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CUSTOMERS & CORPORATE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
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REVIEW OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

1 Purpose of Briefing note

- 1.1 The purpose of this briefing note is to update Members on the progress and findings of the review of Community Engagement undertaken by the Customers and Corporate Scrutiny Committee.

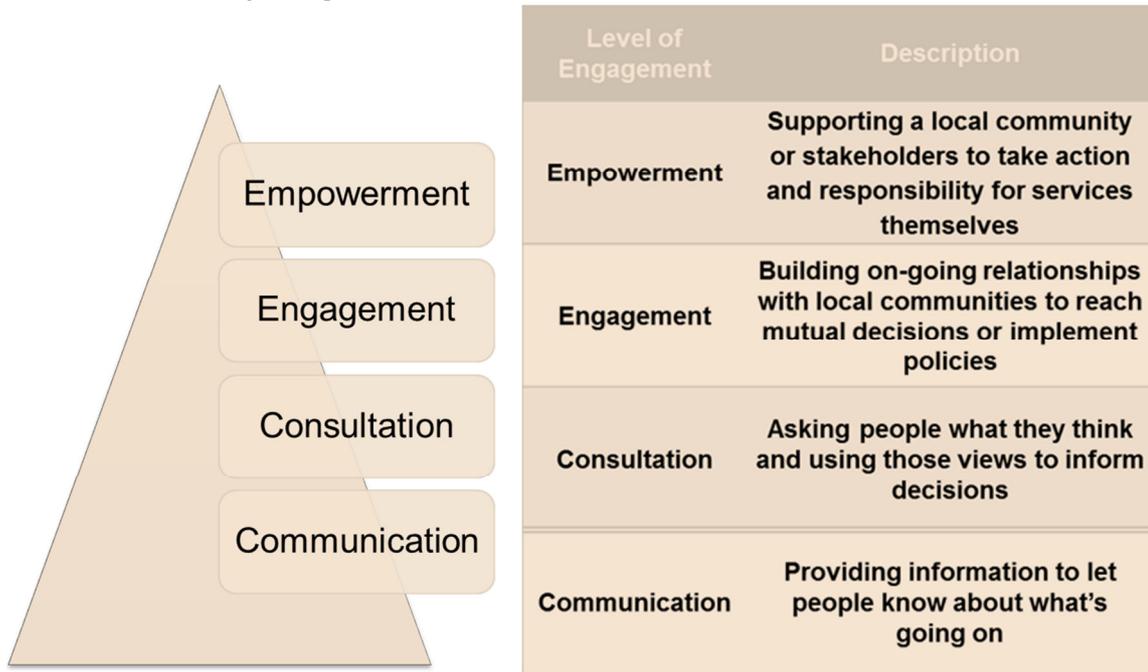
2 Key Issues

- 2.1 Following the decision of Council in May 2015 to discontinue the Community Forums, the Customers and Corporate Scrutiny Committee was assigned to review the Council's existing approach to community engagement and provide recommendations for development where appropriate. This briefing note summarises the progress to date with regard to the review.

3 Detail

- 3.1 Prior to their discontinuation in 2015, Cannock Chase Council had previously held quarterly community forums in four localities in the District. The forums had been a means for community issues to be raised and for dialogue between Members, Officers and the public. However, it had been widely acknowledged that the forums had not been an effective or efficient method of engagement for some time and thus the decision was taken to cease the meetings.
- 3.2 During the 2015/6 Municipal Year the Customer and Corporate Scrutiny Committee has included a review of community engagement in its work programme, to assess the remaining methods of community engagement used by the Council, research good practice from elsewhere, and provide where appropriate recommendations for service improvement or change.
- 3.3 A Task and Finish (T&F) sub group was established by the Committee in order to focus on this subject and provide further information to the Committee as a whole. In so doing, the T&F group began by requesting information on the Council's current activities in this sphere.

3.5 The levels of engagement and the distinctions between types of activity are demonstrated by Diagram 1 below.



3.6 The Council’s current activities with regard to the “Engagement Pyramid” illustrated above are summarised thus:

- **Communications**
Includes website, media relations, social media
- **Consultation**
Includes surveys, public opinion, residents’ panel
- **Community Engagement**
Includes community groups & networks, involvement & special projects

3.7 Information on the tools, methods and types of response were also provided to the T&F group, including data on numbers of followers for the Council’s social media accounts and the varying response rates to public consultations.

3.8 It was also noted that whilst the Council has developed online and social media tools for communication and consultation, traditional methods of dialogue through face to face contact, printed publications and the local media continue to be important methods for communicating with the public in the District. A wide range of traditional and contemporary methods are used in attempting to maximise the impact of all types of communication and engagement from the Council.

3.9 The T&F Group did note that since the Forums ceased, there may be an engagement “gap” in face to face contact with the public. It was noted that there is a crucial role for local Members in representing the views and concerns of

their residents and bringing about resolutions to issues. It was further suggested that better use could be made of 'dual-hatted' Members (those who are both district and parish councillors) to report on issues and improve communication locally.

- 3.10 With regard to the role of Scrutiny Committees, the T&F Group discussed the opportunities for such Committees to include items of community concern or interest on their work programmes. The potential for relevant members of the public, interest bodies or community groups to attend Scrutiny Committees and present information was discussed, alongside the possibilities for meetings to be held in locations beyond the Civic Centre where and when appropriate to a local issue.
- 3.11 In reporting back to the Committee as a whole, the T&F Group noted the potential for Scrutiny Committees to provide a community engagement link to the District's residents and an alternative channel for community issues to be explored. This aligns with some of the work undertaken by the Transitional Scrutiny Committee as part of its "Scrutiny Toolkit" development and the review of Scrutiny functions as a whole.

Background Papers

None