



ENVIRONMENT & COMMUNITY SUPPORT SCRUTINY SUB-COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the OPEN section of the meeting of the ENVIRONMENT & COMMUNITY SUPPORT SCRUTINY SUB-COMMITTEE held on 15 JULY 2003 at 7.00 P.M. at the Town Hall, Peckham Road, London SE5 8UB

PRESENT: Councillor Barrie HARGROVE (Chair)
Councillor Gavin O'BRIEN (Vice-Chair)
Councillors Alfred BANYA, Lisa RAJAN and Alison MOISE

ALSO PRESENT Nathalie Hadjifotiou – Head of Social Inclusion
Stan Dubeck – Head of Community Safety
Catherine Mangan – Best Value Team
Pat Tulloch – Southwark Action for Voluntary Organisations
Nathan Oley – Southwark Action for Voluntary Organisations
Angela Stanworth – Southwark Community Care Forum
Glen Egan – Assistant Borough Solicitor
Nikki Fashola – Legal Officer
Maggie Sullivan – Corporate Strategy
Leigh Henderson – Scrutiny Team

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillor William Rowe.

CONFIRMATION OF VOTING MEMBERS

The Members listed as being present were confirmed as the Voting Members.

NOTIFICATION OF ANY OTHER ITEMS WHICH THE CHAIR DEEMED URGENT

There were none.

DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS AND DISPENSATIONS

There were no disclosures of interests made nor dispensations notified.

RECORDING OF MEMBERS' VOTES

Council Procedure Rule 1.17(5) allows a Member to record her/his vote in respect of any motions and amendments. Such requests are detailed in the following Minutes. Should a Member's vote be recorded in respect to an amendment, a copy of the amendment may be found in the Minute File and is available for public inspection.

The Committee considered the items set out on the agenda, a copy of which has been incorporated in the Minute File. Each of the following paragraphs relates to the item bearing the same number on the agenda.

4. FAST-TRACK REVIEW OF THE VOLUNTARY SECTOR

Members had invited representatives from Southwark Action for Voluntary Organisations (SAVO) to attend the meeting to help inform the discussion and recommendations arising. SAVO was represented by Pat Tulloch, Director and Nathan Oley, Policy and Research Manager. In addition, Members agreed to receive a deputation from Southwark Community Care Forum (SCCF), represented by Angela Stanworth.

Nathalie Hadjifotiou, Stan Dubeck and Catherine Mangan presented and discussed the findings of the report 'Fast Track Review of Voluntary Sector Funding' which would be considered by the Executive on the 29th July. The report addressed:

- Council policy framework and priorities with respect to funding of the voluntary sector;
- The decision-making arrangements for voluntary sector funding; and
- The process of commissioning services from the voluntary sector.

The review recommended that the Executive adopt six policy objectives to align the service delivery from the voluntary sector with the Council's policy framework and priorities. These recommendations included:

- the adoption of a formal commissioning approach, cross referenced to a new procurement strategy which was being developed;
- that funding for the voluntary sector is policy driven with explicit outputs/outcomes linked to priorities and service objectives;
- that all programmes are reviewed against current priorities and a re-commissioning process undertaken;
- that the process of policy review is sensitive enough to pick up new and emerging needs;
- that the current criteria for the Community Support programme should be realigned to more explicitly support the key corporate priorities of Equalities and Cohesion, Anti Poverty and Community Safety; and
- whatever option on decision making is adopted, an annual report should be produced for Members which provides a strategic overview of voluntary sector funding and its outcomes.

Officers outlined the four options set out in the report for decision making arrangements of funding for the voluntary sector.

- Option A: Status Quo
- Option B: Policy led Option
- Option C: Financial Threshold Option
- Option D: Full Delegation Option

Members considered the advantages and disadvantages of each of these options. Under Option A, the status quo, Members retained full engagement and had a full picture of funding of the voluntary sector. However the disadvantages, of inconsistencies with best practice and decision making in other areas and concern with the current process, seemed to outweigh the advantages. Option B was considered advantageous, as decision making for the voluntary sector would be in accordance with decision making in other sectors and Members would have full responsibility for the cross-cutting corporate programme. The main disadvantage of Option B was that Members were less informed of voluntary sector funding.

Options C and D were proposed on the basis that decision making processes would be brought into line with general decision making processes and that Council processes would be consistent with the modernising agenda and best practice councils. However both of these options (to varying degrees) dis-engaged Members from voluntary sector funding.

The final recommendation was the adoption of a formal commissioning framework to improve the processes for commissioning services from the voluntary sector. Officers detailed the benefits of a commissioning framework in terms of linking priorities to funding, having a framework which was consistent and considered as part of the overall procurement strategy, having guidelines for different funding mechanisms and when they should be used, having advertising requirements and an improved monitoring framework.

The review was fast-tracked, as the new voluntary sector funding framework needed to be agreed by the Executive in July to come into effect in 2004/05. Officers noted that consultation was limited due to the tight project timeframes. Officers outlined the consultation process and the project timeframes.

Comments by SAVO and SCCF

Consultation with umbrella voluntary groups was designed to reach a cross-section of organisations. Representatives from SAVO and SCCF expressed concern regarding the lack of consultation, in particular direct consultation with minority groups. SAVO had understood, prior to the consultation, that it would enable all those groups currently receiving funding, to have input.

SAVO noted that the proposed new framework did not establish a clear role for the voluntary sector in terms of informing and influencing policy-makers particularly with regards to the needs of new and emerging groups. SAVO suggested that it might be possible to set-up a voluntary sector advisory panel to assist Members in decisions on funding. Officers advised that this could lead to a conflict of interest.

SAVO commented that the community leadership role provided by voluntary agencies was unlikely to directly align with the Council's priorities. Furthermore SAVO highlighted that voluntary agencies were not compensated for providing input in policy development and that service specification should define this role. SAVO believed that the voluntary sector should have a greater role in developing the policy framework, which guides decisions on voluntary sector funding.

SCCF emphasised the need for the new funding arrangements to challenge the largely historical basis upon which funding to the voluntary sector had been determined.

SAVO requested further information about the outsourcing of the funding allocation. Officers advised that outsourcing would result in additional costs and was not considered as a viable option.

DEPUTATION BY ANGELA STANWORTH OF SCCF

Angela Stanworth made the following general comments during her deputation:

- the importance of consultation with small voluntary groups in any review process given that larger, wealthier groups had more scope to win funding;
- that contracts were the preferred funding mechanism as contracts clarified service specifications and provided security;
- there was, however, a need for contracts to be more tailored ie a contract for child services should include child protection measures;
- welcomed strategic priorities being integral to contract development but that protocols would be required;
- that the fast-track review was a valuable process in terms of defining objectives, standards, deliverables and value for money;
- that a greater focus on outcomes was welcomed, noting that outcomes were difficult to measure and the potential cost of monitoring; and
- that outsourcing of administration of voluntary sector funding generally resulted in reduced funds to the voluntary sector.

Angela Stanworth raised a number of concerns regarding proposals for voluntary sector funding under new arrangements including:

- the commissioning of voluntary services on the basis of Council priorities would result in policy-makers taking a narrow view – emerging needs would not be identified as the voluntary groups being funded were likely to be a static group;
- the inability of smaller voluntary groups that win annual grants to progress to funding through contract arrangements - known as the 'glass ceiling';
- That the Council could consider joint commissioning from the voluntary sector with, for example, health bodies;
- That the voluntary sector was currently in a funding crisis with a reduction in funding from other sources, for example the Community Fund which was 'a useful means of getting small groups up and running'. Any further reduction in funding from the Council would exacerbate the issues;
- That commissioning needs to consider and incorporate 'wider issues' of service delivery (ie preventative measures);
- that commissioning officers needed to be provided with training and support and that the voluntary sector should have input to this; and
- that voluntary sector funding should be considered not only as in receipt of funding, but in terms of the contribution it makes back into Southwark's economy.

SOUTHWARK ACTION FOR VOLUNTARY ORGANISATIONS – AN INITIAL RESPONSE FROM THE VOLUNTARY SECTOR

SAVO had prepared a written response to the fast track review, which was submitted to the Sub-Committee. SAVO representatives Pat Tulloch and Nathan Oley made the following comments:

- That SAVO welcomed the review but expressed concern that consultation was not carried out as proposed;

- That a more dynamic and interactive process and relationship between the Council and voluntary sector agencies was required – SAVO emphasised the need to retain flexibility;
- That the new arrangements should safeguard the voluntary sector's independence;
- That the contribution of the voluntary sector to Southwark economy needed to be recognised and estimated;
- That any annual reporting on voluntary sector funding should be co-authored by officers and voluntary agencies;
- That information about tendering processes and grant programmes needed to be well advertised and that the sector required training in negotiating and legal advice; and
- That SAVO recommended that a combination of options B and C be adopted; noting that the sector has to date preferred B to C.

Officers acknowledged that there were on-going issues and that improvements in voluntary sector funding arrangements would require continual reassessment and commitment. Officers welcomed a role for the voluntary sector in training commissioning officers.

Members of the Sub-Committee agreed on the following recommendations:

RESOLVED:

1. Members of the Sub-Committee agreed to recommend Option B: Policy Led Option (as defined in the report) for the decision-making arrangements;
2. That the new framework/arrangements for funding of the voluntary sector are inclusive of new and emerging voluntary groups, in particular BME groups;
3. That measures should be taken to address the 'glass ceiling', which prevents smaller groups from developing and extending their remit of services;
4. That commissioning officers are provided with training and on-going support and that voluntary organisations have input to the training;
5. That an annual report outlining the voluntary sector's activities be prepared for the Executive's consideration. This report is to be co-authored by the Council and voluntary sector organisations in receipt of funding which wish to contribute; and
6. That officers draft a report for Members to approve, to supplement the officer report on the Fast Track Review of Voluntary Sector Funding due to be considered by the Executive on 29 July 2003.

5. WASTE MANAGEMENT STRATEGY – PROJECT BRIEF

The Sub-Committee drafted a project brief for the Waste Management Review with reference to the following:

Why is the Committee doing this?

Waste management was a key issue facing the Council as waste generation escalates. The current draft Waste Management Strategy was proposed to last up until 2021 with considerable financial investment. On recycling, in particular, the Council had to meet stringent national targets and had under-performed against 2002/03 targets.

Who/what does the committee seek to influence with this work?

The Sub-Committee wished to make recommends to the Executive so as to influence the development of the Waste Management Strategy in both the long and short term

What will the Committee's output be?

A report to the Executive or a response/comment to consultation before the Strategy was returned to the Executive for further consideration

Who does the Sub-Committee need to receive advice/evidence from?

Senior officers, in particular the Director of Environment and Leisure, members of the Greater London Authority (GLA) and Southwark Community Recycling Project (either in person or by written correspondence)

What approach should the Sub-Committee use to invite input?

Write to the Director of Environment and Leisure, the GLA and Southwark Community Recycling Project seeking their views on waste management strategies and invite each to give evidence at the next meeting to be held in September. Members also expressed an interest in having a site visit to another borough, known for best practice in waste management, with a full infrastructure in place for dealing with waste.

How should the review be publicised?

The Sub-Committee would determine this at a later stage.

RESOLVED:

1. That the Waste Management Review be conducted over September and October;
2. That the Chair of the Sub-Committee write to the Director of Environment and Leisure, the GLA and the Southwark Community Recycling Project; and
3. That Officers arrange a site visit to another borough.

6. SCRUTINY TRAINING

The Sub-Committee agreed to defer this agenda item until the September meeting.

The meeting ended at 10.20 p.m.

CHAIR:

DATE: