CABINET	Agenda Item 85
	Brighton & Hove City Council

Subject:		**Strengthening Communities Review – Stage One Report**
Date of Meeting:		**14 October 2010**
Report of:		**Acting Director of Strategy and Governance.**
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Key Decision:	**No**	**Forward Plan No. (7 Digit Ref): CAB 16733**
Wards Affected: All		

FOR GENERAL RELEASE

1. SUMMARY AND POLICY CONTEXT:

1.1 On 14 January 2010, Cabinet agreed a formal review of the Strengthening Communities commissioning activity.

1.2 The activity commissioned under this theme is split into three areas of activity; Third Sector Representation, Stronger Communities Partnership and Community Development Commissioning, (see further detail at 3.9 of this report).

1.3 On 9 March 2010, Governance Committee also agreed the review and set up a cross party working group to steer the process. Regular updates and briefings have been presented to Governance Committee.

1.4 On 22 March 2010, Cabinet agreed 'Creating a Council the City Deserves' which set the review in the context of the transformation programme and the need for stronger engagement with citizens and communities.

1.5 Due to the size and complexity of the work, reporting of the Strengthening Communities Review will be made in two stages.

1.6 This initial report, (Stage One), focuses on activity commissioned under the 'Strengthening Communities and Involving People' chapter of the Sustainable Community Strategy.

1.7 The Stage Two report will focus on broader engagement activity in the city, with a particular focus on the City Council's own engagement practice and processes.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

2.1 That Cabinet notes the contents of this initial report.

2.2 That Cabinet agree the following principles for commissioning based on review findings:

a) Third Sector Representation
- Continuing to commission third sector representation across all activity linked to Intelligent Commissioning.
- Continuing to commission third sector representation and involvement in the delivery of the Sustainable Community Strategy.
- In particular, ensure support focuses on supporting smaller, neighbourhood and grass roots groups.

b) Strategic Coordination of Community Engagement
- Continuing to commission strategic coordination of the Community Engagement Framework and action plan.
- Continuing to commission activities that support and develop best practice in community engagement.

c) People and Place
- Commission through a need analysis approach that takes into account both people and place, ensuring those less able to engage and participate are supported.
- Commission for bottom up solutions that support communities to identify their own solutions to local issues and problems.
- Commission for the outcomes of engagement rather than activities that impose structures, allowing different communities to decide what works for them

2.3 That Cabinet notes that a further (stage two) report focussing on broader engagement activity in the City with a particular focus on the City Council's own engagement practice and processes will be submitted to a further meeting of the Cabinet

3. RELEVANT BACKGROUND INFORMATION

3.1 The Strengthening Communities Review report follows two months of consultation and research and over 200 different stakeholders have taken part.

3.2 Stage One – Commissioning Priorities (this report).

3.2.1 The engagement and representation activity detailed in this report is currently funded through Area Based Grant (ABG), and Local Public Service Award (LPSA) funds. The Communities and Equalities Team have been able to access approximately £500,000 through these funding streams to deliver the activity.

3.2.2 The activity has supported Third Sector representation and involvement in the city, alongside strategic community engagement activities and community development support to neighbourhoods. (Further detail on this activity at paragraph 3.9).

3.2.3 ABG and LPSA funds are concluding and there is a need to identify funds from mainstream sources. Consideration of joint funding across public sector partners has also been explored (further detail on this activity is at paragraph 3.10)

3.3   Stage Two – Engagement in the City (to be drafted)

The next report will be substantial. It will include a qualitative examination of community engagement and Third Sector representation activity in the city, with a particular focus on the City Council's approaches.

3.4   REVIEW STRUCTURE AND KEY FINDINGS

There have been four elements to the review process:

A) An on-line mapping of engagement activity in the city.

B) A qualitative analysis of the City Council's engagement activity.

C) An independent evaluation of commissioned community engagement and third sector representation activity.

D) Exploration of joint commissioning.

These are set out below, with initial findings:

3.5   A) On-line mapping of engagement activity in the city

To date we have received 150 responses to the online mapping exercise. The data is currently being analysed against a number of factors to determine the range and scope of engagement activity in the city. These include:

- An analysis of provision across the private, statutory and voluntary sectors.
- An examination of the people and places engaged with – i.e. communities of interest/identity, individuals and geographical areas.
- An analysis of the types of engagement linked to the Community Engagement Framework definitions of informing, involving, consulting, empowering and collaborating.

3.6   150 individual responses is a statistically reasonable sample. However the analysis takes into account that the number of replies is unlikely to offer a complete picture of engagement activity in the city.

3.7   The following points are therefore a summary of mapping findings to date, with further information to follow during stage two.

3.7.1   Interim conclusions demonstrate a huge diversity of engagement activity in the city; including emerging evidence of private sector investment and interest. There remain gaps in activity in relation to those communities and groups less able to participate in society, (for example, gypsies and travellers, homeless persons and parents of children with multiple disabilities).

3.7.2   There is complication and confusion across all sectors about definitions and types of community engagement. In summary; activity being defined as 'community engagement' would appear to be more accurately described as 'customer or service user engagement'. The term 'customer' is being used to describe relationships where there is actually no choice in provision, (for

example with statutory services). This work would be better described as 'service user engagement'.

3.7.3　Findings indicate that the majority of providers feel that the focus of their engagement approach is through 'informing', (41% ranking this as their most relevant area of activity). This is a positive response but suggests a lack of investment of other more empowering approaches.

3.7.4　An 'empowering' approach was a higher priority for the Third Sector, with 21 organisations ranking it as their key area of activity (compared to 6 council teams). This may be interpreted as signifying a lack of investment in empowerment activities, (and therefore the notions of co-production and co-design), and requires further exploration and investment at stage two.

3.7.5　The Community Engagement Framework enables us to cut through the issue of definition and most importantly describes what engagement means to Brighton and Hove as a result of extensive front line consultation.

3.7.6　Duplication of engagement activity is an issue, particularly within the City Council, (where some departments and front line teams are having 'separate' conversations with service users). However, it is also clear that in terms of service delivery, engagement with customers is high priority, part of an ongoing business approach, and in some cases legally required. There are opportunities to intelligently target engagement and increase the quality of our interactions with our customers.

3.7.7　This duplication in engagement activity, can, however extend to other public sector organisations. For example, the City Council and Primary Care Trust occasionally commission the same organisations to carry out engagement activity.

3.7.8　The online mapping could become a useful tool to help to reduce some of this duplication. Using this, commissioners, service managers and partners could potentially access the same information to support their work.

3.7.9　The proliferation of activity in the City would suggest that there is little need to commission new engagement arrangements. A more effective approach would be to focus on reducing duplication, raising awareness and strengthening partnership and collaborative working.

3.8　B) A qualitative analysis of the City Council's engagement activity

3.8.1　As described above, the review has examined City Council engagement activity and this provides helpful underpinning information to support the reorganisation programme.

3.8.2　Some teams of the Council, (for example the Partnership Community Safety Team), have undertaken their own evaluation of their engagement practice, and/or are producing engagement strategies.

3.8.3　A separate paper describing this is being developed in partnership with community engagement service leads across departments and will form part of the Stage Two report.

3.9   C) An independent evaluation of commissioned community engagement and third sector representation activity.

3.9.1   The Communities and Equalities Team accessed £500,000 from various funding sources to commission community engagement and third sector representation activity in the city. This has enabled:

- Funding to the Community and Voluntary Sector Forum (CVSF), for third sector representation and community engagement support, (e.g. third sector representatives involved with Local Strategic Partnership and family of partnerships).
- Funding to the Stronger Communities Partnership (SCP), (a sub group of the LSP), for strategic activity and the promotion of community engagement, (e.g. Get Involved, Democracy Day, community engagement training).
- Funding for community development support to neighbourhoods in 13 of the city's most deprived areas through third sector partners.

3.9.2   An independent evaluation was commissioned to evaluate the effectiveness of this work, and this together with other review consultation activity forms the basis of the following conclusions:

3.9.3   The evaluation found that the work of the CVSF in facilitating third sector engagement and representation is fundamental to collaborative working in the city. This is critical given that there is a move towards commissioning and the Third Sector holds vital intelligence which will support needs assessments, service review, planning and outcome design.

3.9.4   Engagement of the third sector through this work focuses on ensuring that the sector is informed, represented and has influence in citywide strategic planning and decision-making. The CVSF currently has 529 member organisations (all third sector groups active in the city) and supports 60 reps on 30 strategic groups.

3.9.5   CVSF also supports a wide variety of themed networks, (such as the Children and Young Peoples Network). This facilitation enables statutory organisations to engage with specialist community and voluntary sector organisations and their service users. It also enables small organisations to collaborate and provide holistic solutions to commissioning needs (for example, a local after school club working with a disabled children's organisation).

3.9.6   Despite 30% of CVSF members coming from small groups, members still feel that small groups tend to be under-represented in its work. CVSF recognises this and feels that involving small community groups is key to achieving the vision of co-design and co-production of services.

3.9.7   The review also found that involving the third sector also brings added value by building individual and organisational capacity. This can help to create a more effective, professional and diverse third sector in the city. This kind of market development is central to the intelligent commissioning agenda and the CVSF is supporting the implementation of this throughout the city.

3.9.8   The Stronger Communities Partnership, (SCP), is successfully taking forward the cross sector approach to the community engagement and delivering on the Strengthening Communities chapter of the Sustainable Community Strategy. It is leading on the implementation of the Community Engagement Framework and associated actions. Its successes to date include, the Get Involved Campaign, (which includes the recent Democracy Day event), and community engagement training pilot.

3.9.9   SCP also provides an important mechanism for "grass roots" issues and representation to feed directly into policy, good practice and strategic decision-making through the community representatives on the partnership.

3.9.10   However, the review found a lack of organisational 'buy in' amongst some partners, particularly with regard to senior level investment. This would benefit from further work and review.

3.9.11   The SCP has been one of the few groups in the family of partnerships to undertake joint commissioning (of engagement) activity. This has led to the successful application for LPSA funding which has been used to support new projects, including those that support seldom heard communities.

3.9.12 Community Development Support has had strong and positive impact on neighbourhoods and improved perceptions of place. Individual empowerment is evident, new community groups have formed and the work has supported resident involvement in service design, delivery and planning.

3.9.13 A Social Return on Investment evaluation found that 100% of residents asked and involved in projects supported by community development reported increased confidence, skills and knowledge.

3.9.14 Historically, community development in the city's deprived neighbourhoods has been funded through government initiatives such as Neighbourhood Renewal. The work has had significant impact on issues such as fear of crime, neighbourhood pride and belonging.

3.9.15 However, national evaluations of these programmes, together with the Brighton and Hove Reducing Inequality Review, indicate that inequality remains an issue in deprived neighbourhoods. It also found that social and economic disadvantage extended to groups of individuals across the entire city.

3.9.16 The Reducing Inequality Review suggested that as long as particular parts of the city are specifically designated as areas to house poorer people, inequalities will persist.

3.9.17 The review concludes that there is a need for a stronger focus on measures which will serve more directly to reduce inequality. This is being addressed through the refreshed Community Strategy and strategic plans of the council and other public sector organisations.

3.9.18 The establishment of a range of neighbourhood forums in the city enabled residents to determine how allocated area based funds were spent in partnership with service providers. The forums also succeeded in influencing mainstream service provision and continue to focus on this.

3.9.19 In some areas community development support for forums and their work has consumed a significant proportion of the available resource for the neighbourhood, with some residents feeling that meetings are taking priority over grassroots activity.

3.9.20 With a changed public sector climate, it is unlikely that such significant area initiatives will exist in the near future. We therefore need to ensure that our funding is used to maximise support for community activity.

3.9.21 Senior representatives of partner agencies in the city value the extent and ways in which residents are involved in service planning. It will there be important to capitalise and build on the learning and practice of neighbourhood forums through the reorganisation plans of the City Council and others.

3.9.22 These points, together with national priorities such as Big Society, would suggest the need for a continued, but strengthened approach, which enables community development to focus on supporting communities to find their own solutions.

3.10 D) Joint Commissioning of Engagement and Representation activity

3.10.1 The review has examined the possibilities of partner contributions to this area of work. It is of collective importance, and has collective impact. There is growing acknowledgement of shared responsibility for a variety of reasons, including:

- The need to engage communities with some of the difficult decisions that are likely to be made in the next few years and support communities to help themselves where appropriate and possible.
- The need to engage with the third sector as key partners in designing and delivering services into the future and in to support their role as experts at working with 'hard to reach' individuals and communities.
- The need to better integrate people and place approaches to ensure that issues of multi-disadvantage are targeted and tackled, particularly in the context of pressurised public services.
- The statutory responsibilities across sectors to involve local people and customers.
- The shared commitment to the Sustainable Community Strategy and the Community Engagement Framework.

Barriers to Joint Commissioning

3.10.2 There are a number of valid reasons why joint commissioning of engagement and representation work is however problematic.

- A lack of knowledge about future funding allocations, coupled with knowledge of planned immediate reductions.
- Competing and differing timescales and processes for decision making.

- Competing and different priorities for engagement and representation, (for example, engaging for health outcomes and/or engaging for community safety outcomes).
- A current lack of commissioning approaches amongst some public sector partners.
- Anxiety about new approaches and a lack of tried and tested models.

3.10.3   This report has been shared with the Public Service Board and a discussion on joint commissioning indicated interest in this from key partners. At the same time operational discussions with organisations such as the Primary Care Trust and Sussex Police are continuing and may result in some quick wins; for example, funding for projects where contract targets are similar.

3.11   Conclusions and Next Steps

Cabinet are asked to note the excellent work that has been commissioned under the Strengthening Communities theme. It has had significant impact across a range of council priorities and there is a sound business case for continued support.

The ability for communities and individuals to support themselves through self help, early intervention and voluntary activity presents an excellent business model. Local people are often well placed to identify ways in which local need can be met efficiently. Engagement with third sector organisations enables the collation of intelligence related to need and enables collaborative approaches to delivering services into the future.

This report recommends that we therefore continue to commission projects that support this model. The review recommends that this commissioning take into account the need to maximise impact with reducing resources. The commissioning principles set out at paragraph 2 provide a framework for a new strategy to achieve this.

4.   CONSULTATION

4.1   Over 200 stakeholders have taken part in the Review, (in addition to and including those involved in the mapping process). It is high priority for the majority of partners involved in the Local Strategic Partnership and is critical to delivering the Sustainable Community Strategy.

4.2   To date 150 organisations (or teams of the Council), have taken part in the online mapping survey.

4.3   During the recent LSP partnership review sessions, engagement and third sector involvement was consistently noted as a priority for the future.

4.4   Consultation methods have included focus groups, interviews, questionnaires, a Social Return on Investment (SROI) analysis, and an independent evaluation.

4.5   Feedback from Community Engagement Framework consultation processes demonstrated strong support for approaches which focus on enabling communities address their own priorities.

5. FINANCIAL & OTHER IMPLICATIONS:

Financial Implications:

5.1 Commissioning activity as described in 2010/11 can be met by agreed grant funding. Future commissioning expenditure will need to be agreed as part of the Council's budget strategy, partner contributions and any identified external funding.

Finance Officer Consulted: Anne Silley   Date: 21/09/10

Legal Implications:

5.2 There are no legal implications to raise in respect of this report. The review is consistent with the Council's legal powers and duties.

Lawyer Consulted: Elizabeth Culbert   Date: 21/09/10

Equalities Implications:

5.3 An equalities impact assessment is underway and will be included with the stage two report. The process has already identified the need to ensure that equalities considerations are embedded in any future commissioning arrangements.

Sustainability Implications:

5.4 Future commissioning arrangements will take into account the need to promote sustainability considerations in all aspects of planning and delivery.

Crime & Disorder Implications:

5.5 On behalf of the Safe in the City Partnership, the Partnership Community Safety Team (PCST), Communities against Drugs and Environment Improvement Teams deliver a range of activities which engage and build cohesive communities. Some of these activities are integrated within the delivery plans of priority crime areas: facilitating the community led Racial Harassment Forum is one example of that. Other work such as supporting the network of Local Action Teams link closely with meeting the delivery requirements of Neighbourhood Policing and as such, have specific outcomes which are about identifying local policing priorities and delivering community safety solutions in partnership with local people. The PCST carries out targeted work with refugee and migrant individuals and communities and its programme of activities to 'build resilience to violent extremism ' is a specific programme of work with Muslim and other faith based communities. Performance on this programme is measured against national indicators within the LAA process.

5.6 The Partnership looks forward to working with future commissioning approaches and achieving a consistent approach across the City.

Risk & Opportunity Management Implications:

5.7 The lack of resource to continue community engagement, development and third sector representation activity into the future carries significant risk in relation to our ability to ascertain and meet the needs of local people and deliver on the organisational change programme of the City Council. Re-focusing on the key principles underpinning the activity does however provide the opportunity to ensure the targeting and value for money of any work undertaken.

Corporate / Citywide Implications:

5.8 The scope of the review includes city-wide provision of community and neighbourhood engagement and engagement with the third sector. This has implications for all wards and supports the corporate objective to "Reduce inequality by increasing opportunity".

6. EVALUATION OF ANY ALTERNATIVE OPTION(S):

6.1 Not applicable.

7. REASONS FOR REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS

The report recommends that Members agree to formally review this area of work for the following reasons:

7.1 Current arrangements for funding of strengthening communities commissioning will come to an end in April 2011.

7.2 The Reducing Inequality Review recommended that we review and resolve our approach to targeting both people and place, and therefore our priority neighbourhoods work.

7.3 The work underpins our ability to deliver on the 'Creating a Council the City Deserves' programme.

7.4 The national policy and legislation focus on localism is still emerging and is likely to be a key area of activity for the City.

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

Appendices:

None

Documents in Members' Rooms

None

Background Documents

None