

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Head of Service: Andrew Bircher, Interim Director of Corporate Services

Wards affected: (All Wards);

Urgent Decision?(yes/no) No

If yes, reason urgent decision required:

Appendices (attached):

Summary

To set out proposals on how the Council will better engage with residents to receive feedback on services and better understand residents' needs

Recommendation (s)

The Committee is asked to:

- (1) Agree to support Officers in carrying out the engagement activities set out in the report, incorporating Member feedback.**

1 Reason for Recommendation

- 1.1 The reason for the recommendation is to take forward a renewed approach to community engagement using a variety of methods as set out below.

2 Background

- 2.1 The Annual Plan 2022-2023 included the following two objectives:

- Create a community panel which reflects the diverse nature of our Borough.
- Hold a series of community conversations with an emphasis on listening to the seldom heard.

- 2.2 The Council had a citizens' panel a number of years ago, but this is no longer active and the person who used to run it no longer works for the council. This was part of the communications team. The panel was not considered to be demographically representative of the Borough.

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- 2.3 In addition, there is a lot of work involved in the creation and maintenance of a citizens' panel. This involves making sure it has sufficient numbers with active engagement and that it is representative of the profile of the borough. It should also be refreshed on a regular basis to ensure that those on the panel are providing fresh insights. Finally for the panel to be useful there needs to be a programme of work that the panel is asked about and their answers taken to inform policy development etc. Currently the citizens' panel is not up to date and has not been used in recent years
- 2.4 The other part of the target from 2.1 above is to hold a series of community conversations focussing on the seldom heard. There is more work to be done in this area although there has been some very successful engagement with residents as part of the local plan consultation which showed a good way of getting views from different groups of people via different platforms (including social media), and other consultations such as taxi licencing.
- 2.5 There are significant challenges with funding and maintaining an effective citizens' panel and we do not believe that establishing another citizens' panel (which would need to be started again from scratch) would deliver what the Council wants from community engagement. We also want to hear from specific community groups on specific issues and it is unlikely that one solution, e.g. a citizens' panel, is going to be the right vehicle to capture that feedback.
- 2.6 In response to this, the target above has been updated and reflected in the 2023/24 annual plan as follows:

“Bring forward a Project Initiation Document (PID) that proposes how we better receive feedback from people who work, live and study in Borough, regarding our priorities and services.”

3 Proposed Consultation Approach

- 3.1 An officer working group has been considering how best to approach the requirement to better engage with people who live, work and study in the Borough. Working on the assumption that there is not one single approach, and the council would benefit from a variety of feedback channels, the following engagement objectives are proposed:
- 3.1.1 Objective 1: Obtaining regular feedback on council services / customer satisfaction.
- 3.1.2 Objective 2: Ability to deliver 'mass' consultations on particular issues, e.g. new services, strategies/plans and policies.

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3.1.3 Objective 3: Ability to deliver targeted engagement on particular issues, e.g. products and software, design / improvement projects where user testing is required.

3.1.4 Objective 4: Ability to deliver targeted community engagement with hard-to-reach groups.

3.2 A further important assumption is that, at this stage, future engagement activities should be delivered within the council's current financial and officer resources. If at a later stage additional resources are felt necessary to enhance engagement activities, then business cases will be prepared at the time, and funding will need to be identified.

4 Exploring Engagement Options

4.1 The four objectives above can be arranged into two activity areas - feedback on existing council services (including venues), and consultations – both of which are underpinned by equality impact assessments. The latter will ensure that for each engagement activity, the council will strive to include those that are seldom heard and / or hard to reach.

4.2 Feedback on council services

4.2.4 Activity 1 – Complaints, compliments and comments (CCCs). This would involve a review of complaints and comments in all channels to be able to learn what customers are telling us, the themes and how we can improve. Work is done on this already, but the data is not shared widely and improvements are limited. We would aim to establish an officer working group to analyse comments and complaints and suggest improvements that can be taken forward. A report on complaints should come to councillors and be made public so that people can see the progress that is being made and acknowledgement of the issues that cause frustration.

4.2.5 Activity 2 – Microsoft Forms / surveys: each service to have a series of customer satisfaction questions. Submissions can be made online, paper, council offer to complete with a helper if requested, forms promoted through council's social / third sectors partners. This can be done through venues and could be targeted at particular services following events e.g. a survey on users of the museum at Bourne hall, feedback after an event at the playhouse, surveys in reception of the town hall. There is often a degree of user fatigue with surveys and so the use should be limited but capturing user experience at the point of delivery is very important. An option to hold a pop up stall or the like in public spaces to canvass feedback on services or key topics would be a positive way for the council to engage with residents

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4.3 Consultations

4.3.1 Activity 1 – Review current council consultations guidance / process documentation, to ensure it is up-to-date and adopts modern practices for equality impact assessments etc.

4.3.2 Activity 2 – develop the success we have had recently with consultations. Recent example of using external company and social media to gain responses to the local plan has been very successful. The approach in this area would be to consult on issues that affect wide numbers of people e.g. local plan, through to focussed or targeted consultations on people who make use of particular services e.g. taxi licencing.

We have also recently carried out consultations with hard-to-reach groups through partners, e.g. working alongside partners to establish the need and user requirements for the pantry.

We would also carry out consultations on particular issues involving product design e.g. design of new website to use small number of user / experience testers.

There will be different approaches for the above, some of which are best delivered in small groups face to face through to others which are better done online to capture wider numbers.

In some cases it may be better to make use of external agencies rather than using staff to deliver the consultation to ensure there is an unbiased approach and responses are impartially analysed

Responses from the above will be used to inform product development and discussion and added to committee reports, to help decision making. We can also make key results public via the website.

4.4 Officers would welcome views from Members of the Committee to help deliver on the objectives above. Views would be welcomed on matters including, but not limited to, the following:

4.4.1 Are there any other activities which officers should consider?

4.4.2 Would Councillors welcome complaints feedback relating to services in their area?

4.4.3 How would councillors want to hear the outcome of consultation activities so as to provide a feedback loop to the initiatives above?

5 Risk Assessment

Legal or other duties

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5.1 Equality Impact Assessment

5.1.1 For the consultations planned above EqIA would be done

5.2 Crime & Disorder

5.2.1 Working alongside the CDRP we could carry out surveys on opinions on crime and disorder issues

5.3 Safeguarding

5.3.1 Not arise directly from this report

5.4 Dependencies

5.4.1 n/a

5.5 Other

5.5.1 n/a

6 Financial Implications

6.1 **Section 151 Officer's comments:** Budget has not been identified for new expenditure so the activities identified above will be met from existing resources

7 Legal Implications

7.1 **Legal Officer's comments:** None arising from the contents of this report directly.

8 Policies, Plans & Partnerships

8.1 **Council's Key Priorities:** The following Key Priorities are engaged:

8.2 **Service Plans:** The matter is included within the current Service Delivery Plan.

9 Background papers

9.1 The documents referred to in compiling this report are as follows:

Previous reports:

- n/a

Other papers:

- The Annual Plan 2022-2023
- The Annual Plan 2023-2024