



Executive Summary - Qualitative Research

Focus Group with under heard groups

Report for Lambeth Council

September 2007

working with you

to improve social results

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1. Introduction

The aim of this research is to ascertain the views of particular groups resident in the borough of Lambeth to inform the Sustainable Community Strategy (SCS), which is being developed by Lambeth First, the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP). This qualitative research exercise provides an evidence base, using the views and perceptions of residents in the borough, to support improvements in service delivery. The SCS will set out the actions for Lambeth council and its partners in the next few years and in doing so will establish a picture of what Lambeth needs to look like in 2020.

The objectives of this research exercise are as follows:

- Analyse and identify the issues as highlighted in the 2005 survey of Lambeth residents (both of adults, young people and children) and the 2006 BVPI general survey that the research should explore further
- Explore reasons behind residents' concerns and views on quality of life in Lambeth
- Explore key issues impacting on residents' perceptions of the council, its services and other public services in Lambeth
- Investigate the reasons behind significant differences between sub-groups of residents' perceptions, i.e. demographic and geographical sub-groups; service users and non-users etc.

This is a summary of the full report, which is available on request.

2. Methodology

There were two stages to this project:

- Desk research to identify gaps in knowledge about particular issues or groups and
- Fieldwork to address the gaps arising from the desk research;

The focus groups and paired interviews selected to be part of this project were initially identified from the desk research and finalised after discussions with relevant directorates within the council. During these discussions, as well as confirming the groups to be consulted, there was further exploration of the issues to be covered during each discussion, which were also expanded. In essence this meant that while there was a core discussion guide containing questions that were to be covered by all the focus groups and paired depths¹, there was also a range of questions focussing on specific areas of interest to specific groups.

The final list of focus groups and paired depths that were conducted as part of this project were:

¹ In some instances it was felt that carrying out face-to-face interviews with pairs of people would be a more suitable approach to elicit people's views about the issues we were discussing than larger focus group discussions. Paired-depths offer a more secure environment for people who may feel less confident, or able to participate in a larger group process.

Focus Groups

- 7 to 11 year olds
- 12 to 16 year olds
- 16 to 21 year olds
- Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community²
- Emerging (Polish) community
- Muslim women
- North Lambeth – business community
- Clapham³ & Stockwell – general public
- Clapham – Young Professionals
- Brixton – not working
- Norwood – social housing and older people

Paired Interviews

- People with mental health issues
- People with learning disabilities
- People with physical disabilities
- Carers
- Elderly and vulnerable people

3. Summary of findings

Lambeth is a diverse borough, both in terms of the people that live and work there and its geographical make up. This diversity is reflected in the views of residents, with each group providing their own unique experiences and stories on living in Lambeth. Often the issues and concerns raised by residents reflect the diversity of localities and the particular communities that make up Lambeth. Nonetheless, we are able to extrapolate some key themes that have been identified as priorities during this exercise.

Residents involved in this exercise have mixed views on living in Lambeth. Whilst there is the general perception that life is improving, residents identified services that need further attention. Although many residents felt that Lambeth looked better, as a result of cleaner streets and better physical environment, they often stated that they did not feel better, which was driven by a perception of high levels of crime and community safety and poor service provision. The following section summarises some of the key issues that were identified during this exercise:

- The **diversity** of the borough is a draw to many residents. This diversity contributes to variation between localities with many residents suggesting that this contributed to the

² A second group was carried out with this community due to low attendance at the initial group

³ A second group was carried out with young professionals from Clapham due to interesting issues arising from the first group

dynamism of the borough, enjoying the cultural benefits that this affords. The council could build on the cultural capital within the borough to facilitate more interaction between cultures and different generations.

- **Crime and community safety** surfaced as a key priority for most of the participating communities. There is a perception of high prevalence of crime, particularly in certain hotspots such as Brixton and Stockwell. Many residents correlate anti social behaviour with lack of youth diversionary activities, and, drug and alcohol abuse. Information on existing youth activities in the borough could serve to provide diversionary activities for young residents in the borough and offer an additional forum for young people to interact with their peers.
- Whilst **Police Community Support Officer's (PCSO)** are more visible, a number of residents were uncertain of their powers and responsibilities. More clarity and information on the remit of their jurisdiction and their responsibilities may instil more faith in their role as community safety enforcement officers.
- Residents that access **social care services** recognise the value this adds to their quality of life and frequently request help from their social workers. However, many participants felt that this service was unresponsive and unsympathetic. Participants suggested that better communication between service providers and service users, particularly providing feedback on decisions that relate to the service users care, could help challenge the perception that social services are unresponsive to need. In addition, participants felt that there is a lack of information on other social care services and facilities that are on offer to them and felt uninformed on how they can better manage their own care.
- Some groups felt that accessing **social housing** is challenging. Participants often did not have a clear understanding of the criteria for allocation and therefore feel that it is a long and difficult process. Participants that are currently living in social housing felt that the condition of the property is poor and that allocation of housing can be inappropriate leading to tensions within communities.
- Lambeth has a **good range of leisure facilities** that reflect the needs of the various community groups in the borough. Participants enjoy using the parks and leisure facilities that exist within the borough. Nonetheless, there was suggestion that improvement to access, particularly for women with young children and physically disabled participants, would better accommodate the needs of residents.
- The **council is not visible** which may contribute to a lack of trust and uncertainty as to how effective the council is on delivering on service provision. In thinking about the Local Strategic Partnership, residents focussed discussion on Police and the NHS, but had little awareness of other agencies.
- Some groups of residents had little awareness of services that the council delivers, and the council is perceived to **focus more on vulnerable residents** and therefore did not equally cater to the needs of all residents.
- Residents were generally **positive about the way the council communicates to residents**, suggesting that the council frequently sends letters to keep them informed. However, residents were less well informed about where to access additional information that they need.

- In discussing future **involvement** in council activities, there was a varied response as to what the optimum level of involvement is. Some residents favoured face to face contact with the council whilst other residents, particularly young professionals, suggested use of bill boards.
- Residents were keen to receive more **feedback on consultations** undertaken by the council, providing open and honest feedback on what is working well and, importantly, what is working less well.

Group specific issues and key priorities

This section provides a quick guide to the main issues by each population group rather than clustered by theme

Business community

- **Parking restrictions have a negative impact on passing trade.** In addition the group wanted a bigger pedestrianised area.
- **Limited contact with the council** – Contact with the council often focused on charges or indemnities and not on “positive” communication.
- **Property database** – Participants suggested that it would be useful if they had information on empty properties and available premises. This would reflect better service delivery and improved communication between the council and the business community.
- **Conservation and regeneration** – The business community hoped to regenerate the area while maintaining the character of the area (Lower Marsh Street). The business owners wanted to encourage independent shop owners, while ensuring that conservation in the area is of a high standard.
- **Improved signage from Waterloo** – This would encourage passing trade in the area.

7 – 11 year olds

- **Increase the range of leisure facilities in the area** – Young people were keen to see activities such as tennis, archery and bowling in their area.
- **Ensure the affordability of leisure services** – Young people often attend leisure facilities as a family and therefore suggested that the affordability of the leisure services should be a council priority.
- **Better allocation of housing** – Young people felt that older residents were housed nearby and this restricted the possibility of them enjoying themselves and making noise.
- **Greater focus to alleviate crime and fear of crime** – Young people were concerned about the levels of youth crime and felt that more should be done to alleviate this.

11- 16-year-old residents

- **Greater focus to alleviate gun crime and violent crime amongst young people** – There is a prevalent concern that crime amongst young people is increasing and that greater resource should be focused on diversionary activities.
- **More activities to be provided for young people on weekends and during school holidays** – Young people felt that often youth activities did not extend to weekends and school holidays. Provision of such activities was a further means of discouraging gang crime.

16 –21 year old residents

- **Better housing provision for people under age of 23** – Young people felt that it was particularly difficult for them to get access to housing due to their age.
- **Better information on job opportunities for young people making the transition from education to job market** – Many young people were uncertain on how to enter the job market upon leaving school and suggested that there should be greater provision of information and job opportunities within the borough, specifically for people that did not have experience.
- **Increase level of benefits for young people** – Cost of living was felt to be particularly high for this group who were at an early stage of their careers and had limited disposable income, this should be reflected in the benefits that are allocated to them, including discount on travel.
- **Improved diversionary initiatives** – Activities for young people to prevent them from drifting into crime.

Carers

- **More support for financially secure carers** – some carers had limited entitlements due to access to personal funds; however, they felt that they still needed council support.
- **Affordable care** – The cost of council social care has increased significantly which has resulted in the carers not being able to access care and support for the people they care for – this increase in charges had not been agreed at the time the research was carried out.

Elderly vulnerable people

- **More community activities** – Elderly vulnerable people often described themselves as isolated and felt that greater provision of community activities, catering to their needs, would improve quality of life in Lambeth.
- **Better provision of information** – Often people did not have access to information, finding it difficult to read or to know where to locate the information

they needed. They suggested that Council Officers should come to their house to inform them of local activities.

- **Change of carers** – Elderly, vulnerable people found it difficult to build up personal relationships with carers given that they changed frequently, which made it difficult for them to manage their care.

Residents with mental health issues

- **Maintain good day care centres** – the participants had generally had good experiences with adult social care services in the borough. They were keen to emphasise the importance of such services, specifically day care centres, in helping people live with mental health illness. To this end, it is important that such services continue to be accessible to residents in the borough.

Residents with physical disabilities

- **Responsive social care** – Participants discussed occasions in which they felt that social workers had not responded in a timely manner to their queries or their concerns. As a result, they often had sought assistance from other statutory agents, such as doctors, or had contacted advocates and voluntary sector bodies.
- **Lack of access to leisure services** – Leisure services did not adequately accommodate the needs of people with physical disabilities, for instance, non-functioning lifts. This excluded people from enjoying leisure services in the borough.
- **Lack of information on service provision** – Often, participants relied on their peers or other support networks, such as FE colleges, to acquire information on the services and benefits entitlements.

Residents with learning disabilities

- **Social workers to be more responsive to the requests of people with learning disabilities** – In particular, better attendance at Lambeth Learning Disability Partnership Board meetings.
- **Better communication between social workers and people with learning disabilities** – This includes more face to face meetings and regular informal contact.
- **Health care practitioners to tailor service provision for people with learning disabilities**, particularly with the use of signage and more accessible information provided in hospitals.

LGBT residents

- **Recognise and celebrate the lifestyle of LGBT residents** – Festivals and gay cultural events to celebrate the contribution of LGBT residents to the borough.

- **Tackle homophobic abuse** – This could be achieved through better systems of monitoring homophobic bullying in schools, with some focus on homophobic incidents. There was a perceived 'hierarchy of equalities', in which LGBT issues were not prioritised. The council should be seen to lead on LGBT issues to restore confidence amongst this community.
- More **intergenerational activities** to build better communities - involving elderly and young residents in community events.

Brixton Residents – Unemployed

- **Greater focus on crime and community safety, particularly gun crime** – More youth diversionary activities and increase the number and visibility of PCSO's, particularly on the side streets.
- **More community centres for arts and cultural events** – This could include sports and cultural events particularly for young people in Lambeth.
- **Prevent the harassment of young people by police** – Participants thought that young people were harassed by police officers. To ensure better relationships between young people and police officers, this issue should be addressed.
- **Increase the incentives for employment** – There is a lack of local, well paid jobs as well as affordable childcare to encourage people back into work. Need a clear financial incentive.
- **More support to develop local businesses and skill development** – Increased awareness amongst residents of existing support that is offered within Lambeth, as well as opportunities for development of skills in ICT, would be welcomed.

Clapham and Stockwell Residents

- **Tackle crime** – Provide programme for young people, particularly in crime hotspots.
- **Greater accountability and transparency of Council spending** – Residents wanted to ensure that resources were allocated appropriately. In addition, there should be greater visibility of the Council successes.
- **More joined up services within the council** – Continuity of service provision has been lost.

Clapham Young Professionals

- **More community events** – Community wide events should be held on Clapham Common, for instance open air cinema or cultural events
- **Greater visibility of information on council priorities and events** – Particularly on billboards and notice boards in the area

- **Improved street cleaning and rubbish collection** – Residents are keen to have cleaner streets, particularly in footpaths near large estates and on Clapham Common.

West Norwood – Elderly Residents

- **Better provision of social care services** – Provide feedback and a more timely response to requests for help.
- **More information** – Many members of the group suggested that they rely on their friends and family to provide them with information. They wanted more assistance in accessing information on service provision in Lambeth
- **Value for money and greater accountability** – Residents need assurance that council funds are used efficiently and that council spending secures outcomes for communities that reside in Lambeth.

Muslim Women

- **A lack of activities for young Muslims in Lambeth** – Muslim women are keen to have more culturally specific activities for young people, particularly for young women. Facilities should also have a crèche. A number of the group suggested that there should be a Muslim centre that could provide services for Muslim communities in the borough.
- **Information on local activities** – There is a lack of information on activities in the borough, particularly for people that have recently arrived in to the country.
- **Better housing provision** – There was concern that housing allocation did not fit the needs of families, and often families were poorly housed. They thought that the new ALMO may improve housing.

Emerging communities – Polish Residents

- **The Council should have closer links to Polish newspapers and culturally specific advocacy services** – This would ensure that Polish residents are informed about service provision in the borough, such as GP and health care services. They are keen to have more information on schools, particularly school places in Catholic schools.
- **Extra support for Polish children in schools** – There is some concern that children are lagging behind their English speaking counterparts and that additional support would enable them to participate better in school.
- **Access to English language courses** – A number of people in the group want easier access to English language courses, but felt that course provision often conflicted with their work schedule. They suggest that access to English language courses enables them to mix better with other communities and reduce suspicions and negative attitudes towards Polish people.