

CABINET OVERVIEW WORKING GROUP
Thursday 14 March 2019 at 7.30 pm
Council Chamber - Civic Centre

AGENDA

1. Apologies for Absence
To receive any apologies for absence from Councillors.
2. Declarations of Interest
To receive Councillors' declarations of interest (if any) in relation to any matters on the agenda.
3. Minutes (Pages 2 - 3)
To approve the minutes of the meeting held on 17 January 2019.
4. Matters arising
Any matters arising from the minutes of the previous meeting.
5. Work Plan (Page 4)
To review the Overview Working Group's work plan for the current year.
6. Community Engagement Strategy - Final Report (Pages 5 - 21)
7. Houses of Multiple Occupation - Question and Answer Session with the Leader and Portfolio Holders
8. Matters of Urgent Business
Such other business which, in the opinion of the Chair, should be received as a matter of urgency by reason of special circumstances to be specified in the minutes.

**MINUTES OF THE CABINET OVERVIEW WORKING GROUP
HELD ON**

17 January 2019

7.30 - 8.40 pm

PRESENT

Overview Working Group Members

Councillor Tony Durcan (Chair)
Councillor Tony Edwards (Vice-Chair)
Councillor David Carter
Councillor Simon Carter
Councillor Jean Clark
Councillor Bob Davis
Councillor Maggie Hulcoop

Other Councillors

Councillor Simon Carter

Officers

Lisa Thornett, Corporate Governance Support Officer
Jane Greer, Head of Community Wellbeing
Julie Houston, Strategy and Economic Development Manager

17. **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Mike Garnett.

18. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

None.

19. **MINUTES**

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 29 November 2019 be agreed as a correct record.

20. **MATTERS ARISING**

None.

21. **WORK PLAN**

The Chair expressed concern that it appeared that the panel mainly delegated activity to sub groups that meet in private. The Chair suggested to show more openness that sub groups should be restricted and more should be directly dealt with by the main panel in open session. The Chair

will review the function of the panel with the Leader of the Council. Members supported this proposal.

RESOLVED that the work plan was agreed.

22. **REGENERATION STRATEGY - INTERIM REPORT**

AGREED that the report would be noted and a small sub group consisting of Councillors Simon Carter, Edwards and Hulcoop be set up to bring a more substantive report to the group.

23. **HOUSES OF MULTIPLE OCCUPATION - SCOPING REPORT**

RESOLVED that:

1. A special meeting of the Working Group would be set up in February inviting Councillor Ingall, the appropriate Portfolio Holder and Senior Officers for the options and implications of moving forward with implementing an Article Four Direction.
2. Clear direction from the Cabinet would be obtained with regards to proceeding with the review and the implementation of Article Four Direction.
3. The review would look at the process Stevenage Borough Council followed. Officers from Stevenage Borough Council who implemented the Article Four Direction would be invited to the meeting.
4. The timeline changes within the terms of reference be agreed. This included an Interim Report in March and Final report to the first meeting in the new municipal year.

24. **HOUSING STRATEGY - SCOPING REPORT**

AGREED that Jane Greer would forward papers to the Working Group and a report would be brought back to the Group with evidence with timescales for panel to determine a way forward.

25. **MATTERS OF URGENT BUSINESS**

None.

CHAIR OF THE OVERVIEW
WORKING GROUP

Cabinet Overview Working Group Work Plan 2018/19

	Meeting dates 2018/19				
Title	Thursday 9 August 2018	Thursday 11 October 2018 CANCELLED	Thursday 29 November 2018	Thursday 17 January 2019	Thursday 14 March 2019
Non Housing Asset Management Strategy	Presentation		Final Report		
Community Engagement Strategy			Interim Report		Final Report
Regeneration Strategy				Interim Report	
Local Council Tax Support Scheme			Report		
Treasury Management Strategy			Strategy Review		
Houses of Multiple Occupation				Scoping Report	Q and A with the Leader and Portfolio Holders
Housing Strategy				Scoping Report	

Agenda Item 5

REPORT TO: CABINET OVERVIEW WORKING GROUP

DATE: 14 MARCH 2019

TITLE: COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY – FINAL REPORT

LEAD OFFICER: JANE GREER, HEAD OF COMMUNITY WELLBEING (01279) 446406

CONTRIBUTING OFFICER: CHRISTINE HOWARD, YOUTH AND CITIZENSHIP MANAGER (01279) 446192

RECOMMENDED that the Working Group:

- A** Notes the work of the Community Engagement Focus Group
- B** Recommends the draft Community Engagement Strategy (attached as Appendix A to the report) be approved

BACKGROUND

1. An interim report was submitted to Overview Working Group on 29 November 2018 to provide an update on the wide range of community engagement work that had taken place over the previous 18 months.
2. A copy of the draft Community Engagement Strategy for 2018/19 – 2020/21 (the Strategy) was presented to the Working Group at the meeting on 29 November 2018 along with the interim report and, whilst they felt it was fit for purpose, Councillors requested that it should be reviewed again before being presented to Cabinet for approval.
3. It was agreed that a Focus Group, including Councillors and Officers, should be set up to discuss and have input to the final draft of new Strategy and agree the future approach to community engagement activity across all Council services.
4. The Focus Group met on 18 January 2019 for an initial discussion about the draft Strategy and to consider how it will be delivered going forward.
5. At the meeting on 18 January 2019 it was agreed that a Community Engagement Mission Statement would be developed and a final review of the Strategy would be undertaken. To support delivery of the Strategy, a Community Engagement Toolkit and Action Plan would be developed following approval of the Strategy by Cabinet.
6. A Mission Statement has been developed and approved by all Councillors on the Focus Group. The Mission Statement is included in the Strategy.

7. A further meeting of the Focus Group took place on 22 February 2019 when the Focus Group Members agreed final changes to the Strategy.

ISSUES/PROPOSALS

8. At the meeting on 22 February 2019 it was proposed that the Focus Group continues to meet over coming months to ensure Councillor involvement in the development of a Community Engagement Toolkit and Action Plan. The aim of the Toolkit will be to support Officers and Councillors to ensure good practice and consistency across all Council services when planning and delivering community engagement activity. The Action Plan will be used to demonstrate key tasks around development of the Council's approach to community engagement and to evidence outcomes of these tasks.
9. A lead officer for Community Engagement has now been identified. This will ensure timely publication of the Strategy once approved by Cabinet as well as timely development and implementation of a Toolkit and Action Plan to support delivery of the Strategy.

IMPLICATIONS

Place (Includes Sustainability)

The development of the Community Engagement Strategy will assist the Council in the implementation of robust consultation processes for future planning policy proposals

Author: Andrew Bramidge, Project Director – Enterprise Zone and Interim Head of Planning

Finance (Includes ICT)

None specific.

Author: Simon Freeman, Head of Finance and Deputy to the Managing Director

Housing

The Community Engagement Strategy will need to align with Housing's Tenant and Leaseholder Strategy to ensure alignment of the Council's future engagement commitments and to ensure a holistic approach is achieved in terms of promoting and encouraging engagement within the Town.

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)

Effective community engagement on both a statutory and discretionary basis underpins well informed decision making across the Council and encourages greater involvement in democracy. The proposed strategy sets out the Council's commitment to clear and open engagement practices across the Harlow Community.

Author: Simon Hill, Head of Governance

Appendices

Appendix A – Draft Community Engagement Strategy 2018/19 – 2020/21

Background Papers

None.

Glossary of terms/abbreviations used

None.

Harlow Council

Community Engagement Strategy

2018/19 – 2020/21



Contents

Item	Page	Content
	3	Introduction
1	4	What is Community Engagement?
2	6	Why Community Engagement is important
3	8	Partnership working
4	9	How the Council intends to engage with communities in the future
5	11	Future engagement – the Council’s commitment
6	13	Measuring success
	14	Acknowledgements

Introduction

Harlow Council takes its responsibility for engaging with local people and businesses seriously and aims, wherever possible and practical, to take their views and opinions into consideration when making decisions about things that affect them.

The Council genuinely wants to ensure that people feel well informed about local issues; have the opportunity to get involved in and influence local decision-making and the ability to tell the Council what they think about its policies, procedures, service delivery and work with partner organisations. Above all, the Council wants to help build strong, involved and integrated communities where people can live happily alongside one another and enjoy all the benefits the town has to offer.

In addition, through effective engagement and marketing we can work together with residents, businesses and our partners to ensure that Harlow is recognised as a great place to live, work and visit; a great place for children to grow up being healthy and feeling safe and happy; an excellent place to do business where businesses will thrive and flourish and a place where people from all backgrounds can live happily together demonstrating community spirit and pride in Harlow.

The purpose of a Community Engagement Strategy is to build on good practices that already exist within the Council; plan a way forward for engaging with local people in the future and ultimately increase the number and diversity of people who engage with and work with the Council to help make Harlow the best place it can possibly be.

The strategy also acknowledges the Council's desire to work closely together with statutory, voluntary and community partners for the benefit of all local people and businesses.

The strategy is set out clearly in four sections

1. What is community engagement?
2. Why community engagement is important
3. Partnership working
4. How the Council intends to engage with local people in the future

The strategy links directly to the Council's Corporate Plan 2018/19 - 2020/21 in which the Council clearly states its goals for the next three years and how it intends to achieve these. Engaging with local people, businesses and partners will undoubtedly play a key role in the council's success in this respect.

The strategy also links to the Council's Tenant and Leaseholder Involvement Strategy which outlines how the Council will work together with tenants and resident leaseholders of Harlow Council to improve the services it delivers.

Further, the strategy is aligned to the findings and recommendations from extensive work undertaken by The Campaign Company in 2017/18 and will build on the work already undertaken for the Discover Harlow project to ensure Harlow is recognised for its outstanding location, energy, aspiration, achievement and wealth of opportunities.

Officers and Members have worked together to develop a Mission Statement that describes succinctly the Council's aim in respect of community engagement. This will be used when promoting the strategy and other community engagement resources such as posters and leaflets and will inform the various work streams that will naturally evolve as a result of delivery of the strategy.

Mission Statement

Community Engagement is the process by which Harlow Council aims to build strong, connected, involved and empowered communities with voices that will be heard and responded to as part of local decision-making.

1. What is Community Engagement?

The term 'Community Engagement' can mean different things to different people and can take a number of different forms depending on what is hoped to be achieved. With this in mind the Council takes a varied and flexible approach to engaging with local people and recognises that there are many different types of community. For example '**Communities of Place**' are people living within a defined geographical area such as Church Langley or Staple Tye. '**Communities of Identity**' are people who share a particular experience or characteristic, such as young people, faith groups, older people, people with a disability, ethnic groups or lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people. '**Communities of Interest**' are people who share a particular interest such as skaters, athletes, musicians etc.

It is easy to think about community engagement as a set of steps ranging from providing information right up to passing decision-making responsibilities over to local people. Thus, engagement can include the provision of a whole range of information in various formats; undertaking research and consultation; encouraging, supporting and enabling participation and devolving decision-making powers where possible and appropriate.

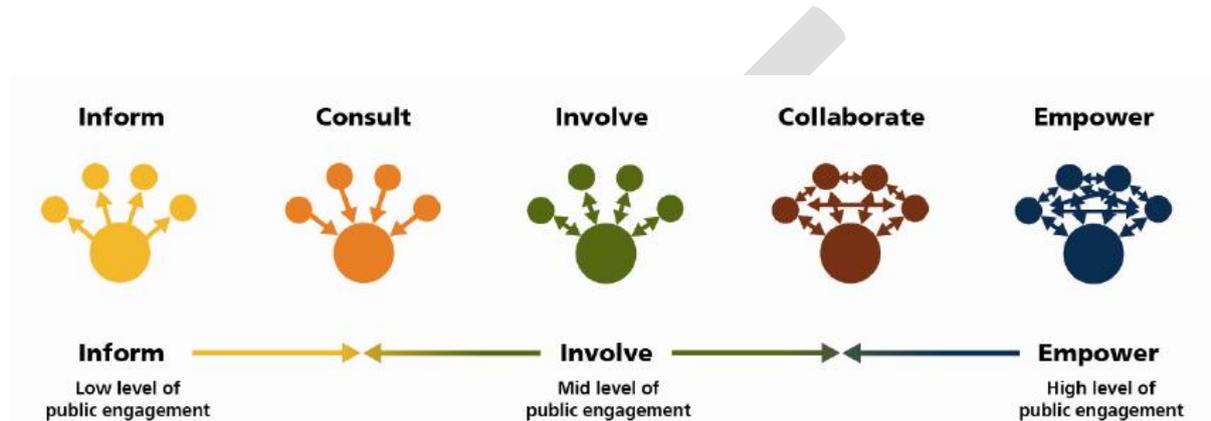
Effective community engagement is about making sure that residents are well informed about local services and issues that might affect them and the town more widely. Good engagement enables people to participate in lots of different ways to help make Harlow a better place in which to live, work and enjoy leisure opportunities. It also includes actively involving service users in the design and delivery of services wherever possible so that we can deliver quality services that meet the needs of local people.

The Council currently provides information on a whole range of subjects in a variety of different formats. As well as informing people about the different services and functions of the Council, it also sets out the challenges being faced; what it has achieved and the choices that it faces within the resources that it has available. It is

important for local people to understand what the Council can do as well as what it can't and the reasons for this.

However, engagement is not just about providing people with information. It is also about consulting them to gain an understanding of their views and opinions; conducting research to gather valuable information about local communities and by working together, in partnership, with local people to achieve a common aim.

There are different levels of engagement - from the simple provision of information through to direct involvement, collaborative working and ultimately the empowerment of local people to come together as strong, involved and influential communities.



Community engagement can take place in many different ways and the Council engages individuals and groups using the following formal and informal methods:

- Annual Staff Survey
- Biennial Landlord Survey
- Consultations – for example in relation to the Town Centre Area Action Plan and the Harlow and Gilston Town Project
- Council Committee meetings
- Councillor Surgeries
- Harlow Council Website
- Harlow Times Magazine
- Housing Focus Groups
- Housing Standards Panels and Board
- Online, using Facebook, Twitter and other appropriate social media sites
- Posters, leaflets, flyers etc.
- Procurement Exercises
- Public meetings, displays and market place opportunities
- Residents' Associations
- Resident Inspectors
- Surveys – online, face-to-face and postal
- Task and Finish Sub Groups
- Tenant and Leaseholder Involvement Strategy

- Tenant and Leaseholder Forums
- Ward Inspections
- Youth Council

Note: For the purposes of this strategy 'local people' are defined as people likely to be affected by, or particularly interested in, a particular function. As well as residents of Harlow this can include people who work or study in Harlow, visitors to Harlow, Harlow service users, third sector groups in Harlow and businesses operating in Harlow.

2. Why Community Engagement is important

Harlow's population has grown slightly over recent years and is projected to grow further. The town's population currently stands at 87,100 (2018). However, the Office for National Statistics projects Harlow's population to reach 94,800 by 2033

In 2017, 22.1% of the town's population was aged under-sixteen. This was slightly higher than the mean for all UK Local Authorities (18.5%).

Harlow is becoming a much more ethnically diverse town with latest statistics showing around 16% of Harlow's population being non White British.

Over recent years the town has also seen a significant increase in the number of families being placed in to Harlow by other Councils. This brings its own challenges in terms of increased demand on local support services and pressure on schools and health services but also in that the Council does not always know about or understand the community demographics in these areas and this could impact on opportunities for effective engagement going forward.

It is therefore important that the Council recognises growth in the diversity of its communities and prepares for the changes and challenges that this will undoubtedly bring. The Council needs and wants to be able to engage positively with people of all ages, from all social and ethnic backgrounds and intends that this strategy will inform and drive this work.

The Council wants to work with residents, statutory and non-statutory agencies and community and voluntary groups to strengthen relationships between people from different ethnic backgrounds and faiths and, in its role as community leader, will aim to bring communities together and improve relationships between different groups.

The Council also recognises the importance of young people's views and actively supports the work of Harlow Youth Council and the Harlow Youth Strategy Group to ensure that young people's views are heard and taken into consideration when decisions are made about things that affect them, including the commissioning of local services.

Engaging with local people helps the Council build a clearer understanding of local issues and needs from the perspective of those who are most affected by the

situation. Getting to know local communities better means that the Council can ensure the most appropriate methods are used to engage them effectively and successfully. Likewise, good engagement also means that local people gain a better understanding of the challenges being faced by the Council in seeking to meet their needs.

It is recognised that good community engagement can result in strong, vibrant and empowered communities. The Council aims to support local people to develop and enjoy such communities by further developing meaningful opportunities for dialogue with local people in good times and in difficult ones. We will listen to what local people have to say when making decisions about resources and services that affect them both directly and indirectly. In addition, we will work closely with local people to set up and run their own Residents' Associations to help build strong, connected and resilient communities.

Community engagement activity ranges from ensuring the availability of relevant information to suit the needs of local people through to undertaking research and conducting consultations and actively encouraging and supporting participation in decision-making processes.

Good community engagement can result in a range of benefits for individuals, businesses, communities and partners which can include any or all of the following outcomes.

- Assisting partners meet their requirement to carry out statutory consultation.
- Improved relationships with communities through open conversation and honest feedback. Increased public involvement in local decision-making and greater possibility of the public being able to influence local decisions.
- Involving residents in the delivery of public services to make sure their knowledge, experience and priorities help shape services so they are more responsive to local need.
- Encouraging more voluntary and community groups to become involved in planning and delivering local services so that they meet local demand.
- Helping people build strong, involved and empowered communities that are more resilient and self-sufficient and thus less reliant on the Council.
- Engaging more people in local democracy and decision-making about things that affect them.

Effective and successful engagement will assist the Council to achieve its top five priorities for 2018/19 to 2020/21.

- **More and Better Housing**
- **Regeneration and a Thriving Economy**
- **Wellbeing and Social Inclusion**
- **A clean and Green Environment**
- **Successful Children and Young People**

Positive engagement will be led by the Council's three guiding principles as set out in the Council's Corporate Plan 2018 - 2021

- **Being the Community Leader**
- **Sound Resource Management**
- **Equalities and Fairness**

3. Partnership working

For many years the approach to community engagement in Harlow has been that individual organisations have been responsible for their own engagement activity. The Council however recognises the benefits of partnership working and whenever possible and practical seeks to work in partnership to effectively engage and involve local people.

There are real benefits to be had in working together with partners to engage local people and economies of scale can be achieved where consultation activities can be joined up and undertaken simultaneously rather than duplicating engagement activity or events. Also, by sharing and combining information, agencies can gain a much clearer picture of local issues and the specific needs of the community.

It is important that there are opportunities for a range of different people to come together at various times, depending on the situation, to work together with the Council to ensure successful community engagement. We will seek to actively engage relevant people and partners on an ongoing basis and will include the following.

- Harlow residents and those defined as 'local people' (see page 4).
- Ward Councillors - as elected representatives of their communities.
- Voluntary and community groups - both individually and through local infrastructure organisations such as Rainbow Services.
- Smaller community groups such as Residents' Associations and local support groups etc.
- Private sector organisations, local businesses and social enterprises.
- Public service providers such as the County Council, the police, education, health, housing providers etc.

4. How the Council intends to engage with communities in the future

As mentioned on pages 3 and 4 of this strategy, the Council currently engages with local people in a variety of different ways although community engagement activities have not always been planned or joined up effectively across all services and audiences in the past.

The Council's communications channels and activities – including the Harlow Times magazine, website, various newsletters etc. and council events have been an important part in engaging with local people. Over recent years the Council has made more and better use of social media platforms and the Communications Team has undertaken both a customer services review and an extensive review in to the use of social media. These reviews highlighted key ways in which we can improve the way we engage with people via social media in the future to ensure we reach as wide an audience as possible.

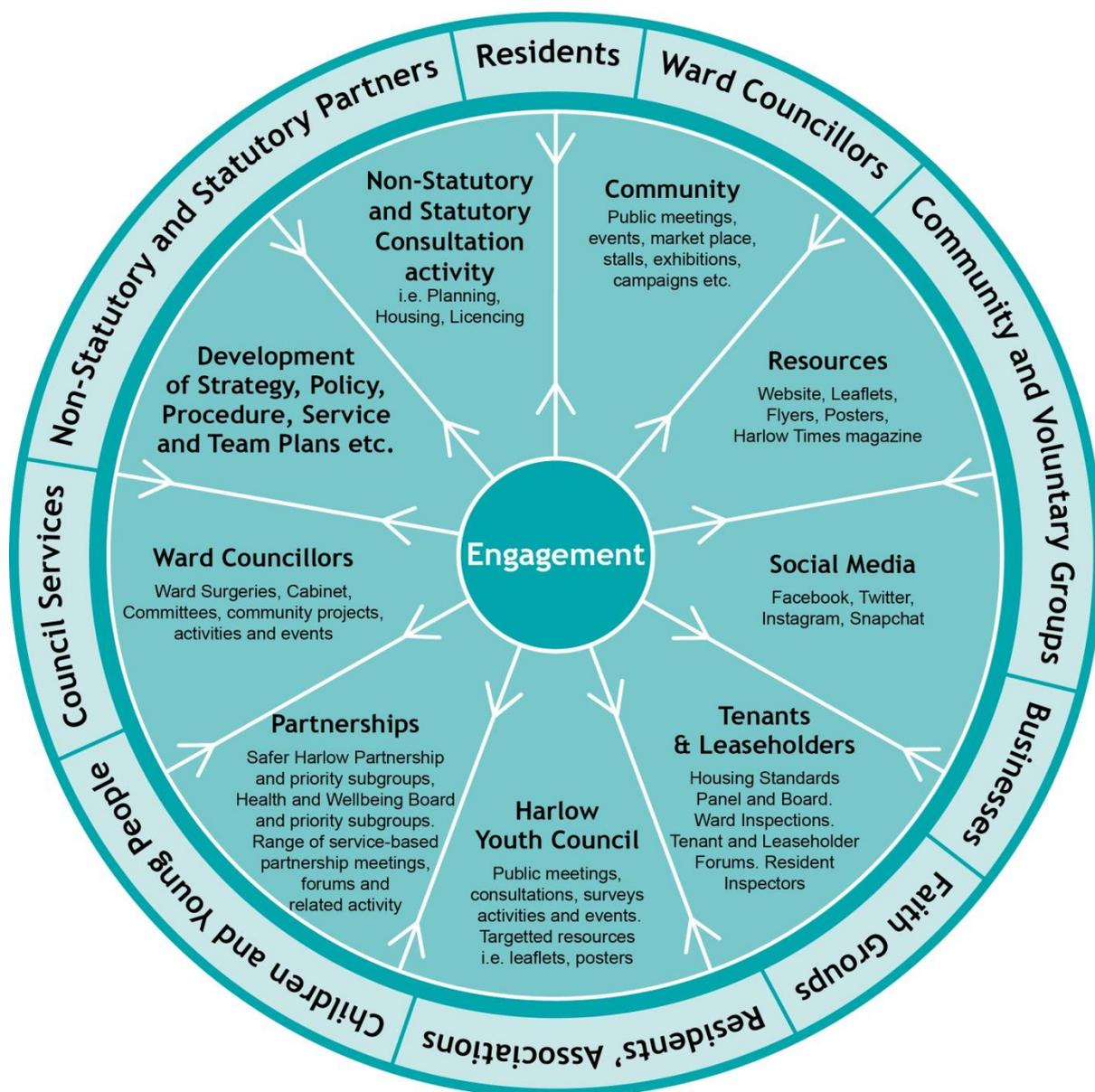
Due to the Council's efforts to increase the number of people accessing services via the website (for example to pay rent and Council Tax and book services such as green waste and bulky items for collection) local people are becoming much more familiar with the website and as a result there will continue to be a strong focus on developing the website as an important self-serve and community engagement tool.

The Council is already actively and effectively using social media to engage with a much wider audience across all ages and will continue to develop this area of engagement. In particular, social media will be used to target and engage young people about things that affect or interest them and the Council's Communications Team actively supports Harlow Youth Council to engage young people via social media.

However, we will continue to ensure that we offer a wide range of appropriate engagement opportunities that meet the needs of all local people across all age groups and social backgrounds. We will strive to ensure that we can actively engage people and groups that may be viewed as 'hard to reach' or are vulnerable through age or disability for example. We will regularly ask local people how they wish to engage with us and respond to their requirements positively whenever possible.

The diagram overleaf gives a visual representation of the many ways in which the Council engages with individuals, groups and partner agencies.

In delivering this strategy, the Council will work to increase the range of methods available for positive engagement. We will be open to new and innovative ways of engaging with local people to ensure their voices are heard and taken in to consideration as part of decision making processes.



Principles

The Council's approach to future engagement with local people will include the following.

- Having clearly defined objectives for engagement and communicating clearly and openly about decision-making processes and resulting actions.
- An openness to considering and developing new ways to deliver services.
- Seeking to reach those communities and individuals not yet engaged i.e. hard to reach and marginalised groups.

- Genuinely listening to the views and opinions of local people and taking these into consideration when making decisions that affect them.
- Being open and honest with local people when their views and opinions cannot be acted upon and the reasons for this.
- Sharing information (where appropriate) and expertise and pooling partner resources to maximise engagement and reduce 'engagement fatigue' and duplication for communities, businesses and individuals.
- Seeking to identify new and innovative ways to engage local people in timely and creative ways in order to ensure maximum participation.
- Recognising and valuing existing community engagement methods and working to make these more responsive and effective.

5. Future engagement – the Council's commitment.

The Council will undertake the following actions in order to support robust delivery of this strategy and ensure effective community engagement in the future.

- Ensure an organisational culture where all Councillors and staff recognise and value the importance of effective engagement and consultation
- Observe good practice and available guidance, for example the 'New Conversations – LGA guide to engagement' and the Harlow specific tool 'Embedding Community Engagement Through Change'
- Develop and promote a Community Engagement Toolkit that will be understood and delivered across all council services to ensure good practice, effective planning and robust monitoring and evaluation of community engagement activity.
- Be clear about what it hopes to achieve from consultation and not undertake consultation where it is clear that public opinion will not change outcomes - for example when statutory duties must be met
- Continue to use a variety of community engagement methods to consult and engage with local people – using the most appropriate approach depending on the situation
- Continue to develop the Council's website as an important, informative and useful engagement tool with the intention that more services become available to the public through self-serve platforms online and through mobile devices

- Ensure people have a choice about the way in which they communicate with the Council, for example by letter, email, telephone and also through social media platforms and that the Council offers a range of appropriate methods for sharing information and communicating with local people. This includes the availability of information in different languages and large print
- Ensure that community engagement activity is aligned to the work of the Communications Team; is well planned and co-ordinated across the Council and that feedback from local people is shared appropriately internally as well as being shared with external partners whilst taking in to consideration issues of confidentiality and General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) .
- Undertake all statutory engagement effectively, ensuring residents have sufficient time to respond.
- Take an Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) approach to working with communities. This approach focusses on identifying the strengths, skills and experiences of people within local communities as well as other assets such as community buildings and local community and voluntary groups. Asset Based Community Development draws upon existing community strengths to build stronger, more sustainable communities for the future.
- Make available the option for up to three 'Community Call' public meetings a year. This approach gives local people the opportunity to request a public meeting with Councillors and officers to discuss an identified issue and work together to develop a community based solution.
- Continuously seek to identify new and innovative ways to actively and successfully engage local people on an going basis and regularly liaise with other local authorities to identify new areas of good practice
- Actively encourage tenants and resident leaseholders of Harlow Council to participate in forums, become members of the Housing Standards Panels and Board and be involved in other housing related involvement activities to reflect the increasing diversity of Harlow.
- Work in partnership to develop initiatives and activities to involve people in improving their neighbourhoods
- Support existing Residents' Associations and the development of new ones in order to bring communities together; enhance community cohesion and assist residents to take interest in and greater sense of responsibility for their own areas
- Work in partnership with the community and voluntary sector to support them to play a key role in influencing and delivering services

6. Measuring success

The Council will develop a Community Engagement Action Plan to support delivery of this strategy and embed Community Engagement within its working practices across all service areas. Success will be measured against performance targets and desired outcomes contained in the Action Plan.

DRAFT

Acknowledgements

Page 4, Community Engagement diagram – Dr Crispin Butteriss, Bangthetable
Community Engagement Blog

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