

**REPORT TO:** SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

**DATE:** 16 NOVEMBER 2022

**TITLE:** USE OF COUNCIL NOTICE BOARDS

**LEAD OFFICER:** SIMON HILL, DIRECTOR OF GOVERNANCE AND CORPORATE SERVICES (01279) 446099

**CONTRIBUTING OFFICER:** EMILY PARSLEY, TECHNICAL MANAGER (01279) 446747

**RECOMMENDED that:**

- A** Repairs to existing notice boards are continued to completion.
- B** A review of appropriate locations and standard content for notice boards is undertaken.
- C** Notice Boards are brought into Council control following replacement.

**BACKGROUND**

1. A review topic regarding use of Council notice boards was submitted to Scrutiny Committee for the 2022/23 work plan. Given that there is no print media circulation within Harlow, the notice boards have a role to play in providing information regarding Council contact details and relevant initiatives and events within the town.
2. The purpose of this review is to ensure that notice boards are managed and used effectively.
3. An audit of notice boards and their management arrangements formed part of the suggested review scope, along with any existing policies relating to notice board use. An audit of state of repair for noticeboards, alongside options for future enhancement of these was carried out during 2021, and the outcome report from this forms the basis of this review report.
4. There are no policies in relation to management of notice boards.

**ISSUES/PROPOSALS**

5. The internal report Community Notice Boards in Harlow can be found at Appendix A and forms the main evidence base for this review which covers repair, location, content and ownership of the boards (ownership is mixed between resident key holders and Harlow Council).

6. A number of issues were identified by the report:
  - a) Process for displaying display information on the boards is not clear;
  - b) Lack of contact information on updating the board leads to people sticking items to the outside of the board;
  - c) Vandalism;
  - d) Design makes updating them difficult, and in some cases potentially dangerous;
  - e) Enthusiasm for key holders to update the boards is decreasing; and
  - f) Location of current boards isn't necessarily correct.

### **Repair and location**

7. Following a condition survey a number of notice boards were found to be in disrepair and following discussion with relevant Portfolio Holder it was agreed that in short term these should be repaired using Council's maintenance budgets held with HTS (Property and Environment) Ltd. The work programme to complete these repairs is expected to complete by mid-November 2022.
8. Replacement of the notice boards with a more modern and easily accessible design would be preferable and could form part of the Estate Renewal programme. It was noted that the location of noticeboards is not evenly spread across the town and some are not in the most effective location to make most of passing footfall, nor do they allow easy access to change contents.
9. The option to replace boards with electronic units was also reviewed within the survey report; this option comes at significant capital cost and would be considered as part of regeneration schemes where it could be incorporated into commercial design schemes. As a free-standing information unit in existing public realm spaces however the risk of vandalism and clash in style with heritage locations does not make it a viable option for all boards.
10. A review of more appropriate locations to increase coverage of the notice boards across the town is therefore recommended.

### **Content**

11. If notice boards are replaced with newer, more easily accessible boards it would also be possible to change the design of display boards to either a magnetic or plastic pre-printed board with relevant contact information on it and frames for display of additional information which would provide a clear, uniform look to the notice boards and make changing content an easier and tidier process.
12. The content of noticeboards was found to be mixed, with some locations well used for displaying third party information, and others less so. Where non-

Council information is displayed this is from other public sector partners rather than voluntary sector groups. By standardising Council content for the notice boards and including uniform spaces for others' information the notice boards would become a more easily readable method of communication and could be used to display ad-hoc information to support health and wellbeing or anti-social behaviour campaigns, as well as information about Council events.

13. A standardised design for notice board backing, pre-printed with essential information, is therefore recommended with a proposed basic content of Council opening hours for Civic Centre, phone numbers for Council and HTS, website and social media details. Historical information about the relevant area could also be included, or details regarding local amenities.
14. Provision of spaces for public sector partner information, or voluntary sector information would also allow for periodic display of posters on the notice boards for key Council announcements, and campaigns or events to mirror the content of the Council's social media feeds. This content is produced through work with other public sector bodies, and local groups, and provides information that is relevant to the needs and interests of local communities.

## **Ownership**

15. Keyholders for the noticeboards is mixed and ownership falls between interested residents and resident association representatives. Interest in maintaining the boards is also mixed and isn't standardised across the boards. The local keyholders have provided a consistent and reliable service historically, but as use of the boards has fallen away from previous levels enthusiasm has understandably also waned for some.
16. Re-designing the boards to provide essential information for estates and also provide a trusted site of information about Council services and those of our health and community safety partners is designed to re-invigorate interest in the boards as sites for local interest. Moving the locations of some of the boards may mean that relying on community ownership of the boards is less convenient for current owners.
17. The notice boards should not create a burden for local residents and taking on the ownership of all the boards means that the Council can update all the boards at the same time and a regular inspection of the boards can also be incorporated in this meaning any repair issues can be noted and reported at same time. It is therefore recommended that current community owners are thanked for their service in updating the boards but stood down from their responsibilities on installation of new boards.

## **IMPLICATIONS**

### **Regeneration and Strategic Growth**

The renewal of the community notice boards will be an important component of the Council's intention to undertake regeneration activity in the town's hatches and neighbourhood centres.

**Author: Andrew Bramidge, Director of Strategic Growth and Regeneration**

### **Finance**

The recommendations set out in the report can be contained from within existing approved budgets.

**Author: Simon Freeman, Deputy to the Chief Executive and Director of Finance**

### **Housing**

None specific.

**Author: Andrew Murray, Director of Housing**

### **Communities and Environment**

As contained in the report.

**Author: Jane Greer, Director of Communities and Environment**

### **Governance and Corporate Services**

None specific.

**Author: Simon Hill, Director of Governance and Corporate Support**

## **Appendices**

Appendix A – Community Notice Boards in Harlow

## **Background Papers**

None.

## **Glossary of terms/abbreviations used**

None.