

Subject: Strengthening Communities Review – Stage One Report

Date of Meeting: 28th September 2010

Report of: Director of Strategy and Governance

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Wards Affected: All

FOR GENERAL RELEASE

1. SUMMARY AND POLICY CONTEXT:

- 1.1 On 9th March 2010, Governance Committee agreed a strategic review of neighbourhood and community engagement – the ‘Strengthening Communities Review’. It was agreed that the review would look at existing approaches to community engagement and third sector representation and offer recommendations for public engagement activity into the future.
- 1.2 The Committee also requested:
- Written updates be provided at every Governance Committee and where appropriate committee members be involved in key aspects of the process.
 - That a cross party working group be established to ensure Member involvement.
- 1.3 Due to the size and complexity of the work, reporting of the Strengthening Communities Review will be made in two stages.
- 1.4 This initial report focuses on commissioned activity for strategic engagement and third sector representation in Brighton and Hove.
- 1.5 A report detailing the second stage of the review will be presented to a future meeting.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 2.1 That the Committee note the content of this initial report and that a further report will be submitted to the committee covering remaining issues.
- 2.2 That the Committee note the following principles for commissioning based on review findings.

- a) Third Sector Representation
 - Continuing to commission third sector representation across all activity linked to Intelligent Commissioning.
 - Continuing to commission third sector representation and involvement in the delivery of the Sustainable Community Strategy.
 - In particular, ensure support focuses on supporting smaller, neighbourhood and grass roots groups.

- b) Strategic Coordination of Community Engagement
 - Continuing to commission strategic coordination of the Community Engagement Framework and action plan.
 - Continuing to commission activities that support and develop best practice in community engagement.

- c) People and Place
 - Commission through a need analysis approach that takes into account both people and place, ensuring those less able to engage and participate are supported.
 - Commission for bottom up solutions that support communities to identify their own solutions to local issues and problems.
 - Commission for the outcomes of engagement rather than activities that impose structures, allowing different communities to decide what works for them

3. RELEVANT BACKGROUND INFORMATION / CHRONOLOGY OF KEY EVENTS:

- 3.1 The Strengthening Communities Review report follows two months of consultation and research.

- 3.2 Stage One – Commissioning Priorities (this report)
 - 3.2.1 The engagement and representation activity detailed in this report is currently funded through Area Based Grant (ABG), and Local Public Service Award (LPSA) funds. The Communities and Equalities Team have been able to access approximately £500,000 through these funding streams to deliver the activity.

 - 3.2.2 The engagement and representation activity has supported Third Sector representation and involvement in the city, alongside strategic community engagement activities and community development support to neighbourhoods. (Further detail on this activity is at 3.9.1 and information on impact at Appendix One).

 - 3.2.3 ABG and LPSA funds are concluding

3.3 Stage Two – Engagement in the City (to be drafted)

The next report will be substantial. It will include a qualitative examination of community engagement and Third Sector representation activity in the city and will also detail the councils' work in this area.

3.4 REVIEW STRUCTURE AND KEY FINDINGS

There have been four elements to the review process:

- A) An on-line mapping of engagement activity in the city.
- B) A qualitative analysis of the City Council's engagement activity.
- C) An independent evaluation of the Communities and Equalities Teams commissioning of community engagement and third sector representation activity.
- D) Joint Commissioning of engagement and representation activity.

These are set out below, with initial findings:

3.5 A) On-line mapping of engagement activity in the city

We have received 150 responses to date in the mapping exercise. The data is currently being analysed against a number of factors to determine the range and scope of engagement activity in the city. These include:

- An analysis of provision across the private, statutory and voluntary sectors.
- An examination of the people and places engaged with – i.e. communities of interest/identity, individuals and geographical areas.
- An analysis of the types of engagement linked to the Community Engagement Framework definitions of informing, involving, consulting, empowering and collaborating.

3.6 150 individual responses is a statistically reasonable sample. However the analysis takes into account that the number of replies are unlikely to offer a complete picture of engagement activity in the city.

3.7 The following points are therefore a summary of mapping findings to date, with further information to follow during stage two.

3.7.1 Interim conclusions demonstrate a huge diversity of engagement activity in the city; including emerging evidence of private sector investment and

interest. There remain gaps in activity in relation to those communities and groups less able to participate, (for example, gypsies and travellers, homeless persons and parents of children with multiple disabilities).

- 3.7.2 There is complication and confusion across all sectors about definitions and types of community engagement. In summary; activity being defined as 'community engagement' would appear to be more accurately described as 'customer or service user engagement'. The term 'customer' is being used to describe relationships where there is actually no choice in provision, (for example with statutory services). This work would be better described as 'service user engagement'.
- 3.7.3 Findings indicate that the majority of providers consider their engagement to encompass the 'informing' approach, (41% ranking this as their most relevant area of activity). This is a positive response but suggests a lack of investment of other more empowering approaches.
- 3.7.4 An 'empowering' approach was a higher priority for the Third Sector, with 21 organisations ranking it as their key area of activity (compared to 6 council teams). This may be interpreted as signifying a lack of investment in empowerment activities, (and therefore the notions of co-production and co-design), and requires further exploration and investment at stage two.
- 3.7.5 Duplication of engagement activity is an issue, particularly within the City Council, (where some departments and front line teams are having 'separate' conversations with service users). However, it is also clear that in terms of service delivery, engagement with customers is high priority, part of an ongoing business approach, and in some cases legally required. Opportunities remain for better targeted engagement and a minimisation of multiple 'conversations'
- 3.7.6 This duplication in engagement activity, can, however extend to other public sector organisations. For example, the City Council and Primary Care Trust occasionally commission the same organisations to carry out engagement activity.
- 3.7.7 Online mapping could provide a useful way of minimising this duplication. Using online facilities, commissioners, service managers and partners could potentially access the same information to support their work.
- 3.7.8 The profusion and diversity of engagement that occasionally leads to duplication, indicates that there is little need to commission new engagement arrangements. A more effective approach would be to focus on awareness raising and strengthening existing partnerships.

3.8 B) A qualitative analysis of the City Council's engagement activity

- 3.8.1 Linked to the mapping exercise above, the review has looked at the range of engagement activity within the City Council and provides helpful underpinning information to support the reorganisation programme. Some teams of the

Council, (for example the Partnership Community Safety Team), have undertaken their own evaluation of their engagement practice.

3.8.2 A separate paper describing this is being developed in partnership with community engagement service leads across departments and will form part of the Stage Two report.

3.9 C) An independent evaluation of the Communities and Equalities Teams commissioning of community engagement and representation activity

3.9.1 The Communities and Equalities Team accessed £500,000 from various funding sources to commission community engagement and third sector representation activity in the city. This has enabled:

- Funding to the Community and Voluntary Sector Forum (CVSF), for third sector representation and community engagement support, (e.g. third sector representatives involved with Local Strategic Partnership).
- Funding to the Stronger Communities Partnership, (a sub group of the LSP), for strategic activity and promotion of community engagement, (e.g. Get Involved, community engagement training).
- Funding for community development support to neighbourhoods in 13 of the city's most deprived areas through third sector partners.

3.9.2 An independent evaluation was commissioned to evaluate the effectiveness of their work and the following conclusions were made:

3.9.3 It was found that the work of the CVSF in facilitating third sector engagement and representation underpins third sector involvement in the LSP family of partnerships and broader decision making processes in the city. This is critical given that there is a move towards commissioning and the Third Sector are expected to fulfil key roles. This coincides with a more sophisticated understanding of need in the city, and decreasing resources; successful partnerships will need to step up to the challenge and meet increasing demand with fewer resources.

3.9.4 The Stronger Communities Partnership is successfully taking forward the cross sector approach to the community engagement and delivering on the Strengthening Communities chapter of the Sustainable Community Strategy. It is pioneering work on community engagement and its successes to date include the Get Involved Campaign and community engagement training pilot.

3.9.5 However, there is a lack of organisational 'buy in' amongst some partners, particularly with regard to senior level investment. This would benefit from further work and review.

3.9.6 Community Development Support has had strong and positive impact on neighbourhoods and improved perceptions of place. Individual empowerment is

evident, new community groups have formed and the work has supported resident involvement in service design, delivery and planning.

- 3.9.7 There has been significant investment in the city's deprived neighbourhoods with longer term initiatives making considerable impact on some indicators. However, national evaluations of these programmes, together with the Brighton and Hove Reducing Inequality Review, indicate that inequality remains an issue in deprived neighbourhoods, but that this also extends to groups of individuals across the entire city.
- 3.9.8 The Reducing Inequality Review also suggested that as long as particular parts of the city are specifically designated as areas to house poorer people, inequalities will persist. The review concludes that there is a need for a stronger focus on measures which will serve more directly to reduce inequality. This is being addressed through the refreshed Community Strategy and strategic plans of the council and other public sector organisations.
- 3.9.9 The establishment of a range of neighbourhood forums in the city enabled residents to determine how allocated devolved funds were spent in partnership with service providers. The forums also succeeded in influencing mainstream service provision and continue to focus on this.
- 3.9.10 In some areas the support and activity associated with structures such as forums, has consumed a large proportion of community development resource, with some residents feeling that meetings are taking priority over grassroots activity.
- 3.9.11 With a changed public sector climate, it is unlikely that such area initiatives will exist in the near future. We therefore need to ensure that our funding is used to maximise support for community activity.
- 3.9.12 Senior representatives of partner agencies in the city value the extent and ways in which residents are involved in service planning. There are opportunities to further embed neighbourhood learning and practice as part of the reorganisation of the City Council and others through programmes such as 'Improving the Customer Experience'.
- 3.9.13 These points, together with national priorities such as Big Society, would suggest a need for a fresh approach to community development commissioning linked to supporting communities to find their own solutions.

3.10 D) Joint Commissioning of Engagement and Representation activity

- 3.10.1 The review has examined the possibilities of partner contributions to this area of work. There is an awareness of the collective impact and this requires a collective response for many reasons, including:
- The need to engage communities with some of the difficult decisions that are likely to be made in the next few years and support communities to help themselves where appropriate and possible.

- The need to engage with the third sector as key partners in designing and delivering services into the future and as experts at working with 'hard to reach' individuals and communities.
- The need to better integrate people and place approaches to ensure that issues of multi-disadvantage are targeted and tackled, particularly in the context of pressurised public services.
- The statutory responsibilities across sectors to involve local people and customers.
- The shared commitment to the Sustainable Community Strategy and the Community Engagement Framework.

Barriers to Joint Commissioning

3.10.2 There are a number of valid reasons why joint commissioning of engagement and representation work is however problematic.

- A lack of knowledge about future funding allocations, coupled with a knowledge of planned immediate reductions.
- Competing and differing timescales and processes for decision making.
- Competing and different priorities for engagement and representation, (for example, engaging for health outcomes and/or engaging for community safety outcomes).
- A current lack of commissioning approaches amongst some public sector partners.
- Anxiety about new approaches and a lack of tried and tested models.

3.10.3 This report has been shared with the Public Service Board and a discussion on joint commissioning indicated interest in this from key partners. At the same time operational discussions with organisations such as the Primary Care Trust and Sussex Police are continuing and may result in some quick wins; for example, funding for projects where contract targets are similar.

4. **CONSULTATION:**

4.1 Over 200 stakeholders have taken part in the Review (in addition to and including those involved in the mapping process). It is high priority for the majority of partners involved in the Local Strategic Partnership and is critical to delivering the Sustainable Community Strategy.

4.2 During the recent LSP partnership review sessions, engagement and third sector involvement was consistently prioritised.

4.3 Consultation methods have included focus groups, interviews, questionnaires, a Social Return on Investment (SROI) analysis, and an independent evaluation. Full detail of this will be available in the Stage Two report.

5. FINANCIAL & OTHER IMPLICATIONS:

Financial Implications:

- 5.1 Commissioning activity as described in 2010/11 can be met by agreed grant funding. Future commissioning expenditure will need to be agreed as part of the Council's budget strategy, partner contributions and any identified external funding.

Finance Officer Consulted: Anne Silley Date: 21 September 2010

Legal Implications:

- 5.2 There are no legal implications to raise in respect of this report. The review is consistent with the Council's legal powers and duties.

Lawyer Consulted: Elizabeth Culbert Date: 21st September 2010

Equalities Implications:

- 5.3 Future commissioning arrangements will take into account both people and place and ensure support is directed to those most in need.

Sustainability Implications:

- 5.4 Future commissioning arrangements will take into account the need to promote sustainability considerations in all aspects of planning and delivery.

Crime & Disorder Implications:

- 5.5 On behalf of the Safe in the City Partnership, the Partnership Community Safety Team (PCST), Communities against Drugs and Environment Improvement Teams deliver a range of activities which engage and build cohesive communities. Some of these activities are integrated within the delivery plans of priority crime areas: facilitating the community led Racial Harassment Forum is one example of that. Other work such as supporting the network of Local Action Teams link closely with meeting the delivery requirements of Neighbourhood Policing and as such, have specific outcomes which are about identifying local policing priorities and delivering community safety solutions in partnership with local people. The PCST carries out targeted work with refugee and migrant individuals and communities and its programme of activities to 'build resilience to violent extremism' is a specific programme of work with Muslim and other faith based communities. Performance on this programme is measured against national indicators within the LAA process.
- 5.6 The Partnership looks forward to working with future commissioning approaches and achieving a consistent approach across the City.

Risk and Opportunity Management Implications:

- 5.7 The lack of resource to continue community engagement, development and third sector representation activity into the future carries significant risk in relation to our ability to ascertain and meet the needs of local people. Re-focusing on the key principles underpinning the activity does however provide the opportunity to ensure the value for money of any work undertaken.

Corporate / Citywide Implications:

- 5.8 The scope of the review includes city-wide provision of community and neighbourhood engagement and cross-sector engagement with the third sector. This has implications for all wards and supports the corporate objective to “Reduce inequality by increasing opportunity”.

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

Appendices:

None.

Documents In Members’ Rooms:

None

Background Documents:

None

