

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

COMMUNITY SELECT COMMITTEE MINUTES

Date: Wednesday, 7 November 2018

Time: 6.00pm

Place: Shimkent Room - Daneshill House, Danestrete

Present: Councillors: Sarah Mead (Chair), Adam Mitchell CC (Vice-Chair), Sandra Barr, Jim Brown, Liz Harrington, John Mead, Simon Speller and Tom Wren.

Start / End Start Time: 6.00pm
Time: End Time: 7.55pm

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Roni Hearn and Sarah-Jane Potter.

There were no declarations of interest.

2 MINUTES - 2 OCTOBER 2018

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the Community Select Committee meeting held on 2 October 2018 be agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

3 RESIDENT ENGAGEMENT SCRUTINY REVIEW

The Chair invited feedback from Members regarding research they had undertaken into resident engagement processes used by other local authorities.

Councillor John Mead had investigated on-line consultation and had been impressed by the consultation hub used by Bristol City Council. It had recently received nearly 3,000 responses to a consultation exercise regarding Houses in Multiple Occupation, and provided a demographic breakdown of those who had replied. They had also used the hub asking residents to vote on 5 possible options for the Council's 2019/20 Budget.

Councillor Adam Mitchell had supplied some examples of existing resident engagement activities and processes carried out by SBC.

Councillor Sandra Barr had carried out some on-line research on resident engagement techniques employed by other local authorities, and highlighted:

- the use of a large map in an area of Suffolk, allowing residents to label their concerns and needs. The outcome of this exercise was directly fed into the Council's business plan priorities;

- a website for community events and consultation exercises maintained by a local volunteer in an area of Peterborough, the logo for which was designed following a competition in a local primary school;
- the “Friends of Ashfield Fair Share Trust” group on Facebook. A Nottinghamshire group, providing regular access to community information; and
- “The Gedling Conversation” – an annual consultative campaign in June/July each year that provided opportunities for residents to meet face-to-face with Members and senior officers in order to raise issues of concern.

Councillor Jim Brown gave feedback on a meeting he had attended, accompanied by the Scrutiny Officer, with the Youth Council. It was acknowledged that work was required in order to successfully engage with young people. A joined up approach by SBC and its partners in engaging with young people could perhaps be developed. It was also recognised that attention was needed to provide a robust method of consultation with residents with learning difficulties.

The Chair welcomed Councillor Judi Billing (North Hertfordshire District Council) to the meeting. Councillor Billing had been invited to the meeting to provide a perspective from another authority on resident engagement.

Councillor Billing advised that she had a fondness for area governance, and had been the Chairman of the Hitchin Area Committee for some 12 years. In response to Members’ questions, she commented:

- The use of Twitter, Facebook and other social media was important; it was important that Members monitored the Facebook pages of known community groups, so that they were aware of public feeling on issues and (where appropriate) were able to contribute to the debate; this often might be a reputational defence of decisions taken by the Council;
- whilst engaging with hard to reach groups was challenging, much of her time was spent dealing with “hard to avoid” groups (often self-appointed community leaders); the use of Town Talk sessions prior to Hitchin Area Committee meetings and monthly Saturday morning surgeries in Hitchin Town Square were invariably attended by members of such groups, although it was often a good way of gleaning their views;
- in terms of engagement with minority communities, it can take a long time to secure their trust;
- although residents’ surveys often produced a result where 70-80% of respondents were interested in being more involved in local decision-making, the reality was that very few took the matter forward;
- Digital engagement – as well as using this platform to engage with working and full-time mothers, a possible idea could be to engage with them outside of schools at dropping off/collection times;
- Participatory budgeting was a good idea, especially on a small scale and involving specific projects; and
- The use of locality budgets, both at County Council and Borough/District Council level, was also important, and good outcomes should be publicised through social media platforms.

Councillor Billing referred to and commended the Local Government Association's "New Conversations: Guide to Engagement" document, which was an excellent publication for councillors and officers working to build stronger dialogues between councils and the community.

The Community Development Manager introduced a Resident Engagement desk top comparison exercise he had recently undertaken, which was set out in the agenda papers. This compared the existing SBC model of engagement with those of Brighton and Hove City Council, the London Borough of Southwark, Croydon Borough Council and Milton Keynes Council.

Following the presentations from Members and officers and evidence supplied by Councillor Judi Billing, the Select Committee formulated the following recommendations:

- Resident engagement should include a mechanism for dealing with issues at a street-by-street level;
- There should be a corporate branding of SBC consultation/engagement exercises, along the lines of SoSafe;
- From time to time, residents' meetings should be encouraged to consider town-wide topics, as well as focussing on local issues;
- Residents' groups should be encouraged to set up Facebook pages;
- Consideration should be given to moving residents' meetings around each area;
- Consideration should be given to re-visiting the concept of Area Committees, which could be a helpful mechanism for dealing with larger neighbourhood issues;
- The proposed Community Engagement Framework should include an information booklet providing a directory of local groups and a flowchart on best practice for community engagement;
- All committee reports should include a section on consultation / engagement;
- The correct methodology should be adopted for carrying out random structured surveys (eg) Resident's Surveys;
- The methods of digital/electronic engagement should be improved, including the idea of a consultation hub;
- Consideration should be given to the installation of a screen in the SBC Reception area to highlight current consultations;
- Data analysis, using digital platforms, should be undertaken regarding the hard to reach groups;
- The Neighbourhood Warden Service should be developed to ensure each County Division was supported, and that consideration should be given to re-naming their job title to Community Engagement Officer;
- Consideration should be given to holding some Policing Priorities meetings in community venues; and
- Consideration should be given to diversifying resident representation through existing mechanisms, such as the Housing Management Advisory Board.

The Scrutiny Officer reminded Members of some possible further draft recommendations he had gleaned from the Select Committee's consideration of resident engagement at previous meetings, including:

- That the Community and Neighbourhood Business Unit Review addressed the areas of deficiency regarding resident engagement, including improving the links between different elements of the service, some of which sat in isolation, such as the Youth Council. Making links to the minority ethnic groups in the town and the LGBT community. That officers demonstrate how Neighbourhood Wardens were engaging with residents to improve neighbourhoods. That the Business Unit review helped the Council to fulfil its obligations as a social landlord. That the Business Unit review recognised the work that voluntary groups, such as scouts/cadets and non-vocational training (eg. dance/drama/singing clubs/sports clubs) carried out in the community and had in many ways a greater capacity than the Council to engage with local people;
- Investigate and potentially enhance the engagement with young families via the play service, which could adopt some of the models that Housing Resident Engagement employed. Perhaps utilise informal networks, such as parents at school gates child pick up to engage on issues;
- Make Resident Engagement simple, convenient and provide real time responses. Timely responses/acknowledgements to come across to residents that someone was listening to them;
- Focus on themes and projects to build engagement - Area based regular meetings had their place, but the most successful resident engagement was project/issue based. The Bragbury End gardens project was provided as a good example of engaging local residents in a project to enhance their area and, as a consequence, residents had been more likely to engage on other issues. The nature of these projects could be ad hoc, task and finish. This was something that a wider cadre than Community Development/Housing officers could be engaged on;
- Digital Transformation – It was critical that a strong consultation platform be developed as part of the digital transformation plans and new website; Promote digital expansion – internet clubs at Community Centres – low income groups/older people, those with learning difficulties. Training residents and Housing Tenants – digital inclusion (identify those who don't use IT) – use diagnostic tools/schedule appointments etc.; Resilience of the Council's IT systems crucial – take away single point of failure, need robust back-up systems; Develop an SBC App which could access all electronic interactions with the Council (part of the Customer Account Programme); Encouraging departments to take a lead (e.g. a separate social media presence for each department, such as Environmental Health refuse collection teams) to give real time updates/responses; Provide a better website with a community/resident engagement page.

Members also noted that, in addition to the above, there had been further recommendations that were not raised at the meeting, but would need to be considered by the Committee.

It was **RESOLVED** that the above recommendations be incorporated into the final report on the Resident Engagement Review to be submitted to the Select Committee in due course.

4 **URGENT PART 1 BUSINESS**

None.

5 **EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS**

Not required.

6 **URGENT PART II BUSINESS**

None.

CHAIR