



Citizen Engagement



A report from Overview & Scrutiny





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Reports that have been submitted to Council can be downloaded from www.birmingham.gov.uk/scrutiny.



Preface

Cllr Lisa Trickett, Chair, Districts and Public Engagement Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Birmingham is made up of many different communities – amongst these are communities of place, faith, practice and interest. All have value and shape us as a city. Our greatest assets are the citizens of this city and – a key issue for the city – is how we unlock such potential and ensure it is at the forefront of shaping our future city and the services upon which we all depend.

The need to change the way we engage as a Council is set out as a key objective within the Leader's Policy statement. Positive change can be identified. The Council has started to use, with some effect, social media. Active citizens have welcomed attempts to share understanding of the key challenges we face. The good intentions of many Councillors and officers can be evidenced. However, discrete changes to practice and good intentions will not deliver the cultural change requirement. We need to secure fundamental change in the way we behave and interact with communities and citizens in the city.

We have knowledge and knowhow as a Council, which is valuable, but in failing to combine that with the knowledge and understanding drawn from the citizen experience in the city we limit our capacity and capability to deliver relevant and positive outcomes for the communities we serve. This reinforces citizens' current disconnect with the democratic process. Knowledge exchange is what it says: it is an exchange and an interaction that combines understanding, a prerequisite to securing collective purpose. It is a core function that has underpinned local government since the days of Chamberlain.

Good governance helps us feel secure. It is at the core of the requirement to ensure accountability and probity. However, an over-reliance on structures and governance can reflect old paternalistic approaches and/or pander to professionally driven processes. An ongoing conversation or process of civic engagement is required that is adaptive to today's complexity and is able to reflect the city's diversity. In the way we measure our own and partner performance we need to place far greater emphasis on the requirement to build effective relationships, which has at its core the reconciliation of competing and conflicting priorities – a key challenge for any organisation or individual who espouses to be a leader of place.

Our intent to engage and the value we place on knowledge exchange needs to be built into every level and at all points that a citizen interacts with us. Too often we fail at the first hurdle – a failed response to a call to the contact centre; a website that has seemingly no intent or capacity to interact, merely tell; or consultations where the perception is, whether true or not, that the deal is already done.

Hence, this report calls for, not just a new framework and understanding of the purpose and process of engagement as part of our work on the Future Council and if you like a renewed civic mission, but also demands improvements to core business to evidence intent and build common understanding of the cultural change requirement.



I am grateful to all the witnesses who attended our meetings for what were, generally, very open and honest discussions and the members of the Reference Group, chaired by the Barrow Cadbury Trust, who provided support and challenge to the process. I would also like to thank the Committee Members and all the Officers who have provided information and support.

Lisa Trickett

Chair of the Districts and Public Engagement Overview and Scrutiny Committee



Summary of Recommendations

	Recommendation	Responsibility	Completion Date
R01	The Deputy Leader to secure improvements to the Council's website to address the concerns set out in Section 4.2 to be overseen by the Governance, Resources & Customer Services O&S Committee.	Deputy Leader	September 2014 (Plan to be discussed with Committee June 2014)
R02	The Deputy Leader to draw up an improvement plan for how the Council deals with citizens as customers, which should be overseen by the Governance, Resources and Customer Services O&S Committee.	Deputy Leader	September 2014 (Plan to be discussed with Committee June 2014)
R03	The Deputy Leader together with the Cabinet Member for Social Cohesion and Equalities to draw up and implement a cross-cutting improvement plan for consultation to address the issues in Section 4.4 and ensure consultations are consistently good quality, meaningful and influence decision-making.	Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Social Cohesion and Equalities	September 2014 (Plan to be discussed with Committee June 2014)
R04	The Leader, along with Cabinet Members, Executive Members for Local Services and Ward Chairs bring forward a plan that addresses the key concerns raised and opportunities set out in the report and take on the fundamental step changes set out in Chapters 5-8.	Leader in consultation with Cabinet Members, Executive Members for Local Services and Ward Chairs	February 2015 Draft Plan to be discussed with committee June 2014 Interim feedback in October 2014
R05	Progress towards achievement of these recommendations should be reported to the Districts and Public Engagement Overview and Scrutiny Committee in September 2014. Subsequent progress reports will be scheduled by the Committee thereafter, until all recommendations are implemented.	Leader	September 2014



1 Why Look at Engagement ?

1.1 Current Policy Drivers

- 1.1.1 We had previously undertaken an inquiry into the evolving devolution agenda: *Devolution: Making it Real*. That noted both the importance of understanding and focusing on place and also on the role of engagement in supporting devolution:

“To achieve radical reform will require close engagement with citizens to understand needs and set priorities and also to have the legitimacy to make some of the tough decisions that will be required. Engagement with citizens will be necessary to achieve the required understanding of place and to deliver efficient and effective services.

.....“Different for less” has to be about understanding the differential needs of areas, and part of that understanding comes from listening to residents formally and informally.

Sounding out citizens at a particular point in time may not provide the intelligence and understanding now required. Consultation, therefore, needs to be part of an ongoing discussion with citizens about needs, priorities and quality of place and services.”

- 1.1.2 We were keen to investigate this further.

- 1.1.3 In July 2013 the *Leader’s Policy Statement* set out priorities for 2013/14:

“We will launch a new approach to public engagement based on the principle of ‘Engagement for Action’, ensuring we move up the ladder of public participation from previous tokenistic approaches towards engagement that leads to real practical action and a greater democratic right of residents to influence and shape the services they receive.”

- 1.1.4 Part of the mission statement is:

“Democracy – to deliver on our vision for devolution and localisation and to rebuild engagement in local democracy by putting local people and communities at the heart of everything we do.”



- 1.1.5 As the cuts bite and local government looks to how it can protect core services whilst supporting community wellbeing, councils are increasingly looking at their relationship with citizens and key stakeholders.

“Empowerment in local government must be a way of working rather than a specific set of programmes or initiatives. It is a way of working which will enhance the ability of local government professionals to deliver services to local people. Through good public engagement councils can stimulate creativity and innovation in order to really make efficient decisions that enhance the lives of local people.”

- 1.1.6 In response to the challenges and change requirement facing Birmingham, the Executive has been developing ideas for the “Future Council”. As the Council tries to redefine its shape and activity over the next few years, we recognise that will require the Council’s relationship with citizens to change, with the ownership and delivery of public services potentially diversifying further. However, the need for accountability and equality will remain and a key challenge for the “Future Council” in procuring and commissioning services will be the ability to lever advantage for the seldom heard through a process of influence and engagement.

- 1.1.7 The social contract between the citizen and the Council is changing and engagement has a key role to play in defining this relationship. A recent select committee report¹ adds that advantages of engagement for policy making includes:

“Improving the quality of policy, by ensuring as broad a range of knowledge, views and values as possible are present in the process and ensuring that policy goes with the grain of public values.”

- 1.1.8 It was pointed out that engagement is not an optional extra but an approach that has to be embedded in how the Council does things. It is clear that there are a range of issues it needs to improve on.

“This is not only because of severe budget cuts – but also the (growing) diversity of the city’s population. Democracy, engaging citizens, costs money. Reaching out, in particular, to the supposedly ‘hard to reach’ groups has financial implications. Justifying such expenditure in hard times may appear difficult – a luxury we cannot afford. But the cost of dis–investment in engagement strategies may well cost more in the medium to longer term.

There is a growing body of evidence (both internationally and, post the riots in Tottenham and elsewhere, in the UK) that where citizens do not feel they have a

¹ Public Administration Select Committee (2013) *Public Engagement in Policy Making*



*stake in their community, where they lack influence and voice, things fall apart both in terms of people's quality of life generally and, more literally, in a descent into factionalism and violence.*²

1.2 The Inquiry

1.2.1 We asked three key questions:

- **What is the purpose of engagement?** With initial scoping highlighting the need for us to secure some commonality about what we understood by the term of engagement.
- **How could we do it better?** Early in the scoping process we were told that the Council does not always engage well and that this was an area for learning and development.
- **How do we get results?** Engagement has no meaning just as a process, and we sought to find out what changes as a result of engagement.

1.2.2 Appendix 1 sets out how the inquiry was undertaken. An evidence pack is referenced throughout this report and can be found at <http://www.birmingham.gov.uk/osreports>. A Reference Group, chaired by the Barrow Cadbury Trust, was also set up to support and provide challenge.

1.2.3 The Council undertook a series of service reviews over the spring and summer of 2013. The aim of these was to take a fresh look at every service provided by the Council and to start to prioritise services in the light of budget cuts. The *Support Services Review Tranche 1* considered engagement and a planned outcome of that review was to create a new engagement structure and strategy. Given we were developing this inquiry it was agreed that our work will feed into the new strategy.

1.3 The Report

1.3.1 Chapter 9 sets out our requirements for change, the key being that a plan to address the concerns in this report is developed and implemented. It will require fundamental whole system change underpinned by changes to behaviour. The recommendations set out largely reference the Executive, but are the responsibility of everyone who wishes to be seen as a leader of place within the city.

1.3.2 Of the other sections, Chapter 2 reflects on the Council's engagement currently and Chapter 3 outlines some of the principles of good engagement, brought to our attention by witnesses. Chapter 4 argues that improvements have to be made to some of the Council's interactions with

² Angus McCabe, Third Sector Research Centre, University of Birmingham



citizens in order to build their trust so that engagement will be worthwhile. The areas discussed are information, especially the Council's website; dealing with customers to get the day to day interactions right; and the formal consultations the Council carries out. Chapter 5 considers issues to do with working with other organisations and Chapter 6 covers the role and potential of social media. Chapter 7 considers relationships and governance, including Ward and District Committees. Some principles for engagement that we feel amount to a step change in how things are done are set out in Chapter 8.

1.4 What do We Understand by Engagement?

1.4.1 Our working definition was:

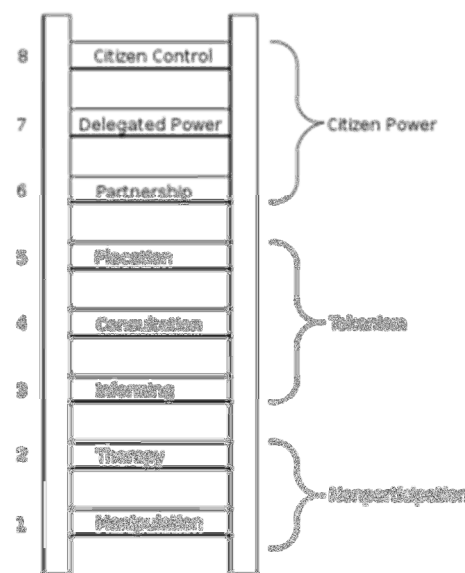
"Public engagement is the active participation of members of the public in the decisions that affect their lives. These decisions can be specifically related to improvement, delivery and evaluation of services. They can also relate to the public having a role in strengthening the assets of their community and building sustainable and empowered groups and individuals."

"Public engagement is about engaging in meaningful dialogue with the public to build strong and ongoing partnerships with stakeholders and service providers."³

1.4.2 There have been discussions during the course of the inquiry about engagement being about a move from representative democracy to one of participative democracy. Whilst active participation is key, accountability via the ballot box remains a fundamental part of democratic participation.

1.4.3 We considered the practical relevance of the "ladder of participation" (mentioned in the Leader's Policy Statement) which was seen to be a useful tool for thinking about how much engagement is required and where the power lies.⁴

1.4.4 The weakness of this, however, is that there is an assumption that the top of the ladder can be seen as being "best". The ladder concept expects the citizen to climb towards the power and gain it from the Council, rather than recognising that in a two way relationship the Council has much to gain from the citizen.



Sherry Arnstein (1969)

³ Involve /LG Improvement and Development (2010) Not Another Consultation

⁴ Arnstein, S (1969) *A Ladder of Citizen Participation*



- 1.4.5 Loose use of language can mean some activities are referred to as “engagement” or “consultation”. However, they may be more about providing information, or worse, manipulating citizens, which is not acceptable. It was suggested in discussions with the Reference Group that laying the ladder on its side might better demonstrate the two-way flow of information and knowledge between the Council and the citizens that is required.
- 1.4.6 The degree to which citizens wish to be actively involved needs to be better understood. Many citizens just want a good service. Their wish for a degree of control and capacity to connect with services that impact upon their lives is very different to managing or controlling the means by which the service is provided.
- 1.4.7 Early on we formed the view that engagement is part of a wider set of rights and responsibilities, at the core of the social contract between the Council and citizens. We have consciously used the word “citizen(s)” in place of terms such as resident, service user or customer. Citizens have rights to expect certain things to happen or to do certain things, such as vote; but they also have responsibilities, such as to follow the law and, we suggest, to contribute positively to the communities within which they live and interact.
- 1.4.8 Jenni Northcote (Birmingham South Central Clinical Commissioning Group) set out some of the challenges of building future relationships:
- “A lot of the time we’ve done engagement we’ve gone out and withdrawn back in; gone out and withdrawn back in. We can’t do that. We need a conversation about the challenge and complexity..... People will start with what is immediate to them..... It’s about dialogue, conversation and constructive relationship building that’s got to be about rights and responsibilities, and how collaboratively we’ve got to create solutions”.*
- 1.4.9 People are complex and wear many hats. We might engage as citizens, politicians, parents, carers etc. We recognise the complexity of the term “community” and have also sought to identify:
- “communities of place” (e.g. a “Brummie”, a Hawkesley resident, a city-centre worker – a community with a spatial if fuzzy boundary);
 - “communities of interest” (e.g. a dog walker, a swimmer, a volunteer, a member of a faith community); and
 - “communities of practice” (e.g. a care worker, a member of the Federation of Small Businesses, a lawyer, a member of the Chartered Institute for Environmental Health).
- 1.4.10 Engagement can involve all of these communities and at any one time we may occupy a space that cuts across all three. This complexity and uncertainty is a key element of engagement, and our role as a Council, in terms of leadership of place. At a time of great change in public sector



finances, the role of the Council and power dynamics, Fred Ratley, Church of England⁵, suggested that:

“The city (not just the City Council) needs to unlock whatever resources it can from wherever it can and much of the unlocked potential lies in its citizens.”

1.5 Language

1.5.1 Language is seen to also be a key barrier and can be used too loosely. For clarity when we say:

- “The Council” – we mean the decision-makers and those carrying out its roles – both Councillors and officers; and
- By “place” we mean the region, the city, the district, the ward and/or the neighbourhood.

1.5.2 Engagement and consultation are different. “Consultation” is part of engagement, but tends to be more formal and carried out on a one-off basis. We share the view articulated in the Council’s good practice guidance that:

“Consultation is the process by which the Council (or other agencies) seeks advice, information and opinions about planned changes, strategies, policies, plans and services in order to inform its decisions.”⁶

1.5.3 One witness to the Public Administration Select Committee offered us our working definition that:

“Consultation has a degree of formality to it, whereas engagement is an ongoing conversation.”⁷

1.5.4 The Council, therefore, needs to stop confusing the practice of consultation with the process of engagement.

⁵ A member of the Reference Group

⁶ Birmingham City Council, *Twenty Steps to Consultation Good Practice*

⁷ <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201314/cmselect/cmpublicadm/75/7505.htm>



2 What Does Engagement Look Like?

2.1 The Overall Picture

- 2.1.1 In gathering evidence no-one was questioning the good intent of the Council, but what was striking was the consistent feedback that engagement and consultation is not being done well enough and is not meeting the needs of the Council or citizens. We heard a lot of great examples of engagement relating to both officers and Councillors, but it was not consistent across the city or the Council.
- 2.1.2 Approaches taken to engagement and consultation vary immensely across the Council. The Directorates were asked to share examples of engagement activities they undertook and lessons learnt. Overall they were good at telling us about engagement, but understanding how they changed practice because of it was less evident.
- 2.1.3 Their full submissions can be seen in the evidence pack.⁸ In addition to the directorate submissions the Council also publishes an annual statement of consultation which captures the formal consultations carried out.⁹
- 2.1.4 Overall we have heard about some concerted efforts to improve engagement and we know there are officers who want to get it right, and many who have the skills to help do this. We also were reminded about the varied ways in which Councillors themselves engage locally.¹⁰ There has been some very good engagement over the years and we are aware the Council has lost many experienced officers as it shrinks.
- 2.1.5 A desktop review of the quarterly resident's tracker showed that perceptions differ considerably across the city. For example, in Sutton Coldfield 61% of residents feel they know how to influence local decisions compared to 33% in Hodge Hill. Overall 53% of residents are satisfied with the ways to get involved with local decision-making (of the public sector) and again this ranges from 76% in Edgbaston to 43% in Hodge Hill.¹¹

Green Papers

- 2.1.6 It is worth noting the dialogue that took place surrounding the Council's Green Papers, as this was the most ambitious engagement carried out by the Council in recent times.¹² During the summer and autumn of 2013 the Council carried out a series of service reviews covering all elements of the

⁸ Evidence pack, pages 230-241 (Local Services Directorate) and pages 292-324 (Adult and Communities; Development and Culture)

⁹ This can be found at: <http://www.birmingham.gov.uk/annualconsultationstatement>.

¹⁰ See evidence pack pages 152-158

¹¹ Residents Tracker Q2 2013-14

¹² See evidence pack pages 242-244



Council's service. This was to help identify a way of managing a combination of cuts and budget pressures estimated at being £825m over an eight year period.¹³ The findings of each of these was summarised and published as a "Green Paper" or discussion paper at: <http://www.birmingham.gov.uk/servicereviews>. Questionnaires for all of them were on-line at Be Heard the city's consultation hub: <https://www.birminghambeheard.org.uk/>. The Executive should be congratulated for the aspiration to set out information about all the Council services and the challenges being faced.

- 2.1.7 Alongside the web presence, senior officers were asked to take information to each of the Ward Committees to both explain the Green Papers and signpost citizens as to how to make their views known. The aim was to be able to listen to the views expressed and to use them in constructing the budget for 2014-15 and to ensure some of the challenges had been understood before starting on the statutory consultation for that budget.
- 2.1.8 Our conclusions were that as a starting point for informing citizens of the challenges faced by the Council and setting out the scope of services in question it was a good baseline. It was a huge step in re-engineering public services and does represent a positive move forward in terms of engagement.
- 2.1.9 However, both citizens and Councillors found that the information produced was complex and gave little information on how changes might affect them in their locality. We appreciated that a number of pages of feedback were incorporated into the White Paper *Planning Birmingham's Future*. However, given the huge volume of work that has been undertaken and the tight timescales, we have concerns that decisions about services had to be taken or options closed off before the analysis was carried out and shared with all relevant decision-makers.

2.2 Reflections on Current Practice

- 2.2.1 Public bodies constantly conflate governance and structures with relationships. The Council, acting within the rule book of the constitution, tends to place governance over relationships. Structures, such as Ward Committees, and user groups may exist, but this tells us nothing about the quality of relationships with citizens or other stakeholders. It is often one to one relationships that lead to understanding and changes.
- 2.2.2 A range of concerns have been raised by witnesses, within Committee discussions and by the Reference Group. These include:
- The Council consults when they've already made the decision or aren't asking anything meaningful;
 - Bureaucratic processes and tight timescales can render engagement meaningless;

¹³ Birmingham City Council (2013) *Planning Birmingham's Future & Budget Consultation 2014-15: A White Paper* sets out forecasts for 2010-11 to 2017-18



- The Council often acts in an overly paternalistic way towards citizens;
- The Council tinkers with engagement, rather than using it to radically reform the relationship and balance of power between the Council and citizens;
- Citizens feel ignored – even if they engage they are not given feedback;
- The Council has an over-reliance on formal structures with a reliance on formal meetings which may mean citizens only come if there is an issue relevant to them;
- There is an over-reliance on occasional consultation and insufficient understanding of the need to build an ongoing conversation through the good and the bad times;
- Too often the language used is professional local-government-speak and material is not written or thought out in the language and common understanding of the average citizen;
- There is a fear / reluctance about embracing digital technology fully;
- The Council fails to do place based engagement with key partners in the health and police services - each service aims to talk to local citizens, but without co-ordinating those efforts;
- Many Councillors do a lot of local campaigning and engagement. It is unclear how this is captured and fed back into both place and service improvements as well as political campaigning.



3 Principles of Engagement

3.1 Lessons Learnt

3.1.1 So what does that mean in terms of why the Council engages and what it should engage about? This chapter sets out some of the lessons learnt and good practice suggested by our witnesses.

3.1.2 Angus McCabe, Third Sector Research Centre, suggests:

“The single, most important commandment for engagement should be to respect the participants in the process.”¹⁴

3.1.3 Catherine Durose (University of Birmingham) and Liz Richardson (University of Manchester) shared with us some of their research work based on discussions across the country. Many of the dos and don'ts are simple common sense, but pressure of time, resources and misguided approaches can mean they are forgotten. Most of them are about ways of behaving (see text box).

Lessons from Connected Communities	
Durose and Richardson	
<i>Do:</i>	<i>Don't:</i>
<i>Trust and value local people</i>	<i>Start with the service – consider networks and contacts – what works for the users of the service?</i>
<i>Make discussion interesting</i>	<i>Commence thinking you know what is best for people – make sure you consider what the best outcomes are for them and what will work for them.</i>
<i>Keep discussions informal and loosely structured. Inspire people with intelligent conversations</i> <i>– e.g. through peer to peer learning and common interests</i>	<i>Treat residents like children</i>

¹⁴ See evidence pack pages 218 and 225-229



3.1.4 Stephen Belling of the Nehemiah Foundation reflected on many years of engagement in the city and drew up a list of things that had worked and things that had hindered, which is summarised in the text box.¹⁵

<i>What Helped?</i>	<i>What Hindered?</i>
<i>1. Clarity of aim</i>	<i>1. Previous negative experiences</i>
<i>2. Initial recognition</i>	<i>2. Sense of being used</i>
<i>3. Ongoing dialogue</i>	<i>3. Being asked again</i>
<i>4. Prospect of improvement</i>	<i>4. Failure to listen properly</i>
<i>5. Word of mouth</i>	<i>5. Everyday demands & pressures</i>
<i>6. Skilled and committed individuals</i>	<i>6. Outsiders</i>
<i>7. Schools and young people</i>	<i>7. Wasted resources</i>
<i>8. Faith communities</i>	<i>8. Lack of trust</i>
<i>9. Partners</i>	<i>9. Over dominating individuals</i>
<i>10. Community events & activities, workshops</i>	<i>10. Off putting speakers</i>
<i>11. Planning for real; Appreciative Enquires</i>	<i>11. Lack of information</i>
<i>12. Information and knowledge</i>	<i>12. Failure to connect with opportunities</i>
<i>13. Networks and relationships</i>	<i>13. Underestimates of time</i>
<i>14. Shared understanding</i>	<i>14. Changing goals posts</i>
<i>15. Element of independence</i>	<i>15. Loss of momentum</i>

3.1.5 Looking at urban regeneration and community development in very polarised and segregated communities, Luciau Botes and Dingie Van Rensburg (2000) developed some commandments for securing participation (see text box overleaf).¹⁶

¹⁵ See also evidence pack pages 188-192

¹⁶ Referenced in Angus McCabe, evidence pack 225-229



Commandments

- *Respect the skills, knowledge and experience of citizens and communities. This includes the 'awkward' as well as the active citizen.*
- *Act as facilitators and catalysts of community engagement and activity. Avoid dominance and paternalism.*
- *Promote co-decision making in defining needs, setting goals and formulating policy.*
- *Communicate failure as well as celebrating success.*
- *Guard against the domination of one/particular interest group.*
- *Recognise that process related issues can be as important as the hard product related issues.*
- *If task overwhelms process, and the social aspects of engagement are lost in the tasks – people withdraw.*
- *Aim to release the energy in communities without exploiting or exhausting them.*
- *Strive to ensure equity in the outcomes of citizen engagement. Is the City a fairer place as a result of the process?*

Luciau Botes and Dingie van Rensburg (2000)

3.2 Previous Work in the Council

3.2.1 Many of these issues are not new. Ironically, or frustratingly, we have been here before. During the inquiry we shook the dust off the 2006 Engagement and Consultation Strategy. The text box includes some of the phrases in this strategy, but eight years on we contend that these principles have not been embedded.

2006 Engagement and Consultation Strategy

Talking Together: Working Together

Key concepts included:

- *Valuing day to day opinions and feedback*
- *Offer choices*
- *Ensure it's high quality*
- *Listen to voices that are not usually heard*
- *Involve local residents in planning and delivering services*
- *Actively respond and always feedback*
- *Ensure it informs actions and decisions*
- *Share information cross council and partners*
- *Co-ordinate consultations*
- *Building a culture of consultative dialogue*
- *Evaluating consultation lessons and learning lessons*
- *Encourage citizens to be engaged*
- *Be clear on the purpose of consultation*



4 Getting the Basics Right

4.1 Underpinning an Engagement Strategy

4.1.1 As previously noted the degree of influence many citizens seek is over the quality of services they receive. Too often we hear of examples where the Council fails with that initial contact. The Council has to get better at the basics it has control over and can improve, before it has credibility in engaging in more complex relationships.

4.1.2 The Chair of the Reference Group¹⁷ noted the importance of:

Making sure that the Council's commitment to engagement is demonstrated at every level and at every entry point to the Council including not only the first line response staff, but the website, messaging, continuing conversations, feeding back following consultations and really demonstrating that it listens, not just saying that it does.

4.1.3 In order to build this trust, so citizens feel there is reason to engage and that they will be listened to, there needs to be:

- Improvements to the Council's website to address concerns below;
- An improvement plan for how the Council deals with citizens in their role as customers; and
- An improvement plan for consultation drawn up.

4.2 Information

4.2.1 All too often citizens say they did not know they were being asked or that they could have a say. Information is not engagement, but knowing what you are being asked to contribute to and when, how and why is the starting point; the bottom of the ladder of participation.

4.2.2 The Council should do more to co-ordinate the key messages for citizens, around place or for the city as a whole. Citizens also need to be able to set the agenda more often, but both approaches can operate together. Across the Council officers and Councillors need to understand better what the messages are beyond their own silo – so they can help direct citizens to consultations, events and conversations.

4.2.3 With reductions in printed information – letters, leaflets, advertising etc. the Council needs to work more smartly to ensure they support engagement and consultation.

¹⁷ Debbie Pippard, Barrow Cadbury Trust



4.2.4 The internet is important (although there is a digital divide – see 6.1.5) and increasingly the website, www.birmingham.gov.uk, is the access point to the Council. We understand a replacement is being built but currently it struggles to be an effective tool for engagement:

- It is difficult to use and navigate;
- There is a front page tab for consultations, but this leads to an out of date page. It also does not enable clicking through to formal consultations for planning or licensing;
- It does not yet fully reflect that Birmingham has devolved. Although there is a page for each district they tend to be reasonably static and do not yet provide an interface for engagement and conversation about the area. For example, although each district has held a District Convention, taking a snapshot view in December 2013, only two of the ten Districts note this on their website;
- Live streaming of City Council and committee meetings and archive is good and has been well received (over 214,000 views since starting in February 2013), but can citizens locate this easily on the website?; and
- Democracy in Birmingham, where all formal agendas, reports and minutes sit, does not encourage democratic engagement as it difficult to use. We were told of one officer who spent 20 minutes trying to locate the date of a Ward Committee meeting.

4.2.5 In redeveloping the web site there is an opportunity to make it much more dynamic and to use it to encourage conversations. It should include real time service information, such as when missed bin collections will be collected. It could also include twitter feeds, blogs, hot topics, consultations, links to local Councillors and links to local on-line fora etc. It also needs to be easier to navigate. The web is a very important window and indicator of how the Council works, and it could be used to show, rather than tell, citizens that the Council wants to have a conversation with them.

The development of the Council's new web site needs to address these concerns.

4.3 Working with Customers

4.3.1 The day to day customer interface is the front door to the Council and this often feels closed. As Councillors we are acutely aware of when the Council and our contractors fail to provide services in the right way to citizens. They often come to us (and are probably more likely to come to us) when they have failed to secure improvements through the usual interfaces with the Council – the customer call centre, the website and customer service centres (neighbourhood offices). Some of our constituents tell us they feel upset at the way they are spoken to and lack of respect shown. The Council might call someone a customer, but sometimes it seems as if constituents are expected to be grateful recipients when trying to get the services they require, or simply wanting to tell us that something we're delivering is not working. The Council does not give citizens the confidence that it is hearing them, listening to and learning from them.



- 4.3.2 The customer interface also requires better internal communications supported by an improved database of contacts / roles so citizens making contact in any way can be swiftly passed onto the right team and action can be taken to resolve their issues and to listen to them or to explain clearly why their expectations cannot be met.
- 4.3.3 We wonder if formal complaints are adequately analysed across the Council to ensure continual improvement? As Councillors we certainly do not know what issues are raised as complaints and we are not using them to influence policy making or understand the impact of cuts – cutting staff or services. We could make better use of our own case load information in the same way.

There needs to be an improvement plan for how the Council deals with customers.

4.4 Consultation

- 4.4.1 The Council needs to get consultations right every time and it needs to build citizens' confidence that it wants to and is able to listen, and have a genuine intention that it is prepared to act differently than it would otherwise, in response to the feedback it gets from citizens consulted. Historic processes have created a credibility gap (see many of the issues in 2.2.2), accentuated by citizens' experience of some strategic-level 'consultations'. Many citizens formed the impression, for example, that the weekly refuse consultation was about whether or not to have wheelie bins when the decision had already been taken. Citizens also have a perception that they can influence things which cannot be influenced, such as many planning (development control) decisions, where legislation can tie the hands of the Council.
- 4.4.2 The Council needs to ensure all officers and Councillors better understand the legal requirements of when it has to consult and when it does not. It needs to avoid consultations that will not lead to action because the decision has already been made or the timescale to consider views is too short. The Council needs to be clearer on the purpose of consultation and understand who it needs to consult with and how it best does this. If it does not get this right it is undermining public trust in consultation, and destroying its future chances of building a culture of on-going engagement.
- 4.4.3 Consultations generally do not clearly set out what is on the table: what are the parameters of the consultation, what can change, what is not open to negotiation. This could include greater clarity about financial pressures and there could be honesty about the limits of what can change. Consultation also needs to be based on robust and relevant data.
- 4.4.4 We understand that there is a lot of relevant advice on the Council's intranet, but are unsure if this is well used, given the increasing time pressures on officers.
- 4.4.5 There is an online consultation portal, Be Heard, which is making a good job of capturing consultation activity.¹⁸ Since the new system was launched in April 2013 over 100 consultations

¹⁸ <https://www.birminghambeheard.org.uk/>



have been uploaded.¹⁹ The portal includes information on each consultation, current and past, with a basic search function. It has an easy to set up and easy to use questionnaire facility, although it is not used by all. Its capabilities do not appear well used enough yet:

- For planning collaborative consultation – timetabling to allow for complementary issues to be considered together by citizens or events to be jointly arranged;
- The events / calendar tab is incomplete, even though we are aware of events happening, or they are tucked away under a specific consultation on the portal. This does not help guide citizens to face to face opportunities for discussion;
- There is little feedback on Be Heard. There is capacity for “what we found” and “what we did”. There were limited cases of key issues found and even fewer cases of full consultation analysis uploaded. There should be an expectation that a summary of key findings is uploaded as soon as it is available, followed by a “you said, we did” summary. Good practice would be to upload the full consultation feedback report as the Substance Misuse Service Redesign team have done; and
- It is still City Council focused when we had understood that it would be open to the wider public sector.

4.4.6 We have not audited the formal consultations as part of this inquiry and we are aware of many very well constructed and delivered activities. But we also are aware of a number of consultations where concerns were raised about:

- Clarity of purpose;
- The information made available (whether it included the right information to help citizens make an informed response, was accurate, or biased);
- The questions asked (too many, too few, complex, unnecessary or biased); and
- The challenge of making citizens aware their views are being sought.

A cross-cutting improvement plan for consultation needs to be drawn up to ensure consultations are consistently good quality, meaningful and influence decision-making.

¹⁹ This includes engagement activity as well as formal consultations, such as the service review Green Papers



5 How Can the Council do Better This Time Around? – Working Together

5.1 Working Together....

5.1.1 The 2014-15 budget consultation sets out a number of “big ideas”. Big Idea number 2 is working with others and makes specific reference to the need for developing teams across different organisations and working more closely with community groups, social enterprises and voluntary organisations. This echoes our wish to see engagement working much better along with other organisations.

...With Statutory Partners

5.1.2 We took health services and West Midlands Police as our case studies.²⁰ We learned that engagement is crucial to all those organisations, although a wide range of ways of engaging are used. A lot of effective tools are being used by all the organisations. There is also a view that engagement does have an impact on the way services are provided from neighbourhood policing priorities to the commissioning of health services. West Midlands Police have a particular interest in place, mirroring our own, and many of these public sector organisations work at a sub-city level.

5.1.3 Each organisation tends to engage in isolation. Yet we know that many active citizens will attend a Ward Committee or neighbourhood forum one day and a local policing or neighbourhood watch meeting the following week. Very often we are asking the same people questions about the same area or local services.

5.1.4 Schools play a key part in the community and we know a broad range of conversations about improving things locally happen in the school playground and at the school gate. There are also opportunities to piggyback on school events, such as parents’ evenings which are often missed.

5.1.5 There is duplication in how the public sector works and those bodies need to find a way to have a coherent approach to collaborate across the public sector to engage with the citizen. This has been said before, but there has never been a more crucial time to do it.

....With the Third Sector – Community, Voluntary and Faith Groups

5.1.6 The third sector is extensive in Birmingham. However, even those organisations can feel their views are not listened to. The 2012 BVSC State of the Sector report said that almost half of third

²⁰ See evidence pack pages 211-213 and 250-291 (Health – Minutes relating to Birmingham South Central CCG. Submissions from Healthwatch and Birmingham CrossCity CCG) and pages 195-197 (Minutes relating to West Midlands Police)



sector organisations felt they would benefit from help to ensure their views and experiences inform local policies.

- 5.1.7 The organisations themselves support and work across numerous communities of place, interest and practice. They can provide an opportunity to meet with citizens where they choose to congregate; signpost their members to engagement activities; and undertake engagement on our behalf. But this misses the way this sector can turn engagement on its head and demand from the Council that it focuses on certain issues or take an altogether different approach. It needs to be much more open to this.
- 5.1.8 The Council needs to build strong relationships with formal and informal third sector organisations and social enterprises. But it cannot rely on these as the only routes to build relationships with citizens who may not be involved, as some of these organisations share the same challenges as the Council in terms of structures, processes and governance. We would welcome on-going discussions with the sector as to how to achieve the step changes set out in the report.
- 5.1.9 As well as the formal and established groups, there are numerous community groups, small volunteer-led groups and faith groups and it is equally important to build links with those and work in a more collaborative way. The relationships between the formal and informal third sector and district structures are important. There are a range of ways of doing this across the city. One example we were given was in Erdington where the District Plan is co-owned by strategic partners who also have joint responsibility for engagement and delivery. They find that this, along with key officers from the district being charged with working with community groups, and keeping a live database, helps them to reach the seldom heard.
- 5.1.10 There are many types of third sector organisations, but some focus specifically on engagement for action. Citizens UK, for example, uses Saul Alinsky's community organising model.²¹ When Citizens UK started in Birmingham 18 months previously, it issued an open invitation to organisations and groups, bringing together a broad-based alliance of people and organisations. It uses a method based on links and relationships between groups and organisations. It started by undertaking a listening campaign in the city – mobilising members of the groups signed up to listen to stories, concerns and priorities about social justice from members of their own communities. This fed into a prioritisation event on October 2013 where four key themes were chosen, ranging from access to mental health services to the living wage and unemployment.
- 5.1.11 In this way Citizens UK sets the agenda and requires public sector bodies and others to talk about the issues they raise. It challenges the Council's approach to engagement as it is used to setting the agenda and controlling the conversation. For that reason it is welcome and the Council needs to learn from it too.

²¹ See evidence pack page 194 (minutes)



6 How Can the Council do Better This Time Around? – Using Social Media

6.1 Social Media

6.1.1 Social media has radically transformed how citizens communicate (see text box). Alongside this there is a real push for “digital by default”, defined in the Cabinet Office’s “Government Digital Strategy” (2012) as:

“...services which are so straightforward and convenient that all those who can use digital services will choose to do so, while those who can’t are not excluded.”

Social Media for a Two Way Conversation

The way citizens engage and consume information has radically changed since the growth of the knowledge economy. People are no longer “waiting to be told or be advised of new initiatives” instead they are actively searching for information and gathering views from multiple stakeholders through the use of social media tools such as twitter, Facebook, You Tube etc. This has enabled citizens to not only engage in the conversation, but also act to further disseminate messages to new audiences.

The real challenge to the public sector is to ensure that our information and engagement strategies reflect the way citizens choose to receive and consume information.

The traditional ways that local authorities engage with citizens are changing but are not changing fast enough. Local authorities are still printing leaflets that simply bypass the citizens and often go straight in the recycling bin.

Raj Mack, Head of Digital Birmingham

6.1.2 Given the power of digital media to be able to inform and enable conversation and consultation with citizen, the Council needs to embrace new technologies and social media and to be able to use it fully. However, social media cannot replace other relationship building. Huge steps have been taken to open up Council business through live streaming. The drawback with remote live streaming is that it can reinforce the role of the citizen as a remote observer without a voice, rather than an active citizen with a real influence on decisions. However, it can enable the Council to reach out and allow the seldom heard to be informed and to better facilitate their active involvement to influence decision-making.



- 6.1.3 As we were finalising the report we were told about the budget consultation live webchat. Allowing active participation from members of the public through submission of questions to the Cabinet had resulted in more questions in the two hour session, than at any single public meeting on the same consultation. Total participation of members of public at the four public meetings on the budget consultation combined was under 300 and yet over 500 people viewed the online discussion live, with over 1,600 people watching the archived footage in the week following transmission.
- 6.1.4 The intent to use the archive as a training device for Councillors in the future is welcomed.
- 6.1.5 There are concerns about those who do not have access to the internet: the digital divide. We were told that around 18% of our citizens are still offline and, of those, 50% are estimated to live in social housing. The Council needs to be aware of who it does not hear from when using social media. The take up of smartphones, tablets and other connected devices will continue to grow amongst all age groups and the Council must adapt its engagement channels to go to “where the eyeballs are”. Equally the Council needs to respect people’s right, through active choice or personal inability, not to embrace social media within their lives. A significant proportion of our citizens will continue to use traditional communications channels and the Council needs to ensure this group, which is likely to encompass a disproportionately large element of need, are not disadvantaged by this. We note the Cabinet Office statement on ‘Digital by Default’ explicitly reinforces this point.
- 6.1.6 Digital Birmingham told us about interventions that have worked in the past and many ways they are supporting citizens now.²² However, we are concerned about the role libraries play as internet access is an important part of their offer. There was a concern that charges levied by Service Birmingham had prevented some libraries from extending their IT facilities, as well as the impact of possible library closure or reduced opening hours.
- 6.1.7 Najm Clayton of the Sutton Coldfield Local hyperlocal website answered the question “how can Birmingham City Council improve engagement with citizens?” Two of his responses set out the challenge ahead:

Implementation of online resources to aid two-way communication:

This would include the effective use of social media as one of the channels of communication. By effective, I mean with genuine engagement rather than just as a platform for broadcasting.

The recognition and use of active citizens:

There are numerous people across the city taking an active interest in the community, be they bloggers, neighbourhood forum members,

²² (See pages 245-247 of the evidence pack. Reference also for text box in 6.1.1)



*environmentalists etc. who are in a position to act as a communication 'bridge'.*²³

6.1.8 Both of these point to technology being one of the tools (though not the only one) to building relationships. We were told that citizens in Birmingham are ahead of the game in using social media to benefit communities. Elsewhere Jon Bounds has said:

*"Birmingham is getting a real reputation for being a place where social media doesn't only happen. It organises and does things that are intended to create social good."*²⁴

6.1.9 Some individuals are doing extraordinary things on-line for social good in the city:²⁵

- Dave Harte told us that Birmingham has some 26 hyper-local sites. Each of these is run by an individual and there are very different drivers for doing this, and each is very different in character. They provide valuable local information and can provide a link to Council activity.²⁶
- Luke Addis is running Birmingham Updates on a voluntary basis telling citizens about problems (travel, fires, missing people), events happening and signposting them to consultations public bodies are doing. Birmingham Updates has over 140,000 likes on Facebook and over 1000 followers on Twitter.²⁷
- Casey Rain, writing his blog during the 2011 riots, did a great job of sifting and checking information and reassuring the city (see text box).²⁸
- When the first Big City Plan was published Jon Bounds and a team of

On-line Journalism and the 2011 Riots

"Dominating online coverage in Birmingham was not a local newspaper or broadcaster but a Tumblr site – Birmingham Riots 2011 – set up by musician Casey Rain. Over dozens of entries Casey posted countless reports of what was taking place, and a range of photos and video footage which dwarfed the combined coverage of regional press and broadcast.

Adopting the 'publish, then filter' principle of online journalism, he continuously acknowledged the dozens of unfounded rumours going around. In doing so, however, he also provided a way to quickly separate the rumour from fact.

By publishing and then filtering, Casey acknowledged that the information was already out there, added notes of scepticism, and provided a means for others to confirm or debunk it."

<http://onlinejournalismblog.com>

²³ Evidence pack page 326

²⁴ <http://www.jonbounds.co.uk/blog/tag/power-of-information/>

²⁵ Evidence pack, pages 209-210 for minutes of discussion on social media and pages 325-327 for submissions

²⁶ <http://daveharte.com/> and see Appendix 1 for details hyper-bloggers who contributed to the inquiry

²⁷ <https://www.facebook.com/BhamUpdates>

²⁸ <http://birminghamriots2011.tumblr.com/>



bloggers rewrote it in plain English and set up the opportunity for on-line comment and discussion on each section "Big City Talk". All comments were then fed into the official consultation framework. This approach was highly acclaimed, but the lessons learnt from it do not seem to have changed how the Council consults. Najm Clayton of the Sutton Coldfield Local website still feels that the use of 'council-speak' and jargon in public documents is a great concern.

- Nick Booth from Podnosh told us about the social media surgeries he helped establish which have been so successful in terms of providing skills and support to new adopters of social media, primarily by bringing them together with and drawing on the skills and expertise of existing users. This has obviously had a positive effect on the city.²⁹

Nick Booth, Podnosh

- 1 Thanks in part to the social media surgeries and the work of many active hyperlocal bloggers Birmingham already has a head start in what I call online civic engagement. The work Podnosh is doing is helping to develop the skills to get involved in these online conversations among public servants.*
- 2 The internet allows people to get to know each other and collaborate to make things better. This is very different from how public services normally consider engagement - which is a time and subject specific process. For public services to be part of how these new connectedness changes thing public servants need to be allowed to get involved in the conversations and then use the relationships and the ideas that emerge from that to change things - iteratively.*
- 3 There is a big challenge around culture. Allowing public servants to think like citizens rather than servants of a council process is a big step towards that.*
- 4 We're already good at using the web for civic good in Birmingham - embrace it support it, don't try and own or control it.*

6.1.10 Social media does not happen in a vacuum. We were pleased to hear examples of how it can work alongside engagement structures and "real life" relationships. Chief Superintendent Emma Barnett from West Midlands Police described a meeting which was followed by five times as many people as in the room on social media. She also explained that the digital divide can be overcome and described an example of a girl supporting her grandmother. One of our own Committee Members, Cllr Phillips noted how conversations on Facebook have led to new people attending her Ward Committee, due to the barriers social media can break down.

²⁹ <http://podnosh.com/about/> and page 327 of the evidence pack



7 How Can the Council do Better This Time Around? – Governance and Relationships

7.1 Relationships

- 7.1.1 We recognise that effective engagement depends on building robust relationships. However, relationships alone do not provide the improvements the Council requires. The public sector has a remit to act in the best interest of citizens, but to ensure probity and accountability needs governance structures to be in place.
- 7.1.2 However, it is perceived that public authorities in general have a tendency to believe that good governance will lead to good accountability and partnership. Examples from across the city and from practitioners highlighted that robust and relevant relationships amongst key stakeholders and communities were key.
- 7.1.3 The relationship and interaction between an individual officer or Councillor and a citizen can make or break engagement. As the number of officers has reduced by a third in the past three years, without a similar cut in the number of services the Council provides, we acknowledge that having time to build relationships can be a challenge, but that is where the changing role for Councillors and their interface with communities is key, with a renewed emphasis on the requirement for civic engagement and local accountability.
- 7.1.4 Fred Ratley³⁰ asks:

“A focus on service delivery can mean that people with imagination from all parties are lost at a time when the city most needs creativity – are we retaining the right people for the new world order? Should we value the ability to build and sustain relationships more highly in our staff?”

7.2 The Role of Councillors in Building Relationships

- 7.2.1 Each ward has three Councillors, which is a tremendous resource; although we acknowledge that there is a higher ratio of citizens to Councillors compared to many areas of the country. Councillors play a role as the key local stakeholders: Leaders of Place. There is not a more important role for Councillors than engagement for action and their local knowledge needs to feed into service

³⁰ Church of England, member of the Reference Group



improvements. The Council needs to retune the role of Councillors to be advocates for localities by better listening and securing action.

- 7.2.2 Especially at the level of the district, the opinions of local citizens, combined with Councillors' own knowledge of their wards and understanding of the front line impacts of services and cuts, needs to be part of the evidence base developed to help the Council develop services differently across the city.
- 7.2.3 Low levels of engagement with our democratic structures through voting can be harmful to engagement as it makes us less accountable through the ballot box. We note a recent poll that indicated citizens are more likely not to vote due to fury with politicians than apathy.³¹ There is a strong need to reinvigorate connection with the democratic process and we are supportive of any voter registration campaigns. A lot of effort will need to be put in to make single electoral registration effective later this year.³²

7.3 Structures for Place Based Engagement

District Committees

- 7.3.1 Currently there are fifty place based structures which form part of the governance of the city: ten District Committees and 40 Ward Committees.
- 7.3.2 Each of the District Committees is made up of 12 local Councillors and meets every two months. The cost of a District Committee meeting is estimated as being between £470 and £600. This does not include the cost of officers, other than the Democratic Services Officer in attendance, nor preparation costs.
- 7.3.3 Citizens can now observe this through the live streaming and archive facility. Taking the June / July 2013 meetings as a snapshot a total of over 14,000 viewers watched the meetings with almost 2,500 of those being live and the rest when archived. Districts varied from around 600 views in Northfield to 2,800 in Hall Green.

Ward Committees

- 7.3.4 Each of the 40 wards in the city has a formal Ward Committee which is made up of the three ward Councillors. Their aims are set out in the Council's constitution and the Leader's Policy Statement (see text box overleaf). They meet around 4-6 times a year.³³

³¹ <http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2013/dec/26/fury-mps-not-voting-poll>

³² By 2015 each voter will need to register, rather than the head of household completing the electoral register

³³ See evidence pack pages 328-335 for analysis of Ward Committee attendances May 2012 – September 2013



Leaders Policy Statement 2012

Aim to "Improve accountability to residents and opportunities to influence services at the local level, with Ward Committees being the major means of local people engaging on issues affecting their area.

Leaders Policy Statement 2013

Launch a 'civic enterprise challenge' inviting Districts, Wards and resident groups to bring forward innovations in the way local services are managed and delivered and new ways of effectively involving residents in the work of Ward Committees.

Summary of the City Council Constitution on Ward Committees

Ward Committees aim to achieve dialogue, between the Council and local citizens. They aim to:

- (a) Identify the needs of the Ward and key issues affecting local people;*
- (b) Ensure that those needs and issues are clearly expressed to, and considered by, the Executive, Officers and other public bodies;*
- (c) Maximise the influence of local people over how the Council works in the Ward.*
- (d) Approve delegated budgets; and*
- (e) Support neighbourhood forum through approving and grant funding them.*

7.3.5 An analysis of Ward Committees between May 2012 and September 2013 showed that on average 18 citizens attended each Ward Committee meeting with numbers to a single meeting ranging from zero to 120. Almost a third of Ward Committees attracted fewer than 80 citizens attending in total over that period³⁴, with each committee holding at least five meetings.

Lessons from Shard End Ward Committee

- 1. Rotate the meeting round different neighbourhoods.*
- 2. Advertise with a leaflet through doors in the nearby streets.*
- 3. Ensure agenda items are appropriate to that neighbourhood.*
- 5. Seek to build a ward team of active citizens who want action.*
- 6. Keep the 'community champions' informed.*
- 7. Task the Democratic Services Officer to follow local issues through to ensure action is taken and that the citizen gets feedback.*
- 8. Ensure paperwork is in plain English*
- 9. Encourage residents to speak as much as possible.*

Cllr Bridle

7.3.6 In that 18 months Longbridge and Shard End had both had over 300 people attending in total (Longbridge average being 39 and Shard End being 38). Cllr Bridle, Chair of Shard End Ward Committee, told us what worked there (see text box).

³⁴ That figure is the combined total of citizens attending each Ward Committee meetings over that period, so an individual attending regularly would be included many times over.



7.3.7 The most popular meeting was a Sutton Trinity meeting with 120 people. Cllr Parkin explained this:

“The meeting with 120 attendees had the issue of green belt development on the agenda – an issue of huge public interest in Sutton.”

7.3.8 We were told that a number of Ward Committee meetings were not representative. For example, feedback on a number of Ward Committees attended indicated that people with visible disabilities did not attend. Access was often difficult and so currently these meetings could not stand alone as the one citizen focussed structure for an area.

7.3.9 A typical comment was that the aim of Ward Committee meetings was still unclear, as they neither build up participative democracy, nor help representative democracy to be effective. The view of an observer is shown above.

7.3.10 These structures cost and at this time of cuts the Council has been looking to justify all council expenditure. The cost of each Ward Committee meeting is said to be around £350. These costs do not include the preparation and set up costs, nor the costs of officers attending, other than the Democratic Services Officer in attendance. We know from our own experiences that officers can outnumber citizens.

7.3.11 The Green Paper process really tested the Ward Committee process, as each ward had this as an agenda item between one and three times. Given the huge resources put into this process we question if the Ward Committee process proved “fit enough for purpose”?

7.3.12 Overall our conclusion is that Ward Committees are not currently fit for the purpose set out in the Leader’s Policy Statement (2012) as the major means for citizens to engage on issues affecting their area.

7.3.13 To be fit for purpose does not mean a one-size-fits-all model and the way they work best needs to be flexible to meet local needs. Some Councillors may feel that the structure does work as a mechanism for engagement locally, but for others the resources should be ring fenced for

Ward Committees: A View

In Birmingham there is some variation among Ward Committees in how they operate, but they follow a roughly similar pattern. The meeting room is laid out with rows of chairs facing a table at which sit the local councillors, the local support officer, and the clerk.

There is a Code of Conduct ... but it makes no mention of how citizens can put items on the agenda. There is no provision for citizens to submit documents in the agenda papers.

One of the councillors chairs the meeting, and generally leads the discussion of each item, speaking at whatever length and frequency they wish. Officers are often there to give reports. Citizens can speak, but it is generally to ask questions for information or to make a complaint, and time may be cut short.

Richard Hatcher



engagement, but more flexibility given as to how to do this to meet the local needs. To make the best use of resources Councillors should have greater freedom to determine what will work best in their areas. Some strong pioneering effort should be promoted across the city for radical experimentation with new and different formats. This would mean that over a couple of years some 'best practice' can be identified to achieve some kind of 'Ward Committee' that is truly fit for the purpose of being the primary means of engagement between the Council and citizens.

Renewing Place Based Engagement

7.3.14 The forthcoming report to Cabinet on *Transforming Place: A Framework for Action* needs to be used as a basis for improving the effectiveness of engagement on neighbourhood issues, noting that the kinds of issues on which people most often wish they were more engaged, are those most impacting on the neighbourhoods where they live.

7.3.15 The Support Services Review also examined structures, especially the range of service user or single issue forums, steering groups etc. It also questioned whether it makes sense to talk to citizens first as users of one service, then another and then about their neighbourhood. The proposal from this Review was:

*"The City Council will engage individuals as citizens (e.g. a resident of Wylde Green) and therefore users of multiple services, rather than as users of individual services such as libraries or refuse collection or social services, requiring numerous individual and disparate contacts."*³⁵

7.3.16 Stronger place based engagement needs to happen to make a reality of devolution. It needs to feed into governance structures; it needs to focus on the citizen as a whole, whenever possible, and as the next section indicates, be a more collaborative effort with other organisations.

³⁵ See evidence pack, pages 161-166 for Support Services Review summary to Committee



8 Engagement for Action: The Future

8.1 This Time.....

8.1.1 This section sets out some things that have to be better this time around. Two things are different now:

- a) There is a funding crisis which is challenging. However, it does put pressure to revisit all current practice and to seek out new opportunities; and
- b) The leadership's momentum on devolution which has changed the governance structures and makes engagement key to how the Council delivers differently across different places. This is an important means by which power and influence will be steadily transferred to citizens and communities in order to improve local democracy, making it much easier for people to hold their services to account, and giving people more ability to shape their city and their local neighbourhood. The Leader's Policy Statement highlights engagement as part of the future policy agenda.

8.1.2 The rest of this chapter sets out some principles for moving forward. To achieve consistent working some of them will require a step change from how the Council does things now.

Develop Local Solutions

8.1.3 Whilst an overall approach for the Council needs to be developed, an important finding from this inquiry is the recognition that the Council's overall approach to 'public engagement' needs to distinguish between two very different forms and purposes of engagement: (a) strategic or city wide engagement, usually in relation to citywide decisions such as annual budget decisions, and strategic service changes such as wheelie bins, and introducing 20mph traffic speed policies; and (b) local engagement on local services, neighbourhood quality or public realm decisions such as roads, streetlights, crossings, community centres, litter hotspots, green-and-safe decisions.

8.1.4 Much of the general discussion of approaches to public engagement in this inquiry has focussed on the former, strategic engagement decisions. For many citizens, 'engagement for action' becomes real and meaningful when it is about the street scene outside their window and the local environment experienced as they walk to shops, schools, the health centre or local park. To enact the 'devolution and democracy' aims of the 2013 Leader's Policy Statement the Council needs to develop local solutions to more effective 'engagement for local action'. This means integrating the means of enabling the engagement, with the means of achieving the action so citizens can see the link locally, between their engagement and the achievement of local actions. It is therefore important to develop place specific (and if necessary service or consultation topic) approaches to this, by building on local knowledge and existing relationships.



- 8.1.5 Alongside this flexibility quality standards and minimum expectations of council-supported activities should be developed.

Weigh up the Competing Voices

- 8.1.6 We recognise that engagement would be easier if there is only one view coming from communities. As noted, a challenge with engagement is listening to all voices, small as well as loud and well connected. The Council needs to make sure that it gives weight to quieter voices.
- 8.1.7 Inevitably listening to citizens will mean a range of competing and conflicting priorities and needs are voiced. One role of engagement is in demonstrating conflict and then seeking to resolve it so all parties feel they were heard. One member of the Reference Group Asif Afridi (brap) suggests:

We have limited public resources and we are aware that service re-design/ budget cuts will affect some groups disproportionately. Yet we have not yet found a fair, proportionate, robust process for making decisions about which inequalities we should agree to endure/ which inequalities we are going to respond to/ aim to address. The most important thing we need to get right is our approach to decision-making based on the evidence about needs. This is the hard bit – and the bit we assume will be fair/ transparent (but which often isn't – or isn't felt to be by communities). This is also the bit that has the most potential to lead to cohesion problems/ conflict within local areas. Some decisions that disproportionately affect some communities will be unpopular – yet people need to feel they have understood why those decisions have been made and that they have been made in a balanced/ proportionate way.

Embed Equalities

- 8.1.8 The Council has to be able to hear and act on the widest array of voices to help it manage a major risk of certain groups facing disproportionate cumulative impacts from how it makes decisions in response to the cuts. There is a danger that interest groups and certain individuals are seen as speaking for all people in an area or of a group.
- 8.1.9 To ensure that engagement is a worthwhile activity the Council needs to maximise the number and range of voices it hears from. Equalities need to underpin our approach to engagement. Questions to pose are:
- Do citizens have an equal say?
 - Do citizens have equal access?
 - Do all voices have equal power?
- 8.1.10 We often hear the term “hard to reach” which implies some groups of people are hiding away. We suggest the term to use is “seldom heard” as then it becomes the responsibility of the Council to address this.



- 8.1.11 Much of the information the Council provides can be impenetrable. As stated earlier, the language is often “council speak” and not the language of our citizens. Some of the consultations that the Council carries out, however, make an effort to be accessible to a broad range of people. For example, using easy read³⁶ can help people with learning difficulties or poor levels of literacy engage.
- 8.1.12 Reflecting on the superdiversity of Birmingham a recent scrutiny report noted that each ward, building on its understanding of local communities, should develop a strategy for engagement.³⁷ Feedback from the Executive in November 2013 said progress was being made. It linked this to both the guidance to be developed on Annual Policy Statements and District Development Plans and to the emerging document *Transforming Place: A Framework for Action*.³⁸
- 8.1.13 Engagement with citizens is an important way to understand these different needs and, in particular, if changes to policy and decisions to change services has a disproportionate impact on certain groups of people. However, the challenge to the Council is about how it uses any information it gains through consultation and engagement to meet the equality duty. This comes back to the importance of thinking through, in any engagement, the relevance of what you are asking or undertaking and what you are trying to achieve. The public sector equality duty requires the Council to advance equality of opportunity for people with specific characteristics. This includes minimising disadvantages, meeting their specific needs and encouraging their participation in public life and other activities where their participation is low. Although the way the Council undertakes this may follow the letter of the law, given the diversity of the city and the opportunities this brings, the Council will have to think “outside the box”.
- 8.1.14 We suggest that the equalities box is often seen to be ticked by including monitoring consultation responses. Monitoring respondents can help to target engagement activities and understand the different impacts different groups might face. Importantly, this information can be used to develop robust equalities assessments (still often referred to as EINAs - Equality Impact Needs Assessments). But is the Council too much of the time paying lip service to the ‘equalities strands’ at a huge reputational price to the credibility of the engagement? One witness, for example, reported that citizens were alienated by the question in the weekly waste survey which asked respondents to declare their sexual orientation. Clearly, careful consideration needs to be given to when to ask and the purpose of asking questions relating to the equalities strands.

Be Honest

- 8.1.15 It sometimes feels as if consultation and engagement is just a process that the Council goes through without any intention of meaningful difference being expected. Sometimes this comes

³⁶ See example at: <https://www.birminghambeheard.org.uk/adults-communities/sexual-health-consultation>

³⁷ Birmingham: Where the World Meets, February 2013

³⁸ Formerly the neighbourhood strategy



down to the language used and the Council needs to be better at distinguishing when it is informing citizens and when it is engaging or consulting for a purpose.

- 8.1.16 There must also be a presumption against carrying out engagement unless a demonstrable effect is intended. This means ceasing doing engagement that is really Public Relations and scrapping all consultation and engagement that is intended to have little or no effect on action.
- 8.1.17 The Council needs to ensure the conversations with citizens are honest. This might be about the options for service redesign, or about what is negotiable or not negotiable. There are political risks associated with this, but it is key to building trust.

Build Relationships

- 8.1.18 The importance of building relationships cannot be overemphasised. All Councillors and officers have a role to play. Building relationships needs to be part of the core business of the Council, not an added extra. As noted previously, Councillors certainly have an important role to play in building and nurturing relationships.

Hold a Civic Conversation

- 8.1.19 We heard a lot about the need to develop meaningful conversations. The quote from a Chamberlain Forum publication illustrates this. The rules for a good conversation can be extended to apply to effective consultation (see text box).
- 8.1.20 Traditionally it has been thought that citizens will come to the Council if they want their views heard. To make sure there are meaningful conversations this is one of the things that must change and the Council will have to meet with citizens wherever they spend time, such as at the school gate or at the entrance to the supermarket. This can also happen through piggybacking on events that are happening locally, such as a school parents' evening or a summer carnival.
- 8.1.21 The Council needs to be better at listening and finding ways to join in the conversations that are happening, without dominating them. Social media, used well, is an ideal way of doing this. It cannot, however, control the message with social media and it needs to better understand how it acts on this complex set of messages and conversations.
- 8.1.22 Such conversation ensures there are opportunities to continually develop and share knowledge as part of

Are we being Heard? Consultation as Conversation

"Conversations are between people – human and interpersonal factors (that is, who is involved in the conversation and how they relate) are often the most important determinants in the success of consultation.

When people – both consultants and consultees - talk about a poor experience of consultation, it is often a result of failing to understand and prepare consultation as if it was a conversation: too much jargon, not enough listening, and an inability to exchange views or hold dialogue in a dynamic way."

Chamberlain Forum 2011



the cycle of improvements. A new civic conversation with citizens can bring about change in all of the city's communities, and it is the responsibility of everyone; Councillors and officers.

Broaden our Support

8.1.23 Some of our key services are run by businesses and third sector organisations. As the Council may move to different models of service delivery in the future it needs to ensure that meaningful citizen engagement, let alone Councillor engagement does not prove impossible. The Council needs to ensure engagement can impact upon contracted services like highways. It also needs to ensure our neighbourhood and ward based approaches open up opportunities for citizens to have meaningful input into local services, such as schools.

See Citizens as Assets

8.1.24 Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) is an approach which recognises "capacity, skills, knowledge and connections" in communities and service users, rather than labelling areas and focussing on problems or assuming some groups are just "hard to reach." We think, as set out in our last report *Devolution: Making it Real*, that this approach needs to become embedded in how the Council does things. This will unlock resources that exist and enable all citizens to feel they have something to contribute.

Share Power and Work Collaboratively

8.1.25 Above anything this should mean that it stops being the Council setting the agenda and that the Council is much more open to listening to what citizens want to talk about. In particular the Council needs to enable community, voluntary and faith organisations to take the initiative and then engage in those conversations.

8.1.26 The Council cannot control engagement, and must become more open to working and listening in other ways. The Council cannot do it all, but neither should it do it all, alone or on just its own terms.

8.1.27 As noted previously, the Council needs to ensure that it does not duplicate efforts with other statutory bodies and that they work much more closely to improve our neighbourhoods, wards and districts through engaging with citizens together. This will require partnership skills from all and strong high level leadership.

Help Citizens Climb the Ladder of Participation

8.1.28 Although we set out a critique of Sherry Arnstein's ladder of participation the top of the ladder does take us to a qualitatively different type of engagement: citizen control, delegated power and partnership. Engagement is not a process; it is about the transfer of power from institutions to individuals and communities. It is not static; it is about using the mechanisms of engagement as a means for creating change, and transferring more power to residents. The Council needs to vastly widen the scope of influence that citizens can have, such as in community and participatory



budgeting, citizens co-opted into the decision cycle, service redesign processes and open book budgeting.

- 8.1.29 There are opportunities for jointly designing or specifying services in the city (some people refer to this as co-production). But this has to be taken slowly, to build trust and demonstrate small wins and can only happen if officers cede some of the power of their knowledge and skills and appreciate the experience of citizens, especially in their role as service users.
- 8.1.30 However, to use the ladder metaphor, the lower rungs first need to be stronger to enable it to be climbed. This takes us back to the improvements to day to day engagement set out in Chapter 4.

Secure Action

- 8.1.31 Throughout the inquiry we were reminded that engagement has no point by itself. It is only relevant if it leads to something happening as a result of it.
- 8.1.32 The strategy needs to enable “engagement for action” not “engagement for box ticking”. What is missing from the Council’s efforts is often its ability to respond by changing what it does. Engagement has to be fully integrated in the action cycle as the Council creates stronger democratic control of local public services. In taking forward any new policy the officers and Councillors need to be able to demonstrate that they have drawn upon engagement and/or consultation.
- 8.1.33 We were told that when citizens come up with innovative ideas there is no channel to enable them to be considered. The Standing Up for Birmingham campaign, for example, will only work if all officers and Councillors are clear about how voices are to be heard.

Reshape Democracy

- 8.1.34 The *Devolution: Making it Real* report set out an aim of getting council services to a “safe and steady” state. Twelve months on it seems as if the only certainty is that there will be 1.1 million residents in the city and it will continue to be young and diverse. The Council’s structures and procedures are built round certainty and it is proving difficult to make changes as quickly as it needs to. There will continue to be complexity and uncertainty and engagement needs to be able to work within that and form part of the cycle of continuous improvement and service refinement. The Council needs to ensure that continual improvement drives delivery, and not merely the need to deliver on-going cuts.
- 8.1.35 The Council has to reshape democracy to respond better to the critical challenges this city is, and will be, confronting in the context of huge cuts, and the uncertainties that will need to be faced. Taking the steps we have set out here will help that process.

Understand Success

- 8.1.36 The Council needs to have a better collective understanding of when engagement has been successful. Some measures could, for example, include:



- How do we know if citizens have had opportunities to engage?
- Have we heard different citizens' voices to last time we engaged (e.g. 10% or 20% of those engaged are different to last time we did something similar)?
- Has engagement led to action – outcomes / decisions compared to the decisions that would have been made?

8.1.37 The Five Steps to Wellbeing developed by the New Economics Foundation (see text box) are already being used within the Council (e.g. the White Paper, *Making Birmingham an Inclusive City*). The outcomes of success for engagement could also be measured by reference to this and could be incorporated into an overall measure of community wellbeing / the sustainability of place:

- Is the community connected?
- Is there continuous learning?
- Do officers pick up on what is around them and take responsibility or feed issues through to the appropriate department or agency?
- Do neighbours have time to help each other?
- Has the Council given up some power?

Own this approach

8.1.38 Helen Baglee, Healthwatch told us:

“Culturally we hope it is understood that engagement is a whole organisation’s responsibility”.

8.1.39 Ownership of engagement has to be clear at the top of an organisation and has to run explicitly through it; from the top to the bottom, and be embedded in the culture. These leaders need to be aware of the skills set that is required. Accountability for consultation and engagement has to be clear.

Five Ways to Wellbeing

Connect...

With the people around you...

Be active...

.... discover a physical activity you enjoy and that suits your level of mobility and fitness.

Take notice...

Be aware of the world around you ...

Keep learning...

Try something new. Rediscover an old interest.

Give...

Do something nice for a friend, or a stranger.

NHS Confederation / NEF Five Ways to Wellbeing:



9 Conclusions and Recommendations

9.1 Culture Change

- 9.1.1 Rather than detailed recommendations this Chapter sets out an expectation of improvements in four areas, which can be developed and implemented over the coming year. They each need to address the concerns raised in this report and the principles set out for moving forward.
- 9.1.2 Working collaboratively with citizens has to be part of the “Future Council” and ensuring the Council can secure “different for less”, and is the key to reconfiguring what the Council does. The current structures of the Council intended to be the main approach for engagement are not consistently effective enough – often few citizens engage and even when they do the structure is still one of Councillors with power and others trying to be heard. The Council needs to put more effort into building relationships, including harnessing the potential of social media. The focus of engagement needs to have more of a place focus to meet the aspirations of devolution. In doing that there are opportunities that the Council needs to explore further of doing engagement alongside statutory and third sector partners.
- 9.1.3 It is dependent upon building relationships and setting out to do things in a way which values input from citizens, organisations and businesses. A number of these issues relate to behaviours, and the challenges facing the Council in taking forward citizen engagement are formidable. The Reference Group spent some time discussing the behaviours which Councillors, officers and citizens should model in their engagement activities, such as respecting all participants, active listening, valuing all views and building relationships. We think there is mileage in developing and setting out these expectations. They need to be translated from mere guidance to being part of core business for the Council and “the way things are done around here”.
- 9.1.4 Given the importance of this issue there needs to be a step change in how engagement happens. This report aims to create change and achieve transfer of power from institution to individual and community. The expectations set out will require significant cultural change, in part through learning and development, to bring about a city that seeks to empower its citizens and communities to engage and come up with creative solutions together. It is a collective city approach which will require changes from the Council, key stakeholders and citizens. The cultural change needed should not be underestimated:
- Officers need to be more receptive to engagement and being influenced by citizens;
 - Citizens need to be prepared to take more active responsibility for their role in improving their neighbourhood and helping their city; and
 - Councillors need to accept that their job is to help their community to succeed.



- 9.1.5 We hope that there can be a wider discussion about the principles in this report with the citizens of Birmingham. It is incumbent on us as Councillors to take forward this debate.
- 9.1.6 We expect the new Engagement Strategy to be developed. We recommend that the Reference Group is asked to stay involved to provide challenge to that process too.
- 9.1.7 The first Service Review of *Support Services Tranche 1* considered engagement and this will lead to changes of officer and directorate structures for enabling engagement. At the time of writing, no announcements have been made as to how the staffing structure and support for engagement might change. We feel it is important in making the change that the principles and actions set out in the report can be facilitated.

9.2 Actions to Underpin an Engagement Strategy

9.2.1 To ensure that there is a firm base to build engagement we have identified three areas that need significant improvement and these need to be addressed in this municipal year. They relate to access to information, access to services and ensuring citizens' voices can be heard through formal consultations. If the Council cannot improve issues which it has control over, it will not be able to develop the more complex relationships required in engagement. These are areas where considerable resources are already invested and we believe that the improvements can be made by making smarter use of existing resources. The areas for improvement are a – c below.

- a) To improve access to information there needs to be improvements to the Council's website, to be overseen by Governance, Resources and Customer Services (GRCS) O&S Committee as part of their ongoing work programme;

	Recommendation	Responsibility	Completion Date
R01	The Deputy Leader to secure improvements to the Council's website to address the concerns set out in Section 4.2 to be overseen by the Governance, Resources & Customer Services O&S Committee.	Deputy Leader	September 2014 (Plan to be discussed with Committee June 2014)

- b) The customer interface can be face to face, via the internet or social media or in writing. This front-facing interaction with citizens in their role as customers needs to be better. The Council needs to uphold the rights that citizens have to services as well as being clear what their responsibilities are. Officers need to ensure information is always accurate. It is worrying to be aware of cases such as a senior citizen being asked to phone a number which just rings out.

If citizens are not treated well each time they deal with the Council they can feel they are not respected. There needs to be an improvement plan for how the Council deals with citizens as customers, which should be overseen by Governance, Resources and Customer Services O&S Committee.



As this report was being finalised, the Deputy Leader attended the Governance, Resources and Customer Services O&S Committee and spoke about the intention to develop a set of service standards that would both improve the quality of response our customers receive and drive service improvement. That Committee will receive a further update on the proposed customer services strategy later in the year. This is to be welcomed as our inquiry identified the need for improvements in how we deal with and work with our customers. The improvements need to occur both at a city level and a place level.

	Recommendation	Responsibility	Completion Date
R02	The Deputy Leader to draw up an improvement plan for how the Council deals with citizens as customers, which should be overseen by the Governance, Resources; Customer Services O&S Committee.	Deputy Leader	September 2014 (Plan to be discussed with Committee June 2014)

- c) Consultations are part of engagement, but are a more stand-alone and often a one-off formal process. They can sometimes be a starting point for on-going dialogue and engagement. An improvement plan for consultation should be drawn up, to be overseen by the Districts and Public Engagement O&S Committee.

	Recommendation	Responsibility	Completion Date
R03	The Deputy Leader together with the Cabinet Member for Social Cohesion and Equalities to draw up and implement a cross-cutting improvement plan for consultation to address the issues in Section 4.4 and ensure consultations are consistently good quality, meaningful and influence decision-making.	Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Social Cohesion and Equalities	September 2014 (Plan to be discussed with Committee June 2014)

9.3 An Engagement for Action Plan

- 9.3.1 A failure to improve engagement will inhibit the development of devolution. Our key recommendation is that the Leader, along with Cabinet Members, Executive Members for Local Services (also known as District Chairs) and Ward Chairs reflect and review the issues and key principles raised in this report. Working collaboratively, they should bring forward a plan that addresses the key concerns raised and opportunities set out in the report and takes on the fundamental step changes set out in Chapters 5-8. It should set out a shared understanding of the purpose of engagement. This will require systemic and cultural change from the Council and a move from paternalistic relationships with citizens. It also requires putting place above the silos within the Council that still exist. It needs to ensure place-based action follows.



- 9.3.2 An early version of this plan should be brought to this Committee to enable us to comment and influence the plan. If the plan is insufficiently ambitious the Committee will set out some more specific recommendations.
- 9.3.3 An effective form of democratic local governance is not an optional element of the package for some to do and others to avoid. It will need to be done differently in different areas / communities of course, but the end result should be a fundamental right to have a coherent form of local engagement. This may not be through formal meetings, but the approach would need to be able to pass the test of legitimacy with local citizens. Ward Committees might still achieve this, but the action plan needs to consider this.
- 9.3.4 The action plan should also set out how the Executive will engage with key stakeholders (e.g. West Midlands Police and the health service) on how to achieve a more collaborative place based approach for engagement.

	Recommendation	Responsibility	Completion Date
R04	The Leader, along with Cabinet Members, Executive Members for Local Services and Ward Chairs bring forward a plan that addresses the key concerns raised and opportunities set out in the report and take on the fundamental step changes set out in Chapters 5-8.	Leader in consultation with Cabinet Members, Executive Members for Local Services and Ward Chairs	February 2015 Draft Plan to be discussed with committee June 2014 Interim feedback in October 2014

- 9.3.5 The Districts and Public Engagement O&S Committee will also set up a programme of calling directorates to account for their engagement and their formal consultations on a rolling programme focussing not just on the processes, but also the outcome and actions.

	Recommendation	Responsibility	Completion Date
R05	Progress towards achievement of these recommendations should be reported to the Districts and Public Engagement Overview and Scrutiny Committee in September 2014. Subsequent progress reports will be scheduled by the Committee thereafter, until all recommendations are implemented.	Leader	September 2014



Appendix 1

How we did this Inquiry

Please Note: the evidence presented to our Committee is in the evidence pack available at: <http://www.birmingham.gov.uk/osreports>. Also included in the evidence pack is the tenant engagement information that went to our Committee on the 11th December 2012.

Our committee discussed the Council's Be Heard consultation database with Kaja Carson and Chandra Quarshie; and public engagement at our meeting of the 5th March 2013.

Dr Catherine Durose, Director of Research/Senior lecturer, INLOGOV and Liz Richardson, Snr Lecturer in Politics, University of Manchester attended our 23rd April 2013 Committee meeting.

Four Councillors attended our 23rd April 2013 Committee meeting to share a diverse range of good practice.

As part of the City Council's Service Review process, the "Green Paper: Support Services Part 1" was launched in early July 2013. The Green Paper referred to a number of cross-council support functions, including public engagement and consultation.

The improved site should be more user friendly. All consultation activities should be put on the site.

Engagement should not be regimented and urged that good practice should be promoted, rather than producing a 'model' or 'toolkit'.

Cllr R Alden: *Members needed to be honest when engaging with the public and not give false impressions.*

Cllr C Badley: *One lesson from District Conventions was not to miss contacts or networks from the representation.*

Cllr M Bridle: *The purpose of the Ward Committee in Shard End is to get action for residents.*

Cllr W Zaffar: *Do use online engagement to supplement and complement face-to-face engagement.*

The City Council will engage individuals as citizens and therefore users of multiple services, rather than as users of individual services.

Digital engagement will be supported by widening participation in Ward Committees and the Neighbourhood Forums and other partnership arrangements (funded corporately) and user forums, as necessary (funded by individual directorates)



At our meeting on the 16th July 2013 the Committee agreed that we would work alongside the Green Paper and Service Review process to ensure that any implementation would take account of our proposals. We also discussed our terms of reference for this Inquiry.

We held our first formal evidence gathering session for this inquiry on the 3rd September 2013, with:

Saeed Haque: *Citizens UK began with 'wins' for people and developed their perspective on situations.*

It also used a method based on links and relationships between groups and organisations.

Stephen Belling, the Nehemiah Foundation: *People were suffering deprivation, meaning there were no easy means of engaging them.*

The Foundation pulled together existing knowledge and experience in order to try to create a 'living' plan.

Chief Superintendent E Barnett, West Midlands Police: *Engagement was key to policing in order to build confidence in the community and obtain knowledge or intelligence.*

Officers attended local meeting places e.g. schools, libraries or supermarkets.

The Police was embracing social media e.g. facebook and twitter – although it was not the answer to everything.

Jan Kimber, Birmingham Community Safety Partnership: *A significant question was how to engage people with whom there was normally no contact. The Partnership used a*



We held our second formal evidence gathering session on the 22nd October 2013, with:

Nick Booth, Podnosh: *The Service Reviews needed to be approached differently. Details should be publicised as individual issues on social media, which would then be disseminated across the social media network.*

It was important to signpost people to information and to look for people with relevant skills in the community, using them as a conduit to enable voices to be heard.

There is a big challenge around culture. Allowing public servants to think like citizens rather than servants of a council process is a big step towards that. We're already good at using the web for civic good in Birmingham – embrace it, support it, don't try and own or control it.

Dave Harte, Bournville Village hyperlocal website: *There were 26 'hyper-active' local websites in Birmingham. There was evidence that regional media companies were picking up issues from local sites and that people were interested in 'place'. <http://bournvilllevillage.com>*

Lol Thurstan, B26 Community hyperlocal website: *There are numerous people across the city taking an active interest in the community, be they bloggers, neighbourhood forum members, environmentalists etc. who are in a position to act as a communication 'bridge'. <http://b26community.wordpress.com>*

Geoff Coleman, BCC: *The Corporate Communications Team was connecting to local websites and was sending press releases to them at the same time as to regional media companies.*

Helen Baglee, Healthwatch: *They commissioned local volunteers. The HealthWatch website will be launched, with links to various services and social media feeds. The People's Forum was seen as a good means of engagement and HealthWatch would like to replicate it in relation to health care.*

Dr Peter Rookes, Birmingham Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCG): *Structures could create barriers, which it was important to break down and develop networks. People needed to be given the opportunity to express solutions they wanted, rather than solutions being imposed.*

Jenni Northcote, Birmingham South Central CCG: *Taken the approach of identifying what motivated people to become involved in service considerations: the items they were interested or wished to complain. They had worked with partner bodies and had identified where people were meeting and discussing items. It was necessary to have continuous dialogue with citizens, rather than short-term engagement exercises.*

Cllr Tony Kennedy and Sam German, Birmingham Community Healthcare NHS Trust
Using their 4 level approach to engagement there is no such thing as hard to reach.

Jonathan Gurling, Birmingham Faith Leaders Group:
*Faith communities are key stable, local institutions and can play a part in place based engagement. To aid engagement a faith map for Birmingham can be found at:
<http://www.birminghamfaithmap.org.uk/>*



We held our third formal evidence gathering session on the 19th November 2013, with:

Angus McCabe, Third Sector Research Centre: *Engagement suggested an opportunity to influence decisions and needed to involve a clear process, with people understanding the outcome.*

Policy making was meant to be a clear, logical process, but issues could be emotional for residents and that generated a conflict of approach. Predominant voices needed to be taken into account in the process.

Structures established for engagement could create barriers and the sub-contracting of work could create additional problems.

Presenters should be carefully selected, as it was not the case that everyone was a good presenter and the process of discussion should be considered carefully, with non-negotiable matters being stated clearly.

Raj Mack, Digital Birmingham: *They were trying to work with schools and parents to widen knowledge of using IT and were working with officers responsible for Universal Credit to provide information on forthcoming changes.*

Chris Jordan, Local Services Directorate: *The City Council should use technologies and processes with which citizens were familiar and comfortable.*

Paul Slatter, Chamberlain Forum: *There had been exasperation expressed with the City Council, as it had only begun asking people their views when resources were restricted. People were concerned at the tendency towards central decision-making, for example taking District Committee meetings back into the centre.*

He suggested citizens wanted to scrap Ward Committee agendas and to replace them with a forum for positive discussion. There was concern that many items were submitted to 'tick boxes' rather than to promote discussion.

Sarah Hinksman, Corporate Resources: *The Green Papers exercise had not been a consultation in a formal sense, but was an early stage in the process. There would be a formal consultation on the budget proposals following the exercise.*

Officers would have liked to have had more resources available and to have used social media more to promote the exercise.

Asking citizens for their views at an early stage was confusing for people because the details available were less clear.

Officers had struggled to convey the message regarding the financial situation and that the City Council was not making cuts because it wanted to do that and there has to be a reduction of services.

Papers not easily digestible and would like to be able to cut these down.

It had become clear that citizens needed more assistance and support to give feedback.



Officers' and Councillors' attended engagement events including Ward Committees, the neighbourhood strategy events, a Citizens UK Assembly, the Social Inclusion Process summits and consultation drop in events. Some of the formal consultations on Be Heard were also considered.

We set up a reference group with external organisations.

The Citizens Engagement Reference Group

The Reference Group comprised:

Debbie Pippard, Barrow Cadbury Trust; Asif Afridi, Brap; Fred Rattley, Church of England; Charles Ashton-Gray, Birmingham City Council and Cllr Lisa Trickett.

It was felt important to draw on the knowledge and expertise outside of the Council to act as a sounding board and inform the work led by Councillors. The Reference Group was asked to:

- Support in the gathering, summarising and analysis of the existing body of knowledge and research;
- Challenge and support the committee in its role; and
- Influence the development of the new strategy for engagement.

Invitations were also extended to Prof Jenny Phillimore, University of Birmingham and Brian Carr, BVSC who were unable to attend.