

EXTRACT

MINUTES OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE Tuesday, 8 December 2009 at 7.30 pm

PRESENT: Councillor Jones (Chair), Councillor Castle (Vice Chair) and Councillors Clues, Motley (alternate for Councillor Leaman) and H B Patel.

Also Present: Councillors Colwill (Lead Member for Adults, Health and Social Care) and Powney.

Apologies were received from: Councillors Leaman, Mistry and Thomas

Update on the Voluntary and Community Sector Strategy 2010 - 2015

Linda Martin (Head of Service Development and Commissioning, Housing and Community Care) introduced the report which summarised progress to date on the Voluntary and Community Sector strategy. She explained that there had been an agreement over what areas the Voluntary and Community Strategy would cover, a broad understanding of how these areas would be addressed and what groups would look at specific areas. The draft strategy had also been approved by the Project Board and work would continue on developing the strategy in January 2010. A 12 week consultation period would commence and a survey was to be sent to all stakeholders to seek further input and engagement. Future events would be held to allow respondents to discuss the findings of the survey and there would be further consultation on the draft strategy in the spring of 2010. Members noted that it was intended to launch the finalised strategy in the summer of 2010.

Jacqueline Carr (Brent Citizens Advice Bureau) was invited to address the Committee. Jacqueline Carr stated that the Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) had not been involved in development of the strategy up to this point and she highlighted the need for greater communication and for more engagement. Members noted that CAB had learnt about the Council's Main Grant Programme the previous week and Jacqueline Carr added that CAB would be interested in running a scheme under this programme in future. She commented that the Funders Fair event had been a useful exercise.

Keith Lunn (Oxford Kilburn Youth Trust) welcomed the move to three year grants under the Main Grant Programme which he felt offered significant benefits to participants, including providing greater stability. He also felt that the Council was engaging more with voluntary sector organisations through a number of different service areas and through various means. However, Keith Lunn commented that one of the difficulties was the Council knowing what voluntary organisations there were in the various areas of the Borough and what knowledge voluntary organisations had of what areas the Council was involved in. He stressed the importance of spreading information widely and he felt a long term objective would

be for the Council to be able to filter information to all voluntary sector organisations in the Borough. The use of electronic information and through locality-based work and a cascading information system was suggested as a way forwards to achieve this, whilst the Voluntary Sector Unit could also be provided with the funds to help circulate and cascade information.

During discussion by Members, Councillor Clues expressed concern that CAB had not been involved in the strategy to date and not been aware of the Main Grant Programme until recently. He sought clarification with regard to Brent Association for Voluntary Action (BrAVA) role and its relationship with voluntary organisations. He felt that the strategy could benefit by taking an Area Consultative Forum (ACF) approach to reach out to the relevant local organisations, particularly those in more deprived areas of the borough. Councillor Clues added that good use could be made of the ACFs' databases to identify relevant organisations. Councillor Castle commented that Brent Police and NHS Brent already made use of the ACFs' database. He welcomed attendance at ACFs from the Council's Voluntary Sector Unit and commented that there was not presently a co-ordinated approach to recording the numerous voluntary groups in the borough. Councillor H B Patel suggested that those who attended ACF meetings tended to be because of a specific issue relevant to them was on the agenda.

The Chair stressed the need for the various organisations views to be taken on board during the development of the strategy, including those from the voluntary sector. She felt that capacity training was a particular issue and enquired whether specific training was to be organised. Confirmation of the deadline to apply for grants under the Main Grant Programme and how grant tracking was performing was sought. With regard to the area forums suggestion from Councillor Clues, the Chair added that ward councillors could help identify what local organisations could be involved in the strategy consultation and make use of the ACFs database which could also be shared with other areas of the Council. The Chair stressed the need for the strategy to address communication issues. She also sought confirmation as to when the next update on the strategy would be presented to the Committee.

In response to the issues raised, Linda Martin acknowledged that capacity building was an issue for organisations and NHS Brent was running workshops on this topic with a view to enabling voluntary sector organisations to run community health help sessions. She confirmed that the deadline for applications for funding from the Main Grants Programme was 30 November 2009 and approximately 60 organisations had been funded through this programme since it had began. In addition, a voluntary sector day had take place in 2009 to provide information and advice on obtaining funding through this programme and another such day was planned for 2010. BrAVA were presently responsible for distributing information to voluntary organisations with regard to the Main Grant Programme and the strategy and information also appeared on the Council's and Brent Resource and Information Network's (BRAIN) websites. Linda Martin advised that the Main Grant Programme was theme based and linked to key Council objectives. The themes changed each year and priority was given to those organisations who had applied to run schemes that tied in with these themes and the grants were for a three year duration. Linda Martin commented a number of high quality bids had been received in the first year since the change of criteria to the Main Grant Programme that the first year of

applications and that 22 organisations had been successful. Monitoring was undertaken to ensure that the funding provided was being spent in the right area and grant tracking had generally been effective, although it was important that the various service areas of the Council involved were inputting the correct data and appropriate training was required. The Committee noted that there would be future changes to the Main Grants Programme criteria and that BrAVA would need to apply for funding to continue in its role as the local voluntary sector umbrella organisation and that other organisations may also be interested in applying.

Linda Martin continued that that the draft strategy survey took a sector-based approach, whilst voluntary sector representatives had been appointed to the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) Strategic Forum. She acknowledged that contact with the relevant representative might not always be in place and ways of improving communication were being looked at. With regard to suggestions to utilise ACF databases, Linda Martin stated that this could be considered further, although a sector-based approach was presently taken because funding was theme-based. It was also proposed that some meetings of the Voluntary Sector Service User Consultative Forum take place during the day and each meeting to be theme based. It was acknowledged that there was an active voluntary sector community in Brent and, although not all were necessarily involved with the Council, their contribution to the community was welcomed.

Members noted that the date of the next update was yet to be confirmed. The Committee then agreed to the Chair's suggestion that ways of improving communication with voluntary and community sector organisations be considered, such as the Voluntary Sector Unit utilising the ACFs' databases to contact relevant organisations.

RESOLVED:-

- (i) that the Update on the Voluntary and Community Sector Strategy 2010-2015 be noted; and
- (ii) that the Executive be requested to agree that the Council consider ways of improving communications with voluntary and community sector organisations, such as the Voluntary Sector Unit utilising the Area Consultative Forums' databases to contact relevant organisations.