48 were currently in receipt of funding.
- There were 173 attendees at consultation meetings organised by the Council and a further 60 people were involved in the consultation at meetings organised by community and voluntary organisations and attended by council officers.
- It was recognised by all involved that some difficult decisions would have to be made.
- A panel of senior officers reviewed all of the grant allocations in order to ensure there was an even spread across themes and geography.
- Officers had also developed some working principles in order to facilitate the assessment process (currently funded organisations would only receive increase on their current allocation in exceptional circumstance; organisations funded in the past would not automatically receive funding, however, preference would be given to existing recipients where there were bids of equal status; where alternative sources of funding were available funding would not be provided unless the offer was distinctly different; funding would not be used to replace a decommissioned Council service)
- Eight ward based infrastructure projects had been funded.
- The programme would be developed to increase the future ward based offer.
- Not all protected equalities characteristics had specified funding – allocations were made on the basis of identified need.
- A programme would be developed to ensure that advice giving organisations worked together to provide a comprehensive offer.
- 27 appeals against proposed funding allocations had been made in time for the deadline, three more had been received after the closing date – and it was likely that these would also be considered.
- Each organisation would be given an opportunity to make a case to Mayor and Cabinet about why the officer recommendation should be overturned.

6.2 James Lee (Head of Cultural and Community Development) and Aileen Buckton (Executive Director for Community Services) responded to questions from the Committee; the following key points were noted:

- There was a range of different reasons that the 24 organisations currently receiving funding had not been recommended for a future funding allocation. It was not the case that these applications had been poor.
- The decision not to fund an organisation did not necessarily reflect the quality of an organisation's bid.
- In some cases the context for the delivery of services had changed.
- There had also been a considerable over subscription for available funding.
- The decision making process had been intensive and had required a great deal of work.
- The £100k for small grants and faith group funding had been reviewed (and agreed by Mayor and Cabinet) as part of the existing proposals.
- The process of deciding on equalities funding had been difficult. Initially, an organisation had been sought to take on a coordinating function for the different organisations working on equality.
- However, it was felt that none of the bids demonstrated the ability to carry out this role. A recommendation had been made that the Stronger Communities Partnership board should take over this coordination role.
- The role of the partnership board would be to redirect equalities work in different ways.
- Work on equalities would likely head in a different direction.

- A decision had been taken not to provide funding for individual communities. There were previous allocations of funding to groups based largely on historical practice.
- There was, however, funding for organisations to deliver language support, where it was required.
- Officers would bring a report before the committee as soon as possible setting out equalities funding in detail and highlighting the monitoring requirements for funding allocations.
- The Goldsmiths community centre had closed, but the Goldsmiths community association was still in operation. Officers were working to deal with the issues identified with the building.
- The process of identifying organisations for neighbourhood work had been difficult. Officers wanted to be confident about the organisations being funded – with clarity about the work being undertaken.
- Officers also sought to link the Community Connections work with the proposals for neighbourhood development.
- Work had been carried out with organisations to support them in their bids for funding. This included holding grant surgeries and funding days.
- Poorer applications for funding were not necessarily from organisations that did not know how to produce good bids. It was felt that there was complacency on the part of some organisations.
- Officers had collated a range of different pieces of information about each of the funding bids and the bidding organisations; this could be presented in a range of different ways.
- It was agreed that ward profiles would be circulated.
- There was no existing funding to pay for consultants to support organisations to develop community development activities.

6.3 Joan Millbank (Cabinet Member for the Third Sector) addressed the Committee; the following key points were noted:

- Support had been provided to some organisations in their funding bids by students from Goldsmiths. This was seen as a valuable asset to the borough.
- Communities should not be viewed from a deficit point of view, whereby they always needed support from external sources to achieve successful outcomes.
- The Council worked with organisations in an attempt to make communities more resilient. Resilient communities helped people to help each other.

6.4 Members also highlighted the discrepancy between the time, motivation and skills of communities in different parts of the borough. A concern was raised that areas of affluence were the primary recipients of community development funding.

- Members requested a ward by ward inventory of organisations working in the borough showing each organisation's previous funding allocation, their new funding allocation and the location of their work – by ward or locality.

6.5 Members also questioned the allocation of £180k of existing funding to EqualTeam given the lack of reported activity by the organisation that had been highlighted in the report. Specific comments could not be given by officers on the circumstances and funding allocations of specific organisations whilst the process was still underway. Nonetheless, officers assured the Committee that all funding allocations would be monitored closely, to ensure that they were achieving their stated aims.

Resolved: to receive a further update on the main grants programme, which would provide details about the geographic spread of grant funding in the borough.

7. Draft VAWG review report

7.1 Timothy Andrew (Scrutiny Manager) introduced the report and the following key points were noted:

- The Committee had carried out its review of awareness raising in relation to Violence Against Women and Girls over three meetings, it had also received information about the Council's strategic approach to Violence Against Women and Girls.
- The Committee agreed the terms of reference for the review in November 2014.
- The evidence gathered during the review was presented in the final report.
- Members were asked to put forward recommendations based on the evidence and agree that the report be submitted to Mayor and Cabinet.

7.2 Geeta Subramaniam-Mooney (Head of Crime Reduction and Supporting People) responded to questions from the Committee. The following key points were noted:

- Officers had written to all secondary and primary school head teachers to create a profile of work taking place in the borough to develop healthy relationships.
- Advertising and awareness raising work had become increasingly focused on preventing child sexual exploitation.
- More recently, head teachers were increasingly willing to become involved in discussions about healthy relationships, child sexual exploitation and gang violence.
- The 'growing against gangs and violence' programme had been taken up by a number of schools.
- The new Violence Against Women and Girls service had started, there had been difficulties in finding space for the organisation to work from, but they were providing services on a roving basis.
- There was no intention to house the service in the Council's buildings in Catford; it was felt that the service should not look like as Council service, because this might be off putting or intimidating to some people.
- The service was called Athena – and it was run by refuge – who also worked with the London wide refuge service to place women at risk in other area of the city.
- The new service had developed a website. The address would be circulated to the Committee.

7.3 It was agreed that the Committee make recommendations in three areas:

- Schools approach to awareness raising and prevention work
- Reporting and collecting of information
- Writing to Chairs of governors to ask them to support awareness raising and prevention activities.

Resolved: to incorporate the Committee's recommendations into the report before submission to Mayor and Cabinet.

8. Items to be referred to Mayor and Cabinet

Resolved: to refer the Committee's views under item five to Mayor and Cabinet; and to refer the VAWG: awareness raising and prevention review to Mayor and Cabinet for consideration.

The meeting ended at: 21:20

Chair:

Date:
