

Report and Feedback – CfPS, Kensington and Chelsea Social Council

Museum of Brands 16.05.2018

On the 16th of May KCSC invited [Ed Hammond](#), Director of Programmes, Projects and Policy Developments at The Centre for Public Scrutiny to introduce and lead a discussion on their review of [Kensington and Chelsea Council's Governance](#). The meeting, part of an on-going series of events by the Grenfell Network Group, was attended by around 50 participants from across the North Kensington area and wider.

It is not the intention of this brief report to re-iterate what was said during the meeting but to capture comments and observations expressed at the end of the day. Armed with the reflections we aim impress on decision-makers the urgency in the need for change and influence the nature of change in line with views of the Voluntary and Community Sector and the communities we serve. We also aim to look to KCSC to see how we can deliver some of the suggestion made.

It was clear that at least one person, who straddled the voluntary and the community sector, had questions about the scope of the research into the community. They seemed, therefore, unconvinced by the findings. For those interested I have requested the document referred to from the floor with a view to circulating it.

The feedback broadly fell into three categories comments, suggestions and questions. The target of the feedback also fell in to three recipients, the Council, KCSC and CfPS.

Comments.

A common comment on the report was that **CfPS** had set the bar very low and that some of the 12 Steps could have been for any organisation. The following two comments exemplify this:

“The 12 steps are surely what is already expected of organisations!”

And... ***“This presents an easy tick list – they can virtually say they are working to it already.”***

Given the perception of a low bar being set, so suggested that **RBKC** could erroneously claim to be doing much of that which is recommended already, the result of such claims, it was felt, could make a bad situation worse.

One piece of feedback specifically for **CfPS** was the suspicion that they listened only to the loudest voices. CfPS had made available a public survey and had extended the deadline to ensure the residents and community groups had the opportunity to have their say.

One Achilles heel identified by one contributor was the seeming lack of consequences for **RBKC** after all the report is a list of recommendations and there are no sanctions for not delivering it.

A challenge was thrown out to **KCSC** and the wider community and voluntary sector as a whole when it was identified that change needs personal development of skills, knowledge and confidence to participate from the community, as well as political and structural change something, which cannot be left to the local authority to deliver alone.

There were a number of challenging comments made about **RBKC**. Some questioned the understanding of salaried staff who live out of borough whilst others expressed disquiet at the seeming ambivalence of the wealthier parts of the borough to the suffering in the north – perhaps even disenfranchisement. It was also suggested that the councillors ought to be wary of believing the May elections was a vindication of previous strategies.

“It ... be unfortunate if the political leadership at RBKC understood May’s election results as a vindication for their approach to governance, and became complacent about the need for change as a result. That would not only be a missed opportunity, but would let down many residents, particularly in the north of the borough, who need to be given confidence that their local authority understands the need for a fundamentally different relationship with the people it serves.”

A view held by some participants was that **RBKC** conducted business with the community from a paternalistic and transactional standpoint, a position compounded by a sense that the council and its machinery needs to learn to listen and to understand the emotions it faces – and not be afraid of it, recognising this does not mean losing power.

The council was also believed by some to remain plagued by poor communications – indeed some felt communications such as public meetings and the scrutiny forums just made things worse, with suggestions that some councillors needed to understand what empathy is. One response was:

“Challenges both technical and philosophical. The latter is much harder to achieve if RBK&C believe that North Ken is collateral damage in an otherwise successful borough, that those residents are an impediment, not people to be served, that they are agents of their own disadvantage – how can local people alter these beliefs? The example of Rotherham as a council that didn’t want to acknowledge it had a fundamental problem, but has been able to change, is hopeful and needs to be explored to see how it can be applied to RBK&C.”

One final comment was whether the **CfPS** document is accessible to various communities in a “jargon busted” version.

Suggestions

Following on from general comments there were in depth suggestions for the key agencies noted above. One significant area of concern was just how the **CfPS** plan is implemented and who, independently, was going to oversee the process. One suggestion was,

“There needs to be an independent body to oversee implementation of recommendations, it should be made up of local stakeholders, residents, CVS and other appropriate professionals – solicitors was mentioned.”

There were several suggestions for **KCSC**. That there is a feedback day on the **CfPS** process once it becomes clearer, that we act to create a more coherent collective voice on issues such as the report.

There were a number of issues not relating to the CfPS review but actions for **KCSC** such as capacity building support referencing **CfPS** for **KCSC** around activities and requests for support that are being addressed internally.

RBKC, it was suggested, could strive to go beyond the **CfPS** paper and consider introducing council administered localised grants for the community and voluntary sector, overseen by local councillors answerable to an independent panel. This could bridge the gap between the council and the community – and highlight the local community’s priorities. This theme continued with a call for Councillor-led neighbourhood forums, in which residents, the local voluntary sector, and other

interested parties attend. This could be used to include the community in decision-making such as discussing priorities for s106/CIL money is spent. This would strengthen community buy-in to the decision-making process, and make residents feel less the subject of **Council** decisions but more part of them.

Some expressed that **RBKC** needs to do more to get information into the communities;

“Information needs distributing in multiple languages formats and places...bus stops, train stations, libraries, schools religious centres community centres and hubs...as well as through the door.”

There is a strong theme that the RBKC councillors and officers must do much more to reach out across the spectrum of demographic. It was said that mingling with the communities they represent, informally where people are much more at ease and to make efforts to appeal across the generations. Furthermore, communications in various languages with a more sustained effort to use imaginative locations for posting information was clear outside buildings like club venues, bus stops, libraries, community centres, hubs etc. Also, much better use of The Borough – perhaps even a community language edition covering updates and progress reports?

Picking up directly on the report which said; *“ we would like to see a review of scrutiny’s role and purpose carried out to ensure clarity and a consistent approach’.* (p 20) It was suggested by a few contributors that consideration could be given to the introduction of a ‘policy and performance’ type committee, in which crosscutting issues and those most pertinent to resident experiences across a range of issues could be scrutinised. On a similar theme, it was stated by a several contributors that lead councillor members of scrutiny committees should have fixed standing order items demanding feedback on progress, from councillors not delegates, this was suggested this would avoid the suspicion of councillors hiding behind officers.

A summary of Recommendations

1. The bar needs to be set higher
2. CfPS need to be wider in the voices heard
3. There needs to be training for community, voluntary sector and local government.
4. The councillors needs to be wary of misconstruing May’s elections as a vindication
5. The council needs to listen and learn and not to be afraid of emotions the community express.
6. The council needs to up its communications skills and delivery
7. CfPS needs to make a jargon busted version of the paper it needs to be accessible to all (community languages?)
8. The paper needs independent scrutiny of the delivery.
9. There should be a feedback event to share progress.
10. RBKC to strive beyond the **CfPS** paper
11. Introduce council administered localised grants for the community and voluntary sector answerable to an independent panel
12. Establish Councillor-led neighbourhood forums, in which residents, the local voluntary sector, and other interested parties attend.
13. Councillors and officials must do more to become familiar to the community, to engage in less formal ways.
14. Scrutiny needs to begin afresh.

Finally, there were a number of questions, posted unfiltered;

- How can the implementation be meaningfully monitored, independently?
- What will proper delivery look like?
- Why has CfPS given so little regard to changing social structures?
- Will CfPS or the Council make a more readable community version of the document?
- Would the Citizen's Assembly (Council) have guidelines for inclusion? Who selects participants, will the council ensure all views are heard?
- How or will feedback be implemented?
- With so many other initiatives taking place, is the approach and recommendations for restructure joined up in terms of pressure from the "task force" and the CfPS plus others who may be scrutinising the council?
- Will there be a tight timeframe for adoption?
- What tools do councillors have for managing their trauma, and trauma of their constituents?
- Complaints, raising concerns and commenting about councillors needs greater clarity.
- How can we future proof? Need to establish a joined up approach to families affected who have or are moving to the south of the borough

KCSC will forward this paper to RBKC for comment.