

Report of the Strategic Director – Environment and Sport to the meeting of the Keighley Area Committee to be held on 22 April 2015

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Subject:

Community Engagement Review

Summary statement:

This report sets out proposals for ways in which Keighley Area Co-ordinator's Office can develop community engagement, including Neighbourhood Forums, across the Keighley Area.

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Portfolio:

Safer & Stronger Communities

Overview and Scrutiny Area:

Corporate

1. SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report sets out proposals for ways in which Keighley Area Co-ordinator's Office can develop community engagement, including Neighbourhood Forums, across the Keighley Area.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 At its meeting held on 23 October 2014 Keighley Area Committee considered a report on Neighbourhood Forums in Keighley Area held during February to June 2014. During the discussion of that report a number of concerns were raised by Members:
- Falling attendance
 - Ageing attendees
 - The same people attend and raise the same issues every time
 - There are now more ways to raise issues/request action from Council services (e.g. Web-based forms and the Council App)
 - More people are engaging with each other, with community issues and with public services through digital means, including social media, than by going to meetings
- 2.2 At that meeting Keighley Area Committee resolved:
That the Area Co-ordinator be requested to review the Neighbourhood Forum/public engagement process, taking account of the views of Members that alternative methods are required to increase participation and attendance and provide a future report on that issue once the review is completed.
- 2.3 Following discussions with Members and officers the Area Co-ordinator is proposing three Options for the future development of community engagement activities and opportunities across the Keighley Area for the Area Committee to consider. These are set out in Paragraph 9 below.
- 2.4 For the purposes of planning and delivering Neighbourhood Forums in the Keighley Area the Area is currently divided up into the following 17 neighbourhoods: Ilkley, Addingham, Silsden, Steeton with Eastburn, Oakworth, Haworth, Crossroads and Stanbury, Oxenhope, Laycock, Guardhouse and Braithwaite, Fell Lane and Exley Head, Bracken Bank and Ingrow, Beechcliffe and Utleigh, Highfield, Lawkholme, Knowle Park, Hainworth and Thwaites, Riddlesdon and Stockbridge, and Morton and Sandbeds.
- 2.5 Scheduled Neighbourhood Forums are organised in two 'rounds': September – December and March – July (taking into account the requirement to not hold public meetings in the run up to Council elections). Usually a Forum is held in each of the neighbourhoods described above (with the exception of Ilkley Ward where Neighbourhood Forums are not currently held) in each 'round' and that the venues are rotated so as to take account of the different sub-neighbourhoods. This makes a total of 32 Forums being held in each 11 month block (September – July).
- 2.6 Forums do not have to be organised in this way and, across the District they have taken many different forms. One approach is to target them at particular sections of the community in a neighbourhood. For example, a Forum for older people during the day focussing on health and social care issues, a Forum for young people held at lunchtime in a school focussing on the provision of youth services, or a Forum for parents with

young children held at a Children's Centre focusing on play and environmental issues.

- 2.7 Some Areas (Bradford South and West) have moved to Ward Forums which are held once per year in each Ward and are focused on discussing Ward Plan priorities and actions.

3. OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

- 3.1 Community engagement is a major part of a Ward Officer's role. They organise and chair Neighbourhood Forums, have constant contact with voluntary and community groups and with individual residents. Any proposed changes to the way the Area Office delivers community engagement needs to take account of the increased pressures on Ward Officers' time due to their number being reduced in recent years from 5 to 3, meaning that each Ward Officer now covers two Wards.
- 3.2 Community engagement is also carried out by other Council officers including Council Wardens, Youth Workers, Street Cleansing staff and by partner organisations including the Police, Incommunities, Community Development workers and Voluntary and Community Sector organisations. The Area Office has an important role to play in developing a more co-ordinated and joined-up approach to community engagement by all these agencies and staff.
- 3.3 Community engagement is also a key role of District Ward Members who are in constant communication with residents, arrange public meetings, hold Surgeries, respond to queries and complaints and receive feedback on Council and other services.
- 3.4 The rising use of the internet and Social Media (e.g. Facebook and Twitter) as a means of communication has undoubtedly affected the willingness and need of residents to attend public meetings in order to gain information and report issues and concerns.

4. FINANCIAL AND RESOURCE APPRAISAL

- 4.1 Neighbourhood Forums and other community engagement activities are provided within existing financial resources.

5. RISK MANAGEMENT AND GOVERNANCE ISSUES

No significant risks.

6. LEGAL APPRAISAL

- 7.1 There are no legal implications for Bradford Council arising from this report.

7. OTHER IMPLICATIONS

7.1 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY

Efforts are made to find ways to make sure that Neighbourhood Forums and other community engagement activities are accessible to all sections of the community.

7.2 SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS

Public consultation and involvement in decision-making leads to more sustainable solutions to local issues.

7.3 GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS IMPACTS

No significant impacts.

7.4 COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

Crime and community safety issues are discussed frequently at Neighbourhood Forums which are attended by representatives from West Yorkshire Police.

7.5 HUMAN RIGHTS ACT

There are no Human Rights Act implications arising from this report.

7.6 TRADE UNION

There are no trade union implications arising from this report.

7.7 WARD IMPLICATIONS

The information in this report is relevant to all Wards in Keighley Area.

8. NOT FOR PUBLICATION DOCUMENTS

None.

9. OPTIONS

9.1 Option 1

The current arrangement of 32 Neighbourhood Forums is replaced by holding six Ward Forums. One Ward Forum would be held per year in each Ward.

Advantages

- Brings everyone together from across the Ward to consult on common issues
- Provides a Forum for community consultation and involvement in Ward Plans

Disadvantages

- People don't relate to Wards but to the neighbourhood they live in
- Dilutes the discussion of neighbourhood issues which are of most importance to people
- Provides less regular meetings for people to engage with Council officers
- May alienate the current Forum attendees

9.2 Option 2

The number of scheduled Neighbourhood Forums is reduced from 32 to 15 per year. Three Forums would be held per year in each Ward. Ward Officers will develop ways of improving the publicity, promotion, speakers, Agenda items, format and style of these Forums in order to catch the interest of local people, and to give the meetings a clear purpose in terms of consultation and engagement. Ward Officers will then be able to use

more of their time to develop more and varied ways of engaging with the public, e.g. Special Forums – on a specific topic of current local interest, events and activities targeted at specific people groups (e.g. older people or parents with young children), stalls at events organised by local community groups (e.g. Galas and Fun Days) and digital engagement (e.g. Facebook, Twitter and local websites)

Advantages

- Retains a significant number of regular meetings in each neighbourhood
- Allows time for Ward Officers to develop more and varied ways of engaging with the public

Disadvantages

- Purpose of the meetings may be too general and unclear
- The attendees continue to be the same people who regularly attend meetings

9.3 Option 3

The current arrangement of holding 32 Neighbourhood Forums per year is maintained.

Advantages

- Keeps things as they are for those who currently find Forums useful
- Provides a regular meeting in each neighbourhood

Disadvantages

- Purpose of the meeting is too general and unclear
- The audience will be the same people each time raising the same issues
- Very little opportunity to attract new and younger people

10. RECOMMENDATIONS

10.1 Keighley Area Committee approves Option 2, as set out at Paragraph 9.2 of this report, as a way of developing community engagement across the Keighley Area.

10.2 Keighley Area Committee requests that the Keighley Area Co-ordinator brings a further report to this Committee in 6 months time which details the action taken by the Area Co-ordinator's Office to develop community engagement in accordance with Option 2, as set out at Paragraph 9.2 of this report.

11. APPENDICES

None

12. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Neighbourhood Forums in the Keighley Area between February and June 2014, Document 'W', Keighley Area Committee, 23 October 2014