MINUTES OF THE SAFER STRONGER COMMUNITIES SELECT COMMITTEE
Wednesday, 19 October 2016 at 7.00 pm

PRESENT: Councillors David Michael (Chair), James-J Walsh (Vice-Chair), Brenda Dacres, Colin Elliott, Stella Jeffrey and Jim Mallory and

APOLOGIES: Councillors John Paschoud, Luke Sorba and Paul Upex

ALSO PRESENT: Councillor Joe Dromey (Cabinet Member Policy & Performance), Councillor Joan Millbank (Cabinet Member Third Sector & Community), Timothy Andrew (Scrutiny Manager), James Banks (Chief Executive) (Greater London Volunteering), Robyn Fairman (Head of Strategy), Philippe Granger (Rushey Green Time Bank), Roz Hardie (Director Lewisham Disability Coalition) (Lewisham Disability Coalition), James Lee (Service Manager, Inclusion and Prevention and Head of Cultural and Community Development), Barrie Neal (Head of Corporate Policy and Governance), Andrew O'Brien (Head of Policy and Engagement) (Charities Finance Group), Andy Thomas (Cultural Development Manager), Phil Turner (Second Wave Youth Arts) and Simone van Elk (Cabinet Executive Officer)

1.   Minutes of the meeting held on the 15 September 2016

Resolved: that the minutes of the meeitng held on 15 September be agreed as an accurate record.

2.   Declarations of interest

- Councillor Elliot declared a non-prejudicial interest in relation to item 4 as the Council's representative to the Lewisham Disability Coalition.
- Councillor Michael declared a non-prejudicial interest in relation to item four as a patron of the Marsha Phoenix Memorial Trust and as Chair of Lewisham EqualiTeam.
- Councillor Mallory declared a non-prejudicial interest in relation to item four as Chair of Lee Green Lives, which receives a grant from the Council; a board member of Lee Fair Share, which is funded by the local assembly and a member of Deptford Challenge Trust, which is a provider of funding.

3.   Response to recommendations - Poverty Review

3.1   Councillor Dromey (Cabinet Member for Policy and Performance) introduced the response from Mayor and Cabinet, the following key points were noted:

- Mayor and Cabinet welcomed the Committee's report.
- Cllr Dromey had been appointed as cabinet lead, to take forward the recommendations in the report.
- There was a recognition of the difficulty in adequately and accurately defining poverty.
- Mayor and Cabinet had accepted the recommendation of establishing a poverty task force. Proposals would be brought back to the committee about

how this would be progressed. The intention was that the taskforce would include a broad range of stakeholders.
- The causes of poverty were complex and included issues with housing, low pay and insecure work.
- The Council would be looking to innovate and learn from best practice by other councils.
- The final report produced by the taskforce would be brought to the Committee before being agreed at Mayor and Cabinet.
- A briefing would be produced for circulation to the Committee, which would set out a proposed timescale of activities.

3.2   In the discussion that followed these key points were noted.

- Members thanked the cabinet member – and said that they would be happy to be involved in the taskforce.
- The Council should be cautious about making unrealistic promises in a time of constrained resources.
- Members asked that there be a structure of accountability in place for the taskforce. The taskforce would present recommendations to Mayor and Cabinet, and this report would be presented to the Committee before going to Mayor and Cabinet. The work of the group would be limited but it would have to have the authority to do things by itself.
- Better understanding residents' experiences of poverty – as understood through diverse identities and characteristics- would be an important part of the work of the taskforce.
- It was recognised that there were a number of interlinked issues facing residents in poverty, often including mental health and access to housing and services.
- Officers would also look at the potential to create a measure for poverty in the Council's management report.
- It was recognised that poverty might increase in the borough, despite the efforts of the Council.
- The Committee also asked that the taskforce work with officers from public health. It was recognised that people with long-term health conditions were at significant risk of falling in to poverty as a result of struggling in employment or becoming unemployed.

Resolved: to note the response from Mayor and Cabinet and to continue to add additional items on the work of the task force and its final report to the Committee's future work programme, as required.

4.   Developing Capacity in the Voluntary Sector - Evidence Session

4.1   James Lee (Head of Culture and Community Development) addressed the Committee; the following key points were noted:

- It was a difficult time for the sector. The Council was making substantial cuts to the main grants programme budget.
- Public sector commissioning budgets were being tightened at the same time that accessing funding form alternative sources was becoming more competitive.

- London Councils was also withdrawing its funding for infrastructure support organisations.
- There was still a high level of demand for services provided by the community and voluntary sector and there were significant numbers of people living in relative poverty who needed support.
- The Council recognised the need for a strong sector and there was a recognised need for local communities to be supported through civil society.
- Infrastructure support was also needed to assist organisations to monitor how well they were performing and diversity their sources of funding.
- There was a recognised need for mergers and partnerships in the sector.
- Officers were also working with organisations to help them understand what funding reductions from the main grants programme would look like for them.
- Officers were working with organisations to build the capacity of peer support networks.
- The local partnership of community organisations was strong.
- Specific work was now taking place with Voluntary Action Lewisham (VAL), Rushey Green Time Bank and Volunteer Centre Lewisham to consider Lewisham's infrastructure support offer based on the 'way ahead' proposals.
- It was recognised that infrastructure support needed to be less bureaucratic, better community led and more flexible.
- A combined infrastructure support offer might include a disclosure and barring service hub; it might procure or provide training. It might also provide a focus for local activity. It should be responsive to local issues and help the Council to engage with the sector. It should also mobilise local people to tackle local issues.
- An important role for infrastructure support organisations in the future would be to provide a voice for the sector: to raise issues, challenge the Council and to collect information to demonstrate the cumulative impact on the sector.
- This would allow the Council to better meet its responsibilities without shunting costs from one area to another.
- There would be a proposal relating to infrastructure support as part of the main grants update to Mayor and Cabinet in the December. The report would be presented to Committee before the decision was taken.

4.2 Cllr Millbank informed the committee that London Councils leaders group decided to prioritise grant funding for frontline services over infrastructure support out of necessity, rather than based on the performance of specific organisations.

4.3 James Banks (Chief Executive, Greater London Volunteering) addressed the Committee, the following key points were noted:

- The 'way ahead' report brought together a wide range of stakeholders to consider the future of civil society in London.
- The report broadened the definition of voluntary activity to encompass a wider range of actions to achieve change.
- It helped to demonstrate the requirement for civil society support.
- In challenging economic situations, new approaches were required to achieve positive outcomes.
- In London, there were a hundred and twenty thousand civil society groups; 3.5 million Londoners who volunteered regularly; 7.3 million Londoners who came into contact with the charitable sector in an average year; two hundred and fifty

thousand people who worked in the sector, an estimated economic and wellbeing contribution of £27 billion a year to the London economy.

- The sector was large but it needed support to enable it to thrive.
- Focus groups and research had shown that there were high levels of pressure on contracts and on volunteers in the sector, with less funding and increased competition.
- There was an expectation that civil society organisations could change models quickly and produce their own resources, which wasn't always the case.
- Civil society support groups were also facing high levels of demand for their services.
- The proposal in the report was that there be a new system of working, which would identify the wide range of organisations involved in providing support to the sector and build on their strengths.
- The system being proposed in the report was markedly different from what currently existed.
- Work was taking place to progress the recommendations in the report, but change would take time.

4.4   In the discussion that followed, these key points were noted:

- There were differing levels of social capital in different areas, which had the potential to make the community-driven approach to infrastructure support unbalanced.
- 90% of volunteering hours came from a third of the population.
- There was an important role for infrastructure support organisations at a local level. Every member of the community should be involved in helping to decide what their community needed and how it should be delivered.
- Support organisations didn't need to provide everything themselves. They had a role in brokering offers of support and providing peer to peer connections.
- Accessing volunteer time from corporate supporters was usually straightforward but accessing skills was often more difficult.
- Funders were sometimes reluctant to support organisations' core operating costs.
- There wasn't always a consistent approach at the Council to funding core costs. This would be something that officers would need to do further work on in the future.

4.5   The Committee also made the following key points:

- Members highlighted their concerns about the differing levels of social capital, and the ability of different groups (with differing levels of capital) to mobilise the resources required in their communities.
- The Committee expressed its thoughts about widening the definition of civil society. Some Members felt it was too narrowly defined in the way in which it had been used in the 'way ahead' report; and others felt that the definition should be broadened to include the concept of 'civic pride' which would be a way to stretch the remit of organisations in the sector.
- There was a preference for the assets (rather than deficit) model for understanding the sector, which concentrated on the skills and opportunities available in communities that could be used rather than simply identifying areas of need.

- The Committee recognised the importance of using the skills of volunteers from the corporate sector to best effect, rather than matching volunteers with projects that did not make the most of their skills.
- Committee members also highlighted the imbalance in spending power, marketing and use of targeted data, between large and small charities.

4.5   Andrew O'Brien (Head of Policy and Engagement, Charities Finance Group) addresses the Committee; the following key points were noted:

- It was rare for Councils to still have a separate community grants budget.
- There had been a significant reductions in grant funding in recent years. In 2010 there was £6billion in grants available for the sector, in 2016 this had fallen to £2billion and it was estimated that there wouldn't be any grant funding available at all by 2024.
- Grant funding was important because it allowed organisations to be flexible, resilient and demand led.
- Monetising savings and monetising impact could be difficult for small and medium sized organisations.
- The Council should use a personal and common sense approach to evaluating the success of community and voluntary sector organisations.
- Successful mergers and asset sharing between organisations in the sector were reliant on sustainable funding streams.
- The front loading of local government cuts from central government and the speed at which these were passed on to the sector meant that some small organisations, that (given better notice) could have become self-sustaining had to close and once that capacity was lost it would be difficult to rebuild it.

4.6   In the discussion that followed, these key points were noted:

- Organisations with small incomes might find it difficult to demonstrate their impact and effectiveness. They might also have to spend a disproportionate amount of time writing bids and attempting to demonstrate their impact.
- Match fundraising (either through donations or volunteering) had potential, but it didn't always take inequalities into account. There had to be a mechanism to incentivise contributions from areas with lower social capital.
- Providing a set of options to small organisations to encourage asset sharing and mergers was a better approach than forcing organisations to work together. Small organisations found it particularly difficult when they were merged with another organisation and their shared resources were immediately cut.
- Organisations might want to change the way they work but a significant proportion of their time was spent managing their day to day business and trying to remain sustainable.
- The main grants programme had moved towards a commissioning model, there was further work to be done on determining what the grants programme should be trying to achieve in future.
- The Council should consider what it's trying to achieve and use appropriate methods to make this happen, this might be through the commissioning approach or via grant funding. Each approach had benefits and drawbacks from different reasons. The important thing would be to choose the right method for the desired outcome.

- The issue of capability was central to the future of community and voluntary sector organisations. Work on building capability used to be led by the government on building capability in the sector, but this funding had been substantially reduced.

4.7 Philippe Granger (Rushey Green Time Bank) addressed the Committee, the following key points were noted:

- The community and voluntary sector had moved from a situation in which it had lots of money available to a situation of restrained resources.
- When resources were plentiful, there were lots projects and lots of groups. This had led to a situation of providing services for people, rather than enabling them to do things for themselves.
- Organisations in the sector were asking themselves questions about what they should do with less money in order to support communities to thrive.
- There was a danger of creating a deficiency model in the sector – in which people believed they needed more and more funding to meet their needs.
- The investment was needed to equip people and empower them in their own communities to make a change.
- Civic society should promote a new vision and a new language for Lewisham, which focused on people's assets and helped them to connect with others.

4.8 In the discussion that followed, these key points were noted:

- Small numbers of people were responsible for a disproportionately high level of volunteering activity. (Andrew O'Brien referenced the 2014 report from the Charity Aid Foundation on Britain's civic core).
- The challenge in all areas was to engage wider numbers of people in the civic core. One approach might be to work more with younger generations in creating a sense of pride and place.
- The Committee noted that there were young people involved in volunteering. It was recognised that one of the difficult groups to reach was people in their mid 30s and 40s.
- Further work might need to take place to link work taking place in schools with other activity in the community and voluntary sector.
- Large charities had access to substantial sets of data, which enabled them to target activities. The Council might look to carry out further work to provide intelligence and data support for smaller organisations in the sector.

Standing orders were suspended at 9:15pm until the completion of business.

4.9 Roz Hardie (Lewisham Disability Coalition) addressed the committee; the following key points were noted:

- Busy charities were not always in a position to evidence their outcomes and found it difficult to target their work.
- It was not the role of charities to pick up public services.
- The LDC would like access to trusted specialist support or a trusted framework for purchasing or trading skills. The sector might look to share support, rather than having to develop specialist skills in each organisation.
- Organisations were sometimes buying expensive contracts because they were

not aware they could get the support free elsewhere.

- Organisations in the sector found that the Council was helpful in providing technical support. It was recognised however, that this might be problematic if an organisation had an issue with the Council.
- There was a worrying trend of large organisations taking up resources.
- Lots of people were volunteering and fundraising, but they weren't necessarily using the same language as the sector to talk about their work.
- Sometimes the Council made it difficult for groups to do things because of the levels of bureaucracy.

4.10   In the discussion that followed, the following key points were noted:

- Trustees of local charities should look towards the future with optimism and ambition.
- The provisions of the Social Value Act might help to redress the balance between small and large charities locally. The Council might want to carry out further work to understand how the act was being implemented.
- Organisations in the sector needed funding and consistent support to take risks and carry out change.
- More work should be carried out to define benefits of activity in the sector. This should be outcomes rather than output focused.
- The government had carried out some work to establish the unit costs and benefits of activity in the sector. This generic work didn't always take account of local context. It would be better carried in the local context through the creation of a local dialogue.

4.11   Councillor Michael thanked all participants for their interesting, informative and helpful evidence.

Resolved:
- To explore options for re-drawing the diagram in the 'way ahead' report so that it might be more useful locally.
- To receive an update on the work being led by the Head of Strategy with Goldsmiths University. This could be included as part of the draft report on capacity in the voluntary sector.
- To receive an update on the implementation the Social Value Act. This could be included as part of the draft report on capacity in the voluntary sector.
- A recommendation for the final review could include considering the potential for setting up a Chief executives network for the community and voluntary sector
- A recommendation for the final review could include receiving further information about work taking place in schools to encourage volunteering.

5.   Select Committee work programme

5.1   Timothy Andrew (Scrutiny Manager) introduced the report. The Committee was reminded that the following items were scheduled for the meeting on 28 November:

- MOPAC police and crime plan
- Local assemblies
- Main grants programme
- Demographics review: scoping report

5.2   In the discussion that followed, the following key points were noted:

- The Committee requested an update on initiatives to tackle knife crime and hate crime as part of the item on the Mayor's police and crime plan.
- It was expected that the report on the voluntary sector would inform the comments/referral the Committee made on the main grants programme report.
- The scope for the demographics review should set out options to explore the Council's approach to forward planning, with particular emphasis on future requirements for infrastructure and new policy approaches. The Committee was concerned about the borough's readiness for dealing with the impact of medium/long term changes in the composition of the population. Members highlighted the social changes occurring as a result of new patterns of mobility and transition in and out of the borough due to increasing gentrification.
- The Committee also asked that further work be carried out to follow up on the poverty review. It was noted that Cllr Dromey offered to provide a written briefing for members setting out next steps for the creation of the poverty taskforce. Members recognised that further updates may need to be factored into the work programme toward the end of the year.

6.   Items to be referred to Mayor and Cabinet

There were none.

The meeting ended at 10.00 pm

Chair:

Date: