



**Cabinet
15 September 2014**

Report from the Chief Executive

Developing the Brent Borough Plan 2015 - 2019

1.0 Summary

- 1.1 This paper sets out proposals for the development of the Brent Borough Plan for the period 2015 – 2019 following the local elections in May 2014. It covers the key challenges for developing a strategic, partnership agenda for the borough and outlines a programme for engaging with residents and key partners to create an ambitious programme of change, during a period of continued financial constraint. It also proposes a timetable for key actions to develop the Borough Plan through to March 2015 and alignment of this process with the budget and financial planning cycle of the council and partners.

2.0 Recommendations

- 2.1 That Cabinet endorses the proposed arrangements for consulting on and developing the next Brent Borough Plan 2015 – 2019.
- 2.2 That Cabinet agrees the timetable of actions set out at 3.15.

3.0 Detailed considerations

Challenges and context for the Borough Plan 2015 – 2019

- 3.1 Arguably the next four years will be the most critical period of change that local government has experienced in recent decades and a key moment to redefine the role and relationship it has with both residents and partners. As we experience continued reductions in central government funding, the council will need to build a strong consensus on those services which are local priorities, innovate across service and organisational boundaries to maximise efficiencies and build capacity within local communities to build on their strengths to become more independent and resilient in the future.
- 3.2 The council will need to redefine its role as a direct provider of services and focus its resources on building relationships and influence across the public, community and business sectors to ensure future investment and growth is attracted to Brent. Within this context, the Borough Plan 2015 – 2019, is a critical opportunity to shape the strategic partnership agenda for Brent and the process for developing this vision and narrative is central to creating ownership and commitment to the Plan's objectives across all sectors.

3.3 The next Borough Plan should perform a number of key roles:-

- Present an ambitious vision and narrative of the administration and partners' priorities for Brent, whilst providing a distinct sense of brand identity for the area.
- Give members confidence that difficult decisions on savings and priorities have been informed by reliable and inclusive consultation with residents and partners and they reflect local needs.
- Create a set of strategic objectives, priorities and activities to shape the medium term financial strategy.
- Articulate a shared vision for the borough that informs the future partnership structures and projects, and shapes the future investment across joint commissioning arrangements.
- Adds value by joining up plans, services, activities and energy across the borough.
- Be informed by the changing demographic profile of our population and reflect their needs and preferences wherever possible.
- Use customer insight techniques to appeal to a diverse range of interests, particularly the new communities emerging in Brent.
- Address the complex issues of social and economic polarisation affecting parts of the borough.
- Engage and empower local communities to build their capacity and harness their strengths to shape their neighbourhoods.
- Establish expectations about respective roles and responsibilities and redefine the social contract with residents to manage future demand for services more effectively.
- Influence change in behaviour through a shared sense of responsibility for our borough's future and the wider impact of individual choice.
- Focus on the great opportunities Brent has for future growth and its role in the London economy.
- Promote the borough effectively to external partners, investors and government agencies.

3.4 These are a challenging set of objectives and the process for consulting and engaging with residents, partners and staff to build a strong vision and commitment to the future agenda is central to the long-term success of the Borough Plan 2015 – 2019.

3.5 As part of the process for consultation and engagement, we need to raise awareness of the challenges facing Brent over the next few years. The biggest challenge continues to be that of coping with declining funding from central government while the demand for services continues to grow, particularly for those most in need, both vulnerable children and young people and adults. There are also significant issues in a range of public services in Brent, most particularly crime, education, employment and income levels, the environment, health and housing. The Council is therefore launching a **Call for Evidence** to encourage residents, service users, the community and voluntary sector, and businesses to contribute to the debate about the future of Brent.

Engaging Residents

3.6 Given the inevitable difficult funding decisions ahead, it is vital that consultation with residents on borough priorities is realistic, informed and manages expectations effectively. The style of the consultation on the future of the borough should establish the nature of the engagement that we need to develop with communities. This should be one of mutual respect balanced with clear responsibilities on both sides of the relationship. It should aim to be inclusive and accessible through a variety of formats. Particularly important will be

enabling a range of view points to be expressed, and heard, across all sections of the community.

3.7 The intention is that the Borough Plan consultation should be a high profile conversation with the public across a number of channels and formats:-

- A **'Call for Evidence'**. This would be an open invitation for the public, partners, community groups and local businesses to provide their views on local priorities, ambitions for the area or suggestions and solutions. This call for evidence would be made on our website, and, hopefully, partner websites, through the local press, social media and the Brent magazine.
- To support the frontline call for evidence, a number of **focus groups** will also be organised. Independently facilitated focus groups are particularly effective at constructing representative groups, testing ideas and gaining constructive feedback. They can be highly effective in shaping debates and exploring conflicting expectations. A number of appealing and interactive formats for this type of consultation have been developed by research consultancies, and the council has commissioned an external company to deliver a number of focus groups. During October and early November a series of at least 10 focus groups, based on demographic and mosaic profiles, will be held to explore the challenges facing Brent, residents' priorities and test key political priorities.
- A **residents' survey** will be undertaken by an independent company. This will provide greater understanding of local residents priorities for the future and how they might want to be involved in contributing to the development of their community and indeed, of the borough.
- Our recently refreshed **Citizen's Panel** will be consulted and invited to contribute to the 'Call for Evidence'.
- Coverage on **social media** and debates on local priorities.
- **Local radio**, such as Bang Radio and also Somali TV.
- Sessions at **Brent Connects Forums** and at the five **User Forums**. These are the subject of proposals to improve local engagement and create a more interactive format. The proposals encourage a joint approach with partners to consultation, which will benefit discussion on borough plan priorities across organisational boundaries.
- **Brent Magazine** coverage informing people of the range of ways they can contribute to the discussion and shape the vision for the borough.
- A series of **Business Breakfasts** with local companies will be organised through September and October.
- Collecting views and feedback during the programme of local **Weeks of Action** in community settings.
- In collaboration with ward councillors, **local groups** such as Neighbourhood Watch and Residents' Associations should be involved as appropriate for the locality.
- All members will be provided with materials to promote the programme of engagement and consultation to residents and be involved in local events.

Engaging with service users

3.8 Engagement with service users is also an important part of the process. Each Strategic Director will be responsible for consultation and engagement with the key users in their area. This will be undertaken during September and October and findings will feed into budget decision making and the development of the Borough Plan.

Consultation with Partners

- 3.9 The borough's partnership structure is in need of review. The development of the borough plan gives the opportunity to shape the new partnership structures in the most appropriate way to deliver the objectives of the plan. A number of sectors are currently not adequately involved, for example, the business community and registered social landlords.
- 3.10 Consultation with partners on key challenges and borough plan priorities needs to engage a wider group of partners and also mark a new departure in the style of partnership working. Proposals for the new structure of partnership working are being developed along side the Borough Plan process. Discussion with the Partners for Brent Forum will take place on 2 September 2014 considering the process for consultation, partners priorities and timescales. Work with local partners will continue though to December focusing on:
- refreshing the partnership structure and networks.
 - clarifying priorities across particular organisations and gaining consensus.
 - setting the context and challenges for the four years head.
 - sharing the results from the resident and users consultation on borough priorities conducted from September to November.
 - undertaking workshops with partners on priorities for the Borough Plan.
- 3.11 Participation will include the voluntary and community sector, statutory public agencies and business community. The critical aspect is that it should mark a real determination to approach partnership working in a different way and strengthen commitment across all partners.
- 3.12 The CVS will be commissioned to undertake engagement with the third sector on key challenges and the development of the Borough Plan.
- 3.13 A series of Business Breakfasts will be organised through September and October. These will be managed by the Strategic Director, Regeneration and Growth and chaired by the Lead Member.

Engaging council staff

- 3.14 Council staff, many of whom are also local residents, are critical to both identifying priorities and providing solutions to the future challenges faced by the borough. Engaging staff in the debate about the Borough Plan will improve clarity of purpose within the organisation, targeting of resources and service planning. A range of activities will be undertaken including a series of staff roadshows involving the Leader and Chief Executive.

Timetable

- 3.15 The Residents Survey will be undertaken through September and October. Following the decision of Cabinet, it is anticipated that the launch of the **Call for Evidence** will be 16 September, 2014. Consultation and engagement across the areas identified in this Report will take place in September and October with some running into early November. As they emerge, findings will feed into consideration of spending and service planning. Key dates are as follows:
- 17/11/2014 **Council**
The Leader will use emerging findings in his budget speech
 - Early December **Partners for Brent Forum (PbBF)**
PbBF will consider the draft Borough Plan and revisions to the PbB Framework

- 15/12/2014 **Executive**
The Executive will consider the draft Borough Plan and the proposed PfB Framework
- 2/3/2015 **Council**
The Council will consider both the new Borough Plan and the Council's budget

4.0 Financial Implications

- 4.1 The direct costs associated with commissioning independent focus groups on borough priorities are estimated to be approximately £30 – 35K. All other secondary costs would involve existing officer resources, which will be funded from the core revenue budget. It is anticipated that the direct costs will be funded from the £100k earmarked reserve carried forward from last financial year, re: Resident Survey. The Borough Plan has a key role in shaping the future financial strategy of the council and decision-making on savings.

5.0 Legal Implications

- 5.1 There is a statutory duty on local authorities to prepare a sustainable community strategy in partnership with the community. Whilst that duty is being reviewed, the current guidance emphasises the importance of consultation with local representatives, in respect of the community strategy
- 5.2 The Borough Plan provides the opportunity for such a consultation under the 2012 Best Value Guidance. It reiterates the duty to consult with the community to ensure best value. This proposal meets the requirements for consultation as required by the guidance.

6.0 Diversity Implications

- 6.1 Given the social, ethnic and economic diversity of Brent, the Borough Plan will be central to ensuring the needs of this population are reflected in our service and financial planning framework. The proposed arrangements for consultation will ensure that the diversity of views are represented and the Borough Plan itself will be the subject of an impact assessment.

Background Papers

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