Report To:	SCRUTINY PANEL A	Date:	12 March 2020
Heading:	SCRUTINY REVIEW OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT		
Portfolio Holder:			
Ward/s:	ALL		
Key Decision:	NO		
Subject to Call-In:	NO		

Purpose of Report

This report provides a progress update on the Community Engagement Scrutiny Review. The topic was added to the Workplan in 2019 to ensure that Ashfield District Council continues to develop and improve the methods it uses to engage the community.

The Panel have thus far held two meetings on this topic and worked with the Director, Place and Communities and the Health and Wellbeing Team Leader to establish a coordinated approach to community engagement.

Recommendation(s)

Panel Members are requested to:

- **Discuss any further areas of development to improve community engagement**

Reasons for Recommendation(s)

Community engagement was added as a topic for review to the Scrutiny Workplan 2019/20. Members of the Panel were informed that Ashfield District Council were in the early stages of the development of a Community Engagement Strategy, which would outline values, objectives and priorities for all types of community engagement.

Alternative Options Considered

Members of the Panel have considered all forms of community engagement methods throughout the course of this review. These are detailed in the report.

Detailed Information

In commencing this review, Members agreed that the primary purpose of investigating community engagement was to ensure that an effective mechanism for members of the public to help influence and shape Ashfield in a proactive and meaningful way was provided.

Throughout the initial meetings on the topic Members of the Panel have discussed a number of areas including;

- Different methods of engagement
- Creative ways of engagement with appropriate groups;
- Targeted liaison to support the inclusion of under represented and hard to reach groups;
- The importance of avoiding a tokenistic approach to consultation
- Impact of Digital and Service Transformation in engagement
- Measuring the effectiveness of engagement
- Aims and objectives of a Community Engagement Strategy.

Local Government Association's Guide to Engagement

The Local Government Association (LGA) uses 'engagement' as a term to mean anything that 'creates a stronger two-way relationship between the Council and the community. In 2017, the LGA published its guide to engagement 'New Conversations'.

The guide describes effective engagement as fundamentally being about creating dialogue between residents and the Council. Each side of this engagement poses separate challenges. When a Council is looking to undertake engagement on an issue, the LGA supports asking three fundamental questions;
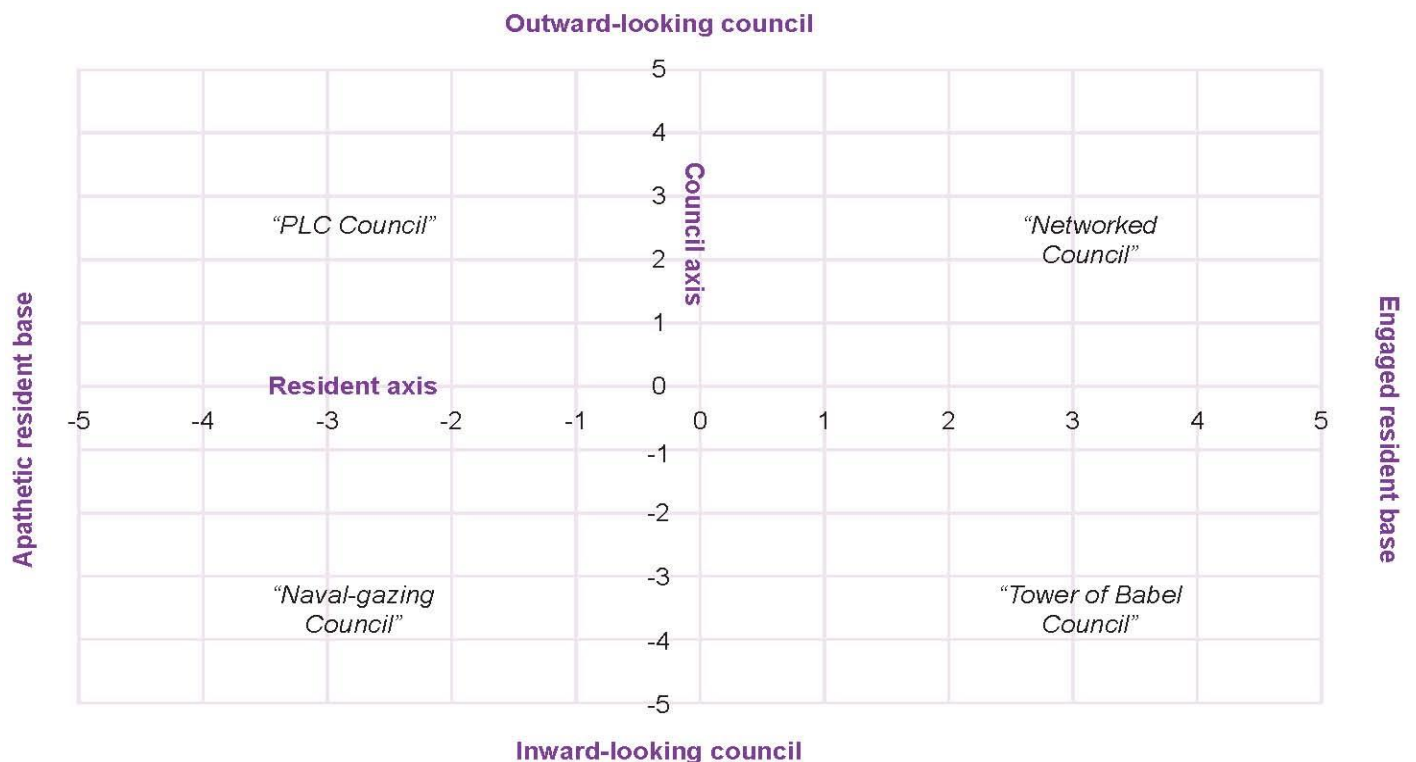
- What views do residents have of the Council? Do we have sufficient insight to understand how residents see engagement? How will they respond when we talk to them?

- What do your Officers and Councillors think of engagement? Is there a shared view of its importance and how it should be done?

- Is there evidence of engagement influencing decisions? How does engagement 'live' within the organisation? (Documents? Training? Official roles?)

In answering these questions, Councils will be able to assess how consultation is used in their organisation and how it can be improved. The guide further sets out how to evaluate engagement, decide what type of engagement is required, and avoid things going wrong.

As a starting point, Councils should investigate attitudes to engagement within the council, considering how well it has gone and whether it has impacted on decisions or simply been a tokenistic exercise.

To assist in this, the guide provides a grid that was developed by local councillors for the New Local Government Network. The Grid helps Council's to establish how outward-looking or inward-looking the Council is, and how engaged or apathetic residents are.

The Council can then assess what description best fits the Council, how this can help us shape our engagement and anticipate potential problems.

Outward-looking council

"PLC Council"

"Networked Council"

Council axis

Apathetic resident base

Resident axis

Engaged resident base

"Naval-gazing Council"

"Tower of Babel Council"

Inward-looking council

19 'Future Councillors: Where next for local Politics?' 'Democratic Futures', Simon Parker and Liam Scott-Smith, NLGN, July 2013

Council Descriptions

PLC Council

- business-like, pragmatic and technocratic
- stable politics and a strategic view
- high performer able to push through services redesign
- executive members more like officers, perhaps with a business background
- entrepreneurial flair and paternalistic

Navel Gazing Council

- politically divided with regular hung or changing leadership
- low public activism
- likely to strip back services to bare minimum in the face of cuts
- unruly political groups with frontline councillors involved in high-energy scheming and plotting
- executive members struggle to get things done

Networked Council

- public able to do more for themselves
- councillors focused on economic growth
- devolution of many services to the neighbourhood level
- challenge to traditional councillor role: councillors have an entrepreneurial and activist skill set
- integration of

Tower of Babel Council

- navel gazing internal characteristics
- an active civil society ready to take on and challenge the internal scenario
- public protests
- electoral challenge from residents associations and independents
- pressure for extreme localisation
- councillors defensive
- highly political with political skills coming to the fore (negotiation, rhetoric, communication and mediation)

<u>Different Methods of Engagement</u>

Throughout the review, Members have set out the areas of engagement that could be used for different engagement exercises. These include;

- community mapping
- public meetings
- focus groups and workshops
- web based consultation
- consensus building
- citizens' panel
- street stalls
- questionnaires
- local community meetings

Members agreed that the type of topic or issue being raised should influence the kind of engagement exercise or input that is required. Furthermore, having an understanding of the target audience is key to whether the most appropriate type of exercise is a listening exercise, face-to-face interview or setting up an online questionnaire.

<u>Hard to Reach Groups</u>

Members acknowledged that not all approaches were suitable to support the inclusion of all residents. In the first meeting of the Panel, Members were concerned about the inability of certain groups to engage with the Authority due to barriers such as illiteracy, innumeracy, language barriers and other difficulties with written and digital mechanisms.

Often there will be stakeholders who need to be asked but who aren't IT literate enough to participate in an e-consultation, or physically mobile enough to attend a formal meeting of the Council or stakeholder events. Members agreed that knowing the audience and the type of engagement that may be most beneficial was key to any engagement exercise.

<u>Meaningful Engagement</u>

Ensuring that engagement is meaningful was a focus of discussion amongst the Panel Members. Key to ensuring engagement was successful is understanding what type of engagement the Council is undertaking, and ensuring the intended audience is also aware of the reason and intended outcome from engagement, whether that be to inform, influence or provide ideas.

Members were informed that there were a number of key types of engagement and these could be broken down simply into 5 main levels. This is set out below.

Levels of Engagement

Level 1 - 5	What	Why	How
1. Informing	Provide information	To keep people informed	Brochures, websites, news releases,
2. Consulting	Obtain feedback to inform decision making Obtain feedback on proposals	To keep people informed, listen to their views and provide feedback on how their input influenced decision making.	Annual surveys, questionnaires, focus groups, interviews, surveys via social media/email/SMS mobile
3. Involving	Working directly with people to ensure that their issues, concerns and aspirations are understood and considered.	Engage with people to ensure that issues, concerns and aspirations are reflected in decision making. Provide feedback on how their input influenced decision making.	Public meetings, focus groups and forums, surgeries, network meetings
4. Collaborating	Working in partnership on all aspects of decision making including development of options and identifying preferred solutions.	To gain advice and innovation to find solutions from people, with the intention to incorporate contributions made to maximum extent.	Community needs analysis, focus groups, partnership groups, steering groups
5. Empowering	The final decisions are taken by the people engaged with.	To facilitate people taking responsibility for designing and delivering services/outcomes for themselves.	User led commissioning, direct service delivery, community asset transfer, skill development

Community Engagement Strategy

At a previous meeting of the Panel Members were advised them that a Community Engagement Strategy was in development and that Members of the Panel could have an input in establishing the objectives and methods of engagement to be set out to ensure that the Council's engagement was both meaningful, clear and measurable.

In discussing a Community Engagement Strategy, Member may wish to consider the further development of a delivery plan, ensuring that there are appropriate mechanisms in place to assess the impact and success of engagement activity.

Next Steps

To progress this review and inform the development of the emerging Community Engagement Strategy, Members are asked to consider the following areas;

- Objectives of the Strategy
- Establishing the core principle of engagement
- Digital and Service Transformation
- Development of a clear Delivery Plan?
- Hard to reach groups

Implications

Corporate Plan:

The Corporate Plan 2019-2023 identifies "Putting People at the heart of what we do" and " being honest with people in an open and professional way" as being part of the Council's key values. This includes placing residents at the heart of our services and treating everyone fairly, involving people in decisions and asking them to shape their own futures. Listening and learning, whilst recognising individual needs.

Legal:

There are no legal implications arising from this report.

Finance:

Budget Area	Implication
General Fund – Revenue Budget	None
General Fund – Capital Programme	None
Housing Revenue Account – Revenue Budget	None
Housing Revenue Account – Capital Programme	None

Risk:

Risk	Mitigation
Community Engagement Strategy – monitoring and evaluating engagement is an outstanding improvement action	Work has been undertaken to consider best practice in community engagement and a draft strategy for discussion has been developed. It is anticipated that the draft strategy will be ready for consideration in April

detailed on the Annual Governance Statement 2019/20	2020, followed by the development of a comprehensive delivery plan.

Human Resources:

There are no HR implications identified in this report

Environmental/Sustainability

There are no Environmental/Sustainability implications identified in this report

Equalities:

Scrutiny Panel A have considered community engagement in accordance with the Corporate Equality and Inclusion Policy 2017.

Other Implications:

There are no other implications arising from 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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