

	<p>Community Leadership and Libraries Committee</p> <p>5 March 2020</p>
<p>Title</p>	<p>Future direction of the Community Participation Strategy</p>
<p>Report of</p>	<p>Councillor Thompstone, Chairman of Community Leadership and Libraries Committee</p>
<p>Wards</p>	<p>All</p>
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Summary

The Community Participation Strategy was first approved in 2014. The fourth update of the strategy is due to be submitted to this committee in November 2020.

The forthcoming update to the Community Participation Strategy comes at a time when the council is renewing its focus on residents and reflecting on how it can develop to meet the changing context in which we work. Pressure on budgets combined with growing demand for services means we have to consider new ways of delivering services.

Mobilising the strengths within our communities, enabling a strong voluntary and community sector, and encouraging residents to take an active role in society can all help take the pressure off services, while benefitting the wellbeing of our residents.

This update therefore presents an opportunity for a more broad-reaching Community Participation Strategy. One that touches on the whole organisation and goes hand in hand

with our corporate priorities. It will set out how we will work better with residents, communities and partner and local organisations in order bring out the best in our borough.

At the heart of this will be a place-based approach - building local networks around communities at a local area level. This helps to build services around the needs of a community and puts residents at the heart of local regeneration and growth initiatives. This may require more effort, attention and resource from the Council's perspective, but will ultimately improve outcomes for people and reduce the cost of Council services over time.

Creating the strategy will itself be an exercise in participation. We will co-design the strategy through engagement with voluntary and small businesses as well as residents.

While the new strategy will explore new ways of working, it remains focused on the original outcomes proposed in 2014.

- Residents and community groups will be more independent and resilient; able to deliver more, and to take on more responsibility for their local areas
- Services will offer more choice, and be better matched to local need
- The Council and the community will work together to make sure community capacity is supported and used to its full potential
- People become more active, involved and engaged in their communities by unlocking the substantial capacity of both the council and local business' workforce and direct it to where it is most needed in the borough.

Officers Recommendations

1. That members note the plans to develop a new Community Participation Strategy
2. That members provide feedback on the proposed approach

1. WHY THIS REPORT IS NEEDED

- 1.1 The Community Participation Strategy is due to be submitted to Community Leadership and Libraries Committee in November 2020.
- 1.2 The last update of the Community Participation Strategy was approved in November 2018. An outcome of this update was the letting of the VCS Development Partnership contracts. These are two-year contracts that will end in 2020. The forthcoming update of the strategy will therefore need to show how the council intends to work with the sector once the contracts end.

- 1.3 There are various examples of London councils that are resetting their relationship with their VCSE (voluntary community and social enterprise) sector, in order to achieve greater outcomes for residents and make better use of constrained budgets.
- 1.4 In 2017 Westminster launched their 'City for All' strategy. This has seen local consultation and engagement given renewed focus, "putting people's views at the front and centre of decision-making", and civic pride at the heart of everything it does. One of the outcomes of this work has been the setting up of the Community Contribution Scheme, where residents in the city's most expensive properties voluntarily contribute to help fund causes that the community decides on.
- 1.5 Bexley's Connected Communities strategy¹ launched last year, aims to encourage and equip local people to, "take part in civic life, to influence decisions and local priorities and shape the place where they live". This is based on building positive relationships across the public, private and VCSE sectors; identifying shared goals and unlocking resources. Bexley intends for this approach to be adopted across the whole council.
- 1.6 Lambeth have also taken a place based approach, developing a Forum Network. This is a partnership of 12 neighbourhood based community forums that supports residents and businesses to network with each other and engage with the council to shape local development, regeneration and services. The network aims to ensure local voices are heard by the council and other services. They hold meetings and workshops, run campaigns and consultations. The network has been particularly successful in bidding for funding, and in 2017-18 attracted £16 for every £1 the council invested².
- 1.7 Outside of London there are several more established examples of local authorities that have successfully transformed the way they work with their communities and partner organisations. Their approaches may differ but what they all have in common are: a collaborative partnership with residents and the VCSE sector, a locality based delivery model and a strong theme of resident engagement. The council will consider all of these examples in developing the 2020 Community Participation Strategy (CPS) to identify any learning that could be of benefit to Barnet's approach.
- 1.8 Within our own council there are also some good examples of community participation that this strategy will look to build on and potentially develop in other parts of the organisation. The recent Children and Young People's Plan was developed through a participatory process with young residents, and our Youth Board provides a strong representative voice in the borough. Adults and Health runs a programme of engagement and co-production every year, based on priorities selected by residents. There is an Involvement Board made up of resident representatives and a series of working groups of people with experience of adult social care services. These are involved in commissioning new services and providing quality assurance and improvement for teams across all of adult social care.
- 1.9 An implementation plan for the 2020 CPS is already in development and is divided into five workstreams.

¹ <https://democracy.bexley.gov.uk/documents/s89782/Item%204-2%20Connected%20Communities%20Strategy.pdf>

² <https://www.lambeth.gov.uk/sites/default/files/lambeth-forum-network-report-2017-18.pdf>

1.10 **A place-based approach**

Evidence suggests that working at a locality level can have greater impact than a borough-wide approach, and many of the council's services are already doing this. Adults and Children's services have locality based workers and delivery hubs respectively. A new team of Social Prescribing Link Workers funded by the NHS are located in neighbourhoods across the borough, while town centre developments and other regeneration schemes have successfully engaged residents and local partners in their projects. The Community Participation Strategy will align with these existing models, and build on these partnerships to ensure that the VCSE is properly involved and that residents are able to participate fully in their communities.

1.11 Many successful community participation projects in other local authorities have used an approach known as Asset Based Community Development (ABCD)³. This works on the principle that communities possess the gifts and skills to help themselves, and that by building relationships between individuals, associations and organisations in a locality it is possible to more easily harness these resources and achieve much more than traditional 'top down' service delivery. Key to establishing these local networks are professionals known as 'Community Builders'. These perform a similar function to the Community Participation Officers in the Strategy team, but are based on the ground in localities. Creating a function like this in the Strategy team will therefore be a consideration for the new strategy.

1.12 **A stronger partnership with the VCSE sector**

VCSE partners report varying experiences of working with the council, and both sides recognise that there is room for improvement. The new Community Participation Strategy will be developed with partner organisations and seek their views on how we can work together better. Part of this will be agreeing how we ensure that the functions currently delivered through the VCS development contracts are sustained and developed. However, this relationship cuts across the whole council, with VCSE organisations involved in a range of council service areas. This means the council and VCSE committing to co-developing policy together, recognising where VCSE organisations are better placed than the council to deliver services (and vice versa) and ensuring that smaller organisations don't get overlooked.

1.13 In its Partnerships and Participation strategy⁴, Barking and Dagenham Council proposed a Community Compact. Co-designed with the VCSE sector, this document sets out shared principles of cooperation, collaboration and mutual respect. It aims to ensure a more level playing field – not just between the council and VCSE, but among organisations within the sector too. The Community Participation Strategy will include a commitment to develop a similar document for Barnet.

1.14 **Unlocking resources for the community**

This workstream will look at ways of increasing the resources available to communities, and making better use of existing assets and funds. As well as the funding the council provides for the VCSE through commissions and contracts there are various other pots of money that can be accessed via the local authority, and many more that organisations outside the council are eligible to bid for. The first step will be to map these funding sources and identify where better use can be made of them. Over time, a closer

³ <https://www.nurturedevelopment.org/asset-based-community-development/>

⁴ <https://www.lbbd.gov.uk/sites/default/files/attachments/Participation-and-Partnerships-LBBD-VCSE-Strategy-2019.pdf>

relationship between Council officers and VCSE organisations could enable significantly more external funding to be levered into the borough for the benefit of local people.

- 1.15 Another priority will be generating new sources of funding. For example, discussions are underway with local health organisations to create a shared 'Community Fund' that would be made available to improve health outcomes for people in Barnet and reduce the pressure on A&E and social care services. The strategy will explore other potential ways of generating money from other initiatives.
- 1.16 Making better use of the social value contributions from companies in the council's supply chain is another important element in this workstream. The council is developing a social value policy that will formalise this process and set up a framework of community causes that suppliers can choose to support.
- 1.17 **Enabling resident participation**
The best examples of VCSE transformation in other local authorities all have a strong theme of community participation and resident involvement. This is not just about listening to residents however, it is about actually involving them in our decision making. Mechanisms already exist in the borough to facilitate this, including the Resident Forums in our parliamentary constituencies. The strategy will look at working with the Governance team to revitalise these forums and boost residents' engagement with them. Other community partnerships around the borough have been set up to facilitate neighbourhood initiatives, while others are focused on town centre renewal schemes. Wherever there is an existing engagement network the Community Participation Strategy will align with this work and ensure the VCSE and residents are fully involved.
- 1.18 The charity Near Neighbours recently conducted a government-funded project in the borough called Real People Honest Talk⁵ where facilitated discussion sessions took place in four neighbourhood areas around the borough. These led to a feedback event called the Big Conversation, held at Hendon Town Hall in January. Groups of residents presented ideas for local improvement projects that had been developed in the discussion groups. They then pitched these to decision makers from the borough. This event showed the potential in the borough for residents to come together and help make change. This is the kind of outcomes-focused resident engagement that the Community Participation Strategy will build on.
- 1.19 Ward councillors provide an essential engagement role in their communities and are often the first to hear about local issues. Many councillors are also already involved in VCSE groups and their activities. The Community Participation Strategy will explore ways of involving members more in local partnerships and making better use of their unique role in the community.
- 1.20 Perception data from residents is vital to monitoring the success of our customer services. The council has existing mechanisms to gather statistically representative insight from residents, but regular use of these has lapsed in recent years. A Resident Perception Survey (RPS) will be conducted in early summer 2020, but the council needs to reinstate regular waves of the survey to ensure we can map trends in resident satisfaction. Similarly, the Citizens Panel provides a ready-made sample of 2000 residents randomly selected to match the demographic profile of the borough. This has

⁵ <https://www.near-neighbours.org.uk/real-people-honest-talk>

proved invaluable in the past in providing balanced, robust resident insight. It is proposed that a new citizens' panel will be established under the new strategy. The strategy will also build on examples of existing good practice in engagement, such as the work done to involve children and young people in the CYP plan. 29 focus groups were delivered across 20 schools and youth settings reaching 422 participants, as well as over 1500 children and young people engaged through assemblies and Annual Youth Perception Survey

1.21 Participation is about more than just engagement, it is about active citizens. Therefore, continuing to boost numbers of volunteers will be a key theme of the strategy. Recent initiatives such as the provision of free litter picking equipment have been very successful in encouraging residents who may not have previously volunteered to come together and work to improve their local areas. This has shown that there is considerable potential in our communities for this kind of participation and it is particularly suited to a locality based approach. The strategy will also look at how we can give accreditation to volunteers to recognise their work and the skills they have developed.

1.22 **Improving the use and availability of data**

A key focus of this workstream will be concerned with planning how best to replace the Barnet Community Directory that was recently taken offline. The organisations listed on the directory only ever represented a small proportion of the borough's VCSE sector, so the most pressing task is to gather further data to create a comprehensive database. This also needs to include details of informal groups, such as resident associations and litter picking groups.

1.23 When moving to a place-based model of community participation, the first step in this process is to map all of the assets in our local communities. This extends beyond tangible resources such as organisations and premises to include anything that an area has that could potentially be utilised for the benefit of the community. This needs to be done at locality level. For example, mapping the assets in a town centre, ward or district.

2. **REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

2.1 Members should be aware of this work, and its implications for the borough and our communities.

2.2 Officers are keen to seek members' views on community participation and the role they can play in this area.

3. **ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND NOT RECOMMENDED**

3.1 We feel that the current VCS contracts are not delivering sufficient outcomes for the community and believe that there are alternative ways the council can support the sector.

In developing the strategy however, all options will be considered including the current approach.

4. POST DECISION IMPLEMENTATION

- 4.1 Following decision, the Strategy Team will continue to develop the strategy in partnership with VCSE organisations, internal partners and the community. The new update of the Community Participation Strategy will be brought to this committee in November.

5. IMPLICATIONS OF DECISION

5.1 Corporate Priorities and Performance

- 5.1.1 The current Community Participation Strategy action plan contains targets that are used as indicators on the delivery plan for this committee. Several of these are KPIs from the VCS development contracts and will need to be replaced when those contracts end. A new implementation plan will be developed to accompany the new strategy, with a new series of indicators to be monitored through the corporate performance framework.

5.2 Resources (Finance & Value for Money, Procurement, Staffing, IT, Property, Sustainability)

- 5.2.1 The strategy calls for a new approach to community participation that may require some additional resource to implement. However, the budget from the VCS development contracts is being retained and can be reallocated to a new delivery model.
- 5.2.2 A place-based model of locality working may require additional community participation officers in the Strategy team. The structure of this team is currently under review and will be resolved in line with the development of the strategy.

5.3 Social Value

- 5.3.1 The Community Participation Strategy will set out how the council can maximise the potential for social value contributions in our supply chain and use this resource to support the community. A social value policy is also in development that will set a threshold for contributions and outline how these will be administered.

5.4 Legal and Constitutional References

- 5.4.1 There are no legal or constitutional implications to this report.

5.5 Risk Management

- 5.5.1 As the VCS development contracts end and we move to a new model of partnership with the VCSE sector there is a risk that support to community groups (and consequently residents) will lapse. The Strategy team will endeavour to ensure that there is a smooth transition and that VCSE organisations are closely involved in this process.

5.6 Equalities and Diversity

5.6.1 Pursuant to the Equality Act 2010, the Council is under an obligation to have due regard to eliminating unlawful discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the Act; advancing equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant 'protected characteristic' and those who do not share it; and fostering good relations between persons who share a relevant 'protected characteristic' and persons who do not share it. The 'protected characteristics' are: age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy, and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation. The Council also has regard to the additional protected characteristic of marriage and civil partnership even though this does not apply to certain parts of the public-sector equality duty.

5.7 Corporate Parenting

5.7.1 The council expects partner organisations in the VCSE and private sectors to agree with our corporate parenting pledge and support our endeavours to raise outcomes for looked after children and care leavers.

5.8 Consultation and Engagement

5.8.1 Consultation and engagement are fundamental to the Community Participation Strategy, which will set out how the council can have a closer and more productive dialogue with residents. The strategy will be co-designed with the community as well as VCSE sector groups.

5.9 Insight

5.9.1 Insight is also a key element of the Community Participation Strategy, and a comprehensive understanding of the assets in our communities is fundamental to its delivery. Collating and mapping this data will be an output of the strategy that will benefit the wider council as well as the community.

6. BACKGROUND PAPERS

6.1 An update of the Community Participation Strategy action plan was due to be presented to Community Leadership and Libraries Committee in September, but that meeting was cancelled. The update is included as Appendix 1.