

Report to Overview and Scrutiny Committee – 17 October 2018

Public Involvement Panel Final Report

Report of the Chairman of the Panel, Cllr Dorothy Baverstock
(Portfolio: Leader of the Council)

Recommended:

That the proposed action plan (annex 1) emanating from the Public Involvement Review is endorsed ready for onward submission to Cabinet.

SUMMARY:

- A Panel appointed by Overview and Scrutiny Committee (OSCOM) undertook a review into public involvement, which reflected on the progress the Council has made over recent years to engage and involve communities and the public more effectively in informing decision making. This report sets out how the review findings will be put into practice as part of the Council's approach to strengthening public involvement.

1 Introduction

- 1.1 In autumn 2017, OSCOM appointed a panel to undertake a review of public involvement. The Panel explored how the Council could build upon its strong track record of engaging communities and involving the public in the most effective way.
- 1.2 The Panel was chaired by Cllr Dorothy Baverstock and also included Cllr C. Dowden, Cllr Thom, Cllr Neal and Cllr Boulton. As a result of the review, the Panel sought to evaluate the approach taken by the Council, and identify future areas for further development.
- 1.3 OSCOM considered the findings from the panel at its meeting on 21 March 2018. It was agreed that the proposals that formed the report would be developed further by the Member and Community Development working group which is chaired by the Leader of the Council and then be reported back to the committee for onward submission to Cabinet.
- 1.4 This report sets out how the review findings will be put into practice as part of the Council's approach to strengthening public involvement.

2 Background

- 2.1 The Panel undertook the review from the premise that public involvement forms an implicit part of the work of a “community councillor”. The scope of the review therefore focused on how councillors can more effectively engage with all parts of their community to inform decision making.
- 2.2 The Panel considered four areas namely:
- (a) A place-based approach to public involvement.
 - (b) The changing role of the Councillor as an advocate and facilitator within communities and communicating and involving the public through targeted approaches to ensure the widest range of views are heard.
 - (c) The changing context for councillors resulting from the emerging digital landscape and the role it can play in engaging the public and the new demands and opportunities this brings with it.
 - (d) Future skills required for councillors.
- 2.3 At its meeting on 21 March 2018, OSCOM resolved that the proposals contained within the report be referred to the Member and Community Development working group for further development. This was done on the basis that a lot of what was contained within the proposals falls within the scope and remit of the working group.
- 2.4 The Member and Community Development working group is chaired by the Leader of the Council and includes Cllr C. Dowden who was also member of the panel. Its role is to develop the Council’s approach to member development, community engagement and place-based working.

3 Review of proposals identified by the panel

- 3.1 The Member and Community Development working group reviewed the proposals emanating from the review and sought to explore how they could be practically implemented. The working group, which is chaired by the Leader of the Council, commended and endorsed the work of the panel. They felt that the proposals that had been put forward would play an important role in further strengthening the Council’s approach to public involvement.
- 3.2 As a result, a draft action plan has been prepared (annex 1) which has developed the proposals into specific areas of action. If endorsed by OSCOM and Cabinet, the actions will form a part of the onward work programme for the Member and Community Development working group.

4 Corporate Objectives and Priorities

- 4.1 Engaging with and involving the public forms an important part of the evidence-base that councillors and the council’s services use to shape the Corporate Plan and its delivery through the Corporate Action Plan. The review and the subsequent actions that have been developed relate to all four corporate priorities.
- 4.2 Priority 4 which is about investing in a great place to “*Contribute and be part of a strong community*”, places a focus on local democracy to ensure all views are heard by strengthening the knowledge and skills of local councillors to

enable them to work with communities on the things that matter most to residents. The actions identified will play an important part in the onward development of the Community Councillor role.

5 Consultations/Communications

- 5.1 The Panel engaged with a variety of stakeholders through the Council's involvement in the national Voice of the Councillor events, considered case studies based on the experiences of councillors within the borough and used feedback gathered as part of the OSCOM roundtable with the Leader focusing on the engagement of the public in the development of the next Corporate Plan.

6 Resource Implications

- 6.1 None directly arising from this report.

7 Legal Implications

- 7.1 None directly arising from this report.

8 Equality Issues

- 8.1 None arising directly from this report.

9 Other Issues

- 9.1 Wards/Communities Affected – All

10 Conclusion

- 10.1 The Public Involvement Panel identified a number of proposals which could help the Council continue to strengthen its approach to public involvement. The Member and Community Development Working Group has endorsed these proposals and developed an action plan for how they can be implemented in a practical way. Subject to OSCOM endorsing the proposed actions the plan will then be ready for onward submission to Cabinet.

<u>Background Papers (Local Government Act 1972 Section 100D)</u>			
<u>Confidentiality</u> It is considered that this report does not contain exempt information within the meaning of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, as amended, and can be made public.			
No of Annexes:	1		
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