

Report To:	SCRUTINY PANEL A	Date:	7 FEBRUARY 2017
Heading:	SCRUTINY CONSIDERATION OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT		
Portfolio Holder:			
Ward/s:	ALL		
Key Decision:	NO		
Subject To Call-In:	NO		

Purpose Of Report

As part of the Scrutiny Workplan consultation process undertaken in 2016, Members raised the issue of community engagement as a topic that would benefit from further Scrutiny consideration.

This report sets out an introduction to community engagement, the types of engagement currently provided by Ashfield District Council through both its public meetings and evolving improvements in the ADC website and social media channels. In attendance at the meeting will also be the Corporate Performance and Improvement Manager, who will assist the Panel with their discussions on community engagement.

Recommendation(s)

- **Note the information contained in this report**
- **Provide feedback and views on effectiveness of current engagement methods**
- **Discuss future options for consideration**

Reasons For Recommendation(s)

Community engagement was identified and approved as a topic in 2016 following consultation on the Scrutiny Workplan.

Alternative Options Considered (With Reasons Why Not Adopted)

None at this stage. Consideration of this topic is aimed at understanding and discussing current engagement methods used by Ashfield District Council.

Detailed Information

In considering this topic Members should be mindful of a wider corporate review due to be undertaken on current community engagement methodologies, which aims to consider and determine more effective, efficient and modern means of engagement which result in more local people being actively engaged in the issues which affect them.

Background

Community engagement means involving the community in discussions and decisions relating to services, relevant policies and strategies. It is the process of working collaboratively with and through groups of people by geographic proximity, special interest or similar situations to address issues that affects them.

'Consultation', 'engagement' and 'communication' are all terms that are regularly used, often interchangeably, to describe community engagement activities. It is important that the appropriate terminology is used when undertaking any form of engagement activity in order to avoid confusion and clarity of purpose.

Definitions

There are many definitions and interpretations of the specific meaning of engagement, consultation and communication. The following definitions have been included to clarify and direction for discussion of this topic.

Engagement

The means of active involvement in shaping, designing and delivering services, having a dialogue. This also includes empowering communities to identify ways to improve services, design, develop and determine direction of community activities and services, resulting in the people who use or provide services having a say in decisions about those services.

This requires more input from the community and our employees, playing an active role within the decision-making process for example by attending public meetings, being a member of a steering group or focus group or through active communication between the community and the Council, providing the community with channels to increase involvement in changes that affect them.

Consultation

Asking people what they think so that decision-makers can make better decisions; formally inviting comments on a proposal or plan. Consultation is often formal in nature and in some cases governed by national guidance. Consultation activities undertaken might include budget Consultation or formal consultation on the Local Plan.

Communication

A means of informing, and sharing information. This is usually top down from the organisation to its communities to share intentions, and upward to give feedback and share the improvement journey. Tend to be mechanisms we have to inform our customers/stakeholders of any changes, updates, improvements in our services. These can include newsletters, email, website or social media updates, leaflets, presentations, media briefings etc. Effective communication needs to be clear, accessible and easy to understand.

Current Approach to Engagement

Ashfield District Council already engage and consult with communities on a wide variety of topics through meetings of the Council, projects and formal consultation exercises. The main objective of this is to create a coordinated approach which enables thriving, prosperous and self-sufficient communities where people become involved in shaping their own communities and futures.

One of the Council's Values, identified in the Corporate Plan 2016-2019 is;

"We will place residents at the heart of our services and treat everyone fairly, involving people in decisions and asking them to shape their own futures. We will listen and learn, whilst recognising individual needs and designing services around those rather than simply standardising, particularly targeting resources at areas of most need."

Any engagement or consultation undertaken should be accessible and of benefit to local people. Furthermore it should also be carried out in accordance with good practice, transparency and adhere to national policies, such as the Localism Act, which has placed more of an emphasis on local authorities increasing participation, delivering responsive services and providing prompt information by conducting effective and meaningful consultation.

The Localism Act

The Localism Act creates a climate that empowers local people and communities, giving citizens, communities and local government the power and information they need to come together, and solve the problems they face. One of the foundations of Localism is transparency. Ensuring that local people have access to the information they need will help enable them to play a bigger part in society.

Through the localism and transparency agenda, The Council can expect local people and communities to hold the Council to account in the following ways:-

- Participating in Council consultation exercises
- Utilising on-line expenditure information
- Utilising published performance information
- Attendance and participation in local meetings
- Challenging Elected Members
- Through local elections

Current Methods of Engagement

The Council is committed to ensure that it continues to engage and consult on issues, policies and decisions in the most effective and accessible means possible. To improve community engagement and participation, a new approach to delivering services at local level was adopted in 2014, to promote community empowerment and underpin regeneration of our local town centres/areas. The approach uses the Area Committee Structure to encourage community engagement, addressing local issues by developing and delivering Locality Plans, which were informed by extensive engagement with communities. The Primary ways for active engagement and involvement include;

- Community attendance and involvement at Area Committees, Council and Planning
- Involvement, engagement and participation in the Scrutiny process
- Formal consultation exercises (including most recently on the budget)
- Specific projects, (most notably the New Cross Project)
- Localities Team Support for community groups
- Submission of Petitions (now made easier through the e-petition function)

- Councillor Surgeries

In 2016, the Council also refreshed its website and social media channels to make participation and engagement more accessible and user friendly. Furthermore, at an extraordinary meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in 2016, the Council worked with our Corporate Communications Team and piloted the user of real time Twitter, to promote active engagement and participation in the discussion.

Considerations

In considering this issue, the Corporate Review will be considering a wide variety of engagement issues including reviewing and exploring;

- who we engage with;
- current engagement methods and whether there are more modern and effective methods that could be considered;
- the usefulness and applicability of different engagement techniques;
- the ease of accessibility.

The role of Scrutiny in this process is not to duplicate work, however it would be useful for Members to consider the current engagement methods used by them as a Councillor and those used by the Council as a whole. Any initial views and thoughts can then be considered by the Corporate Performance Team in its Corporate review of Engagement.

Implications

Corporate Plan:

Corporate Plan 2016-2019, Our Values “Community and Customer Focused, Putting People First.”

Legal:

There are no immediate Legal implications within this report.

Finance: There are no financial implications contained in this report, any identified during the Corporate Review will seek appropriate advice and involvement from the Finance Team in due course.

Budget Area	Implication
General Fund – Revenue Budget	N/A
General Fund – Capital Programme	N/A
Housing Revenue Account – Revenue Budget	N/A
Housing Revenue Account – Capital Programme	N/A

Human Resources / Equality and Diversity:

There are no Human Resources / Equality and Diversity implications contained in this report. Any identified during the Corporate Review will seek appropriate advice in due course.

Other Implications:

None Identified

Reason(s) for Urgency (if applicable):

N/A

Background Papers

Corporate Plan 2016-2019

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