

Report of the Leader and Cabinet Member for Health and Community Engagement

**Community Conversations: Next Steps**

**Summary**

1. This report updates Cabinet on the Community Conversations held to date and asks Cabinet to agree the next steps in developing the process.

**Background**

2. Community Conversations are part of the Council's process to build stronger communities by introducing new ways for residents and communities to interact with the Council, improving the quality of services, increasing skills in consultation and engagement, using resources wisely, and encouraging greater participation in decision making.
3. We expect to see York as a city where communities feel empowered resulting in:
  - increased confidence and skills among local people
  - higher numbers of people volunteering in their communities
  - more satisfaction with quality of life in a local neighbourhood
  - a boost in local democratic participation
4. To be successful, every team within the council must fully embrace the new approach. This instinctively puts the resident first, increasing customer consultation and engagement throughout the process, using the knowledge gained to co-design and deliver the most effective services to monitor achievement of the outcomes identified.
5. Community Conversation events are taking place in each ward across the city during 2014. The Communities and Equalities team

have taken the lead in organising each event and are working with the Marketing and Communications team to promote them.

Each event is split into two parts: one half is in a 'market place' style that allows local community groups and services to showcase their activity alongside a Councillor Café that enables residents to talk directly with their local councillors, the Leader of the Council and a Cabinet Member; the second half is dedicated to a 'Question Time' style debate whereby residents can submit questions in advance, or direct to the Leader of the Council, a Cabinet Member and local councillors. The Question Time debate is generally chaired by someone external to the council unless this has not been possible in which case a council officer has stepped into the role.

6. Eight Community Conversation events have taken place so far, in Haxby & Wigginton, Westfield, Hull Road, Clifton, Heworth Without and Rural West, Guildhall and Acomb wards. The events have been attended by 207 residents in total with a wide range of community groups and services being showcased, e.g. a locally run community centre, Timebank, the Sports and Active Leisure team, local volunteering opportunities, Smarter York, Tour de France, Big Local, church groups and residents' associations.
7. During the eight events a wide range of important issues have been raised, for example, concerning the local plan, regeneration, infrastructure and development, local facilities including for young people.
8. A number of common questions / issues have arisen at the events including: the distinction between capital and revenue spending and the constraints placed on the council; the next steps following the Lendal Bridge pilot; and arrangements for the Tour de France in York.
9. Written responses to all the questions raised have been posted on the Council's website together with responses to the common questions and issues through video responses from the Leader.

### **Successes**

10. Feedback from the events, both anecdotal and written has been positive with residents welcoming the opportunity to put the Leader on the spot and particularly appreciating the opportunity to engage in lively debate on issues that are important to them. They appear to welcome the transparent nature of the process and the

opportunity to address issues in an open and non partisan way. Examples of written feedback are:

- Opportunity to network and inform council of opportunities to collaborate
- Found out quite a bit of news
- The speakers and exhibitors were very approachable and helpful
- Local organisations stalls / info. Chance to question the council Leader
- Congratulations! A really good idea to hold a meeting like this. I thought the councillors listened to the questions and answered them well given the constraints on funding etc. Far better performance than national politicians!!

11. Examples of ways suggested to improve future events were:

- Start later – too early for evening meal
- To extend the speakers and exhibitors at the next one
- Longer Question/Answer session. Wider variety of questions.
- Could have been publicised better
- Better use of microphone. Lot of speakers, difficult to hear.

12. As well as providing factual answers to questions the events have enabled the Leader and local members and officers to begin to address practical issues. For example:

- Haxby and Wigginton ward team had picked up a long-standing issue of problem parking in the ward. This issue was escalated at the Community Conversation event, and subsequently the necessary people have come together quickly to find a solution.
- At Clifton Community Conversation, the event enabled different groups and services to come together and a local primary school came forward as wanting to work with the ward team to host community based events in the Autumn term. Subsequently discussion has taken place between the school and officers and the school is likely to become a key partner on the ward team.
- At Westfield Community Conversation discussion took place around how services for young people could be delivered in the future. Discussions have since began with Chapelfields Residents' Association and Gateway Church about how they can

work together to deliver youth work locally in Sanderson Court Community House.

### **Learning points**

13. Key learning points from the events so far are:

- **Advertising:** In addition to the normal press release, Your Ward, and social media coverage, Community Conversation events have been advertised through leaflets and posters distributed across the area including to local shops, to each child in local schools, and through notice boards. We have also engaged with partners to encourage them to promote events through their newsletters and other publications, and we have engaged residents in the street to raise awareness. For future events we will continue to exploit local contacts to further increase the channels of communication and to look to new opportunities as they come on stream, e.g. Community TV.
- **Resident Forums:** Learning from the Community Conversation events will also be used to shape the future of Resident Forums benefitting from the more flexible, less formalised way of working with residents to make them more resident and community focused, more responsive and interactive.
- **Keeping residents informed:** Following on from the debate that occurs at the event we need to:
  - i. Update residents who were not able to attend
  - ii. Let residents know what has happened as a result of the debate

At the moment this is being handled by placing information on the Council's website; however, there is potential for a more sophisticated approach using the same channels as will be used to promote the events. Furthermore, rather than just providing one-off answers to questions, we need to provide opportunities for interested residents and groups to get involved in partnership with the Council on an ongoing basis.

The learning on this will be fed into the development of corporate consultation and engagement standards as part of the Council's transformation programme.

- **Ward members:** For the approach to work at its best ward members need to be engaged in promotion of the event, in

debate, and in feedback to residents. Critically, ward members need to take the issues raised on to their Resident Forums and Ward Team meetings. The identification of the local leadership skills required by members to collaborate effectively with local residents and community groups will form part of the Council's transformation programme.

- **Wider collaboration:** Similarly, the collaboration of local interest and community groups is needed. We need to continue to raise awareness of how the voluntary sector and other organisations can get involved in decision-making and in multi-agency discussions to solve local problems, notably the ward teams.

### **Next Steps**

14. It is proposed that the outcomes of each Community Conversation event continues to be captured and shared as described above and brought to Cabinet for consideration.
15. See Annex for dates of future meetings.

### **Recommendations**

16. Cabinet are asked to:
  - Note the feedback received from the events held so far
  - Agree to receive feedback from future events
  - Note the learning points outlined in the report and agree the next steps as suggested to refine the process

Reason: To increase consultation and engagement to encourage greater resident participation in decision making to build strong communities.

## Contact Details

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<b>Report Approved</b> ✓ <b>Date:</b> 5 June, 2014		
<b>Specialist Implications Officer(s)</b> None		
<b>Wards Affected:</b> List wards or tick box to indicate all	<b>All</b>	✓

**For further information please contact the author of the report**

### Background Papers:

Document/reports/cabinet/community conversations.docx

### Annexes:

Annex 1: Dates of future meetings