

## **Options for enhanced community engagement in the development and scrutiny process**

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### **1. Purpose**

- 1.1. To summarise the outcomes of the SoScrutiny event related to options for the development and scrutiny committees to engage with the public and partners to a greater extent.

### **2. Background**

- 2.1 During the SoScrutiny event, workshops were held with a mixture of Members, officers and external partners to discuss how the development and scrutiny committees might better engage the community and partner organisations. Below is a summary of the outputs for consideration by the development and scrutiny committees ahead of the commencement of the 2012/13 work programme.
- 2.2 When considering preferred options, consideration will need to be given to the resources available to deliver them.

### **3. Communications, Raising Awareness and Participation**

- 3.1 In the first instance, it was considered important that the council informs people about the scrutiny function and gauges the appetite for participation. This needs to include explanations in plain English as to what scrutiny is about, what it aims to achieve and (crucially) why people should be interested and what their incentive is for participating.
- 3.2 It is important to understand what degree of participation people are interested in having, whether that is being given greater information, suggesting topics or having a role in an investigation.
- 3.3 A number of options for achieving this were suggested:
  - 3.3.1 A dedicated page and/or blog on the SBC website, linked to the front page and/or particular topic or service areas of the website to signpost people when they visit the site with a specific issue. This could include options to suggest topics and/or a range of other opportunities to participate.
  - 3.3.2 Engagement with existing groups such as community associations to communicate about scrutiny and gauge the appetite for participation.
  - 3.3.3 Door knocking in neighbourhoods to communicate about scrutiny and gauge the appetite for participation.

- 3.3.4 Using the CSC to invite participation in scrutiny, such as when a resident contacts the council about a particular issue. A range of different participative options could be offered.
- 3.3.5 Utilising existing pools of volunteers, such as from the CAB and the Stevenage Homes customer pool.
- 3.3.6 Linking in with SoStevenage to a greater extent, such as taking the full calendar of investigations for the year as an information item and inviting comments and/or expressions of interest in participation.
- 3.4 It was also considered that 'scrutiny' is too negative and off-putting and that the council should therefore look at re-naming the function.
- 3.5 As part of ensuring equal access to participation opportunities, the council needs to consider holding some meetings during the day, although it was accepted that this may be a problem for those councillors who are employed.

#### **4. Gathering intelligence/topics**

- 4.1 Related to the need to raise awareness, a number of options were suggested for gathering intelligence/data and suggestions for topics to scrutinise.
- 4.2 A range of data is already held by SBC. This includes complaints data, housing data and officer/Member knowledge. The council needs to look at how this is captured and how it is then used for scrutiny purposes.
- 4.3 Partners such as the CAB also hold data which could be of use. The council could also look at gathering data from users of the CAB, such as via a questionnaire in their waiting area. It is important to be mindful of data protection when making use of existing data.
- 4.4 Social media could also be utilised to gather information, such as topics of concern or to raise awareness of the development and scrutiny function. Members may require training in this area.

#### **5. New investigative tools**

- 5.1 Scrutiny could consider new investigative tools that are more participative. Suggestions included:
  - Holding investigations out in the community and/or at service sites
  - Mystery shopping
  - Engaging and/or collaborating with the Youth Council
  - Utilising existing events where possible to capture information, such as street meets or the Community Conference.

#### **6. Feedback and Follow-up Actions**

- 6.1 If scrutiny intends to involve the public and partners to a greater extent, it is important to provide feedback so that participants know the outcome of their participation and are encouraged to be involved again.

6.2 This could include linking follow-up actions to Members' Local Community Budgets. However, care will need to be taken to manage expectations if the council decides to do this.