



City of Westminster

Policy and Scrutiny Committee

Date:	Thursday 26 th January 2023
Classification:	General Release
Title:	Community Participation
Wards Involved:	All
Policy Context:	The Policy and Scrutiny Committee has requested an update on the work being carried out by the Communities Team around participation as well as an update on participatory budgeting.
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1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 The report sets out the progress made on community participation and participatory budgeting as set out in the manifesto.
- 1.2 The paper provides examples of community participation being implemented across the council, thus reflecting the positive reaction to the Fairer Westminster commitment to include residents and service users in decision making processes. The paper acknowledges more work needs to be done to standardise best practice and increase the number of residents and service users being engaged to include particularly seldom heard voices.

2. Key Matters for the Committee's Consideration

- 2.1 Policy and Scrutiny Committee is requested to note:
 - The consultation process is underway for the Charter of Community Participation
 - The Council's approach to supporting improved resident participation
 - Developing the Resident Research Panel
 - Current examples of participatory budget setting

3. Background

- 3.1 The council has made a firm commitment to actively involve residents and service users in helping to shape the decisions made by the Council and to contribute to the development of services, plans and programmes alongside Council officers and local councillors. The Council has stated that they want to hear how local people wish to be engaged or involved and are

eager to listen to local people and other stakeholders before reaching a decision. This intrinsic commitment to involve residents and service users is set out in how we will build a Fairer Westminster within the Council's Fairer Westminster Strategy. The intention is to achieve this by the Council being committed to the following values:

- **Openness and Transparency** - Being honest and working together with community members on creating solutions to the issues that face us.
- **Partnership and Collaboration** - Working with our community, public, voluntary and private sector partners to ensure our work is as effective as possible. Our partnerships with communities are built and maintained through our Community Development team who deliver engagement events across Westminster, our Community and Voluntary Sector Partnerships team who oversee voluntary and community sector grants and supporting key partnerships such as the Food Poverty Network, and Westminster Connects that supports volunteering. Long lasting relationships are also built with our communities through our Sports, Leisure and Active Communities team.
- **Diversity and Inclusion** – Through our operational support offer we will build capability across the Council to better involve our diverse communities, especially those who have been seldom heard more in decision making, whilst also ensuring we effectively maintain relationships with those already engaged. This is not an overnight fix, developing tools and learning new skills will take some time to embed across the organisation. Our Equality Objectives set out how we will start using our data to understand how our communities are accessing our services to inform improvements in making our services accessible to all our communities.

4. Consultation and engagement delivery objectives

4.1 In line with the Fairer Westminster Strategy, there are several delivery activities to support resident involvement.

- Developing a Community Participation Charter.
- Introducing a Quality Assurance Standard and Quality Improvement Board for consultation and engagement.
- Developing tools to support different Council departments with their engagement work (including an Engagement Toolkit and engagement planning software)
- Promoting the use of residents' panels and steering groups throughout the council
- Creating a 'Register of Active Residents' this will be the overarching contact of all residents who have indicated they wish to be more involved with the council from Westminster Connects/Resident panels etc
- Develop a community capacity building programme to support our communities to become more effectively involved in local leadership & to better understand the workings of the council
- Participatory budgeting

5. Improving Quality of Engagement and Consultation

5.1 We recognise several challenges in the way in which consultation and engagement activities are undertaken across the Council. A deep dive engagement exercise was undertaken in spring/summer 2022, which identified some key areas for action to take place:

5.2 Residents as part of a city-wide listening exercise conducted with reps from Amenity groups, Neighbourhood forums, residents' associations, young people and the Voluntary/community sector in Jan/Feb 2022, told us amongst other key points, that they would like to be more involved and to be able to see, in advance what major consultations were planned. There are several workstreams aimed at improving how we involve residents, which include:

- Creating an online consultation hub so that residents can see what consultations are planned and how to get involved.
- Consulting on a 'Charter for Community Participation' to understand how communities would like us to engage with them. The survey will inform wider principles to be applied to some co-production work with residents to develop a set of key principles for participation;
- Building relationships with our communities and key stakeholders through our Community Development Team, Sports Leisure and Active Communities Team and Voluntary and Community Sector Partnerships team.
- Building capacity through our commissioned provider 'One Westminster' that provides support to the Voluntary and Community Sector.
- Through our Community Investment Strategy to improve how we allocate grant funding to support the Voluntary and Community Sector.
- Development of a geographically and demographically diverse resident research panel to involve residents in consultations by issue or location. In person and online recruitment has led to over 200 members being on this panel.
- Developing an overall 'Register of Active Residents' who wish to get involved in participation activities. Westminster Connects already holds a register of residents interested in volunteering and there are other active residents. These will be extended to include residents interested in participating in other ways.

5.3 Our research has also identified a need to support the different teams doing engagement and consultation across the Council. There are a number of workstreams to support this change including:

- The Centre for Excellence which launched in 2022 to develop staff capability around engagement and consultation. This includes Masterclasses, virtual resource hub and a community walks programme to support staff to better understand the communities we serve
- Work with the consultation institute to ensure best practice. The consultation institute is an expert body that can provide access to best practice resources to support the development of a council consultation toolkit
- A Quality Improvement Board, chaired by the Executive Director for Innovation and Change, to review Consultations and Engagements prior to them going live.

5.4 The Communities Department also run ongoing events to engage and involve the local community such as around International Womens day, Black history month, Southeast Asian heritage; events with a health focus, those with a focus on Men, health and employment as well as for young people. 'Dance Westminster' involving disabled people in a high-profile dance competition and Islamophobia awareness month events with local businesses.

Examples of participation carried out:

The resident panel has completed over 6 distinct projects already:

- Surveys have enabled residents to directly influence the Winter in the City priorities, including allocation of funding by clarifying geographic differences in demand for warm spaces.
- Helped define the Children and Young People's Plan priorities.
- Supported the Active Communities survey to be more representative of the general population.
- Focus groups and discussions have enabled resident input into the Planning Statement of Community Involvement.
- Provided Accessibility and Usability input into the Fairer Westminster Delivery Plan due to be published February 2023.

Residents who participated in discussions so far have agreed that the research topic was interesting, want to take part in future research and generally had positive feedback.

The Council has benefitted from residents' insights for the project and enjoyed working together to build greater trust and understanding between the council and residents.

6. Participatory budgeting

6.1 Participatory budgeting is a form of resident participation in which residents are involved in the process of deciding how public money is spent. Often the participatory budgeting exercises are delivered as part of an event allowing community members the opportunity to take part in deciding what community groups and projects should receive funding through a public voting system. This approach gives residents decision making powers.

6.2 Several neighbouring authorities are using participatory budgeting such as Brent who use this for community grant making (£2.5m) and Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea who allocated specific funding (£1m) to projects to support economic and wellbeing grants to residents impacted by Grenfell.

6.3 None of the boroughs we looked at for this report are using this method to review their overall Council budget, each one has focussed on involving communities in decisions about community grants programmes.

6.4 The Communities Department is already implementing some participatory budgeting in Westminster and will seek to widen the reach and principles of these opportunities to more locations.

Some examples of community grants which are based on the principles of participatory budgeting are the Church St Neighbourhood Keepers fund (programme finishes March 2023)- this was a community initiative developed in the context of the regeneration programme. Community members were involved in the planning of the grant programme, advertising, involvement as panel members to consider the grant applications and were able to input into the final decision as to grant allocation. Delivering this programme aligned to these principles brought about positive outcomes, and the fact that local people were involved in decisions for their neighbourhoods was a tangible expression of civic leadership.

Building on the principles showcased above in NK, we piloted the Community Priorities grants programme 2022/23 £300k, - funded by Public Health. The aims of which are to

understand what the priorities for our residents within neighbourhoods are and how we can support the building of community resilience to deliver successfully on those and the interlinked improvement of public health outcomes through a community grants and capacity building programme.

The pilot initially started in 4 wards in the North and generated much learning which will now be incorporated into the wider grants programme plan to expand across the city into other areas of need. (Further details will be provided at a later date in terms of timescales and areas).

Report Ends