

Part A

Report to: Cabinet

Date of meeting: Monday, 10 July 2023

Report author: Strategic Initiatives Officer

Title: Emerging Community Engagement and Participation Strategy

1.0 Summary

1.1 Watford Borough Council has undertaken a cross cutting review to establish a more strategic approach to community engagement and participation.

1.2 The aspirations of the review included to:

- join together and strengthen activity already taking place, building upon the town's diverse, vibrant and engaged voluntary sector
- harness the insights and energy of the Watford community, establishing a collaborative and productive relationship that serves our residents
- improve the way in which we conduct engagement, supporting the community to shape decisions and ensuring all voices are heard equally
- explore an Asset Based Community Development approach, with the council as an enabler for communities to support themselves and one another, and for community development to flourish

1.3 This report introduces the emerging Community Engagement and Participation Strategy and seeks approval to carry out consultation activity with Watford's Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) over the summer of 2023 to test the strategy and provide an opportunity for the VCS to shape the final version.

2.0 Risks

2.1

Nature of risk	Consequence	Suggested Control Measures	Response (treat, tolerate, terminate or transfer)	Risk Rating (combination of severity and likelihood)
The Council does not adopt a more strategic approach to	Parts of the community are not heard and fail to access support and resources	Develop a strategic approach to ensure new, emergent and unseen communities are all engaged	Treat	4

its community engagement				
Watford's voluntary and community sector do not feel able to shape the strategy and do not recognise their own experiences in the strategy	The strategy does not lead to the step change in the council's engagement and participation with the community and VCS	A programme of consultation	Treat	6

3.0 Recommendations

- 3.1 To approve the emerging Community Engagement and Participation Strategy for consultation with the Voluntary and Community Sector. Which will inform delivery of the finalised strategy later in 2023.

Further information:

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Report approved by: Kathryn Robson, Director of Performance

4.0 Detailed proposal

- 4.1 Watford Borough Council is developing a new Community Engagement and Participation Strategy. This is in line with the ambition in our Council Plan to focus on engaging and listening to our community, and the strategy aims to deliver upon our commitment 'to listen to, and hear, the diverse voices of Watford'.
- 4.2 A strategic review of the council's community engagement activities has been undertaken, investigating the ways in which the council carries out a wide variety and range of engagement with the community.
- 4.3 A social consultancy was engaged to offer insight and advice on best practice and to support the review by undertaking a period of listening and discovery, hearing from a range of people individually and in groups, including the Elected Mayor, Deputy Mayor and Portfolio Holder for Community, other Cabinet Members and senior officers.

- 4.4 A comprehensive exercise has now been undertaken to understand and evaluate the key touchpoints with the community across the whole organisation. Within this, the council's relationship with the voluntary sector and role in community development has also been examined, in order to enable a strategy that establishes a collaborative relationship that is inclusive of, and beneficial to, all.
- 4.5 A variety of approaches by other local authorities and recommendations from bodies such as the LGA have also been reviewed, to identify the way forward that best suits the council, Watford and delivers upon the commitments in the Council Plan.
- 4.6 The emerging strategy seeks to develop a consistent and forward looking strategic approach and set out how we will proactively work and engage with our community, and voluntary and community sector. Celebrating the contribution of our community and recognising the invaluable role they continue to play through each of the recent crises including the Covid-19 pandemic and current cost of living crisis, it sets out how the council can support a strong and resilient community, where people's voices are heard and individuals, groups and organisations feel valued and inspired by our town.
- 4.7 Starting with the commitments set out in our Council Plan 2022-26 and associated Delivery Plan, the strategy will act as a golden thread running through our key strategies and into delivery. It will connect our commitment to work alongside our community to find the right ways to reach net carbon zero with our Environmental Strategy and how we seek to engage with people to understand their barriers, what is important to them, and what opportunities we have to facilitate change. It will support our dialogue as we review the Voluntary Sector Commissioning Framework, our strategy for community assets, our Communications Strategy and our Customer Experience Strategy to help us deliver upon our commitments to celebrate and promote our town's rich and diverse culture and creativity, to support improved health and wellbeing across the town, and to listen to and hear the diverse voices of Watford.
- 4.8 The strategy recognises there is great potential to join together and strengthen the activity already taking place, recognising our communities as contributors and establishing a long term, collaborative relationship that is inclusive of all and allows all to flourish. At the same time, we want to enable new and emergent communities to access support and resources and build for themselves a fulfilling and thriving role within the life of Watford. This opportunity to connect the layers of help and support already so well established in Watford under a unifying vision and clear outcomes, underpins this strategy and approach.
- 4.9 We have taken a strategic review of how we as a council engage with the community, the challenges and opportunities within this activity, and worked to define our emerging vision for engagement and participation. We have outlined

four key themes, accompanied by a delivery plan which sets out how we can implement this vision.

- 4.10 We fully appreciate that the best approach to moving to the next level of community engagement and participation is to hear from, and listen to, the community. Initial engagement with partner organisations across the VCS has helped to shape the draft strategy. This strategy is underpinned by their input, dialogue and ideas, and this paper now proposes the next step of broader consultation with the Voluntary and Community Sector in order to verify our findings, discover fresh viewpoints, and shape the themes and priority areas for action
 - 4.11 Detailed consultation and engagement on the strategy will seek to gather input and insight and test the emerging ideas, validate our findings on the community and VCS's assets and needs, ensure that the community's concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in and shape the strategy, and raise awareness of our work in this area. It will be a test bed for our recommendations that seek to deliver improved engagement, participation from and collaboration with the community.
 - 4.12 The strategy will be accompanied by a detailed delivery plan that sets out responsibilities for each recommendation and strategic oversight of the strategy will be held by the Director of Performance, with the delivery plan monitored as part of the council's quarterly performance reporting. The delivery plan will be monitored by reporting into the EPMO, in line with internal EPMO processes on strategy progress reporting. A draft delivery plan is provided as Appendix 2.
- 5.0 **Implications**
- 5.1 **Financial**
- 5.1.1 The Shared Director of Finance comments that there are no financial implications within this report, noting that actions in the delivery plan will be met from existing budgets.
- 5.2 **Legal Issues** (Monitoring Officer)
- 5.2.1 The Group Head of Democracy and Governance comments that there are no legal implications within this report.
- 5.3 **Equalities, Human Rights and Data Protection**
- 5.3.1 As this is a new strategy, an equalities impact analysis has been undertaken. The analysis is attached as Appendix 5 to this report and will continue to be updated as the strategy is developed. The main conclusions of the analysis are that the potential positive impacts of the strategy will deliver benefit not only to the

community, who will be better enabled to deliver their vital work, access support and resources and collaborate with one another and the council, and directly to residents, who will benefit from the strengthened outputs of these organisations.

5.4 **Staffing**

5.4.1 Resourcing of the strategy has been carefully considered and ownership of individual components has been set out in the accompanying delivery plan.

5.5 **Accommodation**

5.5.1 There are no implications in this section. There is a recommendation to review the approach to community assets and this approach will be assessed under the emerging Community Asset Strategy.

5.6 **Community Safety/Crime and Disorder**

5.6.1 There are no implications in this section

5.7 **Sustainability**

5.7.1 There are no sustainability implications within this report.

Appendices

This report is accompanied by:

- Appendix 1 – Draft Community Engagement and Participation Strategy
- Appendix 2 - Delivery Plan
- Appendix 3 - Our layers of support for thriving communities
- Appendix 4 - Levels of engagement
- Appendix 5 - Equalities Impact Assessment

Background papers

No papers were used in the preparation of this report.