Meeting	COMMUNITY SELECT COMMITTEE
Portfolio Area	COMMUNITIES, COMMUNITY SAFETY & EQUALITIES
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Report Author(s)	Stephen Weaver (2332)
Contributors	
Lead Officer	Rob Gregory (2568)

RESIDENT ENGAGEMENT SCRUTINY REVIEW

1 PURPOSE

1.1 To consider the final report and recommendations of the Community Select Committee Scrutiny review into Resident Engagement.

2 BACKGROUND & SCRUTINY ISSUE IDENTIFIED

2.1 The issue of scrutinising Resident Engagement was agreed by the Select Committee as a scrutiny review item when it met on 7 March 2018 to agree the Committee's work programme for 2018/19.

2.2 **Scope and Focus of the review**

2.2.1 The Committee met on 12 July 2018 and agreed a scope for the review of the Resident Engagement, which it agreed should focus on the way the Council delivers its resident engagement and look at what is working well and ways to improve, in particular:

- Look at the effectiveness of Resident Engagement by SBC, incorporating Consultation Demographic of Residents' Survey and the diversity of currently involved groups
- Can the Council adopt more creative, dynamic engagement? Use of social media/digital platforms? Establish how and why we do resident engagement and in which areas?

- Have a focus on Housing resident engagement as this is the largest service that the Council operates

2.2.2   The overall aim of the review is to identify ways to develop more co-operative and dynamic approaches to community engagement.

2.2.3   Specific Aims:

- To see how well the Council is listening, follow the ladder of participation to see how services and polices have changed looking at "you said, we did" – how well do we listen and respond?
- That the review can establish what currently works well and how can these be built upon?
- What areas need improving and how will these be addressed?
- Are there any exemplars in local government or other comparable public sector bodies that the Council can learn from?
- That the findings inform an overall community engagement/involvement framework for the council moving forwards.

2.3   **Process of the review**

2.3.1   The Committee met formally on five occasions in 2018 to undertake the review. The Committee met as follows: On 20 June to agree the scope and receive an officer presentation on the service and on 12 July to amend the Scoping Document, on 4 September, 2 October and 7 November to interview the Executive Portfolio Holders for Communities and Neighbourhoods, Consultant Rachel Eden, Herts County Councillor Judy Billing, officers including AD Communities & Neighbourhoods, Rob Gregory, Community Development Manager, Neil Baker, Resident Engagement Officer, Guru Lota and finally on 9 January 2019 to sign off and agree the draft report and recommendations of the review. Councillor Jim Brown and the Scrutiny Officer also attended a Youth Council meeting to canvass their views.

2.3.2   Context of the review

2.3.2.1   The wider context of the review is that the Council is making its corporate decisions including the way it relates and engages with residents as a Co-operative Council through the Future Towns Future Council programme and the Community and Neighbourhood Management (CNM) Programme. The review also links to the way the Council reviews its approaches to consultation and specifically in the context of the ladder of participation. Rather than simply communicating how the Council's decisions affect people it is looking to meaningfully engage with residents in the decision making about their services and communities.

2.3.3   The Committee interviewed the following people:

- Executive Portfolio Holder for Communities, Community Safety & Equalities, Cllr Jackie Hollywell
- Executive Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhoods and Co-Operative Working, Cllr Rob Broom

- Consultant Rachel Eden
- North Herts District Council & Hertfordshire County Councillor Judi Billing
- Housing Management Advisory Board, Jon Thurlow
- Housing Tenant & Leaseholder Customer Scrutiny Panel, Les Isaacs
- AD Communities & Neighbourhoods, Rob Gregory
- Community Development Manager, Neil Baker
- Resident Engagement Officer, Guru Lota
- AD Corporate Services & Transformation, Richard Protheroe
- Digital Transformation Manager, Hannah Brunt (Written response)

2.3.4 The following desktop research was undertaken by Members:
- SBC forms of Resident Engagement - Cllr Adam Mitchell
- Desk top research regarding Resident Engagement and online engagement tools - Cllr John Mead
- Desk top research of how other authorities carry out their resident engagement - Cllr Sandra Barr
  Youth Council – Cllr Jim Brown
- The Chair undertook an informal poll of over 50 residents regarding Council methods of engagement. This revealed that the majority contact the Council by telephone, that the Council's web site is the main source of information, that none of the younger respondents were aware of the Council's residents' magazine, the Chronicle and most respondents contacted the Council about local issues including refuse collection, parking, shops and town centre regeneration review findings

3.1 <u>**Conclusions of the Community Select Committee**</u>

3.1.1 Based on the input provided to and carried out by Members conducting the review and by Officers supporting the review the Committee have made the following conclusions.

Key findings of the review:

- Digital Transformation – this corporate project is directly linked to a number of the reviews findings and recommendations so it will be vital that this project succeeds if these review recommendations are to be achieved
- Focus on face to face, time bound themes and projects to build engagement – Residents are more likely to respond to a themed issue or project that they can relate to than abstract constructs/cyclical neighbourhood meetings
- More broadly to: Integrate engagement into individual Business Unit work; address consultation demographics; promote engagement methods and branding; provide an engagement toolkit; improve diversity on Housing tenant and leaseholders forums;
- That the review recommendations link to the Community and Neighbourhood Business Unit Review (including the independent consultant, Rachel Eden, Holy Brook Associates, review recommendations)

3.1.2   <u>Areas covered by Members on the review</u>

3.1.3   Councillor John Mead carried out some desk top research regarding Resident Engagement and online engagement tools including consultation platforms such as Commonplace or Engagement HQ and Bristol City Council's Consultation Hub, which had received over 3,000 responses to a consultation exercise regarding Houses of Multiple Occupation. Councillor Mead provided these examples as a possible way forward for the Council to adopt to encourage residents to respond to local issues via on-line consultations as these on-line tools are more likely to receive a more detailed and more widespread response to public meetings.

3.1.4   Councillor Sandra Barr also carried out her own on-line research of resident engagement techniques carried out in other local authority areas including 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; "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 Barr was most keen on the use of a map and the Gedling Conversation as methods that could be incorporated into Stevenage's resident engagement methods. Within the review Councillor Barr stated that attention was needed to provide a robust method of consultation with residents with learning difficulties.

3.1.5   Councillor Jim Brown attended a meeting of the Youth Council and carried out a survey with the young people about the way the Council engages with young people. The results of this small survey of twelve young people revealed that young people would likely complete an on-line survey if approached via email but be slightly less likely if it were via social media. The issue that are of interest to young people are local Bus Services & increasing cost of bus fares, feeling safe and violence towards young people.

3.1.6   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.

3.1.7   The Vice Chair Councillor Adam Mitchell provided the review with an extensive list of all of the various methods that the Council carries out engagement with residents including Council, Neighbourhood, Political, Culture/Leisure/Sport, Safety/Advice/Reassurance, Electronic, Print and via third party organisations which provides a challenge to make sure that any changes to the way the Council engages with residents is consistent across the business units and across delivery methods.

3.1.8   The Chair, Councillor Sarah Mead, undertook an informal survey of over 50 residents. The responses to the survey were as follows:

- The majority of those polled contact the Council by telephone
- The Council website and Comet were the main sources of information for the respondents
- None of the young respondents were aware that the Chronicle was a Council publication
- The respondents contacted the Council primarily about refuse collection, parking, shops and town centre regeneration

3.2   The digital agenda

3.2.1   The Committee received a report from the Digital Transformation Manager, Hannah Brunt and received input from the Assistant Director Corporate Services and Transformation on the steps the Council was taking to make its services accessible via digital platforms and how residents would be able to interact with the Council in the future.

3.2.2   A new website provider had been appointed and work will commence to ensure that the new website which should be in place summer 2019, would focus on better customer journeys and include more self-service and more self-assessment options. It was also hoped that by the end of next year customers would be able to access all their SBC accounts with a single sign on. Members focused on the importance of being able to access the Council website remotely to make it as easy as possible to pay council tax/rent bills etc. Councillor Rob Broom, Portfolio Holder Neighbourhoods and Co-operative Working has organised a cross party member engagement group which would be involved in the web development project.

3.2.3   Digital Transformation Plans – The review was of the view that it was critical that a strong consultation platform be developed as part of the digital transformation plans and new website. The digital transform plans will include the promotion of internet clubs at Community Centres; training with low income groups/older people, those with learning difficulties. Training should include residents and Housing Tenants in digital inclusion (to help identify those who don't use IT). The Digital inclusion programme will use diagnostic tools/schedule appointments etc.

3.2.4   Members stressed that the resilience of the Council's IT systems was crucial and needed to take away single point of failure, with a need for robust back-up systems. In terms of IT resilience, system failure solutions to alleviate single points of failure will include a hosted website, secondary cabling and cloud technology.

3.2.5   Develop an SBC App which could access all electronic interactions with the Council (part of the Customer Account Programme)

3.2.6   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

3.2.7   Finally, in terms of the digital programme the Council needs to provide a better website with a community/resident engagement page.

3.3   Face to face, time bound, project based engagement

3.3.1   The review explored ways the Council could engage differently with communities including using social media, informal groups, time bound

themed projects in task and finish groups relating to individual services. The example of the Bragbury End Gardens was given as a positive model of engaging with residents over a specific time bound project. Local residents have shown that, with the right preparation, they are interested in engaging over specific projects

3.3.2　The review was keen to make a link between the work of the Neighbourhood Wardens and Community Development officers. Increase the number of Neighbourhood Wardens.

3.4　<u>Integrate Community Engagement Work into individual Business Units</u>

3.4.1　The review was of the view that there was a need to integrate the resident engagement work into individual Business Units as this was an activity that was not just the responsibility of Communities and Neighbourhoods but affected many other aspects of Council services.

3.5　<u>Consultation demographics</u>

3.5.1　Members raised concern regarding the demographic spread of responses to the Council's consultation processes, most specifically the Random Structure Survey which they believed should be addressed in future iterations.

3.6　<u>Promotion of engagement methods and Branding</u>

3.6.1　Members have recommended that engagement methods that have a track record of being positively received should be promoted to other Business Units. Members suggested that if the public became familiar with a specific brand of consultation and engagement then they would be more inclined in the future to complete consultations.

3.7　<u>Engagement Toolkit and Corporate Reports</u>

3.7.1　In line with the independent consultants recommendation Members would also be recommending that officers devise and promote an engagement toolkit and that there should be a specific corporate implications section in corporate reports.

3.8　<u>Learning from others including NH & HCC Councillor Judi Billing and from other desk top research both officers and Members</u>

3.8.1　The use of Twitter, Facebook and other social media was important; it was recognised that 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.

3.8.2　Councillor Billing suggested engaging with hard to reach groups was challenging. However much of Members time can be spent dealing with "hard to avoid" groups (often self-appointed community leaders). In North Hertfordshire the use of Town Talk sessions and monthly Saturday morning surgeries in were invariably attended by members of such groups, although it was often a good way of gleaning their views.

3.8.3　In terms of engagement with minority communities, it can take a long time to secure their trust.

3.8.4   Although residents' surveys often produced results 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.

3.8.5   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.

3.8.6   Participatory budgeting was a good idea, especially on a small scale and involving specific projects.

3.8.7   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.

3.9   John Thurlow HMAB, Les Issacs CSP & Guru Lota, Resident Engagement Officer

3.9.1   Les Isaacs, Customer Scrutiny Panel member and Jon Thurlow member of the Housing Management Advisory Board with Guru Lota Resident Engagement Officer, met with the Committee to give evidence on their experience of the Council's resident engagement on behalf of tenants and residents in the Town. Both of the Groups as well as the resident inspectors were well thought of and in particular the Tenant Participation Advisory Service (TPAS) was using the Customer Scrutiny Panel newsletter as an example of best practice. Both John and Les stated that their involvement with SBC tenant and leaseholder forums has given them a voice into their housing which they wouldn't have without these forums. They knew they were carrying out an important role to represent tenants and leaseholders in the town and it was really important that local people feel they are being listened to and that their input is acknowledged and valued by the Council as many of their recommendations were agreed by the Council. It was also valued that the Council has been willing to widen its governance arrangements.

3.9.2   SBC diversity on Housing tenant and Leaseholder Forums Members noted the positive feedback from the representatives although it was agreed that the diversity of the make-up of the different groups around the town could be improved, but also acknowledged that this was difficult to achieve and they were grateful for the time and energy that the residents put into this work.

3.10   Consultant, Rachel Eden

3.10.1   Rachel Eden (Holy Brook Associates) had been engaged by the Council to support the Assistant Director, Communities and Neighbourhood, Community Engagement review. Rachel provided the Committee with a report and presentation outlining the Council's current community engagement approach and her recommended steps to improve community engagement activity. The Consultant's report followed a review and analysis of community engagement across Stevenage up to March 2018. The Consultant was of the view that the Council has demonstrated that it took community engagement

seriously and some teams demonstrated a mature understanding of the importance of the topic.

3.10.2   Case studies included in the research revealed that there were good relationships between residents and officers. However, there were notable barriers to maximising the benefits of communication and engagement with the community. These included the need to improve digital access channels to enable online sharing and tools / measures to evidence the progress of communication and how engagement made a difference. It was observed that there was occasionally a lack of pace in community engagement and the Council could be reactive rather than proactive on some projects.

3.10.3   The report highlighted that it should be standard practice to consider community engagement requirements and benefits with regards to relevant policies and developments and that stakeholders should be asked to contribute when drafting engagement plans. Members and officers should be encouraged to explore community engagement options and build relationships with residents including those who live elsewhere but work in the Borough.

3.10.4   The consultant recommended that the Council:

•   Creates a community engagement toolkit that included case studies, contacts, checklists and templates

•   Integrates communications planning into community engagement work

•   Works to agree and implement a set of measures for effective engagement

•   Expands the approach to people not currently involved in community engagement

3.11   Equalities & Diversity

3.11.1   The nature of the review links directly to Equalities and Diversity matters as it is vital that when the Council engages with the public via electronic, face to face, public meetings, representative forums etc. it is vital that the relevant protected characteristic groups as well as those from a deprived socio economic background are represented and catered for when responding to the Members review and recommendations and when revising the Council's Engagement Policy.

4   **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Digital agenda recommendations

4.1   The Council's information technology (IT) system be upgraded and the website be revamped to incorporate user friendly resident engagement methods including a consultation calendar on the website. Place consultations in a prominent position (via consultation portal) and explore

methods to capture local resident's views on Council services and local issues such as online consultation platforms such as "Commonplace" or "Engagement HQ"

4.2   The Council considers providing micro-websites for Wards with details such as outstanding community actions.

4.3   The Council commissions community-driven applications (apps) and social media tools such as Twitter surveys and increases the use of mobile devices

4.4   The Council considers digital engagement via touchscreens and other devices at Council offices and in the town centre.

Face to face engagement

4.5   Members and officers improve face-to-face engagement with residents and manage expectations of residents during community engagement work

Integrate Community Engagement Work into individual Business Units

4.6   The Council integrates communications planning into community engagement work for each business unit

4.7   The Council embeds community engagement across individual business units and sub-units

4.8   Customer feedback method used by the Repairs & Voids team be rolled out to other Council services

Consultation demographics

4.9   The Council widens the base for consultations so as to reflect the demographics of the Borough

4.10   That the Random Structure Survey be improved to more accurately reflect the demographics of the town

Promotion of engagement methods and Branding

4.11   The Council puts in place measures to demonstrate the benefits and effectiveness of community engagement

4.12   Provide Corporate Branding with an easily recognisable logo for consultation /engagement mechanisms to build up brand awareness amongst residents

Toolkit and Corporate Reports

4.13   Formal Council reports include community engagement as part of the criteria for sign off at officer and Member level

4.14   The Council creates a community engagement toolkit to enable Members and officers to follow excellent approaches to community engagement

Neighbourhood Wardens

4.15   The Council increases the number of neighbourhood wardens to at least one per county council electoral division

SBC diversity on Housing tenant and Leaseholder Forums

4.16   Diversity of People on existing structures such as Housing Management Advisory Board and Customer Scrutiny Panel should be addressed

Publicising the results of and responding to consultation

4.17   That officers ensure that when local residents respond to consultations and engage in correspondence/contact with the Council, that the authority closes the loop and lets the public know what the outcome is to the consultation / engagement issue. It may be necessary to set up a mechanism to make this an automated process.

Time bound themes and projects

4.18   That the consultation toolkit promotes ways to engage the public in local time bound projects that build engagement between residents and the Council.

Annual review of Resident Engagement methodology and framework

4.19   That there be an annual revisit to the Resident Engagement Framework to check if the methodology used is still relevant.

5   **IMPLICATIONS**

Financial Implications

5.1   A number of the review recommendations could have financial implications for the Council. The Executive Portfolio Holders for Neighbourhoods and Co-operative working and the Communities, Community Safety and Equalities will need to carefully consider with Officers which of the recommendations can be resourced from existing budgets and whether any future growth bids will be required to fund recommendations.

Legal Implications

5.2   There are no direct legal implications to the report.

Policy Implications

5.3   The review findings and recommendations will be linked to the future revised policy on Resident Engagement.

Equalities and Diversity Implications

5.4   The Equalities and Diversity implications for the review are contained at paragraph 3.11 in the report.

Service Delivery Implications

5.5   Depending on the decision of the Executive Portfolio Holders for Neighbourhoods and Co-operative working and the Communities, Community Safety and Equalities regarding individual recommendations contained in the repot there could be direct Service Delivery implications which would need to be addressed.

Information Technology Implications

5.6   Paragraphs 3.2.1 to 3.2.7 and recommendations 4.1 to 4.4 relate to Information Technology implications.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

BD1   Rachel Eden (Holy Brook Associates) Community Engagement review

APPENDICES

A   Community Select Committee Resident Engagement Scrutiny Review Scoping document.