INQUIRY INTO SERVICE COORDINATION IN COMMUNITIES WITH HIGH SOCIAL NEEDS

Organisation: Liverpool City Council

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Legislative Council Standing Committee on Social Issues.

Inquiry into service coordination in communities with high social needs.

Introduction

Liverpool City Council welcomes the opportunity to submit a response to the Legislative Council Standing Committee on Social Issues Inquiry into service coordination in communities with high social needs.

Liverpool City Council's response is grounded in 15 years of practical experience working in and through communities characterised by high levels of social need. On the basis of that experience, two assertions may be made at the outset.

Firstly, Council's approach is underpinned by a view that, in terms of public policy, there are no longer separate economic, social and community relations agendas that can be pursued in isolation, since each set of problems interpenetrates with the others. Poor community relations can undermine the quest for competitiveness while exacerbating social disadvantage. While integrated intervention has become a mantra and a diversity of partnerships proliferates at various levels, there are few concrete examples of integrated planning and service delivery. Yet the imperative to do so is compelling. The dilemma is that we know what needs to be done but face many difficulties transforming actual practice.

Secondly, from the perspective of any public body, two fundamentals apply: how to best manage and deliver services; and how to work with and through communities not only as recipients of such services but also as a provider of services, having resources and informal networks of support (to which people turn first in times of trouble) which exist independently of any statutory or voluntary agency.

Part of the response, therefore, is to investigate the needs of an area and to plan and co-ordinate services and resources as a whole. Thus any specific service would not be self-contained but would be part of a network of services together with the mobilisation of community resources and volunteers to meet identified need – a community development response. Such an approach would be complementary to specific services and not an alternative to them.

Planning, within Council and other statutory providers, therefore must emphasise communities and networks and not the needs of isolated units and organisations. The community must be seen as a provider and not just a recipient of services. There is general acceptance that people should be involved in both the planning and administration of services and the present financial challenges facing all levels of administration have emphasised the need to work together. This must not be seen, however, as "welfare on the cheap". It may be argued that partnership is a necessity, but not just for financial reasons. The development of that partnership will not require less resources and possibly more, but the investment will yield greater returns, that is, in terms of better and more effective interventions with those in need. While no blue-print can determine what is required in any specific situation, the combined resources of government should be utilised to greater effect.

Before highlighting Council's flagship partnership initiative, a brief overview of the Local Government Area is provided by way of context.

Background

The South West region is the fastest growing sub-region in Sydney. That process has been given added momentum by the development of Badgery's Creek Airport which will act as a further catalyst for investment in jobs and infrastructure in the sub-region as well as enhance connections to other cities in Australia and around the world. The South West Growth Centre will therefore continue to play a key role in providing jobs for future residents.

The Liverpool Local Government Area (LGA) covers an area of 305 square kilometres and is comprised of both urban and rural communities. The city is identified as a regional city centre in the NSW "A Plan for Growing Sydney". Its current population of just under 200,000 is projected to grow to 236,950 by 2021 and 288,950 by 2031.

Liverpool is also one of the most culturally diverse cities in Australia. Currently some 150 ethnic identities comprise the social fabric of the city: the top five languages are English, Arabic, Vietnamese, Hindi, and Italian, with 41% of the population speaking another language as well as English.   The top five birthplaces are Australia, Fiji, Iraq, Vietnam, and India.

With linguistic and cultural diversity also come the challenges of social cohesion, educational attainment and economic development. And while the city can point to a thriving small business sector, a significant industrial base with strong manufacturing, logistics and transport sectors, and health and medical sectors clustered around Liverpool Hospital that offer world leading research and development capabilities, areas of Liverpool experience stubbornly high levels of disadvantage, dislocation and distress at community, family and individual levels.

Areas like Miller, Cartwright, Sadleir and Ashcroft exhibit many of the characteristics that contribute to growing inequality: low educational attainment, high levels of unemployment (in some instances, twice the Sydney average), welfare dependency and the tyranny of a culture of low expectations. It is in these areas that the rhetoric of public policy and co-ordination of service delivery meets its most severe test.

One example may be cited that illustrates the successes and constraints associated with partnership approaches to service delivery within the Liverpool Local Government Area.

Community 2168 Project

"Community 2168" takes its name from the area's postcode and covers the suburbs Ashcroft, Busby, Cartwright, Green Valley, Heckenberg, Hinchinbrook, Miller and Sadleir. Described as a "major community renewal and capacity building partnership," the Community 2168 Project began in 1999 in response to a crisis in public safety alongside the closure of the bank, the police station and other local services, which left residents feeling abandoned.

In response to the crisis, Council set up forums for residents and local service providers – including local NGOs, police, housing, health and community services – to come together to identify problems and devise ways of dealing with them. In the early years, the focus was on

tackling crime, through policing and prevention measures, and increasing the range of services in the area. A new Police and Community Youth Club was set up, for example, and parks and other public areas were upgraded.

Community 2168 Project now is an established partnership that brings residents, business, government and community organisations together to align and better target services, facilities and opportunities in response to the felt and expressed needs of the local community. It enjoys the sponsorship of Housing NSW, South Western Sydney Local Health District and Liverpool City Council. Other departments and resident representatives provide in kind and financial support during the course of the project. The project focuses on community renewal, service coordination and community ownership.

A multi-stakeholder Management Committee oversees the formulation and implementation of the initiative's strategy. Committee members include:

- 7 Resident Representatives
- The State Member for Liverpool
- 8 Government Agency Representatives
    - Liverpool City Council
    - South Western Sydney Local Health District
    - Department of Family and Community Services - Housing NSW
    - NSW Police, Green Valley Local Area Command
    - Department of Family and Community Services – Community Services
    - Department of Education and Communities
    - TAFE NSW, South Western Institute - Miller College
    - Department of Premier and Cabinet
- 2 Non Government Organisation Representatives
    - Liverpool Migrant Resource Centre
    - Mission Australia – Miller Pathways
- 2 local Business representatives

The Management Committee has defined its core operational function as follows:

- To facilitate local responses to community priorities such as:
    - crime and safety
    - services and supports for children, families and young people
    - health and wellbeing
    - education and training
    - employment
    - urban amenity and public space
    - partnership and collaboration
    - nurturing effective relationships between government and the local community
    - community capacity, participation and leadership
    - community harmony

- Facilitate the coordination of service delivery to ensure the best outcomes for the community.

- Commission research as appropriate, to ensure evidence based responses to local community priorities.
- Provide flexibility to address issues raised by local communities.
- Plan within the framework of diversity, in respect of culture and geographic location of communities in 2168.
- Provide community members with the capacity to inform and influence decision making around their futures.
- Ensure that people are well informed of decisions affecting their community through a communication strategy.
- Work with existing forums and processes as appropriate.
- Ensure government and community services remain accountable to the community.
- Facilitate effective long term planning.

Measures of success

An independent evaluation of the most recent 2168 Strategic Plan outlined that the Project had succeeded in:

- Enhancing networking and cross sector-collaboration;
- Connecting and engaging the local community providing opportunity to increase equitable access to facilities and resources for residents;
- Problem solving, sharing knowledge and addressing local needs;
- Promoting grass roots community development as well as policy and social investment including education, employment and health service providers, programs for young people, children and culturally diverse community groups, active representation of charity and community groups and access to community facilities;
- Effecting a general perception of improvement in the area;
- Restoring strong community pride and a renewed sense of belonging;
- Achieving a significant improvement in crime and safety and drug related issues.

Examples of highly effective services developed through collaboration and partnerships include:

- **Green Valley Domestic Violence Team** - provides support, counselling and case management to people experiencing domestic violence. Initially targeting the 2168 postcode, the approach has been expanded to cover the Liverpool LGA.
- **Miller Campus** - supported accomodation for young people engaged in study or work and who can't live at home for various reasons. Case management and mentoring services are provided.
- **Living Fair Café** - a community café which provides training and employment to people with mental health disabilities.
- **The Hub** - a community health facility and resource centre based in Miller providing residents with access to resources such as meeting rooms, access to services such as Centrelink and Anglicare, community events, regular volunteering opportunities and programs such as job seeker breakfast clubs and health promotion activities

- **Speakouts** - held in every suburb of 2168 to encourage residents to have their say about social matters, enabling agency planning to be better aligned to resident needs and issues. The Speakouts also ensure regular events are held in each suburb fostering community pride and participation in community life.
- **Living Streets** in 2168 / urban renewal - transformation of 5 public spaces in the 2168 area with community gardens and public art. Providing training in art and horticulture through workshops for residents involved in the projects, providing access to fresh food through veggie gardens, beautifying public space, improving safety through regular activities at previously unused sites and fostering community pride.
- **Community engagement** - increased governance by residents of their area through Management Committee/Working Party membership.
- **Skill development** - 2168 Resident Action Group members hold an annual Community Health and Fun Day and 2168 Youth members organise fortnightly music activities at the local PCYC. These capacity building activities provide volunteering opportunities, skill development with pathways to employment and performance opportunities for up and coming bands and artists. Training was held for residents, including young people, in 'Effective Meeting Procedures: chairing and minute taking', Event Management and Sound Technology: using a PA system. Exchange between residents of 2168 and residents of Wilmot was facilitated to encourage collaboration and information share between the two similar areas.
- **Community events** - organised by residents for residents, providing valuable community information, community pride cultural activities and volunteering opportunities.
- **Small Grants Program** - $30,000 was distributed to local community groups and residents resulting in sustainable community projects. For example, a small business was established by local women who received training in making affordable, natural skin care products. These women are now providing training to other local groups and sell their products at regular community markets to generate income and provide access to affordable goods.
- **2168 newsletter** - developed and distributed bimonthly by a local volunteer, providing increased access to relevant community information.
- **Resources for residents** - the project has attracted more than $1.5m to the community via grants since June 2006 and over $1 million in kind resources to be put toward community programs, activities and infrastructure.
- **Project evaluation** - 10 years of evidence from an independent project evaluation process has determined that the Community 2168 Project and associated community infrastructure improves outcomes for residents of the 2168 postcode.

Further examples of substantive practical outcomes, drawn from the past three years, include:

- Facilitating and resourcing community and government collaboration in the planning and delivery of over twenty five community events including: Health and Family Day, Youth Leadership, Harmony Day, Family and Children's Week, Employment and Education Expo and White Ribbon Day – engaging over 13,000 community members;

- Facilitating up to fifteen partnerships annually;
- Undertaking community safety campaigns and audits across the 2168 postcode and implementing up to forty (40) safety recommendations;
- Providing advocacy and support to urban renewal, beautification and public art projects at nine sites;
- Implementing social enterprise projects like the 2168 Community Markets;
- Establishing the 2168 Employment, Training and Outreach Centre at Miller, accessed by over two thousand people annually;
- Facilitating learning through mentoring, work placement and volunteering opportunities to residents and students;
- Supporting strategic service planning for health and well-being programs;
- Facilitating community consultation, information and awareness strategies;
- Leveraging of grants and funded projects valued at over $900K during the 2014/15 financial year.

The success of the project has been recognised through several prestigious awards:

- 2009 Premier's Public Sector Awards: Engaging with Community
- 2012 and 2014 Zest Award Nominee: Exceptional Partnership in a Local Government Area
- 2015 University of New South Wales Research Centre for Primary Health Care and Equity Collaboration and Engagement.

Barriers to success

Several factors have been identified consistently to act against successful partnership working and the co-ordination of service delivery:

- The failure, on the part of policy makers, to take a long term view of effecting change. Poverty is deep-rooted, multi-dimensional and complex. There are no 'quick-fix' solutions.
- Compounding the above failure is the tyranny of the short-term funding cycles. Securing the resources, both financial and human, necessary to break the cycle of disadvantage and sustain change is dependent on bi-partisan political support over time.
- The absence of institutional memory arising from the constant movement of senior staff within Government bodies and agencies. The result is a bias towards "innovation" and a failure to learn "what works" and, critically, what does not.
- The stubborn resistance of Government silo mentality resulting in the absence of functional alignment across mainstream service providers. Fragmentation, duplication and the dissipation of effort results.
- The failure to purposefully engage the private sector, including major financial institutions, in addressing "market failure" in areas of disadvantage. Getting the market to work better in such areas can affect substantive outcomes in the form of training and employment opportunities, promoting the social economy and building affordable housing.

Learning from the European experience of social partnership.

In seeking to build on the success of the 2168 model, Council has begun a process of exploring best practice models of social partnership with a view to effecting greater systemic connectivity, integration and complementarity in regard to service delivery. That process is being led by a senior member of staff who has had first hand experience, as CEO, of a ground breaking model developed in Belfast, Northern Ireland, which was recognised by the European Union as a best practice implementing Body under EU Structural Funds Programme.

Since the early 1990s, European funding has supported bottom-up local partnership approaches as a deliberate act of policy. Such bodies have been mandated with a twin mission:

- To act as a conduit for voice, participation and democratic engagement;
- To produce substantive outcomes in the form of jobs, skills and training to address both market and public policy failures in employment and development.

The relative strengths and weaknesses of the initial EU partnership model as an aspect of regional governance are well documented – OECD (2001), PWC (2003), Deloitte (2004). At best, the model brought together a broad range of stakeholders to deliver more effectively in terms of public intervention in areas of employability, social exclusion and participative democracy. Less convincingly, the model often failed to operate at a strategic level or to achieve substantive impact, leaving it open to the charge of being a marginalised provider for the marginalised.

In Northern Ireland, the chosen partnership model was the Local Strategy Partnerships. Under the Special EU Peace and Reconciliation Programmes (Peace I and Peace II) the challenges of addressing the legacy of violence and taking opportunities arising from peace were added to the objectives of social inclusion and local economic development.

By addressing systemic weaknesses, through deliberate construction of membership, mandate and mutual accountabilities at several levels, Belfast LSP demonstrated that the partnership model could work as a highly effective social policy instrument that could add value to the structures of governance in the city. It delivered substantive outcomes by way of:

- Pioneering innovative approaches to areas of public policy regarded generally as problematic;
- Delivering quantitative dividends of peace in the form of jobs, skills, training and educational opportunities for sections of the population furthest from the labour market;
- Establishing cross-community, cross-sectoral working at a strategic level based on trust and mutual respect;
- Disbursed, managed and controlled grant aid amounting to some $70m.

More difficult to quantify, though no less significant, were measures of prevention, where the potential for civil conflict – and attendant huge cost in terms of public expenditure - was averted as a direct result of relationships established through BLSP funded projects, particularly in interface areas. Context aside, the principle holds: government expenditure in preventative programs should be regarded as an "investment" rather than a "cost". Program promoters and local communities should subsequently be held jointly accountable for ensuring a return on that investment.

Given the diversity of Liverpool, we believe that an adaptation of the social partnership model, systemically linked to local governance structures, processes and strategies, can act as a vital part of enabling social infrastructure necessary to ensure future social cohesion and inclusion in the form of access to education, training and jobs for those currently furthest from the market place.

The co-ordination of service delivery is not only desirable, but necessary if such outcomes are to be achieved.

Concluding remarks

In conclusion, Liverpool City Council again thanks the Committee for providing an opportunity to assist the Committee in its deliberations and looks forward to the Committee's findings.

Footnote:

This submission is made on behalf of Liverpool City Council, having secured appropriate organisational approval. Details of the relevant organisational contact are as set out below:

Liverpool city council

Creating our future together