

7a. REFERRAL FROM O&S 6 SEPTEMBER 2022: 2022-27 COMMUNITY CONSULTATION STRATEGY

RECOMMENDED TO CABINET: That Cabinet approve the Community Consultation Strategy for the period 2022-27.

REASONS FOR REFERRAL:

- (1) Consultation is critical to demonstrate that the council is committed to engaging with its community, to help shape the direction of future policies, to inform necessary improvement or refinements to services and to ascertain if current approaches to service delivery are meeting the needs of residents.
- (2) Our most recent District Wide Survey (DWS) highlights a decline in resident views since 2019 on how we consult with them. We need to proactively show that we are a council that listens and wants to engage with our residents by successfully implementing our community-facing strategy.
- (3) Increased forms of digital consultation will enable us to reach a wider audience more frequently

The Communications Manager presented the report entitled '2022-27 Community Consultation Strategy' and advised Members of the following updates:

- The survey results from this year highlighted that residents' views on their involvement and engagement by the Council has gone down since 2019, but this was understandable as much consultation work during this time had been focussed on the pandemic response.
- This proposal is for a resident facing, community-based consultation strategy and will involve explaining the consultation process to residents.
- There was a need to consult residents more regularly and increase the level of digital consultation happening. The pandemic had demonstrated that the local community was capable and willing to use digital means to be consulted.
- It was being explored whether a twice per annum District Wide survey could be launched, to give of the moment attitudes of residents.
- Sharing results and being transparent with these was important and these would be displayed on dedicated webpage.

Councillor Terry Hone noted that it was important to take into account, as this proposal has done, those people who do not have the ability or facilities to use digital technology. It was good to see this included as a consideration.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Claire Strong
- Councillor Adam Compton
- Councillor David Levett

In response to questions, the Service Director – Place advised:

- Funding of £8,000 had been allocated to the Engage Zencity platform, which was a discounted rate for the first two years. This came from the strategic priorities funding initially as a trial, and the effectiveness of this platform would be assessed ahead of a full budget bid.

In response to questions, the Communications Manager advised:

- The strategy regarding social media posts, especially since changes to the Facebook Newsfeed algorithm, was to repeat key messages across posts and to utilise different social media channels. This maximises the potential engagement of residents with key Council messages.
- There was the possibility to use a banner across the top of the Council's website, and currently this space was used by the "Ease the Squeeze" campaign.
- The plan was for each new consultation to be included on the banner on the homepage, with a dedicated page linked to this regarding ongoing and past consultations and outcomes.

Councillor Alistair Willoughby proposed and Councillor Claire Strong seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RECOMMENDED TO CABINET: That Cabinet approve the Community Consultation Strategy for the period 2022-27.

REASONS FOR REFERRAL:

- (1) Consultation is critical to demonstrate that the council is committed to engaging with its community, to help shape the direction of future policies, to inform necessary improvement or refinements to services and to ascertain if current approaches to service delivery are meeting the needs of residents.
- (2) Our most recent District Wide Survey (DWS) highlights a decline in resident views since 2019 on how we consult with them. We need to proactively show that we are a council that listens and wants to engage with our residents by successfully implementing our community-facing strategy.
- (3) Increased forms of digital consultation will enable us to reach a wider audience more frequently

The reports and papers associated with this item can be viewed here: [Agenda for Overview and Scrutiny Committee on Tuesday, 6th September, 2022, 7.30 pm | North Herts Council \(north-herts.gov.uk\)](#)