

**The Cooperative Council Citizens Commission
Room 8, Lambeth Town Hall, Brixton**

3.00pm – 5.15pm

Monday 25 October 2010

Minutes

PRESENT

Commissioners:

Councillor Steve Reed (Chair)
Councillor Jackie Meldrum
Councillor Paul McGlone
Martin Green
Richard Bridge

Delegates:

Professor Colin Copus, (Director, Local Government Research Unit, De Montfort University)
Sam Hopley, (Chief Executive, Holy Cross Centre Trust)
John Mulkerrin, (Co-Founder, Community Interest Companies Association)
Councillor Ashley Lumsden, (Leader of Lambeth Council Liberal Democrat Group)
Councillor John Whelan, (Leader of Lambeth Council Conservative Group)
Conrad Hollingsworth, (Director, Lambeth Voluntary Action Council)
Vivienne Hayes, (Chief Executive, Women's Resource Centre)
Reverend Les Isaacs, (Chief Executive Officer, Ascension Trust)

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)
Nigel Harvey (Democratic Services Officer)

1. Welcome and introductions

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

was the final meeting of the Commission and the report should be ready by early December.

2. Delegate initial statements

Professor Colin Copus, (Director, Local Government Research Unit, De Montfort University)

Professor Copus thanked the Commission for inviting him to speak. He explained that he had read the White Paper and had followed the debate so far. Overall he considered this programme to be very positive and it was a testament to the good work that had been carried out by the Council. Colin's main focus of his oral submission would be on the role of the councillor as a community leader and the issues this raises.

With regard to service delivery it was important to engage the public in the service provision and the day-to-day service issues as well as the development of the council's policy framework. In addition, it was important that residents were involved in ensuring that decisions taken were carried through and delivered.

The Commission also needs to recognise the blurring with regard to "leadership". All councils have both political and civil elements to their leadership. It is therefore important to remember that whilst the council will always need to provide political leadership, civil society cannot be "directed" by the council – rather it can only be supported.

There was a role for the councillor as a community leader and the moral leverage for this emanated from the fact that councillors had a democratic mandate. There could be broader powers for councillors so that they could act as a local leader and govern their localities. An example of a new power Lambeth could propose is one where local government can challenge central government regulations. This model currently exists in Denmark and Professor Copus noted that of the first 100 challenges, 60 had been upheld.

The role of the councillor was also important as they played an important part in their ward member role. However the White Paper contained very little details of the roles of councillors. He wanted to see a greater articulation of where they fitted in as there were references to the Cabinet and Council.

There were also very few references to Overview and Scrutiny. Processes used needed to be open and transparent and subject to scrutiny. Therefore as part of this work there needs to be a clear mechanism for scrutinising public services, together with a number of steps for public engagement. The key element was that people should be listened to and engaged with. They also need to be able to ensure that their input has an impact. A member of the public would not necessarily expect their contribution to be taken up but would expect some sort of acknowledgement. There was a need for two way communications as this would pay dividends.

Finally Professor Copus suggested that another way in which transparency could be increased would be by Council Political Groups holding their meetings in public.

Sam Hopley, (Chief Executive, Holy Cross Centre Trust)

In thanking the Commission for the invitation to speak Mr, Hopley explained that he would share his experience at the London Borough of Camden and Holy Cross Centre Trust.

Sam Hopley felt there was a generational opportunity to change public services and that it was important to learn from the last generation. In recent years a significant focus of third sector development has been around developing physical infrastructure in communities. Some of this development (i.e. community buildings) could be seen as “white elephants” as they are not being used as originally planned. Many local areas therefore need to encourage people to use them.

There was now a danger that the public/third sectors approach to changing processes and the way public services are delivered would also lead to the development of “process white elephants”. Sam Hopley argued that a good example of where a new “process”/new approach to service delivery is working is in Camden’s Kings Cross area which sought to support deprived communities.

Key to this projects success has been the involvement of citizens, as they have provided “authentic voices” in the system and ensured projects truly meet their needs. Co-ordination and organisational sharing are essential. Without this there is the potential of there being too many resources in an area which merely duplicated services/capacity. Sam gave examples such as each organisation having their own minibus. It was important that thought was given to ‘joined up thinking’.

Finally, in order to enable organisational exchange and co production, Sam argued that time banking is a model that could be used.

John Mulkerrin, (Co-Founder, Community Interest Companies (CIC) Association)

Mr Mulkerrin agreed with the previous speakers and explained that CICs already existed in Lambeth and could play a role in the delivery of the Co-operative Council. CICs allowed individuals to be recognised without central support. However at present opportunities were not being taken forward.

CICs tried to add value to the community by creating mutual benefits. Owners of CICs tend to be dynamic and are “change makers”. They contribute to connectivity and can operate on a Pan London basis. For instance companies in Newham had set up generic contracts and these had been replicated elsewhere.

Councillor Ashley Lumsden, (Leader of Lambeth Council Liberal Democrat Group)

Councillor Lumsden stated that the Liberal Democrats were interested in the Co-operative Council process. He recognised that Lambeth had moved on and should build on the fact that it had improved performance. The approach should not be to commission all services at the same time. In light of the forthcoming cuts a change is needed.

In the Council Election the Liberal Democrats had proposed a resident led Council where they could set the agenda. This should be included at the beginning of the process and not be imposed from on high. The fear was that the co-operative model with the Council would be one sided because it was an enormous organisation. This needed to be looked at.

As regards to the wider context there was a need to reduce costs more than before. There is a need to demonstrate that the Co-operative Council could support the delivery of these savings, otherwise it would not be taken up. There needed to be a pilot.

A proper sliding scale of engagement was also needed. Some organisations were evolving more than others. The role of organisations often change over time. Frequently they start as a 'Friends' organisation, then evolve as a management company and go on to be trustees taking on projects and raising funds. There was also a question of establishing a network of voluntary groups as these tended to be small organisations in Lambeth.

There was a necessity to learn from what had happened in the past. There had been a number of successful and unsuccessful links with community organisations. Councillor Lumsden therefore questioned where the accountability was as voluntary groups did not have the same democratic structures as the Council. How would the money be spent?

There was a role for Overview &Scrutiny and Ward Councillors. Effective Ward Councillors would help with accountability and visibility. He drew attention to Tenant Management Organisations (TMOs), some of which had failed whereas others had been successful. The Council should look at what had stopped the failures from succeeding. For instance Clapham Park Homes had been successful but there had been issues with them not recognising the Tenants' and Residents' Organisations.

There was also a need to reflect on any difficulties encountered with taking on the work. For instance Age Concern Lambeth had not wanted to take on work which it had agreed to do in other Boroughs. There had also been successes such as the Stockwell Project and the Palace Project in Streatham. In addition thought needed to be given as to how communities could access services. He gave an example in Streatham where the Turkish community leaders wanted to work with the Council on a project but had found it difficult. There was a need to identify where representatives should go.

This could also be a better answer for housing engagement. At present tenants had very little influence in the running of the ALMO (Lambeth Living). It could also be better for regeneration projects

In conclusion the process would be better if all Councillors were involved. They could take on work around accountability in their wards. If this didn't happen it would be outside the political process.

Question and Answer Session

At this point there was a question and answer session for those delegates who had given their presentations at which the following points were raised:

- John Mulkerrin stated that CICs could be in whatever form they liked such as cooperatives, charities or voluntary organisations. He was keen that they were involved in the cooperative model particularly as they were uniform and were replicable.
- Examples of CICs in Lambeth included the Brixton Pound and the Urban Green Fair. He stated that he could provide details of all Lambeth CICs and map them out.
- Colin Copus stated that there should be a partnership between the civil and political partnership and that he could give details of the powers that had been challenged in Denmark.
- There was also a possibility of there being the scope for Urban Parish Councils which would make decision making even more local. However this could mean that the 'usual suspects' would be engaged in consultation.
- As regards Overview & Scrutiny and the role of ward members Colin Copus stated that he wanted them to be able to influence what was happening and call things to account. He referred to page 32 of the White Paper which he felt downgraded their importance. However he did not wish to see reviews being carried out for the sake of it.
- Councillor Reed stated that it was envisaged that there would be an appropriate role for elected members under the Cooperative Council.

Councillor John Whelan, (Leader of Lambeth Council Conservative Group)

Councillor Whelan stated that he supported many of the points made by Councillor Lumsden.

He also welcomed the Co-operative Council initiative as he recognised the underlying value. He referred to the changed political landscape since the General Election and the Emergency Budget and Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR). The Council needed to be both collaborative and co-operative. There was a need for a partnership with other Local Authorities, the voluntary sector and statutory partners. There could not be one particular model as there were 600 separate services to be catered for. Each service needed models that could engage with members of the public. In addition there would

continue to be changes and further announcements from the Government, all of which would have an impact on the next 4 years.

The effect of the CSR would be felt quickly on community budgets. He saw this as a reworking of Total Place. Following the launch of 16 pilots by the Government this would be quickly rolled out.

He referred to the proposed power of general competence that would be introduced to replace all the powers currently exercised by Local Government.

Although there would be reductions in funding this would be offset slightly by an increase of £2bn for Adult Social Care (£1bn of which would be allocated to the NHS). He understood that the present Social Care Contract in Lambeth had been fixed for 17 years and he could not see how this could be mixed and matched. There would also be an enablement for people coming out of hospital as people tended to live longer if they were in their own homes.

He also understood that the criteria regarding public health would be very wide and, for example, it may be possible to pay for road gritting from that allocation because if roads are not gritted properly this could result in an increase in road accidents.

As part of their work Councillor Whelan would like the commission to look at shared services and noted that Bromley and Lewisham were looking at a joint ICT organisation, proving that it was possible to work across the political divide with neighbouring authorities. The proposed localisation of business rates in 2015 was also an opportunity. He also referred to the great experience and expertise that the commissioners had and stated that this showed the commitment of Lambeth to the proposal.

Lambeth had a history of initiative delivery but there had also been difficulties and there was a need to learn where these had not been successful e.g. where TMOs had to be merged before they failed. About 100 councils had shown interest in the proposals and that was to Lambeth's credit.

He questioned the role of the elected member in the Cooperative Council. He hoped it would improve that of the Ward Member. The Commissioners should see if it would improve service delivery and whether it will save money. Who would be accountable if it fails? He questioned what was right or wrong about the process. IT technology helped to make it accountable but it could disenfranchise older people. He also felt that Lambeth was not always good at consultation in that it did not always listen. He questioned whether the consultation had been right and that they should look at all ways of doing it, including getting in touch with hard to reach groups.

Conrad Hollingsworth, (Director, Lambeth Voluntary Action Council (LVAC))

Conrad Hollingsworth explained that his oral evidence would be based on feedback he had received from his members on the Co-operative Council

White Paper. The consultation had been undertaken using a variety of methods/approaches. However despite this a number of members had struggled with the concept and he requested that there be a second stage consultation. Whilst positive of the idea Conrad felt it was a big challenge. In particular small third sector groups had informed him that they thought that they could potentially be disadvantaged through the Co-operative Council. This is significant, as Conrad pointed out that these groups comprised 80% of organisations in LVAC.

Many people thought the concept was good. However the main problem was that, unlike Camden, there was a lack of accommodation in Lambeth and a need for more community facilities. This was a barrier to working together. As a community leader Lambeth Council should seek to tackle this issue

Medium sized organisations also needed support to deliver elements of the Co-operative Council. Local organisations should also be encouraged to play a more active role in the delivery of public services. The council has a role to play here and it is unrealistic to expect LVAC to undertake this advocacy role on their own.

Volunteering on its own is not the answer and there are cost implications for volunteering. Conrad noted that some organisations were currently facing funding difficulties and were unable to pay expenses to volunteers. At a wider level, if volunteering is to be an element of the Co-operative Council, Conrad felt there should be an event to celebrate the work of volunteers.

Supporting localism was a key issue. There was a need to make sure it was fair to organisations to take on services and there needed to be a review. There was also a need to take account of flexibility and recognition that “bottom up” innovation in public service delivery should be supported. There was also a need for better relationships with commissioners and the third sector. A possible way to facilitate this would be through council staff being seconded to the voluntary sector to share their expertise.

This was a potential opportunity for LVAC. However he hoped that the driver was not just financial as it could be more expensive and that it should be introduced because it was a better way of working.

In conclusion he made the following recommendations:

- That there is a 2nd phase of consultation.
- That there is a commitment of funding.
- That an annual event be introduced to celebrate volunteers.
- That more schemes be set up to enable volunteers to return to work.
- That the Council work with CICs.
- That a voluntary sector “resources building” be provided so that back office functions could be shared.
- The Voluntary Sector currently had a Compact which should be reviewed.
- That a small grants fund be established.

- That there is an annual rolling training programme.
- That personalisation be covered.
- That there are more accessible procurement procedures in place.

Vivienne Hayes, (Chief Executive, Women’s Resource Centre)

In thanking the commissioners for inviting her Vivienne Hayes stated that there was a need for the Council to get smarter and be more creative, which she felt could be seen in Lambeth’s Co-operative Council proposals.

There was an issue as to how the Co-operative Council would work in practice. Using providers for services for hard to reach groups was, in Vivienne’s view, a good approach and one the WRC had already adopted. She liked LVAC’s suggestion of there being shared back offices.

Vivienne noted that the issue of equalities had not been discussed in great detail. She pointed out that women made up over 50% of the population and that they contained all of the equality strands.

Commissioning was a problem. Borough Surgeries should be set up to understand the needs of commissioners and people. An evidence based approach was needed to involve people with expertise.

At a wider level Vivienne had been appalled by the emergency budget and CSR which would have a worse impact on women than men. She hoped that Lambeth would not do the same. She challenged the notion of a “one size fits all” approach to services and argued that special measures were needed to make sure that all communities were served. The concept of networking was excellent and this needed to be promoted through the Co-operative Council.

The role of community leader was problematic but there was a need for the council to undertake an enabling and facilitating role. In this regard the concept of “shared leadership” needed to be explored. In addition the Co-operative Council cannot rely on only engaging the ‘usual suspects’ when seeking to work with the community – as these were often men who tended to not raise women’s concerns.

Finally, access to information around the Co-operative Council could be problem. Vivienne felt that the council should consider creating a digest and giving briefings on the issue. This would enable members to engage with the process as they were often too busy working with people and families.

Reverend Les Isaacs, (Chief Executive Officer, Ascension Trust)

Reverend Isaacs welcomed the initiative and felt that it was ambitious. The Church could contribute to the Co-operative Council agenda by bringing groups together, identify the work they are undertaking and supporting any mapping work of third sector organisations. To ensure that the vision worked in the Borough it was important that the council and the community see how

people were creative and frustrated. There was also a need to indicate that the Council meant business and to make sure that people participate.

To enable the Co-operative Council to be realised he would like to develop and help with training. There was a need to develop skills as there was a lot of expertise which was not recognised conventionally. This resource needed to be accessed. There was a need to create opportunities otherwise it was 'business as usual'. People would want help and to know that Lambeth could help them to create and deliver something of use to the Borough.

Question and Answer Session and Round Table Session

A final question and answer session and round table discussion was held at which the following points were made:

- Martin Green stated that he felt that councils were not very good at looking at what services should be de-commissioned. He would like to encourage Lambeth to adopt the model running in Camden and the CIC model.
- Councillor John Whelan said there were opportunities for development but Lambeth would have to be slick and fast to respond to challenges.
- Conrad Hollingsworth said that it was often difficult to book rooms in the Town Hall without being charged and that there should be a way in which premises can be shared by organisations. There was a lack of premises in the Borough.
- It should be possible to 'piggyback' on council contracts.
- Richard Bridge stated that there was a lot of support for the strategy. It would be preferable to deliver services on a neighbourhood basis and decentralise support services.
- It was vital to feedback to people. The proposals represented a shift in power which may not be popular with councillors. Commissioning was the key and it was a bigger process than just the report. There would need to be intelligence gathering.
- Councillors Ashley Lumsden and John Whelan indicated that they were supportive of the approach. The point was made that if it resulted in the greater empowerment of residents there was no reason why major political parties should not support it.
- The question was raised as to what would happen if partners had a different agenda from that of the council.
- It was important that responsibility would be taken if something failed.
- Councillor Jackie Meldrum said that she was encouraged to hear that the Government proposals were similar to 'Total Place'. However Lambeth was very diverse and had a large number of communities and would be more challenging than other areas of the country, particularly rural ones.
- She acknowledged that there was a need for councils to join up but the voluntary sector was different. It would be good to establish a Resource Centre.

- Councillor Paul McGlone pointed out that the procurement process in local government could be very frustrating and could exclude involvement. As this was primarily concerned about Value for Money it can deliver outcomes and meets needs but excludes involvement and innovation. It would be necessary to unlock that, although there was a need for probity and transparency. He referred to the contract for the telephone network where it was hoped to enable the voluntary sector to buy phone units at an advantage.
- Conrad Hollingsworth stated that in addition to there being a need for a central resource building for the voluntary sector he would also like satellite centres with the areas deciding what form they would take. As the funding was not available it would be necessary to work collaboratively. As regards the review of the Compact all partners had signed up to it but political leadership was needed. This was a big task in a 4 year period but it would hopefully break down barriers.
- Colin Copus referred to political leadership and the community. Leadership was interchangeable however there was a need for a vision together with direction and a framework. At some point this maybe party political but it was important that all parties could sign sin up to it and make it binding. Hopefully this would enable the system to bring on board all organisations centrally.
- He also referred to mechanisms that were already in place to enhance the role of the Councillor such as ward based budgets. This may also mean that decisions are being made by 'political opponents'. He questioned how the representative system engaged with the public. He considered that the public did not come to talking shops and interact but they would get involved in discussions and it was the councillor's role to make it work.

CLOSE OF MEETING

The meeting ended at 5:20 p.m.