Communications and Engagement Strategy 2020 - 2023

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'Enhancing the approach to communications also involves adopting a more proactive approach than is seen at present and engaging stakeholders locally more effectively so they know more about what is going on, what the ambitions for the place are and how they can help shape things. We would encourage the Council to think about jointly reviewing and re-designing with residents the mechanisms and channels through which the Council keeps them informed'.

Corporate Peer Challenge Team (November 2019)

Engaging and Enabling our Local Communities

Contents

1. **Foreword**

    'It has been said that engagement is everybody's responsibility in a local authority… good dialogue with residents and securing mutual trust between the Council and the community needs to be part of the whole Council's DNA.' (LGA 2017)

    Effective communication and engagement is vital if local authorities are to ensure their services, and the way they are delivered, meet the needs of the residents they serve. At West Berkshire Council, we are committed to properly informing, consulting and involving our residents in their local services. We must also be confident that the aspirations laid out in West Berkshire 2036 (the long term vision for West Berkshire) and our new Council Strategy (2019-2023) have the best possible chance of being met and that the outcomes for local people are the best they can be.

    Through our Building Communities Together Team, an ongoing Devolution Programme, and, our work on Parish Planning, we have sought to involve local people in our work. As part of our drive to interact ever more closely with our communities, we invited the Local Government Association (LGA) into the Council in November 2019 to assess, among other things, how we might do this. They offered some useful suggestions as to how we might make communication and engagement central to the organisation and we began to implement these immediately.

    As we write this Foreword in October 2020, we are in the midst of the Covid-19 Pandemic. Although we had begun to develop a new approach following the LGA review, the local response to Covid-19 has accelerated this significantly. When we went into a nationwide lockdown in March 2020, timely, effective and engaging communications became an urgent necessity, rather than a medium term aspiration. The Council's approach to communications and engagement had to be, and was, transformed overnight as we responded to events that would have been unthinkable just a few months previously.

    Although the Pandemic has been the most difficult period in living memory, it will leave behind it a legacy of communities across our District coming together to help others, and working with us as the local authority to mitigate the impact of the virus. We wish to build on this spontaneous response and to better involve local people in our ongoing work.

    In addition to enhancing our own communication activities this strategy seeks to show how the Council now proposes to enhance its own engagement work and in particular build more relevant communities across West Berkshire with the aim of reducing inequalities and improving quality of life.

    Councillor Lynne Doherty
    Leader and Portfolio Holder for Communications

2.   **Executive Summary**

2.1   Communication and engagement are distinct, but complementary, concepts. Communication is, at its most fundamental level, the relaying of information from one person to another whilst engagement, by definition, implies involvement, collaboration and shared purpose. Local authorities must do both effectively if they are to meet the needs of the residents they serve.

2.2   West Berkshire Council has long expressed a desire to overhaul its approach to communication and engagement and this Strategy sets out how the Council proposes to do that. As part of this work, the LGA was invited into the Council in November 2019 to review, among other things, the Council's approach to communication and engagement and subsequently offered a number of suggestions, which were gradually being implemented prior to the Covid-19 outbreak.

2.3   The Covid-19 Pandemic necessitated an overnight change in how the Council both communicated and engaged with its local communities. More has needed to be done and at pace. Key changes have included the deployment of additional resources, less reliance on local media and more focus on contacting residents and businesses directly, a more prominent role for the Council Leader and Chief Executive and an increased focus on digital communication.

2.4   To assess the effectiveness of this new approach, some of the questions in a Residents Survey conducted in June 2020 sought feedback on residents' engagement with the Council and how they viewed the Council. We were pleased to see a positive correlation between the two, with those who felt they had become more connected with their community during the Pandemic also viewing the Council in a much more positive light. Through the development and implementation of this Strategy we will build on this work to involve and engage our communities in our ongoing work.

2.5   The importance of communication in enhancing employee engagement is widely recognised. However, previous surveys have shown significant variation in the effectiveness of communication and in employee engagement levels across the Council. The Staff Survey conducted in June 2020 showed similar variation and this needs to be addressed as part of this Strategy. There is no reason why employees in one part of the Council should feel less communicated with and engaged than in another part of the Council. Effective leadership and a cultural shift will be required to make this happen.

2.6   Recognising the strengths and challenges that exist within West Berkshire, the primary aim of this Strategy is to communicate the key themes and priorities set out within the Council Strategy (2019-2023). It also seeks to engage communities in helping to realise the broader ambitions set out within West Berkshire 2036. Alongside the experience gained from previous engagement activities and as part of the response to Covid-19, the Council must also engage local people in the delivery of its Council Strategy (2019-2023) and the development of projects which will contribute to the broader ambitions set out within the West Berkshire 2036 Vision.

2.7   In doing so, it must take into account the needs of a very wide range of key audiences and stakeholders. This wide customer base includes both those who tend to engage with the local authority as well as those who have traditionally been more difficult to reach. It is particularly important in West Berkshire that action is taken to reach those who have been less engaged with us, as these groups are seen to be younger people, BAMER communities and those who are economically disadvantaged, which also aligns with some of those most impacted by Covid-19.

2.8   Improving access to services also remains a vital objective alongside the need to ensure we remain both responsive and courteous to those we serve. Much of this work will be done through the new Digital Strategy (2020-2023).

2.9   The Council's communication and engagement objectives are framed around the Engagement Spectrum namely informing, consulting, involving, collaborating and empowering. A set of principles is set out to guide the approach and specific outcomes are identified along with clarity on how these would be measured. Our communication objectives are;

- Better *informing* our key audiences and stakeholders about what they want and need to know and in a way that is timely, appropriate and relevant to them:

- Planning our *consultation* with stakeholders more effectively to ensure it is genuine and represents value for money:

- *Involving* stakeholders more to help shape what the Council does and increasingly what they and their communities do:

- *Collaborating* more effectively to enable the development of effective engagement and the achievement of better outcomes:

- *Empowering* individuals and communities more so that they can take their own decisions on matters that might historically have been for the Council to take.

- *Transforming* services so that they are better for our customers. A service will be deemed better if it is fit for purpose and cheaper, more resilient or easier to access through a greater number of channels, if it is available for longer hours or if it has a lower carbon footprint (taken from WBC Digital Strategy 2020-2023):

- *Getting it right first time and on time* and treating everyone with respect and courtesy, and using plain English so that everyone can understand.

Our engagement work is focused on working together to build more resilient communities across West Berkshire with the purpose of reducing inequalities and improving quality of life.

We have established a number of guiding principles to shape our approach to engagement along with the following objectives:

- Signposting local communities to help relieve hardship:

- Promoting and sustaining high levels of volunteering:

- Using innovative methods and approaches to improve community engagement and involvement:

- Engaging with local communities to understand their needs and aspirations and providing a framework to enable partners to engage with communities:

- Collaborating with the Council and partners to help find solutions to those needs and aspirations:

- Providing the support needed to make communities more resilient:

- Commissioning specialist support to help develop engagement and resilience:

- Signposting communities to support the vulnerable:

- Signposting individuals to support networks within their community:

- Reducing demand on public services.

2.10   The importance of building trust is reinforced - recognising that 'engagement is not a single person or set of activities. It is an ongoing process or conversation'.

In terms of specific proposals the following are put forward under each of the engagement themes;

Inform

- Corporate adoption of GovDelivery to increase reach and ensure consistency. A weekly Council newsletter would be produced using this platform and all other newsletters would also use this platform;

- the use of video will be extended with a particular focus on hard to reach groups;

- review and renew the website to ensure it remains fit for purpose;

- social media content is expanded to assist in helping engage hard to reach groups;

- campaigns focused around each of the Council's key priorities are planned annually;

- in respect of internal communications a monthly email is provided by the Leader/Chief Executive in addition to the staff newsletter Reporter;

Consult

- preparation of a consultation framework to guide and inform the Council's consultation activities;

- publication of an annual Consultation Plan;

- the retention of Consultation Portal but with enhanced feedback;

- to replace the Community Panel with something that is truly representative of the local community and which enables more of a listening approach;

- the establishment of an annual Residents Survey to measure service satisfaction and Council reputation.

Involve

- to consider rebranding the Council;

- greater engagement through social media;

- greater use of media briefings;

- placing clear expectations on managers to ensure a more consistent approach to engagement with staff and partners.

Collaborate

- reviewing our engagement with Parish and Town Councils;

- adopting co-production as a guiding principle to the way in which we collaborate;

- establishing a new overarching strategic partnership to guide our engagement work.

Empowerment

- commissioning a Community and Voluntary Sector Support Organisation to provide support to, and build capacity within, the local community, voluntary and social enterprise sector;

- agreeing a corporate approach to engaging communities more fully in the design of public buildings and public realm;

- to introduce a new scheme for generating staff suggestions to replace Lions Lair;

- commission a BAME advocacy group;

- realigning the Building Communities Together Programme with this new approach and newly established senior management structure;

- develop a 'Community Engagement Framework;'

- maintaining signposting and connections to community support functions;

- distribution of a new grant fund to support community based engagement work.

Serve - to enhance the customer experience;

- establish clear customer standards which are made accessible to all customers;

- introduce a training and development programme;

- consider the expansion of artificial intelligence and the introduction of webchat;

- continue to pursue an approach based on 'digital by default';

- develop a culture of providing customer feedback and to design systems that automatically enable this;

- to enhance and coordinate the monitoring of customer demand and satisfaction so that we can shape services to meet customer needs.

More will need to be done to ensure that this Strategy is capable of being delivered and the outcomes realised. In particular;

- a greater focus on planning;

- more oversight and engagement from the Customer First Programme Board;

- additional resources;

- a realigned organisational structure;

- some minor changes to the current governance;

- a much greater emphasis on monitoring and evaluation.

2.11 Through the delivery of this Strategy, we will build trust within our communities and develop a culture of true engagement and collaboration. Our Delivery Plan at Appendix 3 (to follow) outlines some of the specific actions we intend to take to facilitate this.

3. **Introduction**

3.1   Engagement is fundamental to the work of local authorities as it enables them to design and deliver services in a way that meets the needs of local residents and thereby helps enhance their lives. The Covid-19 Pandemic has made the need for carrying out this activity effectively even more important as its impact and the need to mitigate it meant, quite literally, that lives depended on it. By its very nature, this necessitated the rapid delivery of new approaches to communication and engagement which will likely stay with us long after the Pandemic has gone. Although this Strategy is not a strategy for the Pandemic, many of the lessons we have learned in recent months form the basis of what follows.

3.2   Prior to the Pandemic, the Council had begun to develop a new approach to communications and engagement in support of the commitments outlined in the new Council Strategy (2019-2023) that was published in May 2019. We recognised the need to gather both internal and external views in order to ensure this approach best met the needs of our District. As part of this, we organised 'Let's Chat' sessions with staff across the Council and, most notably, invited a Corporate Peer Challenge Team from the Local Government Association into the Council in November 2019. As well as speaking to us, they sought to discuss our work with external stakeholders, which then formed the basis of their assessment and recommendations.

3.3   The need for a new Strategy is clear given the changing landscape in which we now serve our residents. This is most strongly evidenced by developments in technology and the constant accessibility this enables. Set against the context of generational and demographic shift as well as an increasingly engaged, socially conscious population, as demonstrated through movements relating to climate change and racial equality, the need for a more dynamic approach is unquestionable. Covid-19 has heightened expectations still further, with the need to realise a new level of engagement now a primary consideration for all local authorities.

3.4   The underlying aim of the Council's approach to engagement is reflected in the Council Strategy 2019–2023 and that is to build more resilient communities across West Berkshire with the purpose of reducing inequalities and improving quality of life. We have set out a number of specific objectives which aim to help us deliver that ambition.

3.5   The remainder of this document seeks to set out the background to our approach, where we see ourselves now, most notably as a result of the ongoing Pandemic, along with clarity on our ambition and how we intend to realise it.

4.   **Background**

Overview

4.1   Whilst communications and engagement have been brought together in this Strategy they are different things. Commonly used definitions include:

Communication – the imparting or exchanging of information by speaking, writing or using some other medium. More simply put, it could be described as the process of passing information and understanding from one person to another.

Engagement – the process of working collaboratively with, and through groups of people, affiliated by geographic proximity, special interest or similar situations to address issues affecting the well-being of those people.

4.2   One perspective is that communication focuses on what to say and who to say it to, whilst engagement is more about who to listen to and what feedback you seek to elicit. Another view is that you can differentiate the two by proximity; engagement is seen as a contact sport, while communication often happens at a distance.

4.3   Although communication can happen without engagement, engagement cannot happen without communication.

4.4   The Council undertakes both communication and engagement. Communication takes place both within the Organisation and with local communities, customers, partners and beyond. Engagement also takes place at a range of levels, with service users, with special interest groups and with broader community groups. Both communication and engagement also take place with parish and town councils, the other tier of local government in West Berkshire.

4.5   The approach and level of communication and engagement varies across the Council depending on the remit of individual Departments and Services. Corporately, the Council employs a central Communications Team whose primary role is to the plan the Council's strategic communications activity and manage the relationship with the media with input from across the Council. In reality, however, some Departments and Services will retain control of their own communications output.

4.6   The same can be said for internal communications. Corporately, communications is delivered through the Communications Team with the Council Leader and Chief Executive taking a prominent role, most notably during the Pandemic. Most day to day communication is however the responsibility of Directorates, Departments and Services who decide themselves how this is best organised.

4.7   Our current approach to engagement is similar, although perhaps more fragmented. Corporately, the Council has actively supported the ambition to support 'communities doing more for themselves' and it is a key priority in the Council Strategy (2019-2023). For this reason, the Building Communities Together Team was created in 2015 to progress this agenda with the support of partners and the Building Communities Partnership.

4.8   Engagement though is not limited to the Building Communities initiative. In many ways it is a fundamental part of delivering the job that local government needs to do. The challenge in the context of this Strategy is whether more needs to be done and if so how this is approached.

What do others say?

4.9   The 2019 Corporate Peer Challenge highlighted two key recommendations in relation to communications and engagement namely;

- to make communications central to the Council's thinking and at the heart of what we do both for residents and staff;

- to jointly design with residents the mechanisms through which to hear their voice more.

4.10   Some of the learning points to come from the Covid-19 response with regard to communications could be summarised as;

- additional resources created additional activity, which also spawned the use of a much wider range of communications media which we can now build and expand upon to shape our vision for the future. The impact of this has been viewed positively, particularly in the context of managing a challenging national emergency;

- the historical reliance on the local media as a means of communication was greatly diluted through investment in GovDelivery. This enabled the Council to communicate directly with large numbers of residents by email although not all;

- communications planning was driven through one point – GOLD – and was actively managed with a daily plan overseen by senior officers and Members. Coordination was stronger and easier as a result;

- the ability to use digital means of communication appeared to be well received perhaps because it became inevitable during a period of lockdown. The opportunity to see and speak directly to someone was a notable departure from the leaflet or email;

- the need for the Council to demonstrate strong local leadership at a time of national emergency was reflected in the decision that the Council Leader and Chief Executive should 'front' much of the communication both within the Council and outside. This level of activity may not be sustainable under more normal conditions but does raise wider issues as to how communications are presented;

- dedicated communication resource was provided to some specific areas of activity during Covid-19 and this seems to have worked well. This resource remained under the purview of the central Communications Team but was there to be used by other functions. This helped to improve both coordination and consistency.

4.11 A Residents Survey was conducted in May 2020 following the immediate Covid-19 response. The findings highlight the fact that residents view of the Council is greatly influenced by the degree of interaction that they have with us. For example satisfaction with the Council was very notably higher when;

- residents had either signed up to, or become aware of the Council's new e-bulletin;

- residents had visited the Council's website to find information about Covid-19;

- residents were aware of the Community Support Hub.

4.12 A similar view of the Council was taken by those residents who said they felt that they had become more connected to their community during the Covid-19 Pandemic.

4.13 Other interesting results that came from the survey included;

- 81% of residents said that they preferred to be contacted by email;19% by telephone and 7% face to face;

- 21% of residents has engaged with the Council on social media;

- 42% had used the Council website.

This highlights the importance of digital means in promoting communication and engagement.

4.14 In relation to internal communications results from previous Employee Attitude Surveys highlight that there is a correlation between the effectiveness of management communication and employment engagement scores. This varies significantly across the Council. Tables 1a and b highlight the challenge with internal communication. Whilst a standard approach can be adopted to corporate communications the approach at a Departmental and Service level varies quite significantly and is often dictated by a manager's individual commitment and ability to effectively communicate. Attempts have been made to try and introduce a more standardised approach for example the introduction of 'weekly team briefs' but the degree to which this has been widely adopted is unclear.

Table 1a – Effective communication delivers stronger employee engagement.
Results of the West Berkshire Council Employee Attitude Survey – 2018
(Rank 1 = high 13 = low)

Service	Engagement		Communication	
	Score	Rank	Score	Rank
Adult Social Care	72	6	53	9
Children & Family Services	64 =	8 =	53	9
Commissioning	83 =	2 =	63	5
Customer Services & ICT	60	10	52	11
Human Resources	84	1	94	1
Commissioning	83 =	2 =	63	5
Development & Planning	56	12	48	13
Education	76	4	66	4
Finance & Property	64 =	8 =	60	6 =
Legal	74	5	79	2
Public Health & Wellbeing	83 =	2 =	54	8
Public Protection & Culture	55	13	52	11
Strategic Support	59	11	67	3
Transport & Countryside	65	7	60	6 =

4.15 The results of a staff survey that was conducted in June 2020 following the peak of the Covid-19 Pandemic highlighted the following;

- satisfaction with the effectiveness of internal communications was highest for the Leader and Chief Executive and for service managers;

- there were notable variations between Departments and Services. As can be seen from Table 1b there was also a correlation between these results and those shown in Table 1a from the earlier Employee Attitude Survey.

Table 1b – The effectiveness of internal staff communication during the Covid-19
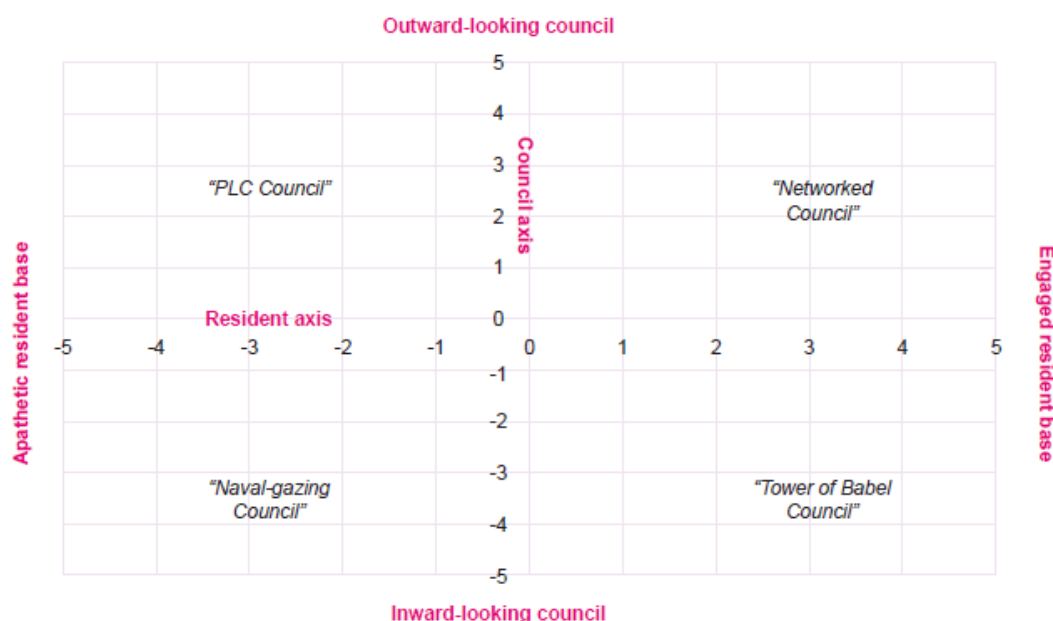*Pandemic – June 2020 (Rank 1 = high   11 = low)*

Service	% of staff who felt communicated with effectively				Rank (by SD/HoS)
	Leader/ CEX	Ex. Director	SD/HoS	Service Manager	
Adult Social Care	67	42	41	54	9
Children & Family Services	79	54	52	55	6
Commissioning	90	68	79	79	1
Customer Services & ICT	65	57	53	60	5
Development & Planning	75	27	41	55	9
Education	86	66	79	69	1
Environment	79	46	66	64	4
Finance & Property	87	67	43	41	8
Public Health & Wellbeing	85	31	69	77	3
Public Protection & Culture	73	29	40	66	11
Strategy & Governance	81	60	50	56	7

4.16   Feedback on the Council's broader engagement activity has been more anecdotal. In general the support provided through Covid-19 Pandemic has been viewed positively – and this is a view which has been confirmed through formal survey work as highlighted in Appendix 5. In general where engagement has taken place the feedback has generally been positive. The underlying question remains as to whether the approach is effectively targeted and also whether the Council has the resources to match its ambition.

Where are we now?

4.17   In their document 'New Conversations – A LGA Guide to Engagement' (2017) four different types of Council were portrayed as a means of stimulating debate around engagement (see Table 2). Different views may be taken as to where West Berkshire Council actually sits but the conclusion here is that it is somewhere between the 'PLC Council' and the 'Networked Council' with the direction of travel moving to the right. This has implications for how communications and engagement are approached.

Table 2 – Types of Council - as described in the LGA publication New Conversations – LGA guide to engagement (LGA 2015) (annotated)

PLC Council	Networked Council
• Business-like, pragmatic and technocractic • Stable politics and a strategic view • High performer able to push through services redesign • Executive members more like officers, perhaps with a business background • Entrepreneurial flair and paternalistic	• Public able to do more for themselves • Councillors focused on economic growth • Devolution of many services to the neighbourhood level • Challenge to traditional councillor roles. Councillors have an entrepreneurial flair and activist skill set • Integration of services with others such as adult social care with GPs
Navel Gazing Council	**Tower of Babel Council**
• Politically divided with regular hung or changing leadership • Low public activism • Likely to strip back services to bare minimum in the face of cuts • Unruly political groups with frontline councillors involved in high energy scheming and plotting • Executive members struggle to get things done	• Navel gazing internal characteristics • An active civil society ready to take on and challenge the internal scenario • Public protests • Electoral challenge from residents associations and independents • Pressure for extreme localisation • Councillors defensive • Highly political with political skills coming to the fore (negotiation, rhetoric, communication and mediation)

4.18   The same report also seeks to provide a test to determine how easy or difficult it is likely to be for a council to win the satisfaction of residents. Table 3 summarises the various categories that have been identified. Use of the self-assessment tool would suggest that the Council is relatively well placed being scored as being 'in pole position with things generally likely to be in the Council's favour.'

Table 3   A framework for assessing the ease with which a Council is likely to win the satisfaction of its residents (source based on work by IPSOS Mori and the development of an Area Challenge Index).(annotated)

More Difficult
1. You're against the ropes – it's really hard going
2. You're swimming upstream – it's a struggle but not impossible
3. You're jogging on the flat – some factors work in your favour and some don't
4. You're in pole position – it's not a doddle but things are working for you - WBC
5. You're freewheeling – pretty much everything's in your favour
Easier

4.19   The SOLACE trust test provides a useful framework for understanding how you might view the local population. It identifies four 'Truster Tribes' which are seen as a useful guide in understanding how to frame an approach to both communication and engagement;

- The *'we haves'* – these tend to be a small but influential minority. They know a lot of people, want to get involved in social issues and have the time to act on that feeling. The 'we haves' are prepared to interact with the Council to get things done. They often get frustrated with public service institutions. This group is very evident in West Berkshire and has been important in moving engagement activity forward including during the recent Covid-19 Pandemic:

- The *'we have nots'* are also an influential minority. They usually live in social housing and have a lot in common through shared adversity. They have individual problems with Council services particularly benefits and housing, and feel the best way to resolve them is by using strength in numbers to secure the things they are entitled to. This is not a group that is very evident in West Berkshire and this should perhaps be considered further in considering how to frame this Strategy. Every voice needs to be heard:

- The *'I haves'* are a larger group. They're self-sufficient, busy and focused on work and entertainment. They tend to be young and mobile and they seldom integrate into their neighbourhoods. The group wants to be treated as the consumers of Council services which they see as important to keep things working. This is a significant grouping in West Berkshire who will probably have a tendency to engage when they choose to:

- The *'I have nots'* are usually isolated and dependent on the Council for financial and social support. They often feel that they cannot help themselves and so they struggle with the Council to get the support they deserve. Many resent their

dependency and feel trapped or controlled by public agencies. Although relatively small this group will exist in West Berkshire although like the 'we have nots' their voice is not often heard.

4.20 All of these groups will be present in West Berkshire although the means of engaging with them will need to be shaped to their outlook and motivations. Further work is required to identify these but it is clear that a 'one size fits all' approach to communications and engagement is not appropriate.

4.21 Understanding where the Council wants to get to, and what it wants to communicate and engage on, are critical. So too is an understanding of the audiences and stakeholders that are to be addressed.

5.   **Our Corporate Narrative and Key Messages**

5.1   This chapter is focused on what we are trying to communicate. It also introduces a corporate narrative which essentially seeks to tell the Council's story and something of the District which it serves.

5.2   The Council Strategy (2019-2023) recognises three distinct areas of activity for the Authority all of which need to be reflected in the way the Council communicates and engages;

- the provision of strong community leadership. This has been particularly necessary during the Covid-19 Pandemic. It extends though into many areas including the Council's work around building stronger community resilience and effectively representing the area on a regional and national stage. This role is often achieved through working in collaboration with partners;

- the provision of services. This is perhaps the mainstay of what the Council does and where the vast majority of its resources are deployed. Most people will directly come into contact with the Council as a customer of its services even if that is just through the collection of Council Tax and the emptying of the bins. Customer perspective is discussed later;

- improving the quality of life of those who live, work or visit West Berkshire. This primarily takes the form of a set of priorities laid out in the Council Strategy. New resources, when available, are generally aligned to these priorities and are a key feature of the Council's Corporate Programme. Again some of this will be done with partners, and also the wider community, through the delivery of West Berkshire 2036 Vision.

5.3   The way in which the Council communicates and engages with stakeholders will vary depending on what activity is being pursued. Customer interactions will be different to those aimed at promoting broader engagement. In some cases straightforward one way communication may be appropriate, for others, a well prepared engagement exercise may be required.

5.4   Our **Key Messages** are understandably based around our strategic plans namely West Berkshire 2036 and the Council Strategy (2019-2023). The themes in the Council Strategy encapsulate this best:

- *West Berkshire is a great place* – to live, work and learn:

- *West Berkshire is open for business* – and we are committed to rebuilding our local economy after the Covid-19 Pandemic:

- *West Berkshire's people are protected and cared for* – and will continue to work to reduce the inequality gap that we know exists in the District and has probably been widened by the Pandemic:

- *Together* with our partners *we will both provide sustainable services and innovate* to create a better future for all.

5.5   Our limited resources will be focused on delivering our key priorities which are also set out within the Council Strategy (2019-2023) namely:

- Ensuring our vulnerable children and adults achieve better outcomes;

- Supporting everyone to reach their full potential;

- Supporting businesses to start, develop and thrive in West Berkshire;

- Developing local infrastructure, including housing, to support and grow the local economy;

- Maintaining a green district;

- Ensuring sustainable services through innovation and partnerships.

5.6   This is more broadly encapsulated within our Corporate Narrative:

West Berkshire was created in 1998 because it was agreed West Berkshire needed its own Council given it was uniquely different from the areas that surrounded it. Since then what we do has changed, as have our communities, along with their ambitions and aspirations. What remains unchanged is that West Berkshire is regarded as a great place, with a strong economy and a beautiful environment. In looking to the future there is much to cherish and hold onto.

Challenges however remain. We need a West Berkshire that is for everyone – whilst the majority prosper, a minority do not. The Covid-19 Pandemic has highlighted the strength of our communities but once again the vulnerability of those who often struggle. Addressing that 'inequality gap' remains at the forefront of what we do - we retain a fundamental duty to protect the most vulnerable.

Our population is getting older and with that more dependent. Our economy is strong but our workforce and the nature of work is changing. The demand for affordable housing is undimmed and needs to be addressed. And our climate is getting warmer and less predictable – a challenge we need to face up to, along with the rest of the World.

We have been told we are a high performing, well managed Council. We also work effectively with our partners. However, we are not perfect. We need to be more outward facing and become more engaged with the communities we serve. Our leadership within the local community needs to be clearer and more visible. We have sought to do that during the Covid-19 Pandemic.

We have neither the capability nor the resources to realise our ambition alone. If we are to succeed we must continue to work with others to deliver what we all want for West Berkshire. That partnership needs to include not only our Partners but also those communities, and those that live within them. These are the communities that rose to the challenge during the recent Pandemic and showed what 'communities supporting themselves' was all about.

6.   **Who Are Our Key Audiences and Stakeholders?**

6.1   West Berkshire's communities are not homogenous. In general they are characterised by;

- an age profile that is currently close to the national average but which is now growing older and at a rate faster than the national average;

- a large proportion of people in employment;

- relatively high income levels;

- a relatively small Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic population;

- a growing inequality gap which is seen in health, employment, educational attainment and in a number of other areas;

- high levels of digital awareness and connectivity.

6.2   Our key audiences and stakeholders in the context of this Strategy can be defined as;

- *residents* - some of whom are more difficult to engage e.g. younger people, minority communities, and those that are economically disadvantaged;

- *customers* - these will include all local residents but also many others who either travel through the District or visit it;

- *businesses and workers* – around 50% of West Berkshire residents actually work in the District. Engagement with local businesses has historically been challenging due to resource constraints. With 'open for business' as a key message this will need to change;

- *visitors* – some will be Council customers others will be day visitors or tourists;

- *Parish and Town Councils* – are a key local government partner;

- *voluntary, community and social enterprise organisations* that are a vital part of the wider community and often key partners in the delivery of local services;

- *community groups* whether they are focused on an area or particular interest. They were the stars of the Covid-19 Pandemic and will hopefully not fade.

6.3   Internally, our stakeholders include;

- *elected Members and Honorary Alderman*;

- *our staff;*

- *our contractors and external service providers.*

7. **Customer Engagement**

Overview

7.1 The Council has a large number of customers some of whom choose to interact through purchasing services, others engage through the payment of taxes, and others who may prefer not to engage but have no choice. For some the Council will play a fundamental role in their health and wellbeing, acting as an essential lifeline.

7.2 Customer engagement is vital activity for the Council and many staff are specifically employed to support it. Mention was made earlier of our key audiences but customer engagement is included here because it is important to recognise the range of customers that the Council has and the wide range of channels that need to be deployed to support customer access. A Council's reputation is often built on how its residents interact with the Council as a customer.

7.3 The move towards digitisation has had a profound impact on how the Council interacts with its customers. Today the vast majority of residents have access to the internet and now virtually all have access to superfast broadband should they wish to purchase it. There is an increasing expectation from many that everything can be done on line and at any time of the day or night. The Council's approach has adapted to support this and other key trends over the past decade most notably;

- the creation of a dedicated Customer Contact Centre designed to manage the Council's telephony in one place;

- the creation of a transaction based website;

- the use of on line rather than paper based forms;

- facilities to pay and book on line;

- the introduction of chatbots to automate simple telephone requests;

- and during the Covid-19 Pandemic, the widespread adoption of video conferencing and virtual meetings.

7.4 The New Ways of Working Programme has highlighted a range of opportunities to further digitise various processes to improve the customer experience and provide better value for money.

7.5 Effective customer engagement is however more than just digitisation. It is about the customer experience and that means clear standards so customers know what to expect and responsiveness and courtesy that often underpin many of these standards.

West Berkshire is a growing district with an estimated population of **157,900** in 2018

There were **347,000** visits to our libraries in 2019/20

There are **900** children receiving support from our Children and Family Services

We empty the bins of **69,000** homes

There are **1,034** children with Education, Health and Care Plans

2,800 residents are supported by our adult social care service

Our website received **1,600,000** visits in 2019/20

69,300 residents paying council tax

3,000 planning applications were received in 2019/20 – receiving a total of **3,851** comments

5,700 businesses paying business rates

873,000 payments taken in 2019/20

Defining our customers

7.6   Past experience and the knowledge we have gained from customer and staff consultation enables us to segment our customers into a number of groups. Each group displays individual characteristics and tends to have particular preferences of how they want to interact with the Council. This is summarised in Table 4 and highlights that one size does not fit all and that in delivering services a common sense approach is taken allowing customers to use channels that are appropriate to their needs.

Table 4 – Our customers, their characteristics and needs

Customer Group	Example Service Lines	Characteristics	Approach to Service Delivery	Channels
Those who receive generic, universal services but do not seek an active relationship with the Council	Rubbish collection, street lighting, school admissions	Expect an efficient and reliable service but if things go wrong, want quick and simple processes requiring minimal effort to resolve. Likely to pay Council tax by Direct Debit.	Fast, efficient and easy to use integrated online services that allow customers to track progress through to completion. Assisted self-serve where appropriate.	• Online customer portal/integrated forms. • Telephony • Web chat • Social media • Artificial intelligence
Those who seek an active relationship with the Council for example Community Champions, Community Leaders and Councillors	Street services, parking, planning.	Expect an efficient and reliable service and want a clear escalation route if this goes wrong or if dealing with complex, abnormal enquiries.	Fast, efficient and easy to use integrated services that allow progress to be tracked through to completion. Clear lines of escalation and quick resolution should things go wrong.	• Online customer portal/integrated forms • Telephony and a responsive telephone service • Web chat • Social media • Artificial intelligence
Those who choose to receive optional, paid for services	Garden waste collection service, residents parking permits, registrar services	As a consumer, would expect a high quality service which very few service failures which provides value for money	• Slick, easy to use, integrated online processes which meet customer expectations, and generate a positive customer experience which enables us to retain customers. • Clear lines of escalation and quick resolution should things go wrong. • Assisted self-serve where appropriate.	• Online customer portal/integrated forms • Telephony with an ability to speak to an advisor • Web chat • Social media • Artificial intelligence

| Customer Group	Example Service Lines	Characteristics	Approach to Service Delivery	Channels
Businesses operating within the District	Business rates, commercial rates, licensing, planning agents	Often require more than one person to access services/personalised information on behalf of the organisation. Expect to be able to self serve using efficient online channels that provide an audit trail.	• Simple to use online processes linked to a 'business account' where transactions can be stored and tracked. • Clear lines of escalation and resolution should things go wrong, particularly for optional, paid for services. • Assisted self-serve where appropriate.	• Online business account • Automated telephone service where appropriate • Web chat
Individuals requiring essential services, the quality of which impacts significantly on their health and wellbeing	Housing benefit applications, blue badge applications, day care services or support for older people, children, families and young people.	Often considered vulnerable in some way and may require a more tailored approach. They rely on receiving a consistent level of service that requires fast intervention should something go wrong.	• Provide integrated online services where appropriate but ensure adequate support is provided via telephone and face to face if required.	• Online customer portal/integrated forms • Auto telephony with ability to speak to an advisor • Appointments with a face to face advisor or specialist
Individuals requiring information or advice directly from the Council or needing to be signposted to other services	Advice on adult social care or on debt management. Landlords.	Want to be able to access easy to understand information quickly and easily.	• Up to date, relevant and easy to access web content including information on where to find/who to contact for further information. • Assisted self-serve where appropriate	• Website
People or groups who may not wish to deal with the Council, or may actively avoid doing so, but where we have a responsibility to intervene	Children's Services, Council Tax recovery.	Often from a vulnerable group and have multiple complex needs. Have a preference for human contact either on the telephone or face to face.	• Explore personalised targeted communication via email/SMS. • Provide direct access to highly trained advisors who are empowered to resolve customer issues or who can refer directly to the appropriate officer without delay. • Assisted self-serve where appropriate.	• Responsive telephone service • Appointments with a face to face advisor or specialist

7.7 A review of where the Council appears to be in terms of its customer engagement can be summarised as follows;

• customers are happy to transact online for simple to access services, and younger customers only want to transact on line and expect a seamless, interactive experience;

• feedback suggests that, on the whole, online services are well received although there have been issues with paying for services on line;

- face to face services are considered last resort for the majority, but essential for the minority. Experience during Covid-19 suggests that the ability to book appointments has significant merit and could deliver potential cost savings;

- customers value the Council's Contact Centre which receives high satisfaction ratings. Call volumes have remained relatively stable over the past 10 years (see Fig.1). Back office call volumes have fallen markedly but it is here that there are greater concerns about responsiveness;

- email is a popular means of communication but is not an effective means of accessing services. Social media is likely to be a more appropriate alternative particularly for some customer groups;

- there still remains significant inconsistency in the way customers access services across the Council – sometimes within Departments and Service Units. New Ways of Working Reviews have highlighted many of these inconsistences and the opportunities that exist to provide a more consistent customer experience. The challenge is now where to start and how to resource and deliver these recommendations. Do all Council Departments need a clear and effective 'front door?';

- customers expect to be able to speak to polite and helpful staff who take responsibility for dealing with their enquiry in a responsive way. They want to be able to contact staff directly if necessary. Feedback suggests that the Council does not have a general issue with responsiveness or courtesy although there are some isolated problems that are the subject of complaints. Accessibility to officers is not a problem but again isolated problems appear to exist highlighting again an inconsistent picture across the Council;

- customers expect the Council to be clear about service levels and then stick to them to avoid service failure and repeat contact. This is an area that needs further attention;

- customers expect to be kept up to date with the progress of their transaction for example be notified when the fly tip they have reported has been cleared or of a delay in providing a service. This remains a major weakness in the customer experience;

- on line transactions need to be accessible on a wide variety of devices e.g. smartphone and tablet. Some progress is being made to deliver on this;

- disjointed services continue to make sharing information difficult. The result is that some customers have to complete forms more than once. The Council did seek to introduce Customer Relationship Management software some years ago without success. Some services such as Tell us Once, fulfil this but integration remains challenging although further work is underway.

- systems and processes are often designed with the service and back office processes in mind rather than the customer experience. NWOW Reviews and the increasing use of Agile methodologies have sought to try and address this problem but there is undoubtedly more to do.

Fig. 1 Customer Transaction Volumes 2015-2020
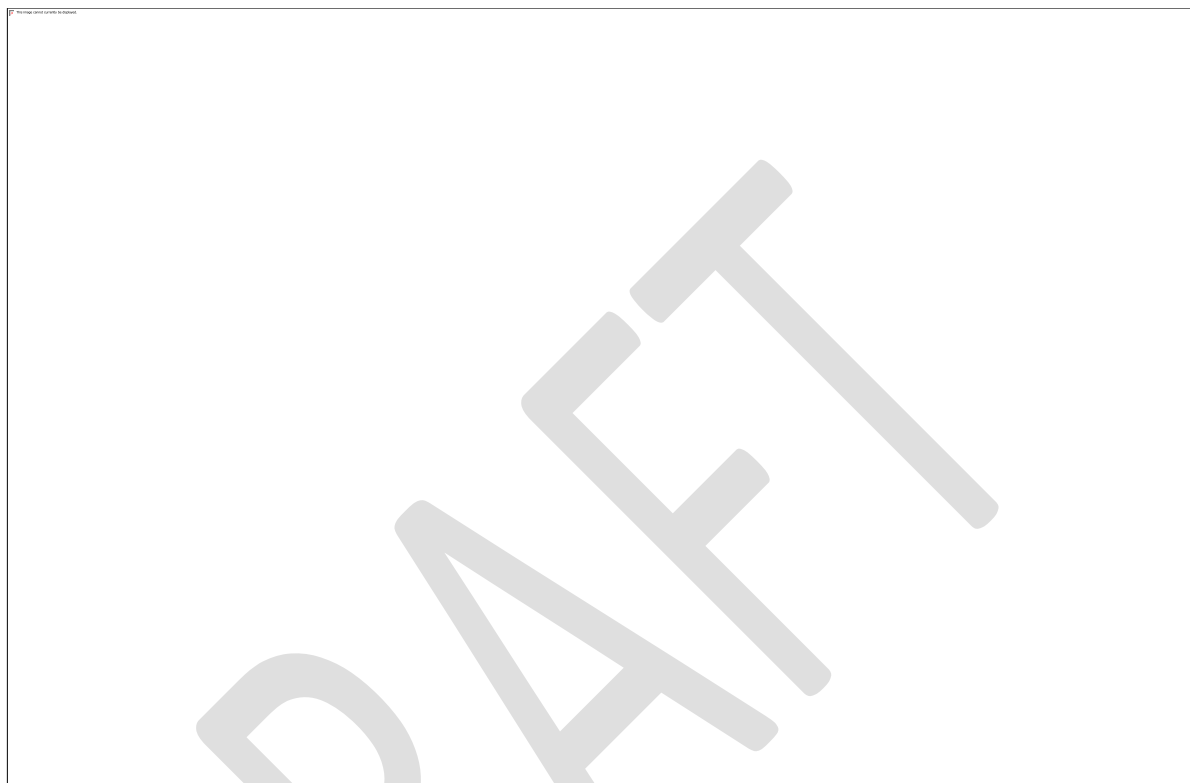
Issues to Address

7.8   The above feedback and the analysis on Table 4 highlight a number of areas in need of attention in the context of this Strategy most notably;

- to ensure for all staff see customer service as their responsibility and for the Council to have an effective development and training programme to support this. There is a significant issue around culture here. Some Departments have the customer far more embedded into their approach than others. It is also important to recognise that some of this cultural block is around an innate unwillingness to embrace, or scepticism about, change. The following are seen as important;

- to have clear service standards that customers can easily access;

- to have the means of monitoring and evaluating our customer engagement;

- to ensure a consistent approach to customer service across the Council;

- to become far more effective at providing feedback to customers as a matter of course;

- to increase the pace of implementing customer focused digital solutions as a means of providing the most accessible, convenient and effective means of accessing Council services;

- to support and resource the introduction of social media as a means of improving the customer experience;

- to expand the roll out of chat bots where appropriate;

- to reconsider the use of web chat for some customer channels.

8.   **Reaching Out**

No one is hard to reach, just more expensive to reach. It is important to put more effort and creativity in reaching these groups (LGA 2017)

8.1   Many of the Council's strategic objectives are focused on groups that would traditionally be defined as 'hard to reach'. The problem is that those who are often most keen to engage, or find it easy to engage, usually fall within the 'we haves' and 'I haves' as discussed previously. There is a need to carefully consider how the voice of the 'have nots' is heard. The problem was very apparent in the responses received to the Residents Survey conducted in June 2020. Those that were asked to take part were drawn from the GovDelivery database and an analysis of the returns highlighted how unrepresentative this was, most notably;

- a significant absence of 16-24 year olds;

- a lower number of 25-34 year olds;

- a notably lower number of responders from Black, Asian and Minority ethnic backgrounds.

8.2   Whilst the survey did not collect information relating to socio economic groups it is very likely that the response from lower income households was much poorer. This is consistent with engagement challenges in other parts of the country.

8.3   If this Strategy is to focus on this current deficit then there are number of issues to address;

- when informing we need to ensure that information is presented in a way that is understood;

- when consulting we need to ensure that we are talking to a representative sample of that community. Effort will be required to achieve this;

- specific effort will be needed to engage those who are less confident. In some cases this may involve using a third party. It will also be important to consider the venue, timings, refreshments etc;

- seek out those who know least. In this way those with a vested interest are less likely to dominate. Attracting such people may require the use of larger incentives;

- use social networks. In some cases it will be important to work first with local leaders or representatives. This helps create confidence and is a technique which has been used successfully in West Berkshire in the past.

9.   **Our Approach**

9.1   Our communication and engagement objectives set out what we are seeking to achieve in relation to this Strategy. Our key principles highlight what will guide us in terms of deciding how we should do it. They also reflect the Council's values as set out in the Council Strategy (2019-2023). The outcomes are what we expect to achieve for our stakeholders. These should be measurable so that we can determine whether we have been successful.

Communications and engagement objectives

9.2   Our high level, strategic communication and engagement objectives and our key principles are;

- Better *informing* our key audiences and stakeholders about what they want and need to know and in a way that is timely, appropriate and relevant to them;

- Planning our *consultation* with stakeholders more effectively to ensure it is genuine and represents value for money;

- Involving stakeholders more to help shape what the Council does and increasingly what they and their communities do;

- *Collaborating* more effectively to enable the development of effective engagement and the achievement of better outcomes but also to build more resilient communities across West Berkshire with the purpose of reducing inequalities and improving quality of life;

- *Empowering* individuals and communities more so that they can take their own decisions on matters that might historically have been for the Council to take;

- *Transforming* services so that they are better for our customers. A service will be deemed better if it is fit for purpose, cheaper, more resilient or easier to access through a greater number of channels, if it is available for longer hours or if it has a lower carbon footprint (taken from WBC Digital Strategy 2020-2023);

- *Getting it right first time and on time* and treating everyone with respect and courtesy, and using plain English so that everyone can understand.

Key principles

9.3   The key principles we are seeking to achieve are:

- Placing the need to build and maintain trust at the heart of our approach and ensuring we are open, honest and transparent and that we always act with integrity:

- Being driven by local community needs and wishes:

- A shared and collaborative approach:

- Being inclusive and thereby reaching everyone – and being clear how we will do that:

- Developing a local approach which puts communities in the driving seat:

- Placing an increasing emphasis on listening and on creating conversation and dialogue and focusing on engagement approaches that make the Council more visible, and increasingly face to face and not in written form:

- Developing an asset based approach – recognising and building on our strengths that exist within each community:

- Being clear who does what:

- Using the right tools for the job:

- Building on what has gone before:

- Ensuring effective communication and engagement is the responsibility of every member of staff:

- Prioritising our resources on our key messages and corporate narrative:

- Moving away from a reliance on the local media as a means of communication to developing a direct conversation with our key audiences and stakeholders:

- Reshaping the organisation, and providing the resources and cultural shift to safeguard that we ensure communication is central to what we do and that we engage in a more coordinated and consistent manner:

- Evaluating how effective we are at what we do:

Outcomes

9.4 The outcomes we are seeking to deliver are:

- Stakeholders and key audiences feel that the Council engages with them effectively and that there is trust and confidence in what the Council does (reputation) (measured through the Residents Survey):

- A much greater proportion of our stakeholders and key audiences are informed about what we are doing and our progress with implementing our key priorities (to be measured directly through GovDelivery and social media take up):

- Consultation is undertaken in accordance with the Council's Consultation Framework and the Plan (measured against the requirements of these documents):

- There is a culture that promotes open communication and engagement across the Council (measured through the employee attitude survey and external assessment):

- The specific hard to reach groups outlined in this Strategy will have been effectively engaged (to be measured directly through the various means used to engage these Groups and the degree to which these groups are represented in our engagement activities):

- Customer satisfaction and the Council's reputation are both enhanced (measured through Residents Survey):

- Staff state that they are being properly engaged (to be measured through the Employee Attitude Survey):

- Variations across Departments/Services in the engagement of staff across the Council have been reduced (to be measured by the Employee Attitude Survey and other survey methods).

9.5 Appendix 5 sets out a more detailed paper which includes further detail on how the Council intends to expand and develop its approach to community engagement. This includes a set of additional objectives which build on those shown in the preceding paragraphs.

Building trust

9.6 In their publication, 'New Conversations 2.0', the Local Government Association (LGA 2017) cite trust as a key element in any approach to developing effective engagement. Three themes are explored:

- Trust in democracy;

- Trust in the community;

- Trust in the system.

9.7 Fig.2 highlights how each of these elements interact.

9.8 Each of the three themes has five pillars set within them. A brief description now follows of each of these pillars since they have been used to shape the 'What we are going to do' chapter that follows.

Fig.2 The Trust Model (from LGA (2017))
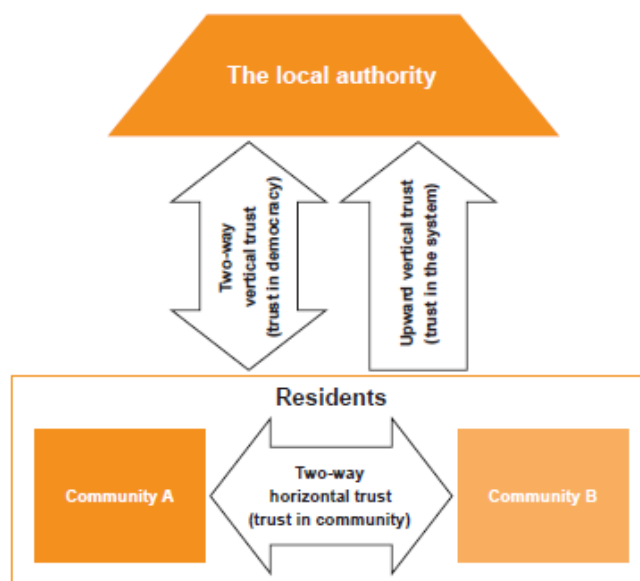
Trust in Democracy

9.9   *Pillar A – Clarifying the choices on offer.* They key issue here is that the engagement process needs to be genuine if trust is to be retained. Outcomes should not be pre-determined and there is a need to be clear from the outset what the consultation and engagement can realistically achieve. This will be achieved through having a clear framework and guidance in place for how engagement is approached.

9.10   *Pillar B – The role of the Councillor in engagement.* Councillors should be at the front line of any engagement process given the expectation that democracy is participatory. It will be important for the role of the Councillor to be clarified in the Delivery Plan for this Strategy.

9.11   *Pillar C – Embedding engagement in the organisation.* Fig.3 highlights a change of emphasis with an emphasis towards focusing the organisation towards looking at engagement in a more holistic manner rather than as managing the communication and consultation entities separately. This is reflected on later in Chapter 11.

Fig.3 Embedding engagement in the Council (LGA 2017)
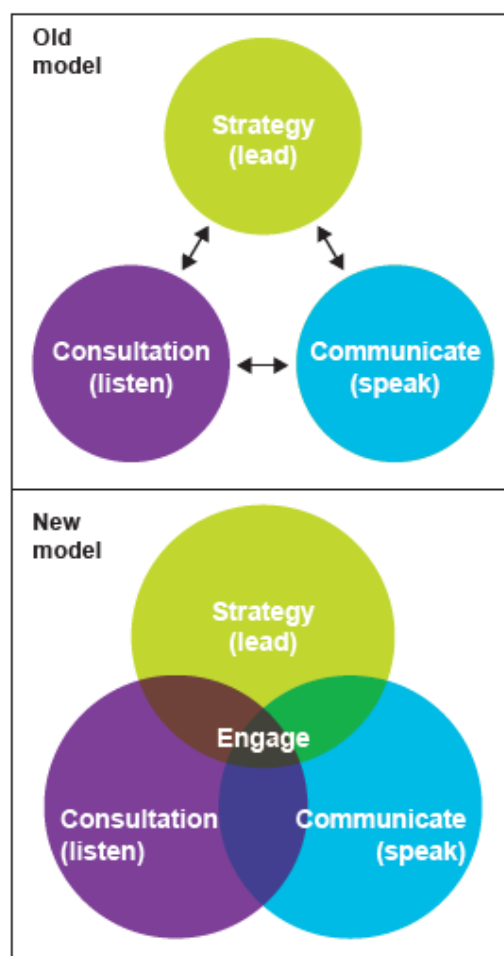
9.12   *Pillar D – Co production and partnerships.* These are seen as important in the development of trust. Examples are already evident in some services but it has yet to become embedded as a whole authority way of working. Evidence elsewhere highlights the need to map the approach carefully.

9.13   *Pillar E - Structured decision making about budgets and planning.* The Council has a strong track record of consulting on its budget but opportunities could be taken to expand this. In the area of regeneration engagement tools include Planning for Real and Planning charrettes are highlighted. The latter was used to a degree with the Market Street Regeneration project in Newbury. This is discussed further within the Strategy.

        Trust in the Community

9.14   For engagement to be effective trust also needs to exist within communities themselves. This has been evident in many communities during the Covid-19 Pandemic and the hope is that this can be built upon to consolidate engagement in future years. Five pillars are identified:

        Pillar F – Social networks and the role of messengers. Enhancing social networks

helps improve inclusivity and dilute the tendency to rely on the 'usual suspects'. Two approaches are highlighted;

- making connections between different groups (more socially confident groups link in with less confident ones);

- identifying connectors, communicators or ambassadors via peer to peer (identify those who can spread the message within a community).

9.15 Some of this emerged during the Pandemic however there is more to do if these social networks are to mature and flourish.

9.16 *Pillar G – 'Place' and engagement. 'Effective places tend to be described as flourishing or resilient. Decisions about local issues involve people and reflect the area's collective identify and shared aspirations. There is a strong sense of civic society, with interconnected communities and spaces for residents to meet. Local authorities achieve it when the organisation is truly aligned with the needs and desires of the place. It happens when the Council's responses to problems match the personality of the area. It's the product of leadership which is place appropriate, genuinely understanding and enabling of communities.' (LGA 2017)*

9.17 Strategic communications is seen as important in helping achieve this but ultimately it is seen as creating an organisation that is independent and cooperative in its work with local communities. Again this is more evident in some local communities than others.

9.18 *Pillar H – Capacity building and citizen power.* There is an expectation that local people should be drivers of change. The Council embraces this within its Council Strategy (2019-2023) with a clear priority around seeking to support communities to do more for themselves. The way in which this is done is key with an expectation of having reciprocity at the core of the approach. Six bottom up techniques are cited as important in achieving this;

- asset based community development;

- neighbourhood planning;

- appreciative enquiry;

- crowd-sourcing;

- citizens UK;

- parishing.

9.19 Some of these are already in play in West Berkshire and proposals are made later in this Strategy for how some could be developed further.

9.20 *Pillar I – Engagement and Cohesion.* Recognising that many engagement exercises are around some aspect of change, it is important for the Council to understand where the community and the tensions within it are. Clear narratives based around the change and a presence on the ground are seen as vital. This requires further development. In West Berkshire deficits were highlighted in the recent Corporate Peer Challenge.

9.21 *Pillar J – Hard to reach communities.* This is a common challenge which is certainly evident in West Berkshire. Proposals to address this include;

- using the right channels and not just one;

- recruiting a cross section of residents;

- taking small steps to engage the least confident;

- seeking out these who know least;

- thinking about social networks;

- being creative and working in a way that everyone can understand.

9.22 Given earlier comments it is recognised that this remains a major issue for the Council in terms of its communication and engagement activities.

Trust in the System

9.23 This focuses on how better engagement can create greater faith in the system as a whole.

Pillar K – Personalisation and the direct channels of engagement. Personalisation is the process of building services around a citizen. It has been adopted in West Berkshire in a range of areas most notably in social care, in preventing homelessness, and in shaping interaction with customers. If the process is done well it means that each person has a single, ongoing and unique relationship with local services rather than a set of individual interactions. Residents have a whole, end to end experience rather than a series of variable and unsatisfactory interactions. At a more strategic level the health and social care integration programme has much of this at the core of its purpose. Within the Council itself the 'passing off' of customers still remains an issue.

Pillar L – The role of social media. *'If you make customers unhappy in the physical world, they might tell six friends. If you make customers unhappy on the internet, they can tell 6000 friends'* *Jeff Bezos.*

9.24 In a local authority context social media presents both a risk and an opportunity. It can enflame an issue when things go wrong but it can drastically improve dialogue between residents and the Council and accelerate the speed at which ideas and behaviours catch on. It proved invaluable during the Covid-19 Pandemic and must inevitably form an integral part of our approach in the future.

9.25 Key issues in relation to social media are seen to be;

- the need for a clear narrative – there is also a need to understand how the Council is currently viewed;

- a balance between audacious content and playing it safe needs to be set – expectations on what response and change can be anticipated from social media feeds, needs to be agreed;

- understanding what audiences are actually being reached with social media;

- its use as a monitoring tool;

- choosing the right channel.

9.26 *Pillar M – Online consultation and the role of digital.* Digital consultation is very cost effective but is not without pitfalls most notably the potential exclusion of certain groups who are less digitally enabled. Consultation is fairly well developed at the Council but a stronger framework and better coordination would be beneficial.

9.27 *Pillar N – The role of frontline staff.* Frontline staff are in many ways the face of the Council. They are present every day in local communities. When it comes to employees, good engagement within the organisation is seen as the best, if not only, route to good engagement beyond the organisation. Challenges in terms of effective communication within the Council and the links between communication and engagement have already been explored and are reflected later in the Delivery Plan.

9.28 *Pillar O – Continuous engagement and relationship building.* Satisfaction and trust are both important things to measure but they are not the same thing. Service satisfaction is potentially brittle. It doesn't require residents to understand competing priorities and pressures. It won't necessarily last if the quality of a service fails.

9.29 Trust on the other hand is a more 'earned' quality. It's defined less by how engaged they feel and how much they sense the Council is on their side.

9.30 In an ultra-responsive Council, engagement and satisfaction measurement should become virtually intertwined with regular listening exercises done to involve residents and gain insights. In the long run the expectation is less forced engagement or statutory consultation – and more positive listening exercises and day to day engagement. Some of the key components to such an approach are;

- an emphasis on engaging when you don't need to;

- an emphasis on measuring through qualitative types of approach based on a two way dialogue, rather than numbers based surveys;

- an emphasis on measuring trust as well as satisfaction.

The Engagement Spectrum

9.31 The Engagement Spectrum is used as the framework to this Strategy. The Spectrum has the following key elements which are summarised in Fig 4. In many ways the maturity of an organisation's engagement activity can be measured by what is achieved across this Spectrum.

(1)   Inform

- providing communities with factual information;

- providing communities with information to understand a problem, policy or service change;

- setting out the results and/or implications of a decision;

- communities given the opportunity for engagement. The Council's website and Reporter would be examples of this.

(2)   Consult

- a means of obtaining feedback from communities or stakeholders from clearly defined channels. It is used to help shape policies, programmes or make decisions. It is also about listening to concerns and aspirations and gathering information. Budget consultation exercises and the recent consultation on the Environment Strategy are examples.

(3)   Involve

- communities and stakeholders are engaged in processes to ensure there is common understanding of the issue and that community views, concerns and aspirations are reflected in the development of options or approached. It involves a two way exchange of information that encourages discussion and provides an opportunity to influence the outcome. Such approaches are used extensively in some social care settings and the Council's Building Communities Team has developed 'community conversations' which embrace this approach.

(4)   Collaborate

- working in partnership with communities as a team, incorporating their input and advice jointly formulating solutions and/or options and sharing agenda setting and deliberation of issues. These approaches have been widely developed with partners but are less mature in community settings. The Community Support Hub is perhaps a contemporary example.

(5)   Empower

- Placing final decision making in the hands of the community – the community decides what will be implemented. The Council's Devolution Programme could be seen as empowerment with buildings and functions being transferred to communities for them to use and shape as they see fit.

Fig.4 The Engagement Spectrum
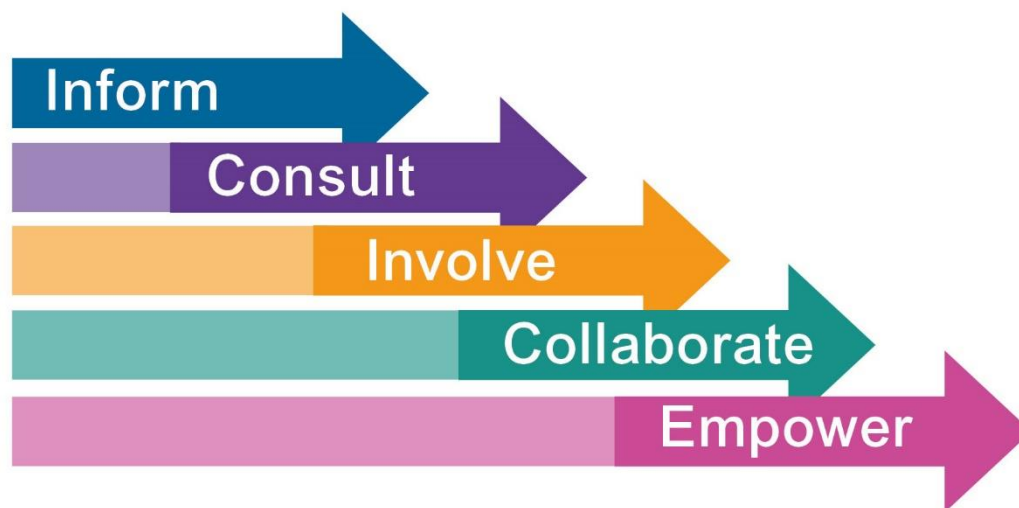
As can be seen the Council already undertakes a great deal of activity under each of the strands of the spectrum. With a desire to become a more networked Council the emphasis of this Strategy will be to move increasingly towards involve, collaborate and empower.

10.   **What Are We Going To Do**

Inform

10.1   This is a significant area of the Spectrum in terms of volume of activity and is where the Council's key communication activities reside. Written means of communication currently dominate notably;

- press releases and photocalls;

- website and intranet;

- various newsletters (internal and external) – some remain paper based;

- social media.

10.2   During Covid-19 use was made of GovDelivery for the first time which enabled direct email contact with residents, something that previously had only been enabled for functional activities such as electoral registration and Council Tax administration. Press releases were replaced by a weekly virtual press briefing which included the Leader and Chief Executive. The internal monthly newsletter 'Reporter' was replaced by weekly emails from the Chief Executive and Leader.

10.3   These new approaches have created a more personal and more targeted form of engagement which has been well received and it is now being proposed to adopt many of these approaches in this Strategy.

10.4   However, feedback from the Residents Survey in March highlighted that younger people, those within BAMER communities and those facing economic hardship were less likely to respond to these methods. This requires further consideration.

As part of this Strategy the following areas of activity are now being proposed to improve our ability to inform effectively;

(1) *The GovDelivery platform* is retained and is used as the means of distributing all Council leaflets and newsletters. Subscribers would be able to decide which newsletters they wished to receive and it would be for Departments/Services to decide how often they were produced. Content would be the responsibility of the Department/Service although it would need to be signed off by the Communications Team. Design would also be for the Communications Team who would have responsibility for the platform. Appendix 1 shows the current known scale of newsletter production across the Council.

A weekly Council newsletter would be produced through GovDelivery which would include a weekly blog from the Leader and Chief Executive. Consideration will need to be given to producing this in alternative languages and through media that would make it accessible to those with hearing and sight impairments.

A newsletter would also be produced for community groups, the VCSE sector and for Parish and Town Councils. It is proposed that all of this material is prepared

by the new Communities and Wellbeing Department although distributed through GovDelivery by the Communications Team.

(2) *The greater use of video and infographics* – video is often seen as a more engaging and effective media particularly with younger age groups. It has been used more extensively by the Council in recent years and was deployed quite widely during the Covid-19 Pandemic. It is a more resource intensive media to support but there is clear evidence of its popularity. Whilst content will be focused around the Council's key messages it will be tailored to the specific audiences that are being targeted. The proposal would be to agree video programming as part of the strategic Communications Plan which is discussed later. It would be the responsibility of the Communications Team. There is a clear opportunity to use video to try and engage hard to reach groups

The opportunity will be taken to introduce customer and resident stories so that different and more personal perspectives can be introduced which are likely to be of greater interest than videos which revolve around Council staff or Members.

Infographics are a way of informing through simple pictures. They are often used to show data in an easily understood manner as in paragraph 7.5. The Council has already adopted the use of infographics in its strategy documents and through social media and will continue to expand its use.

(3) *Website* – the Council's website was redesigned in 2014 with the underlying objective of shaping the site around what customers wanted. This has resulted in a website that is primarily focused around customer transactions. Usage figures highlight the 'channel shift' that has followed. The website is also used for informing and is particularly useful during periods of emergency such as the Pandemic and adverse weather. The principles on which the recently revised website are based remain sound but it is now timely to review the website in light of this Strategy and this is reflected in the accompanying Delivery Plan.

(4) *Press releases and photo calls* – whilst press releases and broader media relations will remain an element of the Council's communication the emphasis will move increasingly towards media briefings which are seen to create much more of a dialogue. These are discussed in more detail later.

(5) *Social media content* - social media tends to be used by younger residents and is more current than anything that could be covered in either a weekly resident's newsletter or press releases. It is particularly useful in getting urgent messages out quickly. It also has greater potential reach than other communication channels. The main challenge for the Council with social media has been a lack of coordination (some social media accounts have been set up and are rarely supported) and a lack of response to the comments that are posted. The result is that 'myths' can often become seen as facts. The proposal here is to;

    a. rationalise the current number of accounts. If Services make a commitment to social media then it needs to be effectively managed and resourced;

b. resource social media work so that responses are provided and the content remains up to date;

c. increasingly tailor content to ensure that it is attractive to hard to reach groups; This will increasingly need to involve posting content on non Council sites. There is a need to actively seek out specific 'user groups' and interact on their platforms.

(6) Campaigns. There will be a role for devising specific campaigns over the course of the year. These will utilise a number of communication media and will be planned through the Consultation Plan.

(7) *Branding.* It is proposed that consideration be given as to whether the Council needs to rebrand itself given the direction of this Strategy. The current brand was established in 1997 prior to the West Berkshire Council being established. It is seen by many as rather traditional. This might be viewed as appropriate but it would seem timely to consider whether it needs now needs refreshing.

(8) *Internal Communication* – again the emphasis will move from informing emails to an environment where a conversation can take place. An 'all user' email will continue to be sent by the Leader and the Chief Executive as they were during the Covid-19 Pandemic but on a monthly basis. Where urgent communication is required then email will continue to be used. The Intranet will continue to be supported as an important repository of information for staff.

Consult

10.5 The Council undertakes a range of consultation activity some of which is statutory most notably in the areas of health, the environment and equalities. The Council also has a small team which focuses on consultation and a Consultation Portal database highlights to the wider community what the Council is currently consulting on and how to take part. Extensive consultation was undertaken for the Council's recent Environment Strategy and new techniques were deployed which were seen to have worked well. There is a need to enshrine these more broadly across the Council.

10.6 Whilst a role will remain for consultation activity, both at a service and corporate level, the intent is to move increasingly towards creating conversations and a deeper and richer form of engagement. The following will be taken forward as part of this Strategy to ensure that our consultation activity is properly focused and coordinated:

(1) *Consultation Framework*. This will which set out the range of consultation techniques that can be deployed clarifying which are likely to be most appropriate and in which circumstances. This will include both qualitative and quantitative techniques:

(2) *Annual Consultation Plan*. All non statutory consultation, and where appropriate statutory consultation, will be set out within this Plan which will be overseen by the Customer First Programme Board (CFPB). The expectation

is that all consultation will be conducted in accordance with the principles set out in Appendix 4;

(3)   *Consultation Portal* will be retained as the means of informing key audiences and stakeholders what consultation is underway and how to take part. It will also be used to show the results of previous consultations and how the Council has used those results. GovDelivery will be used to highlight the existence of Consultation Portal:

(4)   *Community Panel*. This will be replaced with a new grouping that is representative of the local community:

(5)   *Annual Residents Survey*. It is proposed that an Annual Residents Survey is introduced which will be used in part to assess the effectiveness of the Council's Communication and Engagement Strategy. There will be a sample survey drawn from the new grouping mentioned above.

Involve

10.7   Involve and Collaborate are two areas where the Council intends to focus its attention since they will drive a move towards creating conversation and dialogue.

(1)   *Webinars.* This medium had not been used to any great degree prior to the Pandemic. It has however provided useful opportunities to engage key partners and stakeholders in discussions about specific topics. Time is saved by holding the engagement virtually and they can also be recorded and made available for later viewing which adds further to the convenience. Those taking part have the opportunity to ask questions and raise issues whether directly or through some form of chat function. The proposal would be to have an annual programme of webinars drawn largely from the key messages highlighted in Chapter 5. Webinars are also potentially a good way to engage the hard to reach groups highlighted earlier.

(2)   *Social media engagement*. This takes social media beyond simply posting content for people to read, to using social media to have a conversation. It is particularly useful to set out the Council's position or response to a topical issue. It provides an immediate response and was used to good effect during the Pandemic. If it is to be managed effectively it will require dedicated resource to manage it. It can be managed proactively to engage on a topic of the Council's choosing or reactively by engaging directly with a particular audience or stakeholder that has raised an issue with the Council. It is a useful means of demonstrating the Council's responsiveness.

(3)   *Media briefings.* Whilst these were used prior to the Pandemic they were introduced on a regular basis in the Response phase of responding to Covid-19. They provide for a discussion of topics of interest and enable the media to also raise queries and seek clarification. The aim is to retain weekly briefings at an allotted time and thereby reduce the need for press releases.

(4)   *Awards.* The Council will continue to arrange an Annual Recognition Event as a means of celebrating the achievements of its staff. We will also continue to promote the Community Champions awards and will look to extend recognition activities with our local communities.

(5)   *Internal communications* – It is proposed to level up the Council's approach to internal communications most notably through greater involvement. 'Let's Chat' was introduced by the Council a few years ago as a means of the Council Leader and Chief Executive engaging directly with staff. This became virtual and more frequent during the Pandemic and was well received. It is proposed to keep 'Lets Chat' a virtual meeting open to all staff hosted jointly by the Council Leader and Chief Executive. It will be held quarterly and will be recorded and that recording made available on the Intranet. It will replace the staff briefings that have previously been held by the Chief Executive on a face to face basis. In addition Service Directors and Heads of Service will hold a monthly virtual meeting open to all of their staff. This will do some informing but will also provide an opportunity for conversation and dialogue. Once again each session will be recorded and will be available on the Intranet. Executive Directors will also be expected to engage directly with all their staff at least every quarter. This will not be through written communication but by some means that enables the direct involvement of staff. Again this will be recorded.

Fig.5 Engagement Tools to promote community involvement
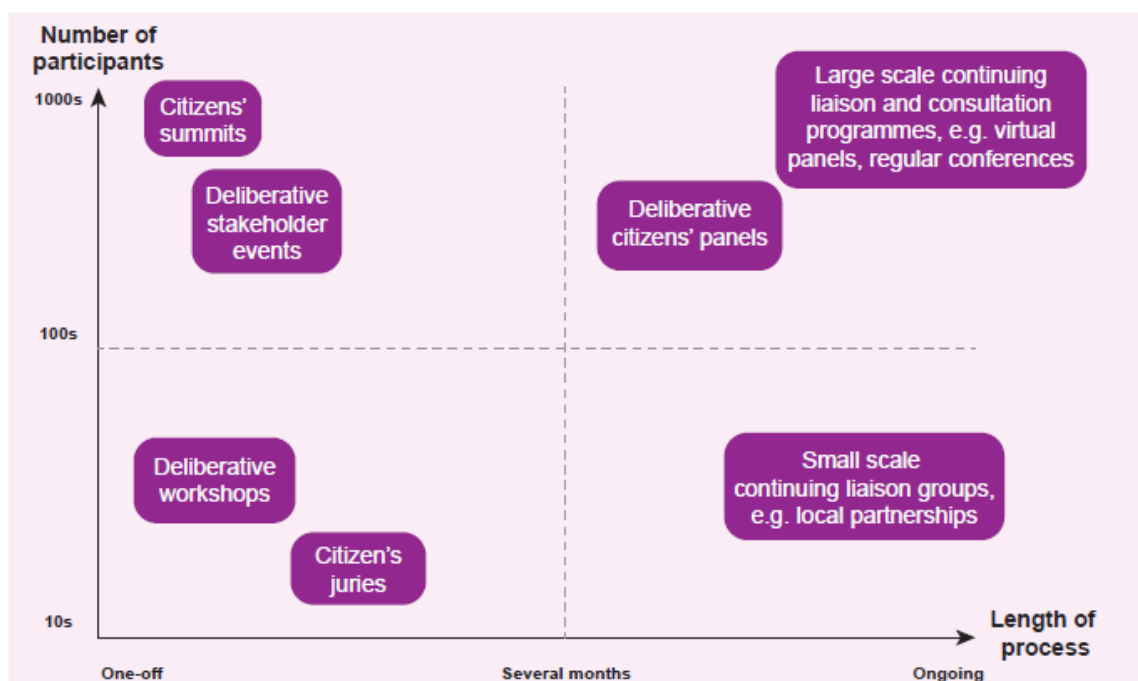
Collaborate

10.8   The Council already collaborates with a range of partners and stakeholders in a variety of ways. The Health and Wellbeing Board acts as the primary partnership across West Berkshire and has a range of sub groups that support its activities. A summary of the current sub groups and partnerships is set out in Appendix 5 and these highlight the extent of the collaboration that is currently in place. Appendix 5 includes a more detailed set of proposals regarding engaging and enabling our local communities. It's the product of a recent debate within the Council on how the Community Support Hub might be developed going forward. This paper proposes the establishment of a Community Alliance.

10.9   More broadly the paper also sets out some specific proposals which seek to take forward the aspirations set out in this Strategy. The key recommendations within that paper at Appendix 5 are set out under the Spectrum headings of 'Collaborate' and 'Empower.'

10.10   The Health and Wellbeing Board also has its own Engagement Group that the Council supports. The Board also owns West Berkshire 2036 and the realisation of that Vision underpins much of the Board's work.

10.11   The Council's own Strategy reflects the aspirations set out in West Berkshire 2036 and the Council recognises that much of what it wants to achieve cannot be done without the assistance of its partners and local communities.

10.12   In terms of specific actions the following are being proposed;

(1) Reviewing our engagement with Parish and Town Councils – a range of collaborative activity is currently underway and this will be retained but a further piece of work will be done within the consultation framework proposal mentioned below to determine how this could be enhanced. The wider role of Parish and Town Councils as facilitators and enablers of engagement will also be explored.

(2) Adopting co-production as a guiding principle to ways in which the Council collaborates – again this will be reflected in the consultation framework mentioned later, but also within the consultation framework mentioned earlier.

Empower

10.13   The Council has adopted a number of approaches in recent years which seek to empower local communities to do more for themselves. The principle is actually embodied within the Council Strategy (2019-2023). Examples of recent initiatives aimed at empowering communities include the introduction of Parish Planning and the subsequent introduction of Neighbourhood Planning and the ongoing Devolution Programme introduced in 2015.

10.14   It is anticipated that these activities will continue but other initiatives could also be pursued. Opportunities will undoubtedly emerge through the engagement activities outlined under emerging Engagement Framework (see below) but the following are specific approaches which are being proposed as part of this strategy;

(1)   Community Infrastructure Levy – this essentially passes developer funding to local communities to allow them to decide how it is spent:

(2)   Regeneration and Development – the opportunity here is to let local communities do their own place shaping taking an active role in the design of buildings and public realm. This has been done in the past but has not been adopted as a corporate approach. There are a number of models that could be adopted:

(3)   Commissioning a Community and Voluntary Sector Support Organisation. The purpose of this will be to provide support to, and build capacity with the local VCSE sector. Further details are set out in Appendix 5. It should also be noted that this proposal has already been agreed on as part of the Voluntary Sector Strategy which was approved by the Executive in April 2020:

(4)   Commission a BAME advocacy group. This has in effect already been agreed through approval of the 2020/21 Budget in March 2020 but the commissioning has been delayed by Covid-19:

(5)   Realigning the Building Communities Together Programme with this new enhanced approach to community engagement and the newly established senior management structure:

(6)   The development of a 'Community Engagement Framework.' The underlying approach will be to foster and encourage engagement not lead it, and the framework will reflect this.

10.15   Empowering staff should not be overlooked. The most obvious example is the staff suggestion scheme. This was recently developed into the Lions Lair initiative which unfortunately quickly faded, a reminder that such initiatives need to be managed and resourced. Whilst this initiative did not succeed it would seem essential to find a suitable replacement and ensure it can be sustained.

Serve

10.16   This does not form part of the Engagement Spectrum but the verb has been chosen to describe the proposed actions to improve our customer focus. Given the previous analysis the following proposals are being put forward (noting that they will need to be aligned with the Delivery Plan from the new Digital Strategy);

- clear customer standards need to be set and made accessible to customers;

- a training and development programme needs to be put in place so that all staff understand what is expected of them;

- consider the expansion of artificial intelligence and the introduction of webchat to support certain customer groups;

- to continue to pursue an approach based on 'digital by default';

- to develop a culture of providing customer feedback and to design systems that automatically enable this;

- to enhance and coordinate our monitoring of customer demand and satisfaction so that we can shape services to meet customer needs;

- developing a coproduction approach to the design of Council services so that we provide services that match what our customers need.

11. Delivering our Ambition

Planning

11.1 The Council has operated with a Communications Plan (which focuses primarily on informing activity) for a number of years. This provides a forward look at what communication activity is to be undertaken in the coming months. It is aligned to the Council Strategy (2019-2023) so is suggested that the Customer First Programme Board (CFPB) takes responsibility the Plan to increase corporate ownership. Its preparation will remain with the central Communications Team. The Plan will continue to be provided to Corporate Board and Operations Board for comment.

11.2 During the Covid-19 Pandemic a daily communications update was produced largely to support GOLD. This was useful in placing communications at the centre of the Council's activities (to coin a phrase used by the Corporate Peer Challenge Team) and ensured timely and effective coordination of communications activity. It is proposed to maintain this but to move it to a weekly not daily bulletin. It is suggested that this is produced by the central Communications Team following the proposed weekly meeting of the Communications Steering Group (see para. 11.13).

11.3 The planning and review of internal communications and engagement activity will rest with Workforce Board.

11.4 The planning of consultation activity has already been discussed. An annual Consultation Plan will be overseen by the CFPB and Consultation Portal will be the means by which stakeholders can engage and also the means by which feedback is provided.

11.5 The role of the Health and Wellbeing Board needs further discussion and it will need to be consulted on the content of this Strategy.

11.6 It is important to stress that whilst the CFPB will oversee the implementation of this Strategy it will be for individual Services, Departments and Governance Boards to provide what actually needs to be communicated, or indeed support a particular engagement opportunity. The responsibility for planning, communication, and engagement extend across every part of the Council.

11.7 As mentioned earlier the Council wants to take a partnership based approach to communications and engagement. The focus needs to be on West Berkshire not West Berkshire Council and it is proposed to develop this under the aegis of the West Berkshire Health and Wellbeing Board.

Resources

11.8 It is recognised that the proposals set out in this Strategy will require additional resources. Management of GovDelivery and the effective management of social media will require additional staffing. Some of this resource could be found through doing less of other activities but new resources will undoubtedly be needed. The extension of video and a focus on hearing those who have to date been largely unheard will also require additional resource although not necessarily deployed in the form of additional Council staff. It is anticipated that much of this will be

addressed through the forthcoming structural review of the new Strategy and Governance Department and through commissioning support through the community and voluntary sector.

11.9 Consideration also needs to be given to what level of resourcing is needed to support the proposed engagement activity.

11.10 More broadly there is a need to look at how digitisation and artificial intelligence can continue to be developed. This is to some degree being addressed through the Council's new ICT and Digital Strategy but again new resources, whether financial or staffing, will be required to support this.

11.11 At this point in time the following are being proposed with regard to additional staffing resources;

- Communications Team Leader;

- Digital Communications Officer;

- Senior Project Officer to oversee implementation of the engagement proposals outlined in this strategy.

In addition to this, additional funding has been put in place (some for the short term only) to fund additional commissioning of support and advocacy as outlined in the Strategy.

Reshaping

11.12 The Council's emerging Covid-19 Recovery Plan encompasses a number of themes that need to be picked up if the Council is to seize the opportunities created by the Covid-19 Pandemic. This Strategy has in part been written in support of that Plan.

11.13 This Strategy has highlighted the need to consider how engagement is managed across the Council and the expectation is that some existing functions may need to be realigned to facilitate this. It is not the purpose of this Strategy to make specific recommendations but four areas of focus would appear to be needed;

- placing communications and engagement central to the way the Council works. This needs to be supported by a management and leadership development programme that gives this due priority;

- an expanded central communications function with some consideration being given to how this relates to customer strategy;

- developing a stronger 'hub and spoke model' for Council communications. Departments and Services would need to identify a communications and engagement lead and provide them with the time and resources to 'do the job'. These leads would have to be members of the Communications Coordinating Group. This should over time help to create a stronger corporate culture focused more keenly on communications and engagement as envisaged by the Corporate Peer Challenge Team;

- ensuring that corporate ownership of the Council's engagement work is assured by the new Communities and Wellbeing Department and that the existing Building Communities Together Programme is reshaped to support that;

- finding the means to drive more quickly the Council's digitisation agenda. This is being taken through the implementation plan for the Council's new ICT and Digital Strategy.

Governance

11.14 There would appear to be little need to add to the current partnership and Council governance arrangements although it is being proposed to create a Communications Steering Group that would meet weekly to plan and coordinate the Council's communications activities. The current arrangements can be summarised as follows:

- *Health and Wellbeing Board and Health and Wellbeing Board Engagement Group.* The Board is the primary strategic partnership in West Berkshire and has the role of providing a framework for the leadership of communication and engagement across the District. The Engagement Group manages the Board's communication and engagement work. Historically the Group has tended to focus on heath activity:

- *Building Communities Together Partnership.* A strategic sub partnership of the Health and Wellbeing Board which has a remit, amongst other things, for the strengthening of community resilience and promoting community engagement:

- *Community Alliance* – a new partnership which is an evolution of the CSH Core Group and which will bring partners together along with the newly commissioned Community Voluntary Sector Support organisation to help drive the engagement agenda forward:

- *Customer First Programme Board.* An internal Council Governance group that is responsible for setting strategy and direction to guide the Council's communication and engagement activities. It is proposed that the Board now takes a lead role in monitoring and evaluation and is specifically responsible for preparing the Council's Consultation and Communication Plans. It will also be responsible for overseeing the implementation of this Strategy:

- *Corporate Board / Operations Board.* Officer and Member decision making Boards that would need to be given the opportunity to provide input into the Consultation and Communication Plan:

- *Communications Coordinating Group.* A new operational group that would meet weekly to agree and coordinate communications activities for the forthcoming week. This Group would also be responsible for implementing the Communications Plan:

Monitoring and evaluation

11.15 In the context of communications and engagement, this area of activity is currently relatively undeveloped.

11.16 It is proposed that the Customer First Programme Board is given this remit as it applies to externally facing communication and customer engagement activity. The following would be key elements for the Board to review;

- monitoring implementation of this Strategy, evaluating the impact of the initiatives within it and the degree to which stated outcomes have been met;

- collecting data to assess customer demand and satisfaction across the many channels that are in place and making recommendations for improvement and further development;

- to put in place a dashboard to enable the regular measurement of the performance of the Council's communication activities;

- overseeing the conduct of an annual Residents Survey to assess service satisfaction and the reputational position of the Council.

11.17 It is proposed that oversight and the monitoring and evaluation of internal communication resides with the Workforce Board given its terms of reference.

Appendices

Appendix 1

Newsletter Audit – November 2017

Service	Team	Newsletter Produced	Name of Newsletter
Communities Directorate			
ASC	Provider Services	Yes	Phoenix News
ASC	Shared Lives	Yes	
Education	SEN & Disabled Children's Team	Yes	SEND Newsletter
Education	SEN & Disabled Children's Team	Yes	Autism Newsletter
Prevention & Safeguarding	Emotional Health Academy	Yes	
Public Health & Wellbeing	Health & wellbeing in schools	Yes	Health & wellbeing in schools
Public Health & Wellbeing	Walking for Health	Yes	Walking for health
Economy & Environment			
Public Protection & Culture	Licensing	Yes	Taxi
Transport & Countryside	Waste	Yes	
Development & Planning	Planning Policy, Transport Policy, Minerals & Waste, Economic Development	Yes	Business Newsletter
Resources			
CEO & Support	Building Communities Together	Yes	
Human Resources	Strategy & Operations	Yes	School's Newsletter
Commissioning		Yes	Care Quality

Appendix 2

Social media activity in the six months to April 2020

Twitter

	November	December	January	February	March	April
No. tweets	74	62	70	50	68	168
Impressions*	127,268	105,638	107,163	105,999	170,73	327,403
Engagements**	2,130	3,262	1,739	2,378	5,836	13,703
Engagement rate	1.3%	2.3%	1.4%	1.7%	2.6%	3.9%

*The number of times a tweet was seen
** The number of times a user interacted with a tweet by liking, retweeting, replying, clicking on an image etc.

Facebook

	November	December	January	February	March	April
No. Posts	37	37	21	16	43	147
Total Impressions*	76,148	76,282	51,121	78,932	199,135	533,135
Total Reach**	71,676	73,925	48,976	76,214	136,314	452,805
Engaged users***	201	199	150	333	465	908

* The total number of times a post was seen
** The number of people who saw a post
*** The average number of people each day who interacted with our content

Video - views

	November	December	January	February	March	April
YouTube	1,134	858	1,203	902	943	1,400
Facebook	833	4,731	10,609	0	8,200	23,035
Twitter	1,800	3,600	2,100	754	5,600	11,600
Total	3,767	9,189	13,912	1,656	14,743	36,035

Video – minutes watched

	November	December	January	February	March	April
YouTube	1800	960	1,500	1,320	1,320	5,040
Facebook	Not available					
Twitter	372	2,500	2,200	350	3,800	3,400

Appendix 3

Delivery Plan

Ref No.	Topic	Action	Timescale	Lead Officer	Department/ Governance Group

To follow.

Appendix 4

Consultation Principles

To follow.

Engaging and Enabling our Local Communities

1 Introduction

1.1 Since the emergence of Covid-19, communities across West Berkshire have sprung into action. Neighbours are connecting and looking out for each other more than usual, informal support groups in local areas have organised to support people in need, and over 90 separate groups have been registered with the Community Support Hub representing nearly 3,000 volunteers across the District (see Appendix 1).

1.2 Whilst the Pandemic is far from over, questions have started to emerge about the long term future of the Community Support Hub (CSH) and how and where it fits in with Recovery and wider opportunities around creating a 'new normal'

1.3 The emergence of the Hub concept through the Covid-19 Pandemic is perhaps a natural expansion of the community resilience work that the Council has been seeking to promote over the past four years under the stewardship of the Building Communities Together (BCT) Team and the BCT Partnership.

1.4 The emergency created by the Pandemic has catapulted this work into a place that might have taken many years under more 'normal' conditions. There is clearly a desire to capitalize on the community energy and commitment that has been created by Covid-19.

1.5 The community response as a result of Covid-19 has also coincided with the work already been planned and approved through the Executive to enhance the Council's working relationship with the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise sector (VCSE).

1.6 The development of the Hub and the associated support also provides an opportunity to address the recommendations set out in the 2019 Corporate Peer Challenge and in particular the recommendation that the Council should 'jointly design with residents the mechanisms through which to hear their voice more.'

1.7 From a West Berkshire Council perspective, the work of the CSH should fundamentally be seen as the means for driving a richer and more meaningful level of engagement and involvement with local communities. It should start a discussion about how the Hub partners can co-produce something together that will eventually place a much greater level of control in the hands of local residents with communities increasingly shaping their own destinies.

1.8 This paper is not about creating a grand strategy but rather about trying to define a shared purpose so that everyone is clear what we are seeking to achieve together with some proposals on how we might get there. The aim is to stimulate discussion about how we can harness the energy and enthusiasm from the Hub to inform a longer term

approach and propose a strategy for engaging our communities and develop a strong and vibrant community and voluntary sector.

2   Background

2.1   Community life, social connections and having a voice in local decisions are all factors that have a vital contribution to make to health and wellbeing. These community determinants build control and resilience and can help buffer against disease and reduce inequalities - often referred to as social capita[1]

2.2   It has been recognised for some time that the relationship between public services and the people who use them needs to be transformed to allow people to take greater control of their health and wellbeing. Existing ways of delivering services can sometimes disempower the people they are there to help, leaving people feeling unable to make positive changes in their lives and their communities.

2.3   A key strength of West Berkshire is its wide and diverse range of communities. We know there is already a wealth of community activity taking place across West Berkshire in neighbourhoods, villages and through clubs, interest groups and community organisations. Some of these activities take place with the support and involvement of public sector agencies. Even more thrive through the enthusiasm and commitment of their own members and the creativity and drive of local people.

2.4   There is a strong argument for greater collaboration with the voluntary sector, our communities and Town and Parish Councils. They often play a vital role in improving our society and likely make a significant contribution to the local economy. They are the biggest builders of social capital, and provide crucial support to people and communities, often to those that are hardest to reach and experience disparities in outcomes (inequalities).

2.5   Evidence also suggests that VCSE organisations are likely to help public sector commissioners achieve value for money by reducing the cost of delivery (involving volunteers and mobilising communities to make changes for themselves) and making savings to other public services

2.6   Covid-19 brought the need for specific and urgent community support into sharp focus almost overnight. The idea of creating a CSH in West Berkshire emerged from discussions between Greenham Trust, West Berkshire Volunteer Centre and the Leader of WBC at the start of the Covid-19 lockdown. It was subsequently agreed that a community support hub would be established which brought together a number of key local interests with the purpose of coordinating a local community response to the Pandemic.

2.7   The term community support hub has always been somewhat ambiguous. It is often seen as some form of building or space that is open and accessible to the local community; a space that provides services that the local community would either want or need. However, the Hub has effectively taken the form of a series of co-ordinated activities to support the community and regular virtual meetings where various activities are coordinated and information exchanged.

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[1] What Makes Us Healthy (2012) http://www.assetbasedconsulting.co.uk/uploads/publications/WMUH.pdf

2.8 The partnership entity that oversaw the development of the CSH was named the Hub Core Group (HCG) and has been at the heart of making sure the required community response needed during Covid-19 had been put in place.

2.9 The HCG consists of the original core partners of WBC, Greenham Trust and West Berkshire Volunteer Centre and expanded to include health/GP representatives, Public Health, Thames Valley Police and Laura Farris MP. A number of organisations including food banks, HealthWatch, local charities and Community United CIC (BAMER) have provide regular reports and feedback to the Group.

2.10 The HCG has played a pivotal role in helping to coordinate this activity among Hub partners. In particular, through the work of the Greenham Trust, £511k of external funding has also been raised of which £228k has now been distributed to local communities (as at 17 June 2020).

2.11 At West Berkshire Council, the Building Communities Together (BCT) Team, working in collaboration with colleagues across the Council, set up the CSH in mid-March. Its focus has been on supporting vulnerable residents across the District who need advice and / or help with shopping, obtaining prescriptions, welfare needs. Most importantly the CSH has been instrumental in making connections with local support, including community groups. The CSH has also specifically supported those defined as critically vulnerable to Covid-19, also termed the 'Shielded'.

2.12 The guiding principles of the Council's approach to strengthening community resilience have been used to help shape the development of the CSH. The focus has been on engaging and facilitating communities to help themselves, and not on the Council providing direct Council support, unless this has become absolutely necessary.

2.13 The CSH has therefore primarily been set up to facilitate contact between residents and community groups and to help and support community groups to function. Council input has been kept to a minimum, leaving the groups to determine their own direction. The CSH has the support of officers from across the Council most notably in terms of logistics, food deliveries, emotional and mental health wellbeing and communications.

2.14 A defining feature of the community response to the Pandemic, and as such the overall effectiveness of the CSH, has been the large number of community groups that have emerged many of whom evolved over the weekend of 14th and 15th March when the lockdown was first put in place. The CSH has worked to foster positive relationships with all of them and has been considered successful in doing so.

2.15 As the Pandemic begins to stabilize these newly formed community groups will start think about what comes next. Some may fade but it is already clear that many do wish to build on the positive aspects of the Pandemic and the strong sense of community spirit that has emerged in many areas. A recent survey to community groups found that 76% of groups plan to continue, although many reported that the total number of active volunteers has been decreasing as people are going back to work (see Appendix 6)

3 Wider context and interdependencies

3.1 The CSH was established on the back of a renewed emphasis by the Council to strengthen community resilience and build on the work of existing good practice across

the district. In developing our approach going forward it is therefore necessary to consider the existing and planned work programmes that have a common purpose to build social capital.

Building Communities Together Team

3.2   The BCT Team is a multi-agency team with officers from West Berkshire Council (WBC) and Thames Valley Police (TVP) at its core with officers from Sovereign, Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service, National Probation Service and Community Rehabilitation Company closely aligned. Officers from other WBC services also work closely with the BCT Team including Public Health and Wellbeing, Adult Social Care, Youth Offending Team and Safeguarding Adults.

3.3   The West Berkshire Council officers in the BCT Team have responsibilities for Community Planning, Community Safety and Devolution. They also have responsibility for developing new approaches to community engagement to build community resilience.

3.4   The Thames Valley Police officers in the BCT Team are problem solving officers who work with Neighbourhood Police Teams and they have responsibility for focusing on the most challenging priority issues in West Berkshire.

3.5   Together the BCT Team are working to support communities to identify issues of concern and to help them develop ideas on how to resolve local problems through 'Community Conversations'.

3.6   The BCT Team, in partnership with communities, is working to harnesses the power of the collective to get things done, taking a proactive approach, favouring restorative practice and early intervention rather than waiting until something has broken down (be it a relationship or a service).

Engagement and Communications Strategy

3.7   The Council published its new Council Strategy (2019-2023) in May 2019. In November 2019 the recommendations from our second Corporate Peer Challenge highlighted the need for the Council to place communications at the centre of all it does, and at the same time, establish better ways of engaging our local communities, by working with them to shape new approaches.

3.8   This Paper is now set within this new Communications and Engagement Strategy and aims to work directly with communities to create meaningful dialogue and a greater sense of collaboration and empowerment.

Commissioning of a Local Infrastructure Organisation (LIO)

3.9   In April this year the Executive approved a report that set out a way forward for developing and improving the Council's working relationship with the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) sector. This agreed to the development of a strategy for future working with the sector and to commission a Community and Voluntary Sector support organisation (VCSSO).

3.10 The Paper outlined the following recommendations that had been informed from discussions at a Council Strategy Board held in early 2020:

1. Establish a project to develop a strategic approach to working with the VCSE sector that reflects a number of key points identified by Members in the Strategy Board.

2. Project to be governed by the Corporate Programme with agreed actions contained within a cross service project, with identified resources and agreed time frames.

3. Undertake a high level mapping exercise of VCSE provision to inform the development of the emerging strategy - what is being provided, to who and where, levels of income/spend, capacity and support for the Council Strategy – scope and resources to be identified/agreed as part of the overall project.

4. Commission a VCSSO in a process that will require careful consideration of the context of current arrangements which are outside of Council funding. Source of revenue budget to be identified/agreed.

5. Ownership will sit within the Resources Directorate for the period of development, supported in the project by the other Directorates, VCSE sector representatives and overseen by the Leader.

3.11 It is anticipated that the VCSSO will support the creation of a framework that would enable the voluntary and community sector to support the objectives of the Council Strategy as well as the Health and Wellbeing Strategy.

Community Wellbeing Model

3.12 The Integrated Community Wellbeing Model was developed in 2019 to facilitate a more proactive, holistic and preventative model of care. It supports individuals to take greater control of their own health and wellbeing through increasing their skills, knowledge and confidence to self-manage. In this way the model builds stronger, more resilient individuals and communities whilst also reducing health inequalities.

3.13 The model supports 6 key principles that are integral to social prescribing:

- Individuals are supported based on their knowledge, skills and confidence (activation) to self-care:

- A personalised and strength based approach focusing on what matters to the individual:

- Builds on existing assets, networks and trusted relationships through community conversations:

- Tackles health inequalities through addressing the wider determinants of health:

- Supports professionals and individuals to be able to work in equal partnership supported by a workforce development strategy:

- Facilitates & encourages a strong and vibrant community sector

3.14 The Community Wellbeing Model was commissioned via the Voluntary Sector Prospectus (see section 3.23) and includes the following components:

(a) **Social Prescribers** (Provided by Primary Care Networks)

One to one support based in primary care for those who need time and support to focus on what matters to them as identified through shared decision making and personalised care and support planning. Connecting people to community groups and agencies for practical and emotional support.

(b) **Community Navigators** (Provided by Eight Bells for Community Strength)

Using a strength based approach to support people to self-care, live independently and have a good quality of life. Actively encouraging people to utilize the West Berkshire Directory and ensure active signposting to local community groups and activities.

(c) **Community Builders** (Provided by Eight Bells for Community Strength)

Embedded in and working with the community. Identifying gaps or issues in local provision and helping to build social and community networks and encouraging new community initiatives.

(d) **Befriending** (Provided by Age UK Berkshire)

One to one social connection and friendship for those who are or are at risk of becoming socially isolated, are at a transition point or life change, or who are experiencing physical or mental ill health.

(e) **Buddying** (Provided by Age UK Berkshire)

One to one support to access local amenities and/or participate in recreational activities, to help people who might otherwise not feel confident or comfortable to engage with an activity or service

(f) **West Berkshire Directory** (WBC)

Web-based search facility which enables residents to search for support from VCSE and community groups in their areas, including family and children's services such as the local offer. Discussions are underway as part of the Customer First Programme Board's work to improve this facility to provide a more tailored capability. It could also be used as a contact list for engagement with those groups registered.

Voluntary Sector Prospectus (VSP)

3.15 A new VSP was launched in Spring 2020 that sought to build on the achievements and learning of the 2015 – 2018 prospectus, promoting enterprise, innovation and social value in service delivery with outcomes aligned to the West Berkshire Vision 2036 and the Council Strategy Building on our Strengths, all of which promote the independence and wellbeing of the people and sustainability of the District.

3.16 The VSP commits to investing £439,385 per annum into the voluntary sector to deliver services that align and support the West Berkshire Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy's cross cutting themes of prevention, integration and building community resilience. Aims and objectives include supporting mental health and wellbeing, building a thriving and sustainable environment in which communities can flourish, enabling people to self-care and help for older people to maintain a healthy, independent life for as long as possible.

4   What do we want to achieve going forward?

4.1   In understanding what the operating model or relationship with our communities should look like, we need to understand what we are looking to achieve and where we want to get to. Set out below are some initial thoughts on what the aim, guiding principles and objectives might be. These are draft and it is anticipated that these are refined further with our community partners.

(a)   Aim

To work together to build more resilient communities across West Berkshire with the purpose of reducing inequalities and improving quality of life.

(b)   Guiding Principles

- *A shared and collaborative approach*: Looking for shared priorities and co-producing shared solutions so that plans take account what is important to and what works in each community.

- *To be inclusive* - recognizing that many communities of interest and place exist in West Berkshire. Ensuring that the voice of under-represented groups is heard within communities and that communities include all views and backgrounds. Inequality remains a major challenge in West Berkshire and it will have exacerbated even further by Covid-19.

- *An asset based approach*: recognising and building on the strengths that exist within each local community.

- *To be driven by local community needs and wishes* – it is largely about communities delivering what they want and need.

- *A local approach:* that allows people to take control of the process, helps them to decide which outcomes matter most and finds solutions that suit the local circumstances. This means that solutions will look different in different communities.

- *To be clear who does what* – accountabilities and responsibilities should be mapped out. No one can do everything.

- *To build on what has gone before* - including opportunities created through the Covid-19 Pandemic. There are already a lot of good things happening. We need to accelerate that work and ensure that it is for the benefit of all.

(c) Our objectives

- To support local communities to help relieve hardship in whatever form that may take with a particular focus on supporting the vulnerable and the most deprived:

- To promote and sustain high levels of volunteering across the District:

- To use innovative methods and approaches to improve community engagement and involvement both with community groups and with individuals:

- Engaging with local communities to understand their needs and aspirations and providing a framework to enable partners to engage with communities:
- Collaborating with the Council and partners to help find solutions to these needs and aspirations:

- Providing the support needed to make communities more resilient:

- Commissioning specialist support to help develop engagement and resilience, if needed:

- Supporting communities to support the vulnerable:

- Signposting individuals to support networks within their community and where required to support from the Council and its partners:

- Reducing demand on public services.

5   Proposals

5.1 In looking to understand how we can best achieve the above aims and objectives, a number of recommendations have been proposed to build on the work of the CSH with current and planned activity as part of the Council Strategy 2019-2023.

5.2 As previously outlined in this paper, this is merely a starting point for discussion with an expectation that any future solution will need to be further refined and tested with community partners to reflect a shared vision and operating model.

5.3 At the core of the proposal is the desire to build on the two Hub entities that were created during the COVID-19 Pandemic, namely the HCG as a partnership grouping, and the CSH as a supportive resource to individuals and communities when they needed it. The recommendations are outlined below:

5.4 Appendices 2 and 3 provides a summary of how these recommendations will help deliver the objectives outlined in section 4.0.

Recommendation 1 – Standing down the Community Support Hub

5.5 Whilst the CSH serviced a critical function during 'Lockdown', the number of enquiries being made to the Hub have reduced significantly during July and August. This has continued into the Autumn of 2020. There will be a Stocktake undertaken during September utilising Hub contact data, local Infection rate data, information on local outbreaks, government guidance and other relevant information to assess the potential operational requirement of the Hub both now and potentially over the next few months.

5.6 Requests for support from individuals affected by COVID-19 may increase as a result of the implementation of West Berkshire's Local Outbreak Control plan.

Recommendation 2 – Establish a new overarching strategic partnership

5.7 Whilst the initial HCG provided leadership throughout the pandemic and a 'voice' for the voluntary and community sector, the membership was not representative of the wider community. There was also no clear governance or formal constitution.

5.8 It is proposed that the HCG is replaced by a new overarching strategic partnership - the West Berkshire Community Alliance (WBCA) that brings together community leads as equal partners to build on the legacy of the HCG. This would bring together a unique collaboration that is responsible for promoting and supporting community capacity building across West Berkshire.

5.9 The partnership would help to redefine the problems of health inequalities, tackle unmet need, foster shared values and collective use of resources to deliver more preventive approaches and the refocusing of priorities onto early intervention and outcomes for citizens.

5.10 Membership of the WBCA will need to be consulted on, but will consist of key 'community champions' as well as statutory partners. Membership will also be extended to a new VCSSO whose remit would be to help build capacity and capability within the VCSE sector. Other members would need to be included such as a parish and town council representatives and other key community leaders.

5.11 To support the strategic partnership a Community Stakeholder Forum (CSF) or series of forums could be created that would provide a means for two-way engagement and dialogue between the voluntary sector, statutory partners and the strategic partnership. It would also be an effective mechanism for members to raise key issues that impact on their sector and those they represent. The CSF would be a key responsibility of the new VCSSO who would co-ordinate and facilitate the forum.

5.12 The WBCA will underpin the delivery of all the objectives outlined in section 4.0 through co-ordination and oversight, but will have a particular role in collaborating to help find solutions to the needs and aspirations of our communities.

Recommendation 3 – Commissioning a Community and Voluntary Sector Support Organisation (VCSSO)

5.13 The Council have already agreed the creation of a new VCSSO that provides an independent voice to inform, strengthen and develop the voluntary and community sector across West Berkshire. A VCSSO would act as a conduit for information across VCSE organisations and public sector agencies. It will collect and represents the views of the VCSE to create a more proactive sector capable of influencing policy and decision making.

5.14 The role and function of the VCSSO will need to be informed by wider stakeholders, but it is envisaged that it will play a critical role in supporting local community and voluntary groups. Functions will likely include:

- Represent and advise the Council acting as an 'expert' intermediary where needed:

- To ensure effective and accountable representation of voluntary and community sector views and interests across the whole district:

- Provide support such as admin, finance, skills development and training:

- Identify and broker opportunities for VCSE groups to work together:

- Attract funding:

- Provide effective governance:

- Network with relevant statutory bodies and other potential collaborators:

- Know what's going on and disseminate knowledge at a local level:

- Lead and provide administrative support to the Community Stakeholder Forum:

- Work closely with the Communities and Wellbeing Department around community engagement:

- Link VCSE organisations to working groups (e.g. sub groups of the Health and Wellbeing Board, ICP) to develop innovative approaches to improve and evidence outcomes:

- To encourage networking, enabling the voluntary/community sector to share knowledge, information and skills, and to promote liaison between the voluntary, public and private sectors:

- To enhance the capacity of the voluntary and community sector by providing and promoting technical and practical support services.

5.15 A key principle of the approach outlined in this paper is the emphasis on communities themselves identifying opportunities and activities that would support the aims and objectives outlined in this paper. The VCSSO would play a central role working alongside VCSE groups to find the resources and support required to sustain these activities

5.16 The VCSSO will help deliver a number of objectives outlined in section 4.0. In particular, it will enable the voluntary/community sector to identify, and appropriately meet, unmet needs and gaps in service provision with particular focus on support the most vulnerable (objective 4, 5 and 8).

Recommendation 4 – Commission a BAME advocacy group

5.17 Over the last 18 months there has been a growing recognition of a need for the Council to better engage with the Black and Minority Ethnic (BAME) population in West Berkshire.

5.18 It is recommended that an advocacy group is commissioned to provide a voice for ethnic minorities so that the Council and partners can best meet their needs. It will also work alongside the Council to improve access to services as well as improve the knowledge and understanding of the wider community, agencies and public services of the needs of the BAME population.

5.19 The current Pandemic has shone a light on the disparity of outcomes experienced by ethnic minorities. A recent PHE report[2] identified a number of recommendations where commitment, focus, and delivery at scale could make a significant difference in improving the lives and experiences of BAME communities. It is recommended that this forms the building blocks for the focus of this work.

5.20 Commissioning an advocacy group for the BAME Community will help deliver several of the objectives outline in Section 4.0. In particular, it will provide a mechanism to engage with hard to reach groups, identify unmet need (objective 4) and work alongside the Council and partners to help find solutions (objective 5).

Recommendation 5 – Realigning the Building Communities Together Programme

5.21 If we are to pursue a new relationship with our communities, the Council and other public sector partners need to create the conditions within which individuals and communities take control over their lives and health.[3]

5.22 The responsibility of the Council will not diminish and it will continue to have an important role to play, in supporting communities. These include planning and providing the Districts infrastructure, helping prevent and respond to emergencies, giving access to information and advice, protecting vulnerable people and providing social care. Some of these require the specialist professional skills and support that the Council can bring via the new Communities and Wellbeing Department.

5.23 Some of what is planned for community engagement and the current CSH has historically sat within the Building Communities Together Team. There will be a need to align these responsibilities within the Council's new Communities and Wellbeing Department that will be in place from November 2020. It is assumed that development work with Parish and Town Councils and the devolution of assets will continue to be supported through this new Department alongside the need to enhance liaison with the voluntary sector.

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[2] Beyond the data: Understanding the impact of COVID-19 on BAME groups
[3] Marmot M. et al(2009) Fair Society Healthy Lives

5.24 Due to limited resource and capacity within the BCT Team, they have primarily focused on delivering the statutory duties of a Community Safety Partnership i.e. reducing crime and disorder and there has always been the intention to broaden its scope to focus more on community capacity building.

5.25 The new Department will lead the active engagement with individuals and communities to mobilise local action in both defining local issues and developing local solutions. The aim would be empowerment of citizens in a more asset based approach, focused on co-production of health and wellbeing as equal partners with communities. This approach would promote change in existing political and professional structures, extend democratic participation and maximise capacity and social capital.

5.26 If the new Department is to bring with it new approaches to community engagement (as above) then resources will need to be found to help support this. The BCT Team currently has a vacant post that previously led on engagement with local communities and it is envisaged that this role would need to continue. In the interim, this resource (supported by additional short-term funding) will be used to appoint an interim project manager to oversee the implementation of the recommendations outlined in this paper.

5.27 The new Department will help deliver a number of the objectives set out in Section 4.0, but importantly will have key role in co-ordinating the council's engagement activities (objective 3) with a particular focus on commissioning specialist support to help development engagement and resilience (objective 9).

Recommendation 6 – Maintain signposting and connecting to community support function

5.28 A successful function of the CSH was signposting and connecting people to local community support. Whilst the number of calls to the CSH have reduced since the peak of the Pandemic, there remains a need to ensure that people can access support and advice to meet their needs.

5.29 People access information and advice through a range of different mechanisms and therefore the future operating model will need to utilise multiple routes for people to access information.

5.30 Ideally we would like to move to a position whereby our communities and public would either self-serve using technology or their needs be addressed by engaging with their local communities through mutual aid and community support. However, it recognised that for some people (particularly the most vulnerable) a point of contact is needed to help signpost to ongoing support.

5.31 The list below identifies some potential opportunities for the signposting and connecting role which has been fulfilled by the hub to be incorporated into other functions across the district.

(a)   **West Berkshire Council Contact Centre**
The Contact Centre operated by West Berkshire Council is likely to be the most suitable mechanism to field general enquires from the public and link them to the most appropriate organisations

(b) Family Hubs

West Berkshire's Family Hubs provide a range of family support services at community delivery points across West Berkshire. These services include early yeas education and childcare, health services, training and employment services and help to access social services and other information and advice services.

(c) West Berkshire Directory

As mentioned earlier in the Paper, discussions are underway as part of the Customer First Programme to access to online information as this is often the primary way of making information available and accessible to the wider public, including families and people who have care and support needs, their carers, family and friends. Mapping our local community assets has been discussed for some time and developing a website that provides advice and support to communities about how to set-up local groups would be invaluable.

(d) Vulnerable and Hard-to-reach Groups

The work of Community United CIC and other advocacy groups will provide an increased opportunity for connection and support with West Berkshire's BAMER community and other marginalised, vulnerable adults, young adults and children.

(e) Social Prescribers

Social prescribing has an important role in strengthening community resilience and personal resilience and with social prescribing link workers now located in each Primary Care Network. Whilst still new to West Berkshire, NHS England's' ambition is for social prescribers to empower people to take control of their health and wellbeing through referral to non-medical 'link workers' and connecting people to community groups and statutory services for practical and emotional support. Link workers support existing groups to be accessible and sustainable and help people to start new community groups, working collaboratively with all local partners. The number of social prescribing link workers is expected to increase over the next few years.

5.32 There are many more VCSE organisations and statutory organisations that have a role in signposting and connecting people to local community activities and support that are not listed here e.g. Community Strengths. Going forward it would be useful to undertake a more comprehensive mapping exercise to understand these further.

5.33 Connecting individuals and community to local activities and the provision of high quality information to self-care will deliver objective 9 outlined in section 4.0.

Recommendation 7 - Development of 'Community Engagement Framework'

5.34 It is proposed that a new Community Engagement Framework is developed that builds on how we currently involve and engage with our communities and outlines what the Council will do to improve the way we consult and involve local people in decision making.

5.35 This will outline how we work together with communities to develop Council plans and where appropriate, jointly delivered services. It will also look to embed co-production and engagement across the commissioning landscape and Council departments.

5.36 It will also identify and involve community assets (things like physical spaces and the skills, knowledge, ability, resources, experience or enthusiasm of groups and individuals) to decide local priorities and design local services. It could also include a new volunteer charter that outlines the Council's relationship with volunteers and the role of the Council in supporting their skills through existing learning programmes such as Psychological First Aid (mental health), Dementia Friends and Make Every Contact Count (MECC) and Family Support Hubs / Local Offer. This not only serves to enhance the skill base of our volunteer groups, but also demonstrates the value we place on their continued commitment.

5.37 The framework will be developed by the new Community and Wellbeing Department and support the delivery of objectives 3 and 4 outlined in Section 4.0.

Recommendation 8 – Distribution of a new grant fund (previously CSF fund)

5.40 To support the ambitions of this paper we will look to utilise the existing Community Solutions Fund to provide a new one-off grant fund to address unmet need, tackle inequalities and social mobility across out population and deliver the objectives set-out within the Council Strategy.

5.41 The fund will also look to encourage innovation and collaboration across the voluntary and community sector to deliver outcomes for public sector commissioners. The fund would be overseen by the Prevention and Communities Department and supported by the LIO who would be an independent body that would be able to provide impartial advice to the sector.

5.42 The non-recurrent grant fund will help deliver a number of objectives outlined in section 4.0, but particularly objectives 1 and 7.

6 Governance

6.1 This paper recommends that a new strategic collaborative partnership (West Berkshire Community Alliance (WBCA) will need to be in place to provide oversight of the community and voluntary sector work across West Berkshire. This would not be dissimilar to the HCG which existed during the Covid-19 Pandemic however its membership and reach would need to be broader and more representative. This would be underpinned by a new Community Stakeholder Forum, made up of a wider network of voluntary and community groups.

6.2 The WBCA would sit under the Health and Wellbeing Board and provide an 'enabling' function that would support the work of the board and its associated sub groups (see Appendix 4). It would also need to work closely with the Health and Wellbeing Engagement Sub Group.

6.3 It is well documented that community life is essential for health and wellbeing, and the evidence of social connections, neighbourliness, sense of belonging, control, and mutual trust is fundamental good population health and reducing inequalities. Therefore the proposal to bring forward the 2019 Senior Management Review that would see Public Health and Wellbeing, the BCT and the Council's Cultural and Leisure Services being brought together into a new Department will provide more coordinated support and strategic direction for this work

6.4 An additional consideration in the formation of this new service is whether the matrix management arrangements for the BCT should be reviewed as part of this process.

7 Timescales

7.1 The table below outlines the draft timescales for delivering the above recommendations. It recognises the need to deliver these at pace, but also the requirement to involve our communities in supporting the development of this work.

Date	Milestone
September 2020	Paper to Budget Board on funding requirements
September 2020	External facing paper to Core Hub Group
September 2020	Project Manager appointed to oversee implementation of recommendations
October 2020	Recommendations agreed at Council Executive
November 2020	Procurement Strategy produced for commissioning VCSSO
Sept-Nov 2020 (See appendix 9)	Engagement and consultation with partners on proposals (including co-design of VCSSO 'service specification').
October 2020 – Apr 2021	Transition of Core Hub Group to new West Berkshire Community Alliance
Oct/Nov 2020	New Communities and Wellbeing Department Established
January 2021	Advert for VCSSO and BAME Advocacy Service published
June 2021	VCSSO and BAME Advocacy Services contract start date
June 2021	Engagement Framework Published

Finance

6.4 The recommendations contained within this report will need to be accompanied by existing and new resource as outlined below:

Commissioning of Voluntary and Community Support Sector Organisation (VCSSO) (opportunities for match funding)	£100,000 per annum (new resource)
Appointment of 12-month senior project manager post To oversee implementation of the recommendations contained within the report, including facilitation with the VCSE	£65,000 (Transformation Funding – new resource)
Establish a new VCSE Community Grant Fund (opportunities for match funding from Greenham Common Trust - TBC)	£100,000 (Existing resources – from Community Solutions Fund following cessation at end of financial year 2019/2020
Commission BAME Advocacy Group	£25,000 (Resources already identified)
New funding required from Council	£100,000 recurrent (LIO) £65,000 one-off (PM)

8   Conclusion and Next Steps

8.1 Being part of an active, supportive community makes a significant difference to people's quality of life and helps people to be more resilient when faced with an emergency or hardship. In short, without communities playing that vital role in providing day-to-day support, the Council would be completely overwhelmed.

8.2 The CSH that emerged during the Covid-19 Pandemic has been seen as a very positive development. However, the CSH was formed specifically to respond to the Pandemic and it is envisaged that many of the functions of the CSH can be absorbed within current and future plans that strive to develop stronger and more resilient communities. This Paper therefore proposes that the staffing for CSH will now stand subject to what support is required to manage the second Covid-19 wave.

8.3 An enduring memory of the Pandemic will be that some individuals were far more affected than others. Their voice will need to be heard in the future, something that in previous work has always been a challenge. In the 'New Normal' the vision is that this work needs to be dominated by communities themselves rather than the agencies and organizations that have traditionally been there to support them.

8.4 It is acknowledged that high-quality coproduction of health takes time. Meaningful relationships between communities and statutory partners should be nurtured to ensure sustainable and inclusive participation.
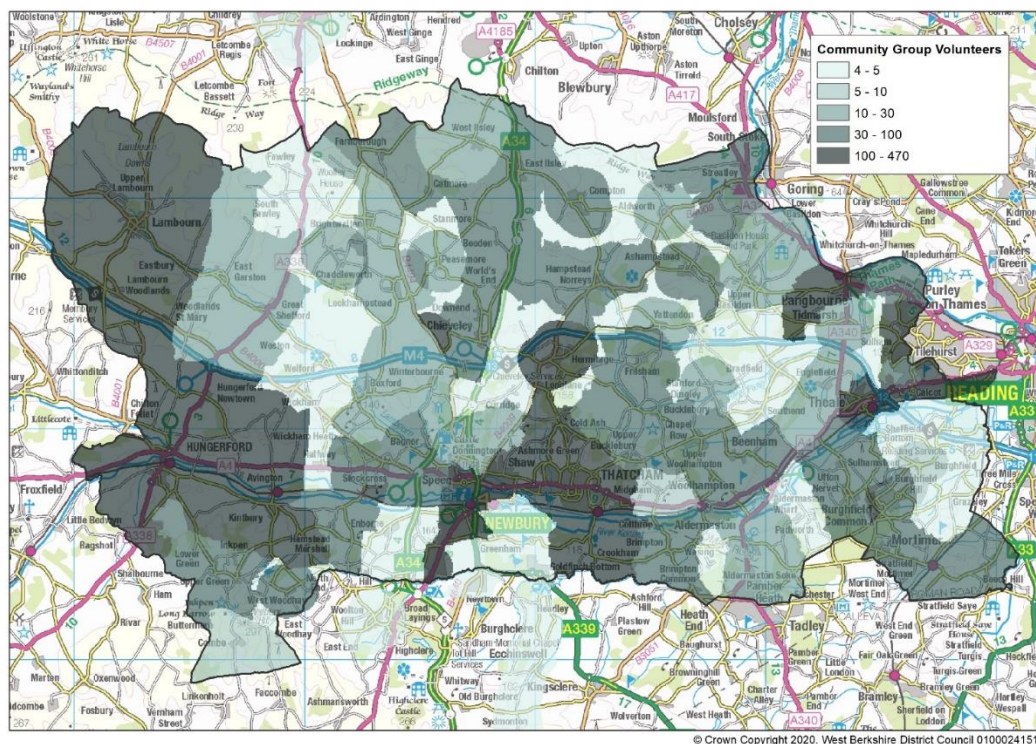
8.5   Engagement with internal WBC services and external partners has already begun – as shown by the following examples of meetings that have taken place or are planned between services/groups and the BCT/Hub and/or Public Health team:

- Food provision to vulnerable families by schools (June):

- Extending the Libraries At Home Service (25 June):

- Links with the Homelessness Hub (25 June):

- The summer offer by Education (2 July):

- Food provider partners (17 June and 22 July):

- Communities United (BAMER) (28 July and 11 August):

- How local community groups can communicate in event of local outbreak (follow-up to the DCP) – planned for 18/21 August:

- Joint working between Hub and Primary Care – planned for 10 Sept:

- Health & Well-being Conference – planned for 11 September:

8.6   Consideration should be given to how these proposals will be presented to health partners and vulnerable groups including BAMER, young people, those in more deprived areas who are economically disadvantaged.

8.7   In the meantime, a more structured series of discussions with internal services should be implemented, led by the BCT Team Manager and Hub Secondees, with assistance from Public Health and nominated service leads (potentially the Comms team service leads). A draft consultation plan can be found in Appendix 9.

Appendix 1
Coverage by volunteer numbers (29 April 2020)

Coverage by number of groups (29 April 2020)

Appendix 2 – Devolution of the Community Support Hub

West Berkshire Community Alliance
- Overarching strategic group bringing together key community champions, statutory partners, LIO

Community Stakeholder Forum
- Providing two way engagement and dialogue between the voluntary sector, statutory partners and WBCA

Communities & Wellbeing Service
- Commissioning LIO & VCS related contracts
- Community Conversations / Engagement / Relationship with communities and Parish Councils
- Mapping Assets / Community Resilience Index
- Administrative Support to Community Alliance

Local Infrastructure Organisation
- Independent Advice and support around finance, skills development and training
- Identify & broker opportunities and collaboration for VCSE groups to work together
- Attract funding for VCS organisations
- Provide effective governance
- Network with relevant statutory bodies and other collaborators
- Lead & provide administrative support to the Community Stakeholder Forum
- Opportunity to second WBC officers into the LIO if appropriate

West Berkshire Council Contact Points
- Dealing with general enquiries and signposting to appropriate services

Appendix 3 – Integrated Engagement Model

Appendix 4 – Proposed governance of for the Community Alliance

*BCT Partnership to review terms of reference

Appendix 5 – Integrated Community Wellbeing Model

Engaging and Enabling our Local Communities

Appendix 6 – Mapping paper objectives against recommendations

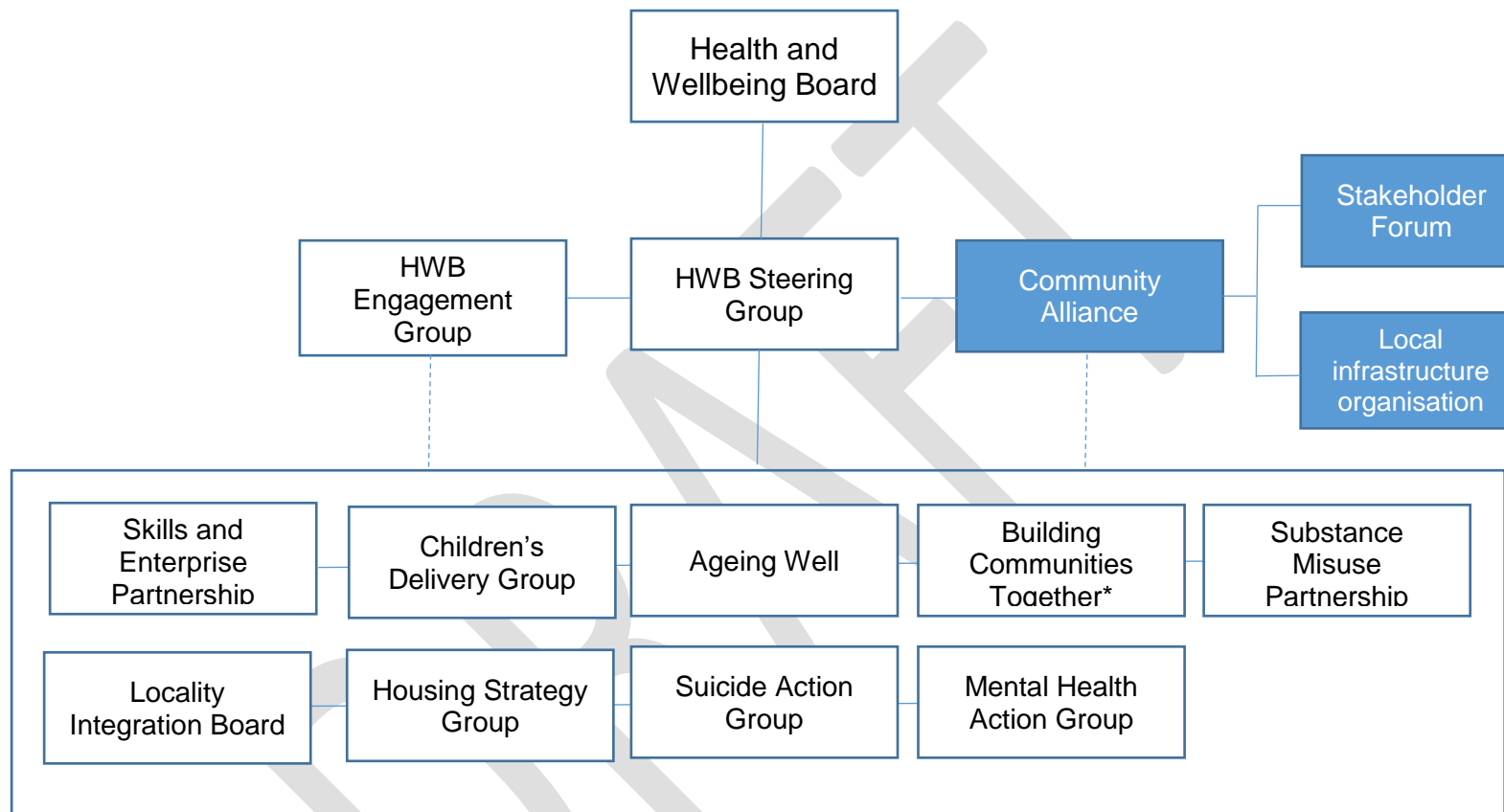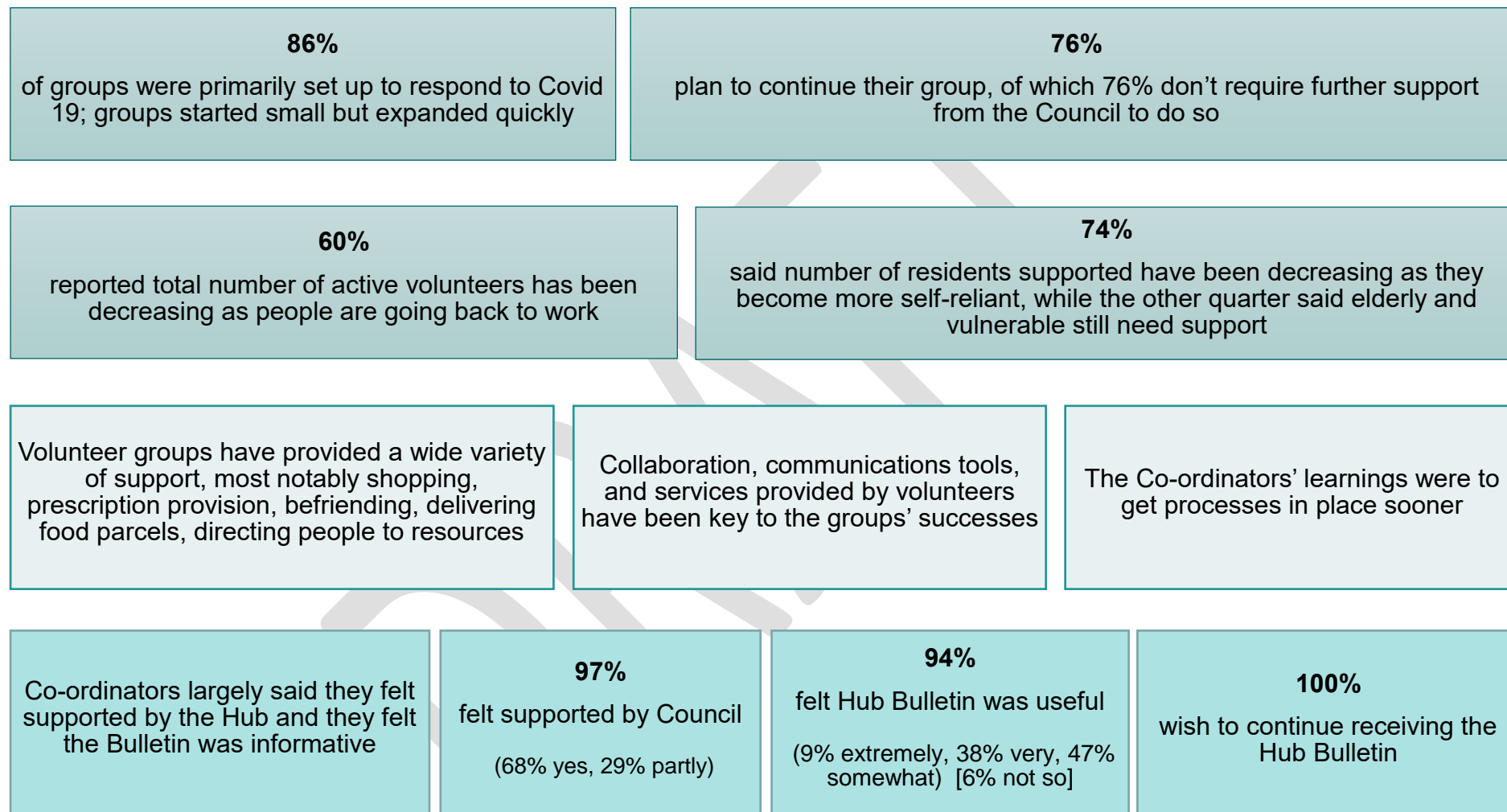|	Objective 1 Support local communities to help relieve hardship with a particular focus on supporting the vulnerable.	Objective 2 Promote and sustain high levels of volunteering.	Objective 3 To improve community engagement and involvement with community groups and individuals	Objective 4 Engaging with communities to understand their needs and providing a framework to enable partners to engage with communities;	Objective 5 Collaborating with the Council and partners to help find solutions to these needs and aspirations;	Objective 6 Providing the support needed to make communities more resilient;	Objective 7 Commissioning specialist support to help development engagement and resilience, if needed;	Objective 8 Supporting communities to support the vulnerable;	Objective 9 Signposting individuals to support networks within their community and where required to support from the Council and its partners;	Objective 10 Reducing demand on public services
Recommendation 2 Establish a new overarching strategic partnership	▓	▓	▓	▓	▓	▓	▓	▓	▓	▓
Recommendation 3 Commissioning on local infrastructure organisation	▓		▓		▓					
Recommendation 4 Commission an advocacy group for the BAME population	▓		▓	▓	▓					
Recommendation 5 Realigning the Building Communities Together Programme							▓			▓
Recommendation 6 Maintain signposting and connecting to community support									▓	
Recommendation 7 Development of 'Community Engagement Framework'	▓		▓	▓						
Recommendation 8 Distribution of a new grant fund (previously CSF fund)	▓						▓			

Appendix 7 – Key findings from Hub Survey

86%
of groups were primarily set up to respond to Covid 19; groups started small but expanded quickly

76%
plan to continue their group, of which 76% don't require further support from the Council to do so

60%
reported total number of active volunteers has been decreasing as people are going back to work

74%
said number of residents supported have been decreasing as they become more self-reliant, while the other quarter said elderly and vulnerable still need support

Volunteer groups have provided a wide variety of support, most notably shopping, prescription provision, befriending, delivering food parcels, directing people to resources

Collaboration, communications tools, and services provided by volunteers have been key to the groups' successes

The Co-ordinators' learnings were to get processes in place sooner

Co-ordinators largely said they felt supported by the Hub and they felt the Bulletin was informative

97%
felt supported by Council

(68% yes, 29% partly)

94%
felt Hub Bulletin was useful

(9% extremely, 38% very, 47% somewhat) [6% not so]

100%
wish to continue receiving the Hub Bulletin

Appendix 8 - Creating a Common Language

Definitions

When we Say	We mean
Asset Based Community Development	Community Development (see definition below) that starts from the point of view of identifying the strengths and assets within a community
Co-production	Working together with communities as equal partners to identify priorities and develop solutions
Community Assets	Skills, knowledge, abilities, capabilities and resources that exist within a community and can be used for the common good of that community
Community Capacity Building	Activities, resources and support that strengthen the skills, abilities and confidence of people and community groups to take effective action and leading roles in the development of communities.
Community Development	A process where community members come together to take collective action and generate solutions to common problems
Community Engagement	Activities the Council (or another agency) undertakes to involve communities and community groups in shaping it's thinking in order to influence the direction it takes
Community Resilience	Community resilience is the sustained ability of communities to withstand, adapt to, and recover from adversity
Community Wellbeing	Community wellbeing is the combination of social, economic, environmental, cultural, and political conditions identified by individuals and their communities as essential for them to flourish and fulfil their potential
Communities	A group of people with a common interest or identity or who share a common place.
Social Capital	The collective values, confidence and capability that exists within a community or group with a common interest or purpose. It can be described as the "glue" that holds individuals together in a community
Commissioning	Commissioning within public services simply means understanding what is needed and deciding on the best ways of meeting those needs, that make a positive difference to people's lives through the use of all available resources.
Social Value	A concept which seeks to maximise the additional benefit that can be created by procuring or commissioning goods and services, above and beyond the benefit of merely the goods and services themselves.

Appendix 9 – Consultation Plan.

A two-stage co-production process is proposed for external partners, based around 'concept' and 'action'.   Remembering the speed by which the Community Support Hub was set up and refined, each stage is envisaged to take no longer than two/three months from start to finish.

The 'concept' phase (August to October) should encourage creative thinking but use facilitation techniques that result in the creation of a co-produced set of aims, guiding principles and objectives. For example, seven or eight themed focus groups (in person or via zoom) with communities of interest and hard to reach groups (BAMER, young people) as well as place-based community group leaders.

As a first step, the Council will engage with the Core Hub Group (which includes Greenham Trust, WB Volunteer Centre, Berkshire West CCG and TV Police) and the BCT Partnership. This will take place in parallel with the setting up of the new WBC Communities and Well-being Service.

The initial 'action' phase (November to January) should be based around encouraging local communities to embrace the idea of community resilience, coming up with their own ideas for ensuring that there is a positive legacy from local Covid-19 community-based activity.

The emphasis would be on action planning and supporting community champions to promote this, the focus on getting things done rather than 'talking shop'. This should include leaders from the most active Covid-19 community groups (e.g. Hermitage, Compton, Lambourn, Streatley, Hungerford) as well as partners and the BAMER community. It could also include a faith leader and a philanthropist (several have made substantial donations to the Greenham Trust Coronavirus Emergency Fund).

The Health & Well-being Conference taking place on 11 September is on the theme of volunteering and community resilience – this presents an opportunity to engage with external partners on the Council's proposals.

Engaging and Enabling our Local Communities

Co-production (consultation) Plan

Strategic Aim: Co-produce a framework to strengthen resilience within communities of place and interest, building on new Covid-related and existing good practice across West Berkshire										
Actions	Sept 2020	Oct 2020	Nov 2020	Dec 2020	Jan 2021	Feb 2021	Mar 2021	Apr 2021	May 2021	June 2021
Milestones										
Programme Manager appointed		★								
Executive approves recommendations		★								
Hub Core Group transitions to Alliance	→→→→→→→→→→→→→→→→→→→→→→→→→→→→→→→→									
New C&WB Department set up			★							
LIO spec / tender/ award / start			★		★		★			★
BAME spec / advert / award / start			★		★	★		★		
Engagement framework published								★		
Phase 1 – Concept: *co-production of aims, guiding principles and objectives AND specifications for LIO and BAMER contracts*										
Consultation with key stakeholders: • Hub Core Grp – 7 Sept / 5 Oct • Community LOCP – 25 Sept? • Locality Integration Board ?										
Co-design of LIO service specification: • BCT Partnership – 13 Oct • Health & WB Board - spec mtg • Refresh VCSE co-production of Community WB model?										
Co-design of BAMER advocacy spec: • Community United and others?										

Engaging and Enabling our Local Communities

Actions	Sept 2020	Oct 2020	Nov 2020	Dec 2020	Jan 2021	Feb 2021	Mar 2021	Apr 2021	May 2021	June 2021
Developing the engagement framework *AND encouraging local communities to come up with their own ideas for ensuring that there is a positive legacy from local Covid-19 (NB could link to community and parish planning)*										
Community LOCP meetings	★		★		★		★			
Workshops with hard to reach groups: • BAMER • Young people • Economically vulnerable						▓	▓			
Workshops with communities of place: • West (Hungerford, Lambourn) • Central (Newbury, Hermitage) • East (e.g. Streatley, Mortimer)						▓	▓			
Ongoing – *community focussed two-way communication channels*										
Weekly comms (e.g. Hub Bulletin and/or Residents E-bulletin)	→→									
Residents Surveys / Lets Chat		★		★		★		★		★

Complaints Statistics – 2017/18 – 2019/20

The table below details Stage One complaints but it does not include any Stage One complaints in relation to Adult Social Care (ASC) or Children and Family Services (CFS), as these are investigated under a separate process administered by ASC and CFS respectively.

Stage One Complaints by Service			
Service	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20
Building Safer Communities	2	0	0
Customer Services & ICT	1	2	1
Development & Planning (Planning) (Housing)	32 (15) (17)	53 (34) (19)	51 (26) (25)
Education	6	1	4
Finance & Property (Benefits & Exchequer)	19 (15)	16 (12)	21 (21)
Legal Services	0	0	2
Public Health & Wellbeing	0	1	1
Public Protection & Culture	11	8	6
Strategic Support	3	3	14
Transport & Countryside (Highways) (Countryside) (Waste)	86 (41) (22) (23)	128 (62) (13) (53)	77 (32) (14) (31)
TOTALS	160	212	177

The table below details corporate Stage Two complaints and therefore only includes those ASC and CFS complaints that relate to complaints about the process. All other ASC and CFS Stage Two complaints are dealt with via their own complaints procedure.

Stage Two Complaints by Service			
Service	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20
CFS	0	0	4
CEO & Support	0	1	0
Development & Planning (Planning) (Housing)	23 (16) (7)	31 (27) (4)	15 (9) (6)
Education	4	1	1
Finance & Property (Benefits & Exchequer)	1 (0)	2 (2)	5 (5)
Legal Services	0	0	2
Public Health & Wellbeing	0	0	2
Public Protection & Culture	3	0	0
Strategic Support	1	2	4
Transport & Countryside (Highways) (Countryside) (Waste)	21 (4) (1) (16)	16 (8) (1) (7)	15 (8) (3) (4)
TOTALS	53	53	48

The table below shows the number of LGO complaints by Service and these include all ASC and CFS complaints.

LGO Complaints by Service			
Service	**2017-18**	**2018-19**	**2019-20**
ASC	1	7	4
CFS	6	9	8
Development & Planning	13	8	7
(Planning)	(10)	(6)	(4)
(Housing)	(3)	(2)	(3)
Education	3	1	0
Finance & Property	1	3	1
(Benefits & Exchequer)	(0)	(2)	(1)
Legal Services	1	0	0
Public Health & Wellbeing	0	0	1
Public Protection & Culture	1	2	1
Strategic Support	2	0	0
Transport & Countryside	2	2	4
(Highways)	(1)	(1)	(4)
(Countryside)	(0)	(0)	(0)
(Waste)	(1)	(1)	(0)
TOTALS	**30**	**32**	**26**

The table below shows the outcomes to-date of the LGO investigation.

Outcome of LGO Investigation						
	Pre-mature	**Not investi-gating**	**Partially upheld**	**Upheld**	**Not upheld**	**Decision awaited**
ASC	0	2	1	0	0	0
CFS	3	4	0	1	0	0
Dev & Planning	0	3	0	0	0	2
(Planning)		(2)				(0)
(Housing)		(1)				(2)
Finance & Property	0	0	0	0	0	1
(Bens & Excheq)						(1)
Public Health & Wellbeing	0	1	0	0	0	0
Public Protection & Culture	1	0	0	0	0	0
Trans & Country)	0	4	0	0	0	0
(Highways)		(4)				