

Cabinet	 TOWER HAMLETS
Wednesday, 24 th April 2024	
Report of: Stephen Halsey, Chief Executive	Classification: Open (Unrestricted)
Community Engagement Strategy 2024-28	

Lead Member	Lutfur Rahman, Mayor
Originating Officer(s)	Afazul Hoque, Head of Corporate Strategy & Communities Craig Morbey, Strategy & Policy Lead
Wards affected	(All Wards);
Key Decision?	Yes
Reason for Key Decision	Significant impact on wards
Forward Plan Notice Published	15/02/2024
Exempt information	N/A
Strategic Plan Priority / Outcome	'A council that listens and works for everyone' Empowering communities and fighting crime Strategic Plan 2022-26]

Executive Summary

Our priority is to be a 'council that listens and works for everyone' as set out in our [Strategic Plan 2022-26](#). To achieve this objective, it is vital that we engage effectively with the community on the issues that are important to them.

The council has worked in partnership with 328 stakeholders, including residents, partners, staff, and elected members to develop a new Community Engagement Strategy 2024-2028.

The Community Engagement Strategy outlines our vision for community engagement to be 'a council that listens to communities to build a borough that works for everyone.' To deliver this vision we have identified six priorities:

- A joined-up approach to coordinating and planning community engagement in the council and with partners which leads to better outcomes.
- The council and communities work together to make decisions that improve the borough.
- The council knows how to reach the community and our seldom heard groups are enabled to participate.

- Staff have the knowledge, skills, and resources to engage with the community effectively.
- The community understands how their involvement has influenced decisions made by the council.
- Residents get more involved in their community and become the next generation of community leaders.

Recommendations:

The Mayor in Cabinet is recommended to:

1. Approve the Community Engagement Strategy as set out in Appendix 1.
2. Note the consultation with residents, partners, staff, and elected members to develop the strategy as set out in Appendix 2.
3. Note the result of the equality screening as set out in para 4.1.

1 REASONS FOR THE DECISIONS

- 1.1 The Council has a priority in the [Strategic Plan 2022-26](#) to be a 'council that listens and works for everyone.' The council does not currently have a Community Engagement Strategy. Agreeing this strategy will mean the council has an approach to engage with the community effectively until 2028.
- 1.2 Developing a new council Community Engagement Strategy was an action agreed in the council's annual delivery plan 2023/2024.

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 THE REPORT

- 3.1 The council delivers vital work that improves the quality of life of our residents. However, to meet our community's needs, we must work in partnership with residents and partners to come to decisions that deliver better outcomes.
- 3.2 Community Engagement happens when the community has a say over the decisions that impact their lives. This means the council listening to our diverse communities and seldom heard groups and giving them more of a say on the issues that matter to them.
- 3.3 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.
- 3.4 The council has a corporate priority to be a 'council that listens and works for everyone' in its Strategic Plan 2022-2026. In support of this, the council has

developed a new Community Engagement Strategy which will run between 2024-2028.

- 3.5 Please note the Mayor's Forward will be added to the strategy after the London Mayoral elections take place.

Vision and objectives

- 3.6 The Community Engagement Strategy as set out in Appendix 1 outlines the council's vision for community engagement between 2024-2028 which is to be 'a council that listens to communities to build a borough that works for everyone.'

- 3.7 To help us turn our vision into a reality, we have developed six priority objectives, as follows:

- A joined-up approach to coordinating and planning community engagement in the council and with partners which leads to better outcomes.
- The council and communities work together to make decisions that improve the borough.
- The council knows how to reach the community and our seldom heard groups are enabled to participate.
- Staff have the knowledge, skills, and resources to engage with the community effectively.
- The community understands how their involvement has influenced decisions made by the council.
- Residents get more involved in their community and become the next generation of community leaders.

- 3.8 Each of the objectives has a set of actions to actions to achieve them. These can be viewed in the delivery plan section in the strategy document in Appendix 1.

Development of the strategy

- 3.9 We brought together a project team of council officers from across council divisions to guide the strategy development and ensure buy-in.
- 3.10 We conducted an evaluation of the council's community engagement practice to identify strengths and areas for improvement.
- 3.11 We then worked with the project team and the Mayor's Office to agree draft objectives for the strategy.
- 3.12 We conducted extensive research into good practice from elsewhere, including speaking to four other local authorities to learn from what they do.

Wider consultation

- 3.13 As set out in appendix two we conducted an in-depth consultation with 328 residents, staff, partners, and elected members.
- 3.14 We engaged with a diverse range of community members who were representative of Tower Hamlets diverse communities.
- 3.15 Participants told us:
- What the vision and objectives should be
 - What good community engagement looks like to them
 - The issues they want the council to involve communities in

- Ideas on how the council can improve its community engagement.

3.16 We used a mixture of methods and approaches to consult with communities, including:

- Online survey
- Pop-up sessions
- Two workshops with elected members
- Two staff workshops
- Two workshops with partners
- Six workshops with residents.

3.17 The consultation was promoted through a communication campaign, including a webpage, articles in newsletters, social media, writing to partners and utilising messaging platform.

Consultation findings

3.18 A full analysis of the consultation findings can be viewed in Appendix 2. Key findings from the consultation were:

- Respondents were overall positive about the vision and objectives but wanted them written in plain English and an objective added about empowering communities.
- The new strategy should include principles of good practice based on the feedback from stakeholders about what good community engagement looks like. These principles should guide the council's community engagement work.
- The community doesn't want to be involved in all council decisions but wants to be involved in decisions that affect their everyday lives, so the council should prioritise community engagement on those matters.
- To improve relationships and trust in the community, excellent customer service is vital, therefore linking this strategy to the Customer Experience Strategy 2023-2026 if vital.

Feedback on the draft strategy

3.19 Following the research and consultation process the information was used to write a draft strategy.

3.20 To get feedback internally we delivered a presentation to the Mayor's Office, Divisional Leadership team meetings and met with senior managers with responsibility for proposed actions. We also organised two workshops and a survey to get feedback from residents and partners who took part in the consultation.

Budget

3.21 The Community Engagement Strategy is fully costed. The only action which is included in the strategy that requires growth is the recruitment of an Engagement and Consultation Service in the Corporate Communications and

Marketing service. This has been approved by the council in its medium-term financial plan in February 2024.

Monitoring

- 3.22 To deliver the strategy the council will establish a strategy delivery group with officers from relevant departments to monitor, review, and revise the Community Engagement Strategy.
- 3.23 The council will measure the sentiment of residents in areas such as feelings of trust, involvement, listening, informed and satisfaction on annual basis through the Annual Residents Survey.
- 3.24 To measure the impact the strategy is having, each year we will conduct a survey with 100 residents to understand their experience of the council's community engagement. In year one of the strategy we will collect baseline data.

4 EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 Extensive engagement and consultation has been undertaken in the development of this strategy. As set out in para 3.7 and Appendix 2, we consulted with 328 residents, staff, partners, and elected members to develop the strategy, delivering a wide range of engagement activities and events, including a survey, pop-ups in public places and workshops. We actively took steps to engage with a diverse range of community members who were representative of Tower Hamlets diverse communities. More details on which community members we engaged with are available in Appendix two.
- 4.2 An equality screening has been completed and there are no evident adverse impacts on any protected characteristics groups that would arise from the implementation of this strategy.
- 4.3 The strategy has an objective that 'the council knows how to reach the community and our seldom heard groups are enabled to participate.' This is supported by a range of actions which will support us to engage with communities with protected characteristics effectively such as creating a directory of local services and groups, developing a recognition and reward policy, strengthening the equalities hub and networks and enabling staff to project easy to understand communications.
- 4.4 For some of the actions included in the strategy it is crucial for services to consider the needs of residents with different protected characteristics. A key action will be to develop an engagement handbook which will provide further guidance on to engage those residents seldom heard and residents with protected characteristics.

5 OTHER STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 Consultations – Details of consultation an engagement undertaken in the development of the Community Engagement Strategy is set out in para 3.7 and Appendix 2.

- 5.2 Best Value – To understand the benefits of effective community engagement we reviewed papers which demonstrate the positive impact that community engagement has. We identify good practice in community engagement by speaking to 2 other local authorities to learn about how they involve communities in decision-making, as well as reading best practice papers and book on community engagement.

6 COMMENTS OF THE CHIEF FINANCE OFFICER

- 6.1 Growth is required for an Engagement and Consultation Service. The growth bid for this 'Bengali Communications and Engagement Team & General Engagement Officer' (GRO / CEO 003 / 24-25) was approved at Cabinet on 31st January 2024 with Council approval for the MTFS to take place on 28th February 2024.

7 COMMENTS OF LEGAL SERVICES

- 7.1 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). Having a Community Engagement Strategy demonstrates a commitment to that duty.
- 7.2 An Equalities Analysis (EA) has been taken on the strategy. 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 will assist the Council in meeting its duties under the Equalities Act (2010).
- 7.3 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.

Linked Reports, Appendices and Background Documents

Linked Report

- Strategic Plan 2022-2026
- Customer Experience Strategy 2023-2026

Appendices

- Appendix A - Community Engagement Strategy 2024-2028
- Appendix B - Community Engagement – Consultation Report

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

- NONE

Officer contact details for documents: Afazul Hoque, Head of Corporate Strategy & Communities