

WINCHESTER TOWN FORUM

23 September 2015

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT: SPREADING THE WORD – COMMUNITY
GROUPS, NEIGHBOURHOOD NOTICEBOARDS AND NEWSLETTERS

REPORT OF ASSISTANT DIRECTOR (CHIEF HOUSING OFFICER)

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RECENT REFERENCES:

None

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

Members of the Town Forum requested that the work programme for future meetings included an item on the subject of community engagement.

The report sets out a number of mechanisms in place across the Town for engaging and communication with the community and considers the role of the Town Forum in supporting this work.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 1 That the Town Forum consider its role and whether it can do more to further promote and support this work.

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DETAIL:

1 Introduction

- 1.1 At its meeting on 10 June 2015, the Forum requested that the work programme for future meetings included an item on the subject of *Promotion of community engagement; noticeboards and literature*. In consultation with the Chair of the Forum, this was amended slightly to fully reflect the nature of the work going on across the Town area.
- 1.2 The Localism agenda places communities at the heart of place shaping and decision making. With continued reductions in public sector budgets, the importance of engaging positively and working collaboratively with communities has never been more important than it is at the current time.

2 Engaging communities across the Town area

- 2.1 There are a number of mechanisms in place across the Town for engaging and communication with the community. They vary in their nature – some enable two-way communication and the opportunity for the community to work with the Council, whereas others simply allow us to inform and get our message across. The most common mechanisms that exist are:
- a) Community forums, such as Winnall Community Forum and the recently established North Winchester Community Forum.
 - b) Community Associations exist in various neighbourhoods and Tenants/Residents Associations Forums are run in Stanmore and Weeke by the Council's Tenant Involvement Officers to help inform decisions about housing services in those areas.
 - c) Community planning has taken place in neighbourhoods across the Town. Community plans have been completed in Stanmore, Winnall and St Barnabas / Harestock and plans are in progress in Highcliffe and Abbots Barton.
 - d) Networks exist at various levels that cascade information and/or provide a platform for debate and discussion. Infrastructure organisations such as Community First: Winchester and Action Hampshire host networks and the sharing of information across the

wider sector, with electronic mailing lists enabling information to be shared rapidly.

- e) Traditional methods such as newsletters and notice boards remain effective ways to communicate. Churches and other faith-based organisations are often involved in this and the church congregation also represents a community in its own right. Other community groups keep notice boards up to date, for example in Abbots Barton, and the Council's Neighbourhood Wardens also do so in certain areas.
- f) Electronic methods of communicating are increasingly important. Community websites such as www.abbottsbarton.org.uk/ are effective ways to engage and websites such as www.streetlife.com/ are growing more popular. Social media such as Facebook provides a valuable insight into community opinion, in particular with the younger age groups.

2.2 The vast majority of activity is community-led. This harnesses voluntary effort, making it sustainable in the longer-term, and it allows local people to shape the agenda to reflect local issues and concerns. Numerous voluntary and community sector (VCS) organisations exist that represent their members and provide a platform for interaction with the Council, other organisations and through bodies such as PACT (Partners and Communities Together).

2.3 The Council is directly responsible for little of this activity, but instead supports and assists our communities to help enable it to happen. Officers help to ensure that communities have the capacity to work together and represent themselves. This might be through developing their skills and confidence; finding volunteers or funding; organising and running events; or by providing a link to other colleagues within the Council or other agencies that can contribute.

2.4 The main focus of this work is in geographical communities. Community Associations and Forums in areas such as Stanmore, Winnall, Weeke and Highcliffe are regularly attended by Council members and officers and form the basis of effective joint working. When they are well supported and well attended, these organisations can act as a catalyst for activity and help to make their communities strong, vibrant and sustainable. Good working relationships with them have led to the development of community plans and, in the case of Stanmore and Winnall, further work leading to the production of planning frameworks. In North Winchester and Abbots Barton the reverse has happened, with community planning work leading to the creation of a community forum and action group.

2.5 Other engagement takes place with communities of interest, for example through WinACC on climate change issues or the City of Winchester Trust on the preservation of historic Winchester.

3 The role of the Town Forum

- 3.1 In the absence of a Parish Council for the Winchester Town area, the Town Forum has an important role in promoting the importance of effective engagement across the Town area and encouraging local people to participate and be active within their communities.
- 3.2 Community plans for Stanmore, Winnall and St Barnabas/Harestock have been presented to the Town Forum in their finished form for comment and endorsement. These and the Highcliffe Plan (still in progress) have been awarded a small amount of funding by the Forum towards the costs involved.
- 3.3 Other funding has been awarded in recent years to help the establishment of the North Winchester Community Forum and for equipment to help North Stanmore Residents Association engage more effectively.
- 3.4 It may be that the Forum could do more, or take a different role, to further encourage this activity. The views of Forum members are welcomed on the effectiveness of the work detailed above and the extent to which it has strengthened community spirit and brought benefit to the communities concerned.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS:

4 COMMUNITY STRATEGY AND PORTFOLIO PLANS (RELEVANCE TO):

- 4.1 The *Active Communities* outcome of the Winchester District Community Strategy (2010-2020) focuses on the people that work and live in the District, encouraging healthy lifestyles and **active participation in their communities** and ensuring that they can access the services they need.
- 4.2 The Portfolio Plans for 2015/16 include no direct reference to this work, but include many projects and initiatives for which the awareness and support of the community are essential. This would not be possible without the range of engagement options set out above.

5 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:

- 5.1 There are no resource implications resulting from this report.

6 RISK MANAGEMENT ISSUES

- 6.1 Any consultation/publicity material produced by or on behalf of the Council would need to comply with the DCLG Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS:

Stanmore, Winnall and St Barnabas/Harestock Community Plans

APPENDICES:

None