

Report of the Assistant Director of Communities and Equalities

An Overview of Resident Involvement

Summary

1. The report is produced in response to the Resident Involvement Feasibility Report considered by this committee on the 7th November 2018. This report summarises activities taking place across the council to promote resident involvement, allowing the Committee to make a decision as to whether to recommend this area, or a subset of the area, to be a topic for a review for a future Committee in the new municipal year.

Background

2. A topic request was made to the Children, Education and Communities Policy and Scrutiny committee relating to tenant engagement, following the dissolution of York Residents' Federation. This was a Federation of Residents Associations, which represented the views of residents to the council. A feasibility report was considered regarding this topic request. The committee asked for an informational report to be provided which surveyed activities in this area. It was requested that this report cover both tenant engagement and wider resident engagement activities.

Consultation

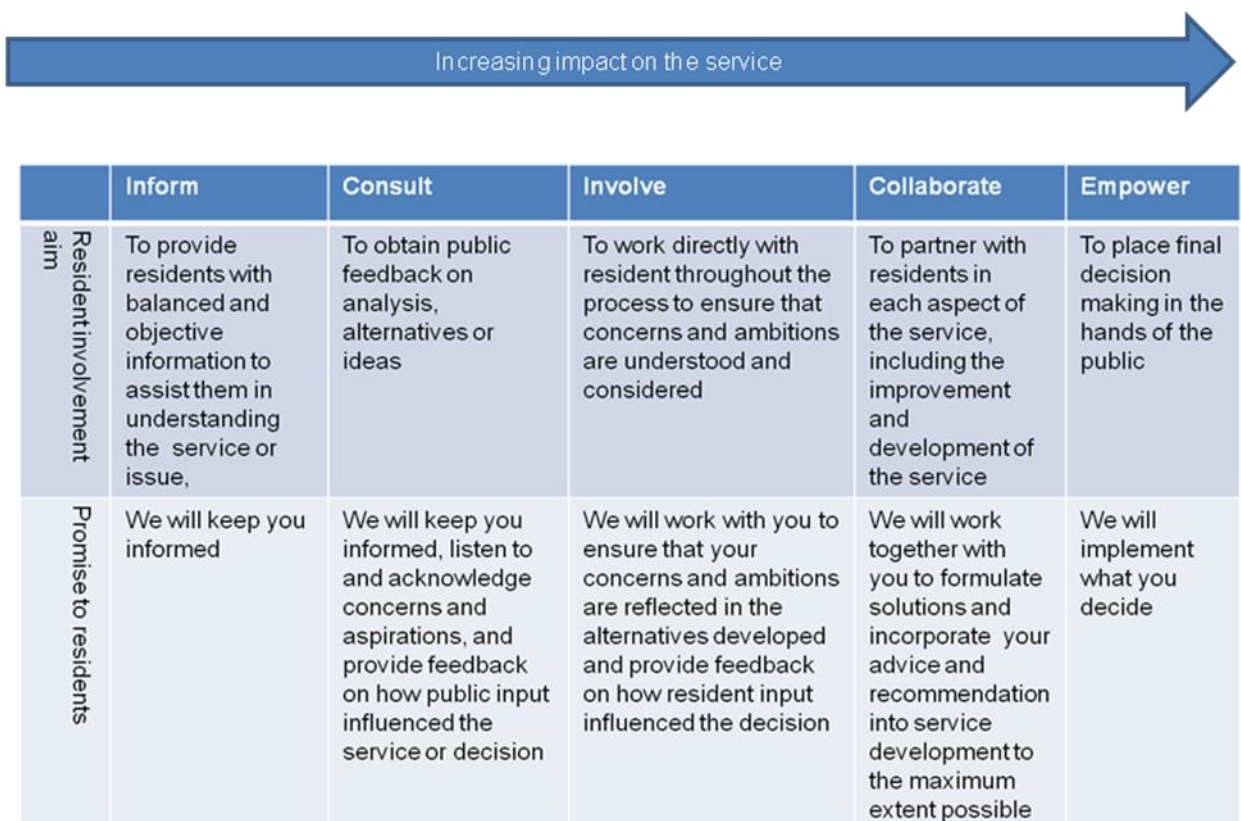
3. This report was written in consultation with officers within the Housing Department and Communities and Equalities team. The Tenant Scrutiny Panel and Service Inspector were also consulted and approved the content of the report

Analysis

Resident engagement – the national picture

4. The involvement of residents in decision-making has changed profoundly in recent years due to developments in information technology. Technology has increased the availability of public sector data, increased the reach of consultations and allowed for speedy communication between residents and decision-makers. The cost of organising and participating in decision-making has been lowered, and residents can cohere more easily around particular issues.
5. There is increasing interest in deliberative decision-making, with the Office of Civil Society launching an Innovation in Democracy Programme which will fund local authorities to open up a policy decision to citizen deliberation through a Citizens' Assembly process, complemented by online civil technology tool to extend the reach, transparency and accountability of the process.
6. The diagram below shows a spectrum of resident involvement. Resident involvement can range from providing information to residents on the service they receive, to placing decision-making on service development into the hands of residents.

Figure 1 Resident Involvement Spectrum



Resident engagement – the local picture

7. Resident engagement in council processes takes many forms, with activities ranging from those at the 'informing' end of the spectrum in Figure 1 to the 'empowering' end. Traditional and social media is used to communicate with residents. Consultations are carried out ahead of decision making and many services involve users in design of the service.
8. Ward committee structures allow for involvement of residents in local decision-making and participation in ward budget decision-making. Following declines in the numbers of residents attending ward committees, a number of wards have experimented with innovative ways of engaging with residents, including holding a ward committee in a residential care home, at a school and at a library. This allowed for individuals unable or unwilling to attend evening meetings to participate in ward activities.
9. A number of schemes are run which respond to residents' suggestions in relation to their local areas. The Ward Highways scheme, for example, involves residents suggesting areas where they wish to see improvement to local highways. This allows issues to be addressed which benefit the quality of life of residents, but which may not be priorities using the risk based approach of the main highways capital programme. For example a project recently completed saw the re-surfacing of the pavement on Acomb Front Street so that people using wheelchairs and mobility scooters could access local shops.
10. An innovative approach was taken to consultation on the MyCastle Gateway proposals. The aim of the consultation was to hold open conversations with everyone who used the space and to develop an active and sustained process which would be towards the right hand end of the Resident Involvement Spectrum shown at Figure 1. The consultation successfully engaged residents, those working in the areas and visitors in thinking creatively about how the area could be developed. The approach will continue to be employed as plans for the area develop.
11. Work is being done to employ this engagement approach in other areas of the council's work. The Communities and Equalities team has initiated an open conversation with residents on loneliness in the city, which aims to inform the work of the Public Health team.

12. New approaches to consultation which adopt an approach of opening up a broad conversation with residents present challenges. The approach requires planning, with sufficient time factored in to projects for engagement. Members of staff are required who have the skills to engage residents. Additionally, flexibility in service planning is required so that projects can respond to the expressed views of residents.

Tenant engagement – the national picture

13. In August 2018 a green paper “A new deal for social housing” was published, aiming to rebalance the relationship between tenants and landlords. The green paper addresses a wide number of issues relating to social housing, including ensuring homes are safe and decent, effective regulation of complaints, empowerment of residents and strengthening the regulator, tackling stigma and celebrating thriving communities as well as expanding supply and support home ownership.

Tenant engagement – the local picture

14. At a local level there are a number of well-established methods for engaging tenants in the management of their properties and estates, which range from informational to active involvement of tenants in the development of the housing service.
15. Tenant engagement activities include:
 - The *Streets Ahead* magazine which provide important information to tenants
 - The Tenant Scrutiny Panel, which meets monthly to examine and challenge policy and planning of services by the housing department, make suggestions for improvements and monitoring changes agreed with the department.
 - The Service Inspectors who meet monthly to monitor satisfaction levels, and examine housing services at the point of delivery. They work closely with officers to improve the service delivered to tenants.
 - Residents Associations, which are supported by the housing department in a variety of ways, including providing training and support with governance and finance issues. Grants are also provided for constituted residents associations (with Council properties within their area of benefit) to support the running of the association.
 - A twice yearly Leaseholder Forum

- The Leaseholder Scrutiny Panel which meets monthly and runs on the same basis as the Tenant Scrutiny Panel with a focus on Leasehold specific issues
- Regular focus groups which gather feedback in respect of specific service areas to ensure improvements take tenants concerns into account and build on good service.
- The New Tenant Focus Group which is held every two months. Every new tenant is invited to a focus group within four months of moving into their new home.
- The new Tenant Equalities Panel which has been formed following a request from a tenant. This Panel currently meets every 6 weeks and will undertake work to ensure all housing policies and procedures ensure all tenants have the same opportunities
- The Tenant Complaints Panel is a designated person registered with the Ombudsman. The panel meets every 6 weeks to ensure they are up to date with new policies and procedures, meeting more regularly when a tenant takes their complaint to them.
- The Annual Tenant Satisfaction Survey gathers the views of tenants. This provides data which is used for the Tenant and Leaseholder Annual Report and is also used for service planning and benchmarking.

16. In recent years, the number of Resident Associations within the city has declined. At the same time an increasing number of tenants are seeking to interact with the housing department on social media. In response, a new Housing Facebook page has been launched which is used in addition to Council Facebook and Twitter feeds to convey information to tenants.

17. Many estates and areas also have resident-led Facebook pages and use social media to communicate with other residents.

Options

18. There are many different activities being undertaken within the council to promote community and tenant engagement. These activities range from conveying useful information to developing services in partnership with communities and tenants.

19. Members may wish to recommend a future Scrutiny Committee considers one or all of the areas outlined in the overview report.

Council Plan

20. Work on resident and tenant engagement is central to delivering the third goal of the Council Plan 2015-19 'A Council that Listens to Residents'.

21. Implications

- **Financial** There are no financial implications
- **Human Resources (HR)** There are no HR implications
- **Equalities** There are no equalities implications
- **Legal** There are no legal implications
- **Crime and Disorder** There are no crime and disorder implications
- **Information Technology (IT)** There are no IT implications
- **Property** There are no property implications
- **Other**

Risk Management

22. There are no known risks.

Recommendations

23. It is recommended that Members consider the contents of this Overview Report, and consider recommending areas for future work by the Scrutiny Committee.

Reason: To allow the Committee to make a decision as to whether to recommend this area, or a subset of the area, to be a topic for a review for a future Committee in the new municipal year.

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Report Approved

Date 18/02/19

All

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