

**Subject:** Community and Neighbourhood Engagement  
**Date of Meeting:** 9 March 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 The City Council is committed to encouraging people at the grassroots to have more say in shaping their communities and the city. This includes providing more opportunities to enable individuals to have increasing control over their lives and supporting them to play an active role in civic life.

1.1.1 This paper considers the *total* picture of engagement in the city, as well as focus on activity in neighbourhoods, as agreed in the formal recommendations of the Council's constitutional review discussed at Full Council on 28<sup>th</sup> January 2010. Whilst there is much debate about the various ways in which engagement happens, the focus of this paper is on the strategic *outcomes* of engagement; most importantly, how effectively local people are given a voice in the city.

1.1.2 This paper suggests a way forward in looking at these areas by highlighting the role of the formal review of Strengthening Communities activity, (see 2.2 below), and suggests expansion to provide evidence based information, and examples of best practice, for future decisions.

#### 2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

2.1 That the Committee notes the public engagement work underway, the Framework and plethora of models developed according to community needs and priorities.

2.2 That the Committee notes the formal review of Strengthening Communities Commissioning activity and agree that the Review should provide a way forward in providing recommendations for public engagement in the future. This will test the existing models and examine the need for further community decision making opportunities, (e.g., looking at LATs and how they feed into the Community Safety Forum etc).

2.3 That the outcomes of the review should include

- A mapping and overview of the different forms and structures for public engagement that exist in the city, such as neighbourhood groups (e.g. LATs), and citywide representative activity, (such as that developed by the Community and Voluntary Sector Forum).

- An analysis of the costs and benefits of community and neighbourhood engagement, including a breakdown of the costs and value of different models.
  - An analysis of the links between the Council's democratic and constitutional opportunities for engagement and those at grass roots level.
  - A quantitative and qualitative analysis and mapping of the various targeted neighbourhood initiatives in the city such as Family Pathfinder, Adult Advancement Centres and Turning the Tide, evaluating what works and determining any fundamental principles for future neighbourhood activity. Where possible, the review would include partner involvement in this and include Neighbourhood Policing and the PCT's work on health inequality.
  - An analysis of the value of the Council's current Discretionary Grants Programme in helping to support public and neighbourhood engagement.
  - To develop new policy and approach in line with the Council's organisational change processes and the move towards stronger commissioning, creating public value and desire to support local communities and economies and enable co-production of solutions at the local level.
- 2.4 That the review be completed by September 2010, (in time for the Council's budget setting processes), and submitted to Governance Committee and Cabinet, (as required by the constitution), for consideration and incorporating into budget approaches for 2011/12.
- 2.5 That the Committee receive written updates at every meeting between now and September 2010 and, where appropriate, Governance Committee attendance and involvement be requested in key aspects of the Review process.

### **3. RELEVANT BACKGROUND INFORMATION / CHRONOLOGY OF KEY EVENTS:**

#### **The National Picture**

- 3.1 With the difficult economic conditions, and the new duty to involve most local authorities are reviewing their community and neighbourhood engagement activity.
- 3.2 The Young Foundation has carried out a national review of neighbourhood working and argue that local authorities under financial pressure have a greater need than before to keep residents engaged in order to support and protect strong and social networks, to breakdown barriers and reduce tensions between different social, faith or ethnic groups in neighbourhoods, and to maintain networks that can be drawn on to tackle local problem; for example through increased volunteering. Other national work makes the case for engagement as an integral element of co-design and co-production activity.
- 3.3 The Review would draw upon this national research activity, (particularly linked to evidence of what works), and examine its implications for Brighton and Hove approaches.

#### **Brighton and Hove Picture**

- 3.4 The work is part funded by time limited grants which are due to come to an end in April 2011 with budget setting decisions required from September 2010. It is

therefore critical that the review looks at consolidation and long term sustainability of this workstream.

- 3.5 Any expansion of activity would therefore need to take this into account and would most naturally be about strengthening this arrangement with consideration of further devolved decision making and budgets.
- 3.6 The City's existing Community Engagement Framework provides the Council with an overarching plan for implementing our engagement outcomes and was the result of extensive, highly commended, consultation in 2008. The Stronger Communities Partnership, (SCP), of the Local Strategic Partnership oversees this work and helps to ensure all public sector partners are signed up to its action plan.
- 3.7 Within neighbourhoods there exist a variety of decision making groups, (e.g. LATs, Friends of Parks Groups and Neighbourhood Forums illustrated at Appendix Two), which have evolved over time according to the needs and priorities for the area. There is no one standard or approach to neighbourhood engagement in the city and no statutory requirement to do so. Thus each area will have its own combination of forums, LATs and/or residents groups. The strengths of this variety is widely recognised and helps to ensure focus on the outcome (i.e. what we achieve in engagement), rather than the form or structure it takes. It may however be, that underlying 'principles' of engagement could be developed as part of the review.
- 3.8 The Community and Voluntary Sector Forum supports third sector organisations to develop their collective voice and influence policy and plans at a citywide level. Sector representatives are elected to participate in strategic boards and partnerships. This representation ensures that third sector organisations are engaged in and contributing to strategy development, service planning and monitoring and evaluation of service provision.
- 3.9 The Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act, 2006, heralded a number of measures relating to local government and the involvement of local communities and the City's Local Area Agreement has engagement indicators assessed as part of the Comprehensive Area Assessment (NI4 % people feel they can influence decision-making, NI6 % increase in volunteering and NI7 % third sector organisations which consider the local public sector is supporting a thriving third sector). The new Local Democracy Act plans to extend and strengthen these duties.
- 3.10 Community development support to neighbourhood groups such as forums and LATs and third sector representation on citywide strategic partnerships is funded through short term arrangements. The map at Appendix Two illustrates some of this activity but does not aim to show the full range of the Council's engagement activity related to service areas e.g. CYPT Cluster groups and Housing Participation. Other programmes such as Discretionary Grants also support resident involvement and all of this would be mapped and examined as part of the Review.
- 3.11 Area Based Grant allocations for the work are due to come to an end in April 2011 with budget setting decisions required from September 2010. It is therefore

critical that the review looks at consolidation and long term sustainability of this workstream.

- 3.12 Any expansion of activity would therefore need to take this into account and would most naturally be about strengthening this arrangement with consideration of further devolved decision making and budgets.

Why is a renewed focus on public engagement important now?

- 3.13 Given impending financial constraints and the likely reactions of a range of public service bodies in the city to change the way they currently operate there are five principal benefits to a tighter focus on engagement in strong and systematic ways.
- **Service Benefits** – active engagement in how we deliver and commission services into the future will make for better services more clearly meeting need. Engagement in the prioritisation and validation of needs, the design approaches and where practical the delivery and ownership of services will be powerful in proving and sustaining services to meet real need.
  - **Democratic Benefits** – as part of our statutory (and constitutional) responsibilities we need to ensure that at a time when the “democratic deficit” is perceived to be growing wider we ensure that citizens have the opportunity to participate in local democracy either via formal party political channels or by active participation in other ways. The fundamental principle of putting power in the hands of residents and communities can only help address a sense of alienation from the democratic process and thus civic life and the council. Ensuring well understood opportunities to get on the “ladder of engagement” (so that individuals who may start with “a problem about x” can progress through various active participation to ultimately become elected councillors or take up other impactful roles). Whilst party politics will continually ebb and flow the ability of citizens to engage and influence must be clear, strong and enduring.
  - **Cohesion Benefits** – strong engagement (aligned with timely and targeted community development activity) will be essential elements of ensuring that all voices are heard in important debates and difficult decisions to be taken into the future. As public spending reduces, the articulation of the needs of our poorest communities will be vital and skilled and engaged community leaders have an increasingly important role in the long term cohesion and health of the city and its communities. Co-design and co-production processes that ensure diversity of participation can also support cohesion by involving all members of the community in providing and shaping services.
  - **Economic Benefits** – engaged residents and communities look to the council (and public services) less as passive consumers and more as active participants in understanding needs and delivering solutions. Whilst this activity is not all “free” to the public purse there is a considerable amount of untapped energy in individuals and communities that can be released to help deliver the outcomes that really matter. The economic value of volunteering has been estimated in a recent Community and Voluntary Sector Forum (CVSF) Report; ‘Taking Account’. In Brighton and Hove there are 19,200 volunteer positions in Brighton and Hove, representing 57,600 voluntary

hours per week. In addition, strong public engagement enables the co-design and co-production of services ensuring that services are designed and delivered efficiently, including where appropriate communities providing services for themselves.

- **Reputation Benefits** – if individuals and communities are genuinely engaged in big civic issues and finding solutions to them, then they will have a different sense of affiliation to the city, the council and its partners. A good and systematic approach to engagement, (at all levels), should increase the respect with which the City Council is held and thus its reputation.

#### Public engagement as an outcome in itself?

- 3.14 At present the City Council and its partners, (where appropriate), seek to engage as effectively as possible. The advantage of good community engagement being an “outcome” in itself are:
- (a) The coordination of a range of current activities (e.g. Get Involved) ensuring consistency of narrative, approach and benefit
  - (b) To champion strong community engagement as we develop strategic commissioning approaches
  - (c) Ensuring that we use all our interactions / engagements with citizens to further the agenda. Whether we engage with people as customers, complainants, service users, citizens, voters etc, making sure we build our knowledge and understanding of them, and their perception of us.
  - (d) To help steer through the complex political and Political issues particularly developing thinking around empowerment at the local level. This would include considering to what extent we involve and empower, (and devolve decision making, budgets, co-design and production), what approaches we might take, the role of democratically elected councillors etc. Targeting of community development and ensuring that both place and people issues are thought through with engagement activities would both benefit from focussed co-ordination.

#### **Current Approaches & Activity - Where are we now with Community Engagement?**

- 3.15 The Community Engagement Framework provides the policy framework to support delivery of the Duty to Involve, (established in 2007), and emerging duties under The Local Democracy Act. It establishes a common understanding of, and commitment to, community engagement across members of the Brighton and Hove Strategic Partnership. It also sets clear standards that members are signed up to and identifies priority actions to help achieve the aims set out in the Framework.
- 3.16 The Framework was developed in response to research which highlighted the need for a better understanding of different types of engagement, improved coordination of activity on the ground, and skills development to improve the quality of engagement work.
- 3.17 It recognises that improving this area of work will impact our ability to intelligently inform service improvements, achieve value for money and improve relationships and reputation with communities and partners.

3.18 Work is ongoing to embed the Framework standards in engagement work within the local authority and partner organisations. In addition, there are 29 actions set out in the Framework, (e.g. to develop a policy on how services will be co-ordinated in neighbourhoods, and to ensure that an introduction to the Framework is part of new staff induction).

3.19 The Framework covers a wide range of talking with, listening to, acting upon and involving residents and communities in city life. Those approaches are broken down into 5 levels of engagement: *Informing, Consulting, Involving, Collaborating and Empowering*. Appendix One provides a case study of engagement work to illustrate this and the following are extracts of good practice:

- i) **Informing** (providing the community with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding problems, alternatives and opportunities)

**Case Study**

The Black and Minority Ethnic Community Partnership followed up standard publicity, including letters, flyers and posters, for an event for International Women's Day with personal phone calls and emails. Recognising that word of mouth can be a powerful tool, they also contacted a range of workers and groups who worked with black and minority ethnic communities and encouraged them to spread the word.

- ii) **Consulting** (listening to communities and individuals feedback on analysis and choices considering input and feeding back on results)

**Case Study**

Safety Net, a local organisation that provides projects, training and support in child protection to voluntary and community groups, undertook a consultation exercise to explore child safety issues in the home and community. In the initial phase they worked with schools and local community organisations to identify parents interested in being involved in the project and worked with them to design a survey. The parents were then supported and trained to work together to undertake the survey with their own families, neighbours and social networks.

- iii) **Involving** (working directly with the community through a process ensuring that concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and taken into consideration)

**Case Study**

The Brighton and Hove Children's Centre Parent Involvement Worker role is primarily to encourage and recruit parents and carers to become involved in the planning, consultation and evaluation of children's services. A key requirement for Children's Centres is to have parents represented on Children's Centre Advisory Groups. The workers responsibilities, therefore, can include organising interpreters, crèche and travel expenses, or providing parents with support to prepare for the meetings. Parent Involvement Workers also support the citywide parent's forum and identify further areas of involvement and opportunities for parents and carers. For example, parent-led projects and volunteering opportunities.

- iv) **Collaborating** (partnering with the community in each aspect of a decision including development of alternatives and identification and delivery of preferred solutions)

#### **Case Study**

With support from the Trust for Developing Communities, (a local community development organisation) Brighton and Hove Library Services sought to develop a model of local 'ownership' as part of the redevelopment of Coldean Library. A range of engagement activities were undertaken prior to and during the building of the new library. The establishment of a steering group comprising key local stakeholders to drive the development provided a mechanism for collaborative working. The steering group included representatives from community groups, local councillors, a local Registered Social Landlord, along with library staff, officers from Adult Social Care and the private developer. (More detail on this case study is attached as Appendix One).

- v) **Empowering** (placing decision making in the hands of communities either by subsidiarity in decision making powers or spending)

#### **Case Study**

The Bristol Estate Community Association (BECA), supported by Serendipity Enterprising Solutions (a local community development organisation) identified disused areas under the tower blocks on their 1950's built estate. Originally designed as drying rooms the now empty spaces were being used as rubbish dumps and places to carry out anti-social behaviour. BECA worked with the city council's housing department and the Creative Industries Manager to attract funding to convert a number of these spaces into artists' studios. The city council arranged to lease the space to the Association which will manage the studios and re-invest the income into improving their estate. To enable the Association to lease, rent out, and manage the units they were assisted to form a Community Interest Company – a "not for profit" company limited by guarantee – with every adult resident of the Estate being an automatic voting member of the company.

- 3.20 However, real empowerment is a long term issue requiring careful thought, but timely given the real opportunities that will present over the next few years. Specifically we will want individuals and communities to become active in their communities and be supported to solve their own problems, including at times producing their own services and solutions. Involving communities through co-design and production strengthens communities and often provides more effective and sustainable long term solutions.
- 3.21 The Stronger Communities Partnership is tasked with overseeing the Framework and ensuring its implementation across the range of LSP stakeholders and partnerships. The Council has recently created a new Team – Communities and Equality, which will lead the Review and corporate drive towards more widespread and diverse public engagement.

## **Current Approaches & Activity - Where are we now with Neighbourhood Engagement?**

- 3.22 Over the last 10 years the Council, with its partners, has delivered a range of neighbourhood regeneration programmes and activities; targeted mainly at the top 10% most deprived areas. Such initiatives include the Single Regeneration Budget (SRB), Neighbourhood Renewal (NRF), and New Deal for Communities (NDC) as well as specialist budgets such as the Community Development Commissioning.
- 3.23 A Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy was developed which set out a vision for the cities most deprived neighbourhoods over the period of 2002-10. Its particular focus was to 'narrow the gap between the most deprived neighbourhoods in the city and the rest'; and its focus was on re-shaping mainstream services.
- 3.24 In 2007, the Council undertook a city wide 'Reducing Inequality Review' which showed that whilst perception and quality of life had changed in the most deprived areas; systemic poverty indicators had remained the same or, in some cases, got worse. Further the review identified that there were people and places outside the top 10% most deprived equally in need of support.
- 3.25 Since April 2009, with the creation of the Communities Team neighbourhood support has been delivered through the Community Development Commissioning and the Stronger Communities Programme, with a greater focus on citywide support. This has been funded through Area Based Grant and corporate recurring funds, with additional LPSA Reward funding, all of which are due to come to an end in April 2011. In addition there is further specific short term funding, (Connecting Communities), for three areas of the city to be allocated by year end March 2010.
- 3.26 The Community Development Commissioning supports activity in 13 neighbourhoods in the city. Two other neighbourhoods (Tarnier and Eastern Road) are provided with support via a Council post. In addition, we commission a small pot to support broader and generic city-wide community development activity.
- 3.27 The community development work focuses on achieving the following 5 overarching outcomes:
- (a) Representative neighbourhood groups supported towards independence, (such as neighbourhood forums, LATs, Friends of Parks groups; with a focus on being community led).
  - (b) Delivery and development of neighbourhood action plans, (setting out the needs and priorities of the area).
  - (c) Neighbourhood community representatives feel they have greater skills, confidence and knowledge to address their own needs and the needs of their community.
  - (d) Activities, projects and groups that reflect local priorities developed and supported to work towards independence (e.g. supporting the Friends of the Park group in achieving funding for new park equipment or helping a community association provide activities for older people).
  - (e) Engage with individuals and communities who are seldom heard within neighbourhoods (for example, BME and young people).



- 3.28 Projects focus on developing the confidence, skills and capacity of individuals and communities to enable them to come together to identify concerns, seek solutions and to implement these, either alone or in partnership with service providers or other appropriate organisations and agencies.
- 3.29 Currently the commissioned work supports over 23 local representative groups, LATs and forums, and 643 people were involved in neighbourhood forums over the last two quarters.

### **Current Approaches & Activity - Where are we now with Third Sector Engagement?**

- 3.30 Engagement of the third sector through the Stronger Communities Programme focuses on ensuring that the sector is informed, represented and has influence in citywide strategic planning and decision-making. The Community and Voluntary Sector Forum currently has 552 member organisations (all third sector groups active in the city) and supports 83 reps on 35 strategic groups, including the Local Strategic Partnership.

In addition, through the support to the strengthening communities agenda:

- The Stronger Communities Partnership is supported to fulfil its Terms of Reference, including monitoring delivery of the LAA Strengthening Communities Indicators and monitoring delivery of the Community Engagement Framework

### **Summary & Conclusions**

- 3.31 Given that public engagement contributes ultimately to all top level outcomes there is an argument for 'mainstreaming' our approaches to engagement. With short term funding in place for this activity, Members are asked to support the Strengthening Communities Review in identifying sustainable options.
- 3.32 The Review will help us to understand the ways in which communities are able to self-identify the forms and structures through which they wish to contribute to decision making in the city.
- 3.33 This paper recommends that the Strengthening Communities review be seen as a strategic conduit through which this coordination can be addressed and that it is expanded to encompass the issues that have arisen during the Council's constitutional review.

## **4. CONSULTATION**

- 4.1 The Community Engagement Framework is the result of extensive consultation with a wide range of neighbourhood, community and voluntary sector partners including involvement of the PCT and Sussex Police. The research, which was carried out in 2007, was highly commended for its consultation practice and now sets standards for other consultation activity in the city.

## 5. FINANCIAL & OTHER IMPLICATIONS:

### Financial Implications:

- 5.1 The review of Strengthening Communities Commissioning activity will be funded in 2010/11 within resources identified within the Policy Unit's budget and funds available to strategic partnerships through LPSA Reward Grant. Any future independent evaluation would be dependent on securing external funding.
- 5.2 The review will need to consider longer term sustainability for consideration in developing the Council's budget for 2011/12 and beyond.

*Finance Officer Consulted: Anne Silley*

*Date: 23/02/10*

### Legal Implications:

- 5.3 The proposals in the report are consistent with the Council's legal powers and duties.

*Lawyer Consulted:*

*Abraham Ghebre-Ghiorghis*

*Date: 23/02/10*

### Equalities Implications:

- 5.4 The Strengthening Communities Review will analyse the extent to which community engagement provides effective opportunities for a range of minority groups and deprived geographical areas to have a voice in Council decision making processes. Where possible, the Review will also analyse the integration of these people and place agendas and made recommendations for further improvement areas.

### Sustainability Implications:

- 5.5 The Strengthening Communities Review will analyse the extent to which community engagement enables both minority groups and neighbourhoods to play an active part in sustainability activity. This will include a review of commissioning outcomes with a view to consider this area of work more in the future.

### Crime & Disorder Implications:

- 5.6 Currently commissioned community development work supports much of the resident engagement with the network of Local Action Teams (LATs) in the city. The LATs are important mechanism for feeding into the Community Safety Forum and Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership. The Review will examine the outcomes and effectiveness of this support and make recommendations for the commissioning of this activity into the future.

### Risk and Opportunity Management Implications:

- 5.7 This will be analysed through the Strengthening Communities Review.

Corporate / Citywide Implications:

5.8 This will be analysed through the Strengthening Communities Review.

**SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION**

**Appendices:**

1. Idea Case Study (an example of empowerment activity in one neighbourhood)
2. Map of areas with commissioned community development support to groups
3. Map of city wide Local Action Teams
4. Brief report of the role of community development commissioning in supporting Local Action Teams

**Documents In Members' Rooms**

None

**Background Documents:**

None

