

EAST HERTS COUNCIL

CORPORATE BUSINESS SCRUTINY – 22 MARCH 2011

REPORT BY COUNCILLOR MIKE WOOD, CHAIRMAN OF THE COUNCIL'S COMMUNITY AND PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT TASK AND FINISH GROUP

WARD(S) AFFECTED: ALL

Purpose/Summary of Report

- This report presents the key findings and recommendations agreed by the Community and Public Engagement Task & Finish Group at its final meeting on 28 February 2011 based upon the review of the council's current engagement methods.

| <u>RECOMMENDATION FOR :Corporate Business Scrutiny</u> | |
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| (A) | That all proposals presented in Essential Reference Paper B be discussed and recommended to the Executive |
| (B) | That a revised East Herts Community and Public Engagement Strategy and Framework be drawn up in line with the principles reflected in this report |
| (C) | That senior management: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Be asked to undertake a review of current spending in this area ii. To ensure that senior management undertake to implement the recommendations within the currently agreed budget and available officer resources |
| (D) | That the Task & Finish group should reconvene within 6 months to check progress with a full review of outcomes and progress in 1 year's time |

1.0 Background

1.1 On 24th August 2010, the Corporate Business Scrutiny set up East Herts Community and Public Engagement Task and Finish group.

The purpose of the group was to review the current methods used by the council to engage with the community and the public and recommend a sustainable, cost effective framework/strategy for Community and Public Engagement for the district of East Hertfordshire.

1.2 The strategy/framework will also ensure the council:

- fulfils its obligations on consultation: Duty to Involve, Duty to Promote and Duty to Respond to petitions.
- engages at local level which will bring improved opportunities and benefits to all living, working and visiting East Herts and deliver 'Fit for Purpose Services'.

1.3 The group also aspired to link its task and recommendations to the "Big Society", localism and citizen involvement agendas.

1.4 It is important to note that the council's desire to improve consultation with the community and the public far exceeds the duties mentioned in 1.3.

1.5 Scope and Purpose

1.6 At the Corporate Business Scrutiny meeting on 24 August 2010, Members identified the topic of "Community and Public Engagement" as one they wanted to explore and review in detail. They agreed to convene a task and finish group to undertake the review and put forward recommendations for a sustainable, cost effective strategy for a Community and Public Engagement Framework/Strategy.

1.7 The Task and Finish group defined Engagement as the whole range of ways in which the council interacts and might interact with all its service users, over and above what it does in providing services

1.8 Task and Finish group membership

1.9 Councillor Mike Wood (Chairman)
Councillor David Andrews
Councillor William Ashley
Councillor Nigel Poulton
Councillor Jim Ranger
Councillor Suzanne Rutland–Barsby

Officer Support

Community Projects Team Leader
Head of Community and Cultural Services
Scrutiny Officer

- 1.10 The Task and Finish group agreed the outcomes/objectives as:
- Recommendations for improved consultation and engagement with measurable outcomes for a 'Fit for Purpose' activity for the council
 - Production of a consultation and engagement strategy.
 - All recommendations made are achievable, do-able and sustainable in the current financial situation and limited available resource.

1.11 Methodology

- 1.12 The group agreed to include the following actions and activities in their review to inform the work of the group:

- a) Building on some of the work already done (attached as Background papers)
- b) Research/ reading on other good practice example authorities
- c) Incorporation of information/data from East Herts Consultation Audit report done in 2009
- d) Poll all councillors as to the links they have and sustain within their own wards
- e) Weigh the value and effectiveness of the current council run Community Voice, Link Magazine. What they bring to the wider 'engagement' agenda and whether they are sustainable in their current format in the challenging economic climate.
- f) Bring in witnesses from partner organisations and officers from the council including young people to gather empirical evidence of practitioners
- g) Join the LGiU Big Society Learning Network to incorporate learning on the current government thinking as far as applicable to East Herts
- h) Investigate/research on what new ways of engagement and consultation are 'on the horizon' and what channels of new media are still to be explored and exploited. Explore the possibility of use of modern technology.
- i) Consult partners at the LSP Board meeting
- j) Invite civic societies and residents' associations to complete a questionnaire and give feedback on this topic

2.0 Report

- 2.1 The group met 8 Times between October 2010 and February 2011 with a final report meeting on 28 February 2011. It invited expert witnesses from organisations outside the council and officers from relevant departments. The group undertook a survey of all elected members of East Herts Council and also surveyed civic societies, voluntary organisations and residents' associations. The results of both survey findings have been used to inform the recommendations within this report.
- 2.2 The recommendation for the framework has been considered with the key theme of Big Society in mind: how accountability, capacity building and localism can be promoted.

The group considered the 5 Key outcomes of the Big Society which are relevant to this review:

1. increasing civic participation
2. strengthening individual's capacity for change
3. strengthening neighbourhood groups' capacity for change
4. improving public sector accessibility and responsiveness
5. building social capital and community cohesion

One of the purposes of decentralisation is to empower communities to do things their way. To make this happen, the council will need to support its communities to enable them to take active part in Big Society. The emerging Community and Public engagement framework aspires to provide recommendations to stimulate this debate. The general feeling was that if an army of volunteers are to run public services in East Herts, the framework provides solutions to how they can interact with formal structures and councillors who have a democratic mandate. The review looked at the council role as enabler, facilitator and a mediator. The driver for East Herts is to better engage by using a variety of methods including modern media/technology. A diagram is attached in Essential Reference Paper C. This gives a diagrammatical representation of the recommended framework for a Community & Public Engagement Strategy for East Herts Council.

2.3 Witnesses

Councillor Linda Haysey (Executive Member for Community

Development, Leisure and Culture)
Head of Strategic Direction (shared) and Communication
Head of Strategic Direction (shared)
Performance Manager
Web Manager
Performance and Improvement Coordinator
Community Planning and Partnerships Manager (Grants & Voluntary Groups)
Community Planning and Partnerships Manager (Youth & Sports Engagement, Community Voice & Parish Conference)
Community Projects Officer (Equalities)
Ian Richardson and Michal Siewniak (Council for Voluntary Service for Broxbourne and East Herts (CVSBEH)

24 Young people at the October 2010 Youth Conference & Another 9 Young People through the Youth Shadowing programme (4 of the 9 Young people attended the Youth conference in October 2010)

Cllr William Nunn: Leader of Breckland Council – an exemplar council in successfully engaging with its communities

3.0 Implications/Consultations

3.1 Information on any corporate issues and consultation associated with this report can be found within **Essential Reference Paper 'A'**.

Background Papers

1. Consultation Audit Report – East Herts District Council & Dacorum Borough Council – September 2009
2. Report on Engagement in East Hertfordshire – October 2010
3. Notes of all Task and Finish Group Meetings are available on request from Scrutiny Officer

Contact Member: Councillor Mike Wood (Chairman of task and finish group)

Contact Officer: Mekhola Ray, Community Projects Team Leader Tel Ext No 1613

Report Author: Mekhola Ray, Community Projects Team Leader

ESSENTIAL REFERENCE PAPER 'A'

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| <p>Contribution to the Council's Corporate Priorities/ Objectives (delete as appropriate):</p> | <p>Promoting prosperity and well-being; providing access and opportunities <i>Enhance the quality of life, health and wellbeing of individuals, families and communities, particularly those who are vulnerable.</i></p> <p>Fit for purpose, services fit for you <i>Deliver customer focused services by maintaining and developing a well managed and publicly accountable organisation.</i></p> <p>Pride in East Herts <i>Improve standards of the neighbourhood and environmental management in our towns and villages.</i></p> <p>Caring about what's built and where <i>Care for and improve our natural and built environment.</i></p> <p>Shaping now, shaping the future <i>Safeguard and enhance our unique mix of rural and urban communities, ensuring sustainable, economic and social opportunities including the continuation of effective development control and other measures.</i></p> <p>Leading the way, working together <i>Deliver responsible community leadership that engages with our partners and the public.</i></p> |
| <p>Consultation:</p> | <p>Addressed in the report</p> |
| <p>Legal:</p> | <p>The implication of the Public Sector Duty and the Public Sector Equality Duty has been considered in the report</p> |
| <p>Financial:</p> | <p>All recommendations must be implemented within the resources agreed at budget setting on February 2011. Specific recommendation has been made in the main body of the report in relation to ensure there are no financial implications</p> |
| <p>Human Resource:</p> | <p>Within existing staffing</p> |
| <p>Risk Management:</p> | <p>N/A</p> |