

Update on the Voluntary and Community Sector Strategy 2010 – 2015 Overview and Scrutiny Committee

1. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered a report on the Scope of the Voluntary and Community Sector Strategy at its meeting in June 2009. The committee was overtly supportive of the report. They asked for an update to be provided on the development of the Voluntary and Community Sector Strategy and information on the council's relationship with the Voluntary Sector which is the subject of this briefing.
2. Reports were also presented to the Council's Corporate Management Team (CMT), The Joint Executive Team (JET) of the Council and NHS Brent and to Partners for Brent, the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) Board. There was overall support for the scope of the strategy, its broad outline and the borough-wide dimensions for statutory and non-statutory sectors. The reports called for the full engagement of partners, facilitate the nomination of representatives and setting up a strategy group to take forward the initiative. Discussions were also held with BrAVA and the Voluntary Sector Liaison Forum as part of the scoping exercise.
3. A memo from Martin Cheeseman, Director of Housing and Community Care (Project Sponsor) on 15th July 2009 requested LSP partners to nominate representatives to take forward the strategy development. A positive response was received from all LSP Partners. The first meeting of the group took place on 13th August 2009 between 2 – 4 pm at the Town Hall. There was a broad representation of Statutory and non-statutory partners among them: The Local Authority (various departments), The Police, Brent NHS, JobCentre Plus College of North West London and Voluntary and Community Representatives on the LSP. In total 20 people attended the meeting.
4. The aim of the first meeting was to:
 - Establish what organisations want from the strategy – finalise the scope and establish priorities
 - Map organisations we work with and identify gaps in the sector
 - Set up a group to draft the strategy
 - Outline a detailed chapter plan for the strategy
5. Further discussions which have taken place have established the information below. The aim of this exercise is to:
 - refine the views, establish an outline and inform a draft strategy
 - ensure all stakeholders are fully engaged in the strategy development
 - ensure shared commitment and buy-in to the strategy when finalised
 - upgrade the information we hold on organisations and communicate better with them in future.
6. The survey format will encourage input from all stakeholders and further engagement especially with the Voluntary and Community Sector. Respondents will be invited to future stakeholder events to discuss the findings from the survey which will inform the draft strategy. The following section outlines in more detail the main headings and asked questions which require input from stakeholders.

6.1. Vision

The vision is to ensure a vibrant Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) in Brent and to establish a framework for:

- The future relationship with the sector to enable us to work together positively and constructively
- Support to the sector to develop its capacity to respond to current and emerging trends and policies
- Clear governance arrangements which allow the VCS to be involved in policy development and decision making
- Efficient use of resources and value for money through joint planning, performance management and effective partnerships.
- Roles and responsibilities
- Commitment to and ownership of the strategy.

Question:

- **Is there anything you will like to add to the vision which we aim to achieve?**

6.2. Compact¹:

The Compact is being refreshed nationally which gives us an opportunity to look at our local Compact and ensure that it is linked to the strategy. If we all adhere to and deliver the above vision, we will be meeting our responsibility under the Compact. The strategy will in essence be a *Compact implementation strategy*.

Question:

- **Do you agree that we link the strategy to the Compact²?**

6.3. Outcomes:

The following outcomes³ which are critical to achieving the above vision have been identified:

- The role of the Local Council for Voluntary Service (CVS) (currently held by Brent Association for Voluntary Action's (BrAVA)) is enhanced to become a purposeful CVS fully engaged with voluntary sector organisations within Brent.
- High quality services and improved quality of life for Brent residents
- Positive and constructive dialogue leading to improved relationship between statutory and VCS organisations
- A co-ordinated, enhanced and defined statutory sector role and support to the VCS.
- The VCS responds to current and emerging policies, builds social capital and maximises efficiencies.
- The needs of the VCS are met through agreed priorities and actions which increase awareness and understanding, capacity building and training.
- Clear and effective structures to involve the VCS
- Agreed systems and processes for sharing information, communicating, managing performance and resolving conflicts

¹ An agreement between Government and the voluntary and community sector in England. It recognises shared values, principles and commitments and sets out guidelines for how both parties should work together. There are Local Compacts at and the Brent Compact was developed in 2004.

³ Duignan, P. (2009). *Introduction to outcomes theory*. Outcomes Theory Knowledge Base Article No. 218. (<http://knol.google.com/k/paul-duignan-phd/introduction-to-outcomes-theory/2m7zd68aaz774/3>), <http://www.easyoutcomes.org/>

- All partners/organisations own and are accountable for delivering the vision.

Question:

- **Are there other outcomes you would like to add to the above?**

6.4. Principles

We aim to have a set of principles which guide us in our efforts to achieve the above vision and outcomes. Some of these are to:

- recognise the contribution of the VCS as an equal partners in delivering high quality services which improve the wellbeing of Brent residents
- work in a fair, transparent and accountable manner
- be inclusive and mindful of the diversity of the borough, ensure equality for small and large organisations
- be proactive in meeting the needs of vulnerable and hard to engage groups
- show respect for individual and organisational opinions, culture and independence
- nurture trust and promote the partnership ethos

Questions:

- **Are there any key principles which you will like to add to the above list?**
- **What are the diversity implications to you(r) organisation?**

6.5. Key issues

The key issues which have an impact on the strategy have been outlined as:

- the current recession and the financial impact on organisations
- growing demand for services, meeting low level needs and the role of the VCS in delivering public services
- tackling cross-cutting issues such as employment, volunteering, social inclusion, community cohesion, crime and community safety, health inequalities, equalities agenda
- Various statutory requirements to involve and promote localism, empowerment and neighbourhood governance.
- the Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA)
- Local Area Agreements
- Transformation in various service areas – adults social care, children and families, customer services, regeneration, sustainability
- Commissioning in public services
- The refresh of the *Compact* nationally
- Creating an environment for a thriving third sector

Questions:

- **Are there any other issues facing your organisation which you will like to add to the above list?**
- **How are you dealing with them/how do you intend to deal with them?**

6.6. Commitment and ownership

There is a strong focus on commitment to a vibrant Voluntary and Community Sector through pledging and involvement in institutional arrangements and being aware of developments and leading on/owing aspects of planned activities/projects.

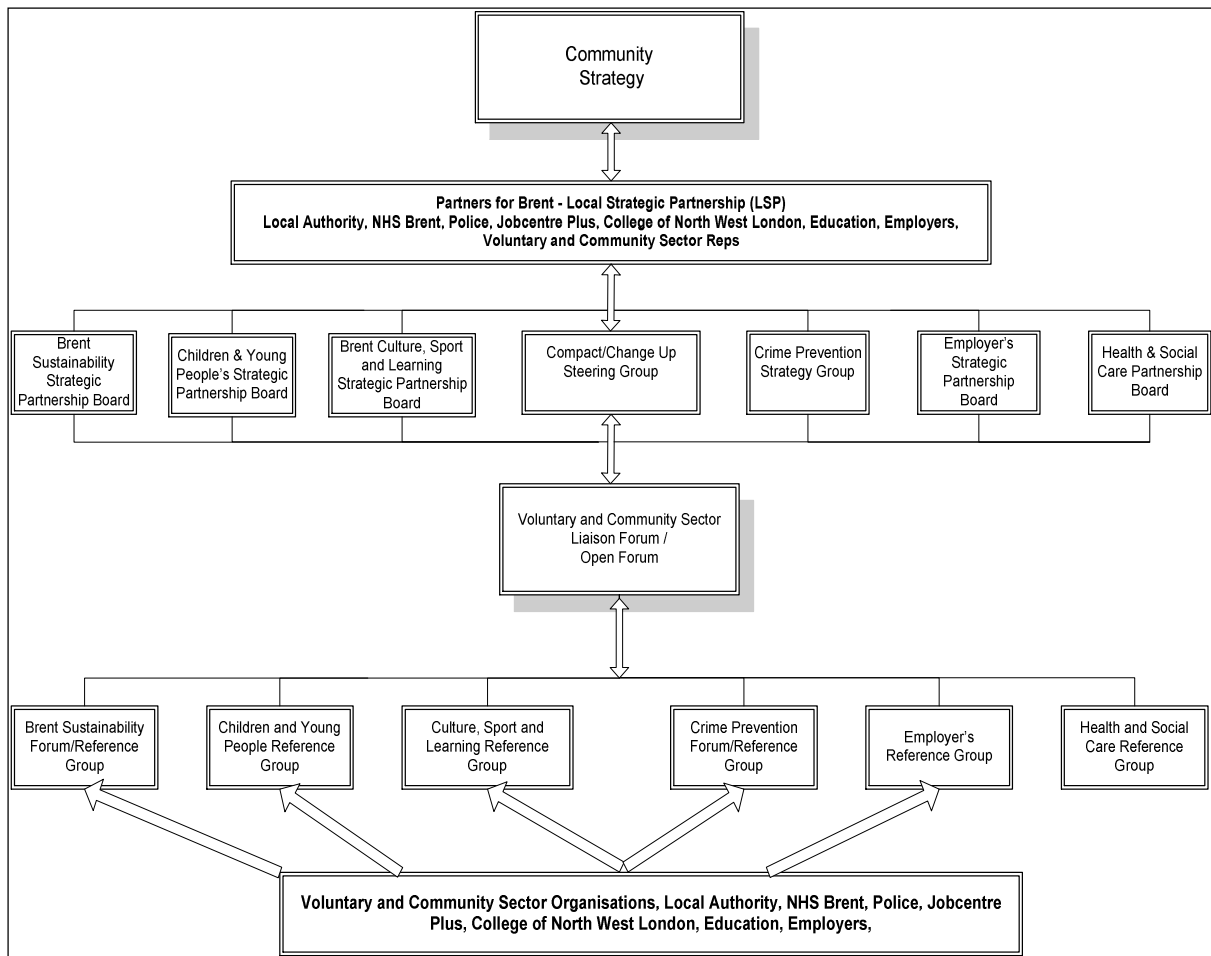
Questions:

- **Are you signed up to the Brent Compact?**

- Is your organisation a member of the Local Council for Voluntary Service [BrAVA]
- Do you currently lead on any multi-agency project(s)?
- Are you involved in any projects with other partners?

6.7. Partnership arrangements

Based on the Audit Commission's definition of partnerships as being "Two or more independent bodies working collectively to achieve more effective outcomes than they could by working separately"⁴ the aim is to establish the model, degree and structures for effective partnership working between the statutory and VCS organisations in Brent. We have developed the following structure for effective engagement with the Local Strategic Partnership and the VCS.



We aim to adopt an inclusive approach which incorporates all degrees of integration at all levels, from strategic to operational service planning and delivery to the breadth and depth of partnership working:

Questions:

- Do you agree with the above structure for engaging with the sector?
- Are you aware of what other organisations are doing (co-ordination)?

⁴ Governing Partnership Bridging the accountability gap <http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk/SiteCollectionDocuments/AuditCommissionReports/NationalStudies/GoverningPartnerships26Oct05REP.pdf>

- **Do you work together in a cohesive way with other organisations/sectors (collaboration)?**
- **Do you work together as one with another agency (integration)?**
- **What partnership/engagement structures do you belong to?**

6.8. Support

Voluntary and community sector organisations need support to deliver the local vision. The support requirements that have been identified include:

- capacity building (skills and competences)
- training
- making funding bids
- developing medium and long term plans
- Positioning the VCS to deliver key objectives and emerging developments

Questions:

- **What skills and competences does your organisation need to develop?**
- **What training do you require to build the capacity of your organisation?**

6.9. Information and communication

The need has been identified to collate, analyse and disseminate information that enables organisations and partners to better work together by ensuring that:

- Vital information is gathered and shared
- Barriers to sharing information are removed by establishing protocols for sharing information
- Signposting and referral systems are established
- All channels of communication are utilised to maximum effect

Questions:

- **Do you inform other organisations of your actions (communication)?**
- **Do you have any information sharing protocols with other organisations?**
- **If you answered yes, with which organisations?**

6.10. Roles and responsibilities

Clear roles and responsibilities need to be outlined in the strategy. These include for:

- Individuals – to attend and participate fully in meetings and projects, be Compact champions, behave in a manner that promotes good working relationships, respond to and provides feedback to enquiries, consultations etc
- Statutory organisations – commitment to support and manage relationships, appoint lead officers within organisations/departments, own and lead on outcomes, Compact compliance
- Voluntary organisations – commitment and ownership, compact compliance, providing performance information,
- Governance structures – representative and inclusive, honest and frank discussions, links to wider partnership arrangements

Questions:

- **Who is the named contact person for your organisation/department?**
- **How often do you report your achievements/performance and to whom?**

6.11. Resources

Resources are a challenge to both public and private organisations especially in the wake of the financial crisis. We need to better manage the limited resources available and cope with the aftermath of the recession. Some improvements have been made such as allocating the main programme grant on a three year basis linked to corporate priorities, ensuring diversity and equal opportunity and providing timescales for grant allocation. Other recommended actions are:

- Prompt payment of invoices
- Setting aside funding for setup and overhead cost
- Joint funding bids
- Established fund raising strategy to both internal and external sources
- Providing small grants
- Joint staffing arrangements and support

Questions:

- **Do you have any additional suggestions to the above recommended lists?**

7. Conclusion:

The consultation will take place over a 12 week period. The results will be analysed and will inform the draft strategy. We will have further consultation on the draft strategy in the spring of 2010. We aim to launch a finalised strategy in the summer of 2010.