



Overview & Scrutiny Committee

27th May 2009

Report from the Director of Housing and Community Care

Wards Affected: ALL

Scope of Voluntary and Community Sector Strategy 2009/14

1.0 Summary

- 1.1 This report outlines the scope of Brent's Voluntary and Community Sector Strategy which will be developed and implemented over the next five years (2009-14). The council and partners in the statutory, voluntary and community sector have expressed the need to define and manage the relationship between the various sectors.
- 1.2 The council is leading on the development of a jointly owned strategy with Brent NHS and the Voluntary and Community Sector. The strategy development was announced in November 2008 at the Voluntary Sector Liaison Forum and a scoping document developed in consultation with partners. Since January 2009, we have further consulted Brent PCT, BrAVA, Age Concern Brent and Elders Voice and a positive reception has been given to the idea of a joint strategy. In February 2009, a successful conference organised by Brent Council and BrAVA was held at Brent Town Hall to explore how we can work together. We wish to build on this by developing a Corporate Strategy that:
- Outlines the future relationship with the sector.
 - Lays out the relevant governance arrangements.
 - Establishes how the council and other statutory bodies can support the voluntary and community sector and develop its capacity.
 - Facilitate positive and constructive dialogue with the voluntary and community sector at all levels and build on recent achievements and improvements.

- Place the council in a good position to maximise efficiencies and agree funding priorities with the sector in the projected financial recession by providing agreed routes for planning
- Assist council officers to respond to the sector in a fair, transparent and consistent way by providing an agreed corporate strategy.

1.3 The report outlines the background, context and emerging policy trends which impact on the relationship with the voluntary and community sector. These are:

- The current **recession** which poses challenges and offers opportunities to develop a strategy to jointly tackle the issues that are likely to affect the local economy.
- The **Comprehensive Area Assessment** which requires local partnerships to work together to deliver local priorities to enable the council achieve excellent ratings.
- Delivering on **Local Area Agreements** which set priorities for the local area.
- Being mindful of the council's **corporate priorities** and other **partners' priorities** and how these can be achieved through shared goals and agreed outcomes
- Ensuring that **Our Compact** remains relevant and an implementation strategy is in place to deliver it.
- Taking account of **best practice** in order to move the relationship between sectors to new levels which deliver for local people.
- The range of **national and local policies** which have a bearing on the strategy such as social inclusion, community cohesion, commissioning and procurement, transformation in various service areas.

1.4 We need to devise innovative approaches and proffer a way forward which establishes fair, equitable practices that promote respect, accountability, an empowered and vibrant voluntary and community sector. The above are dealt with in the report.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 Members are asked to note the contents of this report and comment on the issues raised.

3 Background

3.1 The Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) have a critical role to play in the delivery of local public services. This is recognised across the council which in many respects makes efforts to ensure that the sector is engaged, supported and makes a positive contribution to achieving the local vision. The council's leadership (both officers and elected members) take a keen interest in the sector as an equal partner in delivering services. The collective view is that the leadership role of the council is vital in establishing a vibrant VCS in the borough. However, there is no established strategy on taking this forward. We would also wish to assist the sector to organise itself so it may be taken

more seriously as an equal partner and provide a route for the sector to support itself more effectively.

- 3.2 The VCS in Brent is very diverse and contributes to the provision of service delivery across the borough. The key strengths of the sector are in meeting low level needs, complementing key public services and representing the voice of local residents. They are contracted to provide local services and grant funded to meet gaps in service delivery which otherwise, will be difficult to effectively deliver through local statutory services. In an era of increased emphasis on partnership working, the need to work with the sector is more than ever essential. However, there is a history of poor relationships between the council and the sector. This has improved considerably recently, thanks to the efforts of senior and other officers and we are anxious to build on this improvement in a timely manner.
- 3.3 In 2003, *Our Compact* established the commitment to working together through Brent's voluntary, community, public and private sectors. This was developed by the Compact working Group, a subgroup of Partners for Brent, the Local Strategic Partnership. A lot has been achieved which is compact compliant. The council has sustained support and funding to the sector through the Voluntary Sector Unit within Housing and Community Care Department. The Unit also supports the Voluntary Sector Liaison Forum which has fostered engagement and information sharing through quarterly meetings. We would benefit from a compact implementation plan across the council, other statutory partners and the voluntary and community sector. The Department of Health intends to issue fresh compact guidance later in 2009 and there is some discussion in central government about making the Compact statutory.
- 3.4 The Government has committed to enhancing the role of the Voluntary and Community Sector by establishing The Office of the Third Sector in the Cabinet Office. The Office of the Third Sector and HM Treasury jointly completed a review of *the future role of the third sector in social and economic regeneration (July 2007)*. The review is structured around five major themes; enabling voice and campaigning, strengthening communities, transforming public services, encouraging social enterprise and supporting the environment for a healthy third sector. These have to be taken into consideration in developing the strategy.
- 3.5 On 6th May 2009, The Office of The Third Sector published a *National Survey of Third Sector Organisations* conducted between September and December 2008. An overall report for Brent shows that 241 out of 880 registered organisations in Brent responded to the survey, a response rate of 31%. A cursory read highlights low ratings for funding, support, ability to influence local decisions and interacting with local statutory bodies. The ratings improve in relation to the questions regarding value, understanding, independence, information and consultation of/with the voluntary sector. The survey will be looked at in detail with voluntary sector partners to identify areas for improvement

as part of the strategy development and to improve the national indicator 7 (NI 7 – environment for a thriving third sector).

- 3.6 The sector is represented on the Local Strategic Partnership and its subgroups via BrAVA. However, there is no structure which groups organisations so that they may feed into these top local governance structures. This poses a question of how coordinated the sector is to work in partnership, and how they may get involved in local decision making through effective planning and avoid being sidelined in major and emerging trends.
- 3.7 A consultation paper, *from patronage to partnership: Building a new relationship with the Voluntary and Community Sector (2003)* undertaken by the Voluntary Sector Unit culminated in a conference to discuss how to improve the relationship between the council and the sector. There have been subsequent conferences between the sector and key statutory bodies to establish how they can work effectively together. In 2009, a successful conference took place at the Town Hall which explored how the council can better work together with the sector. In a key note address, the Chief Executive expressed the council's commitment to work together with the sector. This is in line with the Government's recognition of the role of the third sector.
- 3.8 In May 2007, the Overview and Scrutiny Task Group investigated and reported on *Voluntary Sector Funding*. The report captures specific funding issues and makes wider recommends, among them, *that an overarching Voluntary Sector Strategy is developed that clearly sets out what the council is trying to achieve in the way it works with and funds the voluntary and community sector to achieve more for local people*. Eleven other recommendations are made which require a more effectively managed relationship with the sector. The report is being implemented such as the adoption of a three year funding approach along thematic lines linked to corporate priorities.
- 3.9 In November 2008, the Head of Service Development and Commissioning within Housing and Community Care announced at the Voluntary Sector Liaison Forum (VSLF) that a voluntary sector strategy will be developed. She invited views from members on what they will like to see included in the strategy. A scoping document was developed and circulated in January 2009 to shape the discussion. There has been valuable input, discussions and feedback to the document from officers within the council, the PCT and voluntary and community sector organisations (VSLF) which inform this report. These have widened the initial proposals which were limited to commissioning and have taken into consideration the wider context and the need to develop a broad joint strategy for the VCS. This wider context is set out in 1.2 and elaborated in the following section.

4 Context

- 4.1 The current **recession** poses challenges and offers opportunities to develop a strategy to jointly tackle the issues that are likely to affect the local economy. The main areas that are likely to be affected are public

finances, income, businesses, employment, skills and training, housing, crime, social care, benefits and public confidence. Of particular concern is how this might affect service provision if there is an unprecedented increase in the numbers of local people requiring services. In any case, early intervention, information, communication, advice and support will be vital and we will need to plan more effectively to ensure that we overcome the above challenges. The council is aware of and plans to be mindful of any eventualities, have wider discussions and monitor the impact of the recession.

4.2 There are opportunities that should not be missed if the borough has to survive the recession and cope with the aftermath. The development of a joint strategy is timely and should look at highlighting collective actions that should be taken in this regard. The voluntary and community sector has started to reflect on the consequences of the recession. A discussion on the impact of the recession was held recently at an “open forum meeting”. An independent consultant has also been commissioned to look at the consequences of the recession on the sector. The strategy will need to take a collective approach to providing solutions to the impact of the recession locally. It will:

- Establish collective actions that will be undertaken by all to sustain service provision during this difficult time
- Recognise the contribution of the voluntary and community sector in supporting service provision
- Ensure that barriers to the sector’s contribution are discussed and removed as part of wider efforts to empower the sector.
- Monitor changes in service levels, assess and analyse such changes and act jointly with partners in the LSP.

4.3 The second driver for a joint voluntary and community sector strategy is the **Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA)** which came into effect in April. The new inspection regime is based on local organisations working in partnership to deliver local people’s priorities. The challenge is to have a voluntary and community sector that contributes to and facilitates the Brent’s journey to excellence. We will need to demonstrate how we have involved the VCS. It goes without saying that inspectors will want to ascertain how the sector is modelled and the outcomes to which they have contributed to.

4.4 The strategy will need to establish how we will evidence the above by

- Ensuring that national indicators that relate to the sector have detailed actions
- The sector is informed and contributes to any work that relates to the CAA
- Ensuring we are in a position to respond to future joint inspections that also look at health provision by harmonising the approach to the sector across the council and NHS Brent.

4.5 **38 Local Area Agreements (LAAs)** including 15 children’s mandatory targets for Brent have been developed and signed off. There are a number of projects which clearly have voluntary sector organisations as

lead partners such as income maximisation, Brent Carers Project and volunteering. Delivering stretched target successfully requires working in partnership with a range of providers in the voluntary and community sector. The strategy should spelt out the commitment to involve all partners in delivering local priorities through LAA projects and ensure that there is focus on the council priorities of children and young people, sustainability, regeneration and tackling crime.

- 4.6 A joint Voluntary and Community Sector Strategy will need to take account of **partners' priorities** and ensure that we establish agreed goals and outcomes which define and enhance the relationship between the sectors. In discussions with the PCT, world class commissioning, has been stated as a key priority that needs to be taken into consideration in developing a Voluntary and Community Sector Strategy. BrAVA has highlighted commissioning and procurement as key priorities which they will like to see included in the strategy. We intend to:
- Establish a strategy group with representation from all partners to further discuss and prioritise what the strategy will achieve and
 - Ensure that the agreed goals are taken forward and implemented successfully
- 4.7 Initial discussions with partners and the voluntary sector have indicated that the strategy should be a joint strategy and not the council's strategy. Other comments related to the basics of how we work together such as gathering, analysing and sharing information, communicating effectively, establishing performance frameworks, fair and equitable processes and ensuring that what is agreed is fully implemented. It is therefore important that while the key priorities of partners inform the strategy, the strategy should be a reference for targeted actions and outcomes agreed between partners and implemented in all sectors.
- 4.8 The agreed principles to which we are currently working are set out in **our compact** developed in 2004 by a subgroup of Partners for Brent. The strategy will need to ensure that **our compact** remains relevant. The document itself is still relevant and the principles stated do not need to change. Views have been expressed however that these have not been fully implemented and the strategy should look into:
- Agreeing ownership and commitment across partner agencies to a refreshed document with clear proposals for full implementation, monitoring and evaluation
 - Ensuring that the strategy development group has named individuals from service areas and partner agencies who will become compact champions
 - Ensuring that a set of actions are incorporated in the strategy which ensures the profile of the compact remains high and continued awareness and dissemination is raised by all partners.

- 4.9 Finally, there is the **range of national and local policies** which will have a bearing on the strategy such as community cohesion, social inclusion, commissioning and procurement and transformation in various services areas. The voluntary and community sector have a key role to play in ensuring grass root support to national and local policies, representing the views of local people and campaigning on local issues which have implications for particular groups (faith and ethnic minority groups and vulnerable members of the public). They can and do reach a wide range of people who might not have contact with statutory services and this potential needs to be harnessed to promote greater representation, involvement in planning and service provision.

4.0 Financial Implications

- 4.1 There are no immediate financial implications at the scoping stage of the strategy development. We are collecting the total financial spend by the Council for contracts and grants to the VCS as a whole to inform the strategy. Figures we have, show that £14,091,816 is the amount which will be spend between 2007/10 for adult social care and supporting people contracts. Voluntary Sector Unit Grants and Needs and Private Sector Service Level Agreement will amounted to £1,766,984 in 2008/09. In discussions with Brent tPCT, the financial considerations have also been raised. Presently, it is difficult to know the total amount of grants made to the Voluntary and Community Sector across the council and if there is double funding of organisations. The strategy will streamline and ensure effective management of financial support, value for money and use of resources to the sector.

5.0 Legal Implications

- 5.1 There are no legal implications at this stage of the strategy development.

6.0 Diversity Implications

- 6.1 An Equalities Impact Assessment is being undertaken for the allocations of the Main Programme Grant and the conclusions will be used to inform the overall development of the Voluntary Sector Strategy. The scope itself will not affect any sections of the community in a disproportionate manner. Care will be taken in ensuring all smaller organisations, including B&EM organisations, can engage with the strategy.

7.0 Conclusion

- 7.1 This report has highlighted the complex and challenging issues which are involved in the development of a voluntary sector strategy. Initially, it was envisaged to be limited to commissioning. An initial scope was developed which reflected this. However, feedback from the initial scope and discussions with stakeholders resulted in an agreement that it needs to be a joint strategy. As a result of this, the focus has been broadened to take account of the wider issues that impact on the

relationship between the council and the Voluntary and Community Sector in Brent.

7.2 We have followed the statutory twelve week consultation with the sector to get to this point where this report is being presented. We intend to continue discussions with all stakeholders to ensure that the strategy process is smooth and successful. The following will be undertaken to progress this work:

- establish a strategy group – to first meeting (2 months)
- draft the strategy – (6 months)
- wide consultation of the draft strategy – (6 months)
- approval and signoff of the strategy. (14th month)

It is anticipated that it will take approximately 14 months to finalise the strategy.

7.3 Given the high profile nature of this initiative, we need to fully commit and ensure buy-in by all stakeholders.

Contact Officers

Edwin Ambe
Telephone number 020 8937 4231
Email: edwin.ambe@brent.gov.uk

Linda Martin
Telephone number 020 8937 4061
Email: linda.martin@brent.gov.uk