

MINUTES OF THE SAFER STRONGER COMMUNITIES SELECT COMMITTEE

Wednesday, 1 July 2015 at 7.00 pm

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

APOLOGIES: Councillor Luke Sorba

ALSO PRESENT: Councillor Joan Millbank (Cabinet Member Third Sector & Community), Paul Aladenika (Service Group Manager, Policy Development and Analytical Insight), Timothy Andrew (Scrutiny Manager), Winston Castello (Community Enterprise Manager), Liz Dart (Head of Culture and Community Development), Andreas Ghosh (Head of Personnel & Development), Kay Kelleher (Chief Executive) (Volunteer Centre Lewisham) and James Lee (Service Manager, Inclusion and Prevention and Head of Cultural and Community Development)

1. Minutes of the meeting held on 14 May 2015

Resolved: that the minutes of the meeting held on 14 May 2015 be agreed as an accurate record.

2. Declarations of interest

Councillor Elliott – non-prejudicial – Council Appointee to the Lewisham Disability Coalition.

Councillor Upex – non-prejudicial – Member of Voluntary Services Lewisham and Member of the Green Cooperative Development.

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

Councillor Morrison – non-prejudicial – Member of the Board of the Ackroyd Community Association.

Councillor Michael – non-prejudicial – Supporter of the Citizens Advice Bureau; Member of the Stronger Communities Partnership Board; Patron of the Marsha Phoenix Trust.

3. Implementation of the volunteering strategy

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

- The action plan was developed with partners in 2011-12 with the objective of running for five years; however the environment in which the strategy was operating had changed.
- Lewisham and its partners had delivered a number of successful initiatives through the strategy.
- Looking forwards, Lewisham and its partners would be looking to build on the successes of the strategy, as well as developing new initiatives and making the best use of new technology.

3.2 Kay Kelleher (Director, Volunteer Services Lewisham) addressed the Committee; the following key points were noted:

- Volunteer centre Lewisham had worked with local assemblies, registered social landlords, schools, faith groups and many others to support volunteering.
- The climate for volunteering had changed over the time the strategy had been in operation.
- The increased focus on delivery of core public services and the provision of information online had changed the way people engaged with volunteering.
- Volunteer Centre Lewisham was working to develop a new web platform for volunteering opportunities in the borough. This platform 'VC connect' had been used successfully by a number of other local authorities and would provide new functionality for the coordination of volunteering opportunities in the borough.
- It was recognised that face to face work would still be needed in the provision of advice and brokering.
- Face to face meetings with potential volunteers resulted in 60% of contacts being transferred into active placements, which contrasted with 12% of contacts which were transferred to placements online.
- The ambition in the strategy was to make it as easy as possible to volunteer.

3.3 Kay Kelleher (Director, Voluntary Action Lewisham) responded to questions from the Committee, the following key points were noted:

- There were a number of safeguards in place to protect volunteers and people who worked with volunteers.
- Volunteer Centre Lewisham was clear that volunteering should not be used for job substitution, or as a replacement for cuts.
- The Centre was keen to work with partners to ensure that volunteering could be used as a pathway to employment, where this was appropriate.
- Partners in Lewisham were part of the 'keep volunteering voluntary' campaign to ensure that volunteering was not used as a punitive measure.
- The Centre worked with organisations requesting volunteers to develop their role descriptions and ensure that the relevant safeguarding processes and procedures were in place for volunteers.
- There were 27 thousand people on the Volunteer Centre Lewisham database as potential volunteers.
- The 'volunteer journey' was becoming more tailored to the ways in which people accessed services.
- The online platform 'VC connect' would enable new functionality for potential volunteers to find the right opportunities.
- The Centre did not have authority over the organisations it worked with and could not insist that they acted in any particular way.
- However, the Centre could advise organisations on best practice. It was also looking to become a 'disclosure and barring centre' in order to support the checking of volunteers – where this was appropriate.
- The Centre had two volunteers who work exclusively to develop the online presence.
- The Centre worked with organisations of all sizes in order to facilitate a range of activities. Some small organisations needed volunteers for single events – or for a single day rather than on a regular basis.

- There was a 200% increase in volunteering applications following the financial crash in 2008. There had been a reduction in applications since then.

Resolved: to note the report.

4. Voluntary sector accommodation - implementation plan

4.1 Liz Dart (Head of Culture and Community Development) introduced the report; the following key points were noted:

- The report was still in draft and officers intended that it would be sent out with a 'draft' watermark.
- The report would be changed before consideration at Mayor and Cabinet to include a recommendation for further consultation to take place.
- There would be more consultation with organisations over the summer, which would follow from the previous discussions about the framework.
- The intention was to ask the Mayor and Cabinet for ratification of proposals following the consultation over the summer.
- The plan covered a period of three years; there would be further consultation throughout.
- The negotiation of leases would be on-going.
- Plans were for two community hubs in the borough, one at the Mulberry Centre and the other at the Leemore.
- Work would also be carried out with Phoenix Housing to build on the offer provided at the Green Man and in the developing plans for the Fellowship Inn.
- Organisations were being asked to be pragmatic about their use of space. There were lots of opportunities to bring partners together to work better.
- Community centres would provide neighbourhood services focused on a smaller network of centres.
- Of the current establishment of 23 buildings seven would be retained; six would be offered to registered social landlord partners; two would be reallocated as nurseries and seven were proposed for closure.
- It was proposed to either keep community space on the site of the Goldsmiths Community Centre either in the current building or as part of a redevelopment with housing subject to further surveys, consultation and options appraisal.
- Facilities being offered at full market rates would be likely to stay in that category. Organisations which did not wish to remain in commercially rented spaces could opt to relocate to the community hubs.
- There would continue to be engagement with partners in the community and voluntary sector, as well as joint working with premises management organisations and colleagues in strategic housing to look at the most efficient use of assets.
- Any organisation facing significant change would be given at least three months' notice of the proposed change.
- A change was also proposed to the community asset transfer framework to enable the Council to use community asset transfer, where it was appropriate.

- This would mean that priority uses and services would be safeguarded and that viability, sustainability and value for money would have to be clearly demonstrated.
- The equalities analysis assessment of the proposals highlighted the impact on older and younger users. It also indicated that as the hub model of working developed it would mitigate the impact through the re-provision of services.

4.2 Liz Dart (Head of Culture and Community Development) responded to questions from the Committee; the following key points were noted:

- A mapping exercise had been carried out; the results of which were in the appendix to the report. This exercise indicated the locations of all the other facilities in the borough and enabled a consideration of the impact of the changes to accommodation of the community and voluntary sector to be assessed.
- A fundamental review of advice giving services was being carried out as part of the main grants programme funding.
- As part of the review, an assessment of the locations of advice giving services would take place.
- Following the consultation over the summer, the options for each organisation would be reconsidered, based on the current usage – and balanced with existing resources.
- Officers would be asking organisations about how they might use space differently.
- One of the drivers for the work was the lack of funding available in the Council's corporate asset services to maintain all of the buildings in the community services portfolio to a high standard.
- Officers would provide an analysis of the loss of space in terms of overall floor area, as well as the change in functions operating from each building.
- The moves being proposed were pragmatic. If there was no need to make savings to the budget, the Council would keep all of its centres open. It was the case that difficult choices had to be made.
- If it was possible to ask developers to build community spaces as part of new developments then this would be considered. As always, however, the cost of maintenance and upkeep for spaces in new builds might be prohibitive for many community and voluntary sector organisations.
- The Council was working with Voluntary Action Lewisham to develop a closure policy for organisations facing the loss of their space. Lessons had been learnt from the closure of Parker House.
- Spaces that were re-designated as nurseries would be marketed as such and arrangements would be made with organisations wishing to take up leases in those spaces to pay proportionate rents (this was dependent on whether they were a profit making business or a charity).
- Officers would be challenging organisations to demonstrate their requirements for space and all groups would be asked to work more closely together.

4.3 Members of the following organisations addressed the Committee:

- Honor Oak Community Centre Association

- Lewisham Pensioners Forum
- Brandram Road Community Centre
- Milton Court Tenant and Residents Association

4.4 The following key concerns were noted:

- The impact of the proposed changes on the physical proximity of services to other organisations or services in the borough.
- The lack of detailed and organisation specific consultation to date.
- The confusion caused by the previous generic consultation and the submission of plans to Mayor and Cabinet without information being provided to affected organisations.
- The inaccessibility of some of the new proposed spaces for specified groups of people.
- The importance of community facilities to community wellbeing and cohesion.
- The belief that the Council was unaware of the extent of the activities taking place in community centres.
- The negative equalities impact of the proposals (particularly on older people and BME communities).

4.5 Councillor Joan Millbank (Cabinet Member for the Third Sector and Community) addressed the Committee; the following key points were noted:

- It was recognised that the proposals were controversial but all groups had the opportunity to make their views known as part of the review of the policy.
- The community hub concept was broadly well received in the sector.
- The community and voluntary sector was looking to save money and operate more efficiently, as was the case in the public sector.
- Co-location of services would provide the opportunity for groups to network and to share facilities.
- The Council was mindful that some community spaces were under used or only used by small sections of the community.
- The Council wanted to work with organisations to develop a fuller understanding of the resources that were available in the community already.
- The Council also wanted to look forward to consider what work could be done to meet emerging needs.
- The Council was keen to reduce the number of sports halls and large spaces in the portfolio and replace them with adaptable spaces.
- It was recognised that there were concerns about moves and closures, but there was also a bigger picture.

Members also discussed the proposals and highlighted the following key points:

- Their concerns about the contentious nature of the work being undertaken and the importance of consultation.
- The potential negative equalities impact on people of different ages and members of the black and minority ethnic community.

- The possibility of changing planning policy to create community spaces in new developments.

Resolved: to note the draft report being presented to Mayor and Cabinet – and to add the report on the outcome of the consultation with the Community and Voluntary Sector to the Committee’s work plan in advance of its consideration at Mayor and Cabinet.

5. Council employment profile 2014-15

5.1 Andreas Ghosh (Head of Human Resources) introduced the report and a presentation; the following key points were noted:

- The Council developed an employment profile each year. It aimed to ensure there was rigor in the monitoring of staff and the tracking of data.
- Lewisham was a pioneer in terms of its development and publication of the profile.
- The profile was also part of the Council’s commitment to be a good employer.
- Overall numbers of staff had been reduced in line with the Council’s requirement to make major savings from its budget.
- There were currently 2800 individual members of staff (fewer full time equivalents); there were 70 redundancies in 2014/15 and 350 in 2013/14. It was anticipated that there would be more redundancies next year.
- There had also been a reduction in the numbers of agency staff.
- Numbers of staff in schools had increased each year in the past ten years – this was accounted for almost entirely by non-teaching staff.
- The Council was still recruiting, as part of the process of on-going reorganisations.
- Half of all appointments in the past year were filled by internal applicants.
- This was positive for employees of the Council but it did not allow for sufficient refresh of staff to significantly change the employment profile.
- Staff referred to in the monitoring as ‘casual’ and ‘claims’ might be lecturers, tutors or elections staff who were paid on an irregular basis.
- The Council directly engaged 3435 people in some way, it also had arms-length responsibility for schools staff.
- 400 staff had applied for voluntary severance a quarter had been accepted.
- There were slightly more acceptances from older staff.
- The programme was broadly proportionate in terms of its acceptances of black and minority ethnic employees.
- There was generally a low rate of return from individual staff members in response to questions about equalities monitoring.
- The returns were particularly low in terms of religion, marital status and sexual orientation.
- Each round of redundancies had a disproportionate impact on either BME or white staff.
- There were high numbers of BME applicants for jobs at the Council, which indicated that it was an attractive place to work.
- Changes to the youth service in the early round of reorganisations had a disproportionate impact on BME staff because of the composition of the staff working in youth services.

- There was good distribution of gay and lesbian people at senior grades and there were a higher rate of acceptances from applications and interview of people from the LGB&T community.
- Women were well represented at all grades in the Council, including at the senior level; a new female Executive Director had just been appointed for the Children and Young People directorate.
- The age profile of the Council had not changed significantly. The Council was not an aging workforce; it was, on average, an older workforce.
- Work was taking place to attract younger people to the workforce, including through the apprenticeship programme.
- Agency workers were more representative of the local workforce than the permanent staffing structure.
- Attendance levels had declined in the past year – but surveys with staff indicated that most people were happy in their roles.
- Later in the year there would be an employee survey, which would provide additional insight into the opinions of staff.

5.2 Andreas Ghosh (Head of Human Resources) responded to questions from the Committee, the following key points were noted:

- There were very few outstanding employment tribunal cases against the Council.
- About 12 people each year were dismissed. This tended to be on grounds of discipline rather than capability.
- There had been 70 compulsory redundancies in the past year.
- 110 employees had left under voluntary severance.
- Next year it was likely that there would be a greater number of compulsory redundancies.
- It was not necessarily the case that the low numbers of people completing the equalities monitoring indicated a lack of trust in the organisation.
- There were small numbers of respondents to some questions – but the intention in the employee profile was to demonstrate that monitoring was taking place.
- The Council had a responsibility to help people work more flexibly.
- Most vacancies would be filled by internal or agency staff, who had knowledge of the way the Council worked and would be well placed to apply for roles as they became available. This did not indicate unfairness in the process – internal and agency staff could not be barred from applying for internal roles.
- Most employee surveys in most organisations would highlight pay as an issue for staff. Workload was always mentioned as an issue; this was a particular problem in social care.
- The terms Black/BME/BAME were used interchangeably in the presentation.

Resolved: to note the update.

6. Select Committee work programme

6.1 Timothy Andrew (Scrutiny Manager) introduced the report.

6.2 The Committee discussed the work programme and requested that the item on the main grants programme scheduled for September include information about equalities monitoring. The Committee also agreed to move the item on local assemblies from January to November. Members indicated that they were particularly interested in the 24k discretionary funding which had been allocated previously for the assemblies programme; the item on provision for the LGBT community was moved to the end of the work programme to make space for other agenda items; and it was agreed that the voluntary sector accommodation implementation plan would be added to the meeting on 16 September. It was also agreed to add an item to the work programme for 19 January from the Lewisham Disability Coalition’s work on hate crime reporting.

6.3 It was agreed that the poverty review would be based on the information in the indices of multiple deprivation.

Resolved: to agree the changes to the Committee’s work programme, as discussed.

7. Items to be referred to Mayor and Cabinet

There were none.

The meeting ended at 9.40 pm

Chair:

Date:
