



Community Involvement update report

Report to: Neighbourhood Services and Community
Involvement Scrutiny Commission
Assistant Mayor: Cllr Kirk Master
Lead director: John Leach

Useful information

- Ward(s) affected: All
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1. Purpose of report

1.1 This report seeks to outline the services and activities which have been involved in the delivery of community engagement over the past decade. The report also outlines the current support for community engagement particularly with regard to the Neighbourhood Services section.

2. Summary

2.1 There is long history of community engagement work through a wide range of council services. Earlier initiatives were delivered through the housing department with national funding.

2.2 A range of council services deliver community engagement activities.

2.3 Within Neighbourhood Services Ward Community and Engagement Officers support ward councillors to deliver ward events and to assess and administrate ward funding. The team supports community groups to engage and develop and supports ward councillors on ward based issues.

2.4 Neighbourhood Services also undertakes community engagement activity through a network of community centres and libraries, and most recently through in depth consultation activity under the Transforming Neighbourhood Services programme.

3. Recommendations

3.1 The Scrutiny Commission is recommended to note the historical information supplied and to provide comment on the community engagement activity which is currently promoted through Neighbourhood Services and other council services.

3.2 The Commission is recommended to note the range of community engagement activity which is promoted through a wide range of council services.

4. Report

4.1 Community Involvement

4.1.1 Two key terms associated with community involvement are “community engagement” and “community development”

4.1.2 This report concentrates on the promotion of community engagement through a range of city council services.

4.2 History of City Council's Support for directed Community Engagement

4.2.1 The following provides a broad overview of the council's support for community engagement over the past decade:

4.2.2 Prior to 2008 and the commencement of recognised austerity, a Neighbourhood Management structure was in place that was based on a national approach and was located in Housing. This structure ended in May 2010.

4.2.3 From December 2010 to March 2013, with funding from Neighbourhood Management, Community Development Coordinators were set up in the Saffron and New Parks areas. One Coordinator retired and both areas were then run by a single coordinator until the end of 2013.

4.2.4 In September 2013, the City Council appointed a Voluntary and Community Sector Engagement Manager, located within the Delivery, Communications and Political Governance division, based in the City Mayor's Office. This was a newly-created post and the first position dedicated to working with groups and organisations in the voluntary and community sector, based in or active in Leicester. Most of the time since appointment has been spent helping refresh and renew the Council's relationship with such groups and organisations in the context of the city's changing demographic profile, needs and interests, as well as against the backdrop of changing allocation of resources and support. On occasion, the VCS Engagement Manager has drawn on the assistance of the Ward and Community Engagement Officers (e.g. facilitating the organisations of public meetings in Council Neighbourhood Centres) and been involved in discussion of some of the activities, programmes and projects described in this report (e.g. Community Asset Transfer and Transforming Neighbourhood Services, when VCS groups or organisations approach the Council expressing the need for premises to use as a base).

4.2.5 In 2014, the Community Services section established a structure including 9 Community Engagement Officers who were local contacts covering several wards each. The posts supported ward meetings and ward funding applications as well as local groups and events.

4.2.6 A team of Ward Community and Engagement Officers (WCEOs) was created in 2016 and replaced the Community Engagement Officers following a substantial staffing review. The WCEOs provide high quality support to ward councillors and communities at city, area and ward level and promote community engagement and involvement with local issues.

4.2.7 Multiple council services have historically been involved in community development. The following summary is illustrative and does not constitute an exhaustive list of services and activities which have delivered community engagement in the city:

- Housing department – creation of and support for tenants and residents associations and the running of the Neighbourhood Management

Programme. The Tenants and Residents Associations (TARA) initiative was funded by the Housing Revenue Account. The Neighbourhood Management programme was funded by the Department for Communities and Local Government.

- Community Services have worked closely with community stakeholders to delivered partnered approaches to the promotion of community buildings and the to provide support for new and established community groups through the Community Engagement Officers.
- Public Health (transferred over to the City Council 2013) – Health focussed community engagement initiatives were delivered through the Community Wellness team. The recent focus has been on the Saffron and Eyres Monsell, New Parks & Beaumont Leys, St Matthews and Belgrave areas.
- Parks and Open Spaces – work with local communities to develop use of parks and run an extensive volunteering programme. Parks and Open Spaces offer a comprehensive volunteering package with appropriate training and support, ranging from individuals undertaking tasks on their local open space to organised activities on land and water supported by a team of 4 Volunteer Leaders and a Volunteer Co-ordinator. In addition there are over 30 established volunteer groups who undertake projects under the Royal Horticultural Society's Its Your Neighbourhood.
- Sports Services - work with local communities to encourage and promote more active lifestyles. Local communities also benefit from volunteering opportunities through sports.
- Libraries – have promoted use of shared space for a wide range of stakeholders. These include craft groups such as “knit and natter”, local history groups, self-help groups and toddler time sessions. Volunteers are encouraged to get involved in the delivery of activities such as the children's summer scheme and reading groups.
- The Arts and Museums service has developed a large network of volunteers currently managed by a part time coordinator.
- A new Community Engagement Fund was set up in 2016 with the purpose of engaging Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) organisations as active partners in strengthening the council's response to the Public Sector Equality Duty. There were 25 applications in the first round of funding, of which four applicants were successful in obtaining support. These four projects can be seen as testing the water for small-scale, low-profile projects requiring modest resources but demonstrating meaningful social impact.
- Voluntary Action Leicester are currently contracted by the City Council to provide support for new and existing community groups.

4.3 The National Picture on Community Engagement

4.3.1 Community services do not form part of a statutory service. Therefore there are many and diverse responses to the requirement for community engagement from local authorities. The models vary from services totally contracted out to the voluntary sector to various in-house solutions, citizen panels and so on. Good community engagement should deliver improved community capacity and cohesion and reduce isolation, however it is achieved.

4.3.2 Most recently the Casey review (December 2016) reports on integration and opportunity in isolated and deprived communities. The review emphasises the value of community cohesion and states “social mixing and interactions between

people from a wider range of backgrounds can have positive impacts; not just in reducing anxiety and prejudice, but also in enabling people to get on better in employment and social mobility.”

4.4 Community Engagement in Neighbourhood Services

4.4.1 Four Ward Community and Engagement Officer (WCEO) posts based within the Neighbourhood Services section support community engagement through providing high quality support to Councillors in their community role at City, area and ward level. The WCEOs are tasked with maximising the impact of Ward Community meetings and promoting community engagement and involvement with local issues.

4.4.2 The WCEOs promote community projects by helping groups to develop bids to the community ward fund and to facilitate the assessment of bids for ward councillors. The support is important to help develop robust bids to the ward community fund to develop strong projects for each area. The WCEOs also provide support for ward councillors to arrange ward engagement activities such as ward meetings and patch walks, or to deliver ward based events.

4.4.3 To date, 406 ward funding bids have been made during this municipal year, (between 1st April 2016 and 28 February 2017). Of these, 90 bids were made jointly to two or more ward funds. The Ward Engagement Team supports ward councillors with the assessment criteria for bids and with the administration of the funding. A key part of the process is the post activity follow up involving a review of assessments submitted by community organisations.

4.4.4 The following examples illustrate the types of activity with which WCEOs have been involved over the past year:

4.4.5 **Community fun day** (Evington Ward). This is an example of a larger scale event benefiting from £3,000 funding by the ward. The engagement team worked with ward Councillors and local groups to facilitate a community cohesion day for everyone in the local Coleman and Rowllatts Hill area. Community groups who are users of Coleman Neighbourhood Centre used the event to bring local people to promote community cohesion and with a specific focus on opportunities and activities for young people. Activities included a climbing wall, local boxing sessions, basketball, football and a local dance group. The tenants association were available to promote their organisation. Several members of the Ward Engagement Team were involved in delivering the event on the day due to the wide range of events taking place.

4.4.6 **Thursday lunch club welfare event** (Humberstone & Hamilton Ward) WCEO support was given for a bid from the lunch club running at Netherhall Neighbourhood Centre. The group has been running for 41 years and mutual support is frequently derived with regard to issues such as benefits, pensions and funeral care. The WCEO assisted with delivery of a £500 project from the ward to deliver advice sessions for the club. The session provided support on issues relevant to the group and promoted the lunch club activity to new members.

4.4.7 **Dementia showcase event** (Westcotes Ward). The event, scheduled for early March 2017 was developed by the East West Centre. The WCEO has helped to develop plans for monthly dementia activities throughout the year to support people affected by the illness and their parents and their carers. The idea was developed between the East West Centre manager and the WCEO at a recent ward meeting.

4.4.8 At a local level eleven Service Delivery Managers work with groups, schools, partners and stakeholders to develop local services. Each SDM oversees a small group of neighbourhood buildings which host a wide range of community activities including craft groups, reading groups, under 5s “Toddler Time” sessions, children’s summer events, ward meetings, light exercise classes and friendship groups.

4.4.9 Between 1 April and 31 December 2016 (end of quarter 3 of the current financial year) the following numbers of people had been supported to participate in neighbourhood activities in libraries and community centres:

Measure	Number*
No. of visits to Neighbourhood Services facilities	1,745,510
No. of attendances at under 5's sessions	25,010
Number of enquiries dealt with through the ward engagement helpline	222
Number of participants in children's summer reading scheme in libraries	6,794
Number of volunteers in Neighbourhood Services	138
Number of neighbourhood buildings offering community space (libraries and community centres)	35

*1 April 2016 – 31 Dec 2016

4.4.10 There has been significant engagement with many groups over the three years that Transforming Neighbourhood Services (TNS) has been underway, which has linked groups in more closely to the new service and has enabled a number of officers in the service to learn more about the sort of organised activity that is taking place in our communities. For each of the six areas of the city considered under the TNS programme a six week engagement period has been undertaken, followed by a six week consultation period. Community organisations have been involved in drop in sessions, focus groups and consultation meetings within each area. An extensive network of stakeholders has been developed for each area and there is potential for these networks to be used to promote opportunities for community stakeholders beyond the

delivery of the TNS project.

4.4.11 The most recent TNS consultation activity took place in the North East neighbourhood covering five wards. During this time around 780 stakeholders attended consultation meetings and 1,436 stakeholders responded to the consultation questionnaire. A contact list of 230 community stakeholders was developed through the engagement and consultation process.

4.4.12 One outcome from this work has been the development of Community Asset Transfer (CAT) opportunities whereby community organisations are invited to develop a business case to take on the running of some buildings. The council has worked with the independent organisation Locality to help groups develop capacity and to work through their business plans for CAT.

4.5 Future Direction

4.5.1 It is clear that the Ward Community and Engagement Officers have been well received across the city. The role will continue to support ward councillors and community engagement through ward events, working with partners on ward issues and administration of the ward fund.

4.5.2 The council will continue to develop partnerships with other organisations to maximise the impact of community engagement work. Our developing work with Locality as a component part of TNS will help further engagement work and spread an understanding of what community groups can achieve, for example through taking on buildings through CAT and by seeking sources of income, other than that of the council.

4.5.3 One outcome at the end of the TNS process in March 2018 will be a detailed contact list of stakeholders and community groups in all wards across the city. During the TNS consultation process it has been suggested that this network of contacts be proactively developed to improve communications with a broad range of stakeholders across the city.

4.5.4 The council will continue to align local community engagement initiatives with developing national policy.

5. Financial, legal and other implications

5.1 Financial implications

There are no financial implications arising directly from this report – Colin Sharpe, Head of Finance, ext. 37 4081

5.2 Legal implications

There are no legal implications arising directly from the recommendations of this report

– Emma Horton, Head of Law (Commercial, Property & Planning), ext. 37 4126

5.3 Climate Change and Carbon Reduction implications

5.4 Equalities Implications

Engagement is important in ensuring public authorities understand the impact of their decisions on different people. Engagement with people with protected characteristics and other stakeholders can be useful for fostering good relations. Effective engagement is valuable and can contribute to the council delivering better, more effective and efficient services, based on what residents and diverse communities want. The Council can draw on the knowledge and experiences of residents in improving the services we provide and in making them more tailored to local priorities. Getting people involved, increases the council's accountability to, and credibility with, local communities, strengthening the democratic process.

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