



Report to Policy Committee

Author/Lead Officer of Report: Dan Spicer,
Policy & Improvement Officer

Tel: 0114 2734554

Report of: *Director of Policy & Democratic Engagement*

Report to: *Strategy & Resources Policy Committee*

Date of Decision: *24th July 2024*

Subject: *Our approach to engagement with citizens and in communities*

Type of Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) undertaken	Initial	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Full	<input type="checkbox"/>
Insert EIA reference number and attach EIA	2754			
Has appropriate consultation/engagement taken place?	Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>
Has a Climate Impact Assessment (CIA) been undertaken?	Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information?	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
If YES, give details as to whether the exemption applies to the full report / part of the report and/or appendices and complete below:-				
<i>“The (report/appendix) is not for publication because it contains exempt information under Paragraph (insert relevant paragraph number) of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended).”</i>				

Purpose of Report:

This report sets out the Council’s approach to delivering on the Council Plan priority of developing “A new approach to community empowerment and engagement, working with our Voluntary, Community and Faith sector partners and through Local Area Committees”. It does this through:

- *setting out a strategic Statement of Intent for this area of work;*
- *welcoming the leadership being shown by the Governance Committee on the development of our vision and longer-term plan for community engagement*
- *proposing a set of “Foundations for Good Engagement” to make clear the consistent, core standards of practice we need to have in place ahead of the Governance Committee’s work completing, and to ensure they are building on solid ground*

Recommendations:

Strategy & Resources Policy Committee are asked to:

1. *Approve the Engagement Statement of Intent set out in this report*
2. *Approve the proposed Foundations for Good Engagement set out in the report and Appendix 3 as a living document, and delegate authority to the Director of Policy and Democratic Engagement to update these as necessary*
3. *Note the Governance Committee's work to respond to the recommendations of the Involve report, including the establishment of a Public Involvement Working Group*

Background Papers:

[Citizen participation and community involvement: next steps](#), November 2023

[Citizen participation and Community Involvement – identifying Member leads](#), December 2023

[Community Engagement Update Report](#), July 2024

Lead Officer to complete:-		
1	I have consulted the relevant departments in respect of any relevant implications indicated on the Statutory and Council Policy Checklist, and comments have been incorporated / additional forms completed / EIA completed.	Finance: Paul Foster, Finance Manager
		Legal: Andrea Simpson, Corporate Governance Lawyer
		Equalities & Consultation: Ed Sexton, Senior Equalities & Engagement Officer
		Climate: N/A
	<i>Legal, financial/commercial and equalities implications must be included within the report and the name of the officer consulted must be included above.</i>	
2	SLB member who approved submission:	<i>James Henderson</i>
3	Committee Chair consulted:	<i>Cllr Tom Hunt</i>
4	I confirm that all necessary approval has been obtained in respect of the implications indicated on the Statutory and Council Policy Checklist and that the report has been approved for submission to the Committee by the SLB member indicated at 2. In addition, any additional forms have been completed and signed off as required at 1.	
	Lead Officer Name: <i>Dan Spicer</i>	Job Title: <i>Policy & Improvement Officer</i>
	Date: <i>15th July 2024</i>	

1. PROPOSAL

1.1 CONTEXT FOR THIS WORK

- 1.1.1 This report sets out the Council's approach to delivering on the Council Plan priority of developing "A new approach to community empowerment and engagement, working with our Voluntary, Community and Faith sector partners and through Local Area Committees". It does this through:
- setting out a strategic Statement of Intent for this area of work;
 - welcoming the leadership being shown by the Governance Committee on the development of our vision and longer term plan for community engagement
 - proposing a set of "Foundations for Good Engagement" to make clear the consistent, core standards of practice we need to have in place ahead of the Governance Committee's work completing, and to ensure they are building on solid ground
- 1.1.2 Engagement covers a broad range of activity, from broadcasting information, to consultation, through to active involvement, collaboration, and co-production. As the LGA note in their New Conversations Guide, as well as telling people what is happening and asking them what they think about it, engagement can also "be about working with the community to design campaigns or interventions or about asking for action and involvement. At other points it will mean seeking insight into what local people think and feel. It increasingly involves using digital technologies, and seeks to make services more responsive to residents' needs."
- 1.1.3 High quality engagement is critical to the Council serving the city well. Without it, those running services will not have the insight they need to deliver them according to people's needs and a changing population; we will lack the knowledge to make capital investments that reflect what people want for their areas of Sheffield and support the city to grow sustainably; and we will make it harder for citizens, communities and businesses to help shape the key policies and plans we have to put in place to guide the development of the city over the coming years.
- 1.1.4 Through our Future Sheffield programme, we are on a journey to become a customer and community-focused, digital council and have recently agreed our new Customer Experience Strategy and our Digital Strategy. A strong and consistent approach to engagement is central to making a success of the Future Sheffield work on Customer Experience. Excellent, effective citizen engagement is a vital tool in developing the intelligence we need to design and deliver

effective services that meet people's needs, and to help shape places that are great for people to live in. A strong approach to engagement provides a key interface between the Council and citizens of Sheffield, helping us to build understanding and trust.

1.1.5 It is well acknowledged that the Council has been through some challenging years with regard to our approach to engagement. The Race Equality Commission, the Lowcock Report into the Street Trees disputes, and our recent Peer Review, have all highlighted lessons for us to learn, and things we need to improve on, in this area. A summary of these is contained in Appendix 1.

1.1.6 There is a set of key messages that emerge consistently across these three reports:

- The importance of trust, the central role of engagement and taking action together in building this, and the potential for positive feedback relationships;
- The benefits of being able to be open and honest about limitations the Council is under, alongside being flexible about how to work within them;
- The importance of actively reaching out to find out what people think and want, not just relying on passively receiving information – particularly people who are most likely to be impacted by changes or less likely to find the Council's current engagement routes to be accessible;
- The importance of getting the basics right as a key platform to build trust;
- That citizens and communities are not adversaries: they want to work with us, and doing so is central to getting things right for Sheffield and its communities;

1.1.7 But acknowledgement of failings and lessons to learn, while appropriate, is not sufficient: we need to take action to be better in the future. We also need to properly reflect that despite the challenges noted above, there are areas of the Council that have built excellent practice in how they engage with citizens, residents, service users, or the partner organisations they work with. We need to learn the lessons from this work and spread them throughout the organisation in support of developing a consistent, coherent approach.

1.2 GOOD PRACTICE AND ASSETS TO BUILD ON

1.2.1 In learning those lessons, it is important that we acknowledge good practice in the Council on which we can build. The issue is not that we have no skills or experience in engagement, it is that our practice and supporting arrangements are not consistent across the organisation as a whole. Appendix 2 provides a non-exhaustive summary of examples of current practice we can learn from.

Key points from this summary are summarised by:

- Working in the open can have real benefits for building trust
- Trust is also built by being open and honest about the restrictions we are under, but flexible about how we work within them
- Engagement is not necessarily comfortable, but that can be necessary to make progress
- We need to invest in building connections to local communities and opportunities, and working to coordinate activity
- Where we build relationships constructively and with a joint purpose in mind this can lead to joint delivery
- There are real benefits of sharing power with people with lived experience in shaping strategy and service delivery
- We can make a bigger impact by bringing our resources and skills together with the insight, understanding and energy of the people we are working with
- Investing real time and resource into this work is necessary to get the most out of it

1.3 WHERE DO WE WANT TO GET TO?

1.3.1 In the Council Plan, we made set out a clear priority as part of our focus on Caring, Engaged Communities:

A new approach to community empowerment and engagement, working with our Voluntary, Community and Faith sector partners and through LACs

We will work with communities on new ways to build engagement into the way we work so that we listen better and work together to find shared solutions. We will also develop new approaches to community development, working differently with our Voluntary, Community and Faith sector partners in ways that support and value their unique role, and build on the progress made with Local Area Committees (LACs) in developing our work in places and with communities.

1.3.2 The importance of our approach to engagement is not just restricted to this priority: throughout the Plan there are references to listening to, involving, and collaborating with citizens, communities and partners to deliver the improvements the city needs to see. A robust approach to engagement is central to doing this well.

1.3.3 It is important to be clear that engagement includes consultation, in relation to which we have statutory duties to consult on certain proposals across a range of policy areas, and must make sure that all consultations reach the legal standards in line with the [Gunning](#)

Principles. This helps to ensure consultations and our decision-making are robust and can survive challenge, including through potential judicial reviews. But consultation should not just be about surviving challenge: it is also an important tool to check the outcome of a broader process of engagement to develop a proposal for implementation.

1.3.4 As part of the transition to the committee system, the Council emphasised the importance of transforming citizen involvement in our decision making as part of the change that our organisation needed to undertake. As part of this, we started working with the national participation charity, Involve, to support our thinking and development as an organisation and to connect to citizens.

1.3.5 Following a process of engagement with the Council and partners across the city, Involve's report was presented to the Governance Committee in November 2023, with recommendations the Council:

1. develop a vision for engagement/participation and a plan to embed that vision in working culture across the Council
2. develop, grow and enhance existing engagement and participation practice

1.3.6 The Governance Committee have taken a leadership role in responding to those recommendations, with a particular focus on the first. They have established a Working Group to be comprised of Elected Members, relevant officers, and partners, to co-produce a vision for the Council's approach to engagement and participation.

1.3.7 Council Officers have also begun work to respond to the second recommendation, including the establishment of a Community of Practice for officers working on engagement and participation as a mechanism to spread good practice and provide mutual support and development.

1.3.8 Early discussions through this network have made clear that practice and supporting arrangements across the Council are inconsistent. As identified in section 1.2 above, there is much good practice in the organisation, but this is not spread as widely as it could be and officers are not necessarily supported by the system in which they are working. This suggests there are steps that could be taken to improve the Council's overall approach in advance of developing an aspirational vision.

1.3.9 The Governance Committee's commitment to co-production is in line with the lessons identified above, of working to build trust in our approach. However it will take time to work through: to provide clear leadership and prepare the ground for success, Strategy & Resources Policy Committee are asked to approve:

1. A Statement of Intent, making clear our ambition to be

recognised for innovative practice in our approach to engagement and participation, and to be led by Sheffield residents in everything we do;

2. A set of Foundations for Good Engagement, setting out expectations of services in doing the basics well, and covering the supporting arrangements that need to be in place to support officers both in delivering high quality engagement, and reflecting the outputs in policy proposals.

1.4 A STATEMENT OF INTENT

1.4.1 In the Council Plan we committed to a new approach to engagement, with a key role in this for Local Area Committees and our VCFSE partners. The Governance Committee's work to develop a response to Involve's recommendations and their commitment to doing this collaboratively with citizens and partners is welcome. None of what follows should be seen as pre-empting the outcome of that work, and the statement below is written with the aim of leaving space for that work to develop.

1.4.2 A "new approach to engagement" can mean any number of things: it is important that we make clear what we mean by this in order that we can be held properly accountable. With this in mind the following is proposed for approval.

1.4.3 Engagement Statement of Intent

1. Over the medium term, we aim to become a Council that is recognised nationally for its innovative and open approach to engaging and involving its citizens and communities
2. We will aim to be genuinely led by citizens of Sheffield and those who use our services, seeking and valuing their insights on what they want from us and for their communities
3. We will live our values of openness and honesty, being frank about any restrictions we are under, but creative about working with Sheffield residents and the communities in which they live their lives
4. We will be proactive in reaching out, not just a passive receiver
5. We will embed a consistent approach and culture of engagement across the whole organisation

1.5 SETTING THE FOUNDATIONS

1.5.1 To ensure our work in this area starts from a strong position, we are proposing a set of Foundations for Good Engagement for approval by the Committee, and following that for adoption and implementation across the Council. These Foundations set out guidance and supporting arrangements across 12 areas, covering practical actions that are consistent with established good practice.

1.5.2 The 12 areas covered are:

1. Capacity-building for engagement
2. Being clear about the scope and purpose
3. Knowing the groups you need to reach
4. Using existing feedback sources
5. Knowing when consultation is required
6. Choosing the right engagement method(s)
7. Using digital engagement effectively
8. Planning and resourcing the engagement
9. Authorising and 'owning' the engagement
10. Quality-assuring the engagement
11. Monitoring and analysing the engagement/consultation
12. Communicating the impact of the engagement/consultation

1.5.3 These Foundations represent the basics we need to have in place, and are expected to be a living document that evolves over time as we improve and refine our approach. It is proposed that the Director of Policy and Democratic Engagement be given authority to update them as necessary. The full detail is set out in Appendix 3.

2. HOW DOES THIS DECISION CONTRIBUTE?

- 2.1 This work represents the first step towards delivering on one of the key priorities in the Council Plan.
- 2.2 This is also a key plank in delivering our ambitions in relation to Customer Experience, with high quality engagement central to understanding customer needs and designing our services in response.
- 2.3 This work is also important for demonstrating our commitment to learning the lessons of the REC, the Lowcock Report, and our recent Peer Challenge, and delivering change in response.
- 2.4 This work will provide a strong steer for the development of related areas of work, such as the development of LACs and their supporting arrangements, and the development of our relationship with our VCFSE partners.
- 2.4 A strong approach to community engagement will also have benefits for our reputation as an organisation, locally and beyond, with a robust approach enabling a strong dialogue with citizens and communities, and issues to be understood and taken forward together without them becoming controversies that might otherwise have been avoided.

3. HAS THERE BEEN ANY CONSULTATION OR OTHER ENGAGEMENT?

3.1 By their nature, there needs to be engagement on these proposals. We have had some engagement internally with officers, through the Community of Practice, to identify gaps in current arrangements and to help to develop the foundations referenced in this report.

3.2 However we have committed to engagement including co-design and co-production work on development of our vision for engagement and participation, through the Governance Committee's work in response to the Involve report.

4. RISK ANALYSIS AND IMPLICATIONS OF THE DECISION

4.1 Equality Implications

4.1.1 The Council has legal requirements under the Equality Act 2010, including the Public Sector Equality Duty. This requires that public authorities must, in the exercise of their functions, have due regard to the need to:

- (1) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is connected to protected characteristics and prohibited by or under this Act;
- (2) advance equality of opportunity between those who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not;
- (3) foster good relations between those who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not.

4.1.2 Public engagement is one such function and has direct equality implications, relating both to:

- how engagement is done – the methods used, their accessibility and take-up, underpinned by strong equalities data analysis, and

the subject matter of the engagement exercise itself, which may have particular impacts for different groups of people.

4.1.3 There is a need and an opportunity to develop a future approach to engagement that directly supports our equality duties – for example, by enabling equality of opportunity through diverse and accessible engagement methods.

4.1.4 An Equality Impact Assessment will continue to be developed, both to respond to and to inform the approach that the Council chooses for community engagement.

4.2 Financial and Commercial Implications

4.2.1 There are no financial or commercial implications arising directly from this report. The implications of any changes to the Council's approach to community engagement and any proposals put forward by the Policy Committee, should be costed prior to implementation.

4.3 Legal Implications

4.3.1 The Council has a duty pursuant to section 3 of the Local Government Act 1999 to secure continuous improvement in the way in which its functions are exercised, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness (the Best Value Duty). This incorporates a duty of consultation the purpose of deciding how to fulfil the Best Value Duty. The proposals set out in this report will assist the Council in meeting this duty.

4.3.2 There are no other legal implications arising directly from this report.

4.4 Climate Implications

4.4.1 Strengthening our approach to engagement with and in communities will support us to work more effectively with Sheffield residents and communities around understanding the impact of, responding to, and mitigating the climate emergency.

4.4.2 In particular a strong approach to engagement will be important in understanding the unequal impacts of climate change and shaping our response to ensure we mitigate these.

4.4 Other Implications

4.4.1 There are no other implications for consideration from this proposal.

5. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

5.1 One alternative option would be leaving arrangements as they currently are: as set out in this paper this would be unsatisfactory as it would leave the Council in the position of not delivering key priorities in the Council Plan.

5.2 A second alternative option would have been to bring a fully worked-up engagement framework and approach for endorsement. This was not pursued as it would not reflect our intention of being more open in our approach to engagement: it is preferable that the Governance Committee conduct their work to shape is as is proposed.

6. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 6.1 This proposal is recommended in order to demonstrate our commitment in a way that enables the Council to be held accountable, and to ensure that the foundations of our approach are in place on which more aspirational work can build.

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