

TASK AND FINISH WORKING GROUP: RESIDENT ENGAGEMENT

1. Purpose of Report

1.1 The purpose of this report is to establish background information, set the scene and set out the scope for a task and finish group looking at the Council's approach to resident engagement.

2. Background

2.1 The Scrutiny Coordinating Committee Work Programming session held on 12 June 2025 provided Members, officers and partners with the opportunity to discuss a variety of scrutiny topics, compiling a shortlist of potential issues for task and finish work during the coming year.

2.2 The first of these topics, selected by Members, will be to look at the Council's resident engagement. The task and finish working group will aim to conduct a focused, clearly scoped, and time-limited piece of work with clear objectives.

3. Resident Engagement - Overview

What is Resident Engagement?

3.1 Resident engagement refers to the process by which organisations actively involve members of a community in discussions, decision-making, and activities that impact their collective well-being. The aim is to build trust, foster collaboration, and create solutions that benefit both the community and the engaging organisation. This interaction can take various forms, including face to face, online surveys or collaborative projects.

3.2 Resident engagement looks to encourage open dialogue, allowing diverse voices to contribute to shaping outcomes. Whether driven by local governments, non-profits, or businesses, the goal remains the same: to empower individuals and groups to play an active role in shaping the decisions and actions that affect their communities. By creating these connections, organisations can drive positive social change, improve services, and promote long-term sustainability.

3.3 Key elements of resident engagement may include:

- **Inclusivity:** Ensuring that a diverse range of community members, including those who may be hard to reach or underrepresented, have the opportunity to participate.
- **Communication:** Sharing information transparently and effectively to keep the community informed about relevant issues, decisions, or projects.
- **Participation:** Actively involving community members in the decision-making process, whether through public meetings, workshops, surveys, or other means.
- **Collaboration:** Working together with the community to develop solutions, policies, or initiatives that reflect their input and meet their needs.

- **Empowerment:** Supporting and empowering community members to take an active role in shaping their own future and influencing decisions that impact them.
- **Feedback and Evaluation:** Seeking and incorporating feedback from the community and regularly evaluating the effectiveness of engagement efforts.

3.4 Resident engagement can take various forms depending on the context and goals. It is often employed in urban planning, public policy development, healthcare, education, and other fields where decisions can have a significant impact on the well-being of a community. Effective resident engagement fosters a sense of ownership, trust, and collaboration, ultimately leading to more sustainable and equitable outcomes¹.

The Importance of Resident Engagement

3.5 Resident engagement can improve how services are developed when communities are consulted and listened to. Good resident engagement can contribute to better participation, better services and better outcomes for communities.

3.6 When done well, good resident engagement can lead to:

- Public services that are planned, developed and delivered in a way that are influenced by, and respond to, community need.
- People who currently find it difficult to participate (due to numerous factors including, language barriers, disability, poverty or discrimination) can help to influence the decisions that affect their lives.
- The various strengths and assets in communities and across key stakeholder organisations are used effectively to deal with the issues communities face.
- Relationships are developed and strengthened between local communities and the Council which can help to build trust and cooperation.

Types of Engagement

3.7 There are numerous methods of engagement that can be used to engage people and will be reliant on a number of factors including the issue under consideration, who needs to be consulted and what is being asked. The various types of engagement could include workshops, resident/community events, world cafes and online communities, which will be explored as part of the working group's evidence gathering.

4. Title of the Working Group

4.1 The title of the review is suggested as 'Resident Engagement'.

5. Overall Aim of the Working Group

5.1 To provide an in-depth look at the Council's resident engagement approach looking at the challenges, barriers and opportunities that exist and understanding what

¹ What is community engagement? Nick Jain. Ideascale. November 2023

good community engagement should look like and its relevance to the Council and its residents.

6. Proposed Terms of Reference for the Working Group

6.1 The following terms of reference for the working group are proposed:-

- (a) To fully understand the Council's existing and developing resident engagement approaches.
- (b) To look at how the Council engages with residents and communities including those 'underserved' or 'seldom heard' and 'new and emerging' groups, including the barriers and opportunities to engagement.
- (c) To examine the role of Councillors in local resident engagement activities and identify opportunities to strengthen and enhance this in the future.
- (d) To consider feedback mechanisms for both the organisation and residents on the outcome of consultation and engagement activities.
- (e) To identify examples of good practice and consider how this could be applied across the organisation.

7. Gathering the Evidence

7.1 The task and finish working group will gather evidence from a number of sources and this will be coordinated, on behalf of Members, by the scrutiny officer and relevant officers. Every effort will be made to involve Members in the research; data collection techniques could include a combination of the following:

- Desktop research;
- Visits;
- Use of secondary research e.g. surveys, questionnaires;
- Evidence presented by key stakeholders.

7.2 The review will gather evidence from a variety of sources and rely on existing evidence and work that has already been undertaken. Additional evidence will come from information provided by council officers and external partners likely to include, though not exhaustive, the following:

- (a) Relevant Cabinet Portfolio Holder(s);
- (b) Director of Strategy and Corporate Affairs;
- (c) Senior Communications Manager (People);
- (d) Various council service areas;
- (e) Community and resident groups.

8. Scope of the Review

8.1 The review will consider, as part of the review process, the following issues related to resident engagement:

- What do we mean by resident engagement?

- What is the importance of effective resident engagement?
- What approaches are used in terms of resident engagement?
- How are 'underserved' or 'seldom heard' and 'new and emerging' groups identified?
- How do we ensure that the right groups are targeted and engaged with?
- What are the perceived barriers to engagement?
- What role can elected members play in resident engagement?
- How do we feedback on resident engagement?
- How do we ensure resident engagement manages expectations and is also seen as meaningful by participants?
- How do we identify examples of good practice?
- How can good practice be applied in other parts of the organisation?
- What are the key components of a community engagement strategy?
- What role is there for partners and partnership working to further enhance engagement opportunities

8.2 As the review investigation develops Members need to remain focused on the key terms of reference to ensure the review is conducted within the time constraints, as well as being robust and based on the evidence and research gathered.

9. Timescales

9.1 Attached for Members information is a draft timetable (**Appendix 1**) for the piece of work which outlines the short and focused process for this working group. Members of the working group will be invited to attend all the meetings.

10. Membership of the Working Group

10.1 In order to conduct the task and finish project it is suggested that the membership of the working group should consist of no more than 6 Members drawn from the Scrutiny Coordinating Committee.

10.2 The proposed membership of the group is as follows: Cllr John Usher (Chair), Cllr Tracy Dodds, Cllr Michael Hartnack, Cllr John Price, Cllr Peter Walton and Cllr Linda Williams.

11. Recommendations

11.1 That the working group agrees the title of the review as 'Resident Engagement'.

11.2 That Members agree the terms of reference for the task and finish working group.

11.3 That membership of the working group is agreed by the Committee.

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APPENDIX 1

Timeline	Review Task	Aims & Objectives	Methodology	Contributors
Session 1	Setting the Scene	To provide the working group with an overview of Resident Engagement	Working group meeting	Working Group Senior Communications Manager Scrutiny Officer
Session 2	Good Practice	A look at some examples of good practice from other local authorities	Desktop research and working group session	Working Group Senior Communications Manager Scrutiny Officer
Session 3	Engagement Activity	A look at some examples of previous and current engagement activity	Working group meeting	Working Group Senior Communications Manager Relevant Officers Scrutiny Officer
Session 4	The Role of the Elected Member	A look at the role of the elected member in resident engagement	Working group meeting	Working Group Senior Communications Manager Elected Members Scrutiny Officer
Session 5	Outcomes and Feedback	To look at how we feedback on the outcomes of engagement and share lessons learned	Working group meeting	Working Group Senior Communications Manager Scrutiny Officer
Session 6	Reflection of evidence and development of draft report and findings.	A look at all the evidence gathered and the development of a draft report	Working group meeting	Working Group Scrutiny Officer