

**Co-operative Council Citizens' Commission
Lambeth Town Hall, Brixton**

10.00pm – 1.00pm

Thursday 17 September 2010

Minutes

PRESENT:

Commissioners: Councillor Steve Reed (Chair)
Councillor Jackie Meldrum
Matthew Taylor
Richard Bridge

Delegates: Angus Johnson (Clapham Park Project)
Ching Wah Wong (Clapham Park Project)
Duncan Law (Transition Town Brixton)
Merlin Hayward (Transition Town Brixton)
Aisling Duffy (Lambeth LINK)
Nicola Kingston (Lambeth LINK)
Wai Ha Lam (Lambeth LINK)

Officers supporting

Commission: Derrick Anderson, Chief Executive
Sophia Looney, Director of Policy, Equalities and
Performance
Mike Wiltshire , Policy Manager
Thomas Man, Senior Policy Officer
Julie Stoltman, Senior Policy Officer
Valerie Dinsmore, Head of Policy, Research and
Customer Relations

APOLOGIES: Conrad Hollingsworth (Lambeth Voluntary Action Council (LVAC)); Jeanette Threadgold (Lambeth LINK) and Vivienne Hayes (Women's Resource Centre)

1. Welcome and introductions

The Chair of the Commission, Councillor Steve Reed, welcomed everyone and highlighted the aims and objectives of the meeting.

2. Delegate initial statements

Angus Johnson (Clapham Park Project)

Mr Johnson gave a synopsis of the Clapham Park Project (CPP) and its working methods, the delivery of objectives, its learning points and key messages. CPP was established in 1999 as a resident led organisation serving 7,800 residents/3,500 homes.

Working methods:

- Understand the issues and residents' priorities
- Residents and professionals develop solutions
- Project cycle management framework
- Project appraisal, delivery, review and evaluate
- Established neighbourhood management

The delivery of objectives:

- Initially with project teams/contractors
- Developed local groups and social enterprises
- 2007 focused on recruiting local residents
- Now 60% of staff are Lambeth residents – (20/32)
- Board 60% local residents (6/10)
- Provide community space, support and advice - community anchor

Learning points:

- The greatest impact made to the local area and quality of people's lives were often from relatively low cost projects and programmes. Some examples included:
 - Community volunteers
 - Time Bank
 - Youth Forum/outreach
 - A.S.B. initiatives
- Underpinning CPPs work is a body of research and evaluation which tracked the impact projects and programmes had on the local community.

Key messages:

- Support neighbourhood organisations
- Have officers work alongside/facilitate residents
- Re-think commissioning
- Local projects create local jobs
- Make it fun

The following key issues were highlighted and drawn out in the subsequent discussion:

- Council officers should work alongside neighbourhood organisations and facilitate residents – joint working was key.
- The Council should re-think its commissioning process.
- Local projects create local jobs.
- Making the process relevant to local people as well as fun.

Duncan Law and Merlin Hayward (Transition Town Brixton (TTB))

Mr Law explained the background to the creation of TTB – the need to raise awareness locally of climate change, peak oil and design the necessary changes to reverse ever-increasing consumption and ensure a better low energy/carbon future for Brixton. The economy of the future would require the city to operate on much less energy.

The following key issues on the white paper were highlighted:

- There was a lack of vision and specific proposals. Collective decision-making needed to be spelt out.
- The vision should be based on a low energy/carbon future, and work backwards to put the necessary changes in place; e.g. consider how meals on wheels can be provided on a local level.
- People were the key asset. Rather than senior managers doing the commissioning, this should be led by people from the local community. People will then support their choice, and beneficial connections will be created.
- How money is spent in total was a guide to how an organisation is working. Participatory budgeting had been undertaken successfully in Brazil since 1989 and should be used in Lambeth.
- Community organisations should be helped in understanding the power of participatory decision-making, and local people, local organisations and Lambeth staff trained accordingly.
- The Council seemed to assume its leadership role would continue. Instead the Council should facilitate decision-making; e.g., convene an event and support this in a similar manner to the Lambeth First Annual General Meeting.
- Local solutions can be highlight effective. For example the appointment of caretakers by Roupell Park TMO led to a cost effective and sustainable approach to managing social housing. The council must realise that local people and organisations know what is needed and can develop practical solutions.
- One mantra is rethink and reconnect. Economies of scale needed to be considered, including through cross boundary connections, but services needed to be kept local.

In addition, Merlin Hayward made the following points:

- The Lambeth First annual meeting had been inspirational in making the Co-operative Council vision believable. There was a real opportunity to reform and transform society and make passive consumers active participants. Currently, everything in society was organised top down. There was a need to empower people to take responsibility. If some initiatives failed, people would need to take responsibility for that as well.
- One key issue was the type of organisation to be established. People do not know how to organise themselves. There was a need to step

back and empower decision-makers – via organisations that know how to organise people and teach them accordingly to operate co-operatively. Organisations that are not for profit and worker-controlled would give people real control.

- The operating arrangements of TTB were commended – these had been written by local people in Brixton and enabled decision-making by consensus rather than through voting.
- The Council needed to be open and consultative, but public bodies were private in nature. People needed to be taught to advocate, become enablers and learn for themselves. Rather than people being at the bottom, they needed to learn how rewarding it can be to be properly involved. A mandate could be built through local organisations. People will share both successes and failures; there are examples where they have done this in the past. When people say they have done it for themselves, the Council would know it had been a good leader.
- There was a wealth of available research on participation in community, and the work by the New Economics Foundation was commended.

Wai Ha Lam, Nicola Kingston and Aisling Duffy (Lambeth Local Involvement Network (LINK))

Wai Ha Lam outlined the background to the Local Involvement Network, and its role in scrutinising health and social care services on behalf of local people. Leaflets, website and public meetings around the borough were used to seek views; e.g. a session in conjunction with the Council was to be held on the co-operative council. There were four task groups on services to people with disadvantage that local people has asked LINK to investigate, including– newly deaf people, people with diabetes, and older people with mental health difficulties.

Wai Ha Lam also reflected on her Hong Kong experience, working with middle aged women. She felt that the White Paper needed to be clearer around how the council would get community support/buy-in from the community – different groups of people had different needs. People needed the power to make decisions and more detail was needed on the enabling and empowering elements of the paper. In addition, further information was needed on how much power the council was prepared to share.

Nicola Kingston outlined the operation of one task and finish group: children with diabetes. This was a Total Place pilot with the aim of enabling people to manage themselves 365 days of the year. Detail was given of the make-up of the 12 person steering group. Diabetes currently cost the NHS 10% of its entire national budget. Diabetes was mostly preventable through proper exercise and self-care and services around prevention could be a viable pilot area for the co-operative council.

Aisling Duffy gave a further example - how services to people with a serious mental illness could be delivered in a more co-operative way. The changes were currently embryonic, but radical change was envisaged to enable people with great service needs to receive the necessary support. Mental health was a serious issue locally, with ever-increasing spend and people in secondary care. It was clear the existing system did not work

The principles in the white paper were supported. LINK supported the suggestion of establishing a time bank, as part of bringing all available resources together to address the needs of local people. There was also a need to move away from focus on short term outcomes and move to a state of recognising people as valued members of society. To bring this to reality required a massive shift in culture.

Aisling also argued that the procurement process needed to be radically changed in order for it to support the co-operative ethos.

In summary a new level of trust and improved relationship between the council and citizens, including those most marginalised, was required.

Question and Answer session

In response to questions from commissioners, the following points were made:

- The timescale for a move from top down decision-making to a co-operative process was difficult to quantify. It was easier to improve the quality of place rather the way people behaved. A variety of initiatives was necessary, including capacity-building and supporting people to become more confident – e.g. to deal with the Council and other statutory agencies. The Clapham Park Project had taken the risk about four years ago to move to a lead by residents, in response to requests by the residents. This had been successful.
- Quick results were difficult to achieve; all necessary ground work needed to be undertaken first.
- The challenges of changing the council's risk-averse organisational structure were acknowledged. In part this culture was a response to previous poor management which lead fraud and corruption in the late 1980s/early 1990s.
- Even if services are devolved to citizens there will always be a need for the council to set basic requirements, measure outcomes and ensure key legislation (such as qualities legislation) is followed. However the way in which it fulfils these functions needs to be more co-operative.
- Rather than consider what services could not be passed from Council control, the necessary infrastructure needed to be in place to enable different decision-making. Most services could be delivered differently and on a local basis.
- Time banks should be developed – there were three locally already with great potential.

- Other local mutual organisations like London Mutual Credit Union should be supported and developed.
- Awareness of how total sums were spent on each service; the community considered there to be a great deal of public sector waste with allocated sums not reaching the front line.
- Genuine open and transparent engagement with the trade unions should lead to a favourable response. Staff operating on the front line often understood how a service could be better delivered.
- The levers to create culture change within the Council, and where progress could be made quickly to get tangible results, needed to be established. Starting consultation with the users, rather than the staff would be important.
- There were a range of empowered local organisations in Brixton, e.g. successful Tenant Management Organisations, and success was dependent on keeping services as local as possible, and a facilitating role for the Council – e.g. provide small sums of money for leafleting.
- There should be no assumption that the Council would retain the commissioning role. One thought was for the Council to pilot the pooling of budgets for a particular locality and service – e.g. youth, and consult the community on analysing the need and decide how to deliver the service. The view was expressed that a range of services could be slowly handed over to neighbourhoods – volunteers in libraries, park management, environmental improvements etc. The community could do this work cheaper and better, and the ultimate aim could be to pay local people to provide the service. The delegates were invited to send written submissions on a commissioning model.
- A fundamental review was necessary of the deep-seated government regulation as well as bureaucracy in some areas that would need to be tackled in order to free up resources.
- People were not only motivated by financial reward, and the four ways in which people dealt with change needed to be recognised: hierarchical, individualistic, utilitarian and fatalistic.
- Libraries had a high status within the community, and ways of increasing community use were needed.
- On a community investment district model, the benefits of the additional tax would need to be seen for all (e.g. the benefits for all in improving community safety). A local version of an Invest to Save fund could be considered.

CLOSE OF MEETING

The meeting ended at 12:20pm