

## Community and Engagement Committee

12 June 2019

### Community Engagement Framework

Report by Louise Footner, Assistant Director, Culture, Communities and Engagement

Relevant Portfolio Holder: Cllr Tim Cobbett, Engagement and Continuous Education

#### **Purpose**

The council is clear about its ambition to improve community engagement. This will require culture change across the whole council. To help achieve this there is a need for clarity about what is meant by community engagement. Over the past 12 months there have been some good examples of successful community engagement and there have been other examples where we can learn and develop our approach.

The purpose of the framework is to articulate our vision and approach to community engagement more clearly - as stated in the LGA corporate peer review. The framework sets out an approach against which we can be judged and provides consistency in approach and vision.

#### **Recommendation that -**

1. the proposed draft framework for community engagement set out at **Annex 1** is **endorsed**;
2. there is further online consultation and discussion at neighbourhood committees to shape the framework;
3. the Director, Communities is authorised to amend the framework following consultations with the Co-Chairs and the relevant opposition spokesperson;
4. the framework is published on the Council website by the end of August; and
5. a report is submitted to the Committee in February 2020 to update on progress and feedback on the framework.

#### **Benefits to the Community:**

The framework provides opportunities to increase community engagement and involvement in decision-making through a clear, consistent commitment and approach, and by which the council can be held to account.

## Key Points

- A. The council is looking to articulate a clear approach to community engagement that we can be held to account against. It aims to:
- increase the scope of community engagement to help ensure everyone has a voice, especially people from whom we seldom hear
  - outline a clearly articulated approach
  - ensure we co-ordinate community engagement and consultation so people have time and space to have a say on what matters to them
  - encourage better decision-making and problem-solving by hearing more ideas and voices earlier in the process.
- B. Through an agreed approach the council will:
- Increase and strengthen the role of communities in how we live, work and study in Kingston
  - Involve more people in the democratic process and enable communities to influence decisions in a range of ways
  - Support communities to take action by helping them identify needs and support them to develop their own solutions.

## Context

1. The corporate plan - *Making Kingston Better, Together* - outlines our ambition for community engagement:

“We want to be known as a council that is an exemplar for community engagement. We are far from that at the moment but in this new era for the Council, we are focusing on strengthening the relationship between the Council and the community - residents, businesses, students, voluntary and community groups. Kingston has a vibrant and engaged voluntary sector which creates opportunities to maximise community participation. We want to ‘hardwire’ effective engagement into our decision making - involving residents in the design of local services and the things that affect them.”

2. The LGA Corporate Peer Review (January 2019) acknowledged that it is clear that the administration is committed to improving community engagement. The report called for leadership on the issue and to clearly articulate what it is that we need to do differently. The Community Engagement Framework aims to set out the markers for what the council needs to do and how we shape a new approach and culture across the organisation.
3. The framework sets out an approach for a common understanding to improve engagement. It sets principles and standards for how the council engages - to build clear, shared expectations that enable a focus on what can be achieved.
4. It will be for the council to deliver against this framework and to be held accountable as to whether it is doing so. We will be judged against how well we deliver and will refine our approach as we learn.
5. Commitments in the corporate plan and from the administration underpin the framework. It draws on feedback from a workshop with the Community & Engagement Committee and members of the public. We will continue to develop the framework through discussion at Neighborhood Committees and online consultation.
6. Fundamentally, the framework is designed to ensure there are more opportunities to hear a range of voices earlier in the decision making process. A key part of enabling this is testing new methods, learning from best practice and identifying further opportunities to engage.
7. The council is focused on strengthening the relationship between the council and the communities across Kingston - residents, businesses, students, voluntary, faith and community groups. The council has been better at engaging some communities than others and, as well as the overall work to improve engagement, there will be a particular emphasis on improving how the council engages with young people and with businesses.
8. The framework currently reflects the council’s position and more work needs to be done to broaden the framework by seeking to work more extensively with partners on engagement.
9. The framework outlines a five-stage approach to engagement - inform, consult, involve, collaborate, empower (using the International Association for Public Participation - iap2 - spectrum of public participation).

10. Through using the framework we aim to improve all stages of engagement to enable maximum participation. It is important that we have a range of different methods of engaging - some of which are outlined in the framework - and some that will be developed as we try different approaches.
11. At one end of the spectrum (inform) this is about being much clearer in the language we use and the communications we produce (e.g. reviewing correspondence such as letters/emails and information on the website) through to introducing new ways for communities and businesses to participate in redesigning services and places (using activities such as community budgeting, open democracy online platforms and Citizens' Assemblies).
12. We made some progress over the past 12 months in changing how we have carried out engagement and to support our ambitions in involving communities. For example we are currently holding workshops with people across the borough about redesigning our website and improving customer experience. We have also increased the focus on neighbourhood engagement through more local decision-making, more local allocation of resources and more opportunities to hear voices. We know we need to do much more to improve our activity.

## **Proposal and Options**

13. The proposal is to adopt the framework and use it to shape all engagement carried out by the council.
14. As part of this a number of different approaches will be tested including Citizens' Assembly, open democracy online platforms and community budgeting sessions.

## **Consultations**

15. The proposal is to carry out further consultation on the framework online and through neighbourhood committees until the end of July 2019.
16. The feedback will further shape and refine the Framework. As we use the framework we will continue to test it and will report back to the committee in February 2020.
17. As well as face to face testing of the framework, there will be online opportunities to provide comments and thoughts on potential approaches for community engagement.

## **Timescale**

18. The framework to be published in August 2019.

## **Resource Implications**

19. The framework itself does not require a specific budget. However, individual activities to support the framework may require budgets. These will be fully costed and build into budget setting processes.

## **Legal Implications**

20. The implementation of the community engagement framework will comply with all legal requirements.

## **Risk Assessment**

21. The risk of not doing this would limit our ability to engage as widely as possible and 'hardwire' engagement in all we do.

## **Equalities Analysis**

22. The framework will comply with equalities best practice

**Background papers** - held by Louise Footner, Assistant Director, Culture, Communities and Engagement [louise.footner@kingston.gov.uk](mailto:louise.footner@kingston.gov.uk) tel 0208 547 5228

None other than those referred to in this report