

North Tyneside Council Report to Cabinet 14 September, 2015

ITEM 7(b)
Engagement Strategy

Portfolio(s): Community Engagement

**Cabinet
Member(s):**

**Councillor Carole
Burdis**

**Report from Service
Area:**

Corporate Strategy

Responsible Officer:

**Head of Corporate Strategy,
Jacqueline Laughton**

(Tel: (0191) 643 7070)

Wards affected:

All Wards

PART 1

1.1 Executive Summary:

Following a review of engagement activity across the Authority, this report sets out a proposed new corporate Engagement Strategy to enable residents and service users to be better informed and engaged in its decision-making.

1.2 Recommendation(s):

It is recommended that Cabinet

- (i) agree the draft Engagement Strategy as set out in Appendix 1;
- (ii) authorise the Head of Corporate Strategy to undertake external consultation (as set out in paragraph 2.3.2 below) on the proposed Engagement Strategy; and
- (iii) authorise the Head of Corporate Strategy in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Community Engagement to finalise the wording of the Engagement Strategy following that external consultation

1.3 Forward Plan:

Twenty eight days notice of this report has been given and it first appeared on the Forward Plan that was published on 17 August 2015.

1.4 Council Plan and Policy Framework

This report relates to the following priority in the 2014/18 Our North Tyneside Plan

1. Our People will be listened to by services that respond better and faster to their needs

1.5 Information:

1.5.1 Background

North Tyneside Council is a high performing authority that has a commitment to continue to be a 'listening' council that delivers for its residents and communities by involving them in decision-making.

Resident views and priorities shape the Council Plan as the strategic framework which sets the direction of the Authority and its services.

At present, the Authority, in common with all local authorities, must change to respond to increasingly challenging financial challenges and in doing so it recognises the importance of continued effective engagement with residents to ensure that policy direction and strategic decisions are in line with their priorities.

There are a range of statutory requirements which the Authority must meet in relation to engagement. The over-arching obligation on the Authority to consult arises from the Local Government Act 1999 Best Value Duty, which requires the organisation to consult on questions of policy or strategic decisions, as part of its requirement to secure continuous improvement. However, there are other statutory requirements for engagement, including responsibilities around equalities and diversity legislation, the statutory framework that guides its role as a landlord to its tenants; and duties in relation to looked after children.

Currently, there are a number of strategies across various Authority services which set out how residents and service users will be involved in decision making. The current corporate strategy was agreed by Cabinet in January 2012. As part of the Authority's Creating a Brighter Future programme, the teams involved in engagement were brought together into Corporate Strategy from April 2015. This has provided an opportunity to review how the Authority engages with its residents and to identify where improvements could be made.

The proposed new Corporate Engagement Strategy (set out at appendix 1) seeks to address the key outcomes of this review by providing a single corporate framework, setting out how the Authority will engage across all of its services to improve overall engagement outcomes and to provide a more co-ordinated and consistent approach that is more easily understood by residents and service users. It also seeks to ensure that the essential role of Elected Members in the engagement process is clearly recognised.

The proposed Strategy also seeks to ensure that engagement supports and enables the delivery of the Authority's Creating a Brighter Future programme.

The Strategy establishes a wide two-way communications approach, between the Authority, its residents and other stakeholders, and will be delivered through a range of easily accessible opportunities to ensure that everyone will have a choice in deciding whether, and if so how, they can be more involved. This spans from our customer service approach, and the increased use of digital communications and social media, through to intensive collaboration with customers and service users.

1.5.2 Review outcomes

The internal review of all engagement activity across the Authority identified the following key strengths:

- clear policy commitment
- professional expertise

- national best practice in some areas
- the Authority offers a wide range of engagement opportunities for its residents, tenants, looked after children, service users and their representatives
- overall feedback on these engagement activities is positive
- In the 2014 Residents Survey 50 percent of people said the council acts on residents concerns and 59 percent said the council keeps residents informed.

The review also highlighted the following areas for improvement:

- better co-ordination across the Authority and its partners
- consistent branding and terminology to improve clarity for residents and others
- improved forward planning
- increased sharing of insight across the Authority and its partners from all types of engagement activity
- improved feedback to those involved in engagement activity
- broaden the reach of those people who we involve in engagement activity
- improved value for money for engagement activities through increased use of less resource intensive methods where appropriate
- consistent standards to be delivered in all engagement activities
- better involvement with Elected Members throughout all engagement activities
- improved evaluation of all engagement activities

1.5.3 Strategy Aims and Outcomes

The overall aims of the proposed Strategy are:

- to support and enable the delivery of the Council Plan and associated Creating a Brighter Future change programme
- to satisfy all relevant statutory requirements
- to meet relevant best practice guidance
- to deliver the Authority's policy priority to be a 'listening Council'
- to improve public awareness of, and involvement in, engagement opportunities
- to improve understanding across the Authority of our residents and service users – of their priorities and needs

Performance against the Strategy will be assessed against the following outcomes:

- statutory obligations are fulfilled
- resident survey feedback on whether people feel the Authority acts on their concerns, and how well informed they feel about the services and benefits the Authority provides
- the number and range of people involved

1.5.2 Core principles

The Strategy will ensure that all engagement activities will adhere to the following core principles:

- Inclusive: Making sure that everyone will be able to engage in the process
- Clear: Be clear on our aims of each engagement activity from the outset, and the extent to which residents can be involved.
- Integrated: Ensuring that engagement activities are joined up with the relevant decision-making processes.
- Tailored: We will aim to better understand our audience and use different methods appropriately to enable and encourage them to be involved.

- Feedback: We will give feedback, through agreed channels, when we have completed our activity.
- Timely: we will ensure that we give, where we can, sufficient notice to make opportunities available to all. We will take into account those times when it is more appropriate to engage depending on our target audience

A quarterly Engagement Board will bring together representatives of the Council and its partners to monitor how it is delivering on its core principles and to forward plan future activities.

We will help people to understand when it is not possible for us to involve people at all stages in decision-making. This is likely to be in the following circumstances:

- Emergency situations. There are times when we will need to act for safety reasons and may not be able to engage. We will, as soon as is reasonable, inform people of our need to do this.
- Legislative occurrences. There may be situations where we locally have to respond to a directive from central government. In these situations we will engage with residents on any opportunities that may arise where we can shape things locally.
- Operational decisions: The engagement strategy will help set the policy direction and strategic decisions of the Authority. The way these policies are implemented i.e. how the Authority allocates its staff to deliver services, or deals with specific issues relating to individual customers is are operational decisions

1.5.3 The approach

The Strategy will enable the delivery of a wide range of activities and opportunities that enable people and organisations to easily access information about the Authority and its services and to enable people to be involved in informing decision making or to shape services.

At each level of engagement we will explain the offer and what people can expect from being involved.

The different opportunities to access information and get involved are brought together under four themes within the Strategy.

Informs: These opportunities will promote/signposting residents and other relevant stakeholders, to information about North Tyneside Council and its services (and how to access them), key decisions and the delivery of the Council Plan. This will include helping people to understand how the Authority is addressing the challenging economic position by doing things differently in the interests of our borough's residents and its communities via the Creating a Brighter Future change programme.

Consults: These activities will involve residents and service users when significant changes or new approaches are being considered, so we can ensure that we listen to their views in a timely and efficient way before final decisions are taken. When we consult we will make it clear what questions we are asking and how the responses will be used. Some of the consultation will relate to statutory process, including planning and licensing issues.

Involves: These activities will provide opportunities for residents and service users to be engaged in a creative and innovative way to develop solutions and shape the way forward. An example of this is the approach taken with the Whitley Bay Anti-Social Behaviour Task Force that brought residents and partners together to reduce crime and anti-social behaviour by shaping and then implementing a partnership action plan.

Collaborate: Activities will involve people in working together in a more in-depth way. The interests and expertise of those individuals involved will be considered to help deliver the required outcomes. This is likely to include activities that involve our council tenants in shaping housing services, and users of social care services and their carers. Some of these activities will focus on **empowering** our residents to create and deliver solutions. Engagement activities at this level may require the development of specific standards, and participants will be informed of these prior to the start of activities.

1.6 Decision options:

The following decision options are available for consideration by Cabinet:

Option 1

Cabinet may approve the Corporate Strategy and other recommendations at paragraph 1.2 above

Option 2

Cabinet may not approve the Engagement Strategy and other recommendations at paragraph 1.2 above

Option 1 is the recommended option.

1.7 Reasons for recommended option:

Option 1 is recommended for the following reasons:

It will provide a framework for the future engagement offer by North Tyneside Council and will provide greater clarity for the public about the different ways that they can be informed and involved in the Authority's decision-making, and what they can expect from the different approaches.

1.8 Appendices:

Appendix 1 : Draft Corporate Engagement Strategy

1.9 Contact officers:

Jacqueline Laughton, Head of Corporate Strategy, tel. (0191) 6437070

Jeanette Hedley, Senior Manager, Communications and Engagement,

tel. (0191) 6435077

Vicki Nixon, Participation and Advocacy Manager, tel. (0191) 6438215

Alison Campbell, Senior Business Partner, tel. (0191) 6437038

1.10 Background information:

The following background information have been used in the compilation of this report and are available at the office of the author:

(1) [North Tyneside Council Engagement Strategy 2012-2015](#)

(2) [Residents' Survey 2014](#)

(3) [North Tyneside Homes Tenant and Leaseholder Involvement Strategy 2012-15](#)

PART 2 – COMPLIANCE WITH PRINCIPLES OF DECISION MAKING

2.1 Finance and other resources

There are no additional financial implications of approving this strategy. Engagement activities will be delivered within the existing Corporate Strategy budget. The new framework will support the Authority's services to better co-ordinate activities.

2.2 Legal

There are a range of legal requirements (including those deriving from statute, case law and guidance) which require the Authority to engage with its residents and other stakeholders.

North Tyneside Council, as a Best Value Authority, is under a general Duty of Best Value to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the way in which its functions are exercised, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness (by virtue of section 3 of the Local Government Act 1999).

On 27 March 2015 the Department for Communities and Local Government issued revised Best Value Statutory Guidance. The Guidance stipulates that before deciding how to fulfil their Best Value Duty, authorities are under a duty to consult representatives of a wide range of local persons, including representatives of council tax payers, those who use or are likely to use services provided by the authority, and those appearing to the authority to have an interest in any area within which the authority carries out functions. The guidance goes on to say that authorities should include local voluntary and community organisations and small businesses in such consultation. This duty applies at all stages of the commissioning cycle, including when considering the decommissioning of services.

The terms of s.3 of the Local Government Act 1999 are framed in notably broad terms and have been interpreted by the courts to mean that the duty to consult is concerned with 'questions of policy and approach' rather than specific operational matters; an obligation to consult arises for the purpose of determining *how* to fulfil the duty to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the way in which the authority's functions are exercised rather, than for example, determining the terms of particular contracts which an authority may be minded to make (R on the application of Nash) v Barnet LBC [2013]).

Statutory consultation is ordinarily designed to be needed, and is required, at the formative stage of the relevant process as a key purpose of consultation is to enable an authority, properly informed through the process of consultation by representations of residents of the Borough and other 'stakeholders', to decide whether or not to pursue or withdraw from a particular policy or strategic decision.

An Engagement Strategy will assist the Authority in ensuring it meets its obligations with respect to consultation.

2.3 Consultation/community engagement

2.3.1 Internal Consultation

Cabinet Members and the Authority's Senior Leadership Team have been consulted on the Engagement Strategy proposals

Internal engagement has been undertaken, with the Authority's services with statutory engagement responsibilities including, the corporate engagement service, housing, Adult Social Care and Children and Young People's Participation and Advocacy, as part of an internal review of the organisations engagement approach. This has informed the development of the strategy.

2.3.2 External Consultation/Engagement

The Strategy incorporates previous engagement with external stakeholders and further engagement is planned on the final wording of the Strategy with: Residents and tenants, VODA, CVS Chief Officers Group, Healthwatch, the Cornerstone Carers Group, as well as the North Tyneside Clinical Commissioning Group and Northumbria Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust via the Health and Wellbeing Board Engagement and Communications Group.

2.4 Human rights

The proposals within this report do not have direct implications in respect of the Human Rights Act 1998.

2.5 Equalities and diversity

The Engagement Strategy aims to deliver a clear framework for engagement that enables engagement and involvement opportunities to be more accessible to residents and other stakeholders.

Engagement will be required to be carried out as identified in Equalities Impact Assessments, meeting the needs of individuals with protected characteristics that may be impacted by specific projects, policies or service changes.

2.6 Risk management

The clarity provided by the Engagement Strategy on the corporate and service level engagement and involvement opportunities will facilitate greater public involvement in decision-making and therefore reduce the reputational risk of the Authority failing to meet its statutory requirements to engage.

2.7 Crime and disorder

There are no crime and disorder implications arising from this report

2.8 Environment and sustainability

There are no environment and sustainability implications arising from this report.

PART 3 - SIGN OFF

- Deputy Chief Executive
- Head(s) of Service
- Mayor/Cabinet Member(s)
- Chief Finance Officer
- Monitoring Officer
- Head of Corporate Strategy