

MINUTES OF THE SAFER STRONGER COMMUNITIES SELECT COMMITTEE

Tuesday, 21 September 2021 at 7.00 pm

PRESENT: Councillors Juliet Campbell (Chair), Bill Brown, Liam Curran, Rachel Onikosi and James Rathbone (Vice-Chair) and Paul Maslin

APOLOGIES: Councillors Pauline Morrison

ALSO PRESENT: Councillor Brenda Dacres (Deputy Mayor and Cabinet Member for Safer Communities), Councillor Chris Best (Cabinet Member for Health and Adult Social Care), Councillor James-J Walsh, Tom Brown (Executive Director for Community Services), Charlotte Dale (Head of Overview and Scrutiny), James Lee (Director of Communities, Partnerships and Leisure), Salena Mulhere (Assistant Chief Executive), Charlene Noel (VAWG Programme and Strategy Manager) and Sakthi Suriyaprakasam (Community Development Service Manager)

1. Minutes of the meeting held on 16 June 2021

- 1.1 **RESOLVED:** That the minutes of the meeting on 16 June 2021 be agreed as an accurate record.

2. Declarations of interest

- 2.1 The following declarations of interest were declared:

Councillor James Rathbone declared a personal non-prejudicial interest in item 4 as he was on the management team of a community library.

Consideration of this item was subsequently deferred

3. Response to Referrals from this Committee

- 3.1 There were no responses to referrals to be considered at the meeting.

4. Lewisham Libraries

- 4.1 **RESOLVED:** That the item be deferred to a later date so that further information can be provided by officers and to allow for a wider discussion to take place between members and officers prior to the item being considered.

5. Local Assemblies and Neighbourhood CIL Update

- 5.1 James Lee, Director of Communities, Partnerships and Leisure introduced the report and the following points were noted:

- The operation and impact of Local Assemblies had recently been reviewed and principles developed for a revised approach that would focus on wider community development.
- The review was set against the context of a significant budget cut from April 2022. This would include a reduction in staffing and the discontinuation of the current budget for meetings and engagement. However, ward based funding would continue through the allocation of Neighbourhood Community Infrastructure Levy (NCIL) funding.
- The options to revamp Local Assemblies recognise, and build on, the strengths and benefits of the current approach; but address areas for improvement, particularly around engagement with a wider and more representative resident-base.
- The emerging Council-wide work on improving the resident experience and developing an overarching Digital Strategy would inform and support the approach taken in relation to Local Assemblies.
- Key elements of the proposed approach included (a) retention of the ward based structure, including named support officers; (b) retention of formal assembly meetings, although largely delivered online utilising community support; and (c) coordination of local community networks of activity.
- As part of the greater coordination of wider activity, advantage would be taken of other existing structures like the Police's Safer Neighbourhood Teams Ward Panels. It was hoped that this would result in a more holistic and cost-effective approach.
- The importance of retaining some face to face activity was recognised and this could be delivered in partnership with local community groups and organisations.
- There would be an 'annual report' for each ward highlighting specific local concerns for action by relevant partners and highlighting successes from the previous year.
- The role of elected members would be crucial in terms of curating conversations and ensuring local issues are brought to the fore.
- It was recognised that residents must feel empowered and not put upon by the new arrangements, there must be a positive transfer of responsibility / expectation; and the council would need to be ready to respond to issues and concerns raised at assemblies in a timely fashion.
- It would also be important to avoid local community networks from feeling that the council was co-opting work the community was doing.

5.2 In the discussion that followed the following points were raised by Members and responded to by officers:

- There were pros and cons to online meetings, they offered flexibility and could increase participation but they ran the risk of alienating those that were digitally excluded.
The move to a strongly digital based platform would take digital exclusion into account and a blended model with some face-to-face activity would be retained. Even without the cuts necessitating such a move, the pandemic had highlighted the strength of local community leadership and harnessing this would have key benefits. Most people involved in the local assemblies previously were not digitally excluded and it was recognised that it had

always been a challenge to reach all communities via the programme and ensure diverse participation. It was therefore important that the new approach worked hard to reach more people and a small element of the advertising budget would be retained to assist with this. There would be a need to use popular means of communication as 'notes through doors' were not as effective as some social media and face to face communication channels.

- The report listed the groups that might be involved in the new approach, but this did not include groups representing all protected characteristics or the Voluntary and Community Sector.
This was an oversight, they would all be included as they were all core to the new approach.
- It was not clear when the next round of NCIL funding would be allocated, knowing this would assist with the pacing of spend.
A decision on when the next round would be allocated had not yet been taken but the current allocation was utilising NCIL allocated to the council up to 2020. The 2024/5 financial year would be a sensible estimate as this would allow a further four years of NCIL funding to be allocated.
- It would be useful if Members could have an information pack on NCIL funding so they could talk to and engage local communities.
Officers were hopeful that the NCIL guidance currently being worked on, and anticipated to be ready by the end of week, would cover this function. If anything further was required this could be provided. There would also be opportunities for people wishing to lead bids to liaise with, and be supported by, officers at funding workshops.
- Would it be possible to have at least one formal, in-person Local Assembly meeting each year? *Although the programme management approach might work in some wards, those wards without natural community leaders might struggle and not have the capacity present within the community to arrange in-person or even online meetings. The level of officer support available at a ward level would be important in these circumstances. The approach seemed to ask a lot of volunteers. A template or 'how to' guide for assembly meetings that could be provided to people might assist. The desire for face to face activity must be balanced against the capacity of team in the face of significant budget cuts. However, officer capacity would be flexible and could be flexed towards those wards that most needed it, meaning that if there were particular reasons why a face to face meeting was required then these could be considered in planning resource allocation through the year.*

Officers would work in partnership with the community and also take advantage of existing structures like the Police's Safer Neighbourhood Teams Ward Panels. Member concern at streamlining and linking up with the police was acknowledged but incorporating ward assemblies and crime panels into a larger community meeting might help both bodies reach a wider audience and save resources.

5.3 As part of the discussion it was also noted that:

- The move to recognise communities of identity as well as geographically based communities was welcomed by Members.
- The bidding process for the allocation of borough wide NCIL had concluded and applications were currently being reviewed. Over 100 had been received, suggesting that the fund would be between four and five times over-subscribed. The assessment and recommendations would be presented to Mayor and Cabinet in November.
- In theory, NCIL funding could be used to support meetings/activities of a Local Assembly itself as the funding can be used for Community Development activities such as this.
- It was now proposed to remove one of the proposed stages in NCIL allocation. The original intention had been for the projects that were put forward to be uploaded to 'commonplace' so people could comment on them and this could be fed back to the assemblies. However, it was recognised that well mobilised groups could dominate this stage, and the value of retaining this stage was uncertain. The removal of this stage would mean that the assessment of projects and their fair presentation to Local Assemblies would be crucial.

5.4 The Cabinet Member for Health and Adult Social Care noted that the budget cuts would result in the loss of two officers from the team supporting Local Assemblies, which was regrettable, although each ward would still have a named officer. It should also be noted that councillors were all community leaders with the right knowledge, skills and expertise to arrange face to face meetings themselves, if desired. Local Assemblies would continue to be well advertised through a number of different channels and existing webpages could be developed further.

5.5 **RESOLVED:** That the report be noted.

6. Domestic Abuse and Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy

6.1 James Lee, Director of Communities, Partnerships and Leisure introduced the report and offered his and the council's deepest condolences to the family of Sabina Nessa, a teacher at Rushey Green Primary School who had been murdered at the weekend. The following was noted:

- This was a five-year Domestic Abuse and Violence against Women and Girls (VAWG) Strategy, building on existing partnerships to provide a more co-ordinated and strategic response to tackling violence and abuse, with clear priorities that could be embedded into strategic plans across partner agencies.
- The strategy was centred around five strategic priorities: prevent, protect, recover, pursue and partnership.
- The draft strategy was presented to Safer Stronger Communities Committee at its last meeting and Members provided feedback. Feedback was also received via the public consultation that followed, which saw 91 responses.

- The title of the strategy was developed in consultation with a diverse group of agencies who recognised that women and girls carry by far the highest burden of these crimes, but also that the accepted definition of VAWG includes men and boys as victims. All forms of VAWG are under-reported but domestic abuse was by far the most prevalent VAWG crime impacting on Lewisham residents, and so should be the primary focus of resources.. The opening paragraph of Section 3 of the strategy document had been rewritten to make the rationale for the title clearer to the reader.
- Priority four of the strategy had been changed from 'Repair' to 'Recover' following feedback as it was felt that 'Recover' was more empathetic, positive and future-facing language. Priority five had been changed from 'People' to 'Partnership' as it was felt that 'Partnership' more accurately reflected the intention behind this strand of the strategy.
- Other changes had been made to the wording of the strategy to make more explicit the commitment to: (a) ensuring the strategy covers all forms of VAWG, including sexual violence and harmful cultural practices; (b) improving the way data on all forms of VAWG is measured and analysed; (c) working in partnership with other London boroughs to develop and deliver services and share good practice; (d) addressing 'lower-level' forms of VAWG including street harassment and sexual harassment; (e) meeting the specific needs of survivors who are less likely to access services, including those without English as their first language, those that identify as LGBTQ+, those from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds, and those or experiencing homelessness and/or multiple disadvantage; and (f) recognising the ways in which violence in relationships manifests itself within different age groups.

6.2 In the discussion that followed the following points were raised:

- Whilst women make up the majority of victims of domestic abuse, it was estimated that men make up to 25-30% of the victims but only 1% of those referred to the Athena service were men.
It was accepted that male victims were clearly not feeling that this service was for them but work was planned to remedy this. Already, in the last quarter, there had been an increase in referrals from men, thought to have been the result of a targeted awareness campaign and data on this could be provided. "Men Reaching Out" (a male domestic abuse service) would be training practitioners on the disparities and there was now a male officer attending the monthly Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC).
- One Member of the Committee voiced concern at the use of the term "honour based violence" as it could be interpreted as suggesting a justification for the violence (the protection of family honour). It was suggested that "family killings" would be a more appropriate and accurate term.

6.3 **RESOLVED:** That the report be noted.

7. Select Committee work programme

7.1 Charlotte Dale, Head of Overview and Scrutiny, introduced the report to the Committee. It was agreed that:

- The item on Equalities and the use of the terminology “BAME” scheduled for the next meeting be removed from the agenda to allow adequate time for discussion on the remaining two substantive items – the update on the implementation of the Committee’s Equalities Review and the budget item.
- An item on Staff Survey results and staff well-being be included in the work programme and scheduled for March.
- The Libraries item due to be considered at this meeting be re-scheduled to later this year.

7.2 **RESOLVED:** That the work programme be amended as agreed.

The meeting ended at 8.25 pm

Chair:

Date:
