

Bath & North East Somerset Council

MEETING	Cabinet	
MEETING	5th March 2019	EXECUTIVE FORWARD PLAN REFERENCE:
		E 3133
TITLE:	Consultation, Community Engagement and Communications	
WARD:	All	
AN OPEN PUBLIC ITEM		
List of attachments to this report: Appendix 1: Notes of Consultation Workshop held on 26 th January 2019		

1 THE ISSUE

- 1.1 This report updates the Cabinet on work undertaken with members of our Connecting Communities Forums on Consultation, Community Engagement and Communications. The report sets out the learning from recent consultation processes, ideas for building on good practice and suggested new approaches. The report also sets out the outcome of a detailed engagement process on this work so far and proposes next steps.

2 RECOMMENDATION

The Cabinet is asked to;

- 2.1 Note the work of the area's Local Area Forums in engaging with local residents, parish councils, town councils and the community and voluntary sector.
- 2.2 Thank the Bath City Forum and the Consultation Working Group, drawn from representatives of the Forums, ALCA and the 3SG, for their work to date on further developing our framework for Consultation, Community Engagement and Communications.
- 2.3 Requests the CTE PDS Panel to consider in more detail the outcomes of the groups findings, attached in Appendix 1 and detailed below in 5.12, and to advise the Council's Cabinet on how best to develop further this work and incorporate it into the Council's policy and practices.

3 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS (FINANCE, PROPERTY, PEOPLE)

- 3.1 There is a well-established business case for delivering effective and efficient consultation. Identifying appropriate resources for high-quality communications and engagement on projects should be built into their planning phase from the outset.

4 STATUTORY CONSIDERATIONS AND BASIS FOR PROPOSAL

- 4.1 The Council has a wide range of statutory duties relating to engaging and consulting with local residents, and considering responses appropriately through its decision making process.

5 THE REPORT

- 5.1 Cabinet in May 2013 adopted a new Local Engagement Framework for Bath & North East Somerset. The central aim of this new “Connecting Communities” approach was to help local people, organisations and councils address the issues that mattered to them most in their communities, particularly in the light of ongoing financial challenges. The Framework was therefore built around establishing a number of local “Connecting Communities Forums”, involving parishes, local elected members and other residents and local groups. This approach also enabled a complex range of existing locally-based groups to be replaced, removing duplication and providing a single basis for engagement. In addition, it allowed for updates to be given to the Forums from key public services such as the Council, Police and Fire and Rescue Service.
- 5.2 Three Connecting Communities Forums were established initially covering the Somer Valley, Chew Valley and Keynsham areas, building on long-established partnership arrangements in these areas. These Forums brought together Parish Councils, local elected members and community groups as well as Director-level sponsors to highlight and champion their work. Action Plans for each Forum drew together partner activity to utilise the capacity and skills of the local communities themselves.
- 5.3 Following positive feedback on the first phase of the introduction of the Forum approach, it was extended to the whole of the parished area with the creation of the Bathavon Forum in July 2015. This was followed by the first meeting of the Bath City Forum in October 2015, established by Council in July 2015 following a review of governance arrangements for the City. Given that Bath is unparished the representation on the Forum was drawn from elected Bath & North East Somerset Councillors and from co-optees. This meant that for the first time a clear engagement framework had been embedded across the whole of Bath & North East Somerset.
- 5.4 The Forums have continued to evolve and develop. For example, the Bath City Forum now advises the Cabinet on disbursing the local portion of the Community Infrastructure levy for Bath through a Panel established for that purpose. Most recently the Bathavon Forum has been replaced by two separate Forums for Cam Valley and Bathavon North, which it was felt would better reflect the community needs and identities. The Chairs and Vice Chairs of the Forums come together regularly to assess progress, share best practice and make forward plans. However, even within this common framework, local issues are prioritised, identified and pursued. Recent examples of this include a

focus on Houses in Multiple Occupation at the Bath City Forum, whilst the Somer Valley and Chew Valley Forums have discussed rural transport issues. The Keynsham Forum has focussed on issues such as community safety and anti-social behaviour.

- 5.5 A key benefit of the relationships created across all our communities provided by the Forums has been the ability for public services to consult at local level, and to use the Forums to receive a local “take” on B&NES-wide consultations. This was found particularly useful, for example on the “Your Care Your way” community services proposal and also on a wide range of other consultations.
- 5.6 The Bath City Forum in 2018 raised, what they felt were, a number of key learning points from some of the complex consultations that have taken place in recent years, including the East of Bath Park and Ride, Libraries and Air Quality. It was considered that there were some useful lessons to be learnt from these which were considered when developing the Air Quality consultation process. For example, a period of broad engagement and communications prior to the consultation period itself was built into the planning. Overall, this consultation received what is believed to be a record number of responses.
- 5.7 Following this issue being raised at the Bath City Forum, all the other Forums, Somer Valley, Chew Valley, Keynsham, Cam Valley and BathAvon North were asked for their views on how best to work together to improve the process of engagement and consultation in our area. As a result a working group was established consisting of four Members of the Bath City Forum and two from each of the others. Also included were representatives from Avon Local Council’s Association (ALCA) and the 3SG (Third Sector Group). A working group of seventeen in total.
- 5.8 The initial proposal was to undertake a joint workshop with the working group and Council Officers. This was subsequently revised following discussions with the Cabinet Member for Economic & Community Regeneration. It was agreed to hold the workshop just with the representatives from the Forums.
- 5.9 The workshop took place on Saturday the 26th of January 2019 with ten of the seventeen members of the working group present. The workshop was run by the Cabinet Member for Economic and Community Regeneration supported by Officers from Partnerships and Corporate Services.
- 5.10 The workshop was very well received by the members of the Forums who participated, particularly as the format allowed members to engage in role play in order to appreciate the complexity and different perspectives. The outcomes and next steps have been reported back to all the area Forums and further work is planned. There is a genuine desire on behalf of the Forum members and the Council to work together to develop this work further.
- 5.11 The Council has already learnt a lot of lessons from the refresh of the Parish Charter and it is proposed that the resulting principles of partnership working are also fed into our future consultation arrangements.
- 5.12 The workshop proposed four key areas to explore further. These were to:
 - develop a ‘Charter’ on consultation similar to the Parish Charter adopted by the Council to support our working relationship with Town and Parish

Councils. This could provide the guidance on the rules including responding to issues as they arise as well as training and promotion of the Charter.

- agree a vocabulary of ‘consultation language’, whilst not affecting the Council’s statutory obligation, that is understandable by residents across the district.
- explore opportunities of working more closely with the 3SG to engage harder to reach groups.
- investigate the idea of setting up an ‘Consultation Panel’ to give officers feedback prior to the Council embarking on consultation. The Panel will need to be managed within existing resources.

6 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

6.1 None

7 CONSULTATION

7.1 There has been widespread discussion of the proposals within the Bath City Forum and at other Forum meetings across the district. The Bath City Form members have been instrumental in driving the issue forward.

7.2 The whole issue of Consultation, Community Engagement and Communications will be presented to CTE PDS Panel on 11th March for further comment and discussion. These discussions will be reported back to Cabinet at a future date.

8 RISK MANAGEMENT

8.1 A risk assessment related to the issue and recommendations has been undertaken, in compliance with the Council's decision making risk management guidance.

Contact person	<i>Dave Dixon Community Engagement Manager. 01225 396532</i>
Background papers	<p>Cabinet Meeting paper – Connecting Communities: Update December 2014 http://www.bathnes.gov.uk/sites/default/files/siteimages/cc_report_december_2014.pdf</p> <p>New Conversations: LGA guide to engagement https://www.local.gov.uk/new-conversations-lga-guide-engagement</p>

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