

Overview, Scrutiny and Policy Development Report

Community Conversations Review

November 2014



North Tyneside Council

1. Introduction

- 1.1 As part of the Overview, Scrutiny & Policy Development Committee work programme 2014/15.

The main objective was to review and monitor the progress to the agreed recommendations (December 2013) in relation to the Community Engagement Review and investigate the effectiveness of the Community Conversations.

- 1.2 A sub-group of the Overview, Scrutiny & Policy Development Committee was established with an invitation to the Members involved in the Community Engagement Review to be involved.

The Members of the sub-group included:-

Councillor Sandra Graham (Chair)
Councillor Jim Allan
Councillor Brian Burdis
Councillor Marian Huscroft
Reverend Michael Vine (church representative)

2. Methodology

- 2.1 The sub-group held 3 meetings between September and November 2014, to discuss the updated information following the Community Engagement Review and findings of how successful the Community Conversations had been.

3. Monitoring the implementation of the accepted recommendations of the Community Engagement Review (December 2013)

Recommendation Review

- 3.1 ***Recommendation 1:*** Officers work with Ward Councillors to ensure there is a clear feedback mechanism in place for all forms of ward level engagement.

Update Position

Any query submitted in a Community Conversation is fed into the Members Enquiry system, with a view that a direct response would be provided via the councillor in a timely manner.

All queries submitted to a Mayor's Listening Event are responded to directly by the Mayor's Office.

The second phase of the new website will develop this approach more widely to allow greater feedback online. Key issues raised by the public are fed into the communications approach to ensure the public are updated, e.g. in the Our North Tyneside resident's magazine

- 3.2 **Recommendation 2:** *Officers in North Tyneside Homes review Area Housing Forums where positive outcomes are not being met and work with Ward Councillors and tenants to identify a replacement that contributes to the ward engagement model, focusing on wards and issues local to residents.*

Update Position

North Tyneside Homes are continuing to explore new ways to involve ward members, tenants and residents at a local level to discuss housing issues.

A review of the Area Housing Forums is taking place as part of the work to improve engagement and consultation at a local level. Consultation on the proposals to increase the range and variety of opportunities for tenant and ward members to engage continues at each of the 4 Area Housing Forums.

Discussions will be taking place with the Cabinet Member for Housing and the Environment with recommendations for improvement to be put forward for consideration and agreement. In addition, a review of estate walkabouts is taking place and continuation of the new approach of 'Have your Say' Days across wards in the borough which have proved very successful. These include a 'Walkabout Wednesday' and a community event in the ward.

There has been ward member involvement from the start of the process and creation of task groups involving ward members, residents and other interested parties from the ward to look at the issues raised and agree a way forward to find solutions to any problems and really make a difference to the area.

- 3.3 **Recommendation 3:** *As part of the estate based working review, estate walkabouts are refreshed or replaced. This will produce a greater involvement from Ward Councillors and a focus on improving neighbourhood standards for all residents.*

Update Position

North Tyneside Homes have been looking at new, more inclusive ways of engaging ward members and residents at an estate level.

Ensuring ward members know when estate walkabouts will take place so that they can attend or ensure that they have an opportunity to feed in any issues.

The Corporate Communications Team have been provided the dates for estate walkabouts to enable them to tie in with other events that are taking place and publish the dates in the Members Newsletter and enter into ward member calendars.

Improving the advertising of estate walkabouts through posters in the community and through social media communication channels has been implemented.

Incorporated estate walkabouts with clean-up days for intended additional impact.

The introduction of a programme of 'Walk and Talks' is being explored that will compliment estate walkabouts and it is intended they become more demand and/or theme led and allow more flexibility and a focus on solving problems for local residents for increased customer satisfaction. These will be arranged to suit the needs of tenants or ward members to deal with a particular neighbourhood problem. This may only involve one street or a specific area or plot of land.

In addition, The 'Have your Say' Days across wards in the borough will continue and have proved very successful. There has been ward member involvement from the start of the process and creation of task groups involving ward members, residents and other interested parties from the ward to look at the issues raised and agree a way forward to find solutions to any problems and really make a difference to the area.

- 3.4 **Recommendation 5:** *The Participation and Engagement Team liaise with the Policy, Performance and Research Team to ensure that information is included in Members Briefings in relation to youth engagement and participation.*

Update Position

The Young Mayors priorities had been shared and included in Members Briefings. An extraordinary youth council meeting was held on 20 November 2014 and was chaired by the Cllr Mulvenna as Chair of the Council. Youth Councillor's on the day debated the three key issues for North Tyneside young people as identified in the 'Make Your Mark' ballot.

- 3.5 **Recommendation 6:** *All Ward Councillors, in conjunction with local residents and officers, set the agendas for ward level meetings within their area.*

Update Position

Ward members have been involved in agenda setting for the first two rounds of Community Conversations.

- 3.6 **Recommendation 8:** *Where agreeable amongst Ward Councillors, the ward level meetings operate on a 'revolving chair' basis to allow all Ward Councillors to fulfil their role as a community leader and develop the necessary skills required.*

Update Position

Ward councillors have been involved as Chairs at events. The Cabinet Member for Engagement did take the chair at some events to provide a link directly back to the Cabinet.

Human Resources also provide a comprehensive training programme for Members. It is hoped that Members will take full advantage of these opportunities.

- 3.7 **Recommendation 9:** *Action plans be developed for each ward forum which highlight 3 priorities for that area and allow the activities of each forum to be coordinated appropriately.*

Update Position

While Action Plans were not produced for each ward, the 'Out and About' programme has identified the priorities important to the public.

An analysis of issues raised in the Community Conversations has been provided separately.

- 3.8 **Recommendation 10:** *The task and finish group established to develop the website give priority to the inclusion of tools that will allow greater interaction and engagement with residents.*

Update Position

Members were involved in the initial discussions about the website, together with residents and staff and this has shaped the first phase of the website, which does make it easier for residents to feed back to the council, eg reporting issues, commenting on plans.

- 3.9 **Recommendation 11:** *That the work currently being undertaken in relation to Ward Councillor communications recognise the new role for Ward Councillors in delivering ward level meetings and prioritise ways to improve access to clear, concise and up to-date information.*

Update Position

A survey was carried out to consider the views of all members about how they like to be communicated with and what they needed.

The feedback asked for information that helps councillors to inform residents in their ward about local matters. The series of newsletters produced by Capita, and provided on the Members website aims to address this. In addition the Members Newsletter does include information about engagement and key issues for members

- 3.10 Although there were two recommendations rejected by Cabinet in December 2013. This has not stopped work taking place towards increasing engagement as follows:

- 3.11 **Recommendation 4:** *Officers ensure that appropriate mechanisms and support be put in place to ensure that Ward Councillors are able to build closer links with young people through attendance at school council meetings.*

The Participation and Engagement team has been working with the Chair's office to develop a school council award which will comprise 4 modules;

- i. representing others,
- ii. democracy,
- iii. British values (including learning about the role of the council etc) and;
- iv. doing things for others including volunteering and/or raising funds.

3.12 **Recommendation 7:** *As a minimum guideline, each ward holds a meeting on a quarterly basis and arranges additional events as required to meet demand.*

The corporate Communications and Engagement Team was aiming to deliver three Community Conversations in most wards in the current year. In addition residents from all wards were involved in the Out and About programme over the Summer.

3.13 The sub-group noted the extensive work that has been carried out this year and were encouraged that work was progressing to continually to improve engagement with residents.

4. The effectiveness of the Community Conversations

Review findings

4.1 Member led Community Conversations events (CCE) enable Community Leaders to set the agenda in relation to issues and/or concerns in the wards they represent.

Support from officers is available to make arrangements and attend if a particular expertise is required on issues for discussion.

The aim of the Community Conversations events are to provide an opportunity for people to discuss local issues with their ward representatives in an informal setting

The Community Conversations events are not part of the council's formal committee structure and as such do not have an allocated budget.

4.2 A number of engagement events have taken place which, include:

- Community Conversations
- Summer Programme
- Mayor Listening Events
- Joint Event (with the Police Commissioner)

The group was informed that 2 events had taken place in most of the wards on the borough.

The topics discussed in the 1st round of Community Conversations events were explicit in nature and the number of attendees was regarded encouraging.

In the 2nd round, topics were purposely less explicit and attendances did not reach the same level.

It was found that there was a direct correlation with the attendance and the importance of the local issue of discussion. An example was provided where a significant number of residents attended to discuss a single issue in the Cullercoats ward.

Analysis had shown that evening events were attended less than those taking place during the day.

A particular good example occurred when residents were able to raise matters of concern and have relevant meaningful conversations with Ward Members during an event that took place in the Whitley Bay shopping centre.

- 4.3 The Summer Community Conversation programme took engagement out across the borough speaking to people out in their communities. The events were pre-arranged events, in parks, in shopping centres, on the beach and on buses.

During June – September 2091 people were engaged at 41 events and 590 people completed a questionnaire that captured residents' perceptions and experiences of the Authority.

There were 1667 separate comments received which, then were fed into the Creating a Brighter Future programme and budget considerations.

It was with disappointment that some Members were unaware of the occurrence of these events. It was felt that Ward Members should be informed of any engagement event occurring in the ward that they represent so arrangements can be made to be involved and accompany the Engagement Team.

- 4.4 The Mayor's Listening Events (MLE) provided opportunities for the public to meet with the Elected Mayor and Cabinet Members and have their questions answered in person.

These events allow the public to either submit their questions in advance, at the event or via a link on the website.

At the Mayors Listening Events, cards were available that provided individuals an opportunity to submit a question with their own contact details. This then allowed a response to be provided to that individual directly from the Elected Mayors Office.

The group believed that the Community Conversations events would benefit from the availability of similar cards to enable residents to submit questions, provide opinion and feedback. It was encouraged that all enquiries would be recorded onto the Members Enquiry system, which, would enable residents to receive efficient and effective responses from their Ward Members.

- 4.5 The group heard that there had been a significant number of engagement activities undertaken during 2014; however, it was with disappointment that some Members were unaware of the occurrence of some events.

Ward	CC1	CC2	Summer Programme*	MLE	Joint
Battle Hill	14	See Joint	86		30
Benton	34	24	44		42
Camperdown	16	See Joint	59		16
Chirton	6		103	13	
Collingwood	9	10		26	
Cullercoats	15	120	177		18
Howdon	See Joint	5	175		27
Killingworth	16	6	376	50	
Longbenton	27	14	53	42	
Monkseaton North	5		40		
Monkseaton South	27	12		17	
Northumberland	16		21		
Preston	16	9			
Riverside	2		79		
St Mary's	16		133		
Tynemouth	26	See Joint	51		26
Valley	25	24	213	19	
Wallsend	13		114		
Weetslade	14	21	42		
Whitley Bay	14	151	325		51
MLE Police				57	
MLE Carers				33	
MLE Deaf, Hard of Hearing				38	
Total 3303	311	396	2091	295	210

*Summer programme figures show where people were engaged with, not which ward they are resident in.

- 4.6 It was understood that there were some well established community engagement in wards across the borough and it was emphasised that the new Community Conversations should not replace but were there to enhance engagement already in place.
- 4.7 The group was informed that there were a number of developments being progressed that would help with the engagement with residents/businesses and visitors in North Tyneside.

The development of the new council website would enable users to access what they needed with greater ease. There was a dedicated webpage on Engagement,

which, included resources and information on how the team could help with engagement activities.

It was encouraged that further work was being undertaken to see the My North Tyneside webpage could be utilised greater to allow the receipt of feedback from residents etc.

The group was informed that there had been extensive consultation on the development of the new website, with involvement of residents, council staff and councillors who demonstrated variable abilities and IT knowledge and it noted that their preferred options and usability preferences were taken on board in its development. However the group understood that the new website was the first phase and work was in progress for further improvement to the site for ease of use and accessibility.

- 4.8 The Council was had recently invested in a new corporate wide Electronic Document & Records Management System (EDRMS) that when fully implemented would allow greater capture and access of the information held by the Council.

This investment would provide a greater ability to access and provide relevant accurate information to residents, businesses, visitors etc and would be less resource intensive as it was currently.

- 4.9 The group noted that the Authority holds information of all community groups which is continually being updated. This is invaluable when consultations are being undertaken as particular groups in relation to specific consultations can be identified and approached for their views.

It heard that work was being undertaken to look at ward profiling as an enabler to better engagement. Work was also taking place to establish better joint working with the voluntary sector.

Conclusions

- 5.0 It was recognised that not all the wards in North Tyneside are the same. Wards have differing resident profiles, needs and priorities and therefore it was understood that a 'One size, fits all' approach to the engagement with residents is not the best.

It was also recognised that Ward Members have different preferences to how they engage with residents in their role as community leaders.

Throughout the review the group was encouraged to the range of different engagement methods used and available.

It also understood from the analysis provided the methods that received increased feedback to the Authority, noting that conversation events occurring in shopping centres, parks and during ward walkabouts received the most feedback.

It was also reassured that if a particular local issue arose, there was the flexibility and support available to help organise more formal discussion events.

One critical aspect that arose throughout the study was the need to have an efficient and effective feedback process that would allow Ward Members to provide responses to issues raised from the public following engagement events.

It is important that the public can easily locate information about engagement events on the Councils website and that a comprehensive timetable of future events was available this would help signpost the public to activities occurring around the borough and therefore encourage attendance and increase engagement.

Recommendation 1: That as Member Led activity, Ward Members as Community Leaders are best placed to how community conversations/engagement can best be undertaken within the Wards they represent. Members from each Ward should agree and forward their preferred approach to the Communications and Engagement Team, who will be available to provide support. The preferred approach should then be incorporated into the engagement programme.

Recommendation 2: That; (a) feedback cards be made available at all engagement events; (b) feedback cards be progressed fully and appropriately to provide timely feedback to all parties; and (3) the methods to feedback concerns/issues be publicised in Our North Tyneside magazine and available on the Councils website.

Recommendation 3: That Ward Members be informed and made aware when any engagement activity in the ward they represent and a comprehensive programme of engagement/community conversation events be available to the public via the Councils website and always kept up to date.

6. Background Information

The Community Engagement Study-group October 2013 report

Response to Overview and Scrutiny Committee Report on Community Engagement 9 December 2013

Notes of the sub-group meeting 23 September 2014

Community Engagement – Response to Overview and Scrutiny Study

Updated position to Overview & Scrutiny recommendations to Cabinet 9 December 2013

Appendix Recommendations update

Notes of the sub-group meeting 21 October 2014

7. Acknowledgments

- 7.1 The sub-group would like to place on record their thanks to the following officers for the information, support and advice they have provided:

Jeanette Hedley, Manager, Communications and Engagement

Jacqueline Laughton, Head of Corporate Strategy

Esther Windass, Tenant & Resident Involvement Manager, North Tyneside Homes

Vicki Nixon, Participation and Engagement Manager (CYPL)

Paul Wheeler, Democratic Services Officer