

<b>Report To:</b>	<b>SCRUTINY PANEL A</b>	<b>Date:</b>	<b>12 SEPTEMBER 2019</b>
<b>Heading:</b>	<b>SCRUTINY REVIEW: COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT</b>		
<b>Portfolio Holder:</b>			
<b>Ward/s:</b>	<b>ALL</b>		
<b>Key Decision:</b>	<b>NO</b>		
<b>Subject to Call-In:</b>	<b>NO</b>		

### **Purpose of Report**

At the last meeting of the Panel held on the 4 July 2019, Members approved the Terms of Reference for its review of community engagement, following its inclusion onto the Scrutiny Workplan.

This report provides Members of the Panel with further information requested and an update on the progress of the developing Community Engagement Strategy.

### **Recommendation(s)**

Panel Members are requested to;

- Note and discuss the information provided in this report;
- Discuss and agree next step actions;
- Consider potential recommendation areas for further exploration.

### **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**

*(with reasons why not adopted)*

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

## **Detailed Information**

In considering this topic, Panel Members have discussed the issues of Community Engagement with the Assistant Director, Place and Wellbeing and the Health and Wellbeing Team Leader. The Panel was informed that a Community Engagement Strategy was in the early stages of development and that the review would assist the process.

Scrutiny Members agreed that effective community engagement is essential to the provision of services which meet the needs of local communities, as well as to addressing issues of social cohesion and revitalising local democratic processes. Other key drivers for engaging with the community include public demand, community empowerment and the strengthening of local communities.

For the purpose of the review Members expressed their understanding of the definition of the term 'engagement', this included;

- Informing;
- Listening;
- Consulting;
- Involving;
- Collaborating;
- Empowering;

At the last meeting of the Panel, Members also discussed the different ways the Council and Councillors engage with the community, the reasons for that engagement and different mechanisms to ensure that engagement continues to shape Ashfield in a meaningful and proactive way.

### **Different Types of Engagement Currently Undertaken by the Council**

The Council currently has many different methods that it uses to undertake community engagement. This includes surveys, consultation, open public meetings, Place Based Working Schemes, Petitions, Citizens Panel, Youth Forum.

#### **Surveys**

Surveys are a quick and effective way to gain views on particular issues. This can be anything from setting the budget priorities, wider place surveys on Ashfield as an area or satisfaction with services received. An example of surveys undertaken with the community include;

- **Star Survey** - a survey to gain Tenants views on Housing Services. Tenants were asked to participate in this short survey when ringing to report a repair;
- **King and Miller to Kingfisher Survey** - Ashfield District Council and partners received £121,000 funding from the National Lottery to develop a project to conserve and improve King's Mill Reservoir, Sutton Lawn and Hermitage Ponds. The reason for the survey was to ask local residents and groups to help the Council decide on the activities that should be provides and ask how they wanted to be involved in the project;
- **Customer Experience - Payments Survey** - a brief customer experience survey to understand the effectiveness of the current payment system, with a particular interest in

responses from those who make payments online using Ashfield District Council's website and over the phone.

## Consultation

A consultation is a formal process whereby the community are asked for their views to help inform decisions on a specific topic. Comments are then considered along with other information to help inform that decision. Examples of consultation include;

- **Kirkby Leisure Consultation** – consultation on the facilities and seeking ideas on the mix of activities and programming the community would like to see;
- **Boundary Commission Consultation** - The Boundary Commission for England consultation into constituency boundaries. This was the public's opportunity to put forward representations and comment on those already submitted;
- **HS2 Consultation** - At the events, you will be able to find out how the design for the route will be developed and the environmental impacts assessed;
- **Public Space Protection Orders** - Public Space Protection Orders are designed to stop individuals or groups of individuals committing anti-social behaviour in a public place. The Council has to consult the public when proposing Public Space Protection Order.
- **New Planning Design Guide** - Public feedback on a proposed new planning design guide for converting vacant shops to homes.

## Public Meetings

Another means to engage with local democracy is by attending meetings of the Council. Most meetings of the Council, the Cabinet and Committees are open to the public, except where confidential or exempt information is likely to be disclosed, and the meeting is therefore held in private.

The meetings with the most attendance are Planning and Council. Members of the public may ask questions of Members of the Cabinet, the Leader of the Council and a Chairman of any Committee or Sub-Committee at ordinary meetings of the Council. Members of the public are also invited to participate in the discussion with comments and questions at meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and its Panels.

Specific examples of this at Scrutiny have been the Crime and Disorder Scrutiny Meetings, that have utilised social media to engage the community in real time. The meetings were live streamed and real time questions put forward to the Committee and its speakers. The Committee also actively engaged with the Youth Forum through the Chairman and Manager attending the Youth Forum meeting and encouraging participation and questions from its Members, many of which were asked at the meeting.

## Place Based Working Schemes

A number of pilot schemes have been introduced in the New Cross, Coxmoor and Broomhill areas of the District to collaborate with different organisations representing a diverse range of people within the area to highlight the positive amenities available and to build upon them through

community involvement. In doing so, promoting pride for local areas and creating a firm network of consultees.

## **Petitions**

A further form of engagement is petitions. The Council recognises that petitions are one way in which people can let it know their concerns. All petitions sent or presented to the Council will receive an acknowledgement from the Council within 5 working days of receipt. This acknowledgement will set out what the Council plans to do with the petition.

If a petition contains more than 1,000 signatures it will be debated by the Full Council. The petition organiser will be given 5 minutes to present the petition at the meeting and the petition will then be discussed by Councillors for a maximum of 15 minutes. If the petition contains at least 500 signatures, the relevant Senior Council Officer will give evidence at a public meeting of the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

## **Citizens Panel, Youth Forum and Community Groups**

Ashfield District Council regularly works with a number of different groups from independent community groups, the Youth Forum or the Councils own Citizens Panel. Engagement with these groups is varied and can be seeking views through face to face forums, working with them on specific projects or consulting with them on specific issues.

## **Views of the Panel**

In considering this topic, Members of the Panel have discussed and highlighted a number of areas for further consideration. This includes the following;

### **Hard to Reach Groups -**

The Panel recognised that consultation and engagement outcomes should be reflective of the community, including trying to engage hard to reach groups. Such groups may be younger people, older people, BME communities, people with disabilities, LGBTQ community, or a more representative gender balance, amongst others.

Members acknowledged that ensuring all sections of the community are able to have their say through consultation is important. Equally, it is vital that people do not feel 'stigmatised' or 'singled out' but that attempts to ensure inclusion are genuine and respectful.

In discussing the issue, Members agreed that we should consider the methods we use for engagement and ensure that staff involved in carrying out consultation work are adequately trained in equalities issues and avoid the use of stereotypes, assumptions on behaviour or any approach which may appear patronising or discriminatory.

## **Local Councillor Role**

During consideration of this topic, Members discussed the role they play in engaging communities. As a large number of Members are new to their positions some felt that they did not feel that they were aware of what was happening in their communities or wards.

The Local Government Association Guide to Engagement, published in 2017, recognises that Local politicians generally have a close relationship with stakeholders and often lead local opinion. They can broker a compromise and bring together a coalition of the willing.

The guide argues that to make the most of this, good engagement needs to be rewarded, recognised and plugged into the council's corporate mission. Informed and involved frontline councillors can play a key role by listening and talking to voters. The more they reach into their communities, talking to people beyond the usual suspects or the people that voted for them – the better they can do this.

## **Community Engagement in the Scrutiny Process**

The Good Scrutiny Guide, Published by the Centre for Public Scrutiny in 2019 advocates the public as vital partners in scrutiny work. This highlights that traditional consultation or engagement in particular scrutiny reviews is often framed in a way that meets Members' needs or the Council's needs, and may not provide the kind of insight and perspective that comes of giving local people a more meaningful role in the scrutiny process.

Furthermore it states that public input into scrutiny should be awkward and challenging for professionals and councillors alike – it should challenge our assumptions about how services are delivered on the ground, and about how people experience their lives in the communities served.

Ashfield District Council's Scrutiny process has actively engaged the community in some of its reviews but there is recognition that this could be improved. The Panel suggested a number of options that could improved engagement in the Scrutiny process. This includes;

### **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.

The Panel discussed whether considering alternative venues or areas based on the topic could encourage greater attendance and engagement.

### **Communication, Membership and Collaborative Working**

Members agreed that increased working with the Councils Communications Team could help to promote, encourage and inform the community or partners on topics or events to get involved in. Early planning and consideration of co-opting partners, members of the community with an interest in a particular topic can also add value to a review.

Furthermore, utilising and working with Parish Councils, the Youth Forum, Citizens Panel and other Community Groups can bring expertise and innovation to the work that Scrutiny is undertaking.

### **Community Engagement Strategy**

At the last meeting of the Panel, Members were informed that a Community Engagement Strategy was in the early stages of development. In producing the document there were a number of key objectives that were being considered:-

- the importance of avoiding a tokenistic approach to consultation;
- creative ways of engagement with appropriate groups;

- targeted liaison to support the inclusion of under represented and hard to reach groups;

The Panel agreed that the developing Community Engagement Strategy should consider including the following principles;

**Inclusion** - Promoting community engagement to people and organisations to make sure that everyone has an opportunity to participate. In particular not just involve the people and organisations that are easiest, or most convenient, to reach.

**Support** – Actively seeking to identify and overcome any barriers to participation in community engagement through ensuring that the way we engage with people is accessible to everyone who wants to get involved.

**Planning** - Engagement activities should be well planned and have a clear purpose with a clear and realistic plan.

**Methods** - We should use methods of engagement that are fit for purpose. Members acknowledged the benefits to efficiency and effectiveness in using digital engagement but reiterated that other more traditional methods should also be used in order to ensure that we do not exclude people

**Communication** – Members agreed that effective communication, delivered clearly and regularly with the people, organisations and communities who want to take part will result in greater participation and engagement.

**Impact / You Said, We Did** – Panel Members are keen that engagement activities do not just pay lip service or tick a box. To ensure that communities continue to engage, the Council needs to demonstrate what has been done with engagement, consultation or surveys.

## **Next Steps**

To progress this review, the Panel should consider;

- Methods both existing and new to improve engagement activities with Schools, colleges and other groups
- Tools we use to advertise and engage communities i.e Social Media / face to face / locations of meetings / webcasting meetings
- Ensuring Councillors are informed about engagement exercises and events happening within their ward.
- Engaging the Citizens Panel, Youth Forum, Councillors not sitting on the Panel and other community Groups in this review. Questions are already in development for discussion at the meeting.

## **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:**

<b>Budget Area</b>	<b>Implication</b>
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:**

<b>Risk</b>	<b>Mitigation</b>
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**

Good Scrutiny Guide 2019, Centre for Public Scrutiny  
Local Government Association, *New Conversations: LGA Guide to Engagement, 2017*

**Report Author and Contact Officer**

Mike Joy  
Service Manager – Scrutiny and Democratic Services  
01623 457232  
[m.joy@ashfield.gov.uk](mailto:m.joy@ashfield.gov.uk)