

Report To:	Cabinet	Date:	30 November 2017
Heading:	COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT REVIEW		
Portfolio Holder:	CLLR NICOLLE NDIWENI – SAFER AND STRONGER COMMUNITIES		
Ward/s:	ALL		
Key Decision:	Yes		
Subject To Call-In:	Yes		

Purpose of Report

This report presents the findings of the Community Engagement review and proposes new forms of Community Engagement strategies and activities.

Recommendation(s)

Cabinet is recommended to note and approve:

1. Note that the Leader has exercised her discretion to cease Area Committees with effect from 1st January 2018 and has amended the Executive Scheme of Delegation to reflect this (not subject to call in);
2. Note that the Monitoring Officer (in accordance with Article 14 section 14.02(a)) will make necessary alterations and changes to the Constitution as a consequence of the Leader's decision to cease Area Committees, including:
 - a. Delete all references to Area Committees in Part 1;
 - b. Delete Article 7 of Part 2;
 - c. Delete Section 8 of 1.6 Part 3 (Executive Scheme of Delegation);
 - d. Delete the terms of reference for Area Committees in 1.8 of Part 3;
 - e. Delete references to the Area Committees in Part 7, Members' Allowances Scheme;
 - f. Make consequential renumbering and other amendments as a result of the above changes.
 (not subject to call in)
3. Retain Member surgeries, the Citizens Panel and Youth Forum;
4. Cease Locality Plans and continue to identify neighbourhood projects through the capital programme, ensuring new projects are aligned to relevant corporate strategies and follow the capital programme gateway process;

5. Establish public consultation events across the District. These will be exhibition type of drop in events – whereby all Members and officers present strategies and forthcoming plans and priorities to the public and receive feedback and ideas;
6. Cease Member grants in their current format (ie small grants approved through Area Committees); but retain the allocation of £24k in 2018/19 and £21k from 2019/20 to provide contributions to key projects, i.e. Christmas festivities and Remembrance Sunday. This includes an annual £15k to be made available to the Nottinghamshire Community Foundation to continue the availability of small community grants;
7. Continue to improve the organisation’s social media focus through such things as: live streaming of Council meetings, proactive communication and opportunities for feedback;
8. Establish the development of a Community Engagement Strategy and associated Handbook to support a whole Council approach to community engagement;
9. Establish a new marketing strategy to promote the new engagement methods;

Reasons for Recommendation(s)

Rationale for Change

- Area Committees are no longer effective in their current form, despite attempts to enhance their value and encourage increased community attendance. The cost to the organisation is circa £65,000 for staff capacity to support. The Cabinet Report “Review of Community Engagement” of 19 January 2017 provided detailed data from the Budget Consultation on low awareness and low attendance. Through subsequent consultation at Scrutiny most Members agreed that Area Committees should cease.
- Member surgeries are also poorly attended by members of the public. Through the Budget Consultation most of our residents agreed that Member surgeries should also cease. However, these are not resource intensive to run and do provide a direct line to Members for individual members of the public. The recommendation is therefore for Member Surgeries to continue in their present form.
- The Council needs a strategic change in its approach to community engagement to move away from formal set piece meetings where we expect the public to engage with us, to a more informal mix of social media and proactive consultation events, making use of existing opportunities such as Schools Councils and community groups.
- It should be noted that the Council already operates a wide range of consultation methods throughout the year, on both general and specific issues and at both neighbourhood and district wide levels. These will continue. Some examples include:
 - For example: Place Survey, Budget Consultation, Planning Consultations (Local Plan, Neighbourhood Plans and individual planning applications), Tenants and Residents meetings, Citizens Panel and Youth Forum; Neighbourhood level meetings, eg Broomhill, New Cross, Coxmoor, Leamington; Leisure Centre review, Mystery Shopping, Star Survey, Estate Walkabouts, Waste and Recycling surveys; consultation on Licensing, Public Spaces Protection Orders.
- Adequate and timely responses to communications/ issues raised by residents is extremely important in our ability as an organisation to build trust with our communities.

The communications health check therefore suggested more proactive communication and this is linked to the work being undertaken to improve customer services.

- Use of more modern approaches such as social media and the website. A recent example of this was during Democracy Week (9 October), whereby ADC conducted its first Facebook Live streaming of the Crime and Disorder Scrutiny Meeting on Tuesday 10 October. Advance notice was given promoting the stream and inviting questions. Although none were received in advance, during the meeting, 10 questions were received and a selection of these were answered. Nearly 4,000 unique viewers engaged with the streaming and 155 comments were received. This enabled ADC to:
 - Modernise engagement approaches through live streaming
 - Provide a platform for feedback from residents
 - Engage with younger people
 - Provide more focussed information that is relevant to individual residents and customers, facilitating a digital place and digital customers
 - Provided ADC with valuable lessons learned and an approach which can now be replicated for other Council meetings.
- Need to improve our engagement with hard to reach groups:
 - reach young people with things that interest or affect them and involve them in future developments by working with schools and youth groups;
 - improve awareness of digital channels and take up rate of over 55's in our communities through working with Age UK
- We need to encourage communities to do more for themselves and be involved:
 - Channelling the enthusiasm that some of our residents have, through Citizens Panel development based on the existing Tenant Gateway approach.
 - More focused engagement with the Voluntary and Community sector, which will be delivered through the restructure of the Locality and Community Empowerment team.
- There is the need to signal that the whole organisation a collective responsibility for effective community engagement and this therefore requires an understanding of the wider engagement approaches, how these align with our Corporate Plan and collective responsibility in delivery.
- There is a budget imperative in terms of the need to make savings and these more effective engagement methods will be more cost effective. These include activities around the new Place agenda and the intention to establish Town Teams within the Locality and Community Empowerment restructure.
- In order to continue to meet the Best Value statutory duty, we need to ensure that the organisation consults with residents and with representatives of our communities, including voluntary/community groups and businesses, when facing difficult funding decisions, potential cuts or significant change to services.

Alternative Options Considered (With Reasons Why Not Adopted)

Not to change the Community Engagement approach and maintain the current system.

Consultations and research have told us that the Area Committees are not effective in their current form and are highly resource intensive. Our current approach does not take sufficient account of more modern and effective methods of engagement. If we maintain the status quo we will not make the necessary savings through restructure and realignment of the Locality and Community Empowerment section.

Not recommended in view of the research and budget consultation responses

Give the Area Committees greater responsibility by delegating more strategic and operational decision making to them

This would not achieve service delivery consistency across ADC. Also, most services operate across the District and there would be additional operational staff requirements and therefore increased cost, in disaggregating them across 4 separate areas. It would also require a much greater input from Democratic Services in terms of servicing additional committee meetings, which necessarily would need to meet more often than the current once every 2 months.

Not recommended on cost and efficiency grounds

Proceed with the changes detailed in the recommendations and in this report: these proposals will deliver more focused community engagement and will facilitate a restructured and realigned Locality and Community Empowerment section, along with budget savings.

Recommended

Background

The Need for Change

- **Budget Consultation 2016/17:** as part of the wide ranging public consultation which was undertaken from 31 October – 12 December, ADC asked a series of specific questions about engagement methods:
 - **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%).
 - **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%).
 - **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 confirmed that alternative approaches were desired in order to facilitate a greater reach into communities:

- “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 Cabinet Report:** “Review of Community Engagement” was agreed by Cabinet on 19 January 2017; this recommended a review of ADC engagement methods.
- **Peer Challenge 2017:** the need to review the Council’s community engagement processes was identified in the Peer Challenge review held in March 2017. There was a general consensus that Area Committees are no longer effective and that they consume high levels of resources. The peer challenge team encountered a real appetite among Members to review this model and replace it with something that is more engaging, less resource intensive and one that reaches out to all sections of the local population. Recommendations from the peer challenge were to instigate an early review of Area Committees due to the potential to release Member and officer capacity and deploy it more productively across the organisation
- **A Communications Health Check** was undertaken on 5th December 2016 as part of the wider communications review. Recommendations were; to keep a focus on developing our brand identity and on crafting narratives and strategies that articulate the vision of the Council; ensure proactive communications in order to build trust and transparency; and a movement towards more social communications is to be encouraged.

Current climate in local government – ongoing budgetary considerations mean that ADC is constantly striving to achieve greater value for money and cost effectiveness. As well as this, there is a need to encourage greater self-sufficiency amongst the resident population.

The Review

The Aim of the review was to understand our current community engagement methodologies and determine more effective, efficient and modern means of engagement which would result in more local people being actively engaged in the issues which affect them, in order that:-

- Decision making is based on representative views
- There is reduced influence of pressure groups and single issue politics
- Feedback on strategic proposals is improved
- Participatory democracy is increased

The objectives of the review were to determine who best to engage with, the usefulness and applicability of different engagement techniques and the ease of accessibility and cost justification, giving rise to recommendations for:-

- More modern methods of engagement and communication, using the various forms of social media, street surgeries, etc.
- Reduction in officer time
- Increase in engagement with wider demographic, particularly younger people
- Increase in people playing a more active role in decision making processes of the Council

The Approach

- After the approval of the Cabinet Report in January 2017, Views of Members were sought at Scrutiny Panel A on 7th March 2017, undertaking a SWOT analysis of current engagement approaches whilst also generating ideas for opportunities to improve.
- As stated above, resident views of our current engagement methodologies were obtained through our budget consultation exercise in December 2016. We have also examined the results of the 2016 Place Survey and 2017 Star Survey which are relevant to this review.

- An Officer Working Group discussed current community engagement approaches and assessed these using tools from the LGA Community Engagement Toolkit, developing proposals for improvement.
- A desktop review has also been undertaken of innovation and good practice elsewhere.
- The various consultations and research outlined above commenced in Autumn 2016 and carried on up to July 2017. As has been mentioned, the consultation used a wide range of methodologies: face to face, digital, desk research, expert advice, analysis of the views of residents through the Customer Survey.
- In putting forward a more diverse set of engagement methods, we have been particularly aware of the need to engage with harder to reach groups, eg those with no digital access, those with caring responsibilities who are unable to attend meetings, the elderly, those in our more deprived areas, newer citizens to the District who might need more Council help.

Recommendations in detail

- Cease Area Committees in their current format from 1 January 2018.
- Cease Locality Plans and continue to identify neighbourhood projects through the capital programme, ensuring new projects are aligned to relevant corporate strategies and follow the capital programme gateway process;
- Establish public consultation events across the District; whereby Members and officers present strategies, plans and priorities to the public and consult on proposals. These would run as informal exhibition-type drop in events, whereby the public can meet Members and officers and express opinions on council priorities;
- Cease Member Grants in their current format (ie approved through Area Committees); instead, allocate an annual amount as a contribution to Christmas festivities and to Remembrance Sunday and establish a community grants scheme through the Nottingham Community Foundation. Any unspent grant from 2017/18 will be taken as a saving and reported to Cabinet at a later date.
- It should be noted however, that an additional allocation will be made in 2018/19 financial year, specifically for Remembrance Sunday and the 100 Year commemoration of the ending of WW1. This is for the Council to act in its public leadership role following the reduction in support from the Police in 2017 for Remembrance Parades. The Council will provide additional support for the 100th year anniversary and thereafter will provide support for 3 parades of £525 each up to 2021, when this allocation will be reviewed;
- Within the specified budgets, an annual allocation of £15k will also be made from f/y 2018/19 to the Nottinghamshire Community Foundation to continue the availability of the small community grants. NCF is a charity and company limited by guarantee with expertise in the community and social enterprise sector. Like other Community Foundations in the UK, NCF acts as a broker to connect donations with areas of need, ensuring impact within communities. In granting this money, ADC will decide on the criteria for the grants and will of course stipulate that all money disbursed will be spent within the Ashfield District area for the benefit of its residents and community groups in alignment with our corporate plan and objectives.

- Retain the Citizens' Panel and Youth Panel. The Youth Panel is convened via Nottinghamshire County Council and ADC will continue to work with them on this important young people's forum. We will also work with schools and youth groups to develop other young people's engagement arrangements. Regarding the Citizen's Panel, ADC is intending to refresh this to encourage greater levels of membership and to consider alternative ways of working with its members, eg via more digital methods;
- Retain Member Surgeries, which would continue to be facilitated by Democratic Services according to Member wishes;
- Move to more modern digital approaches and placed base focussed connectivity where there is added value in engagement activity. Members will be able to retain involvement with their communities through increased use of social media and face to face engagement such as street surgeries;
- Investigate community engagement through the new Ashfield Place Partnership structures.
- Use the forthcoming Locality and Community Empowerment review to strengthen the work with Ashfield's Third Sector and voluntary and community sector partners. Review and maintain a central list of community groups, voluntary groups, charities and schools as a key corporate engagement information resource. This will enable services to identify and approach relevant groups as required as part of their community engagement activity, adopting a new principle that 'we go to them' to engage.
- Following on from the above, support resident led partnerships to become established, and then self-sustaining, in communities where collaboration has emerged based on the needs of that area, with officers working dynamically in those communities. For example New Cross Community Links and Broomhill. Work to integrate these new groups into the Ashfield Third Sector/voluntary and community sector partners' "family".
- Continue to improve the organisation's social media focus through:-
 - Proactive communication
 - Timely responses to residents which assist to clarify communications
 - Directors and Members being available online
 - Live streaming of meetings where appropriate
 - Working with Age UK and other charities to assist and support over 55's across the district in their awareness and use of digital channels.
- Adopt a Whole Council approach to community engagement, ie, support service managers and team leaders to understand that engagement is wider than information giving/consultation and is part of their wider organisational responsibility. Provide training and develop an Engagement Handbook, incorporating the importance of understanding engagement objectives and planning engagement activity through an Engagement Plan. As part of this approach, establish a resource hub and a community resource hub online through the Councils website with advice on how to engage with the Council and how to engage with local community groups;
- Establish a new marketing and advertising plan to promote the new ways of engagement. As part of this plan, we would include a range of methods such as: information within all council offices, DWP, community centres and hubs, Housing offices, social media groups and digital platforms, Council publications, partner platforms (eg Police, Fire Service, Schools etc);

- Commence the restructure of the Locality and Community Empowerment section in order to implement these changes.

Implications

Corporate Plan:

The context for Ashfield’s approach to Community Engagement is set out in the Corporate Plan, whereby the Council’s purpose states “the Council exists to serve the communities and residents of Ashfield.”

Also, of further significance are 2 of our stated values:

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

Against this purpose and these core values, the Corporate Plan states further 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.

Legal:

Area Committees are formal committees of the Executive appointed at the discretion of the Leader. The Leader has exercised her discretion to cease Area Committees with effect from 1st January 2018 and has amended the Executive Scheme of Delegation to reflect this.

The Monitoring Officer (in accordance with Article 14 section 14.02(a) – to make alterations and changes to reflect in year decisions as she deems necessary) will make necessary alterations and changes to the Constitution as a consequence of the Leader’s decision to cease Area Committees, including:

- Delete all references to Area Committees in Part 1;
- Delete Article 7 of Part 2;
- Delete Section 8 of 1.6 Part 3 (Executive Scheme of Delegation);
- Delete the terms of reference for Area Committees in 1.8 of Part 3;
- Delete references to the Area Committees in Part 7, Members’ Allowances Scheme;

Make consequential renumbering and other amendments as a result of the above changes.

The agreed Schedule of Meetings will also need amending to remove the Area Committees due to take place in 2018.

Finance:

This report is effective from 01/01/2017 and has the following financial implications:

Budget Area	Implication
General Fund – Revenue Budget	<p>There will be a saving of £3k in 2019/20. Any unspent grant in 2017/18 will contribute a small saving in this year.</p> <p>There are also savings of £3.7k in 2018/19 for 2 Member Special Responsibility Allowances as a result</p>

	of no longer chairing Area Committees. The saving in 2017/18 will be £0.9k.
General Fund – Capital Programme	None
Housing Revenue Account – Revenue Budget	None
Housing Revenue Account – Capital Programme	None

Risk:

Risk	Mitigation
Public apathy to new arrangements	This report proposes a wide range of methods (some existing and some new) and a new approach to take the council to the people through twice yearly consultation events
The new proposals become equally resource intensive	There will be a presumption through the Engagement Handbook that Community Engagement is everyone's business and not just the job of a few council officers. As well as this, we will monitor the new arrangements to ensure that they are relevant to the public.
Lack of appetite amongst Voluntary and Community and resident groups to become more self sufficient	It is proposed that as part of the Localities and Community Empowerment review, a coordinator will work with the Voluntary, Community and resident group sector to build local capacity and self-sufficiency.
Negative PR at the cessation of grants	See above. Help for groups to become more self-sufficient and raise their own funds.
Implication that ceasing Area Committees is not democratic	Area Committees are poorly attended by the community and were not seen as useful by those residents who responded to the Budget Consultation. This report proposes a wider range of activities which will facilitate greater levels of engagement with the public.

Human Resources:

The above recommendations if approved will be incorporated into relevant service reviews. Any resultant HR implications will be dealt with under the appropriate HR policies. There are no direct HR implications arising from this report.

Trade Union Comments:

The above recommendations will impact across the Council and the changes in service delivery will be incorporated into Service Reviews. Those Service reviews will be co-ordinated to maximise the opportunities for existing Officers.

The Council recognises the considerable contribution made by officers who facilitate existing Community Engagement and will seek to make use of their transferable skills to facilitate the new ways of working.

Equalities:

Overall there will be a positive implications on Equalities. Although the recommendations propose changes in format to our community engagement approach the overall effect will be positive by ensuring the councils reaches out to existing groups rather than waiting for people to attend its own meetings. The report proposes various methods to increase active community engagement and greater levels of self help across the district. This will include more intensive work with the infrastructure of the Voluntary sector to build their capacity, so that they can provide more support and also greatly improving engagement with younger people. An annual contribution to the Community Foundation, proposed within this report, will also provide some opportunity to groups for small grants.

Other Implications: Communications

Ongoing communications will be required in terms of press releases and direct communications to confirm new proposals once agreed and to provide ongoing support for the new arrangements.

Reason(s) for Urgency (if applicable):

Not applicable

Background Papers

None

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