

Cabinet 30 January 2018	 TOWER HAMLETS
Report of: Will Tuckley, Chief Executive	Classification: Unrestricted
Community Engagement Strategy	

Lead Member	The Mayor
Originating Officer(s)	Emily Fieran-Reed, Service Manager Cohesion Engagement and Commissioning
Wards affected	All wards
Key Decision?	Yes/No
Community Plan Theme	Cross-cutting priority: 'Empowering residents and building resilience'

Executive Summary

This report presents the Council's Community Engagement Strategy 2018-2021, its framework and its delivery plan. It takes into account changes made following a wide consultation to extensively engage with the process.

The strategy aims to support strong, active and inclusive communities who can influence and shape the borough in which they live and work. It also marks a more transparent and accountable council and promotes a vision where 'Local people are effectively informed, engaged, involved and empowered by the Council'.

Recommendations:

The Mayor in Cabinet is recommended to

1. Agree the Community Engagement Strategy, its delivery plan and framework, taking into account the changes made from comments and responses received from stakeholders, Department Leadership Teams, Corporate Leadership Team and the Mayor's Advisory Board.
2. Consider the resources and responsibilities required across the Council to implement the Community Engagement Strategy delivery plan, in particular in relation to local engagement under the Local Strategic Partnership.

1. REASONS FOR THE DECISIONS

- 1.1 To agree the Council's approach to community engagement.

2. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 2.1 The Council to further develop the Tower Hamlets Community Engagement Strategy based on suggestions provided by Cabinet.

3. DETAILS OF REPORT

- 3.1. Tower Hamlets is a diverse borough made up of many 'communities'. From an analysis of the 2011 Census data, the borough is currently the 16th most diverse local authority area in the country, with 43 per cent of residents born outside the UK and a high level of population churn. This growing and changing population puts increasing pressure on local services and creates challenges for community engagement. The Public Sector Equality Duty in the Equalities Act (2010) requires that we have due regard to the need to encourage participation and engage with people affected by decisions. The Council's Community Plan and Strategic Plan make a commitment to support community engagement and leadership in order to empower residents and build resilience.
- 3.2. Savings of over £100m have been delivered by the Council in the last four years. Further savings of £59m over the next three years are required. In this context, effectively engaging our communities in prioritising and making difficult decisions about services is likely to become more important.
- 3.3. The Community Engagement Strategy aims to enhance the Council's approach to community engagement by empowering communities and ensuring services and priorities are better aligned to local need. The strategy is focused on the important resource of the community itself – in self-help, prevention, early help and intervention as well as how the Council can work in partnership with local people where appropriate, to encourage greater ownership in the design and delivery of services.

Vision, Outcomes and Objectives

- 3.4. The strategy's vision is that:

'Local people are effectively informed, engaged, involved and empowered by the Council. They actively help define and design local priorities and policies, deliver and evaluate services and inform council decision-making in areas that impact on their lives.'

3.5. The strategy sets out four priority outcomes:

Outcome 1: Communities lead the way in making Tower Hamlets a great place to live

Outcome 2: Communities have the power to influence issues that affect them

Outcome 3: Activities to involve communities are focused and purposeful

Outcome 4: Tower Hamlets is digitally active

These four priority outcomes are underpinned by an enabling objective:

Staff are supported to involve communities effectively in everything that we do

3.6. The actions in the delivery plan all link to the further objectives and outcomes of the strategy, which are:

Objectives	Outcomes
1. Focus on working in partnership with local people including hard to reach communities.	Services are better at delivering improved outcomes and customer satisfaction.
2. Develop council plans and commission services in a way that involves community assets and is driven by outcomes	Communities are recognised and valued as experts and put at the heart of deciding priorities and services.
3. Involve communities through elected representatives.	Information and insight from local communities (community intelligence) is clearly reflected in the decisions we make.
4. Improve transparency and accountability	Information is easily accessible to communities and open to scrutiny
5. Increase support for people to take part in community life.	Local people influence issues that affect their communities and are involved in improving their local area.
6. Improve people's experience of involvement.	Local people find it easy to be involved with us and feel that they make a difference..
7. Promote opportunities to get people involved.	Local people are more aware of how and when to get involved.
8. Increase the use of digital technology to connect with people in the borough	Local people are able to contact us through a range of digital methods that meet their needs.
9. Promote ways that people can get involved via digital technology.	Local people are aware of digital services and supported to use them.

10. Introduce tools and frameworks to help staff develop effective ways of involving communities.	Staff have access to the tools and support they need to design and deliver involvement which is effective and inclusive.
11. Provide training to support skills and build ability.	Staff have the skills and confidence to engage communities and understand needs.

- 3.7. The new approach to the Local Strategic Partnership is one that sees partners themselves leading in areas they can make a difference. Equally, the community could lead local engagement without the Council being prescriptive as to the structure of this (unlike in the past where local engagement was through structures such as the Local Community Ward Forums and Local Area Partnerships). The Council will now need to consider its role in supporting community led local engagement and the resources that it may be able to provide to engender the joint working approach.

Major dependencies

- 3.8. The Community Engagement Strategy provides an overarching framework which has been further developed as part of the delivery plan. In particular it is aligned with:
- The response to the Transparency Commission
 - The Marketing and Communications Plan
 - The Digital Strategy, Local Presence and Customer Access Improvement Programme
 - Neighbourhood Planning, Neighbourhood Forums and the neighbourhood portion of Community Infrastructure Levy
 - Commissioning
 - The further development of the Local Strategic Partnership

As part of the development of the strategy, Corporate Strategy and Equality has worked closely with council leads in these areas and input from across service areas have significantly helped shape the strategy.

Development of the strategy

- 3.9. The strategy is owned by the Council but has been developed in close collaboration with local partners and stakeholders, such as Tower Hamlets Clinical Commissioning Group and Tower Hamlets Council for Voluntary Service. The Council will be working closely with partners to deliver the strategy (see Appendix B).
- 3.10. The strategy development included open dialogue with representatives from a variety of council services. A cross-directorate working group met regularly to lead the strategy and provide input and communication on behalf of directorates more widely. The working group also had input from a social housing provider and a community based organisation that was responsible for engaging with, and feeding in voices of the community. All Departmental Management Teams and Community Plan Delivery Groups as well as the

Community Involvement Network have received a presentation on the Strategy and had the opportunity to feed in comments.

- 3.11. There have also been a number of articles in Managers' and Members' Briefings, to encourage a wide range of officers and members to feed into the development of the strategy. Two interactive staff events were held to give staff the opportunity to input into the strategy, but most importantly to ensure that they will help embed the thinking behind the strategy into their teams. The strategy has also been informed by engagement with councillors and the Mayor including cross-party Members' Seminar and a number of discussions at Transparency and Overview and Scrutiny committees.

Wider consultation and engagement

- 3.12. This took place in two main phases. The first involved an open conversation to develop the strategy, and the second phase refined the final draft. In the first phase, as well as an online survey open to the wider public, a programme of consultation and engagement was commissioned and delivered by Urban Inclusion (a local community led organisation). Engagement included focus groups, interviews and a literature review.
- 3.13. Public engagement took place with:
- Representative bodies for particular issues or interest groups;
 - Community groups;
 - Service user forums;
 - Steering / taskforce groups;
 - Other community forums of residents.
- 3.14. The second phase of consultation was more extensive and began with a launch event with the Mayor which was held on 10th July 2017 with a presentation to key community stakeholders illustrating the development process and highlighting the strategic drivers for the authority. The strategy was introduced to the wider community with a clear vision and the councils' commitment to the five pledges to involve, be open and connected, keep it simple, share it and enable staff to be adequately trained to support the strategy.
- 3.15. The framework - a short, easy to use summary version of the strategy - was the main document consulted on, with the more detailed strategy and action plan available for those who wished to access it.

Social media

- 3.16. Social media was used to reach a cross section of the community, including:
- Twelve videos posted on our YouTube channel with 222 views
 - Tweets reached a total of 15602 with 168 engagements
 - Facebook posts reached 1607 people with 60 engagements
 - LinkedIn posts reached 12154 people with 51 engagements

Online survey

- 3.17. The online questionnaire was available between 10th July and 5th September 2017, and hard copies were available upon request. This was promoted on

the Council's website, through voluntary and community sector groups and Idea Stores across the borough.

- 3.18. A total of 252 responses were received to some parts of the questionnaire. The majority of respondents (64%) were Tower Hamlets residents, with 28% working in Tower Hamlets, and the rest responding on behalf of an organisation or connected to Tower Hamlets in some other way. The responses were generally well balanced across the population though there was an under representation of younger people (under 35) and people from Black and Minority Ethnic Communities. This was addressed via the face to face work described below, where the results better reflect the population mix of the borough. (It should be noted that the demographic questions were at the end of the survey, and only 122 out of 252 respondents completed these.)
- 3.19. In addition to an online survey, significant inroads were made in engaging diverse communities in the borough through face to face engagement at various locations in the borough. This process was extended to ensure that views of a wider range of communities were captured, including those who had engaged less with the online process. This includes, but was not limited to, younger people, older people, people with mental health challenges and those from Black and Minority Ethnic communities and with English as an additional language need. There were 163 individual responses recorded face to face as well as a range of group responses. This included:
- Queen Mary University's Festival of Communities
 - Engagement with the youth council at their meeting
 - Idea Stores (Watney Market and Shadwell Centre)
 - East London Mosque and Maryam Centre
 - Local cafes
 - Summer Night Lights Events
 - Community Events such as Society Links Summer BBQ
 - Markets
 - Community Centres

Consultation findings and responses

- 3.20. A full analysis of consultation findings can be found in Appendix C. In the main, respondents agreed with the Council's commitments in relation to the Community Engagement Strategy specified in the survey.
- 3.21. Key findings from the consultation were that:
- There is a need to ensure that all parts of the community, including hard to reach communities, and those in full time employment have equal opportunities to engage with the Council rather than the Council's engagement activities supporting only those with the 'loudest voices'.
 - There is a need to clarify where elected members fit with the partnership and local engagement structures.

- There is a need to set out clearly the Council's parameters and approach to co-production, including ensuring systems and mechanisms to support genuine co-production of services.
- There is a need to consider the resources allocated to engaging with the community, to ensure value for money.
- There is a need to supplement the use of digital tools with more traditional methods of engagement and to safeguard against personal data being mismanaged.
- There is a need to allocate a lead council service for engagement, and that training on engagement is available to staff and regular training is offered to mitigate against the impact of staff turnover.

3.22. To a large extent these comments are already addressed in the documentation and where they are not, they will be addressed in the delivery of it. However, where necessary the strategy, delivery plan and framework have been adapted in response to these comments to ensure that these matters are addressed.

4. COMMENTS OF THE CHIEF FINANCE OFFICER

- 4.1. Approximately £19,600 was spent on general public and more targeted community group consultations and this was funded through existing general fund budgets. The outcomes from these consultations have informed the final strategy presented within this report.
- 4.2. In addition, a sum of £355k has been set aside within the Council's specific earmarked reserves to enable delivery of the Community Engagement Strategy. The delivery plan attached in Appendix B details the key activities that will enable delivery of the strategy
- 4.3. Under the Council's Reserves Policy, this specific reserve is now part of the Council's £7.3m service reserve. Should the action plan be agreed, an appropriate sum will need to be earmarked from the reserve.

5. LEGAL COMMENTS

- 5.1. When exercising its functions, the Council must have due regard to the need to eliminate unlawful conduct under the Equality Act 2010, the need to advance equality of opportunity and the need to foster good relations between persons who share a protected characteristic and those who do not (the public sector equality duty). Whilst the Council is not obliged to have a Community Engagement Strategy, such a document demonstrates a commitment to that duty.
- 5.2. An Equalities Analysis (EA) has been taken on the strategy in conjunction with the cross-directorate working group. The intention of the strategy is to improve the reach of council engagement across the range of Protected Characteristics. It is expected that the delivery of the strategy will have a

positive impact on each of the equalities groups. The strategy builds in the mitigating actions from the EA particularly in considerations about ensuring that the digital priority does not have a negative impact on older and disabled residents. The co-production approach of joint working is also intended to bring different people together which will contribute to our cohesion duty in the Equalities Act (2010).

- 5.3. The Council is a Best Value authority within the meaning of Part 1 of the Local Government Act 1999. As a Best Value authority, the Council has an obligation under section 3 of the Local Government Act 1999 to 'make arrangements 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). Meaningful engagement with the community is a way in which the Council can make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the way in which its functions are exercised.
- 5.4. There is no statutory requirement to consult but the Council did consider whether a common law duty arose. It was considered that it did and such consultation complied with the common law criteria.
- 5.5. Before agreeing the strategy however, the product of consultation needs to be conscientiously taken into account. Section 9 of the report sets out key findings from the consultation exercise and a full analysis of the consultation findings can be found in Appendix C.

6. ONE TOWER HAMLETS CONSIDERATIONS

- 6.1 By having a clear and considered strategy on community engagement the Council would enhance its delivery of the One Tower Hamlets Vision 'to reduce inequality, promote community cohesion and enable community engagement'.
- 6.2 The strategy sets out the Council's approach to engaging with the community of Tower Hamlets, including different equality groups, and makes specific reference to engaging with hard to reach communities. During the consultation phase active effort was made to consult with different equality groups.
- 6.3 The Community Engagement Strategy has a commitment to be more transparent and give the public more opportunities to be involved in making decisions and make the council more accountable. This will enable the council to better fulfil its functions with openness and improve the delivery of services to meet the needs of the local people.

7. BEST VALUE (BV) IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 See section 5.3 above

8. SUSTAINABLE ACTION FOR A GREENER ENVIRONMENT

8.1 No specific environmental implications.

9. RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

9.1 An effective community engagement approach will help mitigate against the risk of the Council shaping and delivering services which do not reflect the needs of the local community. The commitment in the strategy to be more transparent will help prevent reputational damage to the Council.

10. CRIME AND DISORDER REDUCTION IMPLICATIONS

10.1 No specific crime and disorder implications.

11. SAFEGUARDING IMPLICATIONS

10.2 No specific safeguarding implications.

Linked Reports, Appendices and Background Documents

Linked Report

- NONE

Appendices

- Appendix A – Community Engagement Strategy
- Appendix B – Delivery Plan
- Appendix C – Online and Face- to-Face survey results
- Appendix D – TH Engagement Strategy Framework

Background Documents – Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements)(Access to Information)(England) Regulations 2012

- NONE

Officer contact details for documents:

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