

Safer Stronger Communities Select Committee		
Title	Lewisham Volunteering Strategy	
Contributor	Volunteering Steering Group	Item 3
Class	Part 1 (open)	1 July 2015

1. Purpose

- 1.1 This report provides the Safer Stronger Communities Select Committee with an update on the progress of the Valuing Our Community 2012-2017 volunteering strategy. The report also sets the scene for a full review of the strategy to reflect recent contextual changes and ensure that Lewisham is a borough that makes the most of its community resource.

2. Recommendation/s

Members of the Safer Stronger Communities Select Committee are recommended to note the content of this report and the attached Valuing Our Community strategy and action plan and provide comments on the proposed monitoring of the Strategy.

3. Background

- 3.1 Lewisham's Sustainable Communities Strategy identifies volunteering as a key contributor to community resilience. The voluntary and community sector in Lewisham, working in partnership with the Council, developed the Valuing Our Community strategy for 2012-17. This strategy built on an original strategy for 2006-11, which was developed following extensive consultation with a range of partners, stakeholders and Lewisham residents. It also incorporated expectations of an increase in volunteering as a result of the successful 2012 Olympics volunteering programme and its legacy.

- 3.2 It is particularly important to understand the context in which the strategy was developed which includes:

- Early stages of cuts to statutory services but with a relatively optimistic outlook around when this process might be complete
- Anticipation locally that the voluntary and community sector and volunteering will play an increasingly pivotal role within the delivery of services in Lewisham
- High profile discussions around the Big Society
- Preparations for the London Olympics including a large volunteering programme and the anticipation of a volunteering legacy

- 3.3 A range of partners were involved in the development of the strategy including:

- Job Centre Plus
- Lewisham Metropolitan Police
- Lewisham Timebank Network
- London Borough Lewisham
- Community Sector Unit

- Lewisham Sport and Leisure
- Children and Young People
- Mayors Youth Task Force
- Stronger Communities Partnership Board
- University Hospital Lewisham
- Voluntary Action Lewisham
- Volunteer Centre Lewisham

3.4 The development of the strategy was overseen by a strategy steering group which fed into Stronger Communities Partnership, which at the time was one of the sub-groups of the Lewisham Strategic Partnership.

3.5 The strategy outlined six priorities to be achieved during its lifetime. In summary, they are:

- Develop a robust volunteering infrastructure
- Increase the range and diversity of volunteering opportunities
- Increase volunteering resources across sectors
- Policy response and campaigning
- Increase the number of people volunteering and expand access to volunteering for groups at risk of exclusion
- Improve the skills base of the volunteering pool

3.6 Flowing from the priorities, an action plan was developed to take forward each priority individually.

4. Progress to date

4.1 Good progress has been made against some areas of the strategy, which remains a live document, as highlighted in the examples below.

4.2 **Volunteering good practice.** Volunteer Centre Lewisham has delivered a programme of work including one to one support, training, workshops and best practice sharing events to support volunteer involving organisations to adopt and implement good practice standards

4.3 **Incentivising volunteering.** The decision was taken to work with the national organisation Spice to explore ways of using time credits as a means of mobilising individuals to give time to their communities. This involved establishing a system where people are thanked with one credit for each hour given, which could then be used to access events, training and leisure services, or to trade time with neighbours. A range of community based organisations signed up to be part of this work and a significant number of volunteers were provided time credits, which were then 'spent' on activities from a menu of opportunities such as ten pin bowling, performances at The Albany and Blackheath Halls and treatments at what was the LESOCO Beauty School. Although the pilot work saw some success, the Council did not continue to provide funding as the take up was not as high as had been envisaged and continuing the work proved to be more expensive than had initially been thought. However, Spice has continued to provide opportunities for time credits on a much smaller scale and the work has provided invaluable learning for the future exploration of ways of valuing the contribution made by volunteers. Important lessons have been learned around keeping administration and overhead costs to a minimum and in response, Rushey Green Time Bank has been working on the development of a volunteer 'membership card' that would provide discounts with local businesses. This

development will be embedded in the forthcoming review of the strategy and subsequent new action plan.

- 4.4 **Time banking.** Lewisham has a strong tradition of time banking and is home to one of the foremost examples nationally in Rushey Green Time Bank. The value of time banking as a means of community development and increasing citizenship has long been recognised. However, in recent years there had been difficulties with the sustainability of local time banks that had been established. In response to this issue Rushey Green Time Bank has developed a model whereby time banking hubs can be developed and supported by the central organisation without the need to establish new structures in each locality. There are now time banking hubs operating in four parts of the borough. Volunteer Centre Lewisham has also developed a time bank supporting people with mental health issues
- 4.5 **Befriending** has been recognised as playing an important part in helping to relieve the pressure on statutory services – particularly in relation to health and social care. As such the Council has invested in work within Community Connections to recruit volunteers and link them up with vulnerable adults.
- 4.6 **Community Transport** continues to be a key issue in ensuring that isolated older people and disabled people are able to access services. Work has been done with Lewisham Voluntary Services and Lewisham Community Transport to further develop the role of volunteers in this context resulting in new opportunities for service users as well as savings within the Councils budget.
- 4.7 **Local Assemblies** continue to be a key forum for mobilising Lewisham residents around community action. Volunteer Centre Lewisham has begun to work with Council officers to devise ways of mobilising volunteers around priority issues which are common across the borough. This work will be further developed through the Neighbourhood Community development organisations that will be receiving funding through the Main Grants programme from 1 July 2015.

5. Next steps

- 5.1 The Volunteering Strategy remains a live document and important progress has been made against action plan objectives in some areas and a recent assessment of the strategy confirmed that the six priorities retain their relevance.
- 5.2 It must be acknowledged that progress in other areas has been slower and changes in terms of context have presented particular challenges. For example the scale and severity of cuts within the statutory sector has resulted in fewer staff resources across a range of services and limited dedicated focus on the delivery of the strategy. The anticipated opportunities around Olympic legacy have also been very limited nationally, as noted by the parliamentary Public Accounts Committee in 2013 “there is a danger of the volunteering legacy fizzling out”.
- 5.3 However, these challenges have presented good learning opportunities regarding ‘what works’ and a full review of the strategy is planned to reflect the recent letting of the Main Grants Programme. This includes on-going support for the Volunteer Centre and Rushey Green Timebank as well as a wide range of other organisations that rely on volunteers for the effective deliver of their services. The process indicated the on-going need for a

strategic overview of volunteering opportunities. The initial assessment has identified a number of areas which require further attention. These are highlighted in the action plan document attached as Appendix 1.

- 5.4 Development and support of volunteering opportunities continues to be a priority in Lewisham; ensuring that all organisations are supported in recruiting and retaining volunteers and that volunteers, and potential volunteers, have as a rewarding experience as possible to cement their commitment and foster continuing giving. As such the monitoring and review of the strategy will be given renewed impetus through a steering group, feeding into Stronger Communities Partnership as originally envisaged, which will provide regular updates on progress and highlight barriers to effective delivery.

6. Financial Implications

There are no financial implications arising from this report.

7. Legal Implications

There are no legal implications arising from this report.

8. Crime & disorder implications

- 8.1 There are no direct crime and disorder implications arising from this report. Some of the recommended main grant organisations deliver services and projects which help to reduce the fear of crime.

9. Equalities implications

- 9.1 Targeted work has been carried out to ensure that volunteering opportunities are fully accessible and represent the interests of equalities groups. For example matching events have taken place for organisations to meet disabled people on a one to one basis to discuss volunteering opportunities. Volunteer Centre Lewisham has also supported organisations to adapt volunteering roles for people with mental health issues.

10. Environmental implications

- 10.1 There are no environmental implications arising from this report.

If you have any queries relating to this report, please contact James Lee, Head of Culture and Community Development on 020 8314 6548.