

REPORT TO: CABINET OVERVIEW WORKING GROUP

DATE: 29 NOVEMBER 2018

TITLE: COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY – INTERIM REPORT

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RECOMMENDED that:

- A** The contents of the report be noted.
- B** A Focus Group, to include Officers and Councillors from the Cabinet Overview Working Group (COWG), is set up to discuss and have input into the new Community Engagement Strategy and agree the future approach with an update to be presented to the next meeting.

BACKGROUND

1. An offer from the Local Government Association (LGA) to be part of a project that they were running with The Campaign Company (TCC) was received with the aim to produce a best practice and practical guide to consultation and engagement for local authorities.
2. This was formally launched on 27 February 2017 and entitled 'New Conversations'. Will Heywood from TCC previously presented the findings at Scrutiny Committee on 14 March 2017. A link to the work is included in the Background Papers section.
3. part of this work, a separate report was produced that focussed on Harlow. This was named 'New Conversations Harlow' and is attached as Appendix A to the report. An in depth toolkit called 'Harlow LGA Toolkit' was also produced and this is attached as Appendix B.
4. There has however been a variety of different engagement streams that have taken place over the last year. Some of these projects are detailed later in the report.
5. The Discover Harlow project is embedding and engagement with stakeholders and businesses is ongoing.

ISSUES/PROPOSALS

6. Harlow and Gilston Garden Town project has already had a significant amount of community engagement and this will continue over the coming years. There was a full consultation on the spatial vision that ran through the summer. This allowed Harlow residents, as well as those from East Hertfordshire and Epping, to comment on the principles and vision. The results will feed into various other documents including the masterplan, the Garden Town transport strategy and sustainable transport corridor and the Garden Town housing plan and economic Development plan which will again be subject to further consultation. Harlow is playing an active role with the other councils and there will be dedicated resource within the Garden Town project team to focus on this.
7. The Town Centre Area Action Plan to guide the future regeneration and development of Harlow Town Centre had substantial community engagement throughout the summer of 2018. In addition to this a consultation was carried out asking for views on community safety within the Town Centre to be used to feed into a public space protection order.
8. A social media review was undertaken by the consultant Comms 2.0 in December 2017 and refreshed in April 2018. This outlines key ways that we can improve the way we communicate through our social media channels to ensure that we reach as wide an audience as possible. This includes engaging with a lot of small local groups and organisations instead of just the large and traditional ones meaning quality insight from areas we wouldn't normally reach.
9. As part of the Customer Service review, customer consultation has been undertaken with users of the cash office. This has given good insight into the habits of the users as well as an understanding of their requirements for the future allowing the Council to tailor it accordingly.
10. The Harlow Health and Wellbeing strategy was launched in July 2018. There was a wide consultation undertaken to inform this ranging from users which included all the health and wellbeing sub groups, the Youth Council and wider partners. Residents and local sports clubs were also invited to give their views on sport and physical activity in the town to help improve participation levels.
11. The Civic Pride Community Fund was launched in October 2018. This will encourage and support engagement and joint working with community and voluntary groups to help achieve council priorities.
12. There has also been consultation with local businesses and property owners in Templefields North East with regard to the introduction of an Article 4 Direction. This is to prevent landowners automatically being able to convert business premises into residential accommodation under permitted development rights.
13. In addition to the above, a consultation was carried out regarding roof signs for private hire vehicles. There have also been statutory consultations in 2018 that have included the local plan and the local council tax support scheme.

14. A Community Engagement Strategy for 2018/19 – 2020/21 has been drafted - this reflects some of the findings resulting from The Campaign Company's work. The draft Community Engagement Strategy is attached as Appendix C.
15. Any new Community Engagement Strategy requires a clear direction on what it is we as a Council want to know and do. A small Focus Group made up of Officers and Councillors from the Overview Working Group should work together to discuss ideas and develop a Community Engagement narrative to inform effective engagement and consultation activity going forward.
16. Once further scoping has taken place; feedback has been received from the Focus Group and there is a clear vision for community engagement; a Community Engagement Action Plan will be developed to support delivery of the strategy. The Action Plan will be aligned to the Council's Communications activity to ensure that community engagement and consultation work is co-ordinated across the Council and embedded into the Council's core activity.
17. A lot of community engagement work is already carried out by the Council although it is not always joined up or co-ordinated. To ensure that a more strategic approach is adopted - one that builds on the work already undertaken and joins together the findings in a way that can be used to improve service delivery, a clear sense of direction and associated resource needs to be identified.

IMPLICATIONS

Place (Includes Sustainability)

As contained within the report.

Author: Jane Greer, Head of Community Wellbeing on behalf of Graeme Bloomer, Head of Place

Finance (Includes ICT)

There are no identified financial implications at this stage although any form of community engagement is likely to require some level of financial resource.

Author: Simon Freeman, Head of Finance

Housing

An improvement in the way that the Council engages with the community will ensure it is able to align resources to priorities.

Author: Andrew Murray, Head of Housing

Community Wellbeing (Includes Equalities and Social Inclusion)

As contained within the report.

Author: Jane Greer, Head of Community Wellbeing

Governance (Includes HR)

There are no legal implications at this stage. Any consultations will though need to ensure appropriate data security is adhered to.

Author: Colleen O'Boyle, Interim Head of Governance

Appendices

Appendix A – New Conversations Harlow

Appendix B – Harlow LGA Toolkit

Appendix C – Draft Community Engagement Strategy

Background Papers

New Conversations: LGA guide to engagement:

http://www.local.gov.uk/web/guest/publications/-/journal_content/56/10180/8287322/PUBLICATION

Glossary of terms/abbreviations used

COWG – Cabinet Overview Working Group

LGA – Local Government Association

TCC – The Campaign Company