

# Local Area Agreements Wednesday, 22<sup>nd</sup> February at VAC

## SUMMARY REPORT

### Local Area Agreements

Local Area Agreements are a Government initiative. They are an Agreement between central Government and local government and its partners (via the Local Strategic Partnership) to bring together plans and funds for local services and negotiate local targets.

Camden is one of the boroughs involved in the second round of Local Area Agreements (they were piloted last year). Camden's Local Area Agreement is to begin in April 2006.

There are four blocks in Camden's Local Area Agreement:

- Children & Young People
- Healthier Communities and Older People
- Safer & Stronger Communities
- Economic development and enterprise

Each block has committed to deliver a particular set of local outcomes (for example, improving mental health and well being in Camden under Healthier Communities & Older People) and there are a list of indicators that will be used to measure their success in achieving these outcomes.

There are also three "cross-cutting themes" that all of the blocks will look to address. These are:

- Tackling worklessness
- Offering support to parents
- Reducing the problems of drugs and alcohol

Rather than a grant bidding process, it has been decided that services will be commissioned (services that satisfy local needs will be contracted from appropriate providers) to deliver the outcomes of each block. Service needs will be outlined by the panels and then appropriate organisations will be invited to propose how they could provide a service to meet these needs.

There will be six commissioning panels with the amount they can currently allocate for 2006/7 indicated in brackets:

- Stronger communities (£1, 141, 117)
- Safer communities (£1,502, 292)
- Children & Young People (£1, 139, 022)
- Healthier communities (£1, 289, 692)

- Older People (£329, 346)
- Economic development and enterprise (£878, 256)

There is common commissioning guidance for all six panels and they are just beginning to meet.

The commissioning guidance suggests that the panels should commission larger projects, but the relative size of projects is still to be confirmed as there are regulations on the size of contracts that have to be offered for competitive tender. It has been agreed that a large project could offer parts of the project delivery to other organisations.

Because of concern about losing the Community Chest, which supported many smaller groups to do project work, there has also been funding set aside within the Local Area Agreement for an Innovations Fund (£500 000 over two years) and voluntary and community sector members are arguing for part of the Stronger Communities block of funding to be used for a Community Chest fund.

### **Update on each of the commissioning panels**

#### **Healthier communities**

Voluntary and community sector members of panel: Maureen Brewster (Camden Health & Race Group) and Mark Harrod (Central YMCA)  
Neighbourhood partnership member of panel: Gillian Hall (Camden Central Community Umbrella).

Priorities: Mental health, sexual health, alcohol misuse, smoking cessation and tackling obesity.

A cross-cutting theme is reducing health inequalities, so all projects will have to demonstrate how they will do this.

There are people from the Older People's and Children & Young People's commissioning panels on this panel to ensure that these themes are also integrated into the process.

Projects will be centred around the neighbourhood renewal areas.

The PCT Public Health Department is currently researching gaps in service provision in each of these priority areas and finding which of the neighbourhood renewal areas is worst affected by the priority issues, to inform the process of the next meeting.

#### **Children & Young People**

Voluntary and community sector members of the panel: Mohammed Hussein (Children & Families Network), Trevor Sharman (Coram Families)  
Neighbourhood Partnership member of panel: Fran Heron (Families in Focus; Camden Central Community Umbrella)

Priorities: Safeguarding, Healthy Living, Enjoying and Achieving, Economic well-being, Positive Contribution

The sub-boards of the Children & Young People's partnerships cover each of these areas and each will have a commissioning function. Mohammed Hussein (mhussein@vac.org.uk) made a request for more members of voluntary and community sector to join these boards. Members of the panel are currently conducting a gap analysis, of each of these areas of service provision.

### **Stronger Communities**

Voluntary and community sector members: Justina Forristal (Kentish Town Community Centre), Simon Luscombe (Camden LGBT Forum), Omar Yusuf (Somali Community Centre), Simone Hensby (Voluntary Action Camden), Stuart Chadboren (Camden Citizen's Advice Bureau)

Neighbourhood partnership member: Miranda Martin (Camden Central Community Umbrella)

The panel has not yet met. There is currently no commissioning strategy or priorities in place. They have been asked to look at the outcomes in the Stronger Communities block of the Local Area Agreement.

### **Safer Communities**

Voluntary and community sector member: Peter Ward (Camden Community Police Consultative Group)

Neighbourhood Partnership member: Mike Stuart (South Hampstead Area Partnership)

Camden has already developed a three year Community Safety Strategy, of which this is the first year. There was a lot of community participation in developing the Strategy and it will form the basis for the Local Area Agreement priorities. At the first meeting of the commissioning panel they were still feeling their way but had agreed to go away and research gaps in services and what was already funded by which different funding streams. It was also agreed that there would be an emphasis on neighbourhood work.

### **Economic development and enterprise**

Voluntary and community sector members: Hazel Capper (Camden Training Network), Winston Costello (Camden ITEC)

Neighbourhood Partnership member: Mohammed Hassan (Somali Cultural Centre; Kilburn Neighbourhood Partnership)

There was already an Education, Training and Employment Partnership in Camden and the commissioning panel was formed as a sub-group of this. There are two elements to this panel. The enterprise element may be covered by funding from the Local Economic Growth Initiative, which LB Camden has applied for. Economic development will be covered by education, employment and training. The Group has met once and agreed that its priorities will be based on the broad outcomes of the Local Area Agreement. They are currently conducting a gap analysis of services to feed into the next meeting.

### **Older People**

Voluntary and Community Sector members: Gary Jones (Age Concern Camden)

Neighbourhood Partnership members: Frances Eley (Camden Central Older People's Partnership), Wendy Munro (Caversham Neighbourhood Partnership)

There had been one meeting of this commissioning panel and there were still vacancies for voluntary and community sector members of the panel. They were still feeling their way and needed to think how the Quality of Life Strategy and higher care needs can be addressed within this agenda and how the Group links with health and social care issues via the Healthier

Communities commissioning panel. They also need to think how it relates to the Partnership for Older People's Project (POPP) for which LB Camden has bid.

## **Discussion – issues raised**

### **Membership of the panels**

- There was concern that there were no members of Bangladeshi groups on the partnership panels, as the Bangladeshi community is the largest minority community in Camden. The point was made that it was not solely up to the voluntary and community sector to address Black and Minority Ethnic communities' issues – this was a duty of all the partners
- There was concern about the inconsistent way in which voluntary and community sector members and neighbourhood partnership members had been selected for the panels. It was emphasised that members were not there as individuals or representatives of their organisations but were accountable to all the voluntary and community sector or all the Neighbourhood Partnerships. It was agreed that the names of members of the panels would be more widely circulated and their details would be put on the Network of Networks website.

### **The Commissioning process**

- There is no system for appealing against panel's decisions – all commissioning panels should agree an appeals process
- Monitoring and evaluation requirements need to be clearly stipulated in the service specification, so that groups can budget for this
- It is difficult to see how the cross-cutting issues will be addressed. None of the blocks seems to be addressing the role of the voluntary and community sector as an employer (they often employ more local people and people from disadvantaged communities) – there should be an indicator to reflect this
- When comparing proposals, will it be taken into account that the Council and other statutory organisations do not include their full costs, such as accommodation and IT costs? And will the voluntary and community sector be at a disadvantage if they include these costs? How can the voluntary and community sector demonstrate its added value in linking people and so building communities and social cohesion?
- How will it be ensured that there is clarity and transparency around who is asked to tender? How will members of the panel know who is providing which services?
- There needs to be consistency across all the panels. Is it sufficient that panel leads will be meeting regularly outside of the panel meetings?
- There were concerns at the way this process has been so rushed and that no details had been received by groups before this meeting.
- It was important that this year we try to make the best of the situation as it is, but look forward to improving the process, and voluntary and community sector involvement in it, next year.

### **Involving small voluntary and community sector groups**

- It is not clear how much there is a genuine desire to commission services from voluntary and community sector organisations – experience in the housing sector suggests that this type of system often results in fewer and larger contracts and the more specialist and smaller voluntary and community sector groups not being funded.
- There were concerns that smaller groups would not be involved in this process. It was argued that often smaller groups had received much training and developed to a stage where they were now ready to deal with a contract – it should not be assumed that they would not have the capacity to manage, administer and monitor a contract.
- Small groups could also look at developing clusters of groups who could deliver a particular service to a diverse range of communities. In other areas they have developed voluntary and community sector commissioning agencies, which manage contracts for small voluntary and community sector groups. Alternatively one group could be commissioned to provide a large service and then allowed to pay smaller groups to deliver different parts to specific communities or areas.
- If the results of the panels' decisions were publicised immediately this would allow groups to consider how they might enhance or aid the delivery of the services commissioned and allow them to contact and negotiate with the contracted organisation.

### **Actions**

- A report of this meeting will be circulated to members of the panels, those attending and those who expressed an interest in attending but had a previous engagement
- Members of the panel will try to clarify the issues raised within the discussion
- The attendees of this meeting will form the basis for an e-mail group that will be kept informed of progress around the Local Area Agreement and the commissioning panels