

BARNESLEY METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL (BMBC)

This matter is not a Key Decision within the council's definition and has not been included in the relevant Forward Plan.

Report of the Executive Director Core Services

SCRUTINY TASK AND FINISH GROUP (TFG) REPORT ON THE WORK OF THE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT STEERING GROUP

1. Purpose of the report

1.1 To report to Cabinet the findings of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee (OSC) from the investigation undertaken on its behalf by the Community Engagement Task & Finish Group (TFG) regarding the work of the Community Engagement Steering Group to improve how the council engages and consults with its communities.

2. Recommendations

2.1 That Cabinet acknowledges the TFG's contribution to the development of the work of the Community Engagement Steering Group outlined in section 4 and considers the conclusions and recommendations set out in section 5.

3. Background

3.1 BMBC's Corporate Plan 2017-20 recognises its role as a local authority is changing and has committed to helping people to do more for themselves, each other and their community. In March 2017 the Council launched its Community Engagement Strategy 2017-20 which states that it will develop a clear, consistent and joined up approach to community engagement and be clear about exactly what it delivers and what its expectations from communities are to encourage community engagement and to develop community spirit.

3.2 The Community Engagement steering group was formed to deliver the objectives set out in the strategy. The work of the group involves procuring a new consultation system, helping Council staff to engage more effectively and creating a portal of information to show residents what the Council does and what people can do to help. This third part of the project was initially called 'The Barnsley Deal'; this work however is in progress and is currently being tested with customers and other stakeholders.

3.3 The aims of the project are:

- To be clear about the work of the Council and what people can do to help via an online information portal
- To encourage innovation and change through community action
- To help Council staff to be more confident and capable when engaging with communities

- 3.4 Part of the project involves development of a web portal with a concept that will come to life when it is launched. It shows the work the Council is doing to make Barnsley a better place. It also shows people how they can help themselves and others; things like recycling more, volunteering, shopping locally and keeping fit and active. If everyone in Barnsley does just one thing, together we can make Barnsley a more welcoming place where people want to live, work and visit. This builds on the Community Offer, when the Council did specific work with communities to understand how we can work better together.
- 3.5 Given Members' extensive experience within our local communities the OSC TFG was set-up to provide scrutiny to the work which had been undertaken as well as be involved in shaping this work as it developed.
- 3.6 The members of this TFG included: Councillor Gail Charlesworth (TFG Lead Member), Councillor Daniel Griffin, Councillor Wayne Johnson, Councillor Sarah Tattersall, Councillor Kevin Williams and Councillor John Wilson.

4. What the Task & Finish Group (TFG) contributed

- 4.1 Initially, the TFG were introduced to the concept of 'The Barnsley Deal' and how a similar model had been used effectively by Wigan Council to engage with its communities. The TFG were shown draft website content which had been developed in relation to Barnsley's version of this work.
- 4.2 The group were in support of the aims of the work, however gave feedback that the name of 'The Barnsley Deal' was not reflective of what was being presented. They also gave some initial feedback on the website content and how it might be improved.
- 4.3 The TFG were tasked with going away to look at the draft website in detail and met to provide their feedback. During this session they gave detailed comments on how the layout and content could be improved to make it more user-friendly, with consideration for the needs of all Barnsley communities. The group's knowledge of their local area and local activities came to the fore and how these could be utilised as part of developing this work.
- 4.4 At the following meeting, the TFG were introduced to the draft 'consultation toolkit' which incorporated documentation on when and how to consult as well as a number of points which require consideration. The group were keen to highlight that it was critical to get our consultation and engagement activities right. This includes ensuring we only consult with communities when they are able to influence the outcome and making sure we feed back to them with 'you said, we did'. The group provided feedback and suggested amendments to the documentation including a 'tick list' for officers to utilise so they could ensure key considerations have been undertaken. This includes making sure local Ward Members are aware of any relevant engagement activity in their Wards so that they can respond to queries from the public.
- 4.5 Whilst considering the 'consultation toolkit', the TFG were also able to highlight considerations which should be incorporated in the specification for procuring a new

consultation/engagement system. This included: having facility to record outcomes/decisions/progress; facility to contact responders to update them on outcomes/decisions; and facility to sign people up to receive future surveys. The suggestion was also made that depending on the system, it could also be utilised to seek public engagement on upcoming OSC agenda items and utilised by OSC members in meetings. This particular TFG meeting also provided opportunity to seek the group's opinion on the proposed new name for the project, which it felt was much improved and more reflective of this work's aim. This working title is currently being tested with customers and other stakeholders.

- 4.6 The TFG held another session which involved consideration of the communications plan to launch this work. Again the group's knowledge of facilities and events both locally and across the borough was critical in shaping ideas for how best to launch this work. The group were keen to ensure that this is not done by just the usual channels of communication but that we reach out to residents for example through local supermarkets and by having a pop-up stall in the Town Centre which Elected Members could be involved in.
- 4.7 The Community Engagement proposals were shared at the recent Elected Member 'Talkabout' event which the TFG Lead Member presented the group's work at. The group's involvement in this work has been welcomed and valued; Members have been able to shine a different perspective on the proposals and their local knowledge of communities has been crucial.
- 4.8 The most recent meeting of the TFG involved testing of the proposed consultation system. This gave the group opportunity to see the functionality of the proposed system, see where their comments had been taken on board and consider the future use of the system.

5. **Recommendations**

- 5.1 As outlined above, during the investigation the TFG members made a range of suggestions and recommendations which were able to be considered. The TFG support the continuation of this and in addition recommend the following for the future:
 - 5.2 **Recommendation 1: In developing the web portal we use this opportunity to highlight what the role of an Elected Member is**
In addition to helping communities to understand what the Council does, Elected Members feel it is important to provide information on the role of a local councillor. This includes advising how they support their local community and local residents.
 - 5.3 **Recommendation 2: Ensure appropriate governance is in place regarding consultation activities to ensure that they are only undertaken when our communities can influence the outcome**
The TFG highlighted the importance of genuine community consultation so that people will continue to engage with the Council. Appropriately skilled officers and governance should be in place for consultation activity to be challenged before it is undertaken to ensure that it is fit for purpose.

5.4 Recommendation 3: Ensure Ward Members are made aware of consultation/engagement activity in their local area

The TFG were keen to ensure that local ward members and not just Cabinet Spokespersons are made aware of consultation/engagement activity so that they are able to answer queries and provide support to their local residents. A prompt for this was recommended for inclusion in the officer consultation tick list and therefore the TFG are keen to highlight that this documentation is utilised by officers.

5.5 Recommendation 4: A report is brought to the OSC on the consultation activity undertaken during the first 12 months of the new consultation system being in place

The report should outline how the new system is being utilised, including the consultation activity undertaken, the response received and how this has influenced service planning/delivery. This will enable the OSC to monitor the implementation of this work and make further recommendations as appropriate.

5.6 Recommendation 5: OSC Members are increasingly involved in the development stages of key pieces of work

The TFG's involvement in the development of this project has been invaluable. Officers leading on the work have valued the opportunity to consult with Elected Members representing the public voice and a different perspective on this work in order to ensure the end product is fit for purpose. Our Elected Members have vast knowledge of our local communities and key local networks. They are able to provide a community viewpoint on how work/projects/information may be received by a local area and advise on considerations officers may need to be aware of which will help to improve service delivery.

The TFG would like to take this opportunity to thank all those who assisted with the TFG's investigation and their input into this work.

6. Implications for local people / service users

6.1 Our community engagement work aims to strengthen community involvement and encourage innovation and change through community action. This has implications for every person living and working in Barnsley, because we are asking them to work together with us to help make Barnsley a better place to live and work. Additionally, by encouraging wider participation in consultation activity will enable the Council to be better aware of the impact decisions may have on people living and working in Barnsley.

7. Financial implications

7.1 There are no specific financial implications, although in responding to the recommendations in the report, the financial implications of these would need to be fully assessed by the appropriate services responding.

8. Employee implications

- 8.1 There are no specific employee implications, although in responding to the recommendations in the report, the employee implications of these would need to be fully assessed by the appropriate services responding.

9. Communications implications

- 9.1 Communication is critical to this piece of work and will require effective plans to be in place to both launch the work as well as ensure its continued use throughout all of the Council's work streams. Prior to launch the Council will need to ensure that both Members and officers are aware of this work so they can spread the word out in communities and utilise it in everything they do.

10. Consultations

- 10.1 Consultations have taken place with the Community Engagement TFG, Councillor Jenny Platts, Councillor Alan Gardiner, Council Officers Phil Hollingsworth, Michael Potter, Rachel King and the Senior Management Team.

11. The Corporate Plan and the Council's Performance Management Framework

- 11.1 As outlined in the Corporate Plan, the three priorities for Barnsley are: a thriving and vibrant economy, strong and resilient communities; and citizens achieving their potential. Ensuring people in our communities are aware of what the Council does and encouraging them to engage with services and participate in volunteering activities contributes to achieving all of these.

12. Promoting equality & diversity and social inclusion

- 12.1 The TFG is keen to ensure that all Council activities are accessible to all its communities. Throughout the TFG's involvement in the development of this work they have specifically referred to making sure that materials are accessible to those who may have physical impairments as well as those where English may be an additional language. Also, by enabling better consultation facilities will support the voice of all our communities to be heard.

13. Tackling the impact of poverty

- 13.1 By encouraging people to take responsibility for their local community we can help people build confidence, skills and capability. This can lead to people having confidence to find work or find a way out of poverty. Additionally, by making communities better aware of what help and support is available can enable them to access appropriate services.

14. Tackling Health Inequalities

14.1 By encouraging people to become more active in their local community, we can have a direct impact on health and wellbeing. By helping people to take responsibility for their local community, we can encourage them to be accountable for their own health and wellbeing. Enabling communities to be better aware of the support services available will help them to access appropriate services. Additionally, by encouraging wider participation in consultation activity will enable the Council to be better aware of the impact decisions may have on communities.

15. Reduction of crime and disorder

15.1 Community engagement has been shown to improve community resilience and discourage people from causing damage in their local area. By encouraging people to be more active in their local community, we can encourage them to take responsibility for their local area.

16. Risk management issues

16.1 This issue relates to the following risk currently logged on the Council's Strategic Risk Register (SRR), as follows:

- 3023 – ‘Failure to engage with stakeholders’

16.2 The intended positive benefits of the project are logged as mitigation to this risk and it is envisaged that the recommended activities detailed in this report will contribute further to the effective mitigation of these risks, and it would be appropriate for any follow-up report regarding community engagement to be cognisant of these risks.

17. Glossary

BMBC – Barnsley Metropolitan borough Council

OSC – Overview and Scrutiny Committee

TFG – Task and Finish Group

18. Background papers

- Barnsley Community Engagement Strategy Cabinet Report (Cab.22.3.2017/8):
<http://barsnlembc.moderngov.co.uk/documents/s18437/Community%20Engagement%20Strategy.pdf>
- Barnsley Community Engagement Strategy 2017-20:
<http://barsnlembc.moderngov.co.uk/documents/s18438/Appendix%201.pdf>