

S14. Participation Strategy Update

The committee considered a report by the Director of Corporate and Housing Services providing an update on progress made in response to a scrutiny panel review of participation and presenting ethical guidelines on community engagement.

Following a scrutiny panel review of the implementation of the Council's participation strategy in 2015, the Executive had agreed on 9 June 2015 (ref EX18) a set of actions including:-

- review the role, remit and membership of the Corporate Participation Group.;
- develop a robust process for local community planning which sets out a defined process for the production of plans
- develop a defined reporting framework for local community plans to ensure that reports on them are submitted to the Scrutiny Committee and then the Executive, prior to submission to the Community Planning Leadership Board;
- promote Have Your Say, the Plan for Local Involvement, and the principles set out within it more effectively, internally to Members and officers, and externally to communities and partner organisations;
- ensure appropriate training is put in place for officers to enable them to implement the principles set out in the plan, for example Plain English training, training in survey design etc.;
- record all consultation activity in a corporate database of consultation activities, drawing on Service Plans, Community Planning, to avoid duplication of consultation/engagement. The effectiveness and accessibility of the current database will also be reviewed;
- provide information to the public/specific stakeholders prior to and after they have informed, consulted or engaged with communities, including feedback. There should also be a clear process for advising Members about consultations that are taking place and feeding the results back to them;
- provide more information on consultations, community engagement and Local Community Planning in the consultation section of the Council's website;
- explore different digital means of engaging with local and thematic communities. This could include the potential for using a bespoke online consultation platform such as Citizen Space. It would also include a review of how the Council's use of social media platforms could be expanded to support its engagement activities;

- ensure that appropriate methods are used to effectively consult and/or engage with hard-to-reach groups and consideration will be given to specific training on consulting and/or engaging hard-to-reach groups; and
- consider the impact of the Community Empowerment Bill and the Council's response to this in August 2015.

The Executive had asked that update reports are submitted to the Scrutiny Committee.

An overview of progress made in the context of developments since then, significantly, the introduction of the Community Empowerment Act, Council's Corporate Plan and National Standards for community engagement.

Details were given of work in regard to:-

- Youth Engagement;
- Locality Planning;
- Winter weather;
- A review of the Participation Strategy;
- The Citizens' Panel;
- Communications and social media;
- A review of the Corporate Participation Group; and
- The introduction of an ethical guide to community engagement.

In response to a question on how the views of the community on service provision are collected, analysed and for what use, the Head of Policy, Technology and Improvement stated that a wide range of information was collected, from a wide range of sources, which was broken down by Service to a Locality level. Through analysis of variations in responses, officers can identify areas where the Council was performing well and where there was room for improvement. The information could be used to drive change and further improvement. Information was sought on what is important to the community. This was analysed and the analysis and proposed response was reflected back to the community i.e you said X, is this a correct interpretation of what you want, if so this is what we will do. Collaboration was important. Once the Council understands what a community wants, it was crucial that Council worked in collaboration with the community to deliver the service. The Head of Policy, Technology and Improvement explained that this process was in use within Children's Services at school level with young people.

Members sought further information on the process. The Head of Policy, Technology and Improvement explained that new information was collected and used to review work done so far and inform new work. The process would continually evolve.

In regard to engaging with young people, the Head of Policy, Technology and Improvement stated that young people were keen to work with the Council. However, it was clear from dialogue that young people did not support the introduction of a Youth Council. They looked for different ways

of engaging – for example through social media and specific issues. A report setting out proposals for youth engagement would be considered by the Executive on 12 June 2018.

In response to a question on the Citizens' Panel, the Head of Policy, Technology and Improvement confirmed that while it was pleasing that 167 young people were involved, it was hoped that following the review of the participation strategy, the ways in which the Council engages with young people would widen and would involve more young people. In clarification, the Head of Policy, Technology and Improvement confirmed that young people ranged from 12-25 and that in itself this covered a wide range of characteristics. Not all identified as "youths". In response to a question, the Head of Education confirmed that Children's Services engage with those younger than 12.

The committee discussed the surveys undertaken as part of the review of the participation strategy and asked whether the make up (in terms of equalities) of the respondents was known. The Head of Policy, Technology and Improvement stated that it had been asked for as part of each survey, with exception of the youth survey, but not all respondents had provided the information. In the case of the youth survey, representative groups had been contacted for equality monitoring purposes.

Decision

The committee noted that officers would:-

- (1) establish a Citizen Space user group to encourage better cross-service communication and collaboration; provide training opportunities; and ensure a consistent approach to monitoring and evaluation;**
- (2) develop a process by which services monitor and evaluate engagement activities as so to effectively measure progress and improvement to the Council's approach to community engagement;**
- (3) develop a set of ethical guidelines for community engagement to support officers;**
- (4) continue to offer training opportunities to staff conducting community engagement, and**
- (5) conduct a public consultation to review the Council's participation expired at the end of 2018.**