Community and Wellbeing Committee
8 October 2024

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT UPDATE

Head of Service:	Andrew Bircher, Interim Director of Corporate Services
Report Author	Andrew Bircher
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 engage with residents to receive feedback on services and better understand residents' needs.

Recommendation (s)

The Committee is asked to:

(1)   Endorse the approach taken to consultation.

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   As a public service organisation we want to hear from the communities we serve about the impact of what we do, how well we do and whether we are doing the things they want us to do. This will assist the Council by informing its strategic aims and policy development.

2.2   We need to consider the best ways of doing this. The Council used to have a citizens' panel a number of years ago, but this is no longer active and the person who used to run it no longer works for the council.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.

2.3   There is a lot of work involved in the creation and maintenance of a citizens' panel. This involves making sure it has sufficient numbers 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.

2.4   As a result, the re-establishment of a stand-alone citizens panel is not considered the most appropriate way to get feedback from residents / customers / service users. Instead, we would like to consider an alternative approach.

3   Proposed way forward for engagement with residents / customers / service users

3.1   We recognise that we represent varied and diverse communities and demographics and therefore one single approach is not appropriate for all circumstances and that a variety of techniques and audiences would be most appropriate to cover off the various types of engagement required. The following are the kinds of techniques which would be considered:

> 3.1.1 Obtaining regular feedback on council services / customer satisfaction.
>
> 3.1.2 Run public consultations on particular issues, e.g. new services, strategies/plans and policies.
>
> 3.1.3 Deliver targeted engagement on particular issues, e.g. products and software, design / improvement projects where user testing is required.
>
> 3.1.4 Deliver targeted community engagement with seldom heard groups.

3.2   Exactly how we engage and in what format will be considered by the relevant parts of the business that are taking forward the change / initiative. For example, a change to some software could be best done with a user group who experience and use the software. This could mean smaller numbers with more hands-on consultations and engagement as this could work better than a wide scale high-level engagement. However as is the case with the Local Plan the ambition is to include as many people as possible so road shows, online marketing, publicity campaigns etc were appropriate.

3.3   Each consultation is tailored to the specific activity and group or groups of people we want to engage. We undertake stakeholder mapping and audience analysis for consultations to help identify all the groups we want to engage including hard-to-reach groups, and plan how best to reach them.

3.4   A tiered approach could help us focus resource and ensure that we are consistent with our approach. E.g.

3.4.4 High priority or Gold - many people in the borough will be highly impacted – would entail multiple opportunities for people to engage across all our channels, including a media release, outreach as above, focus groups, direct mail and paid promotion. Partnership working.

3.4.5 Medium priority or Silver - few people are impacted but to a high degree – targeted outreach would include fewer opportunities to engage via our broader owned communications channels (website, social media, eborough insight, borough boards), but still targeted outreach and potentially paid promotion e.g. boosted social media posts, direct mail and possibly focus groups.

3.4.6 Low priority or Bronze – few people are impacted to a low degree - perhaps a more standard approach e.g. comms through our own channels and other activity depending on target audiences.

3.5 Our communications strategy also outlines how we aim to engage our residents and partners ongoing. There are many opportunities for residents to feedback to us including on social media, via our e-newsletter, by contacting us directly.

3.6 Examples of consultations that we have carried out recently are:

3.6.4 Draft Local plan consultation (Regulation 18) undertaken in 2023, which generated over 1700 responses – one of the best response rates we have had to a consultation. Although this is an important subject, and would be well supported, we encouraged participation through a series of consultation events / roadshows (in the Ashley centre) and made use of on-line, digital consultation and an external agency to help promote this.

3.6.5 When considering changes to dog walking arrangements at Nonsuch, in addition to our usual web and social media presence for the consultation, the team engaged with dog walkers in the park on a face to face basis and with local resident groups. In addition, a public session was run in Bourne Hall with commercial dog walkers to gain their feedback.

3.6.6 Consultation on the proposed changes to taxi licences and the changes to environment impacts of taxis was an important subject that affected taxi companies and drivers as well as users of taxis. The consultation ran for six weeks and engaged 22 residents.

3.6.7 When carrying out a review of the Community Safety partnership, a survey was used to gauge the opinions from all partners and residents. Although a far-reaching survey the response rate was low.

3.6.8 We asked people, particularly women, in a queue for a nightclub to scan a QR code and fill out a survey about night-time safety in Epsom Town Centre

3.6.9 With the recent Corporate Peer Challenge audit, we worked with partners and customers to provide feedback on our services to the peer team.

3.6.10 We have also explored "live scribing" which is a way of creating a visual summary of keynote speeches and workshops, particularly useful for people who take in information in different ways to the usual format.

3.6.11 We have refreshed our complaints reporting so that we can better understand what customers are contacting us about and how we can improve what we do.

4 Working with partners

4.1 One of the things we have struggled with and which many organisations find difficult is how best to engage with those groups that are seldom heard.

4.2 Our work with 'the Good Company' has been an example of where we have used a key community partner that has far better engagement with our target group to act on our behalf to deliver the outcomes we are seeking.

4.3 An exhibition at Bourne Hall marking 50 shapers of the LGBTQI+ movement was well received.

4.4 We attend events such as careers days at Nescot so that the work of the council can be better understood and shared, in this case by younger people who are considering future career options but it is still a good opportunity to showcase what a local authority does.

5 Way forward

5.1 The council considers that the approach taken to engagement as set out above is the correct approach to ensure that residents can feed back on services and help to inform what we do.

5.2 Going forward we propose to continue with this diverse approach to engagement rather than relying on a single citizens' panel.

5.3 We will look for opportunities to run engagement events and campaigns with specific target groups as well as the general population as and when required, or we feel it would be beneficial or considered advisable depending on the subject matter.

6   Risk Assessment

Legal or other duties

6.1   Equality Impact Assessment

    6.1.1   One of the objectives from engagement is to establish what impacts we may have on different parts of the community so an active engagement programme helps to support this

6.2   Crime & Disorder

    6.2.1   None directly arising from this report

6.3   Safeguarding

    6.3.1   None directly arising from this report

6.4   Dependencies

    6.4.1   None

6.5   Other

    6.5.1   None

7   Financial Implications

7.1   **Section 151 Officer's comments**:   There is no budget for consultation although the council does use a small number of SNAP consultation licences. Costs for any consultation would be met through existing budgets.

8   Legal Implications

8.1   **Legal Officer's comments**: The council needs to consider the impact that its policy making could have on the public especially those with protected characteristics. An active engagement programme supports this duty.

9   Policies, Plans & Partnerships

9.1   **Council's Key Priorities**: The following Key Priorities are engaged: None

9.2   **Service Plans**: The matter is not included within the current Service Delivery Plan.

9.3   **Climate & Environmental Impact of recommendations**: None

9.4   **Sustainability Policy & Community Safety Implications**: None

9.5   **Partnerships**: Other than as set out above

10 Background papers

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

Previous reports:

- Community Engagement - Community and Wellbeing Committee 22 June 2023

Other papers: