

<b>Report To:</b>	CABINET	<b>Date:</b>	19 JANUARY 2017
<b>Heading:</b>	REVIEW OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT		
<b>Portfolio Holder:</b>	CLLR NICOLLE NDIWENI – COMMUNITY SAFETY AND ENGAGEMENT		
<b>Ward/s:</b>	ALL		
<b>Key Decision:</b>	YES		
<b>Subject To Call-In:</b>	YES		

### Purpose Of Report

The Council currently has several methods of engaging directly with residents: Member surgeries, four Area Committees (Kirkby, Sutton, Hucknall and the Rurals), social media and at Council Offices within the District. Because of ongoing service reviews and budget cuts, this Cabinet Report proposes an independent review of engagement methods with residents, to advise whether there are more cost effective, efficient and productive methods.

### Recommendation(s)

#### **Cabinet is recommended to approve:**

- a) To agree to an independent review of community engagement methodologies, to include Member Surgeries and Area Committees;
- b) To bring a report to a future Cabinet which provides recommendations for revised engagement methods.

### Reasons For Recommendation(s)

1. Ashfield Council is engaged in an ongoing programme of service reviews in the light of the need for continuing efficiency savings due to budget cuts and Community Engagement forms a key part of the ongoing review.
2. Our current engagement methodologies, in particular the servicing of the 4 Area Committees, are extremely resource intensive in terms of officer time. Experience across all 4 Committees demonstrates that they are poorly attended by residents and only reach a small minority of people within a certain older demographic. This traditional method of evening meetings does not attract younger people, those who work shifts, those with disabilities or who have caring responsibilities.

3. Our current arrangements do not take any account of more modern methods of engagement and communication, eg the various forms of social media, street surgeries, etc. The proposed review needs to research these and any other emerging new methods, such as crowdfunding for local projects.
4. Cabinet Members should note that this Cabinet Report makes no recommendation on the current arrangement of Member grants or Environment grants; these are being considered as part of the budget process, but remain within the scope of this review subject to any changes as part of the budget process.
5. We need to know of any national or international good practice of “what works” from which we can learn and potentially implement; and the proposed review will be asked to undertake such horizon scanning.
6. Members will be engaged in the review and asked to contribute their views on the options once identified

### **Alternative Options Considered (With Reasons Why Not Adopted)**

**Do nothing:** is not an acceptable option because of the need for continuing efficiency savings and the programme of service reviews which are now in progress. **Not recommended.**

**ADC to undertake its own internal review, bringing in expert advice where necessary:** The Councils Corporate Improvement Team will lead on the review and work with colleagues involved in community engagement to deliver the review. It should be noted that due to capacity and the need for independent external expert input specialists will be brought into support the review if needed.  
**Recommended.**

### **Detailed Information**

**Member surgeries** take place in community venues in the 4 areas of Ashfield every Saturday morning (but with a slightly different rota for the Rural areas) and all Members adhere to a schedule of attendance.

**The 4 Area Committees.** These take place in community venues in Kirkby, Sutton, Hucknall and the Rurals 4 times per year. They are comprised of and led by local Ward Members and the Committees are serviced by several officers of ADC: a lead Director, Democratic Services Officer, Community Protection Officer and a member of the Localities and Community Empowerment team; also often in attendance are a Community Protection Officer and the lead Environment Officer. A local Police Officer usually also attends for part of the meeting to discuss local crime and community safety issues.

As well as these formal Area Committees, Members also pursue their own methods of community engagement within their own wards, eg street surgeries, walkabouts, leafletting.

The 4 Area Committees and Member surgeries form an important part of ADC’s approach to local democracy and Community Engagement. They consider matters of local interest and have powers to allocate small grants to local groups. They also make recommendations to the Council on a wide variety of local issues, eg environmental issues, crime and anti-social

behaviour, employment, housing, improvements to town centres. Since 2014 Locality Plans have been established for each of the four areas, developed by the ADC Locality and Community Empowerment team. The Plans have been developed through a combination of research and analysis of local issues and input from the community and Members. Ward Members prioritise projects within the plans and these can be used to support negotiations with developers for Section 106 funding.

It is acknowledged that Area Committees can sometimes be poorly attended by the public and that that attendance is largely from a narrow demographic (older, male and white). As stated above, they do not attract a wider demographic in terms of younger people, those with caring responsibilities, those with shift patterns or busy working lives.

Our current arrangements also do not take any account of more modern methods of communication and consultation, ie social media. The arrangements rely on meetings in fixed locations at fixed times.

The wide ranging Policy and Budget Consultation 2017/18, which was undertaken by ADC from 31 October to 12 December, asked a series of specific questions about current engagement methodologies, ie:

**1. Have you ever attended an Ashfield District Council Member surgery?**

757 people provided a response to this question. Of this number 71, or 9% had attended a surgery. The remaining 91% had either not attended (58%) or was not aware of them (33%).

**2. Have you ever attended an Ashfield District Council Area Committee?**

751 people provided a response to this question. Of this number 55 or 7% had attended an Area Committee. The remaining 93% had either not attended (61%) or was not aware of them (31%).

**3. To what extent do you agree or disagree that the Council should consider alternative methods of community engagement?**

738 people provided a response to this question. Of this number 503 or 68% agreed or strongly agreed; 27% neither agreed nor disagreed and 5% disagreed or strongly disagreed.

Examples of comments received on the consultation confirm that alternative approaches are desired:

- Investing resources in alternative forms of communication is key. As a working mum, I often miss out on news of events, so using social media more often is very beneficial to people like me.
- More visibility of Councillors in Wards, eg door to door, surgeries, communication by leaflet.
- Need to work smarter in all areas. IT – connect, promote it and people will use it.
- Communication, marketing, PR, “keeping you informed”, monthly e mails, social media, more more, more.
- Councillors to be out and about talking to people.

The results of this survey demonstrate the need for greater reach into our communities, and the inherent limitations of the current operations of Area Committees and Member Surgeries.

## **Implications**

### **Corporate Plan:**

Fully in line with ADC Corporate Plan in terms of:

- Community and customer focussed: putting people first;
- Transparent and accountable in our decision making.

The Corporate Plan also states the intention to engage with customers and seek their views, to ensure effective community leadership through good governance, transparency and accountability and to develop a transformation and efficiency programme through service reviews. The proposed review will look at current methodologies and also recommend wider types of community engagement.

### **Legal:**

There are no significant legal issues associated with the recommendation in this report, other than the requirement to comply with Contract Procedure Rules when procuring an external resource.

The future report to Cabinet may have constitutional and legal consequences depending upon the recommendations contained within in and these will be considered as part of the development of that report.

### **Finance:**

A budget of £10,000 is required in the event that we need external support

<b>Budget Area</b>	<b>Implication</b>
General Fund – Revenue Budget	£10k to be funded from the Corporate Improvement Fund
General Fund – Capital Programme	None
Housing Revenue Account – Revenue Budget	None
Housing Revenue Account – Capital Programme	None

### **Human Resources / Equality and Diversity:**

There are no HR implications directly arising out of this report. The review will pay full regard to making sure that citizens have ease of access to democracy and democratic processes. Equality Impact Assessments will be undertaken as part of the development of the review recommendations

## **Other Implications:**

**Communications:** the report provides an opportunity for a press release about engagement with residents and how they prefer to be consulted. It would be an opportunity to reaffirm the commitment to engagement through a variety of methods.

There is likely to be media interest in this issue and its outcome.

Trade Union comments: The use of consultants is often controversial particularly at a time of financial constraint.

We recognise the imperative of ensuring that the Council is engaging with the community particularly at the current time.

The trade union is aware that the Corporate Performance and Improvement Team (CPIT) who we would expect to lead a project of this type is extremely busy carrying out reviews across the organisation.

The expenditure identified is relatively modest and we have been assured that the Review of Community Engagement will be led by CPIT supported by Locality and Community Empowerment Team and that the expenditure identified in the report will be used to supplement existing resource and will purchase expertise that may not be held within the authority.

Given that assurance the trade Union supports the proposal.

## **Reason(s) for Urgency (if applicable):**

n/a

## **Background Papers**

None

## **Report Author and Contact Officer**

**Carol Cooper Smith**  
**Interim Service Director – Planning and Economic Development**  
[c.cooper-smith@ashfield-dc.gov.uk](mailto:c.cooper-smith@ashfield-dc.gov.uk)

**Rob Mitchell**  
**CHIEF EXECUTIVE**