

North Tyneside Council

Report to Cabinet

Date: 8th April 2013

ITEM

Title: New Ways of Engaging with Residents

Portfolio(s): Elected Mayor

Cabinet Member(s): Mrs Linda Arkley

Report from Directorate: Chief Executive's Office

Report Author: Jackie Laughton, Strategic Manager, Policy, Partnerships, Performance and Communications
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Wards affected: All

PART 1

1.1 Purpose:

The purpose of the report is to seek Cabinet's agreement to the development of new ways of engaging with residents.

1.2 Recommendation(s):

It is recommended that Cabinet:

- (1) Agree to discontinue the Area Forums as a means of engagement with local residents; and
- (2) Authorise the Strategic Manager, Policy, Partnerships, Performance and Communications, in consultation with the Elected Mayor, to develop and implement new ways of engaging with local residents.

1.3 Forward Plan:

This report appears on the Forward Plan for the period 13th to 31st May 2013. It has not been practicable to give 28 days notice of this report. However, it is required to be considered at this meeting of Cabinet because of the need to consider future engagement options in advance of the next planned cycle of Area Forums meetings.

1.4 Council Plan and Policy Framework

The report relates to the following section of the Council Strategic Plan 2012/15: Delivering the Plan – Working in Partnership - We will review the way we involve our residents and businesses to see if there are improvements and new ideas to involve greater numbers of our population.

1.5 Information:

1.5.1 Background

Since their relaunch by Cabinet in 2010, Area Forums have been used to bring together residents and elected members at an area level. However monitoring of attendance has shown that the demographic of members of the public attending Area Forums is not representative of the population of North Tyneside as a whole, and attendance is low – in 2011/12 only 229 residents attended Area Forums, being an average of only 14 residents attending each of the 16 Forums that took place over that year.

Area Forums are very expensive to run, and suitable venues across North Tyneside are limited, which means that it can be difficult for some members of the public to get to them. In addition recent experience has shown that single issue events attract a far larger audience; for instance, a recent public drop in event on the issue of flooding attracted over 300 people, more than the number of people who attended Area Forums in a year.

Further, this year the “Voice Your Choice” campaign, which formed part of the 2013/14 budget consultation, enabled over 5500 residents to have their say. This involved getting out into the places that people use every day such as in libraries, community centres and shopping centres – going to them rather than expecting them to come to us. The Authority wants to reach out to more residents than it currently reaches, and this type of approach gives more people an opportunity to find out about what the Authority is doing and to have their say in helping to shape this.

The Elected Mayor and Cabinet’s proposals in respect of the budget 2013/14 included removal of the environmental budget from the Area Forums and the replacement of Area Forums with more direct forms of engagement. For the reasons given, it is considered that the time has come to review and replace Area Forums with a wider and more diverse range of community engagement activities, including activities at ward and neighbourhood levels, as well as an increase in agenda-specific events. It is also proposed to make greater use of social media and offer more opportunities for residents to have their say in a similar way to the “Voice Your Choice” campaign.

Cabinet is therefore requested to agree to discontinue the current Area Forums arrangements, and authorise the Strategic Manager, Policy, Partnerships, Performance and Communications to instead, in consultation with the Elected Mayor, identify and take forward new, improved and more inclusive ways of engaging with local residents.

1.6 Decision options:

The following decision options are available for consideration by Cabinet:

Option 1

Agree the recommendations set out in section 1.2 of this report

Option 2

Not agree the recommendations set out in section 1.2 of this report

Option 3

Refer the recommendations set out in 1.2 back for further consideration.

Option 1 is the recommended option.

1.7 Reasons for recommended option:

Option 1 is recommended for the following reasons:

The numbers of residents currently attending Area Forums is small. It is proposed that the resource currently used to support Area Forums could be used to increase the range of community engagement, including running more single issues events and getting out into venues to talk to people about issues that are important to them.

1.8 Appendices:

None.

1.9 Contact officers:

Jackie Laughton, Strategic Manager, Policy, Partnerships, Performance and Communications, Chief Executive's Office	643 7070
Felicity Shoesmith, Partnership and Involvement Manager	643 7071
Alison Campbell, Finance Business Manager	643 7038

1.10 Background information:

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

- (1) Business plan 2013/14 reference: B11

PART 2 – COMPLIANCE WITH PRINCIPLES OF DECISION MAKING

2.1 Finance and other resources

As part of the 2013-14 Business Planning & Budget setting process a savings proposal was agreed, which is to be delivered by replacing Area Forums with more direct forms of engagement.

It is anticipated that cost of delivering the new ways of engaging with residents will be managed within existing budgets. However, if new proposals, when finalised, do require any additional funding, a further report will be brought to Cabinet for approval.

2.2 Legal

Area Forums are consultative (rather than decision making) bodies established by the Council's executive, Cabinet, pursuant to their residuary powers under section 9D of the Local Government Act 2000. Cabinet has elected to include reference to the Forums in the Constitution; it is not a legislative requirement. Should the Area Forums be removed, this change would need to be reflected in the Constitution accordingly.

2.3 Consultation/community engagement

2.3.1 Internal Consultation

The Chairs of the Area Forums have been consulted on new ways of engaging with residents. Internal consultation has taken place with the Communication and Engagement Network, the Elected Mayor and members of SLT.

2.3.2 External Consultation/Engagement

No direct external consultation has taken place on the proposed changes, however feedback is continually sought and this has resulted in a clear view that alternative methods of community engagement would involve a wider range of residents and provide better value for money in terms of the resource used to support this.

2.4 Human rights

There are no human rights implications directly arising from this report.

2.5 Equalities and diversity

Residents who attend Area Forums or participate in other forms of council engagement are encouraged to complete equality monitoring forms. These have demonstrated that the demographic of people attending Area Forums is not representative of the population of North Tyneside. A move to more issue based engagement and campaigns, that include going out to meet people in places they use, will enable more people from hard to reach communities and a wide demographic to be involved in community engagement opportunities.

2.6 Risk management

Any risks as a result of changes to the way the Authority engages with residents will be addressed in line with the Authority's risk management policy.

2.7 Crime and disorder

There are no crime and disorder issues directly arising from this report.

2.8 Environment and sustainability

The development of new ways to engage with residents, reaching a wider demographic and ultimately more residents, will improve the consultation process for environmental projects.

PART 3 - SIGN OFF

- Chief Executive

- Strategic Director(s)

- Mayor/Cabinet Member(s)

- Chief Finance Officer

- Monitoring Officer

- Strategic Manager Policy,
Partnerships, Performance
and Communications