

ASHFIELD DISTRICT COUNCIL



Council Offices,
Urban Road,
Kirkby in Ashfield
Nottingham
NG17 8DA

Agenda

Scrutiny Panel A

Date: **Thursday, 4th July, 2019**

Time: **10.00 am**

Venue: **Committee Room, Council Offices, Urban Road,
Kirkby-in-Ashfield**

For any further information please contact:

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SCRUTINY PANEL A

Membership

Chairman: Councillor Melanie Darrington

Vice-Chairman: Councillor Ciaran Brown

Councillors:

Trevor Locke

Lauren Mitchell

Caroline Wilkinson

Rachel Madden

Warren Nuttall

FILMING/AUDIO RECORDING NOTICE

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SUMMONS

You are hereby requested to attend a meeting of the Scrutiny Panel A to be held at the time/place and on the date mentioned above for the purpose of transacting the business set out below.



R. Mitchell
Chief Executive

AGENDA

Page

1. To receive apologies for absence, if any.
2. **Declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary or Personal Interests and Non Disclosable Pecuniary/Other Interests.**
3. To receive the minutes of the meeting held on 7th March, 2019. 5 - 10
4. **Scrutiny Review of Community Engagement.** 11 - 20

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SCRUTINY PANEL A

Meeting held in the Committee Room, Council Offices, Urban Road, Kirkby-in-Ashfield,

on Thursday, 7th March, 2019 at 7.00 pm

Present: Councillor Rachel Madden in the Chair;

Councillors Tony Brewer, Lachlan Morrison and
Phil Rostance.

Apologies for Absence: Councillors Don Davis and Nicolle Ndiweni.

Officers Present: Lynn Cain, Mike Joy and Shane Wright.

In Attendance: Councillor Helen-Ann Smith and
Jason Zadrozny.

SA.14 Declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary or Personal Interests and Non Disclosable Pecuniary/Other Interests

No declarations of interest were made.

SA.15 Minutes

RESOLVED

that the minutes of the meeting of the Panel held on 22nd January, 2019, be received and approved as a correct record.

SA.16 Workplan Consultation and Scrutiny Improvement

The Chairman introduced the item and reminded Members that the meeting would be the last meeting of the Panel prior to the District Elections in May 2019. Rather than commence a new review at this late stage, it had been agreed that it would be prudent for Panel Members to consider the potential impact of the upcoming national scrutiny guidance, evaluate the Council's scrutiny function over the last four years and to consider topics for the 2019/20 Scrutiny Workplan.

New Government Scrutiny Guidance

The Service Manager, Democratic & Scrutiny Services advised the Panel that officers had been waiting for some considerable time for the new statutory scrutiny guidance to be released by Government. The guidance was originally due to be published in December 2018 but due to Brexit priorities, the release date has been pushed back indefinitely.

The scrutiny function was first introduced by the Local Government Act 2000 as part of the requirements for the new Cabinet/Leader regime. Should a local authority adopt a Stronger Leader model to facilitate their decision making processes then a scrutiny function will also need to be provided.

No new statutory guidance had been released since 2006 and it was evident that the landscape of scrutiny had changed over the last few years. Originally the scrutiny function enabled members to hold the Cabinet to account, be a critical friend in relation to policy development and to consider items on the Forward Plan.

However, from what was already known about the anticipated new guidance, the emphasis would now focus on:-

- scrutiny of outside/external organisations;
- recognising scrutiny's legal and democratic legitimacy;
- allocating sufficient resources to the scrutiny function;
- ensuring scrutiny members have powers to access pertinent information as required;
- focussing on scrutiny of financial resilience and sustainability of functions.

It was hoped that local authorities would give renewed consideration to the level of support given to their scrutiny function thus ensuring the provision of an effective service that adds value to the work of the authority.

Panel Members were advised that once the guidance was released, a report would be submitted to the next available Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting for consideration.

Scrutiny Improvements

Due to the fact that the current term of office was coming to an end, the Scrutiny Research and Support Officer suggested that it would be a good idea to reflect on and evaluate how the Council's scrutiny function had performed over the last four years. Members comments were to be welcomed and also consideration could be given to some suggested improvements for the next term of office.

It was important that the credibility of the scrutiny function including its Members was maintained with a constant eye to raising its profile wherever possible. A strengthening of engagement with stakeholders during the review process would benefit both the Panel's deliberations and fulfil the Council's ongoing commitment towards transparent and informative engagement.

A reconsideration of scrutiny committee memberships and format (i.e. thematic panels) could be undertaken whilst ensuring that all new scrutiny members are fully supported and trained to ensure that their scrutiny work is focussed and well directed. Thought should also be given to the value, or otherwise, of utilising the expertise of co-opted scrutiny members and technical advisers as and when required.

Scrutiny meetings have traditionally been held at the main Council offices but in a bid to increase community engagement, Members could consider utilising different venues around the District to make the meetings more accessible to

local residents and if appropriate, to locate any such meetings based on the particular Workplan topic under review.

Scrutiny Workplan

It had been previously acknowledged that the compilation and management of the Council's Scrutiny Workplan could be expanded and suggestions had been made to ensure any future Workplans made reference to timelines for completion of reviews and contained an outcome tracking mechanism to ensure all interested parties were kept informed as required.

Discussion

Members thanked the Service Manager, Democratic & Scrutiny Services and the Scrutiny Research and Support Officer for facilitating the Council's scrutiny function so effectively over the last four years and made comments/suggestions as follows:-

- scrutiny reviews and challenge had improved over the last year due to better debate and a more balanced mix of Members which had been in contrast to previous years when the ruling group had exerted too much influence over the scrutiny function;
- the Council should consider having an Independent or Opposition Member as the Chairman of Overview and Scrutiny as the strength of scrutiny provision depended on the strength of its challenge and examination;
- on the whole, attendance at Scrutiny meetings had been quite poor, especially from the Vice Chairs;
- consideration should be given to the main Overview and Scrutiny Committee having an increased membership with Sub Committees being commissioned to undertake particular reviews as required;
- the Scrutiny Committee and Panels enlisting the help of experts to contribute to reviews was a good thing and should be encouraged in the new term of office;
- the entitlement to recommend to Council the co-option of Independent Members onto the Scrutiny Committee and Panels should be utilised and any recruitment should focus on engaging individuals with appropriate skills to add value to the work being undertaken;
- cross-party working on the whole has been successful and some rewarding discussion and agreement has been achieved; a hope that it continues in the longer term;
- a suggestion that more meetings are streamed live through the Council's Facebook and Twitter pages to increase public engagement and accessibility and a response from officers that the last live stream meeting had received over 5,000 hits;
- a suggestion that the more strategic, topical reviews be undertaken by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee rather than the Scrutiny Panels;

- Panel consensus that utilising different venues around the District to make meetings more accessible to local residents would be a good idea and should be considered further;
- agreement that topics should be looked at from a wider perspective rather than in isolation (i.e. the CCTV review considered as part of the whole Community Protection function and how priorities and funding allocations are set across the service);
- new Scrutiny Members will benefit from training in relation to the scrutiny function and to have an understanding of what tools are available to them (i.e. minority reports); to be delivered as part of a two-day intensive training session following the District Elections in May 2019;

Following the discussion, the Leader of the Council who was in attendance at the meeting, commented that he had found the discussion interesting and agreed with the principles of the debate. At times, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee had not been allowed to do its job due to the Executive exerting a little too much influence over its remit and so going forward, it would seem prudent to ensure the scrutiny function has the necessary authority it requires to work effectively.

The Deputy Leader of the Council (Outward Focus) who was also in attendance at the meeting, felt that the scrutiny function had been underutilised for too long and believed that the new elected members (following the District Elections in May 2019) would be in a good position to start strengthening their position and contribution towards the decision making processes of the Council.

In relation to the Scrutiny Workplan, the Scrutiny Research and Support Officer reiterated the importance of having an effective and inclusive Workplan and Members made the following suggestions for the 2019/20 municipal year:-

1. to review the Unauthorised Encampment Policy following 12 months of implementation;
2. to consider the Council's use of bailiffs and their effectiveness, or otherwise, in recouping outstanding revenue for the Authority;
3. to consider parking provision within Ashfield including space sizes, disabled and mother and toddler parking provision and number of spaces including the continued appropriateness of the car park locations taking into account any recent town centre improvements i.e. pedestrianisation;
4. the Council's garden waste collection scheme;
5. the Council's response to the increase in graffiti as a result of anti-social behaviour;
6. an overview of the Environment portfolio and how it manages all aspects of its waste collection scheme;

7. how the Council considers and manages its income generating and commercial opportunities;
8. the potential provision of long-stay parking facilities and permits for staff working within the Council's town centres;
9. the Council's commitment towards conservation and heritage within the Ashfield District.

RESOLVED that

- a) the Service Manager, Democratic & Scrutiny Services be requested to circulate a copy of the new Government statutory scrutiny guidance to Panel Members should it be released before May, 2019;
- b) Members comments/responses in relation to the effectiveness of the Council's scrutiny function over the last four years and any suggestions for future provision, be received and noted;
- c) the potential topics for the 2019/20 Scrutiny Workplan be submitted to the first meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee (following the District Election in May 2019) for further consideration and inclusion on the Workplan if agreed.

The meeting closed at 7.55 pm

Chairman.

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Report To:	SCRUTINY PANEL A	Date:	4 JULY 2019
Heading:	SCRUTINY REVIEW OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT		
Portfolio Holder:			
Ward/s:	ALL		
Key Decision:	NO		
Subject to Call-In:	NO		

Purpose of Report

Community engagement was added to the Scrutiny Workplan on the 6 June 2019. This report aims to provide Scrutiny Panel A Members with an introduction to community engagement, outlining Ashfield District Council's community engagement values, objectives and priorities.

In addition the report provides a draft Terms of Reference attached as Appendix A for consideration by the Panel in order to establish clear objectives and potential outcomes.

Recommendation(s)

Scrutiny Panel A Members are recommended to:

- Note the information contained in this report;
- Agree the terms of reference for the review;
- Arrange an informal working group to progress the review in between formal Scrutiny Panel A meetings.

Reasons for Recommendation(s)

Community engagement was added as a topic for review to the Scrutiny Workplan 2019/20 on the 6 June 2019.

Alternative Options Considered

No alternative options have been considered at this stage of the review.

Detailed Information

In considering community engagement as a potential topic for the Scrutiny Workplan, Members of the Panel have identified the need to ensure that Ashfield District Council continues to improve both engagement activities and access to engagement through reviewing the current methods used, impact of engagement and consideration of enhancing its effectiveness.

Community Engagement

What is Community Engagement?

Effective community engagement can support strong, active and inclusive communities who can help influence and shape Ashfield. Local people are effectively informed, engaged, involved and empowered, helping to define and design local priorities and policies, deliver and evaluate services and inform council decision making in areas that impact on their lives.

It also provides the foundation for;

- Shared decision-making
 - Communities positively influencing options and decisions that are taken
- Shared action
 - Communities contributing to action taken through the engagement process
- Community-led action
 - Ensuring that when communities are best placed to deal with issues, they are supported to take the lead and be proactive

There are five main types of community engagement;

Providing Information

The Council can provide a huge range of information on a wide variety of topics including services, procedures, performance, events and other issues affecting local residents, without providing an opportunity to influence them directly.

Community Consultation

Consultation invites people to give their views or comments with the objective of using this consultation to actively influence decision on issues that might affect the community

Some consultations are statutory; others are carried out in recognition of the value of the opinions of local people, in the case of statutory consultation, there is a need to be aware of the appropriate legislation and/or guidance on the scope and timescales required.

Consultation can take different forms

- Focus groups
- Events
- Workshops
- Online surveys

Community Involvement

Community involvement covers the range of other activities that can be undertaken to involve local people in influencing issues such as service delivery and design on a District or more local basis. Involvement implies that communities are being included in the process of decision making and this may include deciding how they want to be involved.

Unlike consultation, community involvement may be ongoing and give opportunities for the community to raise their own issues.

Examples:

- Citizens Panel
- Youth Forum
- Discover Ashfield
- Ashfield Community Development Group

Collaborating

Working in partnership on all aspects of decision making including development of options and identifying preferred solutions. This is used to gain advice and innovation to find solutions from people, with the intention to incorporate contributions made to maximum extent.

Community Empowerment

This facilitates people taking responsibility for designing and delivering services/outcomes for themselves. It can include user led commissioning, direct service delivery, community asset transfer, skills development.

National Context

The importance of effective community involvement is recognised nationally and supported by significant research. Under the public sector Equality Duty (created by the Equality Act 2010), councils must recognise the need to encourage people to take part in public life and other activities. 'The Benefits of Community Engagement' report by the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) and the Home Office that government services in particular are often too remote and inflexible, and need to be brought closer to the people who use them (people living and working in the district, businesses and other stakeholders).

Over the last two decades, there have been many drives to encourage greater community involvement, backed by the view that it supports better decision-making and builds trust. This view has been reinforced through the Local Government Act (1999) and the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act (2007) which place duties on local authorities to inform, consult or involve the public. The Localism Act (2011) introduced new rights and powers for communities, giving them the freedom to be better involved in the way local decisions are made and more influence over the future of where they live. These included providing communities with the right to take over and deliver local services, bid for assets of community value such as heritage sites and community spaces and approve or reject 'excessive' council tax rises.

Public-service providers nationally have used various approaches to involve their local communities. These have included citizens' panels and juries, neighbourhood committees and forums and community champions.

There are challenges for local authorities in involving people effectively, as set out in the Localism Act (2011) and other legislation behind the Localisation Agenda (an attempt to transfer more powers to local areas and communities). Barriers to successfully involving communities can include the established cultures of organisations in the public sector and the willingness and ability of service users and the public to get involved.

Community Engagement Strategy

An Ashfield District Council Community Engagement Strategy is currently in development aiming to ensure key community engagement principles and objectives are reflected across the whole Council.

The developing strategy will set out the Council's purpose, values, and priorities as well as identifying the differing levels of community engagement. Lead officers will be actively involved in assisting the Scrutiny Panel with its considerations of this topic.

Meeting Accessibility

When discussing the inclusion of this topic on the Scrutiny Workplan 2019/20, Members indicated that reviewing meeting accessibility would be a beneficial line of enquiry for the review.

Webcasting

To increase the accessibility of Council meetings, live webcasting of meetings could be a viable option. Webcasting is the action and practice of video broadcasting a meeting over the internet. Webcasting works in real-time and allows for active engagement between the webcaster and their viewers.

Benefits of webcasting meetings:

- Increasingly affordable
- People generally enjoy visual media
- Can draw in larger audiences
- Ability to engage in real-time

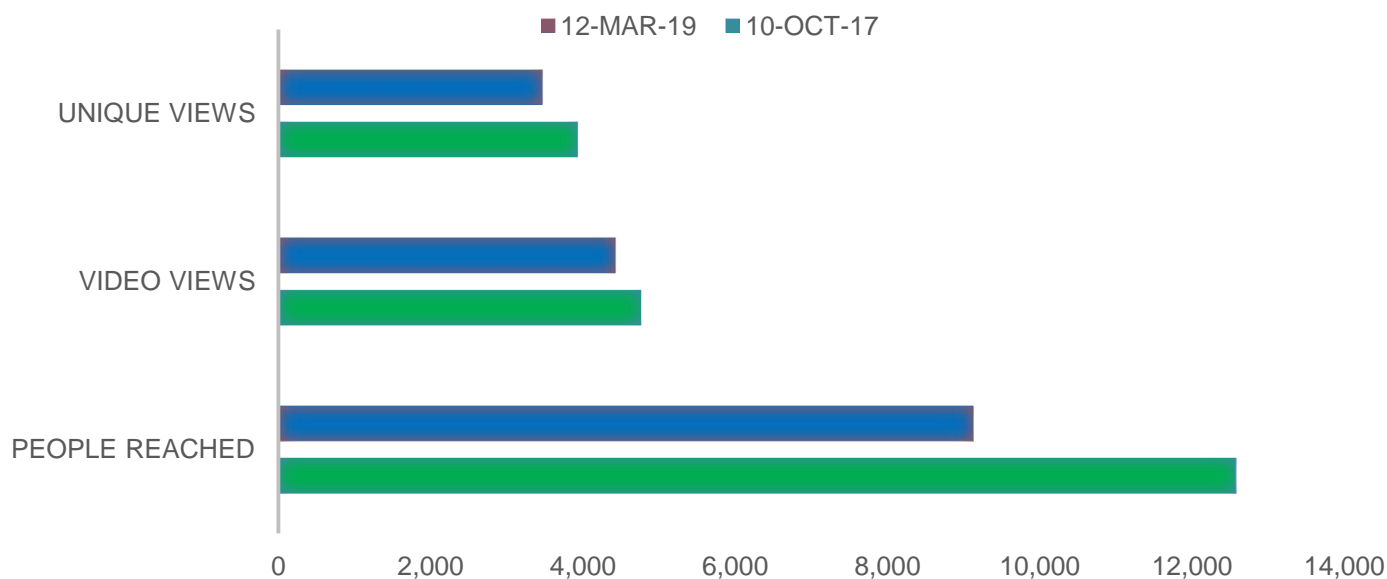
The Council is currently exploring options for webcasting its meetings in real time in 2019, at present some of the Council's meetings are audio recorded (Council and Planning).

Social Media

The Council has used social media outlets such as Facebook and Twitter to actively engage communities in some of its meetings, including the use of taking questions in real time submitted by social media users. This was particularly effective at the extraordinary meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held in March 2019 which engaged the Ashfield Youth Forum and other social media users in its meeting.

The following figures demonstrate two examples of webcasting being used during Overview and Scrutiny meetings and the levels of engagement achieved through this:

CRIME AND DISORDER VIEWERSHIP STATISTICS



	2017 Meeting	2019 Meeting
Peak Live Viewers	47	61
Top Audience	Men, aged 45 - 54	Men, aged 45 - 54
Likes	33	37
Shares	14	26
Comments	155	158

Alternate Meeting Venues

Currently, all constituted meetings are held in the Council's Council Chamber or Committee Room. Consideration could be given to the effectiveness of holding meetings in different locations across the District.

Attending meetings in the Council's Committee Room or Council Chamber can often be a daunting prospect for would-be attendees and can lead to potential engagers being dissuaded from doing so. Holding meetings at locations that are more convenient and comfortable for local communities could increase willingness to engage in Council meetings.

This can also be particularly effective when a topic effects a particular location or demographic, for example an issue that primarily effects young people could be held in a location that is more accessible to them such as a local college, thus making access to that meeting for those affected more appropriate.

Local Government Association Guide to Engagement

Published in 2017 by the Local Government Association, *New Conversations: LGA Guide to Engagement* is a guide for both councillors and officers working to build a stronger dialogue between council and community.¹

¹ Local Government Association, *New Conversations: LGA Guide to Engagement*, February 2017.

Next Steps

To progress this review Members will need to;

- Agree Terms of Reference
- Identify key list of expert witnesses, including Place and Communities representatives, community groups etc.
- Case studies of effective engagement
- Best practice for engagement

Implications

Corporate Plan:

The Corporate Plan identifies “Community and Customer Focused, Putting People First” as a key value. This includes placing residents at the heart of our services and treat everyone fairly, involving people in decisions and asking them to shape their own futures. Listening and learning, whilst recognising individual needs and designing services around those rather than simply standardising, particularly targeting resources at areas of most need

Legal:

Any legal implications relating to community engagement will be considered and addressed as part of the scrutiny review process.

Finance:

Budget Area	Implication
General Fund – Revenue Budget	None at this stage.
General Fund – Capital Programme	None at this stage.
Housing Revenue Account – Revenue Budget	None.
Housing Revenue Account – Capital Programme	None.

Risk:

Risk	Mitigation
There are no risks identified at this stage of the review.	Any risks identified will be fully considered during the course of this review.

Human Resources:

There are no HR implications identified in this report.

Equalities:

There are no equality implications identified in this report.

Other Implications:

There are no other implications identified in this report.

Reason(s) for Urgency

None.

Reason(s) for Exemption

None.

Background Papers

- Local Government Association, *New Conversations: LGA Guide to Engagement*, February 2017.

Report Author and Contact Officer

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SCRUTINY REVIEW TOPIC DRAFT TERMS OF REFERENCE

REVIEW TOPIC

Scrutiny Review of Community Engagement

RATIONALE FOR REVIEW

Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee identified engagement as a key factor in empowering residents of Ashfield. It was identified that community engagement can help the Council in making decisions that are right for residents and the District as a whole.

PURPOSE OF REVIEW/OBJECTIVES

To consider how the Council engages the Community, the types of engagement used, the demographics reached and how effective engagement is. This will include consideration of where public meetings are held and how we engage hard to reach members of the community.

INDICATORS OF SUCCESS

- Community Engagement Strategy
- Clear understanding of how the Council uses engagement for both residents and Councillors
- Improved options for engagement including active participation of hard to reach groups and cross section of demographics

REVIEW METHODOLOGY

- Benchmarking
- Involvement and engagement of community groups (focus groups)
- Case studies (understanding the impact of effective engagement in Ashfield)

KEY WITNESSES

- Community Groups
- Councillors
- Place and Communities representatives
- Corporate Communications

SPECIFIC EVIDENCE AND INFORMATION REQUIRED

To be agreed by the Panel