

Committee: **Executive Committee**
 Date of meeting: **25th September 2019**
 Report Subject: **Wales Audit Office Review Service User Perspective: Community Engagement**
 Portfolio Holder: **Councillor Nigel Daniels, Leader / Executive Member Corporate Services**
 Report Submitted by: **Bernadette Elias
 Head of Governance and Partnerships**

Reporting Pathway								
Directorate Management Team	Corporate Leadership Team	Portfolio Holder / Chair	Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny Committee	Executive Committee	Council	Other (please state)
15.08.19	19.08.19	11.09.19	19.11.19		4/9/19	25/09/19		

1. **Purpose of the Report**
 To present the findings of the Wales Audit Office (WAO) review *Service User Perspective: Community Engagement* and the management response to the proposals for improvement.
2. **Scope and Background**
 - 2.1 As part of the agreed local programme of work the WAO undertook two reviews with a focus on engagement. These reviews were planned to span two audit programmes and were designed to be complementary.
 - 2.2 The first review was *Aligning Levers of Change* and explored how engagement can be an effective lever for change. The focus of the review was agreed with the Council and reflected the commitment to continued development and learning on how we engage with communities and stakeholders.
 - 2.3 The overall conclusion was **that the Council is committed and enthusiastic about engaging with the community and recognises the scale of the challenge**. The review was used to inform the Council's Engagement Strategy 2018-2022 *Our Approach to Engagement*, presented to the Corporate Overview scrutiny committee in September 2018.
 - 2.4 The second review *Service User Perspective: Community Engagement* was undertaken in Spring 2019. This review sought to answer the question "Do the needs, experiences and aspirations of local people inform the design and delivery of the Council's community engagement exercises when making service changes to more closely meet their needs".
2. The overall conclusion was that **local people recognise the Council's**

commitment to community engagement although they are not always able to take part in a way that is effective and impactful.

3. Options for Recommendation

3.1 This report was presented to the Corporate Overview Scrutiny Committee on 4th September 2019 and the Committee accepted the report and appendices as provided.

3.2 The management response at appendix 3 has been agreed by CLT.

Option 1

That Members of the Executive Committee approve the report and appendices as provided.

Option 2

That Members of the Executive Committee seek further clarification where required prior to approval of the report and appendices.

4. Evidence of how does this topic supports the achievement of the Corporate Plan / Statutory Responsibilities / Blaenau Gwent Well-being Plan

Involvement is one of the sustainable development principles and five ways of working under the Well Being of Future Generations Act 2015. The Council has made a firm commitment to continue to develop and strengthen engagement with communities, and the Corporate Plan 2018-2022 makes reference to engagement as key in its delivery.

5. Implications Against Each Option

5.1 *Impact on Budget (short and long term impact)*

The corporate engagement budget is used to facilitate statutory engagement activity on behalf of the Council including with children and young people, through the School Grand Council and Youth Forum; Older People's engagement through the 50 plus Forum and people covered by the protected characteristics via the Access for All Forum. The expectation is that Directorate specific engagement activities are resourced from service area budgets.

5.2 *Risk including Mitigating Actions*

The Council's Engagement Strategy aims to provide better organisational sight and quality assurance of engagement activity to mitigate the potential risk of consultation fatigue on communities and engagement activity that does not reflect the national principles for engagement.

5.3 *Legal*

Involvement is one of the five ways of working under the Well Being of Future Generations Act (Wales) 2015. Certain topics are subject to a statutory consultation period.

5.4 *Human Resources*

The Policy and Partnership team led on the development of the Engagement

Strategy. The team facilitates a number of key forums on behalf of the Council including with children and young people, older people and as part of the officer working group under the Public Services Board working with a range of partners. The Engagement Team works with service areas, providing advice, guidance and hands on practical support on service specific engagement activity. This approach supports the ethos of building capacity and resilience in the organisation to support engagement moving forward.

The team also provides active support to Organisational Development on staff engagement activity.

6. **Supporting Evidence**

6.1 ***Performance Information and Data***

6.2 The findings of the WAO review *Service User Perspective: Community Engagement* is attached at Appendix 1.

6.3 A short animation which summarises the findings can be accessed via the following website:

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1t5ovCTUUNwnNkIEi7W_BBD-78zBGoZPe/view?usp=sharing

6.4 A number of findings sat under the overall WAO conclusion that **local people recognise the Council's commitment to community engagement although they are not always able to take part in a way that is effective and impactful** including;

- Local people can engage with the Council in many ways, however these approaches are not always developed or made available with service users in mind;
- Most people said they were satisfied with the quality of the Council's approach to community engagement when making service changes, although many said they were unable to seek clarity about the questions if they needed to;
- There are some barriers to engagement that potentially limit local participation; and
- Communication with service users tends to be time limited and subject specific.

6.5 The WAO provided a number of suggestions on ways they thought the Council could improve community engagement. The management response to these areas is attached at Appendix 2.

6.6 A number of areas for development under the overall WAO conclusion in the *Aligning levers of change review* were recognised by Members and officers including:

- Improved forward planning of community engagement activity;
- Consideration to the frequency and level of engagement;
- Improving coordination of internal and partner community engagement data;
- Considering how to better use technology to engage (both staff and

- community); and
- Continue to develop ways to engage harder to reach groups (both from a staff and community perspective) and provide feedback.

These areas were used to inform the Engagement Strategy and associated activity and the strategy and approach agreed by Council is an important step forward to support progress in a number of the areas identified.

6.2 ***Expected outcome for the public***

6.3 ***Involvement (consultation, engagement, participation)***

A briefing session on the National Principles for Engagement was held for Elected Members in October 2018.

The *Aligning levers of change* review included a focus group of Elected Members and a workshop with operational staff and middle and senior managers.

The *Service User Perspective: Engagement Community* review included:

- A survey of 847 service users;
- Focus group meetings which included representatives from Faith groups, school councils, 50 plus forum/citizens panel and the Vision House Day Centre;
- Interview with the Leader of the Council; and
- Interviews with Council officers.

6.4 ***Thinking for the Long term (forward planning)***

The Council's Engagement Strategy is aligned to the four year term of the Corporate Plan and involvement activity is aligned to the Well Being Plan the Blaenau Gwent We Want. Future trends information (such as the Gwent Futures regional project developed as part of the PSB activity) assists in the forward planning of topic areas of significance for involvement and engagement.

6.5 ***Preventative focus***

The engagement activity of the Council includes service areas which have a preventative focus.

6.6 ***Collaboration / partnership working***

A collaborative approach including working with partners and community groups

6.7 ***Integration(across service areas)***

The findings from the review are applicable across service areas and the Council's Engagement Strategy advocates an organisational approach in which integrated activity and service area involvement is key.

6.8 ***EqIA(screening and identifying if full impact assessment is needed)***

The Council's Engagement Strategy sets out the approach which is built on the national principles for public engagement. There are number of

established forums which support engagement of people covered by the protected characteristics.

7. **Monitoring Arrangements**

- 7.1 Progress against the WAO proposals for improvement will be monitored via the established performance management arrangements including through the joint finance and performance report.

A mid-term review of the Council's Engagement Strategy is proposed in the options as part of the Committee's Forward Work Programme.

The multi-agency engagement sub group which sits under the PSB feed into the Well Being delivery programme monitoring as appropriate.

Background Documents /Electronic Links

- WAO review findings - Appendix 1
- Management response - Appendix 2
- WAO Video – Community Engagement – Feedback to Blaenau Gwent can be accessed via the following website:
- https://drive.google.com/file/d/1t5ovCTUUNwnNklEi7W_BBD-78zBGoZPe/view?usp=sharing