

 Brent	Resources and Public Realm Scrutiny Committee 10 th May 2021
	Report from the Assistant Chief Executive
Brent Voluntary and Community Sector	

Wards Affected:	All
Key or Non-Key Decision:	N/A
Open or Part/Fully Exempt: (If exempt, please highlight relevant paragraph of Part 1, Schedule 12A of 1972 Local Government Act)	Open
No. of Appendices:	None
Background Papers:	NCIL Cabinet Decision 7 December 2020: https://democracy.brent.gov.uk/ieDecisionDetails.aspx?ID=5351
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1.0 Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 To update the committee on our work with the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS).
- 1.2 To outline the model of collaboration with the VCS, and key activity including a comprehensive commissioning programme; and grant-making activity.

- 1.3 The report also includes a focus on the Neighbourhood Community Infrastructure Levy (NCIL).

2.0 Recommendation

- 2.1 That the committee is assured Brent Council's activity to support and enable our voluntary and community sector is in place.
- 2.2 That the report is noted.

3.0 Detail

- 3.1 Brent's VCS offers a comprehensive range of services and activities that both contribute significantly to the wellbeing of Brent's residents, and complement local statutory services. The council acknowledges the pivotal role played by the VCS. CVS Brent currently deliver Brent's infrastructure provision which includes: training, governance advice, governance support and assistance. There are also various funding streams available to the VCS including to support: activities that meet specific council strategic objectives; borough-wide services; health-based projects; and smaller scale community activities. Grant awards are administered in line with the criteria set against each funding stream and Brent Council's Constitution. VCS organisations have access to bid for NCIL funding and also deliver a number of the Council's commissioned services. The VCS offer provides significant benefits to local communities whilst complementing the Council's strategic priorities.

- 3.2 The Council has ambitious plans with five overarching priorities:

1. Every opportunity to succeed
2. A future built for everyone, an economy fit for all
3. A cleaner, more considerate Brent
4. A borough where we can all feel safe, secure, happy and healthy
5. Strong foundations.

Meeting the aspirations of the people of Brent requires a close and strong partnership between the Council and the VCS. Brent's vision is to work collaboratively with the VCS to deliver on shared objectives to secure an

inclusive, prosperous and sustainable future for all residents. The focus is on shared and coordinated action that delivers in an environment where activity is focused on the delivery of the outcomes of the Borough Plan. Services and initiatives are delivered in ways that make the best of the resources, skills and knowledge of each organisation and promote learning from the best practice in each.

This vision is underpinned by the following principles:

- Understanding of shared priorities and agendas.
- Trust is built on the basis of mutual respect and recognition of each other's roles, skills and knowledge.
- Progress is made, recognised and built on.
- Existing strengths are built on and new ones developed.
- A reflective model which is adaptable to what works well and what doesn't.
- Using this learning to deepen our relationships and make them more effective.
- Recognition that the sector is independent of us.

3.3 Model of Collaboration

3.3.1 The model of collaboration was developed and implemented in 2020 with a focus on delivering clear and lasting positive outcomes for the people of Brent. The new model ensures better delivery on key strategic objectives and challenges facing the Borough into the 2020s. In particular, in ways that help deliver on the objectives shared across sectors to secure an inclusive, prosperous and sustainable future for all our people. It is based on creating a continually improving relationships across agencies and sectors that enable services and initiatives delivered in ways making the best of the resources, skills and knowledge of each organisation and promoting learning from best practice in each. There are two key elements of the model – the strategic group and the thematic groups that feed into the strategic group.

The strategic group is the overarching group within the model and has a key part to play in keeping an overview of implementation of the new approach and

coordinating the work of a number of thematic groups concentrating on agreed crosscutting themes addressing the issues of particular importance and concern to Brent, its communities and neighbourhoods. It comprise representatives of the Council and the VCS (with officers and representative leads from the thematic and locality hubs) and provides the strategic overview of VCS activity across the borough. It facilitates two-way communication between the thematic groups, Brent Connects and locality discussions in ways that help ensure that local issues form the cornerstone of VCS activity across the Borough.

The thematic groups and lead organisations that are currently represented on the strategic group are:

- Advice and advocacy – Citizens Advice Brent
- Children and young people – Young Brent Foundation
- Cultural and community groups – Step-Up Hub
- Food Aid - Sufra
- Homelessness - Crisis
- Long term conditions and disabilities – Brent Mencap
- Mental health – Ashford Place and Brent Carers
- Older people – Age UK

Each thematic group encourages organisations working on similar issues or with similar client groups to share information, find areas of common ground and identify areas for joint action. Each thematic group includes a range of organisations. In particular, they provide the basis for more effective development of consortium arrangements, in ways more likely to be a more attractive proposition to external funders (and able to make stronger, joined-up bids for the funds they provide). This approach has proved particularly successful during the pandemic where partnership working was key in ensuring successful delivery for the people of Brent.

3.4 Commissioning

3.4.1 The commissioning of services from the VCS is a key way to build partnerships and strengthen the voluntary sector. Commissioning provides the opportunity

to develop services in response to new and emerging needs, and use the knowledge of expert organisations to address them. The open, competitive commissioning process ensures that services provide good value for money for Brent residents.

3.4.2 In summary, our VCS commissioning approach has included:

- Ensuring providers are facilitated to deliver services in an outcome-focussed way.
- Developing new evidence-based impact measures that clearly demonstrate the effectiveness of services.
- Ensuring that new services are fit for purpose and able to address emerging needs e.g. the impact of Covid-19.
- Implementing efficiency savings in response to budget pressures.
- Working with stakeholders to ensure they have input into the development of the new service specifications.

The council commissions a wide range of services from the VCS, for example:

Contract	Purpose
Healthwatch Service	Requirement under Health & Social Care Act 2012. Community support and involvement, research, making recommendations.
Brent Advisory Partnership	Capacity building and service delivery. Client contact mainly by phone in 20/21 due to pandemic.
Voluntary Infrastructure	Training, advice, organisational development and helping the VCS become market-ready.
Specialist and Generalist Advice	Provision of advice to Brent residents. Emphasis on supporting children & families.
NHS Independent Complaints Advocacy Service	Guaranteed under Health & Social Care Act 2012, the service provides patients with information and advice on NHS complaints processes. Currently operating remotely. In 20/21, 55 people received extensive support, and 60 others were engaged.

3.5 Grant streams

3.5.1 There are a number of grants managed by the council. The Partnership and Engagement team are responsible for a number of these grant streams. These are:

- **Neighbourhood Community Infrastructure Levy (NCIL)** – available to deliver priorities as agreed with the local community.
- **Love Where You Live** - up to £500 funding is available for projects that aim to foster a sense of belonging amongst communities, where diversity is celebrated. Individuals and organisations may apply. It is about strengthening the skills, abilities and confidence of local people, empowering residents to take action to develop stronger communities.
- **Edward Harvist Trust** - grant funding of up to £5,000 per year for Brent-based, one off community projects that have 30% match funding. The fund is administered by the London Borough of Harrow on behalf of the Trust, and Brent receives 28% of the annual income. The fund is then distributed to voluntary organisations in Brent that meet the trust criteria. Only charities may apply.

3.5.2 Grants are promoted through a number of channels, depending on the focus of each round.

3.6 Neighbourhood Community Infrastructure Levy (NCIL)

3.6.1 The council collects money from eligible new developments in the borough through the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL). CIL is a charge levied on floor space arising from development, in order to fund infrastructure that is needed to support development in an area. CIL can be used to fund a broad range of community facilities such as play areas, parks and green spaces, cultural, sports and healthcare facilities.

3.6.2 At least 15% of CIL receipts generated must be spent on Neighbourhood Projects i.e. NCIL. The expectation is that priorities for spend are agreed with the local community. Further, Government guidance states that the council

must engage the community where development has taken place and agree with them how best to spend the funding.

3.6.3 Brent is divided into five 'CIL Neighbourhoods': Harlesden, Kilburn & Kensal, Kingsbury & Kenton, Wembley and Willesden. The value of grant funding varies between neighbourhoods. Wembley has the most development and is therefore capped at 50% of the total amount of NCIL available. The other 4 neighbourhoods have the remaining 50% split evenly between them i.e. 12.5% each. This money is reviewed at the beginning of each round, taking into account the amount of money collected and the amount of NCIL money allocated to successful projects. This includes the 25% uplift for Harlesden Town Residents Association and Sudbury Town Residents Association.

3.6.4 A scheme must meet eight essential criteria to be funded by NCIL:

- Meet the types of infrastructure that can be funded within the CIL Regulations
- Evidence local community backing for the project proposed
- Address impact(s) and support ongoing development in a specific Brent NCIL Neighbourhood
- Be a one off project that does not require additional revenue funding in its delivery or operation (or, identify how additional revenue funding may be met)
- Reflect the strategic priorities of the council within the Borough Plan, meeting the current NCIL round theme
- Meet at least one of the identified priorities in the Neighbourhood in which the project will be delivered
- Engage with diverse Brent communities
- Demonstrate sound project costing and value for money

3.6.5 The latest NCIL round closed on 3 May 2021. The round can be found on the Council's website <https://www.brent.gov.uk/your-community/community-grants-and-voluntary-sector-support/funding-finder/neighbourhood-community-infrastructure-levy-ncil-fund/>. The theme was Recovery, covering

the response to Covid-19, climate change and building back a better Brent. The successful projects for this round should be decided by end of June 2021.

3.7 Participatory Budgeting

3.7.1 The council is seeking new ways to empower citizens and neighbourhoods and, in doing so, to draw on their knowledge and experience to help us inform and improve decision-making and implementation. Participatory budgeting (PB) is commonly defined as the process of democratic deliberation and decision-making, in which ordinary people decide how to allocate part of a municipal or public budget. It has been described as a form of citizen participation in which citizens are involved in the process of deciding how public money is spent.

3.7.2 At a local level, the use of a participatory-based approach is being piloted on the allocation of the carbon-offset fund. The aim is to help us ensure that this fund can be given for things that better reflect the needs and aspirations of local people. This form of engagement supports the new approach to working with the voluntary sector and helps provide the basis for revitalising the Council's community engagement mechanisms. If successful with local people we would be looking to roll this out with other grant programs.

3.8 Covid19 response with the community

3.8.1 The Brent Mutual Aid network is made up of 20 Mutual Aid independent groups run by neighbours that connect, listen and support other neighbours. Groups covering all of Brent have been working to provide practical support such as delivering food, medicine and other supplies to people who need to stay at home, as well as providing emotional support. A mutual aid grant was set up for mutual aid organisations, administered by CVS Brent. The work with Mutual Aid groups was operationalised at pace during the onset of the Pandemic. As the Pandemic hit local people mobilised into grassroots activity to support each other. The Council welcomed their initiatives and we continue to work closely with Mutual Aid leads, attending their monthly meetings to ensure the relationship with the Council and the CVS is sustained and communities are supported.

3.8.2 The Partnerships and Engagement Team was the lead in supporting departments across the Council to build partnerships with the VCS. Through the Covid19 emergency we have:

- Supported the Hubs to distribute £80k in food aid grants and facilitated direct dialogue with Mutual Aid Groups and the Hubs
- Supported the Children and Young People department to run a £125k small grants fund in support of young people's mental health
- Supported the Brent Health Matters commissioning programme by providing capacity building for organisations

Having a framework for the Thematic Groups in place before the pandemic hit meant that the Council could respond quickly as emergency needs were revealed across the borough. Through the work with the voluntary and community sector the council has established trust with the community in our covid response. This includes giving the facts around the vaccine, being the first council to provide webinars, community engagement through community videos and translated assets and the role out of the Community Champion's programme.

3.9 **Brent Connects**

3.9.1 Our five Brent Connects areas have played an important role in local resident engagement. Brent Connects continued to operate through the Covid19 pandemic. Regular, borough wide meetings were held online, with area based discussions enabled and facilitated by the relevant ward members. Digital meetings had a positive impact, enabling us to engage with new groups. Moving forward, Brent Connects will be delivered in a hybrid model, with physical meetings taking place and digital access available, ensuring we maximise engagement across communities.

3.10 Stronger Communities Strategy

3.10.1 The Stronger Communities Strategy has informed policy development and activity. The objectives are also embedded within other key strategies and plans e.g. the Poverty Commission, the Black Community Action Plan and the Equality Strategy. Examples include:

- **Tackling Poverty** – the Poverty Commission was established in 2020 and has published over 40 well-received recommendations to tackle the causes and consequences of poverty in Brent. These cover housing, economy and jobs, financial inclusion and welfare. The VCS formed part of the Commission and is represented on the consultative group.
- **Tackling extremism** – PREVENT has an extensive reach into the VCS sector through the delivery of specialist projects, with their programme reaching over 5000 people.
- **Engaging new and emerging communities** – the Council's emerging communities programme funded by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) has 41 volunteers. 30 events were run last year, attended by residents. There are active networks of over 20 groups.
- **Tackling underachievement** – There is a strategic focus on improving educational attainment for boys of Black Caribbean heritage. Priority 1 of the council's Black Community Action Plan is centred on early intervention for children, young people and families, with initiatives to understand barriers and promote opportunities amongst the black community.
- **Promote gender equality** – The Council's 4-year Equality Strategy has a key objective to understand the barriers to equality and act to remove them. Equality Impact Analyses (EIA) are a useful means of assessing policy decisions against the protected characteristics. A key action plan commitment for this year is focused on promotion of staff training on gender equality.

4.0 Financial Implications

4.1 The commissioning of services from the VCS and the grant schemes are funded from the Strategy and Partnerships budget.

5.0 Legal Implications

- 5.1 Pursuant to S1 of the Localism Act 2011, the Council has a general power of competence to do anything which an individual may do unless it is expressly prohibited by other legislation. Further, in accordance with s111 of the Local Government Act 1972 the council has the power to undertake any activity which is calculated to facilitate, or is conducive, or incidental to, the discharge of any of its functions; and accordingly implementing processes which increase and improve community engagement would fall within these powers.
- 5.2 In accordance with Part 3, Responsibility for Functions Brent Council's Constitution, Cabinet approval is required for the awarding of grants above a certain threshold. The giving of grants to voluntary organisations is a discretionary power which must be exercised reasonably taking into account all relevant considerations and ignoring irrelevant considerations. The Council's discretion must not be fettered by previous commitments they may have given and it should make its decision in the light of present circumstances. Commissioning arrangements are carried out within the Council's Commissioning framework.
- 5.3 CIL can be used to fund a wide range of infrastructure, including transport, flood defences, schools, hospitals, and other health and social care facilities (for further details, see section 216(2) of the Planning Act 2008, and regulation 59, as amended by the 2012 and 2013 Regulations). This definition allows the levy to be used to fund a very broad range of facilities such as play areas, parks and green spaces, cultural and sports facilities, healthcare facilities, academies and free schools, district heating schemes and police stations and other community safety facilities. This flexibility gives local areas the opportunity to choose what infrastructure they need to deliver their relevant Plan (the Local Plan in England, Local Development Plan in Wales, and the London Plan in London). Charging authorities may not use the levy to fund affordable housing.
- 5.4 Local authorities must spend the levy on infrastructure needed to support the development of their area, and they will decide what infrastructure is needed.

The levy is intended to focus on the provision of new infrastructure and should not be used to remedy pre-existing deficiencies in infrastructure provision unless those deficiencies will be made more severe by new development.

- 5.5 The levy can be used to increase the capacity of existing infrastructure or to repair failing existing infrastructure, if that is necessary to support development.

6.0 Equality Implications

- 6.1 Brent is committed to equality, diversity and inclusion; the council is determined to be an exemplar of good practice in equality, diversity and human rights and it is our policy to treat everyone fairly and with respect. We aim to ensure that all our current and future residents, staff and stakeholders are treated fairly and receive appropriate, accessible services, and fair and equal opportunities.

- 6.2 This commitment requires that equality considerations play a key role in our decision-making processes and that our policies are fully compliant with the duties placed on us as a public sector body by the Equality Act 2010. Our Equality Analyses (EAs) ensure that we follow through on our commitment to equality and they provide a method for clearly demonstrating the necessary legal compliance.

- 6.3 The Equality Act 2010 replaced the pre-existing anti-discrimination laws with a single Act. The legislation covers the exercise of public functions, employment and work, goods and services, premises, associations, transport and education. The act prohibits victimisation and harassment, and all of the following forms of discrimination: direct; indirect; by association; by perception; or discrimination arising from disability. When considering the Public Sector Equality Duty pursuant to section 149 of the Equality Act 2010. The council must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to:

- a) Eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation
- b) Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it; and
- c) Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it

6.4 The Public Sector Equality Duty covers the following nine protected characteristics: age, disability, marriage and civil partnership, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation. The purpose of the duty is to enquire into whether a proposed decision disproportionately affects people with a protected characteristic. In other words, the indirect discriminatory effects of a proposed decision. Due regard is the regard that is appropriate in all the circumstances. Our work with the VCS will support Brent Council to continue to meet its public sector equality duties.

7.0 Consultation with Ward Members and Stakeholders

7.1 Lead members have been consulted. Ward members and stakeholders have been consulted as appropriate to the specific areas of work.

8.0 Human Resources/Property Implications (if appropriate)

8.1 None

Report sign off:

Shazia Hussain
Assistant Chief Executive