| 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 it's 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

■12-MAR-19 ■10-OCT-17
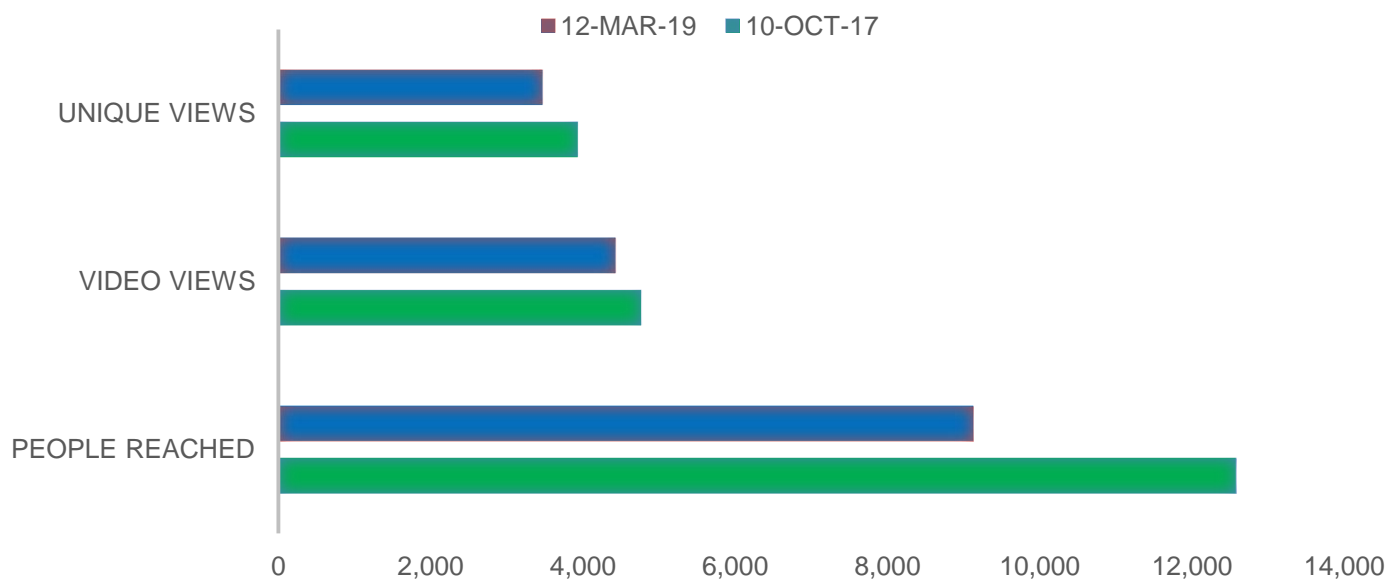


| | 2017 Meeting | 2019 Meeting |
|---|---|---|
| Peak Live Viewers | 47 | 61 |
| Top Audience | Men, aged 45 - 54 | Men, aged 45 - 54 |
| Likes | 33 | 37 |
| Shares | 14 | 26 |
| Comments | 155 | 158 |

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]

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[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 engagment

**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.

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