

# Children, Environment and Leisure Policy and Scrutiny Committee

<b>Date:</b>	6 <sup>th</sup> February 2017
<b>Classification:</b>	General Release
<b>Title:</b>	Community Engagement
<b>Report of:</b>	Senior Accountable Officer
<b>Cabinet Member Portfolio</b>	Environment, Sports and Community
<b>Wards Involved:</b>	All
<b>Policy Context:</b>	City for All
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## 1. Executive Summary

This paper provides an update on the council's community engagement strategy which has been developing since 2015. This includes information on the Open Forum programme.

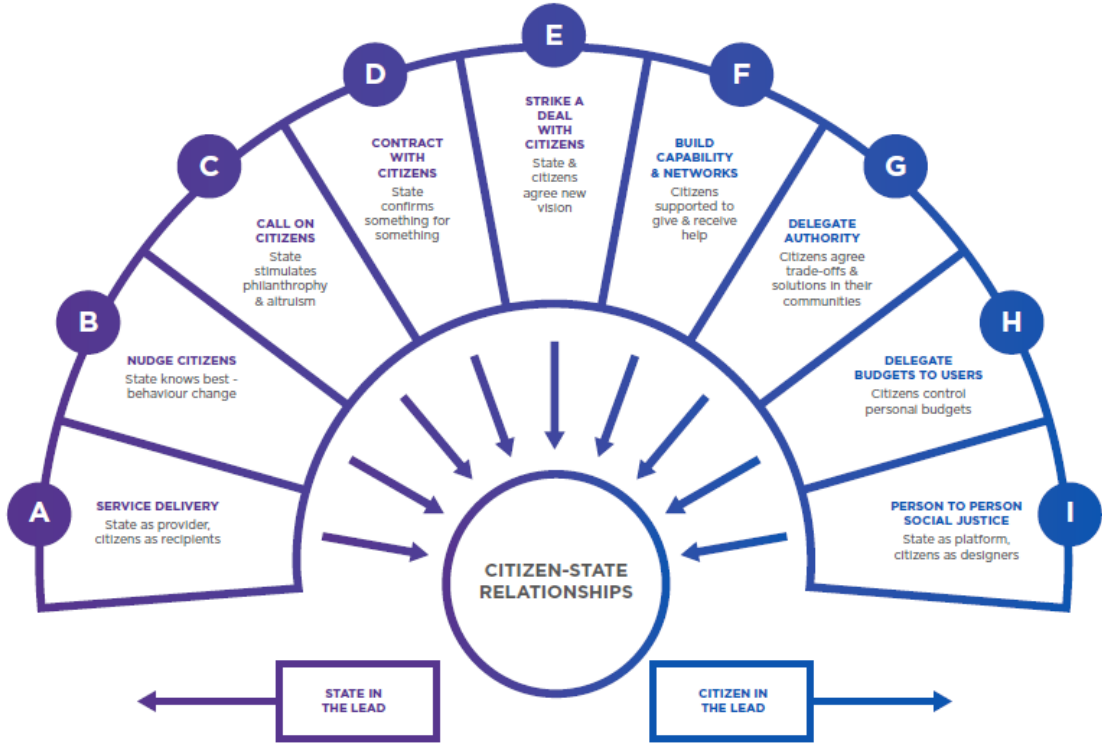
## 2. Key Matters for the Committee's Consideration

- Are there any observations on the success, or otherwise, of the community engagement activities the council has undertaken in the last year?
- Are there areas of community engagement activity which are a priority to improve?
- Are there any particular groups of people or organisations that the council should do more to engage with?

### 3. Background

#### 3.1 Our aims and objectives

Community engagement helps us understand the priorities of residents, businesses and partners. It also helps us to empower people to play a role in shaping the services they receive from the council. There are a multitude of definitions for community engagement, and in local authorities the term is often misused to be just synonymous with community consultation. We define community engagement in its broadest sense as illustrated in the RSA report 'Changing the narrative'. As the chart below shows engagement can range from council led activities, on left hand side, to more resident led activities to the right. Our strategy is to enable our staff, partners and members of the community to operate different types of community engagement depending on what is most appropriate.



Source: RSA Changing the Narrative

At the start of 2016 we established the following community engagement aims:

- To include residents, business and partners in the development of policy and plans
- To engage with residents, businesses and partners about matters of interest to them
- To use feedback to make real improvements in the services we deliver

To meet these aims we developed the following objectives:

- **A consistent approach** – establish an agreed set of common standards for community engagement across the council, ensuring communities get the same standard of engagement regardless of the service area and we do not increasing the cost in both time and money in running them
- **Co-ordinated and targeted engagement** – rationalise the community engagement that we undertake, ensuring that we do not duplicate activities and thereby maximise efficiencies. Ensure that any meetings are focused on issues that matter in the community
- **Better services** – listen and respond to local communities, meaning that services meet their needs effectively and efficiently.
- **Establish an ongoing, developing relationship with our communities**, who feel and are empowered through a high quality engagement experience. This will include a higher profile for local groups in the community including Amenity Societies, Residents' Associations and Neighbourhood Forums
- **Reassurance for the community** that the way we engage tangibly promotes opportunities for the community to meet with us and take part in decision-making.

### 3.2 Open Forum

In March 2016 the Leader of the Council formally launched “Open Forum” as part of her annual speech to full Council. This has formed a large part of our community engagement strategy for 2016/17. Open Forum has been developed as a new way for residents and others in the community, to get involved in local decision making at a time and a place that suits them. The cost of all elements of Open Forum is within the budget of the previous Area Forums it directly replaces.

Open Forum contains both face-to-face and online elements. It has been used in our communication activities including posters advertising our activities, social media, and email newsletters. We have also placed articles and advertisements in council publications such as the Westminster Reporter, and community publications such as Sebra News.

Within the Council Open Forum has provided a means to co-ordinate consultation and engagement activities. These have included supporting the following activities:

- Air Quality Task Group
- Community Cohesion Commission
- Cycling consultation
- Development Opportunity Framework, Upper Vauxhall Bridge Road
- Mental Health Day Services consultation
- Westminster Community Awards

Community Engagement is a key element of the internal “Routemap to Success” and Open Forum has been discussed and developed with officers as part of this.

Members of the public can also contact Open Forum direct at any time. They can contact face-to-face, online, or by post through our freepost address. All the information goes to the same team within Policy, Performance and Communications, who work with other teams within the council to address the issues raised. Open Forum does not replace the existing contact channels for services, such as our main website or our contact centre, or our complaints process. These are still to be contacted direct for the quickest most effective service. For Open Forum we are looking for views on the priorities of the public and how we can work together with them to address any issues.

### **3.3 Online community engagement**

The Open Forum website is a secure microsite of the main council website (<https://openforum.westminster.gov.uk>). There have been around 13,000 visits to the site and we have collected approximately 1,500 responses to online questionnaires. We average around 1,500 visits a month to the Open Forum website.

Over 200 of the most engaged have registered for updates and we send them a regular email containing the latest news and opportunities to take part. We have been advised by our supplier to aim for around 500-1,000 people in total over the next few years.

The platform upon which Open Forum has been built is called Engagement HQ and has been provided by a company based in Australia called BangTheTable. Westminster City Council was the first UK local authority to use this platform and we selected the supplier on the basis of value for money and the creative use of technology. Engagement HQ is currently being used by around 160 organisations across the world. Our team have discussed the use of the platform with other organisations in the UK and also the City of New York, who are interested in following our lead in how we use the platform and the Open Forum programme more generally.

As well as online surveys and project pages the platform will enable us to have online discussions. We are yet to hold our first online public meeting but we are planning to do so in 2017. There are also discussions with some services on whether invite only online meetings or forums could be held amongst key stakeholder groups. These could supplement or replace existing face-to-face meetings if it benefits participants.

### **3.4 Face-to-face community engagement**

The first Open Forum public meeting was held on 6<sup>th</sup> October 2016 and over 100 members of the community took part. In comparison this was a larger attendance than any single Area Forum meeting previously recorded, which averaged around 40 attendees at each meeting. In each wave of the Area Forums there were six separate meetings across the Westminster City Council area. On average around 230 people in total attended each wave across all meetings, assuming they did not attend more than one. Therefore taken together with our subsequent planned Open Forum meetings and our online engagement we are confident we will engage with more people than we did under the Area Forums system.

At our October meeting the Leader of the Council and Cabinet members took part in the discussions and everyone who attended had a chance to talk with them as part of round table discussions.

80 attendees completed a feedback form and the key findings are:

- 97% said they felt they were able to share their views with the council
- 91% would like to attend similar meetings in the future
- 89% said it made them more interested in helping to improve their community or neighbourhood
- 81% said it made them feel more part of the community
- 68% said they felt the council would listen to the views they shared

A quarter (24%) of those attending said they had never been to a public meeting organised by the council before. We look to ensure that these kinds of event continue for residents who want face-to-face meetings, but that we continue to try and ensure a broader engagement with the community, a point made by many of the attendees to the event itself.

Further Open Forum Public Meetings are booked in for 23<sup>rd</sup> January at Porchester Hall, and 20<sup>th</sup> March at Lords.

In addition to the Open Forum Public Meetings the officer supporting Open Forum have been out in the community conducting a City for All Tour. This has involved pop-up stands in locations where residents are including markets and leisure centres. This has resulted in conversations with the public about City for All, but also dissemination of information about Open Forum. It has been a positive experience for the team and participants. It is worth noting that although we have offered to record feedback on local priorities face-to-face, most interest has been in visiting the Open Forum website to leave comments. The places that were visited included:

- 6th August - Queen's Park Festival
- 17th August - Maida Vale Library
- 25th August – Pimlico Library
- 5th September – Queen Mother Sports Centre
- 15th September – Little Venice Sports Centre
- 21st September – St John's Library
- 27th September – Church Street Market
- 4th October – Porchester Centre and Spa
- 11th October – Marylebone Library
- 18th October – Marshall Street Leisure Centre

### **3.5 Volunteering**

The Council has a Volunteering Strategy 2014-2019, the aim of which is to ensure that those who live, work or study in the borough and want to engage in their community through volunteering have the opportunity to do so. The strategy is supported by a number of commissioned contracts in the Policy, Performance and

Communications team which support different cohorts into volunteering and provide infrastructure support for the voluntary sector. These include:

**1. Team Westminster Flagship Volunteering**

This provides volunteering opportunities under 3 strands:

- Team Westminster Ambassadors – volunteering at high profile events (e.g. the London Marathon)
- Team Westminster Active – driving volunteering in sports (e.g. developing skills in coaching or refereeing)
- Team Westminster Social Action - one-off volunteering opportunities (e.g. transforming a local park, organising a street party, intergenerational events to reduce loneliness and isolation on older people)

**2. Team Westminster Volunteer Outreach and Development**

This provides targeted outreach to increase volunteering amongst those that are hard to reach (homeless, unemployed, over 65, 16-25 in education, those recovering from substance abuse; supports organisations to create volunteering opportunities which meet community & Council needs and offers promotional support of the Do-it website.

**3. Team Westminster Do-it Local Website**

- A digital brokerage service matching those who want to volunteer with those organisations needing volunteers. All information about local volunteering opportunities is in one place. It also allows community groups and individuals to log interests, flag relevant opportunities and allows people to share their experiences.

**4. Time Credits**

A borough wide scheme designed to reward and incentivise volunteering across the borough (not just WCC lead initiatives) whereby volunteers earn Time Credits which they can spend in different ways eg at our libraries to hire DVDs or free entry to Tower Bridge, or free courses at City Lit. The scheme encourages people to try new experiences because of volunteering.

**5. Time and Talents**

This contract supports the Council employee volunteering programme which allows staff 16 hours of paid for leave a year to engage in volunteering initiatives in Westminster so that staff can engage with the community they serve.

It is intended that the volunteering strategy be reviewed and updated during the course of 2017.

### **3.6 The voluntary and community sector (VCS)**

As a Council, we value the sector for their local knowledge and understanding; their ability to boost local social capital and the trust and reach they have with communities within the borough with complex needs that are often the hardest to reach. The support of the VCS is essential in helping to build trust and engagement as we reform the ways we work and communicate with our communities.

Officers in the Policy & Strategy team have been conducting a VCS strategic review which looks at our relationship with the sector and makes recommendations. The review is at draft stage and will be submitted to the Cabinet Member for approval later this year.

PPC commission the Westminster Community Network (WCN) to provide the VCS with the capacity to network, advocate and influence. The Cabinet Member has been holding quarterly engagement meetings with VCS leaders who represent the sector (including a BME representative). The aim is to ensure the Cabinet Member can broaden his understanding of the work of the sector with a view to better promoting their contribution to meeting the needs of Westminster's communities and encouraging a positive working relationship between the Council and the VCS. The Cabinet Member recognises and has a particular focus on engagement with those who are hardest to reach.

### **3.7 Our opportunities**

The City Survey, of 1,000 Westminster residents aged 16 and over, has run using the same methodology and largely the same questionnaire since 2003. For the 2016 survey we made room for more questions looking at community engagement and capacity. The key findings are:

- Three in five (63%) residents feel they can influence decisions affecting their local area, up from 47% in 2015 and the highest level ever recorded in the survey (question first asked in 2007).
- Two in five (38%) say they spend a great deal/fair amount of time personally doing something to help improve their community or neighbourhood, up from 25% in 2015 (when the question was first asked).
- A third of residents (37%) say they are interested in doing something to help improve their community or neighbourhood. This interest is across all age groups, peaking at 45% among those aged 45-54, and only falling back for those 75 and over (15%).
- There is a wide range of different things that residents who are interested in doing something for their community or neighbourhood would like to do. The top ideas are
  - 13% would help organise a local event
  - 13% would be interested in joining a tenants/residents' group
  - 12% would donate money to a local group/activity
  - 13% would help keep the local area tidy
  - 11% would help out in a library

- 11% would take part in a sponsored event for a local group or activity
- 11% would get more involved in local decision making
- We also asked those who want to do more why they wanted to get more involved. The top reasons given are:
  - 19% think there is a need in the community
  - 19% want to improve things/help people
  - 18% want to meet people/make friends
  - 16% have the spare time to do it
  - 16% are proud of their local area and would like to do more to look after it
  - 13% say it is part of their philosophy of life to help people

It is clear that the motivations and interests of different groups of individuals are diverse. These findings provide evidence that there is capacity and interest in the community to get more involved.

We will be meeting this need by developing a clearer corporate wide approach for community engagement that is broader than Open Forum. Going into 2017 we propose looking at how we can ensure consistent approaches in areas such as housing, city management, adult services, children services and public health. This includes looking at consultations and engagement specific to a ward or a particular local area. There are examples within each of these areas of best practice and officers and members are already discussing how to learn from these experiences in developing our approach further.

We would also expect the community engagement strategy to be influenced by the findings of the Community Cohesion commission, and to reflect the direction set by the new Leader of the Council and their new Cabinet.

**If you have any queries about this Report or wish to inspect any of the Background Papers please contact Neil Wholey, Head of Evaluation and Performance x3317 [nwholey@westminster.gov.uk](mailto:nwholey@westminster.gov.uk)**

## **APPENDICES:**

None

## **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

Volunteering strategy



Volunteering  
strategy 2014-2019.i