

Improving Community Engagement Scrutiny Review

Background to Review

1. In September 2012, having considered a scrutiny topic submitted by Cllr Barnes on 'Engaging the Disaffected', the Committee agreed to undertake a scrutiny review to look at the issues affecting levels of community engagement across the city, in the following three areas:
 - i. Community Engagement
 - ii. CYC Customer Services
 - iii. Financial Inclusion
2. A Task Group was set up to scope and carry out the work on the review on behalf of the full committee.

Information Gathered

3. Members agreed it would be useful to carry out a comparison between two wards with differing levels of deprivation and reasons for lack of engagement, and agreed to focus their review on Heworth & Rural West wards.
4. Initially, the Task Group considered profile information on the two wards and compared levels of deprivation across those wards identified from the initial findings from the Big York Survey 2012.
5. The Big York Survey 2012 (BYS)
The BYS is a key component in meeting the objective in the council plan of being completely in touch with our communities. The results of the survey also provide key insight into the progress, understanding and public perception of the council's work to deliver the council plan priorities, and are used to help inform decisions around the allocation of resources and budget setting.

6. Due to the low number of responses from the two chosen wards, the Task Group agreed to group those two wards with similar wards, and use findings from those ward groupings to support their work on the review – see agreed ward groups below:

<u>Rural Wards</u>	<u>Highest Deprived Wards</u>
Bishopthorpe	Clifton
Wheldrake	Guildhall
Rural West	Heworth
Skelton, Rawcliffe & Clifton Without	Hull Road
Strensall	Westfield

7. In December 2012, the Task Group looked at the detailed results from the BYS 2012 together with a Cabinet report highlighting the concerns arising e.g.:
- Understanding of Protecting Vulnerable People priority - A higher than anticipated proportion of 'don't know' responses in relation to perceptions of progress on some of the council's priority areas, particularly around protecting vulnerable people.
 - Supply of affordable housing - 46% said that the supply of affordable decent housing needed improving.
 - Jobs Progression Options - one third of people were concerned that people had to commute out of York to work and 45% felt they would personally have to commute out of the York area to develop their career.
8. The Task Group learnt that action was already underway to address those concerns and therefore agreed there was no need for scrutiny to duplicate that work.
9. However, the BYS also showed that in regard to 'Influence on local area', only 29% of people agreed they could influence decisions affecting their local area, compared to 42% who disagreed, with 28% being neutral on the matter. The Task Group were therefore keen to understand how the Council planned to address this, particularly in wards containing Parish Councils, where there are no plans to develop a Community Contract (see paragraphs 23-25 below).
10. As a result on their initial investigation, the Task Group agreed the following review remit:

To identify ways of empowering people and improving community engagement

Objectives:

- a. To improve communications between CYC and Parish Councils
- b. To improve communications in non-Parish Council areas.

i - Community Engagement

11. Community engagement is very important to a healthy political system. The more engaged a community is in how it is governed, the more it is likely to get out of those who govern it.
12. Parish Councils and other local councils i.e. town, village, community or neighbourhood councils, are local authorities in their own right. They generally have a much closer relationship with the community than a Local Authority has. However, parish councillors and ward councillors frequently complain about how difficult it is to get their community involved in their council's business. It is often said, no-one is interested. However, major planning proposals, waste incinerators and such like are usually pretty effective in filling local council meetings with members of the public anxious to know how they might be affected.
13. In York, residents with concerns about social, environmental and economic issues in their area are encouraged to engage with their ward meetings. The Council welcomes suggestions from anyone who lives or works in a ward including young people.
14. Currently, the Communities and Equalities Team (formerly Neighbourhood Management Unit) is working on ways of improving residents' access to information and ways of:
 - Encouraging people to bring forward ideas for their community
 - Fostering a greater understanding of local community issues
 - Getting people involved in their community and in voluntary activity
 - Making sure that what gets done is what the community most wants
 - Helping people see how their council tax is being used
 - Getting involved in local decision making on issues affecting their local area
15. In areas with parish councils, residents are also being helped and encouraged to:
 - Understand how parish business affects them
 - Stand for election as local (parish) councillors
16. Parish Council Engagement
There are 31 Parish Councils in the York area:

Acaster Malbis	Haxby Town Council	Osballdwick
Askham Bryan	Heslington	Rawcliffe
Askham Richard	Hessay	Rufforth with Knapton
Bishopthorpe	Heworth Without	Skelton
Clifton Without	Holtby	Stockton-on-the-Forest
Copmanthorpe	Huntington	Strensall with Towthorpe
Deighton	Kexby	Upper Poppleton
Dunnington	Murton	Wheldrake
Earswick	Naburn	Wigginton
Elvington	Nether Poppleton	
Fulford	New Earswick	

17. CYC maintains a close working relationship with those 31 parish councils through the Yorkshire Local Councils Association. York Branch (YLCA) is a membership organisation and nearly all of the local councils within the City of York area are members of that organisation. In particular CYC liaises with local councils through the Parish Council Liaison Group. The membership of the group is 5 local council representatives selected through the YLCA branch meetings, and an officer from the CYC Communities and Equalities Team. There is an open invite to the CYC portfolio holder to attend liaison group meetings. The purpose of those meetings is to provide regular contact between CYC and local councils to pick up key issues and to ensure ongoing dialogue. The liaison group also has responsibility for the Parish Charter. Those local councils who are not members of the YLCA are contacted directly by the Communities and Equalities team with key messages which are pertinent to all or groups of local councils.
18. In January 2013, the Task Group received a copy of a Charter agreed by CYC and the YLCA on behalf of the 31 local/parish councils in York, which sets out how they will work together. The charter:
- includes a commitment to the principles of democratic local government;
 - acknowledges and recognises that parish and town councils are the grass roots level of local government. By working with local and parish councils CYC aims to act in partnership with local communities, while balancing the needs of the wider locality;
 - recognises that parish councils offer a means of shaping the decisions that affect their communities and of revitalizing or sustaining local communities;
 - recognises the strategic role of CYC and the equitable distribution of services which it has to achieve.

19. In March 2013, members of the Task Group met with the Parish Council Liaison Group to discuss their perceived barriers to improved communication and engagement with the Council. The findings from that meeting are shown at Annex A.
20. The Task Group recognised there are areas of the city not covered by a Parish Council. In many of those areas other organisations are in place, which are fulfilling a similar role. The Task Group noted that Residents Associations (RAs) tend to be formed in non-parish council areas, although at present there are areas of the city which are not covered by either a Parish Council or an RA.
21. Residents Associations
A Residents' Association is a group of local people who meet regularly to talk about things that affect them. They play an important role in building local communities by highlighting community concerns such as the environment and crime, and contributing to the making of policy that delivers services to tenants e.g. housing repairs. Anyone who is a resident within an RA's boundary can join, regardless of whether they are a council tenant or own their house.
22. For an RA to be recognised by the council it has to fulfill certain conditions to ensure it is democratic and representative of its community i.e.:
 - holding an inaugural public meeting when all residents are invited
 - adopting a recognised community group constitution
 - adopting the council's equal opportunities policy
 - holding an annual general meeting to which all members are invited
 - electing a committee
23. The Council offers help through each step of setting up and establishing an RA. They are encouraged to adopt a committee structure, where members are nominated for key posts such as chair, secretary and treasurer. A number of 'ordinary members' can also be elected although this is not always necessary.
24. The Council supports the work of RAs in a number of ways. For example, it produces a bi-monthly magazine 'Working Together' containing news about residents' associations and training opportunities that residents and tenants might benefit from. Some of that training is free or is offered at a subsidised rate. Recognised RAs also receive a support grant to pay for running costs such as meeting room hire, newsletters and stationery, a yearly estate improvement grant and a small training budget to send members on external training courses. The amount of those grants depends on the number of tenants in the RA area.

25. The Council's neighbourhood management officers also help to identify issues in an area and come up with solutions that can be implemented. Councillors, council officers, estate managers and the safer neighbourhood police team will often attend meetings (when invited) to aid RAs in their consideration of those issues.
26. There are currently 20 RAs recognised by the council, each with its own geographically defined area – see list of RAs below:

CYC Funded RAs	Ward
Bell Farm	Heworth
Dodsworth	
Muncaster	
Tang Hall	Heworth & Hull Rd
CAMLOW	Micklegate
Clementhorpe	
Nunnery	
Carr	Acomb
Chapelfields	Westfield
Cornlands & Lowfields	
Foxwood	
Kingsway	
Clifton	Clifton
Copmanthorpe	Rural West
Dringhouses	Dringhouses / Woodthorpe
Dunnington	Derwent, Heslington & Osbaldwick
Fulford	Heslington & Fulford
Groves	Guildhall
Navigation & Walmgate	
Lindsey	Holgate

Private RA's Supported by CYC	Ward
Sovereign Park	Acomb
Chase	Dringhouses/Wood
Badger Hill	Hull Road
Claremont Terrace	Guildhall

27. In regard to the Rural West Villages, the Task Group learnt that volunteers who are willing to get involved and set up RAs in those communities, are being sought.
28. **York Residents' Federation** - This umbrella group for the Residents' Associations (RAs) in York, aims to represent the interests of residents

and to promote their right to be involved in developing policies on housing and other issues. It gives help and support to the RAs listed above, as well as encouraging the establishment of new associations. It also works as a sounding board for service improvements and encourages local initiatives.

29. The Federation holds formal public meetings on the 3rd Thursday of each month, and meets informally on the 1st Thursday of each month. Any resident can attend the formal meetings. Although the meetings are mainly about issues of concern to council tenants, there are often guest speakers talking about more general topics e.g. cold calling zones and the work of the Older Citizens Advocacy York. The Federation also raises issues of common concern across RAs. It helps to identify training needs among RA members and works with other local, regional and national organisations to provide external training and education to meet those needs.
30. The Task Group was informed that overall feedback from Residents Associations in the York area showed a need for improved communication between them and wards councillors. With this in mind, in March 2013 members of the Task Group met with the Residents Association Federation to discuss their perceived barriers to improved communication and engagement with the Council. The findings from that meeting are shown at Annex B.
31. Having met with both the PCLG and RA Federation, the Task Group agreed that in many cases their concerns around engagement and communication with the Council were similar and therefore the Task Group were able to identify a number of draft recommendations which would address a number of the concerns raised by both organisations – see paragraph 55 below.
32. Community Contracts & Action Plans
As Ward Councillors, the Task Group was already aware that Community Contracts were in development in many wards, enabling communities to have a greater understand of their ward, the challenges within the ward, services and facilities, as well as how to actively become involved . Also, that new methods of communication were being trialled, including the use of social media and Your Ward Online.
33. In December 2012 the Task Group considered an example Ward Action Plan (for Heworth) together with information on how it was created and evidence used in support. At the same time, it was confirmed that none of the wards in the rural group (see paragraph 6 above) had an action plan in place. The Head of Neighbourhood Management confirmed she had met with the parish councils in those wards, to learn how they were currently

engaging with their community on issues within their parish, and to encourage the introduction of action plans. However the general consensus of Parish Councils was that they already had a good understanding of the challenges within their parishes, and therefore could see no benefit to producing an action plan. The Task Group acknowledged their view.

34. However, the Task Group recognised the benefit of improving community involvement in ward action planning and service monitoring, and agreed that over time it could lead to an increase in the number of residents who felt they could influence decisions in their local area, thereby improving the figures in the BYS findings shown in paragraph 9 above.

35. Ward Budgets

At a national level, the Coalition Government's promotion of the "Big Society" idea is leading them to take an interest in many aspects of local activism, local self help and community engagement and so there is a strong governmental interest in participatory budgeting, which York has a successful track record in.

36. Each year the wards in York are given a budget to fund initiatives and projects which will support their ward priorities and lead to improvements in their local area. In 2012-13, to make sure that budget made a real difference in the wards, CYC launched an online survey for residents to identify their ward concerns. This was also made available through community builds in a hard copy format. This together with statistics and feedback from service providers will help shape ward priorities for their ward for 2013-14.

37. The Task Group queried whether all Parish Councils and Residents Associations had a clear understanding of how Ward processes worked within their ward, in relation to setting ward priorities, working collectively on the community contract and identifying relevant resources.

38. Ward Team Meetings

The Task Group learnt that the Communities and Equalities Team was currently developing a number of documents to support Councillors in their ward team meetings e.g.:

- A generic list of interested parties, from which Ward Councillors could tailor their invitees to a meeting based on the issues to be discussed. The list should include all the appropriate individuals/organisations to support ward councillors in their consideration of the issues around the priorities they have set as part of their ward action plan, including

representatives from any local Parish Councils and Residents Associations where they exist within the ward

- An information sheet on each ward and its Ward Councillors for new attendees/interested parties at ward team meetings.

39. Overall, the Task Group recognised that across all wards, Parish Councils, Residents Associations, and other local bodies such as Neighbourhood Watch Groups, Gardening Clubs, Planning Panels etc (any organisations that bring together groups of residents), had much to offer in the way of community liaison. And, that they were a source of local information that could be better utilised to inform discussions around Community Contracts and local priorities etc. They therefore agreed it would be useful for representatives from those bodies to participate in ward team meetings and/or ward meetings to contribute to those discussions.

ii – CYC Customer Services

40. CYC Customer Contact Centre

To ensure a fair comparison of the information provided in support of this review, the same ward groupings shown in paragraph 6 above were used when considering statistical information from CYC's Contact Centre.

41. In January 2013 the Task Group received information on the number and type of issues being reported via the Contact Centre, showing the level of community engagement across the relevant wards during 2012 – see Annex C. They recognised the need for the Contact Centre to be able to access up to date information on council services to allow them to respond accurately and thoroughly to enquiries at first contact stage.

42. Having considered the channels used and the number of CRM interactions in 2012, the Task Group queried the use of fax as a first point of contact. They learnt that residents often fax their documents in support of their benefit claims. The majority of the fax interactions reported were for CIS Checks (73%) and change of circumstances (24%). In many cases, a resident may call first but then be asked to fax their documents, which creates 2 contacts. The Contact Centre do not promote that access channel as a first point of contact choice, however they do need to keep it especially as some of the older people in the deaf community still prefer to use that method over mini-com or Type-talk.

43. Overall, the Task Group were pleased to note that the Contact Centre was working well. However, in regard to the Council's website, the Task Group recognised the need to increase the options for self serve, and encourage more residents to register for online accounts. They agreed the look and

feel of the council's website needed improving and suggested lessons could be learnt from the Family Information Service website.

44. CYC Community Services

The Task Group were interested to learn whether residents ever seek information/advice on council services via other routes (other than the Customer Contact Centre). In particular, they questioned whether users of the following mobile community services ever sought information on other council services:

45. URBIE (CYC mobile youth club for young people) - The Task Group learnt that information received from ward team meetings, PCSO's, local members of the community and other CYC Services was being used to determine the group(s) targeted by URBIE.

46. In the north of the city, the URBIE bus goes out three times a week:

- Tuesday 4.00pm till 6.30pm at Orchard Park. It then moves onto Strensall from 6.30pm until 9.00pm
- Wednesday 6.00pm – Haxby/Wigginton (no end time as yet due to being a new session)
- Thursday 6.30pm – Tang Hall (no end time as yet due to being a new session)

47. In the south of the city, the URBIE bus is currently limited due to staffing issues, and only goes out twice a week (Thursday 4:00- 6:00pm and 7:00- 9:00pm). The early session can vary in where it goes but the later session goes into Foxwood.

48. URBIE officers confirmed they had received no specific requests for specific council services such as housing or benefits. However during general conversations with young people, they often raised awareness of the issues of housing and benefit for them, and had highlighted the role of Castlegate in giving advice, and the use of websites such as CYC and the young people's survival guide.

49. Mobile Library Services - The Task Group received information on the mobile library service which provides a range of books for adults and children, including large print books, audio books and language courses. Many of the same services offered through local libraries are also offered through the mobile library service, such as access to community information and children's activities e.g. Summer Reading Challenge. The vehicle also has disabled access. Timetables for each ward indicating where and when the mobile library is in the area, can be accessed via the council's website – see:

<http://www.york.gov.uk/info/200428/libraries-location-and-opening-hours/475/libraries-location-and-opening-hours/14>

50. Mobile Library Service officers confirmed they often received a range of enquires e.g.:
- Health Issues e.g. *“My doctor says I need this operation do you have any info about the condition and being in hospital? Can I use your wifi/PCs to book the time?”*
 - Job Issues e.g. *“Can I look at the Press for jobs? / How do I apply for a job online? / Can I learn more about this company I have an interview with? / I need to update my CV”*
 - Financial Issues e.g. how to budget, latest stocks and shares, ‘Which’ magazine, courses to learn how to manage budgets
 - Council Services e.g. *“How do I report a broken lamp post?/ How do I get a council meeting agenda/minutes?”* Or requests for information on planning applications / councillors / schools / community asset transfer / right to challenge / CYC website access / payments online etc
 - National Govt Information e.g. VAT online, passport and driving licence applications etc
 - Community Information e.g. on forthcoming events, reading groups, focus for community activity, how to volunteer etc
51. Finally, the Task Group received feedback from the council’s mobile toy library service. They learnt there had been no requests for other council services via the service, which visits communities in and around York. The purpose built bus is used by childminders, playgroups, nurseries and other groups that involve children. It offers a range of good quality toys, books and play equipment (age range from 0 to 5 years), and advice and information on play and toys. The Toy Bus visits areas around the city and surrounding area - see timetable on the council’s website:
<http://www.yorkchildrenscentres.org.uk/toybus>

iii – Financial Inclusion

52. In regard to the introduction of Universal Credits, the Task Group were pleased to note the pro-active approach being taken by CYC’s Contact Centre to contact residents ahead of those changes taking affect, to help them understand its affect on the benefits they would receive in the future. The Contact Centre hoped it would reduce the number of residents who

were unaware of the forthcoming changes and allow them to direct affected residents to the appropriate support and guidance.

53. The Task Group also received information on a recent community based project offering financial support to residents in the Heworth Ward area:

York Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) – Prosperous Communities Project

The aims of the project was to provide the advice people need for the problems they face and to improve the policies and practices that affect people's lives. The mission was to empower clients by giving them the information they needed, so they could decide how to resolve their own problems.

The project (funded through Community York Grant -CYC voluntary sector funding)_created an Advice Hub at Tang Hall Community Centre to pilot an innovative, multi-disciplinary approach to providing the advice residents need, under one roof. Led by CAB but with workers from Housing Options, North Yorkshire Credit Union, Future Prospects and an experienced CAB adviser, the project provided advice on claiming in and out of work benefits, prepared residents to meet the challenges and opportunities of Universal Credits, helped resolve debt problems and provided money management advice including budgeting, financial planning and making informed decisions.

Tang Hall Community Centre was chosen as the venue for the drop-in sessions, as it complimented plans to establish a Health and Wellbeing Centre on the site with York Mind, and a whole series of sport and social activities located at the Centre.

54. The Task Group were pleased to learn that since the Hub started in September 2012, there had been 11 x 2.5hr sessions and a total of 33 clients had been seen and assisted with their problems. They also acknowledged the success of the Hub, which up to December 2012 had identified and assisted with the claiming of £21,043.36 of previously unclaimed benefits, and helped clients to deal with £42,062.19 worth of personal debt. The Task Group questioned whether there would be opportunities in the future to extend the project to cover other areas in the city, and it was confirmed that Community York Grant would be available again in the next financial year.

Draft Review Recommendations

55. To date the following draft recommendations have been suggested:

- i. Resident Association meeting dates to be included in the Council's Corporate Calendar, in the same way that Parish Council meeting dates are.
- ii. Corporate Calendar to include both formal and informal ward committee meeting dates
- iii. Consideration to be given to introducing Area Forum pages on the council website, to provide links to all relevant information pertaining to each ward in order to assist interested parties.
- iv. Adjoining Parish Councils to be informed of planning applications as they are often affected
- v. All Council service providers to be instructed to consider use of Parish Council/Resident Association notice boards and newsletters to communicate council information relevant to the area
- vi. The importance of the relationship with Parish Councils and Residents Associations should be included in new councillor induction programmes.
- vii. Ward Cllrs to be encouraged to attend more Parish Council and Resident Association meetings
- viii. Ward Councillors to receive the minutes from Parish Council and Resident Association meetings
- ix. In regard to council consultation, more time should be allowed to enable Parish Councils and Residents Associations to participate, as consultation needs to go to a meeting for discussion, not just to individuals.
- x. The council to identify ways of improving the feedback it gives on consultation responses
- xi. Council to identify ways of improving its notification of changes to services e.g. Christmas recycling arrangements
- xii. Council documents should be checked for jargon i.e. better use of Plain English

Concluding the Work on this Review

56. The Communities & Equalities team have drafted some good practice guidance/information for supporting neighbourhood working, which all Members are due to receive as part of a support pack. The pack will include a Ward Team fact sheet, a list of potential ward team members, Advertising ward meetings checklist and a menu of ideas for ward engagement (see Annex D).
57. In addition, as part of this review the Task Group have already acknowledged the importance of a good working relationship between ward committee members and the need for an understanding of each party's role, in order to manage expectations. To help improve that

working relationship, it is suggested that the Scrutiny Task Group may like to recommend the introduction of a 'Statement of Intent' setting out some principals for working together which all ward team members could be encouraged to sign up to. A draft statement of intent is provided at Annex E for the Task Group's consideration.

58. At the meeting, a map will also be provided identifying the gaps across the city where no Parish Council or Resident Association currently exists. It may be that some of these areas may be covered by a private resident association or some other type of community group that the Council could or already does liaise with, to disseminate information.
59. Finally, Communications officers will be attending the meeting to discuss the issues previously identified by the Task Group in relation to CYC consultation and consultation feedback.

Options

60. Members may:
 - Identify what if any further information is required to conclude the work on this review
 - Agree revisions and/or additions to this report to form the draft final report for the review
 - Agree the draft recommendations shown in paragraph 55 above
 - Identify any additional draft recommendations arising from this review outside of those shown above

Implications

61. Implications associated with the recommendations arising from this review will be identified and included here in this report, once the Task Group have agreed the recommendations they wish to propose. Corporate & Scrutiny Management Committee (CSMC) will consider the implications associated with the draft recommendations when the review final report is presented to them for their consideration at their meeting on 13 May 2013. The final report arising for this review is scheduled for presentation to Cabinet on 4 June 2013.

Council Plan 2012-15

62. A core capability of the Council Plan is for the Council to be completely in touch with its communities. To achieve this, and be a city of active and self reliant communities, the Council is introducing new ways for residents to interact with the Council and improving communications. The aim of

this review is to identify ways of optimising that communication and improving levels of engagement with local communities across both rural and suburban areas of the city.

Risk Management

63. Without full and proper engagement of local communities across the city, there is a risk that the services provided by the Council will not fully reflect the needs of those communities. Any improvement to ways of engaging with residents identified as a result this review will assist in mitigating that risk.

Recommendations

64. Members are recommended to agree:
- i) Any changes required to this report and its annexes
 - ii) The draft recommendations arising from the review

Reason: To form the final report arising from this review for the consideration of CSMC at their meeting on 13 May 2013.

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Wards Affected:

All

Annexes:

Annex A – Findings from meeting with Parish Councils

Annex B – Findings from meeting with Residents Association Federation

Annex C – Statistical Data from Customer Contact Centre for 2012

Annex D – Information/Fact Sheets on Ward Team & their meetings

Annex E – Draft Statement of Intent