



REGENERATION AND TRANSPORT SCRUTINY SUB - COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the OPEN section of the meeting of the REGENERATION AND TRANSPORT SCRUTINY held on 10th DECEMBER 2003 at 7:00PM at Southwark Town Hall, Peckham Road, London SE5 8UB

PRESENT: Councillor Neil WATSON (Chair)
Councillor Paul BATES (Vice-Chair)
Councillors Sarah WELFARE, Billy KAYADA, Catriona MOORE,
Graham NEALE

ALSO PRESENT: Stephanie Dunstan - Scrutiny
Robert Bollen – Corporate Strategy
Paul Evens – Strategic Direction Regeneration
Nuala Conlan – Regeneration CIDU

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr David BRADBURY.

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

None

DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS AND DISPENSATIONS

Councillor Graham Neale disclosed that he resides in Elephant and Castle.
Cllr Watson & Cllr Bates disclosed that they are on the Elephant Links Board.

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.

1. Confirm Meeting Minutes

MINS 101203

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The Sub – Committee requested that the Meeting Minutes of Wednesday 3rd December be confirmed at the next meeting of the Sub Committee.

2. Presentation from Strategic Director of Regeneration

Cllr Watson invited Paul Evans [Strategic Director of Regeneration] to present evidence to the Sub – Committee.

Mr. Evans explained that both he and Nuala Conlan [CIDU] together would present evidence to the Sub – Committee rather than two separate presentations.

Mr. Evans began by explaining that the Elephant and Castle Regeneration Project is ‘true’ example of a large scale regeneration project, in that regeneration must not only include the redevelopment of the physical infrastructure but also mean something for the community

Mr. Evans explained that his definition of ‘community’ is one in the instance of Elephant and Castle that includes not only those living in the regeneration area, but also those in Southwark and the Greater London area. He commented that often when speaking about community in terms of regeneration projects it is assumed that ‘community’ refers to those in the voluntary sector. However his approach is to use the term community to refer to everyone affected by a regeneration project. He pointed out that because the Elephant and Castle regeneration project is one of the biggest regeneration projects within London, forming part of the Mayor’s Plan for London, it is important that ‘community’ is conceptualised in the wider sense.

Mr. Evans commented that a difficult role in regeneration projects is to balance the views of the many different individual voices within the community. Community can also be geographically or common interest based, i.e. the business community. He said that the role of Southwark officers is to be clear about the aim of the regeneration project, identify the different voices in the community and make the best use of Southwark resources to produce the end result. His Unit must balance the individual voices in the borough with the strategic interests of Southwark Council. The regeneration Unit must engage with the community in the widest possible manner whilst delivering the regeneration project.

Cllr Watson asked Mr. Evans his definition of community engagement.

Mr. Evans replied that his definition is not a single sentence definition.

He said that for effective community engagement the community must be fully and effectively engaged, able to express views and have an ability to influence plans.

He commented that the purpose of community engagement is to make sure a wider section of the community as possible are fully and effectively informed of the issue and that they are aware of how they can bring their views forward.

Cllr Kayada asked Mr Evans his opinion how effectively the Elephant and Castle regeneration project was engaging with the community.

Mr Evans commented that the Elephant and Castle project needs to be seen as a long-term project and community engagement must be also seen as a long-term investment.

Mr Evans then commented how that the Peckham Partnership had the most similarities to the Elephant and Castle project and that lessons from Peckham have been filtered into the Elephant and Castle project. A particular lesson from Peckham was to never underestimate how important it is to produce a single clear message for regeneration to the community. He commented that although the delivery method of this message can be done in different means to suit the community, the message needs to remain clear and consistent. Mr Evans stressed that maintaining a flow of information is key, even when people become passive about the project.

Another lesson from Peckham was the need to use the existing methods for community engagement and only search for new mechanisms when the existing methods are failing. The new Elephant Links Diversity Panel is picking up from the problems with engagement in the past and looking at new ways of engaging with the community. Mr Evans commented that Elephant Links board is looking at ways of reaching 'hard to reach' groups in the community and would welcome feedback from this Scrutiny Sub – Committee as to how to do this.

Cllr Kayada asked what role Mr Evans saw for the voluntary sector considering his earlier remarks about 'community'. How is Southwark engaging with the Voluntary Sector?

Mr Evans commented that it is becoming more common to see the Voluntary sector tailored to service delivery, so voluntary groups are interested in certain elements of regeneration projects. He commented that it is important that the Council keeps double-checking that it is involving all groups and take advice on this. Mr Evans suggested that discussions with the voluntary sector could be difficult because they are interested in knowing what the outcome is and only talking with decision-making.

Ms Conlan added that tensions exist between the community and the voluntary sector and the increased professionalism of the voluntary sector. Community representatives and groups are seen as the grass roots. On occasion these groups and individuals look to the Council for support due to mistrust of the voluntary sector.

Cllr Kayada asked Mr Evans how Southwark is encouraging community leader development and community empowerment in hard to reach communities. He also asked if the Regeneration Unit had the correct skill and staff levels to run such programs.

Ms. Conlan replied that her team [CIDU] did run a program established to encourage community empowerment. However, the program was very resource intensive and eventually funding was discontinued. Ms Conlan commented that her Unit are looking to re-establish a similar program. She commented that the difficulty with community empowerment is that it is not a quick process, it is a long-term commitment and difficult in disenfranchised communities.

Mr Evans commented that his Unit were well staffed to be able to run such programs and agreed with Ms Conlan that such programs were a long-term commitment. The Council were also looking to access LDA funding to support this type of work. He hopes that the development of Community Council will build confidence and expertise in the community and empower individuals to feel like they can come forward and engage in Council consultation processes.

Cllr Watson asked about the Best Practice Review of Community Engagement and the recommendations contained within this Best Practice Review. In particular he asked about the funding arrangements for conducting community engagement.

Mr Evans responded that the budget for Community Councils is part of the Community Engagement budget.

Ms Conlan commented that the 'challenges' listed in the Best Practice Review report had come from a range of different bodies of work. She commented that the Best Practice Review had been conducted over a long period of time involving different bodies of work.

Mr Evans commented that the headings in the Best Practice Review report were standardised headings found in any Best Practice Review. The findings of the Review are findings of what people external to the Unit have given on the performance of the Unit.

Cllr Bates asked if he agreed with the challenges that had been listed?

Mr Evans commented that the challenges are perceptions from other people that can be used as feedback to the Unit to design an improved service that can be delivered. Mr Evans said that they are currently implementing the review and ensuring that they do not do it in an ad hoc manner, that it is practical and that lessons are learnt.

Cllr Kayada asked further questions about how CIDU is ensuring their knowledge is rolled out across the organisation. He commented that in his experience it is not working effectively.

Mr Evans replied that it is difficult to do and that it was important that the knowledge was shared across project boundaries not thematically. He demonstrated how Management officers for different regeneration projects have a responsibility to conduct effective community engagement that includes knowing what is occurring in other departments and other councils.

Mr Bollen gave examples of how CIDU was sharing knowledge across the Council to support community engagement. He commented how Southwark Council is slowly moving away from its departmental structure and sharing community engagement knowledge across projects. He gave the example of where CIDU expertise was utilised for a project on Community Councils and on community led research with non-English speaking language groups.

Cllr Kayada asked a question about the staffing levels for encouraging community development

Mr Evans and Ms Conlan both commented that often many groups claim that they are conducting community development but really they are aren't. Ms Conlan commented that often community leaders think that they know the opinion of the community without actively doing and getting feedback on their views. Mr Evans commented that it needs to be recognised that encouraging community development is a specialist skill and that not everyone is equipped to do it.

Cllr Welfare asked about the effectiveness of front line staff working on the Elephant and Castle project and the links with the Council's Customer Focus corporate priority

Mr Evans commented that the role is developing and that the team do receive many requests for information. He then outlined the communications structure for the Elephant and Castle Project. There is the regeneration departments communication team, a lead officer for the Elephant on communications and a Market link who do surveys. He again commented that he felt it was important to keep information flowing even when interest in the project was low.

Cllr Watson asked about what consultants were employed to help with community engagement.

Mr Evans responded that they have a departmental community development officer, an Elephant and Castle community development officer and then use 'Market Link' to conduct surveys on how the information is being received.

Cllr Watson asked about funding arrangements for community engagement work.

Mr Evans responded that the nature of regeneration work is that funding is short term, complex and often un sustainable. He commented that managers of regeneration projects are used to this style of funding and do not expect to have single stand of funding. Mr Bollen commented that this issue had been picked up in other Best Practice Reviews and was being considered in the 2004 Southwark Budget.

Cllr Watson asked about the SRB Funding for Elephant and Castle and its recent loss of £6 million.

Mr Evans replied that originally the budget for the E&C regeneration project had included funding for physical regeneration such as transport infrastructure improvements. That could now not be delivered within the timescale of the SRB project. However, He commented that he thought the LDA will look favourably on the Elephant and Castle regeneration for future funding, and that if not spent on the Elephant and Castle will be allocated to wider London South Central priority area.

There was a general Sub – Committee discussion about comments made anonymously in the Best Value Review. Mr Evans explained that the comments could have been internal or external but they were fairly standard comments. Mr Bollen commented on recent MORI research that demonstrated customer satisfaction in the light of the demographic make up of the borough. This research compared favourably with other boroughs with similar demographics.

Cllr Watson asked about the diversity panel.

Mr Evans commented that the intention of the Diversity Panel was to have a link between broader based community groups and the main board. He commented that the responsibility of the Board was to listen to the opinions of the Diversity Panel, creating a theoretical checks and balances.

Cllr Watson asked about benchmarking of community engagement.

Ms. Conlan said that benchmarking community engagement is a difficult task because of the varied parameters in each project making them difficult to compare. She commented that the Audit Commission are trying to develop a set of National Indicators and are trying to involve Southwark in the project. However, Ms Conlan commented that to be involved in the project was very expensive and she is currently in negotiations with the Audit Commission about this.

Cllr Watson thanked Mr Evans and Ms Conlan for presenting evidence.

4. Progress to Date

Mr Bollen gave a summary of the evidence collated thus far and progress to date.

Ms Dunstan asked people to send comments via email of the work in progress Summary Report

5. Planning for 27th January Meeting

The Sub – Committee had a general discussion about what they wanted to get out of a meeting held in the public, scheduled for 27th January. It was recognised that the meeting would need to be well facilitated. It was decided that any questions asked of members of the public should be based on the terms of reference of the scrutiny and sent to invited guests prior to the meeting.

Cllr Welfare suggested the following questions be asked:

- How do you engage with the community and reach out to other groups?
- Who do you represent?

Cllr Neale suggested that the Sub – Committee need to be clear about whether the Sub – Committee is trying gain information since the Diversity Panel has been formed or prior to the Diversity Panel. He suggested that Reverend Bill McKinley is invited as a witness.

RESOLVED

1. Stephanie Dunstan to develop plan for 27th January meeting and circulate to members
2. Mark Patchett, Chair, Vice Chair and the facilitator for 27th January meet in early January.

The meeting ended at 9.10pm.

CHAIR:

DATED:

