



<b>Subject:</b>	<b>Update on Consultation and Engagement</b>
<b>Date:</b>	20th November 2020
<b>Reporting Officer:</b>	John Tully, Director of City and Organisational Strategy
<b>Contact Officers:</b>	Christine Robinson Strategy, Policy and Partnership Manager Patricia Flynn, Strategic Policy and Planning Officer

<b>Restricted Reports</b>	
<b>Is this report restricted?</b>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<b>If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?</b>	
<b>After Committee Decision</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>After Council Decision</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Sometime in the future</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Never</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>

<b>Call-in</b>	
<b>Is the decision eligible for Call-in?</b>	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>

<b>1.0</b>	<b>Purpose of Report</b>
1.1	To update the Committee on progress with deployment of the Council's new digital civic engagement platform and the supporting framework for consultation and engagement.
<b>2.0</b>	<b>Recommendations</b>
2.1	The Committee is asked to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. note the update on proposed civic engagement (with immediate emphasis on obtaining citizen input on city recovery from Covid-19) utilising the new online Engagement HQ platform;</li> <li>ii. agree that the biennial doorstep resident survey planned for this winter, be deferred for at least 6 months; and</li> <li>iii. agree the revised consultation and engagement framework (attached at appendix 2)</li> </ul>

3.0	<b>Key Issues</b>
3.1	<p><b>Background</b></p> <p>The Local Government (NI) Act 2014 reinforced the Council’s duty to consult, and since then the Council has been working hard to improve its approach to consultation and engagement and has made considerable progress in terms of capacity building and ICT. This work has included procurement of a new digital engagement platform and further development of a revised Corporate Consultation and Engagement Framework to support our approach.</p>
3.2	<p><b>New Engagement Platform and Civic Engagement on City Recovery</b></p> <p>To enhance the Council’s capabilities to utilise more innovative participatory tools using online/digital engagement with citizens, at earlier stages and on a more ongoing basis, we have invested in a new digital platform. The formal procurement stage has now been completed and the ‘Engagement HQ’ platform is currently being configured for Council use, (alongside development of necessary management and operational protocols) in advance of going live by early December 2020. This platform will provide a number of new tools to support early, transparent and ongoing dialogue, and will help address areas identified for improvement that have emerged from associated work on the corporate Consultation and Engagement Framework to underpin Council’s approach.</p>
3.3	<p><b>Roles of Elected Members in supporting deployment of the new platform</b></p> <p>Elected Members are asked to note that the following support will be required in deployment and future development/roll out of the new digital platform:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fronting engagement projects through short introductory video clips/soundbites</li> <li>• Promoting and profile raising of the platform and current projects through Members own networks and communication channels in communities</li> <li>• Inputting to the design of engagement activities at development stages (e.g. via Party Leaders forum, Area Working Groups, SP&amp;R Committee as appropriate)</li> </ul>
3.4	<p><b>Proposals for platform launch and next steps</b></p> <p>The new platform will be launched publicly in early December, with the focus on the first engagements on the city’s recovery from Covid-19 creating new opportunities for dialogue with citizens, to input their comments, ideas and views on what they think is needed for the city and its communities to recover from the Covid-19 pandemic.</p>
3.5	<p>The topics/areas of engagement, and tools for citizen participation, being worked up as part of the platform’s early deployment include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A stronger future Belfast (city recovery)</li> </ul>

- A featured set of engagement activities will seek citizen participation and engagement on city recovery. This will form the main emphasis of communications activity promoting the initial launch of the new platform. The proposed tools/engagement activities being drafted will be framed to emphasise community/neighbourhood aspects of interest to residents. The tools that will be used for this initial engagement are:

- Community stories (good news stories from within communities to highlight the positive experiences/learning from responses to Covid-19)
- Ideas generation (ideas for current and future focus in city recovery)
- A covid-19 survey (to seek views of residents on Covid impacts and inform recovery planning)
- Quick poll (snap virtual poll on immediate Covid concerns)

Building on initial engagement above, it is intended that future engagement phases on city recovery will utilise the platform to support focused engagement work at area level (N, S, E, W) as part of work to develop area based recovery plans. This engagement process, and subsequent activities/methods of engagement activity will be designed in collaboration with key stakeholders over the coming months.

- Climate/Resilience

- A hub on the work climate adaptation and mitigation to seek citizen input on relevant aspects of the programme. An early activity could include engagement on 1 million trees programme, potentially utilising the place mapping tool for residents to suggest possible locations around the city for tree planting.

- VCSE Sectoral Panel and citywide network

- A dedicated portion of the site for VCSe stakeholders engaging with the city's community planning process. This will host key information on the work of the VCSe Sectoral Advisory Panel and will include engagement tools to allow feedback from stakeholders across the wider VCSE sector network.

3.6

The areas above provide an indication of the engagement themes at initial launch and example screen shots showing what the platform will look like are provided in Appendix 1. Over time, new engagement themes/topics will be added to support the engagement needs of the Council, and the Community Planning Partnership where appropriate, to promote earlier and more ongoing forms of participation and engagement with citizens.

### **VCSE Sectoral Advisory Panel**

3.7 Members will be aware that the recently established VCSE Sectoral Advisory Panel plans to host an online sectoral conference on 30<sup>th</sup> November 2020, titled '**Putting community wellbeing at the heart of community planning**'. Aimed at participants from across the city's VCSE sectors, the conference agenda is being developed by the VCSE Sectoral Advisory Panel, and will include:

- Introductory comments from the Minister for Communities
- Presentations from keynote speakers including the Future Generations Wellbeing Commissioner of Wales, Scottish Improvement Service Chief Executive, and Suzanne Wylie, Belfast City Council Chief Executive and Chair of Community Planning Partnership.
- Breakout workshop discussions for VCSE participants to shape the VCSE Panel's approach and engagement with the sector over the coming year.

3.8 The newly established VCSE Sectoral Advisory Panel will also be engaged over the coming weeks to test and refine the engagement tools (while also providing opportunity to input their views) in advance of the wider public launch.

### **Resident Survey**

3.9 The Council undertakes a resident survey every two years, the primary purpose of which is to provide reliable and representative perception data to monitor progress and inform priority setting. Unlike online consultations, which are self-selecting, our resident survey uses a representative sample of Belfast residents based on age, gender and DEA and is collected via doorstep interviews. This ensures that the data is both valid and reliable, which enables consistency and accuracy for trend and performance comparisons. This data is used to help track direction of travel with respect to the Belfast Agenda and corporate plan; we also report a number of these indicators to the NI Audit office as part of our performance improvement duty. The survey was due to commence in November with results available by March 2021. However, due to Covid-19 we are proposing to delay the survey by approximately 6 months, in the first instance, and subject to further review thereafter. It is hoped that fieldwork will be undertaken around summer time so that these performance indicators can feed into the refresh of the Belfast Agenda. In the interim we will also examine the ongoing need for the survey. Ongoing engagement with residents around priorities will continue using the new engagement platform.

### **Revised Belfast City Council Consultation and Engagement Framework**

3.10 Last year, Members agreed to move forward with a public commitment to consultation and engagement in the form of a corporate consultation and engagement (C&E) framework. The

framework is not a programme of engagement events or consultations, but instead provides the policy context in which we will do this i.e. how we will plan, deliver and utilise our C&E activity. It sets out our vision for engagement and the principles and standards that we will aspire to meet. It provides clarity and transparency, and will be supported by an ongoing action plan and officer toolkit designed to help improve the consistency, quality and value of our engagement.

3.11 The draft framework was subject to a 12-week public consultation between December 2019 and March 2020. Key results from this consultation are presented below:

- All respondents (100%) agreed that it was “important that Belfast City Council has a clear policy on consultation and engagement”
- 90% agree with our definitions of consultation and involvement; three quarters (75%) agreed with our definition of engagement and 58% agreed with our proposed vision for consultation engagement
- On average, more than 80% agreed with each of our proposed standards
- On average, around three quarters (range 67% -83%) agreed with each of our proposed aims and aspirations, with value for money and keeping people informed attracting the highest levels of support.

3.12 We also sought feedback on the draft equality screening and rural needs assessment and invited any further comments. Suggested areas for improvement included:

- Creating a shorter and more concise vision
- Enabling ongoing conversations rather than just informing and consulting, with greater openness and transparency around decisions
- More emphasis on valuing engagement and in particular the input from the community
- One respondent highlighted the need for resources to support meaningful engagement, whilst another queried our use of the term “people”. In relation to equality, one respondent suggested that if wanted to make our engagements more accessible, then we needed to look at the language we used and avoid “jargon”.

#### **Finalising the C&E Framework and Next Steps**

3.13 We have revised the draft framework and updated our action plan to reflect public feedback. The finalised framework is attached at appendix 1 for approval. Next steps are summarised as follows:

<i>Framework</i>	Present to SP&R for formal adoption. Promote new framework internally and update on website.
<i>Civic engagement</i>	Develop and implement options to enhance our community engagement, focussing initially on an online engagement platform
<i>Capacity building</i>	Develop continuous programme of support and capacity building for officers, including an officer toolkit, C&E champions and internal networking and professional development.
<i>Consultation</i>	Implement feedback protocol /process for all public consultations. Align citizen space consultations to new engagement platform and review ongoing use.

**Financial and Resource Implications**

3.14 There are no direct financial implication arising from this report. Costs associated with the implementation of the action plan, including the enhanced civic engagement platform and wider capacity building, have been factored into council budgets. Future and ongoing budget implications will be monitored as part of the action plan implementation and learning. Financial and human resource issues relating to ongoing C&E will be brought to CMT as they arise.

**Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment**

3.15 There are no direct equality implications contained in this report. An equality screening and rural needs assessment was undertaken as part of the framework development. Whilst, it is clear that some sections of the community face greater barriers to involvement, the framework aims to help address these and ensure that everyone has an equal opportunity to participate. Equality and inclusion is an underlying principle within the framework and our action plan, which includes steps to improve civic engagement and capacity building for officers, will seek to mitigate any barriers to participation. The enhanced participant management and analytical tools of the new platform will also help us understand better who is engaging with us and where we may need to target our efforts.

**4.0 Documents Attached**

- Appendix 1: Engagement HQ platform overview (working draft screenshots)
- Appendix 2: Revised Consultation and Engagement Framework