

Appendix B

LB Sutton – Fairness Commission, 4th November 2019

Councillors Juliet Campbell (Chair) and James Rathbone (Vice-Chair), and Katie Wood, Scrutiny Manager met with Simon Breeze, Policy and Projects Manager and Alison Navarro, Chief Executive, Community Action Sutton (CVS Sutton)¹, and Chair of the Sutton Fairness Commission.

LB Sutton set up the Fairness Commission in 2017 as a method of engaging the community and ensuring their expertise were built into the Equalities process in the Council. The Commission is hosted by Community Action Sutton and includes key community groups and stakeholders. The Commission chose an investigative theme on which to focus – the first of which was “the life chances of children in the borough”. They reported on this in December 2018. [LINK](#)

“The overall aim of the Commission is to work to ensure that the benefits of living in Sutton are enjoyed by all sections of society. The commission will work to 'eliminate discrimination', 'advance equality of opportunity' and 'foster good relations' amongst all in the borough, including those from 'protected characteristic groups'. In line with the Sutton Plan and the borough's focus on partnership working, the Fairness Commission will be the main vehicle for external equality and diversity activity. The Council will act as a critical friend for partners and will also receive input and feedback on its services, policies and commissioning processes via the Commission.”

During the meeting the following points were raised:

- The initial theme chosen was key and needed to test the process and cut across many equalities themes. Members of the Commission agreed the issue – a focus on children and young people. Engagement was crucial – they discussed with Council CYP colleagues and met with key groups such as: looked after children; and ex-offenders. They held a Fairness Commission conference and invested in an event for young people which they led themselves (this was seen to be very important as the lead and directions had to be from the community groups themselves and not the Council). By the CVS chairing the Commission, they felt they could reach more people than the Council and focus on cross-cutting issues that are separate from the image many have of the Council.
- The Board was chaired by Alison as Chief Executive of Community Action Sutton and included the Councillor Lead for Equalities and Executive member. After the first year it was recommended that the Fairness Commission become the only vehicle for delivering the Council's external equalities function. Following this, the representation was formalised to include: Cabinet Lead for Equalities; Chair and Vice-Chair of People Committee; representatives from opposition parties within the Council; Principal of local college; Police representative; Fire representative; and a representative of the Education sector. Alison remained the Chair. The following link below is to the

¹ A Council for Voluntary Service (CVS) is a type of charity in England and it is the place where local voluntary and community organisations speak to each other and get support.”

Appendix B

report making the Fairness Commission the [Council's external equality function. \(Item50\)](#):

- “At this stage the Commission was re-energised again with a new theme and a dedicated Council officer to support the work”.
- In terms of funding, the Council provided £10,000 initially. Support is now through officer time. Within Community Action Sutton's contract with the borough there is a built-in focus on equalities and with community development.
- Recommendations made by the Commission go to the relevant Council committee. (LB Sutton operates under the Committee system model). The reports can be critical of the Council, for example, one of the findings said there was a lack of leadership.
- Three topics were being considered for the next theme: the gypsy and traveller community; race equality work to develop a BAME strategy for Sutton; and participation of disabled people in community life. Partners such as the Police could also use their own youth engagement strategies etc. Access and engagement would continue to be key. The Runnymede Trust had done a bespoke piece of work on race equality in Sutton.
<https://www.runnymedetrust.org/projects-and-publications/parliament/scorecard/sutton.html>
- The Sutton Fairness Commission is not part of the formal consultation for Council officers when producing EIAs. The Commission can aid with policy development, scrutinising delivery, acting as a critical friend.
- There was a review of Children's Services and Early Help Policy at the Council that has been driven by recommendations from the Fairness Commission.
- There is a positive relationships between the local authority and community sector and a shared sense of issues, process and relationships.
- It was important for the organisation running the commission to be embedded in the community.
- Alison was keen to set up a youth participation framework.
- In terms of consultation events, positive work had been done through the Volunteer Centre with a group called Citizen Commissioners and Young Commissioners. They are given training and take part in interview panels and are consulted with on Council policy changes etc.
- The Council also consulted Citizens panel and had a commitment to engagement. Getting officers to engage early and in a meaningful way was a continuous challenge. The Volunteer centre organised the citizen assembly. Useful for skills and CV - full training involved. The assembly was involved in how to spend money such as in a park.
- See extract below regarding Citizen Commissioning in Sutton from: Public service: state of transformation, 2018 case studies from the public service transformation academy, 2018, page 46 [Link here](#)
- They felt that “fairness” was a more inclusive word than “equality” and more easily understood.

17

'What do they know of cricket who only cricket know?'

Why commissioners should stop commissioning and start collaborating – Citizen Commissioners in Sutton

- Commissioners don't have all the answers and cannot work alone
- Local people will engage but it must be worth their while – and not what you think is worth their while
- You may not always save money but you can avoid costs

What is the context?

Sutton Council has been on a journey. We've gone from services supplied by the council to services of mixed provision. In 2011, our

members agreed to a values-based and value-focused commissioning approach. At its heart, it encourages officers to seek the best return on public money, instead of the cheapest option. Our earliest innovations in commissioning began

in the mid noughties in adult social care. The reason was to improve conditions for vulnerable adults with learning disabilities and to meet a local need to shut one of the last long stay hospitals in Britain.

46 Public service: state of transformation 2018 Report from the public service transformation academy

This case study aims to show that commissioning skills honed in this period have developed into an organisational approach – an approach which could soon be borough-wide, and which centralises residents, with clear evidence why and the impact of doing so.

What's the story?

A shamelessly personal reflection now. I started working in adult learning disabilities over a decade ago. I worked in respite, residential and day care and eventually managed services. Around this time the Valuing People Support Team was working to improve our clients' lives.

One of the dichotomies I struggled with then was the fact people coming into the service were adult, with associated rights and responsibilities, yet the service was shaped for their families. Which is not necessarily a problem, although one situation remains with me: the evening I took a group of adults to the pub. One person got drunk and had a good time. Their family, however, was deeply unimpressed. They felt I had allowed that adult to make a bad choice.

I may not have a perfect answer to this one but, for me, it was more important to respect that person's right to make a choice, and then to support it. After all, it was neither a health risk, nor an issue about previous abstinence. It was about quantity. From then, I began challenging why services were the way were. For example, respite is about giving carers a break, but it's the carer for who leave their homes. I still do not really understand why that is fair.

Fast forward to 2011, and I was managing a project to turn the local authority into a commissioning council. Members were clear: this didn't mean outsourcing only, or cheapest wins. It meant having a robust, evidence-based approach to select the best option. So, if the

commissioning process is integral to our decision making, and, therefore, what our residents receive, there was little doubt that to change our relationship with residents, we needed a commissioning framework that enabled collaboration. At the time, we had some tough decisions to make about our children's services, and so we agreed to train some young people in the art of commissioning and, in some ways, let them loose within our commissioning team.

Yes, their expectations had to be managed and no, they could not have actual money to spend, but the first principle was that their view was as valid, if not more so, than the paid staff.

The council paid for a young cohort to be given accredited training in commissioning, while each committed to one project. We linked them up with commissioners from the council and let them choose their work. They chose public health, regeneration of a local park and services for looked after children, among other projects.

We had those young people, plus others trained later, designing surveys, canvassing harder-to-reach groups, connecting stakeholders, presenting at market consultation events, helping to set method statements, contributing to specifications, taking part in tender evaluations and monitoring performance. And they spotted when we missed things, too. I remember being in a room talking about healthy eating and obesity, with lots of experts who spent over an hour on the topic, only for the young commissioner in the room to point out that, at her college, the biggest problem was among young men under-eating. We checked, she was correct, and we changed the specification.

Members could see the value of this community-led approach. So we tendered for a provider to run a project that would support

Citizen Commissioners of any age from 12 upwards, train them, and incorporate the group of young people already hard at work.

Our local volunteer centre won the contract and we now have about 115 local people trained and a core who are regularly active and others who do more ad-hoc projects. They've been achieving a lot. From working on the sexual health website consultation, the Sutton Young People Survey, E-Safety feedback, Sutton Recycling Campaign, the Make Your Mark project and the recommissioning of looked after children placements. And they've recently undertaken a huge piece of work which is part of the Sutton Plan.

And that is where we are today. Not everyone we have trained has fulfilled their side of the deal, often for perfectly legitimate reasons, but those that have are amazing people who have gone over and above what we asked – and proven beyond doubt the value of opening commissioning to local people. Every time I meet one of them, it holds me to account as an investor of public money, and in a way that submitting reports and being dragged into the boss's office never can.

Who are the key partners?

The Volunteer Centre Sutton and Sutton Council.

What has been the impact?

The completion of more than a hundred commissioning projects, the development of ongoing relationships between 37 local organisations and public-sector agencies, and the solid engagement of 520 Sutton residents. And much more besides.

Public service: state of transformation 2018 Report from the public service transformation academy

47

What have been the key elements of success?

You've got to take a positive approach to risk across all tiers of the council. The expertise of our volunteer centre was vital, as was having enthusiastic young people in the first cohort who were appropriately trained. Striking a balance was crucial: volunteers simply needed to know their involvement would be meaningful, not a direct influence.

Also, the £20,000 for the launch was integral, as was a good choice of commissioning projects.

What has been learned?

If you trust people's good nature you learn new things, possibly before they become problematic. Also, do not expect people to take part in commissioning without making clear what is involved. Allow people to experience the whole commissioning cycle, or repeat aspects with different

projects. Procurement is not a barrier to full contribution from locals and it's not the commissioner's job to decide upon engaging locals, it's theirs. Finally, if you get something wrong admit it, learn from it and move on.

Who are the key contacts?

Tom Alexander, Head of Strategic Business, Commissioning & Governance, London Borough of Sutton tom.alexander@sutton.gov.uk 020 8770 4522