

Meeting Executive

Portfolio Area Communities, Community Safety and Equalities
Neighbourhoods and Co-operative Working

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COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT DRAFT FRAMEWORK

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1 PURPOSE

1.1 This report summarises the draft development of a Community Engagement Framework outlining the council’s co-operative approach to engaging local residents and community groups. The framework builds upon the recommendations from the review into resident engagement undertaken by the Community Select Committee.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 That Executive note the draft Community Engagement Framework, as attached at Appendix A to the report.
- 2.2 That the Strategic Director (MP), following consultation with the Portfolio Holders for Communities, Community Safety & Equalities and

Neighbourhood & Co-operative Working, be delegated authority to finalise the Community Engagement Framework and arrange its publication.

- 2.3 That Executive note the need for development of a related toolkit and training programme to support the effective implementation of the framework across council departments after final publication of the completed framework.

3 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The need for a framework setting out the dynamic ways in which the council can engage with the town's residents was identified as part of the Business Unit Review for Communities and Neighbourhoods. The Business Unit review recognised that there were numerous examples of excellent community engagement practice across the town, often led by elected members and supported by officers, but these were not always documented and the learning not shared across council teams. It was also clear that a number of engagement activities were being supported that did not broaden involvement of local residents and young people in decision making and some were disconnected from the Future Town, Future Council programme.
- 3.2 The council has undertaken some flagship work to demonstrate its commitment to co-operative working. A community engagement framework helps to illustrate this commitment through the way it works with residents on issues and aspirations identified across the town. The Co-operative Neighbourhood Management Programme represents a very clear corporate priority to work with local residents to improve local neighbourhoods and is a programme where community engagement is actively undertaken. There are however, opportunities through the Future Town, Future Council Programme where a Community Engagement Framework can be embraced to help drive the best possible outcomes for local communities. This may range from work with current tenants and leaseholders through the Homes for Life programme, through to new Housing Developments or the Town Centre Regeneration programme.
- 3.3 In tandem with this 'Resident Engagement' was agreed by the Community Select Committee as a scrutiny review item when it met on 7 March 2018. 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 the council, 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

- 3.4 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, Hertfordshire County Councillor Judy Billing, officers including AD Communities & Neighbourhoods, Rob Gregory, Community Development Manager, Neil Baker, Resident Involvement 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
- 3.5 Recommendations from the review were finalised on 9th January, highlighting a need to move toward a more dynamic approach to community engagement across the town
- 3.6 Recommendations were followed by a practical presentation of options to elected members via the Community Select Committee and a Portfolio Holders Advisory Group on the 9th January.

3.7 Summary of Analysis

The review highlighted the positive work already undertaken in resident and community engagement, whilst clearly demonstrating the need for a more community-focussed engagement model, responsive to how different sections of the community live their lives in Stevenage today.

The review clearly identified the need to ensure a practical framework and toolkit approach to involving and engaging that could adapt and change with the council and town over time.

The review also highlighted a range of recommendation that can be summarised under three overarching headings;

Diversity and Inclusion

- a) Providing simple and easy to use literature and advice
- b) Building diversity in community engagement groups and services
- c) Embedding youth engagement and support in wider community development
- d) Continuing the important relationship between council tenants and scrutiny of housing services
- e) Involving families
- f) Celebrating the diversity of Stevenage through community engagement
- g) Expanding and diversifying groups such as the Disability Forum/Resident Inspectors and Customer Scrutiny Panel

Digital Transformation

- a) Improving access to minority groups and those who struggle to have a voice via digital engagement
- b) Improving access to digital engagement
- c) Community engagement/consultation branding
- d) Utilising the council main reception more
- e) Improving council use of social media in engagement
- f) Improving website information on community groups, activities and access to opportunities

Co-operative Community

- a) People and issue led engagement
 - b) Community and neighbourhood mapping
 - c) Removing a one size fits all approach to engagement
 - d) Creating opportunities for empowerment
 - e) Embedding community development and consultation across departments
 - f) Promoting community leadership and valuing community action
 - g) Encouraging a vibrant voluntary and community sector
 - h) Providing simple and convenient ways of engaging
 - i) Simplifying ways for communities to take the lead in developing their area
- 3.8 As part of the review process a Policy Advisory Session was held with members chaired by the Portfolio Holder for Communities, Community Safety and Equalities.
- 3.9 The session highlighted the need to build a simple, effective and active framework that could be reviewed and monitored by Community Select Committee.
- 3.10 The feedback reflected the need to develop a more comprehensive digital engagement platform, while ensuring realistic delivery with current IT infrastructure.
- 3.11 The feedback highlighted the importance of current resident engagement activities alongside a need to diversify and modernise engagement structures within these areas.
- 3.12 Feedback supported the need to link wider co-operative values into the new engagement framework.
- 3.13 Feedback demonstrated the importance of elected members as community champions and the need for more guidance of how elected members could facilitate interaction between residents and the council.
- 3.14 The proposed draft Community Engagement Framework (Appendix A) responds to these points and sets out clear objectives in the way that the council facilitates community engagement. It is intended to act as a clear reference point, both for council officers and elected members, but also for residents who might want to get more involved.

- 3.15 It is recommended that a practical toolkit is developed after final publication of the framework with training and briefing sessions for officers and elected members.

4 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDED COURSE OF ACTION AND OTHER OPTIONS

- 4.1 The delivery of the Co-operative Neighbourhood Management Programme has highlighted the importance of effective community engagement to deliver Future Town, Future Council ambitions. Some good practice has emerged through the development of this programme. This has created an opportunity to consider how community engagement represents a way of working for council services.
- 4.2 In response to the above, the Communities and Neighbourhoods Business Unit Review resulted in the creation of a community development service, combining previous community development, resident involvement and social policy functions.
- 4.3 The Community Engagement Framework enables this capacity to grow beyond the community development service across all council service areas.
- 4.4 The more detailed scrutiny review work undertaken by the Community Select Committee identifies opportunities to improve the council's approach to community engagement as a co-operative council.
- 4.5 It is clear that not documenting the council's strong approach to working with residents in a dynamic way limits awareness and future opportunities.

A work programme will support the implementation of the framework as outlined below:

4.6 Timetable for process

Community Engagement Framework	Start date	Completion date
Final Publication	March 2019	March 2019
AD briefings	April 2019	May 2019
Training for officers	May 2019	July 2019
Modern Members Briefing	May 2019	August 2019
Digital transformation	July 2019	

5 IMPLICATIONS

Financial Implications

- 5.1 There are no direct increases in financial support required through the introduction of the Community Engagement Framework and an associated toolkit. This support functions will be maintained by the community development service.
- 5.2 A time-limited training programme for officers will be included in the launch of the Community Engagement Framework. Delivery of this will be structured into the work plan of the Community Development team.

Legal Implications

- 5.3 There are no legal implications presented.

Risk Implications

- 5.4 The Framework depends on full council implementation for success and will sit closely alongside communications strategies and regulatory consultation processes.
- 5.5 It is recommended that the framework is reviewed bi-annually by the Community Select Committee after community consultation on strengths and potential weaknesses
- 5.6 The active nature of the Framework allows risks to be assessed and managed throughout delivery. All engagement exercises should be risk assessed as standard practice.

Equalities and Diversity Implications

- 5.7 Equality and diversity in engagement is a central platform of this Framework. Due consideration has been given throughout the review and modelling of the framework in increasing diversity and inclusion through engagement processes. The framework embeds the council's obligations under the 2010 Equalities Act.
- 5.8 The recommended Community Engagement Framework embeds diversity as key consideration in the delivery of all engagement while allowing measurement and review of diversity and inclusion through monitoring.
- 5.9 The Community Engagement Framework is designed to have a positive impact on diversity and inclusion throughout council engagement structures.
- 5.10 A full Equality Impact Assessment is attached to this report

Service Delivery Implications

- 5.11 Implementation of the framework will need to be supported by information exchange and training on use. The need to embed community engagement has been fully explored through the development of the framework.
- 5.12 The Framework and an associated toolkit will assist services across the council to better engage with local residents and to ensure services are more effective and better meet their needs.

Safeguarding Children Implications

- 5.13 Safeguarding implications have been fully assessed during the review and development of the Community Engagement Framework. The council will ensure engagement with children and young people follows national standards in ensuring safety and security for those involved, including the use of digital engagement tools

Other Corporate Implications

- 5.14 The Community Engagement Framework builds upon the council's Co-operative Commitment, outlining how the council pro-actively engages with the town's residents.
- 5.15 The review also references the ambitions of the Arts and Cultural Strategy, Housing Strategies and the wider consultation needs has across council business units.

APPENDICES

- A Draft Community Engagement Framework.