

<b>Item No.</b> 5	<b>Classification:</b> Open	<b>Date:</b> 14.12.05	<b>MEETING NAME:</b> Cross-Party Working Group
<b>Report title:</b>		Outcomes of the meeting of the Strategic Reference Group on 12 December 2005	
<b>Ward(s):</b>		All	
<b>From:</b>		Chief Executive	

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That the Working Group
  - notes the outcomes of the meeting of the Strategic Reference Group that took place on 12<sup>th</sup> December 2005 (see paragraphs 10-15);
  - agrees that, following the mainstreaming of responsibility for the implementation of Lord Ouseley's recommendations to the Executive, officers and executive members will maintain a dialogue and engagement with a wide range of community organisations and representatives across the full spectrum of equality and diversity dimensions.

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

2. Following discussions with a number of community organisations, the Working Group meeting on 31<sup>st</sup> May 2005 agreed to set up an Equality and Diversity Strategic Reference Group (SRG) of community stakeholders with expertise and leadership roles within the community across the equality dimensions of race, disability, gender, age, faith and sexual orientation. The purpose of the SRG was to provide input to the Working Group on implementation of the 35 recommendations in Lord Ouseley's report. There was no recommendation in his report to establish an advisory group of this sort but members of the Working Group felt that it could provide a useful additional means for engaging with BME and other communities as a complement to all the existing avenues.
3. The SRG met for its inaugural meeting on 22<sup>nd</sup> June and again on 19<sup>th</sup> July 2005. A meeting proposed for 4<sup>th</sup> October was postponed, although an informal meeting did take place involving five or six SRG members (including the acting Chair), to which some members of the public who were not SRG members were also invited. A further formal meeting of the SRG was subsequently arranged by the Council for 12<sup>th</sup> December.
4. The member Working Group was intended as a time-limited forum to focus on the initial actions required to take forward the recommendations. With the meeting on 14<sup>th</sup> December, this first phase will be completed. Many of the recommendations require sustained action over a long period and relate to core functions of the Council. As a consequence, the Working Group is proposing that the longer-term embedding of actions is mainstreamed, with the full Executive taking responsibility for performance review and monitoring.

5. The intention behind the SRG was for it to advise the Working Group on this first phase of implementation. The terms of reference of the SRG were debated but not agreed at the two meetings in June and July. Notwithstanding the absence of any formal framework, some members of the group agreed to form a “regeneration sub-group” at the close of the July meeting, in order to look at issues affecting traders in the Elephant & Castle area. This sub-group has since met on a number of occasions, although the Council has had no direct involvement, and it has written to the Council with a set of recommendations, which are said by it to have been ratified by the informal meeting held by some members of the SRG on 4<sup>th</sup> October.
6. These sub-group recommendations are primarily concerned with enhancing BME stakeholder involvement in different aspects of regeneration and with securing financial compensation for a) traders in and around the Elephant & Castle shopping centre, b) the proprietors of the former Imperial Gardens Nightclub and c) other (unidentified) current or former traders on Camberwell New Road. None of Lord Ouseley’s thirty-five recommendations are specifically concerned with the position of small businesses in Camberwell or the Elephant & Castle.
7. Following the informal SRG meeting in October, the Leader and Chief Executive of the Council have held discussions with a number of leading members of the BME community, (Rev. David Wade, Vice-Chair of Southwark Alliance and Chair Multi-faith Forum, Linda Bellos Chair SAVO and LGBT Network, Sunny Lambe, Director of Black Business Initiative, and Martin Seaton, Chair of SEA). In particular, they have discussed the most effective way of taking forward dialogue over the longer term about the implementation of the recommendations in Lord Ouseley’s report.
8. The main agenda item for the SRG meeting of 12<sup>th</sup> December was a presentation and discussion of the progress made by the Council in the implementation of Lord Ouseley’s recommendations. The central purpose was to provide an opportunity for community representatives to comment and give views on progress so far, which could then inform this final meeting of the member Working Group on 14<sup>th</sup> December.

#### **OUTCOMES OF THE MEETING OF THE SRG ON 12 DECEMBER 2005**

9. A list of those attending the meeting and the organisations represented by them is attached as Appendix B.
10. The minutes of the July meeting of the SRG were discussed. Concerns were raised over the omission from the minutes of comments from members of the public, which it had been agreed would be included. The minutes were approved, subject to the concerns raised.
11. Two matters arising from the minutes were discussed: the private meetings which had taken place between the Council and some BME community representatives; and the public meeting of some members of the SRG on 4<sup>th</sup> October. There was also some wider discussion of possible future ways of securing community engagement. The sub-group recommendations submitted to

the Council [see paragraphs 5-6 above] were accepted as an accurate record of the meeting of 4<sup>th</sup> October.

12. The Head of Social Inclusion presented progress to date on first phase implementation of Lord Ouseley's recommendations. Comments from individual community representatives and members of the public included the following:
  - There was much to be commended; a lot of hard work had gone in and there was some evidence of improvement.
  - Compared with other councils, Southwark was doing a good job on equality and diversity.
  - There needed to be greater involvement and participation by the community as partners, rather than just consultation on Council proposals (although this was a concern about local government in general)
  - Doubts were expressed over the suitability of the Audit Commission to review the Council's implementation of the recommendations.
  - Concerns were expressed over the methodology and approach taken by MORI for the residents' survey (although it was acknowledged by some that there were constraints imposed by government).
  - The headlines from the presentation were quite impressive but there were concerns around the handling of the complaints and an overly positive representation of Council regeneration in the press.
  - Lord Ouseley's recommendations were sensible and it was unclear why nothing had been done before e.g. on race awareness training for members.
  - The Council is too focused on promoting itself; the first thing it needs to do is accept that there is a problem but it won't do that. Radical solutions are needed for the whole Council to apply real race equality right the way through the organisation.
  - The presentation was all intention and no evidence.
13. No formal decisions or recommendations were made with regard to any of these comments. The Council agreed to take the views expressed away for further consideration.
14. A debate ensued about the process for investigating and resolving the complaints passed to the Council by Lord Ouseley and included in the annexe to his report. Members received a final report on this subject at the previous meeting of the Working Group on 21<sup>st</sup> November 2005. The complaints were not part of the original terms of reference of the SRG and the complaints process was not covered in the presentation to it on 12<sup>th</sup> December. The Council declined to reopen the issue at this stage. It was pointed out that any of the complainants who remained dissatisfied could complain to the Local Government Ombudsman.
15. The meeting was then disrupted by some of the participants, at which point it was formally closed by the Chair.

## **COMMUNITY IMPACT STATEMENT**

16. The Council has a duty to promote equality of opportunity, eliminate unlawful discrimination, and promote good relations between people of different

communities. The Strategic Reference Group was intended to make a direct contribution to the Council meeting that duty by providing a forum for the Working Group to engage with and receive advice from a range of key community stakeholders.

## REASONS FOR LATENESS

17. The meeting of the SRG took place only 48 hours before this meeting of the Working Group and so it was not possible to prepare a report for circulation in advance of the meeting.

## REASONS FOR URGENCY

18. As this is the last meeting of the Working Group, this is the last opportunity to provide it with feedback from the SRG.

## APPENDIX A

### Audit Trail

<i>Lead Officer</i>	Bob Coomber, Chief Executive		
<b>Report Author</b>	Graeme Gordon, Project Manager		
<b>Version</b>	Final		
<b>Dated</b>	14/12/05		
<b>Key Decision?</b>	No		
<u>CONSULTATION WITH OTHER OFFICERS / DIRECTORATES / EXECUTIVE MEMBER</u>			
<b>Officer Title</b>		<b>Comments Sought</b>	<b>Comments included</b>
Borough Solicitor & Secretary		No	No
Chief Finance Officer		No	No
Head of Social Inclusion		Yes	Yes
Executive Member		Yes	Yes
<i>Date final report sent to Constitutional Support Services</i>			14/12/05