

WELWYN HATFIELD BOROUGH COUNCIL
CABINET – 10 AUGUST 2021
REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

COMMUNITY AND STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

1 Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report and its appendices set out a proposed new community and stakeholder engagement strategy for the council. It summarises how the strategy was developed, what engagement took place in doing so, and five principles of engagement which we recommend the council adopts. Within each of these five themes a number of aims have been set out, each supported by an action plan.

2 Recommendations

- 2.1 That Cabinet approves the council's community and stakeholder engagement strategy (CASES) for 2021-24 as set out in Appendix A and notes the supporting action plan (see Appendix B).
- 2.2 That Cabinet gives delegated authority to the Corporate Management Team to oversee the development and implementation of strategies linked to the CASES as set out in paragraph 13.2 below, except where there are existing governance arrangements in place for Member approval and/or scrutiny of those strategies.

3 Background

- 3.1 One of the actions arising from the 2019 LGA Peer Review was to develop a new community engagement strategy that would help us provide coordination, clarity, consistency and quality in how we engage with our communities.
- 3.2 In the discovery phase of the project, we held a stakeholder mapping workshop and follow-up session with members of the council's Corporate Leadership Network across all services, and with political representation from the Leader of the Council. These sessions were guided by the LGA guide to community engagement, *New Conversations 2.0* (2019).
- 3.3 We discussed who our stakeholders are; how we currently engage with them; what we could do more of, less of, or do differently; and what impact those actions might have.
- 3.4 We also ran sessions at the 2020 Welwyn Hatfield Alliance Conference with a wide range of some of our key stakeholders and local partners, facilitated by New Local (formerly New Local Government Network). The insight and qualitative data we acquired in doing that is also reflected in the strategy document.
- 3.5 The outcome was a set of strategic aims, themed as per the principles set out in 4.1 below. We went back to look at these five principles again following the *Your Welwyn Hatfield* survey, which had a number of questions about

community engagement, and received over 1,600 responses from residents. This feedback has also been incorporated in the document.

3.6 We are now seeking Cabinet approval of those aims, as set out in the strategy.

3.7 We also ask Cabinet to note and agree to the action plan that supports the strategy, and the make-up of a new officer community and stakeholder engagement strategy group to oversee, coordinate, and provide challenge to its implementation.

4 Proposals

4.1 The proposed community and engagement strategy sets out five principles of community and stakeholder engagement as follows, with a set of aims under each principle:

4.1.1 UNDERSTAND: Be clear about who our stakeholders are and help them to understand us. Under this heading we aim to:

- Get a better understanding of our communities – their wants/needs as well as demography
- Coordinate and share the information internally we have about our communities
- Bring partners to corporate leadership network and other meetings for discussion, challenge and updates
- Ensure our communities understand our services and how they are delivered

4.1.2 ENCOURAGE: Encourage people from all our communities to get involved. Under this heading we aim to:

- Broaden Borough Panel and Tenants Panel representation, and consider expiry of membership to encourage vitality
- Share insight with our partners and actively involve them in engagement activities
- Be clear about how and why we want to engage
- Work with the Youth Council to encourage young people to take part
- Incentivise engagement by telling the story of how we work with our communities, and what we can achieve

4.1.3 ENABLE: Make it easy for people to have a say, keeping up with technology to enable access. Under this heading we aim to:

- Ensure we understand how and when our communities want to engage with us
- Have a consistent approach to how we engage with our communities, whatever channel we use
- Invest in technology that makes it easier for people to engage with us digitally
- Provide and promote the use of a digital platform for our communities to exchange ideas

4.1.4 CONNECT: Connect with our communities in a meaningful way so they can help shape our services. Under this heading we aim to:

- Work towards a single system for collecting, storing and sharing the feedback we have about our services
- Ensure we have a consistent approach to using our insight to shape services, connecting it more explicitly to our business planning process
- Publish a consultation and engagement calendar so our staff and our communities are clear about when they can get involved
- Work with partners to help increase people's digital skills and confidence, enabling them to engage in new ways

4.1.5 EQUIP: Ensure we are equipped with the tools we need to engage effectively. Under this heading we aim to:

- Continue to improve communication between teams and services taking into account an increase of flexible and remote working
- Develop a new intranet that includes collaborative working tools
- Ensure staff are identifying stakeholders and engagement when planning projects, and develop a community engagement toolkit, helping them to do so
- Form a community engagement group to share best practice
- Support councillors and staff in promoting opportunities to get involved in local activities and decision-making

4.2 To oversee the implementation of the strategy and its supporting action plan, a corporate Community and Stakeholder Engagement Group has been set up. The group comprises engagement leads from across all services of the council. The terms of reference are attached as appendix B to this report.

Implications

5 Legal Implication(s)

5.1 Where there is a legal duty to consult or otherwise engage with our communities, the strategy proposes the development of a toolkit to support officers and Members in doing so in an effective and meaningful way.

6 Financial Implication(s)

6.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from the report. Any budgetary requirements arising from the supporting action plan will be raised through the necessary channels.

7 Risk Management Implications

7.1 The strategy mitigates against the risk that we fail to engage effectively with our communities, and the potential therefore of reputational damage, legal challenge, and failing to provide services in the most effective way to meet the needs of our communities.

8 Security & Terrorism Implication(s)

8.1 There are no direct security and terrorism implications associated with this report.

9 Procurement Implication(s)

9.1 There are no direct procurement implications associated with this report.

10 Climate Change Implication(s)

10.1 The drive to increasingly digitalise how we engage with our communities will reduce the amount of printed material produced and/or sent by mail. This will have a positive impact on our carbon reduction targets.

11 Human Resources Implication(s)

11.1 There are no direct human resources implications associated with this report.

12 Health and Wellbeing Implication(s)

12.1 Effective engagement will help ensure that the services and support we provide are fit for purpose and meet the needs of our communities.

13 Communication and Engagement Implication(s)

13.1 The strategy sets out how the council will engage with its communities and other stakeholders. Everything in it has a communication and/or engagement implication.

13.2 Underneath this strategy will sit a number of other strategies, including but not limited to: Communications Strategy, Tenant/Neighbourhood Involvement Strategy, Campus West Marketing Strategy etc. This report seeks delegated authority to develop and implement those strategies, based on the underlying principles of the CASES, except where further Member approval and/or scrutiny is already required (e.g. in the case of the Tenant and Neighbourhood Involvement Strategy).

14 Link to Corporate Priorities

14.1 The proposals link directly to the council's priority of 'a well run council which puts its people first', and to our commitment to continue engaging with our communities.

15 Equality and Diversity

15.1 The strategy and supporting action plan seek to ensure that we engage with all members of our community, and highlights the need to work harder to engage with some of our communities in order to meet our commitments with respect to equality and diversity.

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Appendix A – Community Engagement Strategy
Appendix B – Community Engagement Action Plan